

2 – PRAGUE

Monday, 9 September

I slept well and rose just before nine o'clock, feeling refreshed. I took my time about having a shower and breakfasting on tea, a banana and an orange, then set off for the city centre on the metro. As the weather did not look very promising, I decided to spend the day in the galleries at the Hrad. I got off the train at the Muzeum stop, changed to another one on line A, but made a mistake and hopped off one stop too soon. I returned to the platform, jumped on to the next train and emerged at Malostranská. Here I caught the number 18 tram, but after a while I began to realize that it was taking a different route from the number 22, and did not seem to go anywhere near the Hrad. I asked a lady (in Czech) for information and did so just in time, for she pointed up a familiar-looking road to the Hrad. I jumped out at the next stop and walked up the steep road that Slavek and I had walked down on Saturday.

When I arrived at the gallery of modern Czech art in the former Riding School, I discovered that it was closed. I checked my guidebook, which stated that it was open from Tuesday to Sunday. Inside the Hrad I discovered that the Saint Vitus Cathedral was locked up again. As there were so few people about, I had the feeling that most places here were closed on Mondays – and it turned out that they were. I wandered about, feeling rather stupid, and cursed myself for not checking my guidebook earlier. When I ambled around to the square by the side of the cathedral, I saw some musicians emerging from a coach and setting up music stands. They then produced brass wind instruments and formed themselves facing, but at some distance from the Royal Palace. At 12.30 p.m. they struck up, played a modern-sounding fanfare, and a young man with black hair and a light mustard-coloured suit stepped out of the Palace and invited a man, who was much more casually dressed, to stand beside him. By now a large group of tourists had gathered to watch the proceedings. The two men stood alone in the middle of the square and there seemed to be no security presence of any description.

When the music had finished, some other officials appeared, and a man with a rather artificial smile made an eloquent but very verbose speech to the man in the mustard-coloured suit and presented him with something that I could not see. Although the recipient was smiling benevolently, it was obvious that he was agitated and nervous because his legs were twitching all the time. Following this, there were handshakes all around and the other men began to speak to the recipient. The musicians played the same piece again; the recipient shook hands with everyone and then posed for photographs with groups of tourists. Finally, the brass band played some light-hearted music and the formalities came to an end. By this stage it had become quite hot and sunny, and I cursed myself for not bringing my camera.

I then made my way down the steps from the Hrad to the Saint Nicholas Church on this side of the river to see about tickets for a concert later today. However, I overheard somebody saying that the tickets were sold out. I walked on, wondering where I might eat lunch. At the Charles Bridge I found a lady selling tickets for a concert of music by Mozart at the Bertramka, the house where Mozart had stayed when he was in Prague during the late 1780s. I was told that there would be performances at 2 and 5.30. I bought a ticket for 150 Kčs; while I was checking my map to see where the place was, I heard some girls talking and thought that I recognized Irish accents. Sure enough, they turned out to be from Dublin. They told me that they had bought tickets for a Mozart concert this evening at the Smetana Hall, starting at 7.30. As it sounded interesting, I decided to give this a try. As it was now too late to go to the 2 p.m. Bertramka performance, I decided to go there tomorrow.

I walked towards the Old Town Centre and stopped to buy an appetizing roll containing ham, cheese and salad, which I ate while sitting on the grass in front of the Church of Saint Nicholas in the square. While I did so, some people in blue Renaissance costumes emerged from the Týn Church nearby and played some music of the period on brass wind instruments. I walked over to the church to investigate what was going on and discovered that there would be a concert at 4 o'clock. I then ambled up Celetná to the Powder Tower, where the Irish girls had bought their tickets for this evening's concert. After a certain amount of confusion I finally found the ticket office, but discovered that tickets were no longer being sold there but could be bought from 6.30 p.m. at the hall itself.

I walked down na Příkopě at a leisurely pace, returned to the Old Town Square and bought my ticket for the concert at four o'clock. I made an attempt to see an exhibition entitled 'Mozart in Prague' but discovered that it too was closed. I killed time for a quarter of an hour, then entered the Týn Church and sat down. The interior was very tall, grim and dark.

The concert started at four o'clock. It consisted of early Italian church music and was performed by an Italian group, the Capella Musicale di San Petronio. The music was played on two trumpets and the organ, and some of the items were sung by a choir. Unfortunately I fell asleep during the first couple of pieces. The rest of the programme was interesting, though not very exciting as the composers were so obscure.

When the concert had finished, I looked around the church and saw the tombstone of Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), the famous Danish astronomer, astrologer and alchemist who had died in Prague. After I had seen everything, I walked to the Bistro at the end of Wenceslas Square and sat down to a meal of ham and cheese pizza with salad and tea.

I then wandered down na Příkopě and sat down to write some more postcards (which I forgot to post later). At 7.15 I walked to the Smetana Hall, where I combed my hair and put on my tie before sitting down. The hall was large and drab; the predominant colour scheme was cream and brown, and the woodwork was very dark. Most of the Czech people in the audience were very elegantly dressed; we tourists certainly lowered the standards! At 7.30 the formally-dressed members of the Collegium Musicum Pragense, an eight-man wind ensemble, assembled on the stage and began the performance, which started with the Octet in B major (Parthia 3

– a work in three movements) by Josef Mysliveček (1737–1781); it was very Mozartian. We then heard Jan Nepomuk Vent's arrangements of arias from Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*, which ended the first part. The music was pleasant and were played very well indeed.

During the interval, I wandered around the spacious building and got myself a refreshing glass of orange juice as I felt very hot and thirsty. I met the Irish girls, spoke to them briefly and arranged to meet them afterwards.

The second half was equally enjoyable: we heard Josef Triebensee's arrangements of arias from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, then Mozart's Serenade in C minor, originally written for wind instruments. I was not familiar with this piece; it turned out to be very pleasant and I enjoyed listening to it.

After the concert I met the girls outside and we went walking around the streets. We ambled into the Old Town Square, where we listened to some excellent street musicians and then the girls decided to have a look for chips and something to drink. A couple of them ate crêpes in the square and then we went off in search of a bar. We retraced our steps up Celetná but found that every place was closing for the night. We turned down na Příkopě, where the girls were able to buy helpings of chips, and poked our heads into a jazz club. At the bottom of Wenceslas Square we wandered into an expensive bar, where we were told that they did not serve beer. At this point the girls decided to give up their search. We walked towards the Muzeum metro station and I stopped briefly to buy an ice cream for just 3 Kčs. I rejoined the girls and left them at the entrance to the station. I was glad to be rid of them, for they were typical rowdy students!

I arrived back at my place exhausted and went straight to bed.

Tuesday, 10 September

I woke up early and discovered that it was beautifully clear and sunny morning. I jumped out of bed, had a shower and swallowed a hasty breakfast of fruit and tea. On my way out, I spoke to Marcela (the lady who owned the apartment) and gave her some clothes to wash. I also mentioned that I would probably like to stay longer.



Dancing girls and a hot-air balloon in Wenceslas Square

At the metro station I bought a bread roll in the café and began to eat it when I arrived in Wenceslas Square. By 9.30 I was at the bottom end watching dancing girls, wearing the briefest of miniskirts, cavorting around to the sound of a jazz band. This turned out to be an advertising gimmick for something or other. Unfortunately the girls stopped dancing just as I finished eating my roll and was taking out my camera out of its bag. Instead, I photographed a huge hot-air balloon that was being blown up; soon it was floating in the air with a young man in red harnessed to it. I hung around for a little and, as luck would have it, the girls started to dance again. I took a few shots of them before leaving the square and walking down na Příkopě towards the Powder Tower.



The Powder Tower at the end of na Příkopě and graffiti on a wall in Celetná



The Old Town Square

I now began my sightseeing and photography in earnest. As the weather was so fine and the light was so brilliant, I decided to concentrate on the exteriors of notable buildings. First of all I paid a small fee and climbed to the top of the Powder Tower, where I was able to enjoy some fine panoramic views of the city.



The Klementium and the Clam Galles Palace

Down at ground level once again, I walked along Celetná, stopping now and then to photograph buildings and 'Sinéad O'Connor' scrawled on a wall. In the Old Town Square I took some more shots. I then continued along Karlova, where I got a little lost and stopped to photograph the Klementium and the Clam Galles Palace. When I arrived at Křížovnické square, I took a few more snaps and one of the view across to the Hrad, which looked quite spectacular. From here I walked along the bank of the river, then crossed the Charles Bridge.



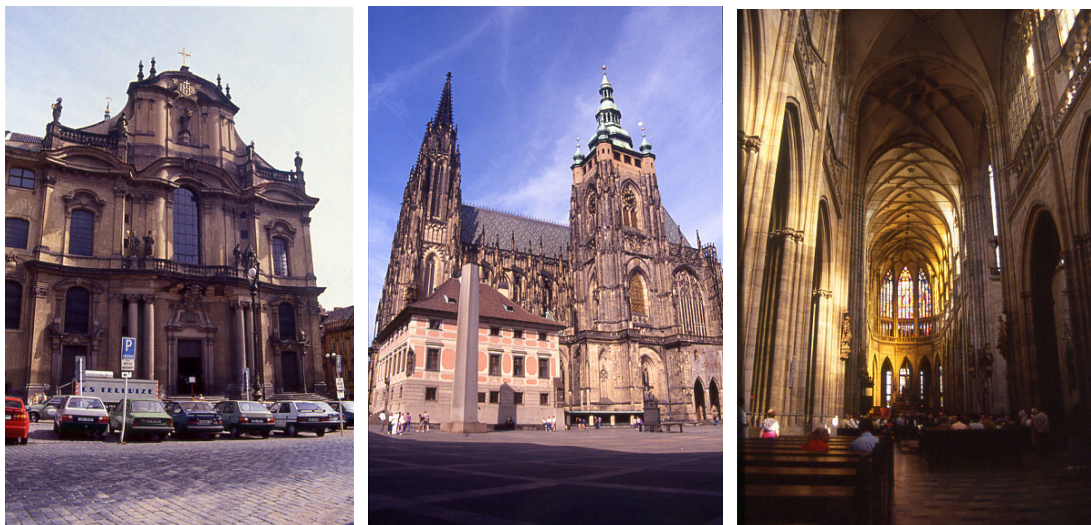
View of the River Vltava, the Charles Bridge and the Hrad

At the other end I climbed to the top of the bridge tower, where I took some more panoramic shots. Next I stopped in Malostranská square, where I bought a

couple of hot dogs and took a short rest. After I had photographed the Saint Nicholas Church, I began the steep ascent up Nerudova to the Hrad. I stopped again, this time in a little café, and drank a pleasantly cool glass of orange juice for just 5 Kčs – quite a difference from the 25 Kčs being charged for canned soft drinks in the more touristy areas.



The bridge tower and a view from the top



The Saint Nicholas Church, the Saint Vitus Cathedral and its interior

Up at the Hrad I discovered that the Saint Vitus Cathedral was open and so went inside for the first time. The interior was huge and very tall. Needless to say, it was full of tourists. I sat down for a while, then photographed the building while taking a look at the various side altars and stained glass windows. I peeped into the Grand Chapel of svatý Václav (Saint Wenceslas), admired the organ and the tomb of Saint John of Nepomuk, then descended to the crypt, where I looked around and surfaced in front of the Imperial Mausoleum of Ferdinand I and Maximilian II.

I sat down to relax afterwards, then left. I took a few more photos out in the courtyard and then drifted over to the Royal Gardens where, within the shade of

trees, I wandered among the flowers, lawns and fountains. I stopped at the Tennis Court building, photographed the sgraffito walls and went inside, where I looked at a display of work by the American architect John Hejduk. Some of his designs and drawings were rather strange and avant-garde.



The Tennis Court building (top) and the Belvedere (bottom)

Outside again, I wandered over to the nearby Belvedere building and took a photograph of it. I was surprised to find it open; when I glanced inside, I realized that there was little to see except bare rooms and an exhibition of modern sculpture.

I now realized that it was time for me to find my way to the Bertramka for the concert at 5.30 p.m. I descended from the Hrad to the Malá Strana and made my way southwards along uninteresting roads. I discovered that this part of the city was quite grubby and depressing. The distance turned out to be much greater than I expected and I finally arrived at the pretty little building and its garden at 5.35 p.m., some time after the concert had started.

I showed my ticket to a lady and she sighed in despair, for the travel agency that had issued it had made a mistake: the concert that I had paid for would be held on the following day! As the lady realized that I was exhausted, she handed me over to

a blonde girl who brought me to the small concert room, where a young lady, Jaromíra Ježková, was playing Fernando Sor's *Variations on a theme by Mozart* on a guitar. As the concert had started at five o'clock, there was an interval after this piece was finished. The audience wandered out into the garden, where the blonde girl poured us glasses of white wine. We sat down on some benches and she told us the history of the house in a very monotonous voice. We learned that this 'country' house had been owned in the mid 1780s by the renowned singer Josefina Dušek, the wife of the composer, pianist and music teacher František Xaver Dušek. In early October 1787, Mozart visited Prague for the second time and, although he had lodgings in an inn, he preferred to stay in the Dušeks' home, and it was here that he finished writing the score of his opera *Don Giovanni* just before its premiere on 29 October, 1787. He also stayed in the house in 1791 on the occasion of the first performance in Prague of his opera *La clemenza di Tito*.



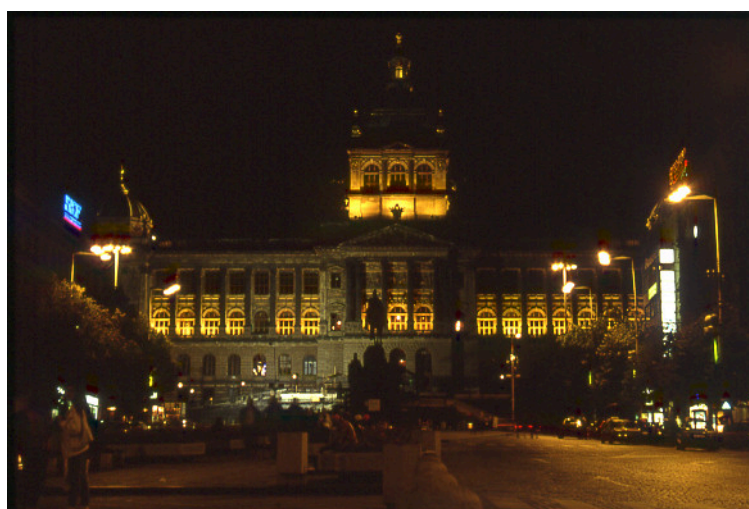
The Bertramka and the fortepiano that Mozart had played

Later we were summoned back to the hall, where we heard the second half of the recital: William Walton's *Bagatelle* No. 2, 'Simplicitas' by Jiří Jirmal (the girl's teacher), and finally Paganini's *Romance* and *Andantino variato*. I listened to it all in a kind of daze, for the wine had gone to my head and I had not eaten much during the day.

After the recital I looked briefly at the exhibition of memorabilia, photographed a not particularly handsome fortepiano that Mozart had played and then, as people had begun to pack things up, I left.

Instead of following my original plan of returning by metro, I walked to Můstek and regretted it, for the light was fading and the Vltava river looked quite uninviting when I crossed one of the bridges.

Back in the old city centre I went to the Bistro at the bottom of Wenceslas Square and sat down, tired and hungry by now, for a meal. I ordered a dish of ham with rye bread, a plate of salad, mineral water, a crêpe with fruit and cream, and finally a cup of tea. While eating, I chatted to three English girls sitting nearby. When they left I was joined by some crazy young people from somewhere Down Under. I paid up, left and walked to the Muzeum station, stopping en route to buy an ice cream and photograph the National Museum and the statue of Wenceslas on his horse by night.



Wenceslas Square by night

Back in the apartment I found all my washing hanging on my doors, dry. I went down to thank Marcela and offered to pay her, but she would accept nothing from me. Upstairs again I had a very welcome shower, drank a glass of water, and sat down to write my diary. Later I made myself some peppermint tea. I finally went to bed at midnight, feeling very tired indeed.

Wednesday, 11 September

I slept well, but woke very early. This morning it had clouded over and the weather did not look very promising. However, it brightened up a little later. I rose before eight o'clock, breakfasted, washed, and set off for the metro. I stopped outside the station to buy a filled roll and some more oranges, which I munched while walking along na Příkopě in the city centre. I was still eating it when I went into a film processing place and bought a couple of batteries for my flash unit. I then ambled up towards the Powder Tower and went into a booking office to see if I could buy a ticket for a concert to be given by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra on the following evening, but all the tickets had been sold.

This done, I now applied myself to my guidebook and map in order to do some proper sightseeing. First of all, I began to fine comb some of the narrowest streets of the Old Town. I found my way around from Celetná to the Church of Saint Jacob and went inside. Although it was very dark, it was impressive. From here I retraced my steps to Celetná, where I stopped to take a look at the Dům u černé Matky boží (House at the Black Madonna). I then walked up the Ovocný trh (Fruit Market), stopping to photograph the elegant Tyl Theatre (originally the Nostitz Theatre), where Mozart's operas had been performed, and the side view of the Charles University. Along the Rytířská I had a look at the ugly former Klement Gottwald Museum, then crossed over to and up the other end of Rytířská.



The Tyl (originally Nostitz) Theatre

I then went up a narrow alleyway to admire sv. Martin ve zdi (St Martin in the Wall), a Renaissance church, then found my way to the Church of sv. Jiljí (St Giles). The interior of this church was quite spectacular, but I could not photograph it as a Mass was in progress.

I wandered outside after a while, then found the House of Lords of Kunštát and Poděbrady. Here I was able to see an exhibition of some quite interesting remains of Romanesque décor in glass cases. In the basement I admired three Romanesque rooms with vaulted ceilings. I glanced at an exhibition of modern ceramics then left, working my way back to Wenceslas Square via Havelská, where I examined the handsome old arcades.

As I was tired by now and it had turned cloudy, I went to the Bistro and ordered the 'bio' pizza, a salad and, as I was thirsty, two glasses of mineral water. I relaxed and wrote quite a number of postcards; I took my time as I was feeling rather exhausted.

When I realized that it was about to rain in earnest, I decided to return to my lodgings. I walked up Wenceslas Square, posted the postcards and caught the metro back to Krč. In my room I rested and then, a little reluctantly, got myself ready for this evening's concert at the Bertramka. I set off shortly after four o'clock and went by metro to I. P. Pavlova and then caught a tram – in the wrong direction! When I

realized my mistake, I hopped out and waited for another one going the opposite way. The tram left me some distance past the Bertramka and I had to run back to get there by 5.30 p.m. I need not have rushed; the blonde girl was there again, and gave me and an Australian girl a glass of wine and took us off for a short guided tour of the house. She repeated most of what she had said yesterday and was often unable to answer our questions.

At six o'clock we went to the familiar hall, sat down and listened to a concert of assorted music played by Hana Dvořáková, a lady pianist, and Bohuslav Pavlas, an excellent cellist. It was a mistake to call this a 'Mozart Concert', for it only featured one short piece by Mozart. The works we heard were two movements of a Sonata in E major by the French composer François Francoeur, Mozart's Piano Sonata in B major, K 570, two pieces by Dvořák and a set of variations by Martinů. It turned out that the performers did not realize that they were supposed to play the last item!

As I had been chatting to the Australian girl, Karen (not her real name), the pair of us wandered off together afterwards and caught the metro to Malostranská. Karen brought me to a rather Germanic restaurant near the Charles Bridge, where a waiter fired the menu at us verbally. I chose a traditional dish of pork with dumplings and sauerkraut, washed down with mineral water. It was quite good, very filling and inexpensive.

After we finished, we ambled across the Charles Bridge, which I had not seen by night; both the bridge and the Hrad looked very beautiful as both were floodlit. The rain had cleared the place of people. En route we stopped for some ice cream, which unfortunately tasted rather watery. We walked towards Wenceslas Square but stopped at an attractive but exclusive restaurant near it, where we could see an old painted wooden ceiling. Upstairs, Karen ordered coffee and I asked for tea. We chatted and made plans; she suggested that we should investigate hiring a car and seeing something of the countryside. I was game to try and said that I would endeavour to get some information tomorrow. We then parted and went our separate ways. Back in my place, I did not stay up very late; I just wrote a few paragraphs of my diary and, as I was tired, went to bed.

Thursday, 12 September

This morning I was woken very early by people moving about. I remained awake for some time and finally succeeded in going back to sleep again, but was woken again by the door buzzer. I rose and had a shower. As it was a dull, cloudy and cool morning, I took my time about eating breakfast and getting ready.

I finally left and walked to the metro station, where I bought two big rolls and a two-day pass. When I emerged from the Muzeum stop, I discovered that the weather had changed dramatically, for Wenceslas Square was bathed in sunshine and the sky was blue. I was annoyed at myself for not bringing my camera, for I had decided to spend the day indoors, visiting museums and art galleries. Rather than travel all the way back again, I made decision to stick to my original plan. I sat on a seat by the statue and ate one of my rolls, throwing the crumbs to some cheeky little birds who made a terrific dash for them.

I then set off along Štěpánské in search of the Pragocar office, but was unable to find it. I nipped into a nearby Čedok information office and the lady gave me

directions. I finally found the place: it was a tiny establishment. The girl gave me a leaflet and I left.

I now returned to the metro at Můstek and got off at Malostranská. I hopped on a number 22 tram heading for the Hrad, but got off instead at the Belvedere and walked back a little to the František Bilek Villa and museum. The house, designed by Bilek, was most unusual – and ugly. Inside I spent some time examining the extraordinary sculpture created by Bilek, who was born in 1872; most of it was too over the top for me, but some of his portraits were excellent. The villa contained some appalling furniture of the period. However, I was glad to have seen this place and get a taste of the styles prevalent in Prague in the nineteenth century. I was determined to experience every aspect of this wonderful and very picturesque city.

To this end, I now walked along the road to the entrance of the Hrad and went into the Gallery of Modern Czech Art, housed in what had been the riding school. I bought a guide to the gallery for just 5 Kčs and went inside. Leaving my bag in the cloakroom, I then did a tour of the gallery. Although most of the artists were completely unknown to me and much of what was on display was quite outrageous, I did enjoy certain things, such as most of the sculpture, the photographs and some of the paintings. It was interesting to read in the guide booklet that the organizers had only been free to exhibit certain works after 1989. All in all I found the visit instructive and interesting.

I left at about 1.30 p.m. and wandered out to the garden where there were fountains, lawns, fine views of the Saint Vitus Cathedral, and several park benches. I sat down on one of these, removed my shoes and socks (my feet were aching) and ate my picnic lunch. Afterwards I relaxed and wrote some more postcards. As I was by now basking in hot sunshine, I was boiled by the time I left about one hour later.

I then popped into the Hrad and put my postcards into a post box. I then walked out by the main gate and went over to the grand Archbishop's Palace and the National Gallery next door. I paid 20 Kčs to enter, left my bag in the cloakroom, and spent the rest of the afternoon in the place, enjoying the fine collections of European art.

The first few rooms contained early religious paintings, of which there were many, and in one suite of rooms I found some Greek icons. In the next section, I stopped to enjoy Johannes de Hemessen's *Opil stařena* ('Drunk Old Woman'), which I found quite hilarious. The old woman, who looked more like a man, had grapes in her hair, a contorted face, and a big snot hung from one of her nostrils. Some young ladies nearby giggled when they saw the painting.

Also in the collection were several interesting little works by Lucas Cranach, and a small portrait by Hans Holbein. One painting that caught my attention was Pierre Magnard's *Portrait of a young man*. There was a Tintoretto painting, one by El Greco, one by Tiepolo, a marvellous view of the River Thames by Canaletto, and several masterpieces by Rubens. I then examined some good landscape paintings by Ruysdael, several by Rembrandt, and a wonderful portrait by Frans Hals. I also saw works by van Dyck and several by Ostade, including a curious and very funny set of small paintings that depicted four of the five senses. Hearing was represented by a man banging a large lid, feeling by a man with his hand in his pocket (checking his money), and smell by a man watching a dog defecating. Another painting in the same room that made me laugh was Frans van Mieris' *Wooing*: a young lady pouring

wine for a seated young blade, who was gazing at her intently. A broken clay pipe lay on the floor and, in the background, a couple of dogs could be seen copulating.

I then suddenly found myself in a room containing modern art. The most stunning painting here was Klimt's *Virgin*, and the most sensitive was Emil Orlik's *Model* which, at first glance, I could have mistaken for a work by Whistler.

Believing that I had seen everything by now, I went downstairs, where I discovered a signpost pointing towards the collection of French Impressionists. This section was full of noisy French students. For some strange reason, chronological order was reversed here. In the correct order I stopped to examine paintings by Corot, Manet, Monet, Sisley, Renoir, Pissarro, Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, Signac (whose pointillist style interested me), Bonnard, Picasso and Rousseau. There were also some powerful statues here by Rodin.

I left when the lights were being switched off at 5.45 p.m., collected my bag and staggered outside. It was a beautiful evening and the view from the Hrad overlooking the city was stunning. I found a cosy place to sit, near a café, where I wrote my diary until seven o'clock. By this time, the light was beginning to fade.

I now walked quickly down to the city centre and met Karen outside the Bistro at Můstek. We walked to the *vinárna* in the Old Town Square and had a large and excellent meal that included a glass of wine. I had chicken soup, trout with rice and a tomato salad, and finished with fruit, ice cream, then tea. This cost me just a little over £4! We discussed plans and eventually decided to take a night train to Banská Bystrica tomorrow evening. We would do a little tour for four days and then return to Prague.

When we finished our meal and finalized our plans, we left. I returned to my quarters, where I spoke to Marcela and arranged accommodation for when we returned. In my room I did some preparations, wrote my diary and went to bed. An enjoyable and interesting day.

Friday, 13 (!) September

I was woken early this morning by noises below me in the house. Although it was very misty out, I could see that the weather would be good today. I tried to go back to sleep again, but was not very successful. I finally got up, had a shower and ate some breakfast. I organized my things and spoke once again to Marcela before leaving. I bought my usual roll at the café and ate it later, when I had made my way to the Hrad by metro and tram.



The Toscana Palace

When ready, I set about some serious sightseeing and took photographs of just about everything of interest. Certainly Prague boasted some really beautiful old buildings. First of all I walked to Hradčanské náměstí, the square at the entrance of the castle complex, where I looked at the Museum of Military History, took shots of a view of the city and the Toscana Palace, and stopped to listen to some lively musicians. Passing a picturesque café and Martinický Palás, I walked along a delightful narrow street named Nový Svět (New World), where I photographed the beautiful old-world houses. It was very quiet and pleasant here. From here I turned down Černínská, where there were more elegant buildings, and arrived at the magnificent Loreto Chapel, built in the 1740s, which I photographed. As I arrived just as the doors were being closed at 12.15, I decided to have lunch at a restaurant next door. I sat outside, surrounded by German tourists, and ordered goulash with spaghetti and some mineral water. The food was good and quite inexpensive.



Nový Svět (top left), the Loreto Chapel (top right) and the Santa Casa (below)

When I had finished eating, I entered the chapel and walked in the cloisters around the Santa Casa, Mary's home in Nazareth, which was believed to have been

transported by a host of angels to a small village in northern Yugoslavia, and from there to a small laurel grove (hence *loreto*) in Italy. This Loreto shrine was one of fifty copies built in the Czech lands. Despite signs forbidding photography, I managed to take a shot of it. I did not dare photograph anything inside the magnificent baroque chapel, for a rather intimidating-looking woman was keeping a close eye on everyone. I merely gasped, looked around and, after I had seen everything to my satisfaction, left and went upstairs to see the treasury. The objects on display were rather too ornate for my liking.



The chapel of the Strahov Monastery

I then left and walked the short distance to the Strahov Monastery, where I purchased a ticket and saw the two magnificent libraries: the Teologický sál (Theological Hall) with its fabulous stuccoed ceiling and the Filosofický sál (Philosophy Hall), with its eighteenth-century frescoes. As no photography was allowed here, I bought some postcards of the place. Outside, I walked over to take a look at the wonderful chapel, where I was able to poke the lens of my camera through the bars of the gate and take a photograph of the interior.



The Lobkovic Palace

Afterwards I wandered out to the Strahov Gardens, where there was a fine panoramic view of the city, still bathed in sunshine, then made my way down to the Lobkovic Palace (now the German Embassy). I managed to photograph the entrance and a view of the garden through the gate when a vehicle came out, and then I walked round the back, where I was able to take an excellent shot of the whole garden and building.

Next I made my way around some of the delightful little alleyways, working my way down and around to the Church of Panna Marie Vítězná and took a photo of the Child of Prague (see Saturday, 7 September, Chapter 1). The church was full of noisy Italian and German tourists.



Part of the John Lennon's 'mock grave' on Kampa Island

I did not stay long here, but crossed over to the Maltézké náměstí, a village-like square, with the Church of Panna Marie pod řetězem at one end. I wandered around this delightful and peaceful district and found my way to Kampa Island, which also contained lovely little old-world streets and John Lennon's 'mock grave', some of which I photographed: an interesting combination of the old and the new.



The Valdštejn Palace

From here I emerged into the street leading to the Charles Bridge, but continued up Tomášská to the great Valdštejn Palace. As I was now beginning to run out of time and energy, I just photographed the front of the building and walked to the nearest metro station.

I returned to my lodgings shortly after six o'clock, where I spoke with Marcela and reorganized my luggage. At this point a young French man entered and, guessing his purpose, I directed him up to what had been my bedroom. I then attempted to take a shower, but as there was no water, I had to make do with a simple wash using a thin trickle of water that came out of the washbasin tap.

As soon as I was ready, I left and returned to the metro station. I travelled to Můstek and, as I was about half an hour too early to meet Karen, I changed \$100 and had a meal of pizza and salad at the Bistro in Wenceslas Square. I met her outside at eight and we went directly by metro to the main train station, where we managed to get a couchette on the train to Banská Bystrica without any bother. The journey cost just a mere 144 Kčs (about £3.27) each. As we had time to kill, Karen bought something to eat, I got a couple of bottles of lemonade, and we sat on some benches with a lot of young backpackers and some seedy-looking characters. The station did not appear to be a very safe place. Soldiers came to check some rather drunk gypsies and stopped two English girls smoking.

Time went quickly enough and the train finally arrived. We quickly found our smart and clean couchette, which we had to ourselves, and settled down. The train pulled out at 9.57 p.m. and we were on our way to Banská Bystrica. I was given blankets and sheets; after a while we pulled down our bunks and made up our beds. We were both tired and realized that it would be pointless trying to write our diaries because of the movement of the train. We both retired to bed and I turned out the light. As the train was quite noisy, I realized that sleep would probably be next to impossible.