

CZECH REPUBLIC FACING FAKE TOUR GUIDES IN PRAGUE



Tourism in the Czech Republic and especially the capital of the country, Prague, is on a rise. Last year, almost 7.9 million people visited the city. This represents an increase of 3.2%, with the large majority of visitors being foreigners (6.67 million). However, these foreign tourists are often the targets of trickery and fraud from foreign individuals and even organized groups. The authorities now fight fake tour guides.

Tour guides are almost not regulated in the Czech Republic since 2008. As a result, it is possible to see chasers with unmistakable umbrellas at the Old Town Square with signs like “FreeTours” or “Tour4Charity”, allegedly in support of poor Czech children.

Neither of these signs reflects reality. There are no payments in advance nor tickets, but the fake tour guides count on the tourists to pay. **This money later goes to the bosses and distributors of this large chain of fake tour guides.**

Regarding the charity signs, the income from the tour guides reportedly goes to the Chance for Children Foundation. According to their financial statements, the company received 5.3 million Czech crowns and generated a loss of 122 thousand crowns in 2017.

“It’s difficult to estimate the financial damage but it is clear that these profits are not recorded, it is unlikely that they pay compulsory levies and taxes. The net profits are really huge – that’s why there are so many of these tour guides. In essence, no one cares about the moral damage in the current atmosphere,” said Naděžda Wellerová, a local tour guide.

How does such a tour “for free” usually proceed? Foreign tourists often find out information that is hard to imagine for the locals.

“They’re trained according to the same brochures prepared so that they are sure to attract tourists. All of them repeat, for example, that the Golden Lane at Prague Castle is just a movie set. It is said that Havel tore down the ruins untouched by the communists and that his filmmaker friends installed the today’s scenery,” says Jana Horníková of the Czech Guides Association.

Other popular things to say are that about 20% of Czechs work in the porn industry or that the statues on Charles Bridge are copies because the originals were destroyed.

“The Czech Republic is the top country in terms of the number of people with piercings and tattoos. Perhaps only policemen and politicians do not have tattoos,” one of the Spanish “guides” says during a tour.

“Jan Hus is commonly referred to as St. Wenceslas on the Old Town Square. They explain that the Velvet Revolution in 1989 broke out due to famine and that Charles Bridge is called Charles because Prince Charles lost his wedding ring here,” Naděžda Wellerová added.

The current state of affairs could be changed with a novelization to the Trade Licensing Act, which passed through the first reading in the Chamber of Deputies of the country. **The goal is to once again regulate the tour guide industry.**

If the novelization goes through, guides will once again have to either have education in tourism or a retraining document or an appropriate examination, which was the case until 2008. There are, however, some disagreements between politicians regarding this matter and thus, for now, it remains to be seen when a change could be brought to the Czech capital but also in other cities like Český Krumlov or Karlovy Vary.

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