

Český Krumlov - UNESCO World Heritage Site

The story of Český Krumlov, a treasure chest of history and art, begins more than seven hundred years ago. Each century has left its unique imprint. This is a most picturesque town boasting a magical atmosphere and a UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

The town's inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List on 4 December, 1992 was a turning point in the modern history of Český Krumlov. Thanks to the complex of undisturbed historical buildings, it was one of the first three towns in the Czech Republic to come under the protection of this organisation in 1992. The very act of inscribing the town on the UNESCO World Heritage List was an important signal to the whole cultural world that there is a monumental heritage jewel in the south of Bohemia.

This is Český Krumlov

Although Český Krumlov might be a small town in size, it is large in importance. Nestled in the valley of the Vltava River at the foot of the Blanský Forest, it showcases the beauty and grandeur of its majestic castle and chateau, which from its rocky promontory seems to oversee the ebb and flow of life below. This picturesque town of 13,000 inhabitants can be found approximately 22 km from České Budějovice. The unique atmosphere of the town and the extensive complex of heritage sites have made Krumlov one of the most visited tourist destinations in the Czech Republic. Winding streets, romantic corners, sgraffito facades of townhouses, pubs, cafés, mediaeval taverns, unspoilt nature all around - Český Krumlov is all this and more.

A little bit of history

According to legend, the name Krumlov is derived from the German "Krumme Aue", which may be translated as "crooked meadow". The name comes from the natural topography of the town, specifically from the tightly crooked meander of the Vltava river. The town was established essentially in two stages. The first part, called Latrán, was built spontaneously below Krumlov castle, and settled mostly by people who had some administrative connection with the castle. The second part of the town was founded as a typical settlement on a "green meadow", i.e. in a place where no previous settlement had been. The town subsequently took the typical town shape with the Town Square in the centre with streets from its corners leading to the town walls.

The first written reference to Český Krumlov as a town dates back to 1309. At that time the Krumlovian estates consisted of a relatively extensive network of castles and smaller subject towns, which were sources of numerous incomes for the aristocracy. A member of powerful branch of the Vítkovec family, Jindřich von Rosenberg, asked the king Václav II (Wenceslav II) to override the law of escheat and vest the Krumlovian estates to The Rosenbergs. They later made Krumlov the main residence of their family. During the rule of the Rosenberg family, the town as well as the castle flourished. The place where Krumlov is situated was the place of contact between the Bohemian hinterland, the Austrian and Bavarian Danube area and northern Italy. This was also reflected in the face of the town and the castle, which was given a unique look of the Italian Renaissance.

The almost four hundred years of Rosenberg rule in South Bohemia ended in 1611 with the death of the famous Peter Vok, the last male descendant. At the end of the 17th century, during the reign of the Eggenberg family, a Baroque theatre was built and the castle garden was rebuilt. In 1719 the Schwarzenbergs took over Krumlov. During their reign Český Krumlov acquired its Baroque appearance and with its high level of architecture and cultural and social events, the town became a leading aristocratic residence in Central Europe. Since the 19th century, apart from the removal of the town walls and gates, no major changes have taken place and the centre has retained its historical appearance.

Český Krumlov today

History is ever present at every step in Český Krumlov in the form of ancient heritage sites. The small historic centre of the town offers over three hundred listed buildings and you can still admire the art and artistic flair of the mediaeval builders. The preserved original appearance and decoration of the Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture is fascinating. The numerous frescoes are often an open-air picture gallery of the old masters. You cannot miss the second largest castle and chateau complex in the Czech Republic, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the oldest Baroque theatre in the world or the monumental three-nave Gothic St. Vitus Cathedral.

However, Český Krumlov does not only breath history, but with the passage of time it has become an important centre of living culture and arts. It offers a wide range of cultural and artistic events throughout the year, from exhibitions of contemporary artists, to singing performances by music stars or performances as part of traditional town festivals, to special night tours or guided wooden raft tours of the town on the Vltava River or sitting in stylish gastronomic establishments. Surrounded by unspoilt beautiful nature, Český Krumlov attracts all those who want to experience something unforgettable.