

Shimmying to the honey-smooth tones of Stevie Wonder; sipping cocktails beneath the stars on the banks of the Vltava; teetering precariously up the cobble-stoned alleyways in Mala Strana; fighting back the icy wind, clutching at my fur coat, watching the snowflakes drift from the heavens to ice the candy-coloured houses; trying to study on Petrin Hill and failing hopelessly amongst the Spring blossoms and carefree lovers ...

It is *fabulous* to be young and living in Prague.

I began my exchange with few expectations. My summer was hectic. I hadn't really had any time to make plans. I'm happy I didn't because all of my imaginings would have fallen short.

I study economics and law at home, but I chose to exclusively study economics at Charles University. Economics students, Charles has a great reputation, very high admissions standards and the calibre of the academic staff is fantastic. One of my lecturers was the former Minister for Finance for the Czech Republic, another was an advisor at the Czech National Bank, another worked on economic policy in the Soviet Union during the socialist planning days. It was extremely cool to hear my Professor talk about his *friend* Paul Volcker, or to give real insight into the Dominique Strauss-Kahn affair.



Outside the Astronomical Clock



At the Prague Beer Festival

One word of warning: if you are planning on coasting through your exchange without so much as a peek at the books, this isn't possible at Charles. I spent several weekends at the National Library hunched over Central European Economic Reports, feverishly writing out flashcards for various Keynesian multipliers. I learnt a stack, and it was extremely interesting to see the world from a Central European perspective, but it required work. On the flip side, I'm now an expert on the financial crisis and Lithuania. It makes excellent dinner party conversation.

More seriously, and it is the thing that everyone says, the people you meet on exchange are really what make it. My darling Finns, Germans, Swiss, Brits, Yanks, Slovaks, Czechs, I already miss you! It isn't difficult to meet people in Prague as long as you're willing to put yourself out there. I never actually lived in the dormitories, preferring to stay in a hotel and then onto a flat in the centre of Prague – squished right between the Astronomical Clock and Charles Bridge – so I made most of

my friends in classes or at parties or in expat hubs. If you want to meet people easily be sure to check out *Globe*. It is a rare day to hear Czech spoken at *Globe*.

A few tips from an insider:

1. Make sure you try Svijany. It's probably the best beer in the Czech Republic right now.
2. If you're looking for a flat try Vinohrady or Schmihov, as much as I loved living in Stare Mesto there are too many tourists.
3. Every guidebook recommends Cafe Lourve, and I'm not saying I didn't spend time there, but Cafe Imperial is better.
4. Chapeau Rouge is completely overrated.
5. Vintage shopping in Prague is surprisingly excellent. There are a couple of cool places in Nove Mesto, and in Stare Mesto as well. Of course, there is Zara and H&M, but if you wander the streets (almost mindlessly) it's amazing what you stumble across.
6. Nothing opens before 10am so it's best to get home late, wake up late.
7. Make sure you check out the Alphonse Mucha Museum on Palanska. The art nouveau posters are a throwback to another era.