



Walking in Southern Bohemia

From castle to castle in glorious countryside

19–25 June 2023 (MJ 771)

7 days • £2,970

Lecturer: Martina Hinks-Edwards

Country walking combined with architecture and history.

Undulating countryside, some uphill walks, through woodland of oak, lime and conifer and across meadows and arable land.

A variety of castles and country houses and extremely pretty towns and villages.

Based in Hluboká and also Český Krumlov, with a concert included in the 18th-century castle theatre.

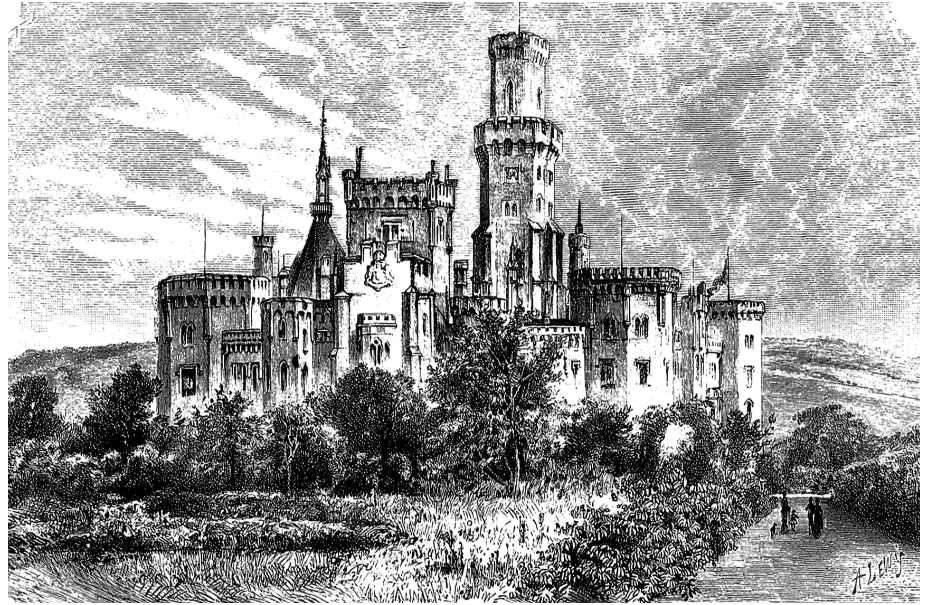
The beauty of Bohemia is two-fold: exquisite towns and villages, and countryside as beguiling as any in Central Europe. In its southernmost reaches low-lying pastures give way to the foothills of the Šumava mountains on the Austrian border. Walking here delves deep into a gentle landscape, much of it farmland, predominantly arable, even more of it woodland and coniferous forest. Water is a constant with innumerable man-made lakes dating from the Middle Ages and the mighty River Vltava.

There are no mountain peaks to scale or deep valleys to traverse. Some views are panoramic, others are snatched in forest clearings, some stretches are enclosed with no vistas at all. Nevertheless, walking here offers an intense experience with its own set of charms.

Firstly, solitude: a careful construction of waymarked paths is woefully neglected by walkers, with just the occasional cyclist or berry-picker to sidestep. Then there is ever-changing texture and colour, through dry and practically alpine forest to low-lying, damp, dark woods; across maize and wheat farmland to fallow fields and meadows: a paint chart of greens, soft and musty or intense and clean.

Finally, the chief focus of the tour: walks into (or away from) buildings and built environments of beauty, charm or magnificence, a sequence of country houses, monasteries, town palaces and castles.

For much of its history, but especially in the 16th century, Bohemia was one of the most prosperous regions in Europe. Many of the great magnates of the Habsburg Empire established summer residences here, constantly rebuilding, extending and refurbishing.



Hluboká, wood engraving c. 1880.

Reception of Italian Renaissance architecture was precocious, and in the era of Baroque there was a veritable mania for building. Many parks and gardens later succumbed to the fashion for the English landscaped style, and also partly of British inspiration was the 19th-century Gothic Revival.

Itinerary

Day 1: Orlík, Hluboká. Fly at c. 10.15am from London Heathrow to Prague. Drive southwards stopping at Orlík with its fine Gothic castle dominating the River Vltava, dammed at this point. Continue to Hluboká where we spend three nights in a hotel neighbouring the castle.

Day 2: Staré Město to Slavonice, Jindřichův Hradec. A moderate morning walk is mostly flat and begins with wonderful views of unspoiled, hilly countryside marking the boundary of the Czech Republic and Austria. Continue through forests of fir and pine, passing defences which the Czech army was obliged to relinquish as a consequence of Chamberlain's acquiescence to Hitler's demands in 1938. Distance: 8 km, c. 2½ hours. Drive to Jindřichův Hradec castle with arcades and an exquisite Renaissance rotunda.

Day 3: Hluboká, Třeboň, Vlkov. Begin with a tour of the Gothic Revival castle of Hluboká, summer home of the Schwarzenbergs,

wealthiest landowners in South Bohemia, and richly furnished and decorated. Visit the Schwarzenberg mausoleum bordering Lake Svět and walk into the delightful small town of Třeboň. In the afternoon, an easy walk on the flat from Vlkov to Frahelž, the heart of the lakelands formed in the Middle Ages to cultivate fish. Distance: 4.5 km, c. 1¼ hours.

Day 4: Kladné to Český Krumlov. Drive to Kladné for a morning walk into Český Krumlov: 6 km, c. 2½ hours. This is a varied and picturesque moderate walk of forested hills, carpeted with blueberries and hayfields, through the decaying remains of a Baroque estate into the formal gardens of the castle, from where we capture a first and wonderful view of this exceedingly pretty town. Continue into the historic centre, clustered around a bend in the upper reaches of the Vltava. In the afternoon, an introduction to some of the main sights on a gentle walk of 1½ hours. First of three nights in Český Krumlov.

Day 5: Krtely, Kratochvíle, Český Krumlov. Morning walk from Krtely to Kratochvíle: 3 km, c. 1 hour. An easy walk through meadows and forest until the Renaissance castle of Kratochvíle gradually appears in the distance. Return to Český Krumlov to visit the castle there, Medieval in origin, with Renaissance and Baroque additions. An evening of music and dance begins in the Masquerade Hall and

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continued

culminates in the theatre, one of the few intact 18th-century theatres to have survived. A buffet supper follows in the gardens. (*Performances are part of the Český Krumlov Chamber Music Festival; programme to be confirmed.*)

Day 6: Český Krumlov, Vyšší Brod. Drive to Vyšší Brod, once a major Cistercian monastery with a 13th-century church. Moderate, circular walk from Vyšší Brod: 6 km, c. 2¼ hours. Skirting the monastery complex, we follow an extremely scenic route via the waterfalls of Menší Vltavice and a neo-Romanesque chapel with lovely views of the Šumava foothills. Tour of the monastery before driving back to Český Krumlov.

Day 7. Drive to Prague for the afternoon flight arriving at London Heathrow at c. 4.00pm.

Some of the places on this itinerary require special permission to visit. The order may therefore vary a little from the description above.

Lecturer

Martina Hinks-Edwards studied English at Charles University, Prague. She began working for MRT while still studying, firstly as an interpreter for groups visiting the Czech Republic, and from 2004 as a tour leader with a wide breadth of knowledge of the country's cultural history. She has led tours throughout the Czech Republic and has a particular interest in 20th-century Czech history and architecture. Martina lives in Prague but loves cycling and hiking in the Bohemian countryside.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,970 or £2,760 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,140 or £2,930 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus A320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 5 lunches and 4 dinners, including one buffet, with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and local tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Štekl, Hluboká nad Vltavou (hotelstekl.cz): a 4-star hotel converted from an auxiliary building belonging to the neighbouring mansion. **Hotel Latrán Český Krumlov** (latran.hotely-krumlov.cz): a small 4-star hotel near the castle. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? This is a walking tour, graded easy. Of the 6 walks, 3 are easy and 3 are moderate, mostly for their length rather than the terrain. It is essential for participants to have appropriate walking footwear, be in good physical condition and to be used to country walking with uphill and downhill content.

Average distance by coach per day: 71 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with *Art in Tyrol, 12–18 June 2023; Gastronomic Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 12–18 June 2023.*