

# Advent Traditions

Advent is a start of liturgical season of 4 Sundays before Christmas. People happily expect Christmas and the coming of Saviour. Even the word "advent" come from Latin word adventus, which means "coming". It's time of meditation and charity. Earlier it was time of Lenten, when celebrations, dancing and singing were banned. Advent Lenten disallowed eating meat, only fish were allowed. This Lenten ended with shining of first star on Christmas Eve. Today this season is connected with preparations to Christmas, buying gifts, sweets baking, chores and house decorating.

## Czech Advent and Christmas Markets

For many Czechs it's a magical time scented with cinnamon, vanilla and mulled wine. In bigger cities, Christmas markets take place and with their atmosphere they are the longest markets of the year. In many stands you can buy gifts for your closed ones. Handmade scarfs, hats and gloves with colourful motives, homemade soaps, candles, ceramics, wickerworks and wooden toys. There's also presentation of traditional crafts. Right on front of your eyes you can have your text or image engraved on glass and smith can make you a horseshoe for luck. In other stands you can taste roasted almonds, chestnuts, trdelník, potato chips and local specials. People would drink mulled wine, hot mead or punch while watching at Christmas tree.

## Customs and traditions

With advent season there are several traditions and customs in Czech Rep., which survive to this day with small changes.

## **Advent wreath**

Advent wreath is the most common tradition and you can find in every household. People often make them themselves from twigs and decorate it with cones, bows and rowan. Crucial part are 4 candles, which are lighted every Sunday. On first Sunday, the first candle of prophets is ignited. On the second Sunday, the candle of Bethlehem is lighted. On the third Sunday, the candle of shepherd and on last Sunday, the candle of Angels. Advent Sundays are also known as iron, bronze silver and gold.

## **Advent calendar**

Advent calendar is also among old traditions. Originally it was carved art where children found verse form Bible or pictures. Today calendar is filled with chocolate or sweets.

## **St. Barbara**

For single girls it's a popular fest. On St. Barbara day, 4<sup>th</sup> of December, girls gather twigs form cherry-tree and put them in water. If twig blooms on Christmas Eve, girl would get married in a year.

## **St. Lucy**

St. Lucy is a patron of dressmakers and spinsters. This day they would stop all work. If not, Lucy would destroy threads and yarn.

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# **Saint Nicholas Day in Czech**

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Saint Nicholas (Svatý Mikuláš) in Czech Republic, as well as in other Christian countries, is a popular fest day. It celebrates figure of Saint Nicholas of Myra, who was born in 280-286 in the city of Patara in Asia Minor province. Later he became a bishop, who was very popular among people for his generosity, charity and justice. During his life he took care of orphans, widows and other persecuted people. Nicholas of Myra died probably on 6th of December between 345-352. On this day people celebrates the Day of St. Nicholas.

St. Nicholas is patron of merchants, archers, lawyers, pharmacists and students. He's also the protector of bridges against floods and helps in need. He's patron of wedding and happy marriage and protector of children against sickness.

Cult of St. Nicholas began to spread about 2 centuries after his death. He was popular in Greek Church and later in Slavic countries. Traditions linked with Nicholas are very diverse and regionally and nationally different. Part of most of them is giving gifts to children. In Scandinavia he lets gifts in shoes, which kids place near fireplaces. In Croatia Nicholas is accompanied by devil Krampus. In Germany he walks with groom Ruprecht and in Russia it's Ded Moroz and Snegurochka. In Holland he's called Sinte Klaas and in UK and USA Santa Claus, who brings presents at Christmas.

## St. Nicholas's handing of gifts

In Czech Rep. so called "Mikulášská nadílka" (Nicholas's presents) is celebrated. According to old folklore Nicholas came from sky to ground every year on 5th of December and together with devil and angel he came around houses and gave

kids sweets or coal and potatoes depending on kid behaviour.

Part of traditions were Nicholas's markets, which took place on many places. Merchants sold bakery, marzipan, gingerbread, chocolate and little toys. Popular were little figurines of devils made from dried plums (prunes) and so called "světy", a big apple standing on three wooden sticks decorated with dried fruits. Bakers made beautiful products, the most common were Nicholas, angel and devil. And a gingerbread alphabet, which helped kids learn and after they could enjoy eating.

In many regions, parades took place. In masquerades were several Nicholas, who were accompanied by devils and angels, but also hussars, dragoons and hajduks. One of the largest parade used to be near Litomysl to the end of 19th century.

Visits of St. Nicholas were regionally different. In poor regions, kids hanged stockings on windows or doors over night and found gifts in the morning. In richer regions Nicholas came to children in person. He was a tall figure with long white beard. He wore long white shirt with red-white cloak quilted with golden thread. He had red or white bishop's hat with golden cross in the front. In one hand he held a long crutch and in second hand he held a bag with gifts.



Devil his companion should scare bad kids. Nicholas asked parents about children's behaviour and then he tested kid if it can pray. If he was satisfied, he gave kids fruits, nuts and some sweets. But if he wasn't devil gave the poor kid some coal and potatoes. But really naughty kids were threaten to be thrown into sack and drag in hell.

This traditional conception of this fest persists to this day, mainly in the countryside. But even there changes applied. Kids are not tested from praying anymore, but they are to told some poems and rhymes and songs. Fruits and nuts were replaced by bars and chocolates. But a little of coal and potatoes is

still a threat.

## Weather Lore on St. Nicholas

With Nicholas, some weather lores are connected. For example:

*“On St. Nicholas, the whole winter is ours alas.”*

*“When on St. Nicholas is raining, the winter is gonna be avenging.”*

*“On St. Nicholas on ice, On St. Stephens on mud.”*

*“If the bird drinks from rail on St. Nicholas, the horse won't drink from river for three months.”*

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## Best Beer Pubs in Prague

We Czechs don't like to drink beer that tastes like rot-gut. So it's only for greater good to recommend our visitors, where to find **best beer in Prague**. Other important thing is atmosphere in restaurant, because in friendly and hospitable places are high standards of bar and kitchen.

Interesting fact is that in Prague people prefer a **little colder beer** than usual. Temperature is about 3°C, while typical is 6°C. Also there's difference between Bohemia and Moravia in how to tap beer. Bohemians prefer beer tapped at once, while the other in three cycles, which makes thick head.

## Best Pilsner in Prague

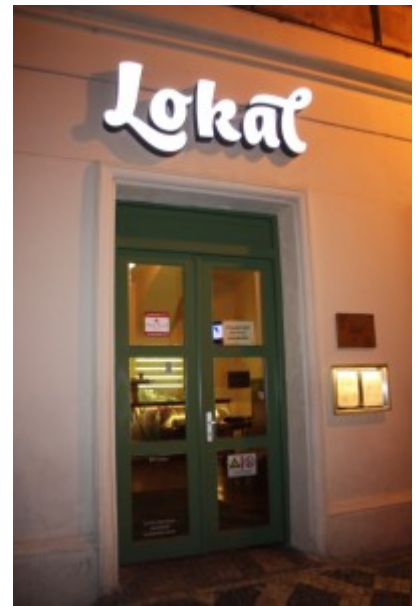
### **Malostranská beseda**

Cosy restaurant right on Malostranské náměstí (Lesser Town Square) can be a nice refreshment checkpoint before hike to

the Prague Castle through Nerudova Street. Local bartenders really understand Pilsner beer. Their service is perfect and when you drink two quick beers it's a taste of joy.

### **Konvikt**

Pleasant modern restaurant and bar for youngsters. You can easily sit here till 3 am and meet various groups of people from teenagers to actors, musicians and beer experts. This place is hidden in mysterious streets not far from National Theatre and Bethlehem Square.



### **Lokál**

Group of pubs with brilliant beer and food typical for serving with beer. But be aware on weekend it gets really like really crowded in here. Across Prague you can find four of these alehouses, but shortly there will be fifth. One can be found in Dlouhá Street, where are numerous pubs and clubs.

### **U Zlatého tygra**

Right on the way from Old Town Square to Charles Bridge is another pub with good beer in Prague. The atmosphere in here breaths out old history of Old Town. Also it was meeting place of Czech elite and even US president Bill Clinton visited this place with Václav Havel. And the prices in here are very favourable.

## Kolkovna

Kolkovna is also a group of restaurants with excellent beer. It's very similar to Lokál and gets overcrowded as well. Local kitchen offers meals from cheese selection to roasted duck. Most popular with best beer is at Celnice on Náměstí republiky.

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# Czech Republic the Beer Nation

When you say Czech Republic in the world, some people recall Czech hockey and sportsmen, Václav Havel or endless politics affairs. What will pop surely in their heads is undoubtedly **Czech beer**. Czechs are rightfully **nation of beer drinkers**. From 2008 Czechs are on the **first place in beer consumption**. Every Czech drinks unbelievable 160 litres of beer per year, that's 320 pints even counting small children.

## History of beer

**History of beer** in Czech countries dates back to the end of 10th century to Břevnov monastery. Although archaeological research proved that beer was brewed in the times of Germanic tribes. The oldest record of **hop cultivation** is charter of Břetislav I. from 1034. Great milestone in beer brewing was foundation of **Pilsner Brewery** (Měšťanský pivovar v Plzni) in 1842. They used **bottom fermentation** and this method quickly stepped forward among rivals. It was so popular that this type

of beer is called **pilsner** ever since. That was the start of **golden age** in Czech beer production. Large breweries started step forward and small breweries perished. In a few years Pilsner was available across whole Europe and a special train loaded with beer departed to Wien every morning.



Pilsner Brewery front gate

To be a genuine beer drinker, you should know at least basic facts what makes Czech beer so popular. **České pivo** is a protected geographical indication (PGI) by EU. It marks out thanks to the use of **high-quality ingredients** from specified regions, classic technology and procedure of production and of course the craft of **Czech master brewers**. Especially Žatec region provides the **world's best quality hop** so essential for brewing. Another essential ingredient is **barley for malt**, although some brewery may use wheat or other grain.

Most popular Czech beers are **lagers of pilsner style**. Pilsner Urquell is considered the best among Czechs, but Gambrinus is perhaps the most consumed. Another great brewery is Staropramen, which sets in Prague. In Moravia, Radegast is very popular for its bitter taste. There are also quality beers from **small breweries**





available in pubs and **beer specials**. Such specials can be found in several joints, for example U Medvídků, where you can taste a 33° beer. A famous restaurant with own brew is U Fleků, where you can taste traditional dark beer with quite similar taste to Guinness. And of course there's Prague Beer Museum with 30 beers on tap from micro-breweries.

Last but not least beer is great source of **vitamin B** and since beer in Czech Republic is literally **cheaper than water**, why not to come and taste for yourself.

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## Prague The Capital City

**Prague** is the **capital and also the largest city** of Czech Republic, which lies in the very heart of Europe surrounded by Germany, Poland, Austria and Slovakia. Prague lies in the centre of Bohemia on **Vltava river** (Moldau river) and it's centre of politics, economics, culture, education and science.



Capital city of Prague has an area of 496 km<sup>2</sup> and has population over 1.2 million. Historic centre of the city with the unique **panorama of Prague Castle** and Hradčany is UNESCO World heritage site since 1992. But Prague is generally known as

one of the **most beautiful historic cities** in Europe and thanks to that amply visited by tourists. It's even one of the most visited sites of Europe.

**Prague has many sights**, the city centre alone offers over 1200

historic and cultural buildings, overall there are almost 3000. This capital is noted for rich culture happenings. It's place of many theatres, among them National theatre from 1881 and State Opera from 1888, concert halls like Rudolfinum, but also music and dramatic festivals, for example Prague Spring or Summer Shakespeare fest.

## Etymology of Prague's name

Former name of Prague was Royal city of Prague from 1784, but since 1920 Capital city of Prague is used. In foreign languages we can find Prag, Prague, Praga etc. But where does word Praha originate is subject to many discussions. One of theories is based on **derivation from the word "práh"** (sill, threshold), but in the mean of "říční práh" (river crossing, ford or rapid). This ford is believed to be in the location, where stands Charles Bridge. Thanks to that the city was built around this ford, it was called Praha. Another view to the origin of name is in Czech legends, where Libuše had the city build on the place, where settler chiselled a threshold of his house.

## Top places in Prague

**Prague Castle:** is undoubtedly the most visited sight in Prague. The largest castle complex in the world is home to the St. Vitus Cathedral with Czech crown jewels, Golden Lane, gardens and halls.



**Charles Bridge:** The oldest standing bridge over Vltava in Prague was built in 1357 upon request of Charles IV. It provides beautiful view over the Prague Castle.

**Old Town Square and Orloj:** Astronomical clock on the Old Town Square attracts crowds of tourists, which are waiting for show every hour. Twelve Apostles show in two windows while Death is ringing bell. Nearby **Týnský chrám** (Church of Our Lady before Týn) is another dominant of Old Town.

**Municipal House:** The finest example of **Czech art-nouveau** architectural style stands right next to **Powder Gate**, the very beginning of so called Royal Way.

**Vyšehrad:** Walled fortification dating to the 10th century and containing several interesting historical sights, such as the Romanesque Rotunda of St. Martin, the Gothic Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, and the **Slavin Cemetery**, where the nation's most famous personages are laid to rest.

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# Easter Traditions in Czech Republic

Easter, in Czech Republic and many other countries, is one of the most important **Christian holidays** and its celebration goes in this spirit. Many traditions and customs are connected with Easter and many of those have their roots in **pagan times**. In cities they are not held thoroughly these days, but in villages and regions with strong **folklore traditions**, for example Moravia, traditions and customs are kept alive.

## Passion Week



Before the Easter days comes **Holy Week or Passion Week**, which reminds end of Jesus live – his death and resurrection. Each day in Passion Week has its name – Ugly Wednesday, Green Thursday, Great Friday and White Saturday. Among traditional customs associated with Holy Week is “departure of bells to Rome” – this week on **Green Thursday** bells chime for the last time and remain silent until Easter Sunday. On Green Thursday it's

also very common nowadays to drink green beer, which is prepared by many breweries.

**Easter in Czech Republic** is celebrated for two days – on Sunday and Monday. On **Easter Sunday** people celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Feast services take part in churches, Easter meals are sanctified (Easter lamb cake, bread, wine and cross bun). At home people eat meat, mainly ground combined with eggs and stuffing. Traditionally a [nettle stuffing](#) is consumed.

Easter Monday is a day, to which there is no special Christian feast and it's more of a folk custom. It's a day of feast and fun and more importantly **Easter thrashing of girls**, when men and boys whip women with "pomlázka" (Easter stick). This is so the girls remain fertile, healthy and merry for whole year. In return men are given painted eggs called "kraslice". Every region has different ornaments. Today girls give away even chocolate eggs or any candy. Adult men are often welcomed with a shot of liquor, mainly slivovitz. But be aware in some places after noon girls can pour cold water over men.

Thrashing of girls, kraslice and Easter lamb are main symbols of Easter in Czech Republic.