

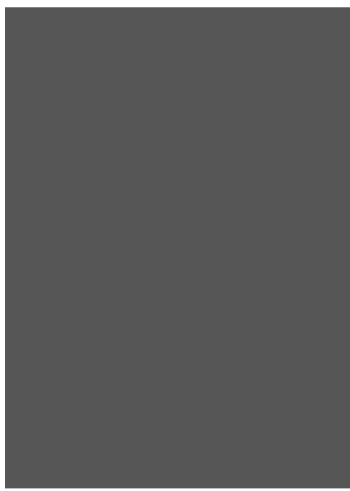
EXPLORER } CZECH REPUBLIC

Peaceful Hiking In Bohemia: Cold War Legacy

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in gravy and topped with a dollop of cream and cranberries) with pints of Budweiser (the Czech version) while mustached men chain-smoked and screamed at a televised soccer match.

The next couple of days took us through wildly diverse terrain that included two 2,600-foot-high mountains and an English-style park dotted with oak trees and empty fortresses. In Nove Hradý, a hilltop town with a leafy main square, we slept in a monastery once used to house guards who patrolled the border. We strode through sleepy vil-



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After checking in to our hotel — a quiet pension just outside the walls — we made our way to the brewery's pub, where we sat on the terrace, chatting with a man named Jiri, who told us about his escape to France during the Cold War. As the sun set, we nursed pints of opaque, orange-hued beer, a special unfiltered brew sold only there, and toasted to getting halfway through our hike.

We spent the rest of the day exploring another of Trebon's oddities. Just outside the town walls were artificial lakes teeming with carp. Some people call carp river scum; the good people of Trebon, however, call them dinner. We ended up at Supinka, a surprisingly chic restaurant that serves carp in just about every conceivable way: fried, pan-seared, and poached; sprinkled with paprika, marinated in soy sauce, drenched in chili or topped with garlic sauce.

This was hardly the hike I expected. Instead of overdosing on bad Czech grub, getting lost in the woods and maybe even encountering a bear, everything had gone smoothly so far. And just to make sure it continued to go well, we went to bed early.

For our final day, we took a bus from Jindrichuv Hradec to Nova Bystrice, about 15 miles from our finish line. A black dog trailed us out of Nova Bystrice until we reached the village of Klaster, which is little more than its namesake, a plus-sized white cloister in the middle of a huge meadow.

About five miles later, we passed the imposing Landstein castle then hiked through dense fern-blanketed pine forest. I half expected to see a troll or a gnome. Instead, we came across igloo-like concrete bunkers, many which were camouflaged with dirt and tree branches.

These bunkers, it turned out, were built from 1935 to 1938 to guard the Czech border against an invasion by Hitler. But during the Cold War, the bunkers served the opposite function: to prevent Czech citizens from escaping to the West. That might explain why the area felt spooky, as if we were trespassing on sacred ground.

As we passed the final bunker, the Renaissance-era bell tower of Slavonice

lages where the only sound was the echo of a soccer ball, bouncing off a stone wall.

Fortunately, Trebon, where we spent our third night, was more dynamic. This town of nearly 9,000 people was the perfect rest stop after a trek of some 22 miles through mangrove swamps, pine forests and deer-filled prairies. The town has a small castle, an irregularly shaped square flanked by colorful Baroque apartment houses, a spa and a warren of winding lanes — all encircled by thick walls.

But we had not gone there to sight-see. Trebon is famous for the Bohemia Regent Brewery, which has been making its fabulously hoppy beer since 1379.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAVEL HOREJSI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ABOVE The town square in Trebon. BELOW A world War II-era bunker near the Czech border with Austria.

TREKKERS' REWARD: LOCAL BEER AND COMFY ROOMS

FINDING YOUR WAY

Hiking and biking maps can be downloaded through the Brooklyn-based **Friends of Czech Greenways** (www.pragueviennagreenways.org). Others are sold at bookstores in Prague, including the **Kiwi Travel**

Bookshop (Jungmannova 23; 420-224-948-455).

GETTING THERE

Buses and trains leave Prague regularly for Cesky Krumlov (trains require a change in Ceske Budejovice). Check schedules at www.idos.cz.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotels, pensions and private rooms are found in every village (look for signs that say "ubytovani" or "accommodation").

In Cesky Krumlov, the **Hotel Na Louzi** (Kajovska 66; 420-380-711-280; www.nalouzi.cz) has 11 rooms in a 15th-century building with an atmospheric pub. Doubles start at 1,350 koruna, about \$85 at 15.8 koruna to the dollar.

In Nove Hradý, the 400-year-old **Monastery of Divine Mercy** (Husova 2; 420-386-301-322; www.klaster.cz) has 21 comfortable rooms, with shared baths, for 340 koruna a person for a single; 300 a person in a double or triple room (add 40 koruna for a single-night stay).

Trebon has lots of hotels, but one of the coziest is **Penzion Siesta** (Hradebni 26; 420-384-724-831). The pension, which faces the tiny canal near the old walls, has doubles from 1,080 koruna.

In Slavonice, the hip **Besidka** (Horni Namesti 522; 420-384-493-293; www.besidka.cz) has eight chic rooms, starting at 1,290 koruna in summer.

came into view. We trudged through a neighborhood of 19th-century houses and through one of Slavonice's medieval stone gates.

The tiny town looked like it hadn't changed in two centuries, with triangular-shaped piazzas lined with old Ren-

aissance apartment buildings painted with colorful, comic-strip-like Biblical scenes. Back in the 15th century, Slavonice was a common stopover on the Prague-to-Vienna trade route. Today, it's become a magnet for artists and Bohemians from Prague.

And, of course, it is also attracting visitors like me, looking for a cheap place to stay and a friendly pub in which to rest my feet and nurse a sudsy beer after an 80-mile Bohemian hike. We put down our backpacks and headed for the first bar we saw. ■

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