

Vaclav Havel Tour: Prague through the Eyes of the 1st Czech President

The Vaclav Havel Tour in Prague, Czech Republic, offers an interesting perspective of the city based on the Vaclav Havel story: the story of an anti-Communist intellectual and absurdist playwright who played an important role in the culture and art of Czechoslovakia.



Havel's career as the President of Czechoslovakia began in 1989. After the “divorce” which split up the country into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Havel became the First President of the Czech Republic from 1993 to 2003. His death in December 2011 marked the end of an illustrious career of a poet, philosopher and politician who was immortalized as one of the haunting characters in absentia in Tom Stoppard's play Rock'n'Roll.

Organized by Prague Steps the tour revolves around Havel's beloved sites linked with the Velvet Revolution in which Havel's Civic Forum party played a significant role, and other important locations around the city linked with the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia. Visitors see Prague history brought to life through the eyes of a man who was an extraordinary politician with friends in several high places – the Dalai Lama in Tibet, the US President Bill Clinton and even the Rolling Stones.



New Town and the Velvet Demonstrations

Start in the New Town, built as an extension of the Old Town in the 14th century, where the famous Wenceslas Square can be found. This was the site of several demonstrations during the 1989 Velvet Revolution. Here is the statue of St. Wenceslas, who is the patron saint of the Czech lands, and also a plaque Memorial to the Victims of Communism. National Street runs through the area, where police once beat down students in a peaceful demonstration and triggered the Velvet Revolution. Here also stands

the National Theater, where Havel's play *The Garden Party* ran in 1965 and showed the absurdity of life under communism.

The Dancing House for a Cultural Heart

The Dancing House in New Town, today known as the Nationale–Nederlanden, was a project close to Havel's heart. A collaboration between Croatian–Czech architect Vlado Milunic and American architect Frank Gehry between 1992 and 1996, there is nothing quite like this building in a city of Gothic, Baroque and Art Nouveau buildings. Havel lived next door for years, and hoped the Dancing House would become a cultural center for Prague.



Prague Crossroads for Creative Dialogue

The Prague Crossroads is another project of Havel's, located in St Anne Church which was de-consecrated a long time ago. It is an international intellectual–spiritual–cultural center where Havel hoped people of different faiths, beliefs and professions would meet for creative dialogue.

Other notable sites along the way include the Prague Castle which towers over the city, the Theatre on Balustrade where Havel was involved through the bulk of his theatrical career, the John Lennon Wall and the Jan Palach Square. The tour ends at a pub where Havel shared beer and wine with US President Bill Clinton and writer Bohumil Hrabal, one of Czechoslovakia's most famous 20th century writers.

Led to these sites not by guide–books but by erudite, companionable and intelligent guides who know the history of Prague like the back of their hands is the best way to enjoy a rare glimpse into Havel's Prague and the sites that carry the shadow of an important revolution.

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