

Why hiking in the Czech Republic is so special

Hiking in the Czech Republic has something special. What is that? And why is that? A little (pre-)knowledge of the modern history of the Czech Republic can help to find an answer to this. In the last 100 years, many developments have coloured this hiking country. Below we cover a brief overview. But: the best way for the clearest answers is of course by taking a walking tour yourself. Just do it! The country is much closer than you think. The South of France is further away (from the Netherlands).



Šumava National Park

Brief history of the Czech Republic

The end of the First World War (1918) also meant 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 from this dual monarchy. Especially in Moravia and Bohemia, the border regions, lived millions of Germans who were rather disadvantaged. This was reason enough for Nazi Germany to annex these territories first, in 1938. A year later, the whole of the Czech Republic became an occupied "protectorate". After the liberation in 1945, the German inhabitants were brutally expelled and expelled.

In 1948, a communist coup d'état took place: the Czech Republic became a dictatorship, as part of what has since come to be called the Eastern Bloc. The Iron Curtain became a

fact. In 1968, a short-lived "liberalization" took place: the Prague Spring. The Czechs were resolutely crushed by the military, led by the Russians. Members of our walking group have seen the tanks enter Prague. In 1989, the Velvet Revolution, led by Havel and Dubček, put an end to 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 were separated again. In 2004, the Czech Republic became a member of the European Union.

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. Civilians were not allowed to enter or had to leave. This resulted in a "secret", isolated and unique nature reserve! The area is now called the National Park, the Šumava or the Bohemian Forest. This borders the Bayerische Wald and the Mühlviertel in Austria. High hills of about 1400 meters high, dense forests, magnificent views and ancient glacial lakes. It might be the least spoiled – the most authentic? – can be a nature reserve of Europe! "Šumava, the green lung of Europe". The park has many marked hiking trails that now cross the open borders.



Kasperske Hory

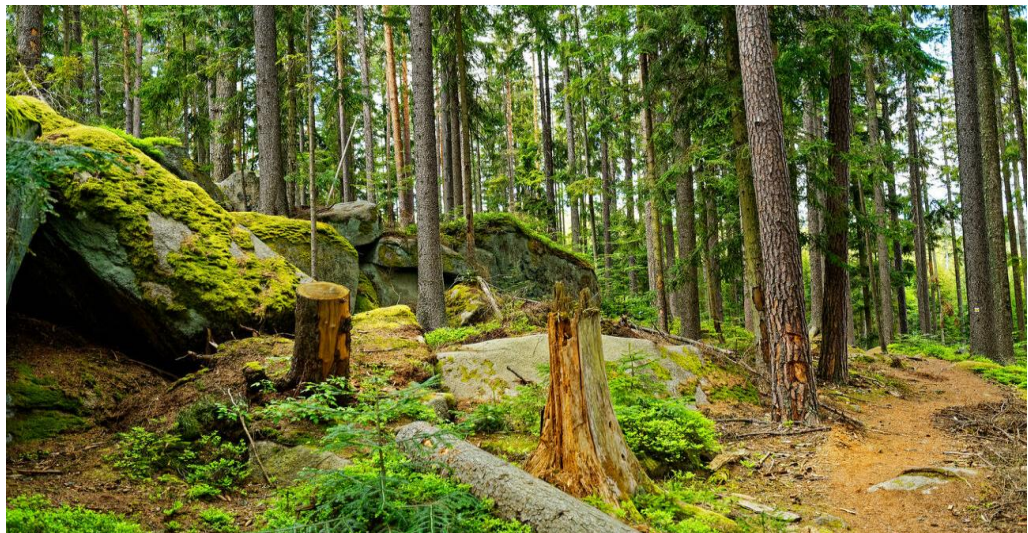
Just outside the National Park is Kašperské Hory, an old gold miner town that was neglected for a long time because communist rule had little regard for local cultures. In the meantime, the town has largely been restored in full glory with, among other things, the typical Bohemian colours. Above the town is a castle, built by Charles IV, – "the greatest Czech of all time" – to protect the gold mines, among other things. Let that sink in while sitting on the old square in the centre. If you go further into the National Park, you will notice the unique and authentic character of the park. Cars are sporadically allowed on the few roads. And "stay on the trails" is mandatory for the hiker.

Mountain meadows, swamps, vast wet peatlands at altitude, stone seas, large fields full of stones, streams that become wild rivers and offer space for trout, otter, bear and grouse. The area has unique flora. The Vltava – "rustle" – river originates here and forms the Lipno reservoir 20 km away. There you can already see how devastating mass tourism can be in our modern world. But fortunately the Vltava is glorying again in and through Prague! Also listen to the matching, beautiful piece of music by Bedřich Smetana from *Má Vlast* (my homeland). Unfortunately, there are also pieces of forest that are dead due to the (bark) beetle disease! However, it is now also a means for the creation of new nature: the circle has come full circle again.

An answer to the why question from the introduction is therefore certain: the area is still fairly 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-caring, pure, original, crafting... This is noticeable in the villages you pass through. A warm film from your own childhood?

Some important points:

- Difficulty: medium
- Advice: buy (on the spot) a hiking map in a kiosk or bookstore with coloured routes
- Starting point: Sušice and enjoy here the old city centre!



Deep forests



Slavkov 1992



In the morning

