

“I come here every year with my children,” says my tour guide from Prague. ‘Here’ is the delightful town of Český Krumlov with its winding cobblestone streets, its melange of medieval buildings, and — most especially — its enormous castle. *Suzanne Morphet*

CARP FOR CHRISTMAS & OTHER CZECH TRADITIONS

IF YOU GO

Stay
■ In Prague, Hotel Mozart is a historic hotel with views of Prague castle.
■ In Český Krumlov, Hotel OLDINN is on the main square close to the castle.
■ Near Pilsen, Purkmistr offers a hotel, restaurant, brewery and spa.

Charm abounds in country of castles, beer spas and traditional treats

SUZANNE MORPHET

Fish are flipping, flopping, and flying through the air as I watch the start of the annual carp harvest in the Czech Republic.

It’s the first weekend of October and a large crowd has gathered on the shore of Rožmberk Pond, the biggest of almost 1,000 artificial ponds in the Třeboň wetlands. Rožmberk is so big that locals jokingly refer to it as the South Bohemia Sea.

“People have been fishing carp since 1584 at this pond,” says Jan Regenda, a university professor who comes every year to watch.

Three weeks earlier, fishers began to drain the pond and pump oxygen into the water to lure the carp closer to the shore. Now, the fishers — mostly men dressed in rubber rain gear and gloves — scoop up the squirming carp, weigh and sort them.

The mood is festive. People mingle, drink beer and dip deep-fried carp ‘chips’ into mayonnaise. “One hundred years ago, they sent a special train from Prague,” Jan adds. Today, it’s an easy 1.5-hour drive south of the capital.

Most of the fish will be kept alive until Christmas, when eating carp is a Czech tradition. Keeping a dried carp scale in your wallet year-round is another one. “For good luck,” smiles our guide, taking out a scale the size of a guitar pick.

Later, we enjoy carp at Šupina a Šupinka, a restaurant in Třeboň, then walk to the tomb of the Schwarzenberg family, the noble family that once owned the Třeboň wetlands.

The French have their croissants and crepes, Austrians love their apple strudel and Czechs would be remiss if they went a day without eating kolache.

The sweet pastry is made from a yeasted dough and filled with cheese, fruit or nuts. During COVID, when rents in Prague’s historic Old Town plummeted, Patrick Novak opened Kolache-rie, a bakery specializing in the traditional treat.

Novak got the idea for his business after visiting Texas, of all places. Czech expats there have started kolache bakeries and often make the fillings savoury. “When I saw the jalapeño ones with chorizo sausage I was like ‘oh yeah,’” says Novak. At his kolacherie in Prague he offers both savoury and sweet. His berry kolache with cream cheese still proves most popular.

One-time, he says, a Czech expat from Manitoba visited, “and she was so happy, like ‘finally, I tasted



Castle Blatná is a privately owned castle in Blatná in the Czech Republic. It’s one of about 2,500 castles in the country. *SUZANNE MORPHET*

kolache again!”

A COUNTRY OF CASTLES

“I come here every year with my children,” says Irena Švajcarova my tour guide from Prague.

“Here” is the delightful town of

Český Krumlov with its winding cobblestone streets, its melange of medieval buildings, and — most especially — its enormous castle, the second largest in the country after Prague’s.

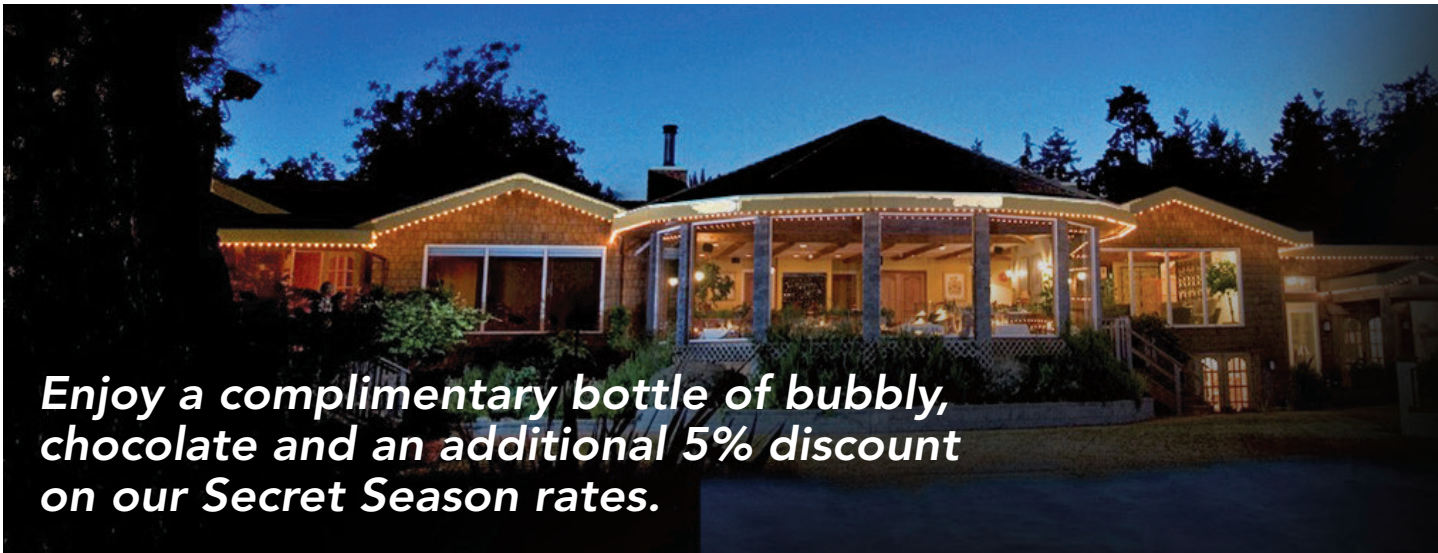
Indeed, the Czech Republic is

a country of castles, with roughly 2,500, and it’s easy to see why Czechs love them.

The castle at Český Krumlov — now owned by the state — boasts a colourful tower overlooking the Vltava River, 350 rooms — some

with luxurious furnishings and tapestries — five courtyards, seven hectares of gardens and a moat with three brown bears. That’s right, three bears; two females and a male.

SEE CZECH ON **NP11**



GALIANO INN
OCEANFRONT INN & SPA

Call **1-877-530-3939** to book
Online booking promo code **2023SECRET**.

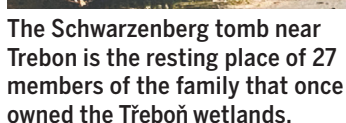
www.galianoinn.com

Statutory Holidays not included.
Offer valid from January to March 2023.

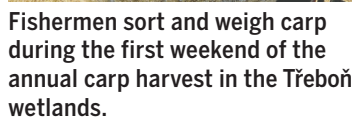
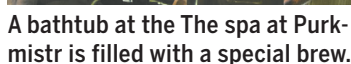
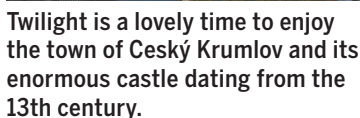
Enjoy a complimentary bottle of bubbly, chocolate and an additional 5% discount on our Secret Season rates.

CZECH FROM *NP10*

So, on a drizzly October morning I find myself not just drinking beer but soaking in it. In the spa, a large wooden bathtub filled with a special brew awaits me. Warmed to 37 C, it smells like beer and looks murky, a bit like Purkmistr beer, which is served unfiltered and unpasteurized. This brew is made with the same ingredients — malt, hops, brewer's yeast and water, but



The writer travelled as a guest of Czech Tourism. It did not review or approve this article.



Offer is for an online access subscription for \$8 + tax billed monthly or \$80 + tax billed annually. Subscription will automatically renew every month, unless canceled. The subscription is non-transferable and cannot be applied to previously placed orders or added to current subscriptions, is not redeemable for cash or credit, is limited in number, is available through one-time promotions and is to be voided where prohibited. A valid email address is required. Other restrictions may apply.

*Plus GST and surcharges. Prices quoted are per person in Canadian dollars based on double occupancy and include return ferry between Metro Vancouver and Vancouver Island for two adults and one car. Valid for new bookings only for a limited time and cannot be combined with any other offer. Promotional blackout dates may be applicable. Book by January 3, 2023 for stays prior to March 31, 2023. Additional restrictions may apply. Third night free is valid when a minimum of 2 consecutive nights are purchased in combination with a return sailing; maximum 1 free night per booking. All offers based on availability and are limited to select room types. Some restrictions apply. BC Reg. 48839.