

The Czech Republic – Summer 2005

This year's International Symposium on Multiparticle Dynamics (ISMD) was in Kroměříž, The Czech Republic—a country I had not yet visited.

Czechia is close enough that I could have driven, but I don't care so much to drive alone in strange places, particularly if I don't understand the language at all. And while handy in the countryside and small towns, a car is a big pain in cities. So, I decided to fly and rely on public transportation, which seemed to be well organized. The country-wide schedule of trains and inter-city buses is on the web. You just type in the date, starting city and destination and if you want a time, and you get a list of all the combinations of trains and buses together with the price. So I was able to plan the entire trip ahead of time.

Tuesday, Aug. 9. Up at 5 to get an early train to Schiphol. Since they were working on the tracks between Nijmegen and Arnhem, I had to go via Den Bosch, which takes somewhat longer. Anyway, it all went OK. The flight to Prague on Czech Airlines was slightly delayed, having to wait for a free gate after landing ahead of schedule. But that didn't matter since I had plenty of time before the conference bus would leave. There were some people from the conference to meet us. Then a wait for a couple of hours until it was time for the bus to leave. Fortunately, it was nice weather and there were benches outside to sit on. We got to the conference site in Kroměříž about 5:30. It is a vocational school: hotel and restaurant personnel, cookery, bakery, horse breeding and jockey training, gardening, butchery and sausage making, ...

The rooms were pretty primitive. I would not have liked to be there as a student—3 to a room with not much space left after the beds and cupboards. But each room had its own shower and toilet, although in pretty poor condition, rusty and generally grungy. Fortunately, we did not have to share rooms. The mirror was on the door rather than over the wash basin, which made shaving rather difficult.

After getting checked in, I went out for a walk to see the town together with one of the other physicists. It is not a large town, population only about 30000. The main sites are a nice town square and the archbishop's palace with its gardens. More about that later. This was just a quick walk to stretch our legs after three hours in the bus and to get a first impression of the town. We did not have too much time, as we had to get back for dinner. We made it with time to spare, and getting back before the rain started.

Wednesday, Aug. 10. Tonight, a reception in the 17th-century baroque Flower Garden, the second of the gardens associated with the archbishop. Like the archbishop's palace and its garden, this garden is on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list. Unfortunately, only part (I would guess about a fourth) of the garden is fully kept up with formally arranged beds of flowers. But that is quite nice, and it is of course where we had the reception with a number of cold and warm dishes: sausages, pieces of chicken and ham, a nice two-fish terrine repackaged in the form of a fish with the head of one of the types of fish attached. The fish head looked rather like a pike and was local; the other fish was salmon. And lots of local wine, drinkable but nothing to write home about. For a time there was a light drizzle, but we were

kept dry under the arcade along the wall. Later it cleared, and we could go up to the top of the wall and look out over the town.

Thursday, Aug. 11. This evening we had a private tour of the archbishop's palace. The rooms are magnificent. There is the hunting hall, the walls lined with deer antlers, trophies of the hunt in the archbishop's forest during the visit by the Russian Czar in 1885, and a billiard-like table in the center set up for a form of billiards the Czar was particularly fond of. It was in this palace that Czar Alexander III met the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef I in 1885. Several reception rooms, living rooms, throne room, and such are nicely decorated with crystal chandeliers, paintings on the walls and period furniture. The paintings are often copies with the originals in a separate part of the castle, which is now the art museum and which we also visited. The collection included works by Cranach, Van Dyck, Jan Brueghel, Veronese. The Liege Hall, where official proceedings and trials took place is nice, with a carved wooden railing separating the area containing the throne and chairs for the important participants and with a fine painted ceiling.

There is an important library containing more than 33000 volumes of which more than 1000 are from the 16th century and 20,000 from before 1800, as well as several old globes. The guide said that the collection was open to the public. She made it sound like a public library. But a sign said it was only for authorized visitors, according to a Czech friend. Anyway, we could walk through the two rooms and admire the filled bookcases. There was also a music archive with more than 1000 manuscripts including works of Dittersdorf, Haydn, Mozart and works by Archduke Rudolph modified and completed by Beethoven.

The grandest room is the large Assembly Hall, which was a great dining hall before being used in 1848 to accommodate the Austrian Imperial Assembly when revolution made Vienna unsafe. The principle that all state power stems from the people was formulated here. With a nice painted ceiling 9 meters or so above you, cream colored walls with gilt decoration and a few paintings, and crystal chandeliers, it is a magnificent room. Early scenes of the film *Amadeus* were shot here.

After the tour of the palace, we went to the Archbishop's wine cellar. It is like entering a shop on a side street next to the palace, but you immediately descend a long tunnel to the cellars, which apparently are under the palace. There were huge wooden barrels some 4 meters tall. In one room a table was laid out with a copious cold buffet, and wine was freely poured. Later a small music group played folk music, and a few people tried to dance to it on the uneven earth floor.

Friday, Aug. 12. It was a free day as far as tourist activities were concerned. Just lectures.

Saturday, Aug. 13. This afternoon was the conference excursion to Olomouc, some 35 km. away. According to legend, Olomouc was founded by Julius Caesar. It was the capital of Moravia until 1777. As compensation for no longer being the capital, it was promoted from a bishopric to an archbishopric. It was this bishop, later archbishop, who had his palace in Kroměříž.

We had a guided walking tour around Olomouc. As usual with such tours, either you keep close to the guide, listen and end up not actually seeing so much, or you stop

to look more closely at things which interest you and end up not hearing most of what the guide says and so not knowing what you are seeing. I tend to the latter, figuring that I can catch up on the background by reading the guidebook. Unfortunately, Olomouc, like Kroměříž, is not included in the Michelin guide, and *Lonely Planet* gives only very cursory information about the sites.

In any case, there is a nice large square with the town hall in the middle and a smaller square only a couple hundred meters away. There is a large astronomical clock in the wall of the town hall, which is quite remarkable. Instead of paintings of saints and princes and a procession of them walking around on the hour, this clock has scientists and workers of various kinds. It turns out that the town hall and clock were damaged during World War II and “restored” by the Communists.

There are also two fountains in the main square. There are four other fountains, which we saw, within the city center. A couple of them are clearly inspired by more famous fountains in Rome. We kept running into a wedding party taking photos of bride and groom in front of the fountains.

It seems that most towns have a plague column, commemorating survival of the plague. Some are called Marian columns, some Trinity columns, some just plague columns. I am not completely sure of the difference, but I think Marian means the column was dedicated to Mary in thanks for saving the town (or anyway some of its inhabitants) and Trinity similarly but to the Holy Trinity. But simply “plague column” is more difficult—who did the people of those towns think saved them? The biggest attraction in the main square is the Trinity Column said to be the largest single baroque sculpture in central Europe, and on the UNESCO Cultural Heritage list. Lots of gilt and ornate stone badly in need of cleaning, it is not my taste but nevertheless rather impressive. *Lonely Planet* says it is “uncannily reminiscent of the Buddhist shrine of Borobudur,” but Borobudur did not enter my mind. The other square also has a (Marian) plague column. There are nice buildings around both of the squares.

We visited several churches ranging from the Gothic St. Moritz Cathedral, with a nice interior, to the baroque. Unfortunately, restoration was in progress around the St. Wenceslas Cathedral. Originally 12th-century Romanesque, now neo-Gothic since major renovation of both exterior and interior in the 1880s, it was still rather nice inside, but much of the exterior was under scaffolding, and the adjacent 12th-century bishop’s palace and cloister, supposed to be very interesting, as well as a chapel and former deanery were closed for restoration.

Sunday, Aug. 14. I skipped a few talks and went into town to look around and take a few photos. There is a nice square with a plague column, a fountain, and some nice old buildings including the town hall. Next to the Archbishop’s chateau is a gate and behind the chateau a vast 17th-century garden (64 hectares = 158 acres).

Tonight was the conference “banquet”, not much different from other evening meals except that there was an aperitif, an appetizer, and wine as well as beer to drink. There was also a small brass band playing during dinner. The only problem was that they only knew about four pieces. So after the tenth time through their repertoire they were sent home.

Monday, Aug. 15. This morning was the last session of ISMD, and this afternoon we started the Workshop on Particle Correlations and Femtoscopy (microscopy but a

million times smaller). I'm glad to have this workshop, since it is raining heavily and is definitely not the time to begin sightseeing.

Tuesday, Aug. 16. In the morning I skipped some talks and walked, together with two others and a Czech friend to the railway station to get tickets for tomorrow. Having someone who could speak Czech helped with buying the tickets. She was somewhat worried about the trains I had picked out from the schedule on the web, since it involved several changes. So she asked about other possibilities. But I decided to stick with what I had found, since the alternative was to leave earlier and miss a couple of talks I wanted to hear or to leave later and hence arrive later at my destination, which would leave less time for sightseeing.

The good news was that it seemed to have stopped raining. So maybe the tourist part of my trip will be dry.

Wednesday, Aug. 17. Today was the end of the conference, but I left early, right after lunch, skipping the afternoon session. There was a bus stop close by, and I took the bus to the train station. The bus times were not very convenient, so I had nearly an hour to wait for my train. Czechia is said to have one of the densest rail networks of Europe, almost every village has a station, though the trains may not be very frequent. Kroměříž is certainly not on a main line, and the station is old-fashioned. There are not so many trains and you actually walk across the tracks to get to yours. There are no signs to say where the trains go, just an announcement. However there are so few trains you can pretty much go by the time, and by checking with the conductor before you board.

My train trip to Kutná Hora involved four changes. The first train was just two cars and only took 10 minutes to get to Hulin where I had 5 minutes to find the right track for the second train. That was no problem. But then things started to go wrong. There was a lot of work on the track. So the train simply crawled along and arrived about 15 minutes late in Prerov, and there was supposed to be only 10 minutes to change. Fortunately, the next train was 20 minutes late, which meant I had plenty of time. However, I was not yet in the clear, since my next change, in Olomouc, allowed only 9 minutes. However, I again was lucky; the next train was also late and I made it with a couple of minutes to spare. I was now on the main line, in a nice modern train, and could relax. Although I needed to change again, it was to a lesser line, and I was confident that the train would wait, although it didn't need to since we made up a bit of time and, in any case, there was 23 minutes between trains. On top of that, this train too was late. So I arrived only 15 minutes or so late at the main station of Kutná Hora.

Kutná Hora has two stations. The main station is some distance from town. From it you have the choice of taking another train to the station on the edge of town or taking a bus. My train ticket was only for this station, I was not sure when the next train would be, and the bus was standing there ready to go. So, I took the bus. However, it seems that buses are not allowed in the center of town, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. So the bus let me off at the closest point to the center. It was more or less straightforward to find the center of town—walk downhill—and I found my hotel on the main square quite easily.

Although my hotel is on the square, my room is not, since I chose for a cheaper room rather than a view of the square. Even so, there were a couple of nice old

buildings to view from my window. There was some confusion checking in. The guy at the reception insisted on speaking Dutch, while I was speaking English. It took me a while to realize that he couldn't understand me because he thought I was speaking Dutch and I couldn't understand him because I thought he was speaking English. So I switched to Dutch and managed to get the key to my room. Then I discovered that the maid had forgotten to put towels in the room. He didn't understand, at first, what I was talking about when I complained. But finally it got through to him and he got me some towels.

I went out and walked around town for a while, seeing most of the sights from the outside: nice square with old buildings and many other nice old buildings in the narrow surrounding streets, a plague column. Then, seeing that it was downhill to the closest train station and uphill to get to the bus to the other train station, I walked downhill to see what the times were. It turned out that there was a connecting train to meet the train I wanted the next day from the other station. So I bought a ticket for the next day. By this time it was starting to get dark, and I was starting to get hungry. I found a restaurant mentioned in *Lonely Planet*, which turned out to be much as described—inexpensive, cheerful bar/eatery with reliable food.

Thursday, Aug. 18. I was up early and stuffed myself at the breakfast buffet. Having eaten so much at the conference, I needed a break, and I went into two-meals-a-day mode, skipping lunch. With a hearty Czech breakfast, I was still eating more than I do at home, but with sightseeing I was also burning off more calories (I think). The reason for the receptionist's attempts at Dutch were also clear. Most of the people at breakfast were speaking Dutch—a large tour group. And they were stuffing themselves even more than I was.

In medieval times Kutná Hora was a very rich and important town, rivaling Prague. This was a consequence of the large silver deposits discovered in 1275, which prompted a “silver rush” mostly among miners from Germany. The royal mint was then located here. The silver wealth enabled a fine Gothic church, St. Barbara's (patron saint of miners), to be started at the end of the 14th century. However, richer silver deposits were found in north-western Bohemia in the early 15th century and the decline of Kutná Hora began. Work on the church finally stopped in 1558, though it continued to be worked on occasionally and was finally completed in 1905.

I arrived at St. Barbara's 10 minutes or so before its 9 a.m. opening time, but the ticket seller had also arrived early, and he let me in. The Gothic vaulting is very nice with a complex pattern of ribs, and there are some interesting wall paintings depicting mining scenes, as well as statues including miners. From behind the cathedral is a nice view of the town and the valley.

The other most notable attraction is the Italian Court, which was the mint. It got its name from the Italians brought from Florence to teach the locals how to make coins. Later it was a royal palace as well. In the 18th century it became the town hall. The tour through the building was interesting, and in the future may well be more so, as much of the building is under restoration.

Then, back to the hotel to check out and walk down to the station for the 11:48 train. Today I only had to change three times, including that at the Kutná Hora main station. That went uneventfully except that I almost got off the third train too soon at a town with similar name to where I was supposed to change. I couldn't really believe that the train was early, but to be sure I jumped off and asked the conductor,

who told me to get back on. She came by later just before the right station to make sure I got off and directed me, in Czech with sign language to the right track. I arrived in Telč right on time at 3 p.m.

Telč is quite small, population about 3000. It was built on a sort of triangular piece of dry ground surrounded by marshes, which were converted into large “fish ponds.” These provided not only food but also defense. There was a huge fire in 1530, and the town has not changed very much since it was rebuilt. This preserved-town aspect reminded me of the Belgian Bruges, except that Telč is much smaller. The long funnel-shaped square is surrounded by beautiful old houses. Almost needless to say, it is on the UNESCO Cultural Heritage list. Near the wide end of the square is a Marian column, and at the narrow end a Renaissance castle. My little hotel was nestled against the town wall 50 meters or so down a narrow street from the wide end of the square.

I took a tour through the castle, which was interesting. The Czechs have invented a clever way to get extra money from tourists: Tours through many castles cost extra with a foreign-language speaking guide. And if you don’t ask for your ticket in Czech, that is what you get. Thus there is no problem with Czechs getting a lower price than other EU citizens. I did feel sorry though for non-English speaking foreigners who had to pay extra, and still had to do with a printed summary in German or French.

The density of castles in Czechia must be a world record. It seems there is one in every town. Czechia was basically feudal up until World War I, with fabulously wealthy landowners. Some of these, the politically incorrect I suppose, lost their estates in land reforms. And after World War II the communists confiscated the rest. Now, after the fall of communism, the owners of property confiscated by the communists can reclaim it, though not all choose to do so, since they would have to restore it.

Friday, Aug. 19. Having managed to see everything the day before, I could leave right away in the morning. So I got the train at 9. I only had to change once, to a train that was only 5 minutes late—the trains seem to run chronically late. I got to České Budějovice a bit before 12.

České Budějovice is a good-sized town, population about 100,000. Apart from being the home of the real Budweiser beer, it has a large square, which unlike most “squares” is really square; each side is 133 meters. Many of the arcaded buildings along its sides are nice, with varied styles reflecting the period they were last renovated. In one corner is the town hall, a Renaissance building but built in baroque style with statues of Justice, Wisdom, Courage and Prudence, fierce-looking gargoyles and lots of decorative reliefs and coats of arms. It looks better than it sounds—pretty nice, actually. In the center of the square is a fountain.

There are many old streets near the square which were nice to explore and a couple of churches. All told, it could be easily seen in a day. But I planned on staying three nights because it was a convenient place to take day trips to surrounding towns.

Since I had managed to see Telč the previous day, I had arrived in České Budějovice at noon, several hours earlier than my original plan. Not wanting to waste the half-day I had gained, I decided to head for Hluboká nad Vltavou, a town about 10 km away. There was supposed to be a local bus, but I had noticed that we passed Hluboká station on the train and decided that that would be convenient. According to the schedule from the web, I could catch the train which left 20 minutes before the next

bus. So I walked back to the station, bought a ticket and boarded the train. Then I sat there waiting as they kept changing the “time delayed” on the signs: 5 min, 10 min, 15 min, 20 min. Then it finally left.

Then came the big surprise. The train station of Hluboká was far from the town. There was a bus, but according to the schedule at the bus stop, the next bus wasn't for an hour. So I decided to walk. I guess it was 3 or 4 km. Fortunately it was (a) nice weather, (b) flat or slightly down hill, and (c) through a woods and along the edges of ponds, presumably artificial fish ponds built to ensure a good fish supply hundreds of years ago. Also it gave me a chance to take pictures of the town and the castle on the hill above it from a distance.

It seems there was a stronghold or castle here since the early 900's (King Václav I or Wenceslas). Since 1661 it belonged to the Schwarzenberg family, one of the rich noble landowners. After World War II it became state property. Through the years it was rebuilt several times, the last in the 19th century in Tudor Gothic style, the inspiration being Windsor Castle. So, although it is quite impressive, it looks rather out of place. I walked around the outside—there are nice gardens—but skipped the guided tour of the interior. Instead I visited the gallery in what used to be the riding school of the castle. It has a very nice collection of Bohemian Gothic (14th through 16th century) painting and sculpture. Unfortunately its collection of modern Czech art was not open. Maybe that was the reason the price was only half of what *Lonely Planet* said.

There was nothing to see in the town. I would have liked to eat at one of the fish restaurants, specializing in fresh fish from the ponds outside the town. But it was a bit early to eat, nothing to do in the meantime, and the frequency of buses deteriorated in the evening. So I found the bus stop and got a bus back to České Budějovice, where I wandered around the town a bit. I still managed to eat fish for dinner, some nice carp sauteed in butter, and some good beer to drink.

Saturday, Aug. 20. The hotel only starts serving breakfast at 8, maybe because it is the weekend, which is a bit late for me. So it was something of a rush to get to the bus station for the 9:00 bus to Český Krumlov.

Český Krumlov is a small town really, population only about 15000, and is an absolute “must.” It is no wonder that it is on UNESCO's World Heritage list. The location alone is fantastic. The old town is within a “horseshoe” bend of a river, except that it is more than just a horseshoe—it is nearly a full circle, about 335°—with a ridge around most of it. On the highest, narrow ridge is a castle, the oldest parts going back to the 13th century. The whole complex consists of more than 40 buildings, of various ages, with courtyards and a park linked by ramps and bridges. Like Hluboká, its latest owner was the Schwarzenberg family, and it is now state property.

The castle proper is entered by crossing a stone bridge, formerly a draw bridge, over a moat, long dry but housing a few bears. Signs not only ask that you not feed the bears, but suggest that for more variety of food and for delicacies you could give money. And there is a box with a bear paw to put it in.

I took a tour through the upper floors of the main castle building, which was quite interesting, being well furnished, with original furnishings, in styles from the 16th to the 19th century. Particularly amusing was the Masquerade Hall, a ballroom decorated in 1748 in the style of the Italian comedy. The walls are covered with

various scenes of brightly painted revelry. The *trompe-l'œil* figures, attired in fancy costumes and wearing masques, seem almost real.

But even better was the baroque theater in a separate building. Built in 1680 and remodeled in 1766, it has survived intact, not only the building but also the auditorium, stage, scenery, lighting, costume collection and archives. Only a limited number of people are allowed in at one time, and only a limited number of visits per day. I was there early enough in the day to get a ticket, but only for a somewhat later time than I would have liked. So I had some time to kill, resulting in a more detailed study of the gardens than I would normally have made, more time looking down at the town and watching people canoing on the river, and a sampling of the local beer (Eggenberg, whose brewery is in the former armory of the town, which was built in 1630—not sure when the brewery took it over though) in a restaurant in one of the buildings by the garden. The beer was good. We could visit not only the auditorium, but below the stage to see the machinery for changing scenes, which could be done in about 10 seconds, and to operate the lifts to raise actors into the middle of the stage. For a performance there would be 10 or 12 men working below the stage and another 8 or 10 above stage to raise and lower backdrops or pull people or scenery through the air. Changes of scenery were usually accompanied by fireworks to distract the audience during the change.

Then I went down to see the town: a nice gate, some old houses, a nice, though in no way comparable to Telč or Kutná Hora, square with a plague column, a Gothic church. In the square a group of dancers, apparently a dance club from somewhere with groups of different ages, were performing, mostly folk dances, but a few of the older (teen-agers) dancers tried something which looked like an attempt to cross folk dances with whatever it is that present-day teen-agers dance.

It had been cloudy most of the day and there was a bit of rain during the bus ride back to České Budějovice, but it was dry when I walked from the bus station back to my hotel. Then it rained a bit, but was again dry when I went out for dinner. The restaurant I had wanted to try because of its recommendation in a guide book turned out to have gone out of business, but after wandering around a while, which was nice in itself, I found a pleasant little restaurant.

Sunday, Aug. 21. There were thunderstorms during the night with heavy rain, but it looked like it would clear. So I was the first person in the breakfast room and got to the bus station by 8:50 to catch the bus to Třeboň.

I had originally been planning on going to Holašovice, a little village about 15 km from České Budějovice. It is supposed to still have a lot of ornate, 19th-century “folk baroque” country houses and barns, almost an open-air museum and also a UNESCO site. But careful examination of the schedule at the bus station the day before showed that there were no buses on Sunday. Hence my decision to visit some other old towns within easy bus ride of České Budějovice.

Třeboň is another small town (population about 9000) with gates, some surviving town walls, a square, old buildings, a castle, and a Gothic church and monastery. Church service was just ending when I arrived, so after a short wait, I could see the church before the lights were turned off.

Just outside of town is a large fish pond, contained (at least at this end) by a dike, which I walked along for a ways.. On the town side of the dike is an extensive fish hatchery—I counted some 41 large basins, 3 smaller ones (about 1/3 size) and 9 yet a

third smaller.

To refer to these fish ponds as ponds is a bit misleading. They are by no means small, being as large as several square kilometers. The region around Třeboň has several. This region, about 700 km², of which about a tenth is water, is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Constructing fish ponds started in the Middle Ages, but the greatest part were made in the 16th century. The resulting landscape mixes farm land, wetlands, woods, sand dunes, and is quite biodiverse. Signs suggested walks or bike trips through the woods and pointed out flora and fauna one could see. Bicycling seems quite popular. There are many marked routes, not only through the woods but also between towns, and in fact many buses as well as most trains take bikes. Many groups, as well as families and individuals, were on the trails, some on modern mountain bikes and some on more ordinary models.

After walking a while into the woods I decided that the bikers had the right idea. Distances were a bit far for walking. So I turned around after a kilometer or so and went back to Třeboň where I sampled the local beer (Regent, since 1379) on a terrace outside of the brewery, looking across the road at the fish pond. Then I walked back to the bus station. The nice thing about these small towns is that even though the bus station is on the outskirts of town, it is not too long a walk to what you want to see.

From Třeboň I got a bus to Jindřichův Hradec, a larger town (population 23000), which meant the bus station was farther from the center of town, maybe 1.5 km. Jindřichův Hradec has a nice square, gently sloping rather than flat, with fountain and plague column, a 16th-century gate, and a large castle, third largest in Czechia. Much of the castle, a round tower and solid walls, quite impressive, particularly from the outside, make clear its medieval origin as a real castle, but most of it is from the Renaissance. Particularly nice is a small formal garden with a pavilion. The town is also “famous” for having the world’s largest mechanized nativity scene, which I chose to skip. I walked out of town through the 16th-century gate and made my way through a large park back in the general direction of the bus station. I had a wait of about 40 minutes for the bus. I thought maybe a train would be faster and walked to the train station next door to find out. There wasn’t, but the station was also the end of a historic train line. So I could pleasantly pass my time looking at the old train which just then pulled in.

Monday, Aug. 22. Again there was heavy rain during the night, but again it looked like it would clear. I took a couple of hours to walk around České Budějovice, since I had rather neglected it so far. Actually, there is not so much to see except for the square. A church mentioned in the guide books was closed—only open from 2–4 pm.

Walking to the bus station for the 11:30 bus to Prachatice, it started to drizzle. That turned to a heavy rain once underway. It was still raining, though much lighter, when we arrived at Prachatice an hour later. Prachatice (population 12000) is another small town with a nice square, fountain, old houses, church. But it also has, almost entirely intact, its 14th-century walls and one of its two gates. I checked into my hotel just off the square—the first I’ve had where no one spoke English, only German, but then this is very close to Austria. The rain stopped a bit later, but not trusting that it would, my first few pictures were taken in the rain. I walked around the town, both inside and outside the walls.

Tuesday, Aug. 23. It was very cloudy, but not raining when I got the 9:00 bus to Praha (Prague). The bus arrived on schedule at 11:30 at its station which was on a metro line. In the metro, most of the ticket vending machines were out of order, but finally the fifth one I tried worked. My hotel, apparently part of a renovated apartment building, was a short walk from a metro stop. The room is nice and large, but then it is also $\frac{2}{3}$ more expensive than anything I have had so far.

I spent the afternoon exploring Staré Město (Old Town)—very nice! It was most pleasant to stroll through the narrow streets past old buildings, churches, the town hall with its astronomical clock, which was not altered by the communists. The weather improved—no clouds, warm. Then about 4 a big black cloud blew in. I visited the Medieval Art collection of the National Gallery, which is in the sv. Anežky Klášter (St. Agnes of Bohemia Convent). Wonderful! It makes what I saw in Hluboká seem like nothing, and I had thought it was great at the time. There was a bit of drizzle when I came out. I walked around some more, through the Jewish quarter, but it was too late to go into anything.

Prague has a tourist tour idea I had not seen before. Perhaps because of the hills, pedicabs and horse-drawn carriages are not so good. Instead it is classic cars. You can be driven around the tourist sites in these old-timers—many models of cars, all (or most) pre-WWII.

Wednesday, Aug. 24. It was gray this morning, looking like rain. So I took my rain jacket, but it wasn't needed. I wanted to take the tram to near the upper entrance to the castle. But apparently part of the tram line is closed, because at some point it deviated from the route on the map. There was light panic among the tourists as they realized that the stations did not match the names on the map or even the names on the route map in the tram itself. Thinking that I had gone too far, I got off and took a tram going back for a few stops. I could find the name of this stop on my map and figured out what must have happened. So, I got on another tram going back in the original direction. Indeed, it joined the usual route just one stop after where I had wanted to get off. So, I got off and walked back. All in all that put a half hour delay in my schedule.

My first site of the day was the Strahovský klášter (Strahov Convent), from which there is a nice view of Prague. The libraries of the convent were fantastic, well worth Michelin's ★★★. The older room (1671-79), long with a barrel vault, the ceiling filled with paintings and stucco work framing them, has floor-to-ceiling bookcases (10-12 shelves) along the walls and several large globes in the center plus, of course, a few tables and ladders to reach the top shelves. The other library (1782-84) is taller, being designed to house the bookcases, 15 m. high, from a dissolved abbey. These bookcases are in hand-carved walnut, quite impressive. The painted ceiling, which portrays the history of philosophy, is interesting. There are biblical figures, figures from Bohemian Christian history, and figures from the Enlightenment with Voltaire being cast down into Hell. Unfortunately, one is not allowed into the libraries, but can only view them from the doorway. As compensation some of the items from the libraries, books and natural curiosities, such as eggs or parts of exotic animals, are displayed in the vestibule.

From the convent I proceeded, though not in a straight line, toward the Castle. The Loretto Shrine has an impressive baroque exterior. Unfortunately I arrived just as they were closing for lunch. So I could not visit the church interior and cloisters.

The interior is supposed to be gorgeous. I thought maybe I would be able to come back another day, but didn't make it—maybe the next time I am in Prague.

Then I proceeded along some old, narrow streets past some old houses, including one where Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler lived. Tycho is supposed to have complained to the Emperor that he could not work because of the frequent ringing of the bells at the nearby Capuchin monastery. Rudolf then ordered the monks expelled, but changed his mind when they presented him with a fine painting.

Finally I arrived at Hradčany Square, a large square with several palaces and at one end the western entrance to Pražský hrad (Prague Castle) and crowds of tourists. One can walk freely around the grounds, but to enter almost anything requires a ticket. Only parts of St. Vitus cathedral are free. So, one must decide what one wants to see, since tickets are only sold at one central place. I bought one of the combi-tickets, and so could visit St. Vitus, the old Royal Palace, and “Golden Lane.”

Chrám sv. Víta (Cathedral of St. Vitus) is a gothic structure begun in 1344 by Charles IV and finally completed in 1929. The nave and transept can be visited without a ticket. The most interesting was a few of the stained glass windows. In the choir, which is the oldest part of the cathedral, are some nice wooden relief panels showing various scenes, but because of the poor lighting they were difficult to study. There are also some tombs, the most spectacular being the baroque tomb of St. John Nepomuk. A statue of the saint stands atop his tomb, dating from 1736, all of which is solid silver, 2 tons of it. But the nicest part of the cathedral was the Chapel of St. Wenceslas, built in 1365. It is a closed room with two doors, one opening onto the choir, the other onto the transept next to the northern grand ceremonial entrance to the cathedral. You are not allowed into the chapel. So you must wait and elbow your way up to the door. If you have the ticket to the cathedral, you get to see it from both doors, otherwise only from the transept door. The chapel is opulently decorated. There is a nice star vault. Two rows of paintings wrap around the walls. The paintings are framed by gilded stucco implanted with semi-precious stones. There are also statues and a shrine. A small door across the room leads upstairs to where the crown jewels are kept. However, they are almost never viewable by the public. The guidebook says there are seven locks to the vault and the keys held by various state and church officials. So, presumably seven different officials have to be present to get to the jewels.

Bazilika sv. Jiří and Jiřský klášter (St. George's basilica and convent) are supposed to be worth seeing. The convent now holds an exhibition of Bohemian baroque and mannerist art, but this is far from being my favorite period, and since to visit St. George's required another ticket, I skipped it, only viewing the basilica from the outside.

The old royal palace was mostly empty, but the size of the large Vladislav Hall is impressive. It was built between 1492–1502, and was at the time the largest secular vaulted space in Central Europe, 62 m. long, 16 m. wide, and 13 m. high. The vaulting of the ceiling is quite impressive. Some of the smaller rooms are also nice. It was in one of these that the Second Defenestration of Prague took place. The Michelin guide describes it thus:

Tension between the Protestants and Catholics of early 17C Bohemia came to a head in 1618. Convinced that Emperor Matthias in Vienna was aiding and abetting Catholic attempts to strip Protestants of their privileges

and reduce the traditional authority of the Bohemian Estates, the fiery-tempered Count Thurn led a delegation up to the Castle and broke into the offices in the Louis Wing from where the Catholic Governors ruled in the absence of the Emperor. Heated discussion soon turned to action. Governors Vilém Slavata of Chlum and Jaroslav Bořita of Martinic, both known for their staunch Catholicism were dragged to the window. Facing death, they pleaded for a confessor, but their pleas fell on unsympathetic ears. Martinic was ejected first, while Slavata managed to delay his fall for a few moments by hanging on to the sill until someone broke his knuckles with the hilt of a dagger. For good measure, their secretary, Filip Fabricius was thrown out too. Surprisingly, all three survived the considerable fall, evaded the random shots fired at them from above, and made themselves scarce. The Catholic version of the event has them miraculously borne up by a solicitous Virgin Mary, while the Protestant, possibly more credible version has their fall broken by the thick layer of ordure accumulated in the moat. For his pains, Fabricius was later raised to the nobility, with the title of Von Hohenfall (Sir Philip of High Fall). Sensing the significance of the moment, the Old Town mob rioted, burning Catholic churches and pillaging the Jewish Quarter, events foreshadowing the greater horrors of the Thirty Years War, the outbreak of which was marked by this defenestration.

The First Defenestration had been in 1419 when followers of the radical Protestant Jan Huss stormed the New Town Hall and thrown Catholic councilors from the windows. That marked the start of the Hussite Revolution.

Finally, I visited the remaining site included in my combi-ticket, Zlatá ulička (Golden Lane). This is a lane of quaint little houses built against the castle's outer wall. The name reflects the story that they originally housed alchemists trying to make gold. However, they were in fact houses of craftsmen. The Castle was outside the jurisdiction of the Guilds, and the poorly paid Castle guards moonlighted, making various things to sell, including golden items. Today it is solid souvenir shops, though of somewhat higher quality than most.

I enjoyed views of Prague from the terrace along the south (city side) of the castle and views of the castle itself from the park across the moat on the opposite side. This park included the Královský letohrádek (Royal Summer Palace), a Renaissance building with a nice arcade. Continuing on through the park for quite a ways, I ended up with a nice view down on the old town. I walked down the hill and across the bridge to find myself in the Jewish quarter. I proceeded on and eventually had dinner in the old town.

Thursday, Aug. 25. This morning I headed south, on foot, toward the old castle district Vyšehrad. It took somewhat longer than expected because the map was not too clear on which roads crossed the railway. Also it was hillier than expected.

Vyšehrad is the legendary place where Princess Libuše fell into a swoon and fore-saw the founding of Prague and where warriors set out to battle the Amazons in the "War of the Maidens." In any case, it was the residence of several of the early Bohemian kings and remained an important military stronghold until the mid-19th century by which time such fortifications were largely obsolete. Around 1870 the

whole hilltop was landscaped and the National Cemetery developed from a parish graveyard. About ten years later the neighboring church of Sv. Petra a Pavla (St. Peter and St. Paul), which dated from the 11th century, was rebuilt in neo-Gothic style.

I walked around the park, which offered some nice views of Prague, and visited the National Cemetery where such Czech notables as Antonin Dvořák are buried. Notable is that there are not many generals and politicians buried here; it is mostly people from the arts, literature and academia.

Next I walked downhill to the river and along the river back toward the center of Prague. I crossed the river to the section of town known as Malá Strana or Lesser Quarter, which lies along the river below the castle. There are various palaces and gardens in this quarter, some now embassies of various countries or governmental ministries. There is also a very nice baroque church, Sv. Mikuláše or St. Nicholas. It was started in 1673 by the Jesuits after Catholicism triumphed in the religious wars, but not completed until 1775, just two years before the Emperor dissolved the Jesuit order. Mozart played the organ here and a requiem mass was celebrated for him a few days after he died. It is difficult to appreciate the church from the outside, hemmed in as it is on most sides. The towers and dome are best viewed from above, *e.g.*, from the castle. The front facade is all curves and statues. The interior is stunning—light, color, statues in dramatic poses, stucco and painting all combine to impress, particularly the *trompe-l'œil* of the ceiling fresco (the largest in Europe). There are also some paintings, a pulpit and altar well worth the admission price.

I next trudged up the hill to the castle to visit the National Picture Gallery in the castle. It was quite small and disappointing, hardly worth my half-price senior-citizen ticket. Then I descended back to Malá Strana past gardens and palaces. I went into the Vrtbovská zahrada (Vrtba Garden), a rebuilt baroque garden behind a small palace. The original was created around 1720, but later fell into disuse. It was rather hard to find, being at the end of a small street which you enter through a door. It is quite charming, though rather small, built on the side of a hill and consisting of terraces. A wedding reception was taking place on the lowest level. So I climbed the stairs, hidden behind greenery, to the next level, and then a grand staircase to the following level from which one could look out over neighboring roof tops, as well as down on the wedding party where photos were being taken. A final set of stairs led up to a belvedere with a nice view. On each level there were flowers and shrubs arranged in nice designs. The wedding party ascended for more photos and I went back down to look more closely at the lowest level.

I walked to the Charles bridge, crossed it, noting the statues and souvenir vendors, and found a restaurant in the old town.

Friday, Aug. 26. I walked to the train station and bought a ticket to Nelahozeves, a little town of 1200 people about 27 km. north of Prague. Never having done a round trip on the train and having seen no mention of return tickets in the web information or in the guidebook, I was pleasantly surprised when the ticket seller asked if I was coming back and sold me a return ticket which was only about 25% more than one way. I got the 9:40 train which got me to Nelahozeves on time at 10:29. It was then only a few minutes walk to the only thing to see, the Nelahozeves castle. It is one of many castles belonging to the princely Lobkowitz family, one of the noble large landowners of Bohemia. Actually I knew one of them, a physicist at Rochester. I regularly met him at conferences until he died a couple of years ago. This particular

castle had been in Lobkowitz hands since 1623 but had never been a main residence. The State confiscated it after World War II. In 1989 it was returned to the Lobkowitz family.

The Lobkowitz family seems to be making a good business out of their recovered properties, perhaps a condition of getting them back. There are tours through the castle, and the gift shop contains products from various Lobkowitz enterprises, like Lobkowitz wine and Lobkowitz beer. I took the Czech tour, being given several sheets of paper with English explanation. A tour in English would have meant a longer wait, and a higher price. Even so, I had to wait 45 minutes. While waiting, three different wedding groups passed through the courtyard, having pictures taken. One group went upstairs.

The first floor (American second floor) was closed, maybe for the wedding party. That meant missing some nice rooms, but I didn't mind too much, since the more important things were on the second floor, and it meant the price was lower. The rooms were nicely furnished and there were displays of armor, glass, porcelain. But the most important were the paintings and the music. There were two wonderful views of the Thames by Canaletto and works by Cranach the Elder, Rubens, Veronese, Velasquez. But the best was by Pieter Brueghel: Haymaking from his series Months of the Year, the only one of the series in private hands.

The Lobkowitz family included many who were musically inclined. They had a court orchestra and supported many composers, including Beethoven. Along with numerous old instruments, the original scores of a number of works are on display, including Beethoven's Third (if I remember correctly) symphony. Originally Beethoven had dedicated it to Napoleon, but was so disgusted by Napoleon's crowning himself emperor that he crossed out Napoleon and replaced him by his Lobkowitz friend, Josef Franz Maximilian.

When I left there were several more wedding parties outside waiting for their turn to have pictures taken.

Actually, there is something else to see in Nelahozeves, the house where Antonin Dvořák was born. It is now a small museum. But I skipped it and caught the train, which was due in just a few minutes, back to Prague. At the first stop, a group of three men, two women and a child got on. The men sat together as did the women and child. The men had small backpacks and a couple of plastic sacks. From the backpacks they produced three large glasses and from one of the sacks a large plastic jerry-can—5 liters, I would guess—filled with beer. Forty minutes later when we arrived in Prague it was nearly empty.

In Prague I took the metro and a bus to the Trojský zámek (Troy palace) in the Northern outskirts of the city. It was built as a summer palace at the end of the 17th century by Count Václav Vojtěch Šternberk (Wenzel Adalbert Sternberg), who didn't even have a palace in Prague at the time but thought an impressive palace in the countryside would do more for his standing at court. Arriving by boat on the small river, one would approach the palace through formal gardens to the right of which is an orchard, also laid out in a formal way complete with a circular maze. In the middle of the gardens is a large fountain. A grand stone horseshoe shaped stairway, inspired by that of Fontainebleau, with many statues leads to the main entrance on the first (American second) floor. The building has white walls broken by rose columns and rose windows, the shade of rose matching the tiles of the roof. It is really very pretty.

The interior rooms mostly have painted ceilings and corridors have *trompe-l'œil*

wall paintings. The grandest room is the Great Hall with walls and ceiling completely covered with frescoes glorifying the Hapsburgs and Christianity and showing the defeat of the Turks. The lesser rooms of the palace displayed paintings of 19th- and 20th-century Czech artists, some of them quite good.

I thought I would walk part way back to town through the large park across the river from the palace. Midway, a bridge over a canal was closed, which meant a kilometer or more detour to the next bridge and then nearly a kilometer back. And the park wasn't really at all interesting. The detour took me past such interesting sites as a small sewage treatment plant. When I finally got out of the park, I was not quite sure where I was, but I spotted a nearby bus stop and saw that it went to a metro station only a few stops away. So I walked in the direction of the bus route and reached the metro station, somewhat tired, with no problem.

Saturday, Aug. 27. There was a small problem checking out of the hotel. They thought I hadn't paid, while I thought I had paid when I reserved the room on the internet, but I couldn't prove it since my credit card statement had not arrived before I left (and even if it had, I would probably not have taken a copy with me). After much searching through their files and a failed attempt to contact the internet reservation company, we agreed that they would charge my card later if it turned out I had not paid. Then a trip by metro and bus to the airport and an uneventful trip back home. Later it turned out that the internet company had not charged my card. The hotel then did, which would have been OK except for the amount. The price on the internet had been in euros, which the hotel converted to Czech crowns (at an unfavorable rate) and which the credit card company then reconverted to euros (also at a rate which gives them some profit). So I complained. First to the hotel, which "couldn't understand the problem," then to American Express. After several rounds of e-mails and faxes, American Express finally decided it was costing them more trouble than it was worth and refunded my €12.50, not such a large amount, but there was a principle involved.