

Sunny and warmer today, after a Wednesday of alternating sun and snow flurries on top of 2-3 Å°C temperatures, the warmer, sunnier weather was welcome. I don't know an official high temp., but I would guess 8-9 Å°C.

It was a nice day, then, to stroll around a lot. I did just that, starting out towards Old Town Square where preparations are well under way for the Spring festivities which start with Easter and really launch the tourist high season:



I then meandered through Old Town over just about every street. I finally got to the eastern end of Kurlov Most, Charles Bridge, and took some snaps before brunch. Here is a shot of the bridge, and one taken from the eastern end:



I did not cross the bridge because with that many people it just didn't look very inviting. Besides, I like looking at bridges in profile. A word about food here. Along the main drag, like where I was yesterday, there are a lot of little stands selling pastry, sausage, chicken sandwiches, etc. Most of these are open early till late, and offer easy eat as you go options. In Old Town, and the other big tourist areas, these options are not really available. Instead there are a lot of restaurants, but they want you to sit down and spend quite a lot for a meal,

comparatively.

For example: one can get a plate with kiobasa, bread, mustard and sauerkraut for about 60Kc, which is less than \$4. In contrast, a similar meal in a sit-down will cost at least 150Kc, but the bread basket which will be dropped on your table unrequested will cost another 35Kc. By the time you add a beverage you're lucky to get out of the sit-down for less than 225Kc, about \$14. If the sit-down is in a tourist area expect to pay a 100Kc premium on top.

Another example: this afternoon I wanted a soda or juice. I stopped into a little coffee shop which advertised soda for 39Kc, about \$2.30. I went to the cooler and picked up a little tiny bottle of ginger ale, maybe 140ml. "75 crown" the proprietor told me - about \$4.50. I put it back in the cooler and walked outside. I took a seat at one of the outdoor caf  and ordered a 500ml lager for 90Kc. That's not a bad price anywhere, and I was sitting in the sun on Old Town Square, watching the crowd mill around in front of the clock tower, and feeling pretty good about not having my ginger ale.



In this context then, understand why I was having brunch at 12:30. I had been wandering all over Old Town looking for some place where I could just get a cappuccino and croissant, which one typically sees for 99Kc. There is nothing like that in Old Town. By the time I got to Charles Bridge I gave up and entered a restaurant. I ordered off a set-price menu, chicken soup, beef goulash with dumplings and dessert for 155Kc. I accepted the offer of a dry sherry aperitif for an additional 60Kc, the bread basket added another 35Kc (the first place to charge me for the bread, grr) the calculated tip at 10% and I had a bill for 284Kc — \$17.20. After brunch I went to the Museum of Decorative Arts. I had high hopes for this, but was kind of let down. They had a featured exhibition on awards in Czech Design which was underwhelming to say the least. It was poorly laid out, and unfulfilling. Next was the permanent collection, which is where my interest really lay. This museum was started by a union of artist and artisan in 1850, inspired by similar groups that had recently been started in Great Britain (now the Victoria & Albert) and another in Vienna. The collection runs to the hundreds of thousands of pieces, of which about a quarter are on display, either here or at the National Museum, at any given time. The current exhibit of the Permanent Collection was

curated in honor of the centenary of the current site (a stunningly ornate old mansion). Well, there are certainly things they like to show off and others they just don't seem to care about. I think this might be most reflective of national pride — those items from times where the country was closest to self-governed are much more likely to be featured. So there is a lot of cut and engraved glass from the 15th to 18th centuries, but Art Nouveau glass and ceramics gets a total of about a dozen pieces in two small display cabinets. I have half as much on display in my own living room as they have here. Harrumph!

The high point? The collections of commercial art and photography are wonderful. They have a great collection of photographs by Josef Sudek and Frantisek Drtikol, amongst others. The room is very dim, however, which I think is due to a lack of good conservation materials for these delicate media.

After exhausting those displays, I struck off to the Jewish Quarter to admire some of the oldest buildings in the area. Since I went to see the oldest Christian worship in England, it is only fitting that I visit the oldest Synagogue in Prague. The Old New Synagogue, from the 13th century, is so named because it replaced an older synagogue, and was then superseded by a newer one which later burnt down. So, old new it is. Here's a snap:



Next back to Old Town Square, and my lager, then into a private exhibition of posters and other commercial graphics from Alfons Maria Mucha, a favorite son here. He was one of the most influential graphic artists in the Art Nouveau movement and his work appeared on everything from biscuit packages to theatre posters (he was a favored illustrator of Sarah Bernhardt). You have seen his stuff even if you don't know it, that is how pervasive his work is.



This show, with over 300 pieces (granted, many are postcards and menus) is hefty, and the 150Kc admission was better spent than the 120Kc I dropped at the Museum of Decorative Arts. I passed on the option of the Salvatore Dali add-on for another 100Kc. I've seen enough Dali to hold me for a while, and can see a large collection of originals in London if I wish, as opposed to the piles of reproductions and prints here.

You're now up to date. I will go out shortly to post this, and then I think I may catch some jazz in a local club tonight. Tomorrow I head back to London. My trip here was short, but surprisingly I am happy with how it has worked out, and don't feel too rushed. I think it helps that since I knew it was short I have been willing to make cuts and shoot for the best.
Ciao ciao!