

# Czech Republic Guide by Megan Dwyer

## 1. Getting to the Czech Republic from the United States (airlines to take, things to have on hand)

To get to Brno, you may either fly into the Prague International Airport (PRG) or the Vienna Airport (VIE). I would suggest the Prague airport as you will not have to cross country lines on your bus ride to Brno. A few suggestions for purchasing your ticket to / from the Czech Republic:

- Beginning as soon as possible, start checking popular travel sites such as expedia.com, Travelocity.com and studentuniverse.com for flight prices. Buy your flight sooner, rather than later, as prices will increase as your departure dates gets closer.
- If prices from Kansas to the Czech Republic seem very expensive, don't be afraid to buy two separate tickets: one from Kansas to Chicago or New York and one from Chicago or New York to Prague.
- The Masaryk University schedule differs by about one month from the K-State schedule (i.e. Masaryk's fall schedule goes from mid-September to early February. Students go home for a one month holiday break and come back to take their finals). However, the professors are very willing to let you take your finals early if you show them proof of having already bought your ticket back to the United States. Do not worry about stay
- Before you leave, make sure to let your banks know that you'll be using debit and credit cards in the Czech Republic.

## 2. Getting from the Prague airport to Brno (where to go in the Prague airport, which bus to take, how to purchase bus tickets beforehand)

- About a month before your trip to the Czech Republic, you will want to buy your bus ticket from the Prague airport to Brno. There are numerous bus lines that operate all over Europe and the Czech Republic, but one of the easiest and most economical lines to use is "Student Agency." Go to <http://www.studentagency.eu/> to purchase your bus ticket from the Prague or Vienna airport to Brno.
  - Click "national bus tickets"
  - In new window, choose "Praha Ruzyně, Terminal 1" in the "leaving from" box and "Brno, AN Grand" in the "going to" box.

The screenshot shows the Student Agency website interface for buying bus tickets online. At the top, there is a logo for "STUDENT AGENCY express" and a link for "Ticket Card registration". Below the logo, there is a section titled "Buy ticket online" with a sub-section "All bus lines". This section contains several buttons for different routes: "Brno - Jihlava - Praha", "Český Krumlov - Praha", "Karlovy Vary - Praha", "Zlín - Praha", "Liberec - Praha", "Plzeň - Praha", "Ostrava - Praha", and "Praha - Hradec Králové". Below these buttons, there is a search form with the following fields: "Leaving from:" (set to "Praha Ruzyně, Terminál 1"), "Going to:" (set to "Brno, AN Grand"), and "Date:" (set to "09.05.2010 Sunday"). There are two buttons below the search form: "Search coach service" and "Swap destination". In the bottom right corner, there are links for "Reload Page" and "Open in Dashboard".

- Click the British flag in the top right-hand corner to keep the website in English
- Choose a bus departure time between 1-2 hours after your flight is scheduled to land (to give yourself enough time to unload the plane, get your luggage, go through customs and get to the bus stop). Choose the ISIC option for price (see how to buy an ISIC card later in this document). The ticket should cost you 220 CKS (about \$13-15)
- It is very important to print your ticket to show the bus driver
- Before you leave the Prague airport, I suggest getting some Czech currency. Go to any “official” window inside of the airport that is doing currency exchange. Currency exchange booths will never give you as good of a rate as a bank will, so exchange no more than \$25-\$75. You’ll want to have a little bit of Czech currency to buy a tram ticket later. Follow the signs (in English) to Terminal 1. There, you’ll see a yellow “Student Agency stand” by one of the doors to go outside. Exit through the nearest door, and cross two streets until you are under an outdoor roof. On your left will be a “Student Agency” bus stop sign. Wait for the bus here. When the bus arrives, you will show the driver your ticket (but keep your ticket, you’ll need it later!)
- The bus will take you from the Prague airport to the main Prague bus station (Florence station). Here, you’ll switch to a different Student Agency bus for your ride from Prague to Brno. Make sure you still have your original ticket!
  - When you arrive at the bus station, go inside to the waiting area and using your ticket, check the “departures” screen to see which platform number you should go to for your ride from Prague to Brno. You will probably wait at the platform for 5-30 minutes for your bus. Below is a picture of the Florence bus station:



3. Where to go upon arrival to Brno (how to get from the bus station to the tram, where to take the tram to)

- There are TWO bus stations in Brno. The student Agency bus line is the only line that goes the “AN Grand” station. All other bus lines go to a different station in the city.
- Masaryk will assign you a “tutor” for the semester. Your tutor is a Masaryk University student that is a great resource for any questions you might have during your time in Brno. If you coordinate with your tutor to have them meet you at the bus station, make sure to let them know that you are coming in on Student Agency, what time your bus arrives and what you will be wearing (as few people speak English and will be able to help you).
- If you are NOT meeting your tutor, follow the directions below to get from the bus station to your living quarters.
  - Upon arrival at the bus station, you will see the “Grand Hotel” across the street. Cross the street to the Grand Hotel and turn left. Follow the sidewalk (you’ll curve to the right) until you see a Kentucky Fried Chicken (you’ll appreciate the familiarity of this, believe me! 😊)
  - When you get near the Kentucky Fried Chicken, turn left and cross the street to where the trams are arriving. Near the benches, there will be a machine where you can buy a tram ticket. Although the entire machine will be in Czech, all you need to look for is “16 CKS” or “18 CKS”- this is the cost of a ticket for one tram ride.
  - You want to get onto TRAM #1 going AWAY from the direction

that you came from (when trams pull up, there will be a lit up number on the front of them). There will be a sign that people are looking at, which will tell you how many minutes it will be until the next Tram #1 arrives.

- Once you get on the tram, you will get off at the FOURTH stop. There will be a small sign at each stop (on the door side of the tram) that tells the name of the stop. You will go through Hybesova stop, Nemocnice u sv. Anny stop, Mendlovo namesti stop and will get off at the Vystaviste- hlavani stop.
- When you get off at the Vystaviste stop, cross the street to the sidewalk in front of the store fronts. Turn LEFT and walk until you come to a magenta-colored restaurant on the corner. At this restaurant, turn right and go UP a narrow, cobblestone street. Continue to the very top of the hill until you can go no further and see a building with white marble steps on your left. This is your residence, Vinarska Halls! Go up the stairs and follow the directions given by your Masaryk coordinator.



#### 4. Masaryk University living accommodations (what they are like, roommates and what you should bring)

- The Masaryk University living halls are called “Vinarska.” They are the international student dorms at Masaryk. You will likely be paired

- with a student from a European or Asian country for your roommate.
- Each room has 2 twin beds (they provide clean sheets and a pillow), 2 large desks, cabinet space, a lamp, a chair, and a large closet that has room for most of your clothing. Additionally, each room has a bathroom (bring shower sandals) and a small kitchen with a sink and a burner.







- When you arrive, there will be no utensils or dishes in your dorm. The international student club (explained later in this document) will have free used dishes / utensils from previous international students to give away free. They have limited amount and will go quickly. If you do not wish to have used utensils, you may buy dishes, pots, pans, etc. at the local Tesco (similar to Wal-Mart). The kitchen utensils will be the same price or slightly more expensive than dishes would be at Wal-Mart in the United States
- Items to bring from the United States for your dorm
  - Power converter (all outlets in the Vinarska dorms are European outlets). Go to any Radio shack or Wal-Mart in the United States and ask for a European power converter. This

will come in handy!

- Extra blanket

## 5. Choosing your classes at Masaryk

- During orientation week at Masaryk, the international student coordinators will go over choosing your classes at Masaryk, so don't worry about having this all set in stone before you go!
- If you need to fulfill just basic elective requirements, I would strongly suggest doing the Central European Studies courses. I did not take these courses, but the majority of international students did take them and really enjoyed them. They are designed for non-Czech students and are a good introduction to the Czech culture and lifestyle. Some of the most popular courses (among the students that took them when I was there) were Czech music, Czech film and theater, and the Czech sociology course.
- If you DO need to fulfill certain requirements, (eg. I took two psychology courses to fulfill requirements for my psychology degree at K-State) Masaryk University has a number of courses that are taught in English for Czech students to practice their English. You can access that list here:

<http://czs.muni.cz/en/in/students/studies/cofi>

- Work with your coordinator to get enrolled in these courses. I really enjoyed being submerged with Czech students in these classes

## 6. Navigating the transportation system in Brno

- All public transportation in Brno is done via the tram system or the busses. Use this website: <http://jizdnirady.idnes.cz/brno/spojeni/> to plan your trips across town. (Make sure to click the British flag in the bottom right corner for English)
- For tram rides, you will always use the tram stop (Vystaviste) that you got off of when going to the Vinarksa dorms.
- A few key routes:
  - To get to the city center, take tram #1 (going in the direction back towards where you came the first day) and get off on the FOURTH stop (Hlavní nádraží). Walk towards the Kentucky Fried Chicken and up the street to the McDonald (the only other American restaurant in Brno!)
  - To get to TESCO (similar to Wal-Mart for groceries and most other needs), take tram #1 (going in the direction back towards where you came the first day) and get off on the FOURTH stop (Hlavní nádraží). Go underground and follow the signs to Tesco

## 7. Optional events planned by Masaryk University- to do or not to do?

- It is critical that you take part in the orientation week (the week before school starts) at Masaryk. During this, you will get your tram pass, your sim card (a card for international cell phones), a lot of information about the city of Brno and the university, and have the opportunity to sign up for the international student club and day trip and weekend trips.
- International Student Club- There is a fee associated with being part of the international student club, but it is well worth it. The club is made up of a large group of students from Masaryk University that want to make international students feel comfortable and welcome in Brno. By being a member of the international student club, you receive discounts at businesses in town, invitations to the weekly international student club events (Czech movie showings, intl. student club parties, day trips, etc.)
- Intl. student club day trips: Definitely go on as many of these trips as you can! The price is less than what it would cost you to do the trip on your own and the club will provide a guide and an itinerary for you. These trips are to cultural sites in and around Brno.
- Weekend long trips: The intl. student club contracts an outside travel agency to plan four weekend trips during the semester. These trips all leave early on Friday morning (take that into account when choosing which classes to take). I would suggest the trip to Krakow, Poland and Slovakia. The best part of the trip to Slovakia is a large hike (make sure you have some sort of waterproof shoes or hiking boots for this excursion).

## 8. Planning your own trips (getting the best transportation and lodging for your money)

- The Czech Republic is a PERFECT place for studying abroad because it not only offers interesting culture within the CR, but is centrally located within Europe and is a great starting point for traveling throughout Europe! Additionally, it is inexpensive enough to live in the Czech Republic, that you may be able to afford to travel to some nearby countries! When planning trips for the semester, keep the following things in mind:
  - Ryanair is a great, extremely inexpensive option for flying to other countries in Europe. Tickets can be as cheap as 1 euro (yes, really!) if you buy them WAY in advance. As soon as you get to the Czech Republic (or even before going), I suggest logging onto ryanair.com and booking any trips a few months in advance (you'll get the cheapest prices that way). The flights will get more and more expensive as the dates get closer. Ryanair is a great way to see faraway European countries like

Spain.

- For flying Ryanair, don't expect to find flights out of Brno. You will likely have to take a bus (no more than \$7-9) to Bratislava, Slovakia or Prague to fly out. Keep in mind that RyanAir often goes to small airports outside of a city, as opposed to the main international airports.
- Before going to a city, use [hostelworld.com](http://hostelworld.com) to book a hostel. This is an inexpensive option for accommodations in cities you're visiting. Pack a backpack and enjoy meeting lots of new people!
- Finally, for traveling to any place in the Czech Republic or nearby cities (such as Vienna, Austria). Use the bus system! They are fast, reliable and inexpensive. You may use Student Agency (<http://www.studentagency.eu/>) to book or the Brno transportation website (<http://jizdnirady.idnes.cz/brno/spojeni/> - you'll have to choose "buses" in the timetable dropdown menu) to see times of other bus departures. For non-student agency buses, you'll have to go to the main train station and buy your ticket from the bus driver.

9. Things to do / see in Brno that the travel guide won't tell you about!

- Go to the StaroBrno brewery. It is just down the street from the Vysteviste tram stop and is the most famous beer in Brno. They have great authentic Czech food also!
- Go to the Brno Christmas market (located in the city center starting in December)
- Go to the Brno fruit and vegetable outdoor market- this market runs when the weather is warm and is located just off the corner of the city center.
- There is a GREAT pizza place on Ceska street in the city center (located near the H & M store). You walk up to a window and pay only 16 CKS (about \$1) for a piece of Czech pizza! It's a great thing to grab on your way to class. Beware: people in the CR eat ketchup on their pizza and the ketchup is very sweet! If you do not want ketchup, make sure to say "ne ketchup" when you order!

10. Best day trips 1: Telc and Karlovy Vary

- Telc: Telc (pronounced "telch" is a town in southern Moravia (east half of the Czech republic). It has some of the most unique architecture in the Czech Republic and can easily be seen in a day. Additionally, there is a fun and interesting story about why the city looks like it does! Go for a day and enjoy walking around the city and walking through the castle



- Karlovy Vary: Karlovy Vary is in the northwestern part of the Czech Republic near the German border. Karlovy Vary has a history as a “spa town” and was a popular destination for European royalty and Russian czars, as it sits on top of a natural spring. Take the bus there and take your swimsuit! There are numerous natural spring spas and a lot of very interesting architecture.
  - While you’re there, take the gondola to the top of the mountain outside of Karlovy Vary for an excellent view of the city



11. Best reasonably priced trip in surrounding countries:

- Vienna, Austria: As the musical capitol of the world, Vienna is a MUST-SEE. It only takes a few hours on the student agency bus to get here from Brno. While there, walk around the old parliament buildings and royal palaces from the time of the Austrian-Hungarian empire. Visit Mozart's home and go to the Vienna natural history museum, where many of Charles Darwin's research is on display, as Darwin lived a good portion of his life in Vienna. Also, make sure to take some more dressy clothing and go to the world- famous Vienna Opera House. Students can go about 30 minutes only and get a "standing-room only" opera ticket for under 5 euro!
  - Stay in the Hostel Hutteldorf – it is clean and has a good free breakfast! (can book on [hostelworld.com](http://hostelworld.com))



## 12. Logistical things for the Czech Republic and Brno

- Currency: The Czech Republic has not yet switched to the euro, as many of its European neighbors have. It uses the Czech koruna (pronounced “crown”). When I traveled to the CR in fall 2009, the exchange rate was about 16 CKS (Czech korunas) to \$1. Clothing is more expensive than it is in the United States, food is about the same price, and accommodations are much cheaper.
  - It is safe to use a debit card most places in the Czech Republic. The most convenient thing for me to do was to withdrawal from an ATM once a month (you can use your American debit card to do this). Just make sure your bank will not charge additional international ATM fees. The bank will convert using a more generous currency rate than the “currency exchange stores”
- Cell phones: If you are interested in having a cell phone in the Czech Republic, you will most likely need to buy one there (unless your American cell phone has a slot for a sim card). When you join the international student club, you will receive a sim card with 200 CKS preloaded onto it. I suggest only texting (not talking on the phone) as that will use less money on your card. To purchase a cell

phone, go to the TESCO store (mentioned above) and visit the used cell phone store on the first floor of TESCO. Here, you can purchase an inexpensive cell phone.

- Availability of English speakers in Brno: There is a much smaller quantity of English speakers in Brno than there is in Prague or other large European cities. Don't be afraid though! The people are very kind and will do their best to communicate with you. The best thing to do would be to have a Czech language phrase book and a Czech / English dictionary with you at most times, just in case!
- Safety: Brno is very safe. However, like any big city, you should avoid going places alone at night.