



# Welcome

A very warm welcome to the latest edition of the *Expats.cz Survival Guide and Business directory*. We are proud to present a completely updated and once again expanded publication for Prague's international and expat communities.

We would like to extend our thanks to our advertisers, supporters and partners who have helped to make this project so successful. In light of great demand of our publication in 2007, we have now increased our circulation to 30,000 copies!

In the past 12 months, Expats.cz has grown significantly and now welcomes more than 100,000 unique visitors each month. We remain as ever, fully committed to providing quality information, education and entertainment, and offering relocation help and advice to those who most need it.

We greatly welcome your feedback on this guide so we may continue to improve it - please email us at [office@expats.cz](mailto:office@expats.cz) with your comments.

Wishing you much success in 2009,

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# The Czech Republic

## Introduction

It would be a shame to limit a discussion of the Czech Republic to its more tourist-minded pleasures. (Though mention its name, and a few stock images – Skoda cars, ancient castles, and admittedly, beer – inevitably confront the mind’s eye.) But delve beyond the surface and you’ll discover that there are many more significant points of national pride. Film: anyone who has lived here for a short time will have been inundated with advertisements for film festivals – having produced one of the world’s most respected directors (Miloš Forman), the country’s passion for the genre isn’t surprising. Music: when the Americans landed on the moon, the Czechs were there; Neil Armstrong took his first gravity-defying steps to the strains of Antonín Dvořák. World-class athletes: though they once called the Czech Republic home, NHL superstar Jaromír Jágr and tennis ace Martina Navrátilová have earned endless accolades in the Western world. Yet the spirit of the nation is hardly so tangible. Cloaked in turmoil and political instability for many years, the country continues to emerge and find its footing in the world at large. As the Czech Republic evolves, embracing and adapting to the foreign while gently clinging to the past, opportunity, in many guises, unfolds. And that’s the beauty of living in Prague; here in this vibrant European capital, one that is as diverse as it is consistently stunning, it would seem that anything is possible.

## Location & Geography

Though commonly considered to be an Eastern European city, the Czech Republic is actually located in Central Europe. This is the preferred and (check your maps) more accurate geographical description. In fact, the Czech Republic is the westernmost of the Slavic nations, and it’s worth remembering that Prague is further west than Vienna, the archetypal Central European city. Approximately 10 million inhabit this space of about 78,866 sq km (roughly the size of South Carolina). The Czech Republic is divided into Bohemia (**Čechy**) and Moravia (**Morava**). Bohemia in the west consists of rolling plains, hills, and plateaus surrounded by low mountains; Moravia in the east consists of very hilly country. The differences don’t end with the landscape: the language and culture of the two areas are similar, although Moravians are said to have a specific accent. It has been suggested that Moravian culture is generally more friendly and laid back than that of the people in Bohemia. Moravia is best known for its tasty wines while the Bohemians are partial to beer (**pivo**). The capital of Bohemia is Prague (**Praha**) and the capital of Moravia is Brno – these two cities have traditionally enjoyed a friendly (or, depending on whom you ask, not-so-friendly) rivalry. The Czech Republic borders Germany (810 km), Poland (762 km), Austria (466 km), and Slovakia (265 km). The highest point of elevation is the peak of Mt. Sněžka (1,602 m above sea level) and the lowest point of elevation is near Hřensko, where the River Labe leaves Czech territory (117 m above sea level). Despite the country’s many rivers and lakes, you’ll have to travel quite far to get to a major body of water. The Czech Republic is a landlocked country 326 km from the Baltic and 322 km from the Adriatic Sea. It is for this reason that many local families hit the beaches in Croatia for their yearly dose of summer sun.

## History

The beginnings of Czech history are a little foggy. Evidence of Neanderthals and even prehistoric fish exist, followed by rambunctious and highly nomadic Celtic and then Germanic tribes

occupying the area. These tribes would eventually beat a retreat out of Central Europe; nipping at their heels were Slavic people from the Black Sea and Carpathian regions. They settled in southern Bohemia and parts of modern day Austria. The activities of these groups are the stuff of legends. It is known that the Great Moravian Empire was the first real state on Czech soil – exactly where it was located is anyone’s guess. Experts place the origins of this principality around the 8th century. That is where the story deviates from history, taking on fairy-tale qualities. According to legend, Libuše, daughter of mythical Czech ruler Krok, was chosen for succession to the throne. Not known for their forward-thinking ways, the people begged her to choose a man to rule instead. She chose Přemysl the Ploughman; they married, had a son, and the Přemyslid dynasty commenced its rule from a castle in Libušen – these days called Vyšehrad. The Czech state gained strength and a new-found sovereignty during their reign, and Queen Libuše prophesied the foundation of a golden city: Prague.

She wasn’t all that far off the mark. The Luxembourg Dynasty succeeded the Přemysls in the 14th century and its King Charles IV facilitated the coming-of-age of Bohemia, and specifically transformed the city of Prague into an imperial capital. Under his patronage, construction began on the Charles Bridge, Charles University, and Prague Castle. He was a Holy Roman Emperor until his death in 1355 and is generally considered to be the father of the country. The tides took a bit of a nasty turn at this point. An ongoing war between protestant Hussites (inspired by the teachings of reformist Jan Hus) and the Catholic crusaders led to political and economic strife and, above all, endless bloodshed. The holy war ended in the 15th century and the country returned to a relative state of calm during the reign of George of Poděbrady. The 16th century would bring the rule of Rudolf II; an intellectual and art lover who granted the Protestants further religious liberty with his Letter of Majesty. Still unsatisfied, the religious group heaved two imperial governors out of a high window in Prague Castle. Surprisingly the



men survived unharmed. This act signified the beginning of the Thirty Years War that would rage throughout Europe – it would be many, many years before the Czech lands were self-governed again. The Austrians captured the Bohemian throne in the 16th century, suppressing Czech culture and language for the next 400 years.

The 19th century brought a turnaround referred to as The National Revival. Fed up with the Germanization of their country, the Czechs considered it high time to get back to not only their own language and culture, but their own government. Emancipation from Austria came in the guise of the Versailles Treaty in 1918. The First Republic was led by President Tomáš Masaryk. The Czech economy was booming; art, literature, and music were flourishing, and the Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia) was one of the wealthiest nations in the world. But such bliss, though long-earned, was short-lived. In 1938, the Nazis set up camp in Bohemia and Moravia and the subsequent effect on the country was tragic. Approximately 125,000 citizens, including 83,000 Jews, were killed, and hundreds of thousands of others were sent to prisons and concentration camps or forced into hard labor. The Czechoslovak Republic was restored after World War II made its exit from history. Yet shortly after coming to power, the country's communist party fell under Soviet influence. In 1968, an attempt to give the communist system a human face, Prague Spring (a period of political liberalization that brought Soviet ire, not to be confused with the Prague Spring International Music Festival), failed miserably when Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia. The new government was more hard-line than ever, and the Czech people remained locked behind the Iron Curtain throughout the 1970's and the 1980's.

Inspired by uprisings throughout Eastern Europe, the Czechoslovak people took part in a peaceful revolt known as The Velvet Revolution (1989), which led to the overthrow of the communist government. Dissident playwright Václav Havel was elected president of Czechoslovakia in 1989 (in 1993 the country split from Slovakia). On January 1, 1993 the country held its first nationwide elections in more than 40 years. The country joined NATO in 1999 and became a member of the EU on May 1, 2004. The Czech Republic has now opened its doors to tourist and expatriate alike, many of whom consider Prague to be one of the continent's loveliest capitals. And while the country continues to develop at a rapid pace, its fascinating history and rich culture will be not be lost to future generations of both visitors and citizens.

## Politics

After ages of political turmoil, the Czech government slowly continues to evolve. The current political status is, according to the constitution, a multi-party, parliamentary democracy. Three branches of the Czech state, which are similar to the US government, exist: Executive, including the cabinet and president; legislative representing parliament, comprised of the Chamber of Deputies (*Poslanecká sněmovna*) and the Senate (*Senát*); and judicial, the highest court in the land.

The president (Václav Klaus since 2003) is elected by parliament every five years. He can nominate judges, dismiss the parliament in certain situations, and veto laws. The president also appoints the Prime Minister (Miroslav Topolánek since 2006), as well as other cabinet members at the PM's suggestion. Only those political

parties that have gained at least 5% of votes through elections are represented in the Chamber of Deputies, while the Senate mandates are attained by majority vote. The current parliamentary parties are:

**Civic Democratic Party (ODS)**  
*Občanská demokratická strana*  
**Party Chairman:** Mirek Topolánek (Prime Minister)  
**Seats in Parliament:** 81  
**Political Orientation:** Center-right

**Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)**  
*Česká strana sociálně demokratická*  
**Party Chairman:** Jiří Paroubek  
**Seats in Parliament:** 74  
**Political Orientation:** Center-left

**Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM)**  
*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*  
**Party Chairman:** Vojtěch Filip  
**Seats in Parliament:** 26  
**Political Orientation:** Left

**Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL)**

*Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová*  
**Party Chairman:** Jiří Čunek  
**Seats in Parliament:** 13  
**Political Orientation:** Right

**Green Party (SZ)**  
*Strana Zelených*  
**Party Chairman:** Martin Bursík (Minister of the Environment)  
**Seats in Parliament:** 6  
**Political Orientation:** Centrist

After the 2006 elections resulted in a stalemate, awarding both the left and right 100 seats each, the government is now led by a coalition of the ODS, KDU-ČSL, and the Green Party.

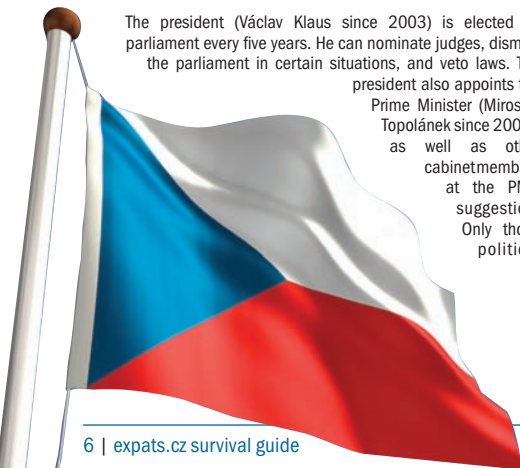
The Czech Republic is a member of NATO, the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Interpol, the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations. But however undeniable the rapid development and progress of the country's political institutions and administrative policies, political experts point to the still-lingering challenges the nation faces: reforming the health care and pension systems and addressing some serious environmental issues. For the people of the Czech Republic, however, the current hot-button issue surely isn't healthcare – it's the US government's proposal to build a missile defense facility here. If approved, construction of the facility is slated for 2011. To be continued...

## Etiquette – Avoiding Cultural Blunders

Quiet down, get used to removing your shoes, and say goodbye to everyone when you leave a restaurant – these are just a few of the seemingly endless rules of etiquette you'll want to memorize during your stay. When in doubt, notice what the locals are doing and act accordingly; should you commit a faux pas (or two, or three, or four!) keeping your sense of humor about you is the first rule of thumb for foreigners living abroad. Learn it, live it!

### Home Visits

- When invited to dine at a Czech household, it is customary to bring flowers as a gift. If you like, you may bring a bottle of wine along with the flowers, but it isn't a must.
- Flowers should be given in odd numbers (1, 3, 5, 7...), unless they are for a funeral: in that case the numbers should be even. Chrysanthemums are reserved for gravestones only. Red



carnations tend to be viewed as a “Communist flower” and are thus inappropriate as a gift.

- Always remove any paper from the flowers before you hand them over.
- Remove your shoes any time you enter someone’s house, unless the host insists otherwise. He or she may offer you some slippers to wear instead.
- It is considered impolite to leave any food on your plate, so try to finish your meal. You will probably be offered seconds, but if you’re really full, you can politely refuse them.

### Dining Out

- In the Czech Republic, it is considered good manners for the man to enter a restaurant or bar before the woman does. This ostensibly keeps her from being eyeballed by the men inside, and allows the man to deal with clearing a path and finding a table.
- Service tends to be at the table, even in pubs.
- When waiting for a beer, put a coaster down in front of you so the server can place your mug there. In some pubs, setting down the coaster will automatically get you a beer.
- Never mix the dregs of a beer you’re about to finish with the fresh beer you’ve been brought.
- Toasting is very common. The local ritual is to look into the other person’s eyes, clink glasses, and say *Na zdraví* (To your health!). Never cross arms with someone else to reach a person on the other side of the table.
- Say *dobrou chuť* (bon appetit) before starting your meal.
- Tipping is 10%, though by Czech standards this rate is considered generous. Tipping in bars, restaurants, taxis, and beauty and massage parlors is customary.
- When leaving a tip, you can give the server the bill’s exact amount and say either to *je dobrý* or *v pořádku* (that’s fine). You may also leave the tip on the table.

### On Public Transportation

- You will be expected to give up your seat on the tram or metro to elderly or pregnant women and to children. For gentlemanly reasons, older men, unless they are very frail, will not take a woman’s seat. But be careful for whom you stand up: you risk insulting a woman if you offer her your seat before she feels she needs it.
- On escalators, always stand on the right side to let people pass on the left.
- Let people out of the tram or metro before you enter.

### At the Theater

- Dressing up for the theater is customary, but is no longer a strict rule. You should, however, refrain from wearing sneakers. When attending a classical concert or opera, on the other hand, you must be in formal dress.
- In the Czech Republic, whistling is not considered a positive form of applause; it’s equivalent to booing.

### Meeting and Greeting

- When entering a shop of any kind, you should greet the salesperson by saying, *Dobry den* (Good day) if it is before the late afternoon. After six o’clock in the evening, it is customary to say *Dobry večer* (Good evening) instead. When exiting the shop, always say *Na shledanou* (Goodbye). Many people will do the same when entering and leaving a doctor’s office, train compartment, or elevator.
- You should also greet your neighbors at your home or office with the appropriate phrase.
- In the Czech Republic, people’s *tituly* (titles) are taken quite seriously, so don’t be surprised if someone addresses you as *pan inženýr* (Mr. Engineer) or *paní doktorka* (Mrs. Doctor). The doctor title does not refer only to medical doctors; anybody

who has a doctorate – particularly lawyers – are considered doctors.

- Greet someone you’ve just met with a handshake. On subsequent meetings, women will often kiss each other on both cheeks to say hello.
- **As a note:** foreigners have a tendency to use the informal greeting (*ahoj*) too quickly. Stick with *dobry den* and *dobry večer* until you are sure you’re on an informal (first-name) basis with the other person.

### Unmentionables

- You may be asked to pay to use a public toilet (usually 5 CZK), even in some restaurants.
- Public urination is not uncommon among men, but it is generally frowned upon. Children also sometimes urinate in public.
- Cleaning up after your dog is becoming the norm, but you can still expect to see some droppings on the street.
- You are likely to see nudity on beaches or by swimming pools, and some topless sunbathing in parks. Nude children are considered perfectly acceptable in pool or beach areas.

### Misc.

- Watch your volume: people in the Czech Republic tend to speak quietly in public areas, and can be annoyed by foreigners who talk loudly in trams or restaurants.
- Though some foreigners describe a lack of warmth or downright rudeness among locals, it is the custom here to maintain a certain amount of distance from people you don’t know very well. Once you’ve spent some time with a person, they are likely to be much more open and friendly. Just be nice, and you will be rewarded.

## Name Days

Each day of the year comes with a Czech name (or names) to be celebrated. It is common practice to give flowers (or some other gift) on a person’s Name Day – you’ll notice many of the flower shops around town often list name days on a blackboard outside. For a full list of Name Days (and some Western equivalents of Czech names, so foreigners can celebrate too) see [www.expats.cz/namedays](http://www.expats.cz/namedays).

## Czech Holiday Calendar

The following is a list of the national holidays observed in the Czech Republic. Most offices, businesses and local shops close and public transport timetables follow the Sunday schedule.

### 1 January: New Year’s Day/Czech Independence Day (*Nový rok/Den obnovy samostatného českého státu*)

Not just the first day of the year, but also a celebration of the restoration of the Czech Republic, which officially split with Slovakia on January 1st, 1993. Czech saying: *Jak na Nový rok, tak po celý rok*, which means: ‘as on New Year’s Day, so will be the new year’. Also: don’t eat chicken for New Year’s dinner, lest your luck for the coming year fly away.

### March/April: Easter/Easter Monday (*Velikonoce/Velikonoční pondělí*)

The only movable holiday in the Czech calendar. Czech tradition: women are beaten (not viciously) with whips made from willow sticks on Easter Monday. Men receive painted eggs or shots of plum brandy (*slivovice*) in return for whipping of women. Alternatively, or additionally, women can be thrown into cold water (preferably a stream, though a bathtub will suffice).

### 1 May: Labor Day (*Svátek práce*)

International Workers’ Day in many countries (though not the US or UK). Also known as May Day, this day is celebrated for different reasons throughout the world. Head up to Petřín hill and rejuvenate

## CZECH REPUBLIC POPULATION STATISTICS

All statistics are courtesy of the CIA World Factbook; dated July, 2008 unless otherwise indicated.

Population: 10,220,911

Age structure:

0 - 14 years: 13.8%  
15 - 64 years: 71.2%  
65 years and over: 15.1%

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 76.62 years  
male: 73.34 years  
female: 80.08 years

Population growth rate: -0.082%

Birth rate: 8.89 births/1000 population

Death rate: 10.69 deaths/1000 population

Net migration rate: 0.97 migrant(s)/1,000 population

Infant mortality rate: 3.83 deaths/1000 live births

HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate: less than 0.1% (2001 est.)

People living with HIV/AIDS: 2,500 (2001 est.)

HIV/AIDS deaths: less than 10 (2001 est.)

Ethnic groups (2001 census):

Czech: 90.4%  
Moravian: 3.7%  
Slovak: 1.9%  
other: 4%

Religions (2001 census):

Roman Catholic: 26.8%  
Protestant: 2.1%  
other: 3.3%  
unspecified: 8.8%  
unaffiliated: 59%

Literacy: 99% (2003 est.)

Labor force: 5.36 million (2007 est.)

Unemployment rate: 6.6% (2006 est.)

Inflation rate (consumer prices): 2.8% (2007 est.)

your love life with a kiss under one of the numerous blossom-laden trees on its slopes, a tradition left over from a pagan fertility rite.

### 8 May: Liberation Day (*Den osvobození*)

Date marking Czech liberation from Germany at the end of the Second World War. Germany signed the terms of surrender on May 8, 1945, and the German army in Prague surrendered on the morning of May 9.

### 5 July: St. Cyril and St. Methodius Day (*Den slovanských věrozvěstů Cyrila a Metoděje*)

Date commemorating the religious teachers St. Cyril and St. Methodius, who translated Christian literature into the Slavic language in the ninth century.

### 6 July: Jan Hus Day (*Den upálení mistra Jana Husa*)

Date commemorating the religious reformer Jan Hus, who was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. July 5-6 usually combine to create a long weekend of relaxation, preferably spent at a summer cottage.

### 28 September: St. Wenceslas Day/Czech Statehood Day (*Den české státnosti*)

Commemorating St. Wenceslas, the patron saint of the Czech people and the Czech Republic, who was killed in September of 929 or 935 (there are some discrepancies regarding the year of his death). Czech statehood is also celebrated on this date.

### 28 October: Independent Czechoslovak State Day (*Den vzniku samostatného československého státu*)

Date of the foundation of Czechoslovakia, which declared independence from the Hapsburg Empire at the end of World War I.

### 17 November: Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day (*Den boje za svobodu a demokracii*)

Date commemorating the beginning of the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Student demonstrations on 17 November (International Students' Day) marked the beginning of the end for the communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

### 24 December: Christmas Eve (*Štědrý den*)

The main Christmas celebration in the Czech Republic – the time when presents are exchanged and a traditional Christmas dinner (carp soup, fried carp, carp surprise, etc.) is served.

### 25 December: Christmas Day (1. svátek vánoční)

More Christmas gatherings with extended family, but the main celebration in the Czech Republic takes place on Christmas Eve.

### 26 December: Second Day of Christmas (2. svátek vánoční)

Celebrated as Boxing Day in the UK and Canada, the Czech Republic officially recognizes the date as the "Second Day of Christmas", or St. Stephen's Day, as it is celebrated in many other countries. St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr, but the date is generally celebrated as the extension of Christmas that its Czech name implies.

The following are culturally important days in the Czech Republic but are not public holidays:

### 27 January: Remembrance of Victims of the Holocaust (*Den památky obětí holokaustu*)

Date in honor of those who died during the Holocaust. On January 27, 1945, the concentration camp at Osvětim (Auschwitz) was liberated.

### 8 March: International Women's Day (*Mezinárodní den žen*)

International holiday in honor of women, celebrated by many European nations and recognized by the United Nations.

### 12 March: Czech Republic Enters NATO (*Vstup České republiky do NATO*)

Remembering March 12, 1999, when the Czech Republic joined NATO.

### 5 May: May Czech Uprising (*Květnové povstání českého lidu*)

Date marking the Czech uprising against German occupation in early May, 1945. May 5 was the date the uprising spread to Prague.

### 27 June: Remembrance of the Victims of the Communist Regime (*Den památky obětí komunistického režimu*)

Date remembering those who died under communism. Political activist Milada Horáková was executed on June 27, 1950, by the communist regime.

### 11 November: Veterans' Day (*Den válečných veteránů*)

International holiday remembering those who have served in the armed forces. The First World War officially ended on the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month in 1918.



## A Clean City

News laws in effect from July, 2008 aim to make the city of Prague a cleaner, safer place. Consumption of alcohol in public is now banned in most of the city's parks and within 100 meters of schools.

New laws now enable police officers to hand out on-the-spot fines of 1000 CZK to persons caught littering. The fines, which can also be up to 30,000 CZK for serious offenses or those brought to court, specifically target previously common infractions: disposing of cigarette butts, chewing gum, or spitting on city streets. That's right, expect to be fined if a police officer witnesses you spitting out gum or tossing a cigarette butt on city streets.

The littering laws also target cleaning up after dogs, feeding pigeons, and washing away soap suds after cleaning your car.

## The Schengen Situation

**Schengen.** Those two syllables can strike fear and confusion in the hearts of many a non-EU expat. When the Czech Republic joined this "borderless Europe" zone in December 2007, it caused mass panic amongst non-legal expats, and even some legal ones as well due to the lack of information, or the mis-information floating around leading up to, and for months following the entry date. The difficulty of finding correct information, and the extra processing time at various embassies and the foreign police due to a backlog of visa applications, magnified the problem.

To get a general overview of the Schengen zone and how it applies to foreigners living in Prague, we went straight to the source: Robert Solich, who works in the **Unit for Coordination of Schengen Cooperation** which is part of the Department for Asylum and Migration Policy in the Ministry of Interior.

First, a quick definition of "Schengen": it's simply a small town in Luxembourg where in 1985 the Schengen Agreement was signed, followed in 1990 by the Schengen Convention. Basically, these two international agreements allow for free movement within the participating countries. That means no border checks, but also as Solich says, additional requirements of all the Schengen member states regarding "a common visa regime, improving coordination between the police, customs and the judiciary and taking additional steps to combat problems such as terrorism and organized crime." Currently, there are 24 Schengen countries. And as Solich points out, there are more benefits than

just the ease of crossing borders. "Schengen allows people to cross borders anywhere and anytime which saves time, fuel, money, nerves - and it supports cross-border contacts (social, business.) Moreover, thanks to improved police cooperation and other compensatory measures we can speak about a new quality of security."

**The following has changed for non-EU foreigners:** Short term stays of up to three months for people from visa-free countries (citizens whose government has visa-free relations with the Czech Republic.) Many people, especially Americans, lived in the Czech Republic for years; popping across to Germany, Poland or Austria every three months to receive a new "stamp" and legally extend their visa-free stay. These people were greatly affected by Schengen entry: you just can't do that anymore. If you fall into this category, you can only be in any Schengen country for up to three months within a six month period. So in order to receive a new "stamp" not only do you need to leave the Schengen zone, you need to be gone for three months total within the six months. That means if you spend three straight months in Schengen, you must leave for the next three months OR if you only spend two months in the Schengen zone, you can leave for one month, then return for one month, and then leave for two more months.

Short stays of foreigners from visa countries now need to obtain a visa which is valid for the entire Schengen zone, not just the Czech Republic. Citizens of countries who have a visa requirement and are living here under a long-term stay with a residence permit can now travel freely within the Schengen zone, whereas before they needed to have an additional visa.

Solich sums it up: "This means that Schengen eased traveling for Czech and other EU citizens, Schengen visa holders and residence permit holders. On the other hand, for visa-free foreigners the rules are stricter than before or, more precisely, they are not so easy to evade."

The different types of visas/residence permits can be an issue of confusion as well. There are two types of residence permits: Long-term (*Povolení k dlouhodobému pobytu*) and Permanent (*Povolení k trvalému pobytu*). Third country nationals are eligible for either of these. To know if you have one - look on your visa where it says "**Typ povolení**." If you are holder of one of these visas, you can travel freely in the Schengen zone for up to three months before either returning to the Czech Republic or leaving the Schengen zone. The travel rules apply also if you are a holder of a Residence card of a family member of an EU citizen (*Průkaz o pobytu rodinného příslušníka občana EU*); a Permanent residence card (*Průkaz o povolení k trvalému pobytu*) or have a Permanent residence permit for a national of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland and his/her family member (*Povolení k trvalému pobytu občana státu Island, Lichtenštejnsko, Norsko nebo Švýcarsko nebo jeho rodinného příslušníka*).

Now, if you are here on a visa, the rules are a little more confusing, especially because the rules are different for people from visa-free countries and visa required citizens. If you have a Czech national short stay visa (*české krátkodobé vízum*) you can enter, stay and exit the Czech territory for up to 90 days. This is a so-called category C visa - on your visa you'll see a C in the "**typ víza**" if this is what you have. This visa isn't going to be issued any longer, but will be replaced by the uniform Schengen visa - Category C (*jednotné schengenské vízum - typu C*).

You may have a long-stay visa - Category D (*dlouhodobé vízum - typu D*). Again, look on your visa in the "**typ víza**" spot to see if you have it. This visa is for people wishing to stay longer than 90 days. It only allows for transit of up to five days through other Schengen countries on the way to the Czech Republic. Under EU law, repeat transit is not guaranteed, only one way movement from abroad to the visa issuing country. If you are from a visa-free country this is all you will have, but you can travel freely for any three months within a six month period. This is a new change resulting from a European

Commission interpretation of the European visa rules, which was presented to member states in June 2008.

People from visa required countries may have a long-stay visa - Category D+C (*dlouhodobé vízum - typu D+C*) which is good for stays of longer than 90 days and does allow movement within the Schengen zone, but only for the first three months of the validity of the visa. After three months, you can't transit, but it is still better because instead of the right to transit, you have a right to travel for three months. Solich adds that if you have a D+C visa and want to travel you should ask for a short-term visa from the consulate of the country you are going to.

So what do you do if you are caught living here illegally? If it's your first offense, Solich says you'll be given a fine of up to 5,000CZK and ordered to leave within a set time period, for example, within 10 days. In more serious cases, like you've been here a really long time, you've ignored a previous order to leave, you have committed some other offenses, etc. you'll receive an administrative expulsion which includes a ban to return for a set amount of time. An additional change in the law following joining Schengen regards if you are expelled from the country. Solich says if you are prohibited from returning for a certain period of time (for example, three years) the ban applies for all Schengen countries, not just the Czech Republic. He says your personal information will be entered in the Schengen Information System which is shared by all Schengen countries and is accessible by all their border police. So if you try and enter during your banned period, your name will come up and it won't be possible to enter any Schengen country, much less get a visa or residence permit.

Solich notes a few common Schengen misconceptions:

"I'm afraid that people from visa countries who have D or D+C visa often think that they can travel freely across Schengen, which is not true. (See above for more information.) They travel to other countries, get caught and penalized. Further, people who want to stay in the Czech Republic for more than three months often come here on



the basis of a visa-free regime or with a short-term visa and later, after a couple of weeks, apply for a long-term visa in our consulates somewhere in Europe. The problem is that the processing of a long-term visa takes a pretty long time, often three months or more and they will not get it before their short-term stay expires. We still have to explain to foreigners wishing to stay here longer than three months that they should apply for a long-term visa from their home country and come to the Czech Republic already with this visa and not hope to get it later, somehow."

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