

## Arts Society Kent Area Visit to Prague – Sept 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> 2018

17 members of various Societies within the Kent Area went on a fascinating visit to Prague in September to see its various sights. We were very lucky to be shown around by a lovely local guide Martina, who was extremely knowledgeable and spoke excellent English. She quite made the trip for us !

We stayed in a central hotel so were able to walk most days to see the various areas of interest. The hotel itself was located in the Old Town and had its own art nouveau architecture, including a particularly lovely breakfast room.

On the first evening we had a short orientation tour of the central area, followed by a delightful meal at a fine dining restaurant, preparing us for a full morning the next day, seeing more of the Old Town, in greater detail. This included The Old Town Square, St Nicholas Church & the St Agnes Convent, which contains part of The National Gallery collection of medieval and early Renaissance artworks. This was followed by a private river cruise including lunch, which gave us a chance to see more of the sights, from the river, and to cross The Charles Bridge. The rest of the afternoon was free & then several of us went out for a meal together at The Red Wheel restaurant , that we had spotted earlier in the day.

The next day we were taken by coach to the Castle Area and started by watching the guards arrive to stand at the gates. The Castle includes several parts, with St Vitus Cathedral being particularly appealing. In the Old Royal Palace we saw the Vladislav Hall, one of the best examples of late Gothic architecture in Prague. The hall was used for many events, including jousting in bad weather so has a Riders Staircase on one side. The Basilica of St George is the oldest of the Castle`s churches. We then visited Golden Lane but found it rather disappointing, due to the huge number of people there at the same time as us.

We continued to the Lobkowitz Palace for a light lunch on their pretty balcony, before attending a short concert with pianist, flute & violin players. Several well known pieces were played. After that we had time to see the artworks in the Palace. We returned to the hotel by tram, once we had walked down the hill through the Vineyard. A few members of the party attended the opera Romeo & Juliet, but the rest of us embarked on a joint restaurant visit that became a bit long winded as our first choice could not accommodate us & sent us to a sister establishment that proved hard to find, but was in fact really close to our hotel we discovered later. We ended up having a very nice meal though.

The following day we went by coach to Kutna Hora, a Unesco World Heritage site, & old silver mining town , site of the Mint. We visited The Church of St Barbara and the Italian Court. We then had a delightful lunch under the trees in a local restaurant, with barbecued meats piled high. On our way home those of us who wished to visited the Sedlec Ossuary where thousands of human bones are tastefully displayed. After our coach trip back most of us went to a concert at The Municipal Hall , which featured a magnificent Mahler Symphony that exhausted us let alone the orchestra. Time for a quick snack after that, with some going to the Hotel de Paris & some to the Cubist Café.

Our final day was still a full one as we started with a walk around The New Town, with coffee and cakes off the trolley in the Municipal Hall, before taking a private tour through its amazing art nouveau rooms. Then a bit of time for last minute shopping and lunch before we left the hotel for the last time & drove to the Strahov Monastery to see its magnificent library. Then time for a final dinner at a restaurant overlooking the river and castle before having to go to the airport to catch our plane home.

What an amazing few days ! It is hard to remember all that we saw and no doubt we all came home for a rest, but hopefully with great photos and tales to tell.