

## Wandering through Prague with Charles IV



**In 2016 it will be 700 years from the birth of Charles IV, King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor (1316–1378), one of the most eminent personalities of European history. Which places in Prague would His Royal Majesty show you, if he took on the role of your tour guide?**

### **Stone Bell House: Charles's Place of Birth**

Start your stroll right in the core of the historical centre of Prague, on the Old Town Square. On its east side you will find a splendid Gothic house with a house symbol on the corner, called the Stone Bell House, which dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. John of Luxembourg and Elizabeth of Bohemia of the Přemyslid dynasty, the parents of Charles IV, dwelt here for some time because following a large fire Prague Castle was uninhabitable. It was mostly likely in this place, where the future sovereign was born on May 14, 1316. You can also view the historical interiors which host exhibitions organised by the Prague City Gallery.

### **Charles Bridge: The Oldest Bridge in Prague**

Charles Bridge, originally referred to as Prague or Stone Bridge, today bears the name of its founder, Emperor Charles IV. It is said that following the monarch's request astrologists calculated the most suitable time for the beginning of its construction, which took place on the 9th day of the 7th month in the year of 1357 at 5 hours and 31 minutes in the morning when these digits formed unique ascending and descending sequences of odd numbers 1-3-5-7-9-7-5-3-1. Supported by 16 pillars, the bridge is 518 m long and nearly 10 m wide. It is made of sandstone blocks and according to legend milk and wine were mixed with the mortar. Today, Charles Bridge is adorned with thirty statues and sculptures and is open to pedestrians only. If you fancy learning a little more about its history, pay a visit to the Charles Bridge Museum located on Křižovnické Square right next to the Old Town Bridge Tower.

### **Old Town Bridge Tower: Gallery of Luxembourgs**

The point of entrance to Charles Bridge from the Old Town, the most gorgeous tower of Gothic Europe, was finished before 1380. The rich sculptural decoration symbolically glorifies the rule of the House of Luxembourg; you will find there not only statues of Kings Charles IV and his son Wenceslas IV, as well as the master builders of the tower, but also Statues of Sts. Adalbert and Sigismund, the Patron Saints of Bohemia along with St. Vitus – Patron Saint of the Prague Cathedral and Bridge.

### **Statue of Charles IV on Křižovnické Square**

Just a few steps from the Old Town Bridge Tower stands the Monument of Charles IV, made in 1848 to mark the five-hundred year anniversary of the foundation of Charles University. The Emperor leans on his sword with one hand and holds the foundation charter of the university in the other. Allegories of the historical faculties stand around him joined by four significant personalities, Charles's friends and close collaborators: Arnošt of Pardubice, Jan Očko of Vlašim, Matthias of Arras and Beneš Krabice of Weitmile.

### **1348: Year of the University and the New Town**

Being exceptionally successful and fruitful for Charles, the year 1348 is written in bold letters in all Czech history textbooks. In March Charles IV started the construction of the New Town, centred around today's Charles Square, later he founded Karlštejn Castle and the Benedictine Monastery referred to either as Na Slovanech or Emmaus Monastery. In April 1348 he established the first university in Central Europe, which now bears the name of its founder: Charles University. The heart of the vast complex in the Old Town is Carolinum, the oldest preserved university college. Its Great Hall hosts graduation ceremonies and official assemblies. Sometimes the Carolinum chambers open their doors to the public on the occasion of exhibitions and concerts. One structure that truly witnessed the times of Charles IV is the beautiful Gothic bay window protruding from the building at the corner of Fruit Market and Železná (Iron) Street.

### **Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral**

Owing to the great efforts of Charles IV the Old Royal Palace at Prague Castle was restored to its former glory and together with master builders Matthias of Arras and Petr Parler, Charles IV significantly contributed to the erection of St. Vitus Cathedral that symbolises the High Gothic Period in the architectural history of Prague. In addition, the King commissioned the construction of the new royal mausoleum and had the remains of Czech Kings and church dignitaries transferred to it. For years the Chapel of St. Wenceslas has been considered to be the heart and soul of the cathedral. Take note of the door set in the northern portal and particularly the bronze ring in it, because apparently it is the very ring which St. Wenceslas held onto shortly before he fell to his death. The door in the south-western corner of the chapel leads to the Crown Chamber that houses the Czech Crown Jewels.

### **His Majesty in Wallenstein Riding Hall**

The Czech-Bavarian Provincial Exhibition organised in cooperation with the National Gallery in Prague to mark the 700th anniversary of the birth of Charles IV will introduce him as an exceptional personality of European political and cultural history who was capable of using art and architecture to promote the Imperial Majesty. You can visit the exhibition at the Wallenstein Riding Hall at Lesser Town from mid-May to the end of September 2016 and see for yourself.

Celebrations will also be staged in Karlovy Vary, a famous spa, founded by Charles IV. In addition, a touring exhibition displaying masterly crafted replicas of the Czech Crown Jewels will stop off at various places around the Czech Republic.

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