

Central Bohemia



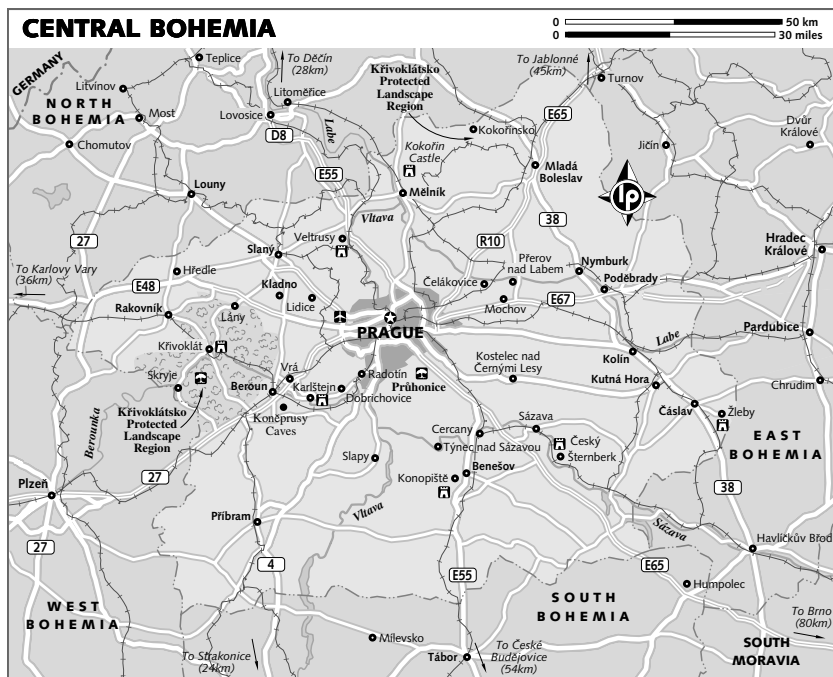
Beyond the serried apartment blocks of Prague's outer suburbs, the city gives way to the surprisingly green hinterland of Central Bohemia, a region of rolling hills, rich farmland and thick forests dotted with castles, chateaux and picturesque towns. Rural and rustic, yet within easy reach of the capital, for centuries it has provided an escape for generations of city dwellers, from the aristocrats and kings who built their country retreats here, to the modern-day Praguers who head out on weekends to hike, bike and canoe on its network of trails and rivers.

Most of Central Bohemia can be easily explored on day trips from Prague, from the medieval silver-mining town of Kutná Hora to the fairy-tale castles of Karlštejn and Křivoklát, and the fascinating excesses of Konopiště. The downside of such convenience is the crowds that throng to these places on summer weekends, but you can avoid them by visiting in winter – Karlštejn under snow is a magical sight – or on weekdays, or better still by staying overnight. As the tour coaches and caravans roll out at nightfall, many of the towns and villages belong once again to the locals and an overnight stay will immerse you in the region's blissful serenity – Central Bohemia's true, although sometimes elusive, highlight.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Be dazzled by Kutná Hora's beautiful **cathedral of St Barbara** (p157)
- Admire the art of bone-arranging in ghoulish **Sedlec ossuary** (p159) in Kutná Hora
- Check out the region's best castles at **Karlštejn** (p148) and **Konopiště** (p152)
- Take in the views and sample the wines in **Mělník** (p154)
- Get off the beaten track and explore the beautiful back roads of **Kokořínsko** (p156)





Castles & Chateaux

Central Bohemia is castle country, with more than half a dozen castles and chateaux you can visit. The two most popular, Karlštejn and Konopiště, are busy on summer weekends.

Tours

If you're short on time or want a guided tour, Prague-based tour companies have a range of all-day excursions from the capital during summer. Tour operators include:

Martin Tour (Map p106; ☎ 224 212 473; www.martin.tour.cz; Štěpánská 61, Nové Město, Prague) Tours, available in 25 languages and using headphones rather than guides, include Konopiště (850Kč, five hours) Karlštejn (950Kč, five hours) and Kutná Hora (850Kč, five hours).

Prague Sightseeing Tours (Map p118; ☎ 224 314 661; www.pstours.cz; Klimentůvská 52, Nové Město, Prague) Tours include Konopiště (890Kč, four hours), Karlštejn (960Kč, 4½ hours) and Kutná Hora (980Kč, five hours).

KARLŠTEJN

pop 800

Karlštejn castle is in such good shape these days it wouldn't look out of place on Disney's Main St. The crowds come in theme-park

proportions as well (it's best to book ahead if you want to be sure of a guided tour), but the peaceful surrounding countryside offers views of Karlštejn's stunning exterior that rival anything you'll see on the inside.

Orientation & Information

From the train station it's a 500m walk to Karlštejn village (turn left out of the station, cross the river and turn right), and then another 800m uphill to the castle through a gamut of souvenir stalls selling everything from giant rubber spiders to African wood-carvings. If you don't want to walk, you can take a taxi (110Kč per person) or a horse-drawn coach (150Kč per person); both depart from the car park (70Kč per day for a car). Private vehicles are not allowed to drive up to the castle.

There's an information office, public toilets, telephones and an ATM at the car park.

Sights & Activities

Karlštejn castle (☎ 274 008 154; www.hradkarlstejn.cz; Tour I adult/concession 220/120Kč, Tour II 300/100Kč; ☎: 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug; 9am-5pm May, Jun & Sep; 9am-4pm

Apr & Oct; 9am-3pm Nov-Mar) was born of a grand pedigree, starting life in 1348 as a hideaway for the crown jewels and the treasury of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV. Run by an appointed burgrave, the castle was surrounded by a network of land-owning knight vassals, who came to the castle's aid whenever enemies moved against it.

Karlštejn again sheltered the Bohemian and Imperial crown jewels during the Hussite Wars, but it fell into disrepair as its defences became outmoded. Considerable restoration work, not least by Josef Mocker in the late 19th century, has returned the castle to its former glory.

Perched high on a crag that overlooks the Berounka river, and sporting a spotless paint job, this cluster of turrets, high parapets and looming towers is as immaculately maintained as it is powerfully evocative. Rightly one of the top attractions of the Czech Republic, its only drawback is its overwhelming popularity: in the summer months it is literally mobbed with visitors, ice-cream vendors and souvenir stalls.

There are two guided tours through the castle. Tour I (50 minutes) passes through the Knight's hall, still daubed with the coats of arms and names of the knight vassals, Charles IV's bedchamber, the Audience hall and the Jewel house, which includes treasures from the chapel of the Holy Cross and a replica of the St Wenceslas crown.

Tour II (70 minutes) must be booked in advance and takes in the Great tower, the highest point of the castle, which includes a museum on Mocker's restoration work, the Marian tower and the exquisite chapel of the Holy Cross with its decorative ceiling.

You can avoid some of the crowds on the way uphill by taking the alternative walking route – turn left just past Pension Restaurant U Janů, and follow this sideroad for 10 minutes or so. About 50m before you reach Pension pod Dračí Skálou, cross the little footbridge on the right and follow the footpath uphill through the woods to reach the castle entrance.

A red-marked hiking trail leads 7km from Karlštejn village via Mořinka (not Mořina) village to the **Karlík valley** (Karlícké údolí), a nature reserve where a yellow-marked trail leads north to the remains of Charles IV's **Karlík castle**, abandoned in the 15th century. Karlík village, 1km down the valley, has a

12th-century rotunda. A road and a green-marked trail run 1.5km southeast from there to Dobřichovice, on the Prague–Beroun train line.

You can also hike 14km from Karlštejn to Beroun (p150 for details).

Sleeping & Eating

Autokemp Karlštejn (☎ 311 681 263; tent per person 60Kč; ☎: Mar-Sep; P) On the northern side of the river, 500m west of the bridge, this has a top location and staff can help organise a canoe for a paddle on the river.

Penzión Slon (☎ 311 681 550; www.penzionslon.cz; s/d 800/1200Kč; mains 80-130Kč; P) Away from the crowds, on the opposite side of the railway tracks from the village (follow the elephant signs), the 'Elephant Pension' offers brightly decorated en suite rooms, and a restaurant with Czech home cooking.

Pension & Restaurant U Janů (☎ 311 681 210; info@ujanu.cz; d/apt 1000/1200Kč) Located on the road up to the castle, this atmospheric place has a decent dollop of authentic charm. There are three apartments and one double room. The restaurant is good (mains 70Kč to 160Kč), with a menu that includes the Slovak speciality, *halušky* (cheesy dumplings with bacon bits), but the staff could have been friendlier.

Penzión U královny Dagmar (☎ 311 681 378; www.penziondagmara.cz; d/apt 1150/1350/1550Kč) Close to the castle and a rung up the price ladder, this slick place has all the creature comforts and a top-notch eatery, with mains from 80Kč to 200Kč.

Getting There & Away

Trains to Beroun from Prague's hlavní nádraží (main station) and Praha-Smíchovské stations stop at Karlštejn (46Kč, 45 minutes, hourly). The last train back to Prague doesn't leave until 9.57pm.

BEROUN

pop 17,600

The town was established at a ford on the Berounka river, on the road between Prague and Plzeň, and was subject to flooding during 2002.

Newly restored, the spick-and-span Beroun makes an attractive base for exploring Krivoklát, Karlštejn, the Koněprusy caves and the surrounding hiking trails, or as the starting point for a canoe trip on the Berounka river.

Orientation & Information

The town's main square, Husovo náměstí, is 500m north of the train station; go under the underpass, across the stream, and keep going in a straight line till you reach the square. From the bus station, 250m east of the square, take the footbridge across the river, bear right and cross another footbridge, then keep heading straight.

ČSOB (Husovo náměstí 38) Has a currency exchange and ATM.

Tourist information office (☎ 311 654 321; mic@muberoun.cz; Husovo náměstí 69; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 1-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat Jun-Aug, 8am-12.30pm & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) On the southeastern corner of the square.

Sights & Activities

Beroun's recent makeover has made the most of its expansive town square, the old town gates and the 14th-century walls, making it a pleasant place for a leisurely stroll. You can climb to the top of the **Plezn gate tower** (adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 9am-noon Wed & Sat) at the west end of the square for a fine view over the town.

The wooded hill to the west of the old town is home to the **Medvědarium** (admission free; ☎ dawn to dusk), an enclosure inhabited by three brown bears, relatives of the bears at Český Krumlov (p172).

From Beroun train station you can hike a red-marked trail east for 6km to the **monastery of St John Under the Rock** (klášter sv Jan pod Skálou), situated in a spectacular limestone gorge. The baroque Benedictine monastery was allegedly once an StB (secret police) training camp. From here, you can continue 1.5km north on a blue-marked trail to Vráž, where you can catch a train or bus back to Beroun or to Prague. Alternatively, you can continue on the red trail for another 8km to Karlštejn. Allow five hours from Beroun to Karlštejn.

The Berounka river is popular for **canoeing**, and the trip downstream from Beroun to Radotín is a leisurely 32km paddle that can be spread over a weekend, with a visit to Karlštejn castle thrown in.

BiSport (☎ 317 701 460; www.bisport.cz; Janečka 511, Týnec nad Sázavou) can arrange equipment hire and transport for around 600Kč for a two-person canoe for the weekend, though you'll need to pay extra for a night camping or in a *pension*.

Sleeping

Autocamp Na Hrázi (☎ 311 623 294; Vančurova 1126; tent per person 60Kč; (P)) The nearest camp site is 800m northeast of the town square and across the river.

Penzion Berona (☎ 311 626 184; www.berona.cz; Havlíčkova 116; s/d 500/1000Kč, apt 2500Kč) This brand new *pension* is on a quiet street just a block south of the town square, and has bright, modern rooms with shared bathrooms. There's also a family apartment for four, on the second floor.

Hotel Parkan (☎ 311 624 372; rtot@iol.cz; Hornohradební 162; s/d incl breakfast 1200/1600Kč; (P)) Set into the old town walls in a pedestrianised alleyway near the Plezn gate tower, this family-friendly *pension* has spacious en suite rooms and a pleasantly old-fashioned atmosphere.

Eating

Pizzeria alla Madonna (☎ 311 610 066; Husovo náměstí 75; mains 75-165Kč; ☎ 11am-11pm) A classic pizzeria with pine tables, wrought-iron chairs and rag-rolled ochre walls, this lively little place sports an English-language menu. Choose from a range of pizzas, pasta dishes, lasagne and steaks, washed down with Pilsner Urquell or Stella Artois.

Restaurace Na Baště (☎ 311 623 364; Hornohradební 98; mains 90-150Kč; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat) Just across from the Hotel Parkan, this rustic little pub-restaurant (the dining room is upstairs) has decent Czech grub – from garlic soup to goulash – and Pilsner Urquell on tap.

Getting There & Away

From Prague it's a beautiful train ride along the Berounka river to Beroun (46Kč to 64Kč, 40 to 60 minutes). Trains depart at least hourly from Prague's hlavní nádraží (main station), calling at Praha-Smíchov station where you can also board.

KONĚPRUSY CAVES

Human bones, the remains of a woolly rhino and a forge for counterfeiting coins are some of the oddities to be found in the guts of these impressive 600m-deep limestone **caves** (Koněpruské jeskyně; ☎ 311 622 405; adult/concession 80/40Kč; ☎ 8am-5pm Jul & Aug, to 4pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 8.30am-3pm Oct).

Take a jumper: it's a constant, chilly 10°C, and you'll be down there for 45 to 60 minutes. There's no food to speak of except a snack bar at the caves.

The caves lie 6km south of Beroun. Buses run to the caves from Beroun's bus station (17Kč, 20 minutes) at 9.25am, 12.20pm and 2.20pm on weekdays, and from the train station (11Kč, 15 minutes) at 9.30am, 11am and 1.40pm on Saturdays and Sundays. It's worth checking these times with the Beroun tourist office before you go.

KŘIVOKLÁT

pop 650

Křivoklát is a drowsy village beside the Rakovnický potok river. The main attraction is Křivoklát castle, but half the pleasure of visiting lies simply in getting there – by train up the scenic Berounka valley.

The valley is dotted with holiday bungalows and hemmed in by limestone bluffs, and the surrounding forests are included in the Křivoklátsko Protected Landscape Region, a Unesco 'biosphere preservation' area.

Visit on a weekday and you'll escape the crowds associated with places like Karlštejn.

Orientation

From the train station, turn right as you exit the train (in the direction of Beroun) and follow a footpath that leads to the main road in the centre of the village. From here, the **tourist information centre** (☎ 313 558 263; ☎ 9am-4pm Jul & Aug) is a few metres to your right, while the castle is 500m uphill along the road opposite you, to the left of the post office.

Sights & Activities

KŘIVOKLÁT CASTLE

With origins stretching back to the 12th century, **Křivoklát castle** (☎ 313 558 120; www.krivoklat.cz; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun May-Aug, to 4pm Apr & Sep, to 3pm Oct, 9am-noon & 1-3pm Sat & Sun Nov & Dec) is one of Bohemia's oldest fortresses.

Once a celebrated hunting lodge, it has survived several fires and seemingly endless renovations as a prettified chateau reflecting the whimsy of 19th-century Romanticism.

There are two guided tours. **Tour I** (adult/concession 80/40Kč, with English-language guide 150/80Kč) takes 70 minutes and visits the castle's interiors, including the chapel, one of the Czech Republic's finest, with its unaltered late-Gothic décor full of intricate polychrome carvings and an altar decorated with angels carrying instruments of torture – a legacy of the castle's 16th-century role as a political prison (the prison and torture cham-

bers are directly beneath the chapel). The Knights' hall features a permanent collection of late-Gothic religious sculpture and painted panels, while the 25m-long King's hall is the second-biggest Gothic hall in the country, after the Vladislav hall in Prague castle (p87). There is also a library of 52,000 volumes.

Tour II (adult/concession 40/20Kč, with English-speaking guide 80/40Kč; ☎ Apr-Oct) visits the castle fortifications, including a strenuous climb to the top of the impressive donjon, the massive round tower that dominates the complex.

HIKING

If you have the gear and an extra day or two, consider hiking the 18km trail (marked red) southwest up the Berounka valley to Skryje. It starts on the western side of Rakovnický potok tributary near the train stop.

Sleeping & Eating

There are **camping grounds** about 2km south of Křivoklát at Višňová, and across the river at Branov (cross at Roztoky).

Hotel Roztoky (☎ 313 558 931; www.hotelroztoky.cz; Roztoky u Křivoklátu 14, Roztoky; r per person 260-450Kč; (P)) Plain but pleasant, with recently redecorated rooms kitted out with Ikea furniture, this family-run place has a decent restaurant and beer hall, and is 1km south of Křivoklát in the village of Roztoky.

Pension restaurace U Jelena (☎ 313 558 529; www.u-jelena.cz; Hradní 53; d/tr/q 1000/1500/2000Kč; ☎ 11am-10pm; (P)) Located down the hill from Křivoklát castle, 'The Stag' is an attractive, modern *pension* with rustic, hunting-lodge décor. It has a good restaurant with an outdoor terrace and barbecue overlooking the Rakovnický potok river. Main dishes range in price from 75Kč to 250Kč.

Getting There & Away

Křivoklát is 24km northwest of Beroun. If arriving by car, park in the official car park beside the petrol station on the way from Beroun; from here a path leads over a footbridge to the castle.

There are plenty of trains from Prague to Beroun (see opposite). The key is making sure there's a good connection from there; there are only two direct trains a day between Prague and Křivoklát (98Kč, 1½ to two hours). From Beroun there are nine trains a day to Křivoklát (40Kč, 40 minutes).

PRŮHONICE

As landscaped parks go, **Průhonice** (admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar), on the south-eastern fringes of Prague, has long been one of Europe's finest. Now a state botanical preserve, it is a green oasis of exotic gardens, colourful flowerbeds, sweet-smelling woodland and artificial lakes. In May, thousands of rhododendron bushes provide a spectacular display of pink, red and yellow blooms.

The **chateau**, once the property of Count Arnošt Emmanuel Sylva-Taroucca, is now occupied by the Botanical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences and is closed to the public. Nearby is the little **church of the Nativity of Our Lady** (kostel Narození Panny Marie), which was consecrated in 1187. Some of its Gothic frescoes, dating from 1330, are still visible. This too is closed, unless you attend the 5pm Sunday mass.

On weekends Průhonice is packed with day-tripping Czech families, but on a weekday morning you could have the place to yourself.

Getting There & Away

Take bus 325 or 363 from Prague's Opatov metro station, on the C line (14Kč, 15 minutes, every 15 to 20 minutes).

KONOPIŠTĚ

Archduke Franz Ferdinand d'Este, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, is most famous for being dead – it was his assassination in Sarajevo on 14 June 1914 that sparked WWI. But during his lifetime the archduke was an enigmatic figure who avoided the intrigues of the Vienna court, and for the last 20 years of his life hid away in Konopiště, which he gradually converted into his ideal country retreat.

Sights

Originally dating from 1300, **Konopiště chateau** (☎ 317 721 366; Benešov; Tour I or II adult/child 180/100Kč, Tour III 300/200Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Aug; to 4pm Tue-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun Sep; to 3pm Tue-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct; to 3pm Sat & Sun Nov; closed 12.30-1pm year-round) is a testament to the archduke's twin obsessions – hunting and St George. Having renovated the massive Gothic and Renaissance building in the 1890s, and installed all the latest technology – including electricity, central heating, flush toilets, showers and a luxurious water-powered lift – Franz Ferdi-

nand proceeded to decorate his home with his hunting trophies.

It seems that Franz Ferdinand shot anything that moved, from elephants and tigers to foxes and hares. His game books record that he shot about 300,000 creatures during his lifetime, including innocuous birds such as spoonbills, cormorants and great-crested grebes. About 100,000 of his victims adorn the walls, each meticulously marked with the date and place where it met its end – the crowded Trophy corridor (on Tours I and III) sprouts a forest of mounted animal heads, while the Chamois room (on Tour III only), with its serried ranks of chamois antlers and a 'chandelier' fashioned from a stuffed condor, is a truly bizarre sight.

There are three guided tours available in English. **Tour III** is the most interesting, visiting the private apartments used by the archduke and his family, which have remained entirely unchanged since the state took possession of the chateau in 1921. At the end you can see the death masks of the archduke and his wife, as well as the blood-stained clothing they were wearing at the time of assassination. (The assassin, Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb, was imprisoned at Terezín; p231.) **Tour I** visits the castle's guest rooms and the Trophy corridor, while **Tour II** takes in the Great armoury, one of the largest and most impressive collections in Europe, and the chapel.

The archduke's collection of art and artefacts relating to St George is no less impressive (not to say obsessive), amounting to 3750 items ranging from tiny images on silver rings to wooden effigies more than 2m tall, many of which are on show in the **St George museum** (muzeum sv Jiří; adult/child 25/10Kč; ☎ same as chateau) beneath the terrace at the front of the castle.

Sleeping & Eating

KONOPIŠTĚ

Hotel Nová Myslivna (☎ 317 722 496; www.hotelmyslivna.zde.cz; d/t 550/825Kč; ☎) The sweeping angular roof of this chalet-style hotel clashes somewhat with the softer lines of the castle, but its location beside the Konopiště chateau car park is unbeatable.

BENEŠOV

Hotel Pošta (☎ 317 721 071; hotel-posta@quick.cz; Týrsova 162; s/d incl breakfast 360/720Kč; ☎) There's more than a hint of 1970s communist-era atmosphere (lots of brown and beige décor) in this

once-grand hotel just off the town square. But hey, the price is right.

Hotel Atlas (☎ 317 724 771; www.hotel-atlas.cz; Týrsova 2063; s/d 742/864Kč) This business hotel is plain and functional, but the rooms are spotless and comfortable, and it is bang on the main street in Benešov.

Hotel Benica (☎ 317 725 611; www.benica.cz; Ke Stadiónu 2045; s/d 950/1700Kč; ☎) Located beside the main E55 highway on the southern outskirts of neighbouring Benešov, the Benica is a bright, modern motel with a decent restaurant specialising in wood-fired pizzas.

Hostinec U zlaté hvězdy (☎ 317 723 921; Masarykovo náměstí 2; mains 80-150Kč; ☎ 11am-11pm) Enjoy Bohemian pub grub at this snug central *pivnice* (beer hall).

Getting There & Away

Konopiště is 50km south of Prague, near the town of Benešov. There are frequent direct trains from Prague's hlavní nádraží to Benešov u Prahy (64Kč, 1¼ hours, hourly). Most trains to and from Tábor and České Budějovice also stop here.

There are buses from Prague's Roztyly metro station to Benešov (37Kč, 40 minutes, twice hourly) – their final destination is usually Pelhřimov or Jihlava. There are also buses to Benešov from Prague's Florenc bus station (44Kč, 40 minutes, eight daily).

The castle is 2km west of Benešov train and bus stations, which are next to each other. Local bus 2 (7Kč, six minutes, hourly) runs from a stop on Dukelská, 400m north of the train station (turn left out of the station, take the first right on Týrsova then the first left) to the castle car park. Otherwise it's a 30-minute walk. Turn left out of the train station, go left across the bridge over the railway, and follow Konopištěská west for 2km. Drivers can go straight down Konopištěská from the bridge.

SÁZAVA

pop 3800

The massive **Sázava monastery** (Sázavský klášter; ☎ 327 321 177; adult/concession 30/15Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm Tue-Sun May-Aug, to 5pm Tue-Sun Sep, to 4pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) was founded in the 11th century as a centre of Orthodox Christianity; it was the first place in Bohemia to conduct services in Old Church Slavonic, though the brethren were booted out of Bohemia a few decades later. Rebuilt in the 13th century and defaced by a heavy-handed baroque renova-

tion, it served as a private chateau in the 19th century.

Star of the show is the monastery's **Gothic chapter hall**, rediscovered under whitewash and masonry during excavations in the 1940s, and restored in the 1970s. All the baroque renovations were meticulously scraped away to reveal the original Gothic chamber, complete with fragmentary frescoes.

These ancient elements are really the only reason to drop by on your way to or from Český Šternberk.

While the compulsory tours are in Czech, English-language text is available.

Trains from Čerčany to Český Šternberk (see below) stop at Sázava Černé Budy (34Kč, 40 minutes, six daily). Go behind the station, cross the tracks, descend the hill, cross the Sázava river and make for the monastery church steeple. It's an 800m-walk – a sign by the station that puts it at 4.5km presumably predates the bridge over the river.

ČESKÝ ŠTERNBERK

pop 100

The crumbling grey hulk of 13th-century **Šternberk castle** (☎ 317 855 101; adult/concession 70/40Kč, in English 130/80Kč; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, to 5pm Tue-Sun May & Sep, to 5pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) looms above the village of Český Šternberk, hidden away among humpbacked hills and thick pine forest to the southeast of Prague. It succumbed to heavy baroque remodelling in the 17th and 18th centuries, but traces of its darker Gothic personality remain,

CANOEING THE SÁZAVA

The Sázava river, which flows from South Moravia to join the Vltava just south of Prague, is one of the country's most popular canoeing rivers. It passes close by Český Šternberk and Sázava, and you can arrange canoeing and rafting trips lasting from one to nine days through **BiSport** (☎ 317 701 460; www.bisport.cz; Janečka 511, Týnec nad Sázavou). Hire of a two-person, plastic touring canoe costs 330/980Kč for one/five days, plus 2700Kč a day for a guide/instructor. A trip from Český Šternberk down to Týnec nad Sázavou (72km), where the best rapids are, takes four days. The going is fairly easy, with nothing graded higher than WW 1–2.

lending it all the brooding grandeur of vampire mythology. The scenery on the train journey up the Sázava river valley – deep woods, steep contours and limestone crags – is itself worth the ride.

The castle's interior is bit of a let down after the imposing façade. The rather slow 50-minute tour reveals an Italian baroque renovation, very heavy on the stucco. Highlights include the rococo St Sebastian chapel (kaple sv Šebastiána) and the Yellow room, with sweeping vistas over the countryside. From here you can see the trees marking out a 17th-century French-style park across the river, the only part of a planned Šternberk chateau that was completed before the money ran out.

You can eat at the rustic *vinoteka* (wine shop) below the castle, and there are a couple of unremarkable *pensions* in the village.

Trains between Prague and Benešov (see p153) call at Čerčany, where you change trains for Český Šternberk (get off at Český Šternberk zastávka, one stop after the main Český Šternberk station – it's much closer to the castle). There are around six trains a day between Čerčany and Český Šternberk (46Kč, one to 1½ hours).

LIDICE

When British-trained Czechoslovak paratroops assassinated Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich – the Nazi governor of Bohemia and Moravia – in Prague on 27 May 1942 (see p110), the Nazis took a savage revenge. The Gestapo suspected a link between the assassination and a family living in the village of Lidice (they had a son serving in the Czechoslovak army in Britain), and on 10 June 1942 the Nazis proceeded to erase the village from the face of the earth. All 173 men were rounded up and shot, and all the women were shipped to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Of 105 children, 82 were gassed in the extermination camp in Chelmo, Poland, and six died in a children's home; only 17 survived, having been farmed out to German foster families or children's homes. The village was systematically burned and bulldozed so that no trace of it remained.

The atrocity electrified the world and triggered a campaign to preserve the village's memory. Ironically, instead of wiping Lidice from the face of the earth, the Nazis' act of vengeance inspired nations around the world to rename towns, suburbs, streets and squares

in its honour, from Lidice, Illinois (USA); and Barrio Lidice in Caracas, Venezuela; to Lidice Ave in Tabor, South Dakota (USA); and the Lidice Memorial Rose Garden in Hackney, London (UK).

The village's former site is now occupied by peaceful parkland, eloquent in its silence, fringed with rose gardens and dotted with memorials. The most moving of these is the **children's monument**, a huddled crowd of bronze figures representing the 82 village children who were murdered at Chelmo.

Between the bus stop and the car park is **Lidice museum** (muzeum Lidice; ☎ 312 253 088; www.lidice-memorial.cz; adult/concession 80/40Kč; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct & Mar, 9am-4pm Nov-Feb), which commemorates the village with photographs, artefacts and multimedia displays, and also screens chilling SS film footage of Lidice's destruction.

Lidice is 18km northwest of Prague. Buses from Prague to Lidice (21Kč, 30 minutes, hourly) depart from the bus stop on Evropska, opposite the Hotel Diplomat, just west of Dejvická metro station. *Prímý spoj* (direct services) to Kladno don't stop at Lidice, but anything going via Buštěhrad does.

MĚLNÍK

pop 19,000

The old town of Mělník sits perched atop a rocky promontory overlooking the confluence of the Labe and Vltava rivers, with its Renaissance chateau gazing out across the flatlands of Central Bohemia. It's the focus of Bohemia's modest wine-growing region, and provides the opportunity to indulge in a spot of wine-tasting bacchanalia far from the bustle of Prague.

Staunchly Hussite in its sympathies, the town was flattened by Swedish troops in the Thirty Years' War, but the defensive castle was rebuilt as a prettier, less threatening chateau in the late 17th century, and the old town retains a strong historical identity. Modernity has caught up with the town, bringing a clutch of factories to its outskirts, but the views from the castle side remain untouched.

Orientation

Across Bezručova from the bus station, head uphill (west) on Kapitan Jaroše, which climbs up to the old town (look for the green signs saying 'zámek', which means castle). Continue on ulice 5.května and through the arch

beneath the clock tower to reach náměstí Míru, the main square. Svatováclavská, first street on your left, leads to Mělník chateau and the church of SS Peter & Paul.

Information

KB (náměstí Míru 26) Has an ATM and exchange desk.

Tourist information centre (☎ 315 627 503; infocentrum@melnik.cz; náměstí Míru 11; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep, Mon-Fri only Oct-Apr) Sells maps and historical guides, and can help with accommodation.

Sights

The town's main attraction is the Renaissance **Mělník chateau** (zámek Mělník; ☎ 315 622 121; adult/concession 70/50Kč; ☎ castle 10am-6pm, wine cellar 10am-5pm), acquired by the Lobkovic family in 1739 and opened to the public in 1990. You can wander through the former living quarters, which are crowded with baroque furniture and 17th- and 18th-century paintings; additional rooms have changing exhibits of modern works and a fabulous collection of 17th-century maps detailing Europe's great cities. A separate tour descends to the 14th-century wine cellars where you can taste the chateau's own wines; a shop in the courtyard sells the chateau's own label.

Next door to the chateau is the 15th-century Gothic **church of SS Peter & Paul** (kostel sv Petra a Pavla), with baroque furnishings and tower. Remnants of its Romanesque predecessor have been incorporated into the rear of the building. The old crypt is now an **ossuary** (adult/child 25/15Kč; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.15-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 1.15-4pm Sat & Sun), packed with the bones of some 10,000 people dug up to make room for 16th-century plague victims, and arranged in macabre patterns.

The compact old town huddles around **náměstí Míru**, a square lined with pastel-tinted Renaissance and baroque façades, and overlooked by the **Prague gate** (Pražská brána), a medieval gate tower. The ho-hum **Mělník regional museum** (☎ 315 630 922; www.muzeum-melnik.cz; náměstí Míru 54; adult/concession 25/15Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun) has displays on viticulture, folk architecture and children's toys. The prize for most eccentric exhibit goes to the collection of historical perambulators from 1890 to 1969.

Both Husova and Svatováclavská streets lead southwest from the square to a **terrace** with superb views across the central Bohemian countryside. The steep slopes below the terrace are planted with vines – supposedly

descendants of the first vines to be introduced to Bohemia, by Charles IV, back in the 14th century. Off to the left is the junction of the Labe and Vltava rivers; the channel directly in front of you is an early 20th-century ship canal.

Sleeping

Autocamp Mělník (☎ 315 623 856; www.campmelnik.cz; Klášterní 720; car/tent/adult/child 35/85/70/45Kč; ☎) This camping ground is 1km north of the old town and offers basic chalets (from 1260Kč for a double) as well as tent pitches.

Penzió v podzámčí (☎ 315 622 889; www.penziovpodzamci.cz; Seiferta 167; s/d incl breakfast 650/1300Kč) This reasonably central place (three blocks from náměstí Míru, to the left as you face the chateau) has modest, modern rooms above a Bohemia crystal shop.

Hotel U Rytířů (☎ 315 621 440; www.urytiru.cz; Svatováclavská 17; d 1900-2500Kč) Conveniently located right next to the castle, this opulent little place has plush, spacious, apartment-style rooms with all mod cons. There's also a garden restaurant with mains from 100Kč to 250Kč.

Eating & Drinking

Restaurace sv Václav (☎ 315 622 126; Svatováclavská 22; mains 90-180Kč; ☎ 11am-11pm) Dark wood décor, cigar humidors, red leather seats and an outdoor terrace that's a lunchtime sun-trap conspire to make this one of Mělník's most appealing restaurants.

Kavárna ve Věži (☎ 315 621 954; ulice 5.května; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8am-11pm Fri, 2-11pm Sat, 2-10pm Sun) Set in the medieval tower of the Prague gate, this atmospheric café and art gallery spreads across three floors linked by creaking wooden stairs. Enjoy the service of an ingenious dumb waiter: write your order on the note pad, ding the bell, and the tray goes down, returning a few moments later with your order. Choose from a wide range of freshly ground coffees and exotic teas, local wines, beer and *medovina* (mead).

The best local white and red wines are both called Ludmila, after the saint and grandmother of St Wenceslas. The best places to taste (and buy) them include the chateau and the **Moravenka Vinoteka** (☎ 315 625 614; Palackého 136), just off náměstí Míru.

Getting There & Away

Mělník is 30km north of Prague. On weekdays buses run to Mělník (38Kč, 40 minutes)

every 15 to 30 minutes from stop No 10 in the bus station outside Praha-Holešovice train station; there are less frequent services on weekends (hourly or thereabouts).

AROUND MĚLNÍK Kokořínsko

The region to the northeast of Mělník is known as the Kokořínsko Protected Landscape Area (CHKO Kokořínsko). It's a fascinating place to explore, with a scenic maze of minor roads, footpaths and cycle trails winding among wooded hills, water meadows and sandstone crags and gorges. Picturesque villages such as Konrádov, Jestřebice, Nosalov and Nedvěži are dotted with pretty 18th- and 19th-century timber cottages, neatly painted in brown and white and sporting traditional fretwork eaves, while the crags are riddled with unusual rock formations, both natural and manmade.

The main sight is the dramatic **Kokořín castle** (hrad Kokořín; ☎ 315 695 064; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☞ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct), rising in fairy-tale fashion above the forest a kilometre northeast of the village of Kokořín. There are *pensions* and restaurants in Kokořínský Důl, in the valley below the castle, and in the village of Ráj, 4.5km to the northwest.

If you want to explore the back roads and hiking trails, get hold of VKÚ's 1:50,000 map *Mělnicko a Kokořínsko* (sheet No 16). For further information, contact the tourist information centre in Mělník (p155).

Veltrusy

This prim symmetrical chateau 15km southwest of Mělník was built in the early 18th century as a summer retreat for the aristocratic Chotek family. As the Choteks collaborated with the Nazis in WWII, the Czechoslovak government expelled them and seized the chateau for the state. Sadly, the chateau was badly damaged in the 2002 floods, and at the time of research was still not fully open to the public.

However, you can wander through the extensive landscaped grounds, whose beautiful woods are dotted with little follies, including an old mill, artificial ruins and an Egyptian pavilion, complete with a sphinx.

It's not worth a trip from Prague in itself, but makes a good add-on to a day in Mělník (if you have a car).

PŘEROV NAD LABEM

The **Labe river region ethnographic museum** (Polské národopisné muzeum; ☎ 325 565 272; adult/concession 50/30Kč; ☞ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, last admission 4pm) is the oldest open-air museum of traditional architecture in Bohemia, established in 1895. Its focus is a house, Staročeská chalupa (Old Bohemian cottage), which is from nearby Přerov village and is decorated in herringbone timber cladding and carved ornaments. Other buildings have been brought in piecemeal from around the region – more than a dozen houses, as well as belfries, pigsties and decorated beehives. Staff tend the gardens and raise bees using traditional methods. An English-language brochure is available for 20Kč extra.

The village of Přerov nad Labem is 30km east of Prague, near Čelákovice. Infrequent buses run via Mochov to and from Prague's Černý Most (22Kč, 30 minutes, every one to two hours).

KUTNÁ HORA

pop 21,000

Now dwarfed by 21st-century Prague, Kutná Hora once marched in step with the capital and, with a little help from fate, might even have stolen its crown. Enriched by the silver ore that ran in veins through the surrounding hills, the medieval city was once the financial heart and soul of Bohemia, becoming the seat of Wenceslas II's royal mint in 1308 and the royal residence of Wenceslas IV a century later. The silver *groschen* that were minted here at that time represented the hard currency of Central Europe. But while boom-time Kutná Hora was Prague's undisputed understudy, the town receded from history when the silver mines began to splutter and run dry in the 16th century, a demise hastened by the Thirty Years' War and capped by a devastating fire in 1770. While Prague continued to expand, its sister city sank below the political horizon.

Which is not to say everyone has forgotten about it. Kutná Hora has risen from the ashes of obscurity to become an A-list tourist attraction – it was added to Unesco's World Heritage List in 1996 – luring visitors with a smorgasbord of historic sights and more than a touch of nostalgic whimsy. Standing on the ramparts surrounding the mighty cathedral of St Barbara, looking out across rooftops eerily reminiscent of Prague's Malá Strana, it's all too easy to indulge in a spot of melancholic what-might-have-been.

Orientation

The old town centre is compact enough to explore on foot. Most attractions lie between the central square, Palackého náměstí, and the cathedral of St Barbara in the southwestern corner of town.

The bus station is 500m north of the town centre. Although there's a train station (called Kutná Hora-město) just east of the old town, trains from Prague stop only at Kutná Hora-hlavní nádraží in the suburb of Sedlec, 3km to the northeast.

Information

ČSOB (Husova 108; ☞ 8.30-11.30am & 12.30-5pm Mon & Wed, to 4pm Tue, Thu & Fri) Has an exchange desk and ATM.

Hospital (okresní nemocnice; ☎ 327 503 111;

Kouřimská) Located about 1km west of the main square.

Knihkupectví U Stříbrného Groše (Palackého náměstí 91; ☞ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat) Has a good selection of hiking maps and town plans.

Post office (Husova 149) Located near the ČSOB.

Tourist information office (informační centrum; ☎ 327 512 378; www.kh.cz; Palackého náměstí 377; ☞ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct; 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) Arranges accommodation, tours and guides. Also has internet access (1Kč per minute, 15Kč minimum) and rents bicycles.

Sights & Activities

CATHEDRAL OF ST BARBARA

The miners' guilds of Kutná Hora trumped Prague in the cathedral department: their Gothic **cathedral of St Barbara** (chram sv Barbora; ☎ 776 363 938; adult/concession 30/15Kč; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10-11.30am & 1-4pm Apr & Oct, 10-11.30am & 2-3.30pm Nov-Mar), dedicated to the patron saint of miners, is one of the finest Gothic churches in Europe and is listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Rivalling Prague's St Vitus cathedral (p89) in size and magnificence, its soaring nave culminates in elegant, six-petalled ribbed vaulting. Work was started in 1380, interrupted during the Hussite Wars and abandoned in 1558 when the silver began to run out. It was finally completed in neo-Gothic style at the end of the 19th century. Inside, eight ambulatory chapels surround the main altar, some with vivid frescoes – including mining scenes – dating from the 15th century. The lofty ceiling vault is covered in a tangle of ribs, stars and floral patterns, and the coats of arms of the miners' guilds and local nobility.

The northwest chapel has an eye-popping mural of the *Vision of St Ignatius*, founder of the Jesuit order.

Take a walk around the outside of the cathedral, too; the terrace at the east end enjoys the finest view in town. At its eastern end is the inconspicuous **Corpus Christi chapel** (kaple Božího těla; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☞ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mar & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb), built in the 14th century. From the viewpoint on its roof you can look across the valley to a rock face in the woods where you will see the giant, carved face of Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912), a famous Czech writer.

Tickets for cathedral and chapel are available from a small information office at the end of Barborská.

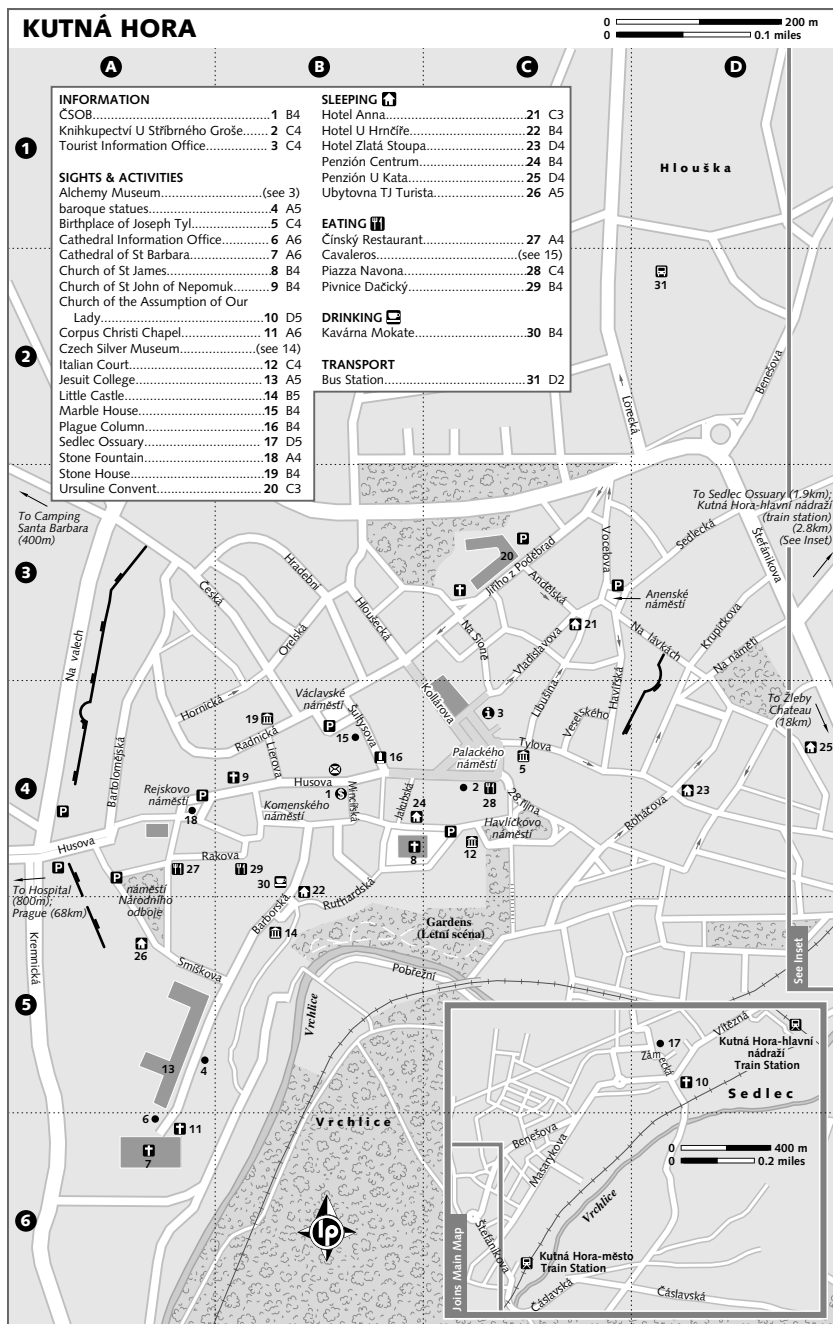
CZECH SILVER MUSEUM

The Little castle (Hrádek), originally part of the town's fortifications, was rebuilt in the 15th century as the residence of Jan Smíšek, administrator of the royal mines, who grew rich from silver that he mined illegally right underneath the building. It now houses the excellent **Czech silver museum** (České muzeum stříbra; ☎ 327 512 159; adult/concession 60/30Kč; ☞ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug; 9am-6pm May, Jun & Sep; 9am-5pm Apr & Oct; closed Mon) with exhibits celebrating the mines that made Kutná Hora wealthy, including a huge wooden device once used to lift loads weighing as much as 1000kg from the 200m-deep shafts. You can even don a miner's helmet and lamp and join a 45-minute guided tour (adult/child 110/70Kč) through 500m of **medieval mine shafts** beneath the town. During the summer months it is best to book the underground tour in advance.

ITALIAN COURT

The **Italian court** (Vlašský dvůr; ☎ 327 512 873; Havlíčkovo náměstí 552; adult/concession 80/50Kč; ☞ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mar & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) is the former royal mint; it took its name from the Italian craftsmen (brought in by Wenceslas II to kick-start the business) who began stamping silver coins here in 1300.

The oldest remaining part, the (now bricked-up) niches in the courtyard, were minters' workshops. The original treasury rooms now hold an exhibit on coins and minting. The guided tour (with English text) is worth taking for a look at the few historical rooms open to the public, notably a 15th-century Audience hall with two impressive 19th-century murals,



one depicting the election of Vladislav Jagiello as king of Bohemia in 1471 (the angry man in white is Matthias Corvinus, the loser), and the other showing the Decree of Kutná Hora being proclaimed by Wenceslas IV and Jan Hus in 1409.

About all that remains of Wenceslas IV's chapel of SS Wenceslas & Vladislav (kaple sv Václava a Vladislava) is the oriel window, which is best seen from the courtyard, although the 1904 Art Nouveau interior renovation is very striking.

The **galérie Félix Jenewaina**, just inside the courtyard, has changing art exhibits (same opening hours as the Italian court).

SEDELEC OSSUARY

If you arrive in Kutná Hora by train, a natural first stop is the remarkable **Sedlec ossuary** (Kostnice; ☎ 327 561 143; Zámecká 127; adult/concession 45/30Kč; 🕒 8am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9am-noon & 1-5pm Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), just a 10-minute walk south from the main train station.

Sedlec's medieval boom-time was ignited when a 13th-century abbot came back from Jerusalem with a pocketful of earth and sprinkled it on the local monastery's graveyard. The Cistercian monastery, Bohemia's earliest, had been around since 1142, but when the plague struck demand for grave plots skyrocketed. With tens of thousands already buried here, the bones began to pile up and the small 14th-century All Saints' chapel (kaple Všech svatých) was soon pressed into service as an ossuary.

When the Schwarzenberg family purchased Sedlec monastery in 1870 they allowed a local woodcarver named František Rint to get creative with the bones that had been piled in the crypt for centuries. But this was no piddling little heap of bones; it was the remains of no fewer than 40,000 people. The result was spectacular: garlands of skulls and femurs are strung from the vaulted ceiling like Addams Family Christmas decorations, while in the centre dangles a vast chandelier containing at least one of each bone in the human body. Four giant pyramids of stacked bones squat in each of the corner chapels, and crosses, chalices and monstrosities of bone adorn the altar. There's a Schwarzenberg coat of arms made from bones, and Rint even signed his name in bones at the foot of the stairs.

A few minutes' walk east of the ossuary, on the main road, is the monastery's **church of**

the Assumption of Our Lady (kostel Nanebevzetí Panny Marie), which was renovated at the beginning of the 18th century by Giovanni Santini in his 'baroque-Gothic' style, unique to Bohemia. Part of Kutná Hora's Unesco World Heritage List, the church was still closed for renovations at time of research.

The ossuary is 2.5km northeast of Kutná Hora's old town and can be reached by local bus (see p161), or a 30-minute walk along Maysarykova and Vítězna streets.

Walking Tour

Begin in Kutná Hora's main square, Palackého náměstí, which is unremarkable except for the **Alchemy museum** (☎ 327 511 259; Palackého náměstí 377; adult/concession 40/25Kč; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), complete with basement laboratory, Gothic chapel and mad-scientist curator (enter via the tourist information office).

From the southeast corner of the square, go along 28.října and then bear right across the square to reach the **Italian court** (p157). Head west towards the colossal **church of St James** (kostel sv Jakuba), begun in 1330 but only completed a century later. Pass south of the church and you'll find **Ruthardská**, a venerable and photogenic lane running alongside the old town walls. It's named after Rožina Ruthard who, according to local legend, was sealed alive in a closet by her medieval burgher father.

At the far end of the lane is the **Little castle** (Hrádek), which houses the **Czech silver museum** (p157). Turn left along Barborská, past the monolithic façade of the former **Jesuit college** (1700), the biggest in the Czech Republic after Prague's Klementinum (p102). On the left side of the street is a row of 13 **baroque statues** of saints, an arrangement inspired by the statues on Prague's Charles bridge. All are related to the Jesuits and/or the town; check out the second one – the woman holding a chalice, with a stone tower at her side, is St Barbara, the patron saint of miners and therefore of Kutná Hora.

After visiting the **cathedral of St Barbara** (p157), return past the Jesuit college and turn left through náměstí Národního odboje and left again on Husova to see remnants of the **old city walls**. Return along Husova, via Rejskovo náměstí with its 1495 Gothic **Stone fountain** (Kamenná kašna), to the baroque **church of St John of Nepomuk** (kostel sv Jana Nepomuckého; adult/

concession 30/15Kč; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr & Jun-Oct, 9am-5pm May) with its frescoed ceiling depicting the legend of Bohemia's patron saint.

Turn left on Lierova to Radnická. The Gothic confection at No 183 is the **Stone house** (Kamenný dům; ☎ 327 512 821; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun May, Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Apr & Oct), a burgher's house dating from 1490, now home to a museum with exhibits on mining, burgher culture and 17th- to 19th-century life.

East and then south is Šultysova, once part of the town's medieval marketplace, lined with handsome townhouses, in particular the **Marble house** (dům U Mramorů) at No 173. At the bottom of the street is a 1715 **plague column**.

Cross Palackého náměstí and walk down Tylova to No 507, the **birthplace of Josef Tyl** (Tylův dům; ☎ 327 511 504; adult/concession 10/5Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct), the 19th-century playwright who wrote *Kde domov můj?* (Where Is My Home?), which became part of the Czech national anthem.

Cross the square again to Kollárova and turn right on Jiřího z Poděbrad. Two blocks down is the former **Ursuline convent** (klášter Voršilek), with a 1743 chapel by Kilian Dientzenhofer.

Sleeping

Camping Santa Barbara (☎ 327 512 051; santabarbara.cam@worldonline.cz; Česká ulice; tent per person 70Kč; Ⓟ) The nearest camp site is northwest of town off Česká, near the *hřbitov* (cemetery).

Ubytovna TJ Turista (☎ 327 512 960; náměstí Národního odboje 56; dm 160Kč; Ⓟ) This attractive, central hostel has four-bed dorms. It gets very busy and reception opens erratically – book ahead.

Penzión U Kata (☎ 327 515 096; www.ukata.cz; Uhelná 596; s/d from 450/600Kč; Ⓟ) This quiet, back-street *pension* offers basic but comfortable rooms, all with private bathrooms.

Hotel U Hrnčiče (☎ 327 512 113; hotel.hrncir@tiscali.cz; Barborská 24; d 750-2000Kč) This beautifully ornate pink townhouse has five stylish double rooms (rate depends on season and facilities) and a delightful garden terrace out back.

Hotel Anna (☎ 327 516 315; hotel.anna@seznam.cz; Vladislavova 372; s/d 730/1150Kč; Ⓟ) This pleasant, family hotel offers comfortable, modern rooms with shower, TV and breakfast in a lovely old building with an atmospheric stone-vaulted cellar restaurant.

Penzión Centrum (☎ 327 514 218; www.centrum.penzion.cz; Jakubská 57; d/tr 1000/1400Kč; Ⓟ) Tucked

away in a quiet, flower-bedecked courtyard off the main drag, this place offers snug rooms and a sunny garden.

Hotel Zlatá Stoupa (☎ 327 511 540; zlatastoupa@iol.cz; Tylova 426; s/d from 1220/1980Kč; Ⓟ) If you feel like spoiling yourself, the most luxurious place in town is the elegantly furnished 'Golden Mount', set on a quiet back street with secure parking. You've got to like a hotel whose minibars contains full-size bottles of wine.

Eating & Drinking

Pivnice Dačický (☎ 327 512 248; Rakova 8; mains 60-100Kč; ☎ 11am-midnight) Get some froth on your moustache at this old-fashioned, wood-pannelled Bohemian beer hall, where you can dine on dumplings and choose from five different draught beers, including Hoegaarden.

Čínský Restaurant (☎ 327 514 151; náměstí Národního odboje 48; mains 90-200Kč; ☎ 11am-10pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun) Set in a plush old house with a garden out back, the imaginatively named 'Chinese' is a little heavy on the MSG but still manages a tasty chicken *kung-po*.

Piazza Navona (☎ 327 512 588; Palackého náměstí 90; mains 100-130Kč; ☎ 9am-midnight May-Sep, 9am-8pm Oct-Apr) Fill up on pizza at this homely Italian café-bar, plastered with Ferrari flags and Inter Milan pennants. Tables spill onto the main square in summer.

Cavaleros (☎ 327 513 810; Šultysova 173; mains 100-200Kč; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm Sun) This lively (but smoky) Mexican restaurant in the Marble house may not win a golden sombrero for authenticity, but it's not bad for Central Bohemia – the salsa is fresh and the *chimichangas* are tasty.

Kavárna Mokate (Barborská 37; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat, 10am-8pm Sun) This cosy little café, with ancient earthenware floor tiles, timber beams, mismatched furniture and oriental rugs dishes up a wide range of freshly ground coffees and exotic teas, as well as iced tea and coffee in summer.

Getting There & Away

Kutná Hora is 65km southeast of Prague. There are direct trains from Prague's Hlavní nádraží (main train station) to Kutná Hora-hlavní nádraží (98Kč, 55 minutes, seven daily). Each has a good connection by local train (10Kč, eight minutes) to Kutná Hora-město station, adjacent to the old town.

There are about six direct buses a day, on weekdays only, from stop No 2 at Prague's

Florenc bus station to Kutná Hora (58Kč, 1½ hours).

Getting Around

On weekdays local bus 1 runs between the town centre and the main train station (Kutná Hora-hlavní nádraží) every 30 minutes; get off at the Sedlec-Tabak stop (beside a big church) for Sedlec ossuary. On weekends, the route is served by bus 7 (every one to two hours). Buy your ticket (9Kč) from the driver. A taxi from the station into town costs around 80Kč.

AROUND KUTNÁ HORA Žleby Chateau

Dating from around 1289, the first castle to stand here was flattened by the Hussites during the wars of the early 15th century. Žleby has since worn a variety of architectural faces, acquiring its latest romanticist look between 1849 and 1868 at the behest of its then owner, Karel Vincent Auersperg. Typically chocolate box in appearance, modern-day Žleby sports all the required fairy-tale accoutrements, from pastel décor to gleaming spires.

The Auerspergs lived here until 1945, when they fled to Austria, leaving everything behind. **Žleby chateau** (☎ 327 398 121; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Sep, 8am-4pm Tue-Sun May & Jun, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) is therefore in

immaculate – and authentic – shape, offering a glimpse of how the other half lived in Czechoslovakia in the early 20th century.

Inside it's all armour and mounted firearms, wood panelling and leather wallpaper, rococo flourishes and a treasure trove of old furniture. Highlights include the Knights' hall, with a huge baroque cupboard and rows of Czech and German glass; the Duchess study, with a replica Rubens on the ceiling and a fantastic door of inlaid wood; and the kitchen, fitted out with the 19th-century's most up-to-date equipment.

There are two tours: Tour 1 (adult/concession 80/40Kč, or 120/60Kč with an English-speaking guide) takes in the romanticist interior, including the Knights' hall, Duchess study and the library, while Tour 2 (100/50Kč, or 160/80Kč with an English-speaking guide) visits the kitchens, the chapel and the Great tower, with sweeping views of the surrounding area.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The chateau is accessible from Kutná Hora by bus (40Kč, 45 minutes to 1½ hours). There are only two morning services, on weekdays only, changing at Čáslav. Get off at Žleby náměstí, the square at the foot of the chateau. Check return times, as the last bus returns around 4.45pm.

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