

North Bohemia



Overtly, North Bohemia highlights the most tragic excesses of the region's experience of a turbulent 20th century, but scratch its grimy and harsh surface and there's plenty of offer for the inquiring traveller keen on discovery.

At first, the country's gritty industrial heart seems tortured and sullen. Freeways fringed by electricity pylons and billowing smokestacks crisscross a strangely compelling lunar landscape stripped by acid rain. But get off the main roads and its rugged edge is retained, and transformed into the dazzling landscapes and sublime hiking opportunities of the Sandstone Rocks of Labe. Travel quietly by boat through the primeval river gorges of the region and industrial pollution will be the last thing on your mind.

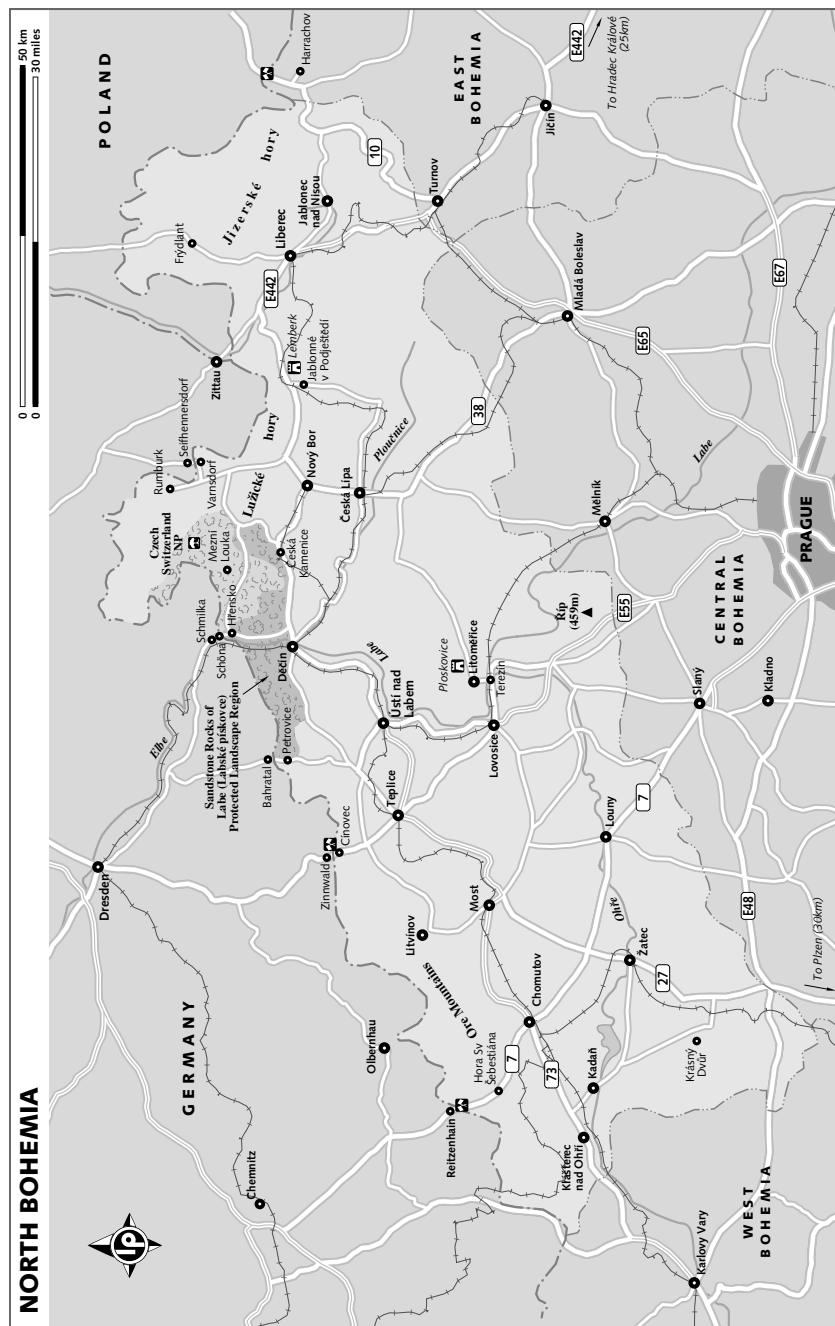
As a sobering antidote to the genteel overkill of perfect town squares and poetic chateaux elsewhere in the country, North Bohemia's most grimly fascinating town is the imposing fortress of Terezín. Built from local sandstone in the 18th century, the Napoleonic bastion was transformed into a concentration camp by the Nazis in another tragic century, and now contains the compelling museum of the Ghetto. Nearby pretty Litoměřice provides an emotional release to Terezín's harrowing but essential travellers' experience.

The region's industrial damage is now being reversed. Even the strategic river city of Děčín, once choked with coal smoke, is regenerating with a green tinge to match the reinvigorated forests surrounding it. All across the region air quality has greatly improved since the end of communism and the Czech Republic's entry into the European Union in 2004.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Negotiate the primeval river canyons and bizarre rock formations of the **Sandstone Rocks of Labe** (p240)
- Confront history's darkest depths in the imposing fortress of **Terezín** (p231), a former Nazi concentration camp
- Ascend the imposing 'Long Ride' to the brooding castle in **Děčín** (p237)
- Descend to the ancient wine cellars under the sleepy streets of **Litoměřice** (p235)
- Admire the exquisite rococo splendour of **Ploskovice chateau** (p236)





TEREZÍN

pop 2960

After the beauty of many Czech towns, the imposing fortress of Terezín is a moving reminder of tragic aspects of Central Europe's past. The massive bastion of stone and earth was built in 1780 by Emperor Joseph II to keep the Prussians at bay, and could accommodate up to 11,000 soldiers. The fortress was never used in wartime, instead it was turned into a prison in the mid-19th century. Gavrilo Princip, the Serb nationalist who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 to ignite WWI, died in the prison in 1918.

In 1940, the Gestapo established a prison in the lesser fortress. The following year, all townspeople were evicted from the Main Fortress to accommodate a transit camp for European Jews. In total more than 140,000 Jews passed through Terezín; 33,000 died victims of the camp's degrading conditions, and 88,000 were sent to Auschwitz. Less than 17,500 remained alive when the Red Army liberated the camp on 9 May 1945. Many survivors died of typhus even after liberation. Between April and September 1942 conditions were the most appalling. The population increased from 12,698 to 58,491, leaving each prisoner only 1.65 sq m of space. During this period, the number of deaths increased by 15 times.

Ironically, Terezín played a terrible role in deceiving the world of the ultimate goals of the Nazi's 'Final Solution'. Official visitors were immersed in a tragic charade, with Terezín being presented as a Jewish 'refuge', complete with banks, shops, schools and cultural events – even a self-administering Jewish 'government'. As late as April 1945, Red Cross visitors returned with positive reports.

Today Terezín is a melancholic town; the wide, empty streets seem more inhabited by the ghosts of recent history than contemporary townspeople. It's a compelling and moving lesson in the harsh realities of modern history, and an essential day trip from Prague.

Orientation

Public buses stop at náměstí Československé armády, the central square area of the town within the main fortress. The lesser fortress is an 800m-walk east across the Ohře river.

Information

All the information you need can be picked up from the museum.

Česká Spořitelna (náměstí Československé armády) Has an ATM and exchange desk.

Post office Near the northern side of náměstí Československé armády.

Sights

Tickets can be purchased at the museum of the Ghetto (below) – or from each of the other venues – and cost 180/140Kč (adult/concession) for combination entry to the museum of the Ghetto, Magdeburg barracks, the Crematorium and the lesser fortress, or 160/130Kč (adult/concession) for the museum of the Ghetto and Magdeburg barracks only. The museum has good multilingual self-guide pamphlets, a large selection of books for sale, and guides for hire (some of them ghetto survivors). When you pay your admission, put your name down to watch two videos on Terezín's history at the end of your visit.

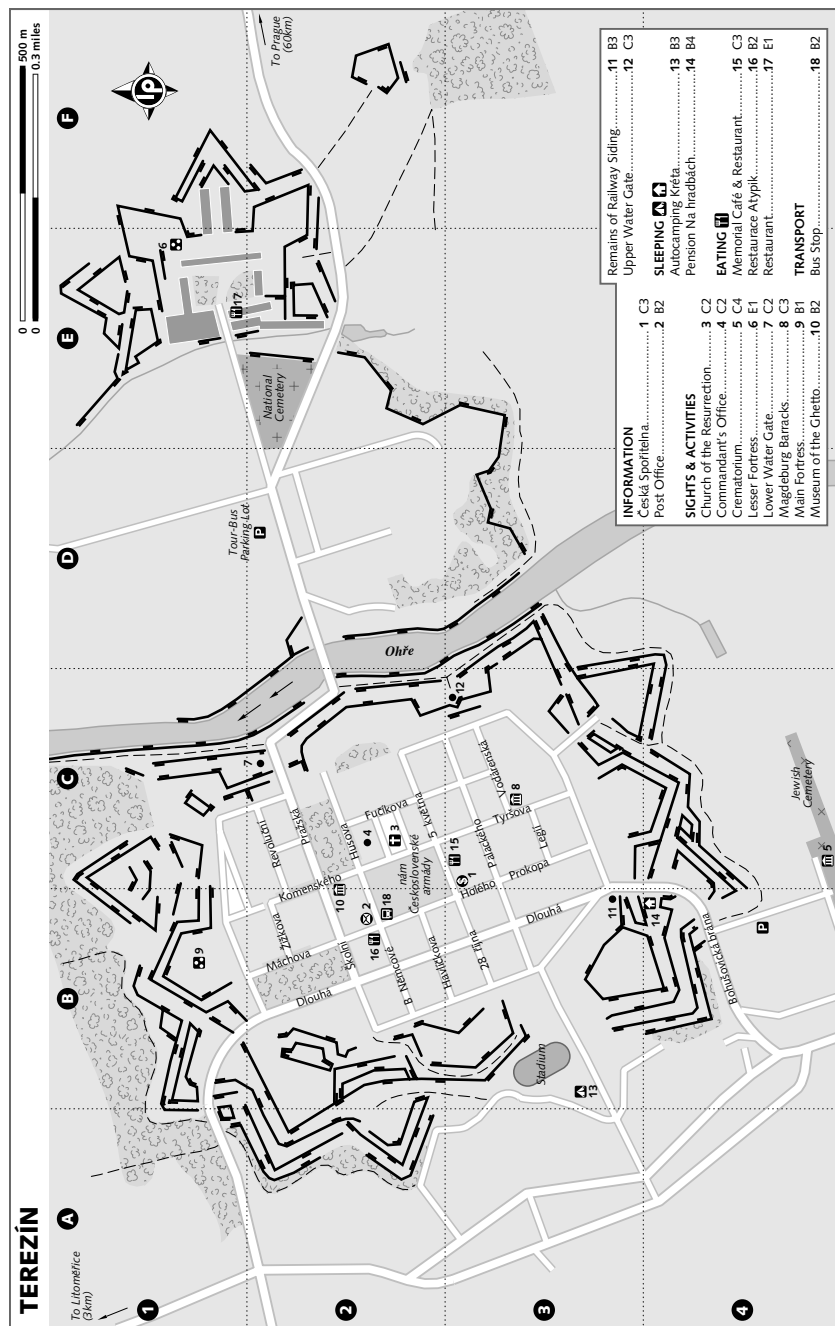
MAIN FORTRESS

From the ground, the sheer scale of the walls and moats that surround the main fortress (hlavní pevnost) is impossible to fathom – mainly because the town is concealed inside them. When you first arrive by bus or car, you may think the central square looks no different to many other small town centres. Look at the aerial photograph in the museum of the Ghetto on Komenského, or wander past the walls en route to the lesser fortress, however, and a very different picture begins to emerge.

At the heart of the main fortress is the squared-off, boxy town of Terezín. There's little to look at except the chunky, 19th-century **church of the Resurrection**, the arcaded **commandant's office**, the neoclassical administrative buildings on the square and the surrounding grid of houses with their awful secrets.

South of the square are the anonymous **remains of a railway siding**, built by prisoners, on which loads of further prisoners arrived – and departed. Two **water gates** (for access to the river) remain.

The main attraction is the compelling **museum of the Ghetto** (muzeum ghetto; ☎ 416 782 576; www.pamatnik-terezin.cz; Komenského; ☎ 9am–6pm Apr–Oct, 9am–5.30pm Nov–Mar), which has two branches. The main museum, on Komenského by the highway, explores the rise of Nazism and life in the Terezín ghetto, using the discarded bric-a-brac of the time to evocative effect. Erected in the 19th century to house the local school, the building was later used by the Nazis to



THE SECRET MAGAZINE OF THE BOYS OF TEREZÍN

Terezín was designated as a camp for prosperous and well-educated Jewish families from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and this tragic focus ensured a rich cultural life within the walls of the fortress. Cultural activities were encouraged by the Nazis to maintain a veneer of normality, but other clandestine activities were also organised by the artists, musicians and writers imprisoned in the camp. The artist Friedl Dicker-Brandeis ran art classes for children who contributed drawings and poetry to *Vedem* ('In the Lead') magazine. More than 100 boys helped produce *Vedem* from 1942 to 1944, but only 15 survived; the others were deported to Auschwitz in 1944. Concealed manuscripts were discovered after the war, and a selection of illustrations and articles were republished in the 1994 book, *We Are Children Just the Same: Vedem, the Secret Magazine of the Boys of Terezín*.

accommodate the camp's 10- to 15-year-old boys. The children's haunting artwork still decorates the walls.

A newer branch is in the former **Magdeburg barracks** (Magdeburšská kasárna; cnr Týřšova & Vodárenská; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Nov-Mar) that served as the seat of the Jewish 'government'. There is a reconstructed prisoners' dormitory and exhibits on the extraordinarily rich cultural life – music, theatre, fine arts and literature – that somehow flourished against this backdrop of fear. Most poignant are the copies of *Vedem* magazine (see boxed text, above).

Both museums are closed Christmas Eve to Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

There is also the **Crematorium** (Kramatorium; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Mar) in the Jewish Cemetery just off Bohušovická brána about 1km south from the main square in Terezín. There is another small exhibit here.

LESSER FORTRESS

You can take a self-guided tour of the **lesser fortress** (malá pevnost; ☎ 8am-6pm May-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Apr) through the prison barracks, isolation cells, workshops and morgues, past execution grounds and former mass graves. It would be hard to invent a more menacing location. As you wander through the seemingly endless tunnels beneath the walls you can fully appreciate the fort's huge dimensions. The Nazis' mocking concentration-camp slogan, *Arbeit Macht Frei* (work makes you free) hangs above a gate. In front of the fortress is a National Cemetery, founded in 1945 for those exhumed from mass graves.

Sleeping & Eating

Only committed history buffs will want to stay in Terezín, with Litoměřice just minutes away.

Autocamping Kréta (☎ 416 782 473; <http://autocamp.kreta.sweb.cz>; sites per tent 70Kč, huts 150Kč; ☎ Jun-Sep) This camping ground is by the stadium west of the main fortress.

Pension Na hradbách (☎ 723 287 738; www.sweb.cz/nahradbach; Bohušovická brána 335; s/d incl breakfast 750/1500Kč) Just outside the western walls of the main fortress, this tidy spot exudes a cheery ambience despite the location.

Restaurant Atypik (☎ 416 782 780; Máchova 91; mains 70-120Kč) Atypik by name, but typical by nature, this busy place offers all the Czech favourites.

Memorial Café & Restaurant (☎ 416 783 082; náměstí Československé armády; meals 120-200Kč) This former coffee and cake place has been overhauled to become a full-blown restaurant, and is popular with tour groups.

There are incongruous fast-food stalls at the tour-bus car park, and a **restaurant** (meals 45-80Kč) in the German officers' mess in the lesser fortress. There is also a restaurant at Pension Na hradbách.

Getting There & Away

Hourly buses leave from Prague's Florenc bus station (61Kč, one hour).

Buses leave Terezín from the northeastern corner of náměstí Československé armády and run to/from Litoměřice station (3km away) roughly hourly (8Kč, 10 minutes). The last bus leaves Terezín at 7.30pm.

LITOMĚŘICE

pop 23,900

Visiting Terezín demands an emotional release, and Litoměřice is the perfect balance with its pretty square etched in pastel shades and the baroque structures of local 18th-century architect Ottavio Broggio. The horrors of Terezín are only a few kilometres

south, but Litoměřice's town square seems like another world.

The history of the town has not always been so benign. The once boldly Hussite town was levelled in the Thirty Years' War, and in 1945 the predominantly German-speaking populace was forcibly expelled. Unlike Terezín, which feels anchored by its tragic past, Litoměřice is a vivacious combo of old-school architecture and a youthful 21st-century outlook; belying its establishment as an ecclesiastical centre almost a millennium ago in 1057. The town's lively cafés and restaurants showcase vibrant after-hours action, and there's even a bar, Music Club Viva (p236), in the old town bastion – somewhere most Czech towns would fill with a stuffy museum.

Orientation

Litoměřice sits at the confluence of the Labe and Ohře rivers. From the train station or adjacent bus station, the old centre begins across the road to the west, past the well-preserved 14th-century walls. Walk down Dlouhá to the central square, Mírové náměstí.

Information

Internet Club Centrum (☎ 416 736 060; 1st fl, Mírové náměstí 125; per min 1Kč) A lively internet café with comfy old sofas.

Jonas Knihkupectví (jonas@kna.cz; Mírové náměstí) This bookshop sells maps.

KB bank (Mírové náměstí 37) Has an ATM and exchange desk.

Main post office (cnr Osvobození & Na Valech) Two blocks north of Mírové náměstí.

Nemocnice Litoměřice (☎ 416 723 111; Žitenická) This hospital is 1km northeast of the centre.

Tourist information office (městské informační centrum; ☎ 416 732 440; www.litomerice.cz in Czech & German; Mírové náměstí 15/7; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat Oct-Apr) This office is in the town hall and can help with accommodation. From May to September it runs sightseeing tours for 60Kč per person. In April and October tours run Monday to Friday only.

Sights

MÍROVÉ NÁMĚSTÍ

Dominating this attractive square is the Gothic tower of **All Saints church** (kostel Všech svatých), which was built in the 13th century and 'Broggio-ised' in 1718.

Beside it, with multiple gables, pointy arches and a copper-topped tower, is the handsome Gothic **Old town hall** (Stará radnice), with a small **town museum** (Okresní Vlastivědné Muzeum Litoměřice; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) inside.

A visit to the **wine cellars** (historické sklepy) can be arranged through the Radniční sklípek restaurant (p236). As well as providing storage for wine, the cellars were used as a place of refuge when the town was under siege.

Most striking is the 1560 Renaissance **house at the Black Eagle** (dům U černého orla; Mírové náměstí 12), which is covered in sgraffito biblical scenes and houses the Hotel Salva Guarda (p236). A few doors down is the present town hall, in the 1539 **house at the Chalice** (dům U kalicha; Mírové náměstí 15/7), with a massive Hussite chalice on the roof. This building also houses the tourist information office. The slice of baroque whimsy is the **house of Ottavio Broggio**.

Interesting art is exhibited in the **museum and gallery of Litoměřice Diocese** (muzeum a galerie litoměřické diecéze; ☎ 416 732 382; Mírové náměstí 16; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar). The collection runs through several beautiful old burghers' houses and includes modern art as well as works from St Stephen cathedral.

AROUND THE SQUARE

Another Broggio original, built for the Jesuits, is south of the square: the pink-and-white **church of Annunciation of Our Lady** (kostel Zvěstování Panny Marie). Nearby is the **Jesuit College** (Jezuitská).

West of the square is another house with a Broggio make-over, now home to the **North Bohemia fine arts gallery** (Severočeská galerie výtvarného umění; ☎ 416 732 382; www.galerie-ltm.cz; Michalská 7; adult/concession 32/16Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar). Work from the 14th to 20th centuries is displayed, and its pride and joy is a set of panels on the life of the Virgin from the *Litoměřice Altarpiece*, one of Bohemia's most famous works of Renaissance art, by the anonymous 'Master of Litoměřice' (whose work also graces Prague's St Vitus cathedral).

Other Litoměřice monastery churches of the Counter-Reformation include the remains of the **St Michael church** (kostel sv Michala), west of the fine arts gallery, the **St James church** (kostel sv Jakuba; náměstí Dominikánské), which is northeast of the square, and **St Ludmilla church** (kostel sv Ludmily), southeast of the centre.

CATHEDRAL HILL

Southwest of Mírové náměstí is Dómské náměstí, site of an ancient Slavic fortress and, despite its forlorn appearance, the town's historical heart.

On the way (along Dómská from the fine arts gallery), don't miss Broggio's finest work, the tiny **St Wenceslas church** (kostel sv Václava; 1716), a short detour to the west along Svatovaclavská.

At the top of Cathedral hill (dómský pahorek) is the town's oldest church, the huge **St Stephen cathedral** (katedrála sv Štěpána), built in the 11th century and rebuilt in the 17th. Spacious and Romanesque in shape, a tall arch reaches out to an 1880s belfry. Behind it is the renovated former **Bishop's palace**.

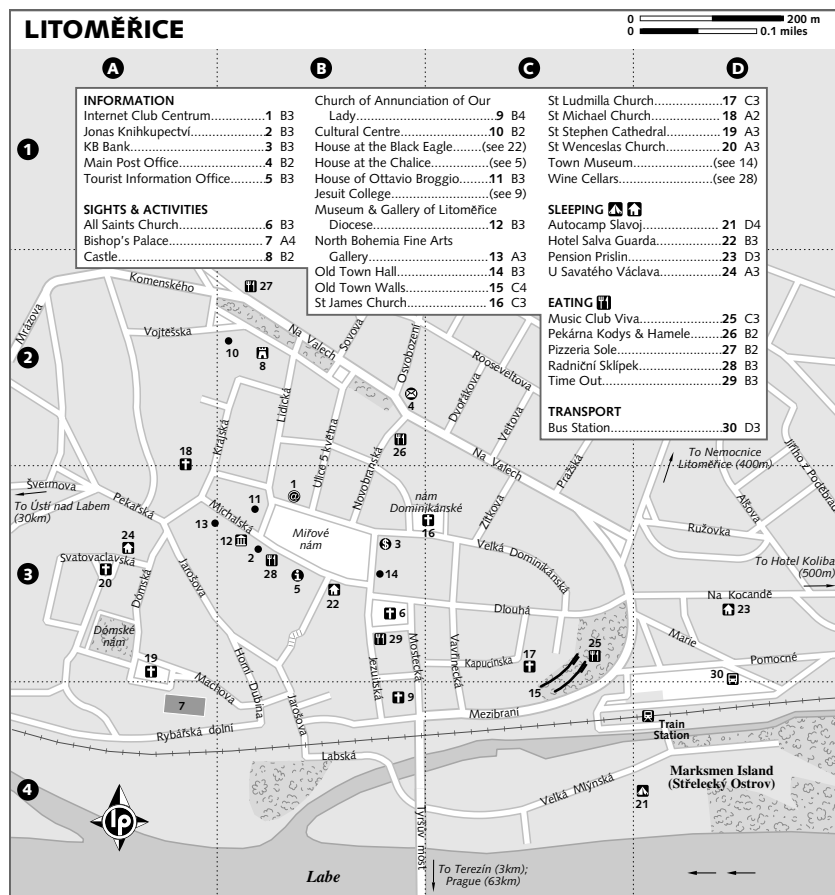
CASTLE

The town's heavily reconstructed 14th-century **castle** is north of Mírové náměstí, up Lidická, and has been closed for several years. Never a very interesting building to begin with, it now adjoins an ugly **cultural centre** (dům kultury).

Sleeping

The tourist information office can help with private rooms from around 350Kč per person.

Autocamp Slavoj (☎ 416 734 481; kemp.litomerice@post.cz; sites per tent 70Kč, bungalow 200Kč; ☎ May-Sep; ☎) South of the train station, this Slavoj is on Marksmen Island (Střelecký ostrov).



Hotel Koliba (☎ 416 732 861; <http://koliba.wz.cz>; Českolipská; s/d 450/700Kč) About 1km east of the centre (look for the Hennlich office), this place has clean budget rooms, a sauna and solarium, and room to pitch a tent.

U Svatého Václava (☎ 416 737 500; www.upfront.cz/penzion; Svatovavřská 12; s/d incl breakfast 600/1000Kč) Nestled beside St Wenceslas church, this haven has well-equipped rooms, a choice of cooked breakfasts, and owners whose English is much better than they think.

Pension Prislín (☎ 416 735 833; Na Kocandě 12; s/d incl breakfast 700/1200Kč; (P)) On a busy road near the train station, Pension Prislín cunningly conceals a quiet garden with views of the river.

Hotel Salva Guarda (☎ 416 732 506; www.salva-guarda.cz; Mírové náměstí 12; s/d 990/1450Kč; (P) (♿)) With interesting old maps in reception, it's a shame they keep the lights so low. However the spotless rooms are well-lit in this classy hotel that's housed in a building dating from 1566.

Eating & Drinking

Pekárna Kodys & Hamele (Novobranská 18) This friendly bakery does sweet and savoury nibbles, with an emphasis on the very sweet.

Pizzeria Sole (☎ 416 737 150; Na Valech 56; pizza 75Kč) The sun's always out at this no-frills Italian café with cheap pizzas and good value combos of soup, pasta and dessert.

Radniční sklípek (☎ 416 731 142; Mírové náměstí 21; mains 80-170Kč) Keep your head down in this labyrinth of underground cellars. It should be easy because you'll be tucking into great value grills and beers. The wine list is also very good.

Music Club Viva (☎ 606 437 783; Mezibrani; mains 90-220Kč) Big shared tables ensure the conversation flows as naturally as the drinks in this hip spot in the old town bastion. You'll find all your favourites on the walls from Bob Marley to Sinatra and Elvis.

Time Out (☎ 603 470 165; Jezuitská 1; mains 70-180Kč) Sports on the telly, crowds at the bar, and it's only Wednesday night. On weekends this spot gets seriously busy with late night frolics.

Getting There & Away

There are bus connections between Litoměřice and Terezín (only 3km away) roughly hourly (8Kč, 10 minutes).

Buses from Prague's Florenc station (61Kč; 1½ hours) to Štít nad Labem stop here hourly.

By train it's a tedious trip via a branch line from Lovosice.

PLOSKOVICE

pop 344

Ottavio Broggio may have left a panoply of churches behind him, but his secular works are less prevalent. Ploskovice chateau is a notable exception and a worthwhile diversion for those demanding a thorough understanding of the architect's work. It has more personality than his churches in Litoměřice, especially after the crazily rococo interior renovations by painter Josef Navrátil, part of an 1850s extreme make-over ordered by Emperor Ferdinand V.

Sights & Activities

The guided tour of the **chateau** (☎ 416 749 092; adult/concession 50/30Kč; (♿) 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Jul-Aug, to 5pm May, Jun & Sep, to 4pm Apr & Oct) takes in about 10 rooms used by the emperor and empress (the tour's in Czech, but an English text is available). Highlights include the emperor's ostentatious bedroom, complete with unusual bidet, and the stunning main hall at the rear, with murals by Václav Vavřinec Reiner representing the four corners of the world. Most of the chateau's other murals are by the immodest Josef Navrátil. On the ceiling of the empress' study he painted himself beside her favourite sculptor, Benvenuto Cellini.

At the rear is a manicured garden, complete with rampaging peacocks.

Getting There & Away

Irregular buses link Litoměřice and Ploskovice (15Kč, 20 minutes). Take a bus bound for Třebušín, but check return times with the driver as times may not be posted in Ploskovice.

TEPLICE

pop 52,000

Once the spa town of Teplice was as famous as Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně in West Bohemia, and Beethoven, Chopin, Goethe and Liszt were all regular visitors. Since its 19th-century heyday, the town has been blighted by industrial pollution and an ugly communist architectural make-over. Elegant slivers of the town's halcyon past remain, but you'll need to search them out amid the brutal and boxy structures that now frame Teplice.

While lacking the glamour of its West Bohemian cousins, the town's spa services are well regarded, especially for the treatment of vascular conditions like hypertension, and the alleviation of locomotive disorders including chronic arthritis. The **Teplice** (www.teplice.cz) website links to tourism and accommodation information, and specialist information on spa services is available on **Lázně Teplice V Čechách** (www.lazneteplice.cz).

Accommodation is in a range of heritage hotels owned by Lazne Teplice. Prices for 'treatment' programmes begin at €64 per person per day, while 'relaxation' programmes, including full board, start at €51 per person per day. Hotel accommodation without sampling the spa services is significantly cheaper (double including breakfast €37 to €42).

Getting There & Away

Trains to Teplice depart from Prague's hlavní nádraží and Masarykovo six times a day (162Kč, 2¼ hours). There's two trains a day from Litoměřice (64Kč, two hours), and trains head north from Teplice to Děčín 12 times a day (52Kč, 1¼ hours). Buses link Teplice with Děčín (44Kč, 45 minutes, two daily), Litoměřice (44Kč, one hour, one daily) and Holešovice train station in Prague (140Kč, 1½ hours, four daily).

DĚČÍN

pop 51,900

With a dramatic location astride the Labe river, the port city of Děčín deserves its improving reputation, as it emerges from a cocoon of industrial soot to become a bustling stop on the EU trade bandwagon from Germany. Originally settled by the Slavic Děčané tribe in the 9th century, the 14th-century emergence of Děčín's old town took place high above the river. The Labe is the town's lifeblood, and occasionally still shows the locals who's boss, most recently flooding in 2002 and 2006. With a brooding, and recently restored, castle, and a renewed dedication to preserving the city's historical heart, Děčín is worth a look before continuing to the grime-free vistas of the nearby Sandstone Rocks of Labe.

Orientation

The town has two distinct centres – Děčín, on the east bank of the Labe, and Podmokly on the west, at the foot of Shepherd's Wall (Pastýřská

stěna). The Děčín side has the town's few historical attractions, while Podmokly has the train and bus stations.

Information

Club 52 (cnr Thomayerova & Teplická, Podmokly; per min 1Kč) Internet connection.

ČSOB Podmokly (cnr Zbrojnická & Československých legií) Děčín (cnr Řetězová & Radniční) Both branches have ATMs.

Dezka (☎ 412 532 111; Prokopa Holého 8; (♿) 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) This office in Podmokly acts as the local tourist office.

Information centre (☎ 412 518 905; www.mudecin.cz; (♿) 9am-6pm Jul-Aug, 9am-5pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Dec, 9am-5pm Thu-Sun Jan-Feb) Across the river there is an information centre at the entrance to the chateau.

Post office Podmokly (cnr Podmokelská & Poštovní) Děčín (náměstí Svobody)

Sights

OLD TOWN & CHATEAUX

A compact section of old-town Děčín has been preserved at the eastern foot of the castle. The centrepiece is the **church of the Ascending Holy Cross** (kostel povýšení sv Kříže), with its high-domed, Romanesque exterior and its frescoed, baroque interior. From here a walled avenue, the **Long Ride** (Dlouhá jízda), climbs to the castle, with a separate, covered walkway along one side.

Děčín's one real historical attraction is its huge, brooding **chateau** (zámek Děčín; ☎ 412 518 905; www.zamekdecin.cz; adult/concession 48/36Kč, foreign language text 12Kč; (♿) 9am-6pm Jul-Aug, 9am-5pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Dec, 9am-5pm Thu-Sun Jan-Feb) founded in 1305 by the Přemysl King Václav III. Baroque accents were added to its original Renaissance bones, and restoration work has recently commenced. At the time of writing, the castle was partially open to visitors, a highlight being the luxurious private apartment of former owner Count Thun-Hohenstein. Ask at the information centre if any additional sections of the castle have opened.

The castle passed into the hands of the Czechoslovak state in 1932, before becoming a garrison for German, and then Soviet troops. The newly independent Russian army left in 1991, but the Long Ride, with its high grey walls, retains an intimidating Stalinist air. Attached is the **Regional museum of Děčín** (Oblastní muzeum v Děčín; adult/concession 30/15Kč; (♿) 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun), which showcases local history.

Stroll through the beautiful **Rose gardens** (Růžová zahrada; adult/concession 12/6Kč; (♿) 9am-8pm

May-Aug, to 6pm Apr, Sep & Oct) beside the castle; accessible from the Long Ride, or via a footpath from the church of the Ascending Holy Cross to a rear entrance.

STONE BRIDGE

This melancholy **stone footbridge** over the Ploučnice river, features a slowly crumbling, baroque group of sculptures by Jan Brokoff (whose work also decorates Charles bridge in Prague). The footbridge is south of the castle, surrounded by weeds and traffic flyovers on U starého mostu.

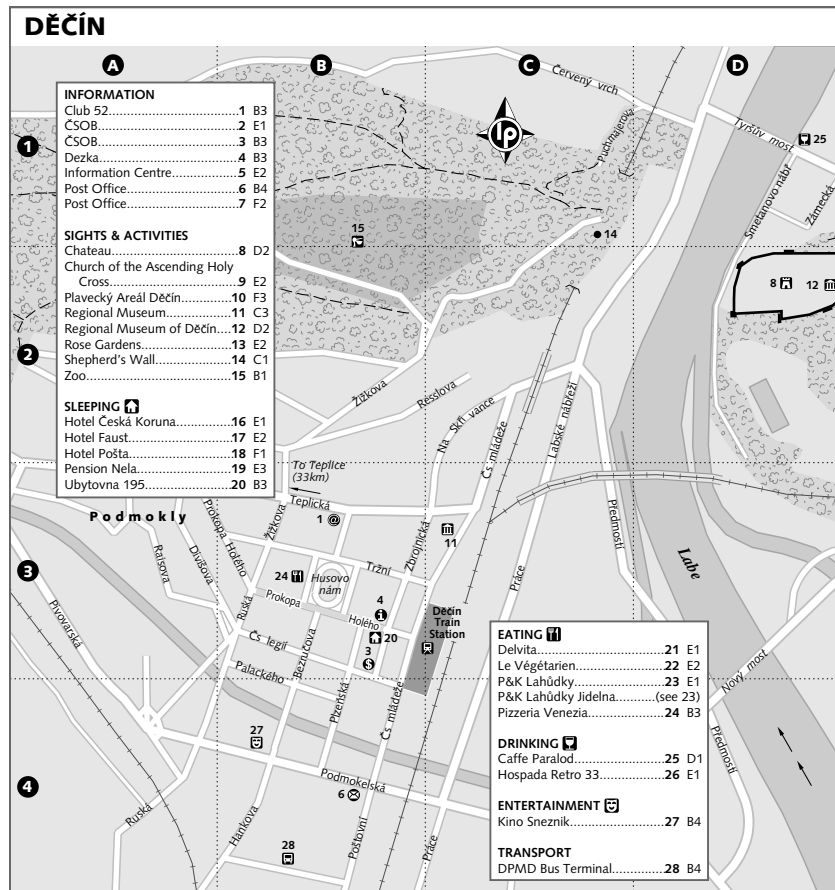
SHEPHERD'S WALL

On the Podmokly side, walk up Žižkova to this cliff, with a startling bird's-eye view

over the castle and Děčín side. A small **zoo** (☎ 412 531 164; adult/concession 60/40Kč; 🚗 8am-6pm Apr-Sep, 8am-4pm Oct-Mar) is behind the chateau at the top.

REGIONAL MUSEUM

In an 18th-century palace, in the north of Podmokly, is the interesting **Regional museum** (Okresní muzeum; Československé mládeže 1; adult/concession 30/15Kč; 🚗 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun). The best displays focus on the castle (including its earlier versions and various royal and aristocratic owners) and shipping on the Labe. Who'd have guessed that until 1886, some Labe boats pulled themselves along a 720km chain between Mělník (Central Bohemia) and Hamburg?



Activities

Plavecký Areál Děčín (☎ 412 704 211; Oblouková 1400; adult/concession 55/35Kč; 🚗 10am-8pm) This flash swimming area has saunas and a bar.

Sleeping

Dezka (p237) can book private rooms from around 300Kč per person.

Ubytovna 195 (☎ 412 518 835, Zbrojnická 18; per person 195Kč) This no-name spot is opposite the train station. Note that reception is only open from 7pm to midnight.

Hotel Pošta (☎ 412 511 544; www.hotelposta.cz; Masarykovo náměstí 9; s/d from 550/1350Kč, apt 2900Kč) From the town square the building looks small, but good design accommodates 100 people from single rooms to a six-person apartment.



Hotel Faust (☎ 412 518 859; www.hotel.cz/faust; U Plovárny 43; s/d incl breakfast 700/1250Kč; 📞) At these prices you won't have to sell your soul, although the 1970s furniture was definitely bought from the devil's-own garage sale. Enjoy the lakeside setting with vistas of white swans...and a nearby freeway.

Pension Nela (☎ 412 512 612; www.volny.cz/nela.d; U starého mostu 4; s/d incl breakfast 800/1000Kč; 📞) Near both the old (stone) bridge and the new (blue) bridge, this welcoming spot somehow manages to fit a spacious garden – with a pond and umbrellas, no less – into a bizarre location amidst the strands of a spaghetti-like junction.

Hotel Česká koruna (☎ 412 516 104; www.hotel.ceska.koruna.cz; Masarykovo náměstí 6; s/d incl breakfast 900/1180Kč; 📞) Děčín's best spot celebrates with an authoritative brace of European flags. The promise is fulfilled with slick service, thoroughly deserving three stars.

Eating

Le Végétarien (☎ 776 249 505; Nároží 5; mains 70-90Kč; 📞) In modern surroundings just outside the Long Ride, tasty vegetarian soups, risottos and curries are all on offer.

Pizzeria Venezia (☎ 607 766 280; Husovo náměstí 5; pizza 100Kč; 🚗 Mon-Sat) Yes, this spot recommended by a reader does have a kitschy chef's statue out of the front, and while it's smaller than most others, it's no reflection on the quality of its tasty food.

P&K Lahůdky (☎ 412 541 367; Masarykovo náměstí; snacks 40Kč; 🚗 7am-6pm Mon-Fri; 8-11am Sat) This deli serves stand-up snacks, while its sister outfit, **P&K Lahůdky Jidelna** (mains 50Kč; 🚗 10am-3pm Mon-Fri), around the back, delivers super-cheap meals in sit-down surrounds.

The **Delvita** (Tyršova) supermarket provides for self-caterers.

Drinking

Hospoda Retro 33 (☎ 412 510 400; Radniční 10) This fills up with diners during the day and gets even busier with drinkers come nightfall. Kind of retro and kind of Irish, it all hangs together in a welcoming and very Czech kind of way.

Caffe Parolod (☎ 412 519 866; Tyršova 347; cocktails 70Kč, coffee 25Kč) A boat-style bar perched above the river, Caffe Parolod is a great place for a daytime espresso, or something considerably stronger once the sun has passed the yard arm.

Entertainment

Kino Sneznik (☎ 412 531 431; www.kass.cz in Czech; Podmokelská 1070/24; tickets 75Kč) Near the bus station, this cinema shows English-language films.

Getting There & Away

Dopravní Podnik Města Děčína (DPMD; ☎ 412 531 400) runs most of the long-distance buses out of the main bus terminal (which sits on an unnamed road through a park). It has seven buses a day to/from Prague's Florenc station (85Kč, 1½ hours). There are also four buses a day to Hřensko (18Kč, 30 minutes), for the Sandstone Rocks of Labe.

Trains (☎ 412 503 481) take a little longer to get to Prague (162Kč, two hours), but also run to cities elsewhere in Europe, including Dresden via Bad Schandau or Schöna (130Kč).

Getting Around

Most municipal bus lines run between the train station (Podmokly) and Masarykovo náměstí (Děčín). Bus tickets are available from automated machines on the bus (9Kč).

SANDSTONE ROCKS OF LABE

North of Děčín, the road snakes for 12km through the Labe valley to Hřensko on the German border. At Hřensko the entire North Bohemian watershed empties into Germany through a slim notch in the rolling hills. In exchange Germany provides a stream of tourists lured by the tacky Vietnamese-owned souvenir stalls lining the roads, selling cheap DVDs, bogus football shirts, and a mind-bending array of concrete gnomes, and other dodgy garden 'art'. Hřensko itself is one of the country's most kitsch tourist spots, so take the short walk from the centre to ensure an enticing glimpse of the staggering landscapes that are secreted beyond the river valley.

The **Sandstone Rocks of Labe** (Labské pískovce) Protected Landscape Region, is one of Bohemia's characteristic 'rock towns', and occupies a 5km by 35km strip along the border. Called 'Czech Switzerland' (Český Švýcarsko) by Czechs and 'Saxon Switzerland' (Sächsische Schweiz) by Germans, the meadows and chalets do look vaguely Swiss, but the steep gorges and dramatic sandstone formations are anything but. The region was named when Anton Graff and Adrian Zingg, two Swiss Romantic artists living in Dresden, moved here after being bewitched by the area's

potential for painting. Ironically Hřensko is the lowest point in Bohemia (116m above sea level). Don't expect vertiginous alpine vistas.

The part east of the road to Hřensko and beyond became the **Czech Switzerland National Park** (Národní park České Švýcarsko) in January 2000, and offers leisurely walking through spectacular, natural landscapes, and relaxed boat rides that negotiate the deep gorge of the Kamenice river. The most popular (and crowded) attraction is a huge, natural, stone bridge called the **Pravčická brána** (Pravčická gate).

Orientation

Wedged picturesquely at the Labe's rocky confluence with the Kamenice, touristy Hřensko is a handy reference point, but no place to linger given the surrounding landscapes. At the northern end of Hřensko is the German border crossing towards Dresden. A road and several walking trails roughly follow the Kamenice from Hřensko to Česká Kamenice. Along or near it, the villages of Mezná, Mezní Louka, Vysoká Lípa, Janov and Jetřichovice offer food, accommodation and access down into the gorge or up into the rocks.

MAPS

The maps to have, especially if you're walking, are SHOCart's *Českosaské Švýcarsko* (Czech-Saxon Switzerland) 1:50,000 or the official *Národní Parky České Švýcarsko* 1:25,000.

Information

Hudy Sport (☎ 412 554 086; Hřensko 131) East of the centre of Hřensko, this outlet offers camping equipment, maps and local information.

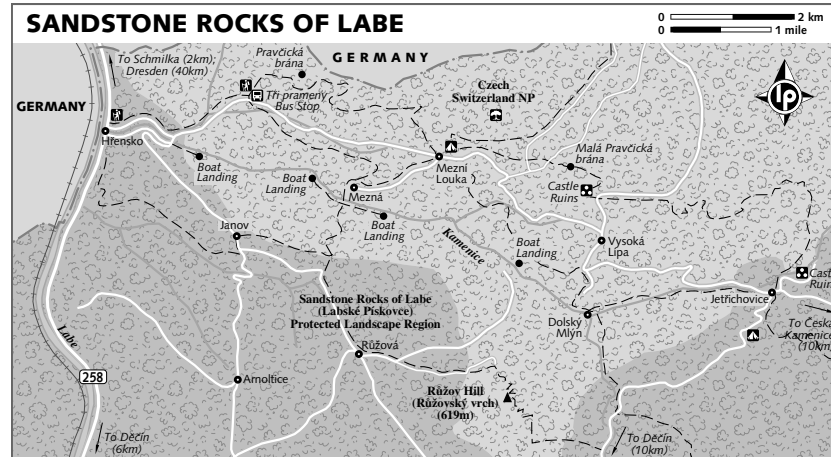
Infocentrum (☎ 412 554 286; www.hrensko.cz; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Mar) Situated in the middle of Hřensko, opposite the river and on the turn-off up the Kamenice valley, this helpful office can arrange accommodation and provide transport information.

Activities

The Sandstone Rocks of Labe are a great option for independent climbers. There are no organised climbs as such. Ask at Hudy Sport for more information.

WALKING TOURS

If you're short on time, a well-worn **nature trail** (*naučná stezka*), marked with a green diagonal slash, takes in the region's highlights in one



long day. From Hřensko it runs beside the road for 3km to a bus stop at Tři prameny, 2km up to the **Pravčická brána** natural bridge and 6km back to the road at Mezní Louka. From there it plunges 2.5km into the **Kamenice gorge** (right) below Mezná and returns to Hřensko – part of the way by boat. A variation that skips the gorge is the yellow-marked trail from Mezná back to Tři prameny.

A 'grand tour' of the area is a red-marked, high trail that follows the nature trail from Hřensko to Mezní Louka (6km by road; the trail itself may be longer as it doesn't follow a straight line) and then continues to Jetřichovice (15km), with options to spend the night at Mezní Louka or Vysoká Lípa. Additional attractions en route include a smaller stone bridge, the **Malá Pravčická brána**, and **castle ruins** north of Vysoká Lípa and also just east of Jetřichovice.

A shorter alternative follows a blue-marked trail from Mezní Louka down into the Kamenice gorge at Dolský Mlýn, and a yellow trail back out to Jetřichovice.

Pravčická Brána

With postcard views south to the 619m cone of **Růžov hill** (Růžovský vrch), this 30m-high natural **stone arch** (www.pbrana.cz; adult/concession 50/30Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is Europe's highest. Nestled improbably in a rocky nook beneath the arch is the Falcon's Nest, a rustic chateau that now houses a national park museum and restaurant. If you don't want to walk all the way there, get off

a Hřensko–Vysoká Lípa bus at Tři prameny and walk up for 2km.

Kamenice Gorge

Break your hike with a placid float along the dammed-up stretches of the Kamenice river above and below Mezná. Whatever the weather up above, it's mossy, damp, cool and very Jurassic at the bottom of this spectacular canyon.

If you're only interested in the boat trip, you still have to walk: 2km from Hřensko to the lower end; a very steep, sharp 1.5km below Mezná to the middle two boat landings; or 3km down a blue trail from Mezní Louka to the upper end. From the upper end you could also continue southeast to Vysoká Lípa or Jetřichovice.

There are two sections – **Edmundova soutěska** (Edmund's gorge; ☎ 9am-6pm daily May-Aug, Sat & Sun Apr, Sep & Oct) and **Dívoká soutěska** (Savage gorge; ☎ 9am-5pm daily May-Aug, Sat & Sun Apr, Sep & Oct) – that have been dammed; here you continue by punt, poled along by a ferryman through a canyon barely 5m wide and 50m to 150m deep. There's a charge for each ferry trip (adult/concession 60/30Kč).

Sleeping

You'll hardly go 2km along the road without seeing **Zimmer frei** (room for rent) signs. Some villages also have camp sites, fairly cheap *pen-sions* and pricier hotels. In Hřensko, accommodation can be difficult to find in summer; booking ahead is recommended.

All of these places serve meals and are either plush hotels or inn-style pubs with rooms above a restaurant-bar.

Pension Lugano (☎ 412 554 146; fax 412 554 156; Hřensko; s/d incl breakfast 600/1200Kč) Tucked into a bend in the river is this bright and sunny spot. A nicely rustic restaurant downstairs serves a terrific breakfast that will see you through the longest of hiking days.

Hotel Praha (☎ 412 554 066; www.hotel-hrensko.cz; Hřensko 37; s/d incl breakfast 1550/2400Kč; (P)) Hřensko's best hotel is a proud Tudoresque confection at the quieter end of town with extremely comfortable rooms and a sunny outdoor terrace restaurant.

Mezná Louka has **Hotel Mezná Louka** (☎ 412 554 220; s/d incl breakfast 1050Kč; (P)) and **Camp Mezná Louka** (☎ 412 554 084; sites per person 60Kč, bungalow 450Kč; (P)). In nearby Mezná there is **Penzión Na Vyhliďe** (☎ 412 554 065; Mezná 80; s/d 450/900Kč; (P)) with basic rooms and a sunny terrace overlooking the forest. The restaurant here is exceptionally cosy.

Further on in the Saxon village of Vysoká Lípa stay at **Restaurace a minipension U nás** (☎ 412 555 004; Vysoká Lípa; s/d incl breakfast 600/1000Kč; (P)) with a bustling dining room decorated with souvenirs from the owners' worldwide travels.

If you've got your own transport, the pretty villages of Janov and Jetřichovice are picturesque bases to explore the region. In Janov **Pension Pastis** (☎ 142 554 037; www.pastis.cz; Janov 22; s/d incl breakfast 550/1100Kč; (P)) has an excellent restaurant, and the nicest spot in Jetřichovice is **Pension Drěvák** (☎ 412 555 015; www.ctour.cz/drevak; s/d incl breakfast 700/1050Kč; (P)).

Getting There & Away

Buses run from Děčín to Hřensko (14Kč, 20 minutes) and from Děčín via Česká Kamenice to Jetřichovice, Vysoká Lípa or Janov every two or three hours. The last bus from Hřensko to Děčín leaves at 6.30pm.

BORDER CROSSING

Buses run from Schöna, on the German side to Dresden (one hour). Some trains between Děčín and Dresden stop at Schöna, on the German side of the river, opposite Hřensko. From the train station, a ferry shuttles to and from Hřensko (12Kč) on demand.

Getting Around

Buses run between Hřensko and Mezná (via Mezná Louka) six times a day (14Kč, 15 min-

utes). There are no direct buses from Hřensko to Jetřichovice. You'll need to transit in Děčín by bus or have your own transport. If you are driving, note there is a hefty 5000Kč fine if you park anywhere on the road between Hřensko and Mezná Louka.

NOVÝ BOR

pop 12,000

Further east is the heartland of Bohemia's glass-making industry. In Nový Bor, the **Glass museum** (Sklářské muzeum; ☎ 487 726 196; www.novy-bor.cz/sklarske_muzeum in Czech; náměstí Míru 105; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Tue-Sun) was founded in 1893. The examples of Bohemian artistry date from the 17th century, and there is also a replica glassworks. Entry to the museum includes the 'Masters of the Glass Crafts' exhibition above the **tourist office** (☎ 487 726 815; www.novy-bor.cz in Czech; TG Masaryka 46; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct), which presents the winning contemporary work from an annual glassmaking competition initiated in 1994. Most of the factories have attached shops where prices are lower than in Prague and other tourist centres. Visit the **Slavia Glassworks** (☎ 487 721 915; Kollárova 313) for handmade art glass, or ask at the tourist office about visiting glass factories in the area. In the last week of June the town hosts an annual **glass-making festival**.

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office staff can organise cheap rooms in Nový Bor.

Parkhotel (☎ 487 723 157; www.parkhotel.dnet.cz; Žižkova 269; s/d incl breakfast 800/1500Kč) This refurbished hotel has a good restaurant and arranges visits to glass factories.

Getting There & Away

One bus a day (38Kč, 40 minutes) and two trains a day (76Kč, 1½ hours) trundle from Děčín to Nový Bor. Instead, head to the junction town of Česká Lípa where there are 10 buses a day covering the 8km north to Nový Bor (16Kč, 15 minutes).

JABLONNÉ V PODJEŠTĚDÍ & LEMBERK CHATEAU

pop 3800

The chateau of Lemberk (or Löwenberg; 'Lion Mountain'), on the outskirts of Jablonné v Podještědí, was founded in 1240 by Havel Markvartic, head of a North Bohemian feudal aristocratic family. Its best-known resident

was Havel's frail Moravian wife, Zdislava, who was made a saint in 1995 for her exemplary life.

Later owners turned the castle into a comfortable Gothic and then Renaissance chateau. It owes its present baroque face to Albrecht von Wallenstein (see p205), the Hapsburg general who grew rich on confiscated Hussite property, and the family of one of his officers who contrived to keep the castle after Wallenstein's murder.

The last private owners, the Auerspergs (who also owned Žleby chateau in Central Bohemia), lent the castle to the German army during WWII.

Though out of the way as a trip from Prague, it's worth visiting en route to/from Děčín or Český ráj in East Bohemia.

Orientation & Information

The chateau is in the hamlet of Lvová on the outskirts of Jablonné v Podještědí, midway between Česká Lípa and Liberec. It's a 500m climb up through scented woods from the Lvová stop on the Česká Lípa-Liberec train.

Alternatively, get off the bus or train at Jablonné, make for the domes of St Lawrence church a few hundred metres up the hill and then walk 3.5km northeast on a green-marked trail to the chateau.

There is a **tourist information office** (informační centrum; ☎ 487 762 441; náměstí Míru; ☎ 7.30am-11.30am & noon-4pm Mon-Fri) offering private rooms and local information near the church in Jablonné.

Sights

ST LAWRENCE CHURCH & MUMMIES

St Lawrence church (kostel sv Vavřince; náměstí Míru), completed in 1722, is apparently where Zdislava is buried. Beneath the building is a **crypt** with mummified corpses dating from the 17th and 18th centuries, amazingly well preserved

thanks to a clever ventilation system. At the time of writing the crypt was not open to visitors; check with the tourist information office.

LEMBERK CHATEAU

A 45-minute, Czech-language tour (foreign guide available for 50Kč extra) of the **chateau** (zámek Lemberk; www.szlemberk.xf.cz; adult/concession 50/30Kč; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) takes in the open-hearth kitchen, chapel, rooms full of furniture and church furnishings, and an upstairs hall with a ceiling featuring 70 panels (dating from 1608) depicting German proverbs and Aesop's fables. Other rooms showcase Zdislava's life.

A few rooms are used for changing exhibitions. Definitely check these out, as you may get to see the most interesting parts of the chateau, a little upstairs baroque chapel beside the castle tower – and possibly the tower too. Outside the gate are several well preserved North Bohemian half-timbered houses.

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office staff can organise cheap rooms in Jablonné.

U Salvátora (☎ 775 027 044; www.pensionusalvatora.cz; náměstí Míru 162; s/d incl breakfast 400/800Kč; mains 80-120Kč) With a prime spot on the main square in Jablonné, U Salvátora offers salvation with a cosy restaurant and the best rooms in town.

Getting There & Away

Jablonné is on long-distance bus routes linking Karlovy Vary (in West Bohemia), Děčín, Liberec and the Krkonoše resorts (in East Bohemia). One bus a day (except Sunday) makes the three-hour trip from Prague's Florenc station (86Kč). All buses stop at the train station.

Trains are limited, with occasional links to Liberec, Cheb and Děčín.

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