

Seven Wonders of the Czech Republic



Besides the original 7 Wonders of the world or even the New 7 Wonders of the world, almost every country wants to have its own Seven Wonders. In the Czech Republic there is no such list however, at least not an official one. Few years ago a local newspaper MfDNES organized an opinion poll. Over 1,2 million readers voted for the top seven architectural marvels in the country. Tourism-Review.com presents the results.

The Charles Bridge was an expected winner with 106,601 votes yet the silver medal holder was a surprise for the newspaper as well as renowned architects. The Dlouhé Stráně power plant received 105,603 votes which was very close to the gold medal. The bronze goes to another famous site, the Prague Castle with 99,509 votes. Below the winners' podium, the order is as follows: the Karlštejn castle (98 065 votes), Jested tower (85 764), Hluboka nad Vltavou chateau (81 444) and the historical city centre of Cesky Krumlov (80 796 votes).

"The final selection could more or less be foreseen. I am very pleased about the ranking of the Jested tower. It suggests that people took the modern architecture into account too," said Zdenek Lukes, a Czech expert in history of architecture.

"The respondents favored the famous tourist attractions, although these bear no extraordinary architectonic quality," commented one of the best-known Czech architects David Vavra. "I myself would definitely not include the Hluboka nad Vltavou chateau. The Santini's church of St. John of Nepomuk on Green Hill on the other hand should in my opinion have had made it to the top five." The second place was the biggest surprise of the whole poll. The Dlouhé Stráně power plant does not belong to generally known and admired works of architecture. The construction belongs without a doubt to the most interesting enterprises of modern technical architecture in the Czech Republic but on the other hand also to the most controversial ones. "There were protests against the project before and during the construction, yet people got to like it," said Lukes and David Vavra added: "The construction is very questionable. It gets me a bit excited...in a decadent way. It's kind of brutal. It somehow presents disrespect for nature."

1. The Charles' Bridge, Prague

One of the oldest stone bridges in Europe was built during the reign of Charles IV, the most popular Bohemian king of all times. The construction took 45 years (1357 - 1402) and the bridge connecting the Old Town and Prague Castle with the adjacent areas remained the only bridge over the Vltava River until 1841. It went through many floods; the worst one damaged two piers and three spans in 1890. There are 30 statues decorating it, yet these are much younger than the bridge itself since they were installed here between the 17th and 20th century. Today, numerous stands with hand-made souvenirs and local street artists welcome tourists enjoying beautiful views over the whole city center.

2. Dlouhé Stráně Power Plant

The water power plant in Dlouhé Stráně (in Jeseníky Mountains) uses the 500-meter altitude difference between the dam on the Divoka Desna River and the reservoir on the Mravenecnik Mountain (1.350 meters above the sea level). Water from the dam is pumped up in the reservoir at night and falls back down in the dam during the day, running two turbines situated in a giant cavern (88x26 meters, 50m high) right inside the mountain. The power plant has been operating since 1996, delivering 650 MW.

3. The Prague Castle

The Castle is one of the most significant symbols of the Czech Republic. Together with the St. Vitus, St. Wenceslas Cathedrals and the St. Georges Basilica, it forms the world-known panorama of Prague. The extensive complex of churches, monasteries, palaces, houses, towers and walls had been growing up for many centuries and is nowadays, according to the Guinness World Records, the largest castle area in the world with 570m of length and the average width of 128m. In the Castle, princes, kings, emperors as well as presidents have been ruling the country.

4. Karlstejn Castle

In 1348, Charles IV began the construction of a castle above the Berounka River, where he wanted to relax and draw energy and strength to make important decisions (for some time women were banned to enter the castle). Yet in the end, the castle became a magnificent treasury to store the crown jewels and important documents, and thus became a symbol of the Czech kingdom. Today's appearance of the castle is a result of the questionable and often questioned 19th century purism reconstruction, only the precious gothic interior decorations remained original.

5. Jested Tower

The hotel and TV signal broadcaster on the top of the Jested Mountain is a remarkable building and one of the symbols of the region. Its architect Karel Hubacek was awarded the prestigious Perret Prize for this project. The building belongs to the gems of Czech architecture. It was built in the 1960s, in the era of the so called real socialism, and surpasses the other products of this era's architecture (mostly unified grey concrete pseudo-art constructions with the originality and shape of a shoe box) not just thanks to its location on a hilltop, but above all thanks to the quality and precision of the work, beginning with the project and going on further up to the realization of the tiniest interior details. In 2006, the building was added to the list of Czech national cultural heritage, which should help Jested to make it to the prestigious UNESCO list. In the same year the tower starred in a successful movie called Grandhotel.

6. Hluboka nad Vltavou Chateau

The chateau was founded in the 13th century as a border guard castle. It has gone through the hands of many owners, rich as well as poor ones, until finally it was bought by the Schwarzenberg family in 1661. The aristocratic family paid for two significant reconstructions of the building. First, the 18th century baroque conversion, and second, larger and more important 1840 - 1871 neo-gothic reconstruction that included the park and the environs of the chateau. The Schwarzenbergs were the owners of the building until 1939.

7. Cesky Krumlov City Centre

Cesky Krumlov is a must-see attraction for tourists from near and far. The south Bohemian town made it successfully through many disasters and historical catastrophes and can boast of an extraordinarily high density of historic sites. Its main and dominating feature is a chateau, the second largest in the Czech Republic, surrounded by a historic centre of the town that is naturally separated from the rest of the town by the meandering river Vltava. The city center is a UNESCO site.

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