

## Hiking in the National Park Sumava Czech Republic

Hiking in the Czech Republic has something special. What that is? And why is it so? A little (pre)knowledge of the modern history of the Czech Republic can help answer this. In the last 100 years, many developments have colored this hiking country. Below we cover a brief overview. But: the best way to get the clearest answers is, of course, to hike there yourself. Just do it! The country is much closer than you think. The south of France is further away.



Sumava NP

### Brief history of the Czech Republic

The end of World War I (1918) also marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (from 1867) to which the Czech Republic belonged until then. Empress Sissi, Emperor Franz Joseph and that nasty hateful formal mother of his, you may know her from the movies, were important figures of this dual monarchy. Especially in Moravia and Bohemia, the border regions, lived millions of Germans who were quite disadvantaged. This was reason enough for Nazi Germany to annex these areas first, in 1938. A year later, the entire Czech Republic became an occupied "protectorate." After liberation in 1945, the German residents were brutally expelled and deported.

In 1948, a communist coup occurred: the Czech Republic became a dictatorship, as part of what later came to be called the Eastern Bloc. The Iron Curtain became a reality. In 1968, a short-lived "liberalization" took place: the Prague Spring. The Czechs were resolutely crushed by military forces, led by the Russians. Members of our hiking group saw the tanks enter Prague. In 1989, the Velvet Revolution, led by Havel and Dubček, ended this dictatorship. The Velvet Revolution took place in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Democracy was restored. In early 1993, the Czech Republic and Slovakia separated again. In 2004, the Czech Republic became a member of the European Union.

### **Highly recommended: hiking through the pristine Šumava National Park**

For decades, the Iron Curtain ran through this area. The border between the Eastern Bloc and the capitalist West. Citizens were not allowed there or had to leave. This resulted in a "secret," isolated and unique nature reserve! Today the area is called the National Park, the Šumava or the Bohemian Forest. This borders the Bavarian Forest and the Mühlviertel in Austria. High hills as high as some 1400 meters, dense forests, magnificent views and ancient glacial lakes. It could well be the least spoiled - the most authentic? - natural area in Europe! "Šumava, the green lung of Europe". The park has many marked hiking trails that now cross open borders.



**Kasperske Hory**

Just outside the National Park is Kašperské Hory, an old gold-digging town that was neglected for a long time because Communist rule had little regard for local cultures. Since then, the town has been largely restored to its full glory, including the typical Bohemian colors. Above the town is a castle built by Charles IV, - "the greatest Czech of all time"- to protect the gold mines, among other things. Take a seat on the old square in the center and let it sink in. If you go further into the National Park, you will notice its unique and authentic character. Cars are sporadically allowed on the few roads. And "stay on the trails" is mandatory for hikers.

Mountain meadows, marshes, vast wet bogs at altitude, stone seas, large fields full of stones, streams that become raging rivers and accommodate trout, otter, bear and grouse. The area has unique flora. The Moldau - "rushing" - river rises here and forms the Lipno reservoir 20 km away. There you can already see how destructive mass tourism can be in our modern world. But fortunately, the Vltava is once again glorying in and through Prague! Also listen to Bedřich Smetana's matching, beautiful piece of music from *Má Vlast* (my homeland). Unfortunately, there are also pieces of forest that are dead from the (bark) beetle disease! However, it is now also a means for the creation of new nature: the circle is complete again.

One answer to the why question from the introduction is therefore certain: the area is still reasonably authentic due to years of isolation. In the real - not touristy - sense of the word, but is not to be confused with "old-fashioned" or "antique." It is unexpected, original, self-sufficient, pure, original, crafty ... This is noticeable in the villages you pass through. A hot movie from your own childhood?

Attention:

- Gravity: medium
- Advice: buy (locally) a hiking map in a kiosk or bookstore with colored routes
- Starting point: Sušice and enjoy the old city center!





**Otava river**