

# Olomouc

**Olomouc** has the second largest and second oldest historic preservation zone in the Czech Republic, (after Prague). Olomouc lies astride the Morava River and is surrounded by the fertile Haná plain. It was capital of Moravia until 1641 and is the fifth-largest city in the country, with approximately 103,000 inhabitants.).

## Understand

The first written mention of a settlement at Olomouc is almost 1000 years ago when the Kosmas Chronicle described a fortified castle watching over the important Morava river ford on the road between Krakow and Prague. The city today is the seat of the regional government, the Moravian archbishopric and the oldest university in Moravia, Palacky University (Universita Palackého).

Legend claims that the city was founded by Julius Caesar. It's unlikely that Caesar actually visited in person, but it is known that the city was originally a Roman military camp with the name Uilio Munsis (Julius' Hill). This name was gradually corrupted to its present form, Olomouc - which is pronounced 'Olo-mowts'. The Roman influence is a proud heritage of the city, and manifests itself in numerous areas.

Olomouc is doubtless the undiscovered gem of the Czech Republic. It is home to countless beautiful buildings, great culture (home of the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra), and hundreds of unique restaurants, bars, and pubs. Olomouc is totally off the radar of most tourists, feeling quietly normal and relaxed even on a nice day in July.

As the home to Palacky University, Olomouc is the country's largest student city by percentage of population. Palacky University is one of the largest and most prestigious universities in the country and only Charles' University in Prague has a longer history. During the academic year, the population of the city is increased by roughly 20,000 students, giving the city a vibrant feeling of life and energy.

Olomouc has been the seat of the Catholic Archbishop for almost 1,000 years, and thus has some of the most beautifully decorated churches in Central Europe - though they will not appear in many travel guides.

## See

Olomouc is an exploring sightseer's paradise. A good place to begin is the main square, with its huge **Town Hall** and the **Holy Trinity Column** (the largest column in Europe), which was inscribed on the [UNESCO World Heritage List] in 2000. It is the second largest historical square in the Czech Republic.

Don't miss the astronomical clock on the Town Hall. It is said to once have rivaled the beauty of Prague's, but was rebuilt and repainted at the beginning of the Communist regime to reflect worker's values.

- The **Holy Trinity Column** was built in the early 1700's and consecrated by the Empress Marie Theresa in 1754. With a height of 35 metres, it has dominated the main square ever since and was added to the UNESCO list of World Cultural Heritage in the year 2000. The column features sculptures of the Holy Trinity (predictably), the assumption of the Virgin Mary, all twelve apostles, and three virtues and the most important saints of the Baroque period. The base of the column contains a small chapel with amazing acoustics and the raised pedestal is a very nice place to sit and eat lunch.
- The renaissance **Olomouc Town Hall** occupies the centre of the main square. Its halls and chapel are accessible on guided tours and it's possible to climb the tower each day at 11am and 3pm. The ground floor of the town hall houses a gallery, restaurant and the tourist information office. On the north face is one of only two astronomical clocks in the country.
- The **Astronomical clock** was constructed in the 15th Century, but takes its present appearance from the 1950's, during a refurbishment to repair damage inflicted in WWII. Czechoslovakia was under Communist rule by then and the clock reflects the values of the day, the saints and angels being replaced by scientists, sportspeople and laborers. There is one other astronomical clock in the Czech lands (in the other ancient capital, Prague), but as a surviving example of Socialist -Realism, the Olomouc Astronomical clock is unique world-wide.
- **St. Wenceslas Cathedral**, a thousand-year-old cathedral, dominates the city's skyline with the tallest spire in Moravia, (second tallest in the Czech Republic) Pope John Paul II and Mother Tereza have both visited the cathedral and the holy relics of Saint Jan Sarkander are interred within.
- **St. Moritz church** is a beautifully preserved gothic church dating from 1398. One of its highlights is the massive Engler organ, one of the largest in Europe. The organ is the focus of the international music festival in September/October and the Christmas Music festival every year. The tower of the church offers a magnificent 360 degree view over the city and countryside and is accessed via a graceful double-spiral staircase.
- **St. Michael's church** appears quite plain from the outside. Upon entering, however, most first time visitors find their breath stolen away. Inside is one of the most beautiful baroque churches in Central Europe. One notable feature is a painting of an apparently pregnant Virgin Mary, quite rare in a catholic church. It's also possible to enter the old monastery attached to the side of the church and climb its bell tower.
- **Bezručovy Sady** is a lovely park that runs between the massive Fortress walls and the Mill channel, providing a great place to stroll and relax, also nice views of the University and St. Michael's Church
- **Basilica Minor on the Holy Hill** (*Svatý Kopeček*). This is one of the most popular pilgrimage churches in Central Europe, and was honored by Pope John

Paul II. The best way to reach it is to take the bus 11 to Svatý Kopeček from stand 'E' in front of the railway station.

- **The University** is spread throughout the city, but the most interesting parts to visitors are between the main square and St. Wenceslas' Cathedral. The fine arts faculty has a sunny terrace courtyard with a café and views over the city walls from above. Also notable is the law campus on 17th. November Ave., which was formerly the headquarters of the Communist party.
- **Baroque Fountains.** The city's impeccable series of six stone baroque fountains are all within easy walking distance of the Main Square. They are based on Roman themes, and depict Jupiter, Mercury, Triton, Neptune, Hercules, and the legendary founder of Olomouc, Julius Caesar.
- **Modern fountains.** There are also several remarkable modern fountains in Olomouc. The Arion fountain in the Main Square depicts the legend of a poet thrown overboard and saved by a dolphin. It was specially designed to allow easy access to the water and is a favorite among children. There are also two fountains located near the Main Railway Station, one of which 'dances' along to recorded classical music.
- **The Archbishops' palace** on Wurmova Ulice is open to the public just one day per week. It was in this building on 2 December 1848, that [Franz Joseph] acceded to the throne of the [Austro-Hungarian Hapsburg Empire].
- **The Premyslid palace** has recently undergone a thorough restoration and now houses the extensive Archdiocese museum. The building is the oldest in Olomouc and much of the original stonework has been exposed. On the upper floors, the circular chapel of St Barbara is a highlight. Entry is free of charge every Wednesday and Sunday. The museum is closed every Monday.
- **Hradisko Monastery** is the oldest in Moravia and its location on the banks of the Morava river, just upstream from the orthodox church, make it a pleasant 20-minute walk from the cathedral end of town. The monastery building has belonged to the military since the monastic order was banned by [Emperor Joseph II] in [1784] and it's now open to visitors only on Thursdays.

## Do

- **Walking tours** Perhaps the best thing you can do while in Olomouc is to join up with a walking tour. [Olomouc Tours](#) offer walking and cycling tours throughout the year and even a FREE! introductory tour in July and August. The tours visit little known places like the torture chamber beneath the Sarkander chapel and the old communist party headquarters out near the Morava River.
- **The theatre** in the square is home to the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as numerous musicals, operas, and plays. The price for tickets is difficult to beat. Be warned that the dialogue will usually be either in Czech or the original language.
- **The Zoo** on the Holy Hill is also worth a visit. It is located near the basilica. There are pointers from the basilica to the ZOO or ask the locals for directions. You can also take the bus line 11 to the terminal station. The ZOO is located in woods abundant in edible mushrooms suitable for pleasant walks.

- The **Museum of Modern Art** (Muzeum moderního umění) is the pale gray building across from the baroque Lady Mary of the Snows church. The permanent collection is OK, but the temporary exhibitions are often very interesting and well worth the 50Kc entrance fee (free on Wednesdays and Sundays) There's a small lookout tower at the top which is included in the entry price of the museum.
- The **History and Nature museum** (Vlastivědné Muzeum) is housed in the former Clarisian convent on Náměstí Republiky (Republic Square). There are the usual collection of rocks and artifacts, and an interesting exhibit of the flora and fauna of the region, but probably the best things to see are in the old Olomouc section; woodcuts and prints from previous centuries, weapons, armour, traditional dress and many of the original religious figures from older versions of the astronomical clock. The museum is closed every Monday.
- The **Botanic Gardens** are in two parts; the outdoor exhibits and rose gardens are across the stream from Bezruč gardens, which is the park below the tall city walls (behind St Michael's church). The greenhouses are behind the Flora exhibition complex; near where the footbridge goes over the main road to connect the two parks together. The main tropical greenhouse also holds large aquariums and terrariums with a range of alligators, snakes, piranhas, and large furry spiders.
- **City Walls** A series of defensive fortifications and moats once completely enclosed Olomouc. The best preserved parts are visible from the Bezruč gardens, below St. Michael's church. The water barracks that today house the Russian and Irish pubs and the 24hr espresso bar were also part of the system. There were also sixteen outlying forts, some of which still exist. Most still belong to the military and are off limits to the public, but one is home to 'Exit discotheque', and another is within the grounds of the botanic gardens. Enter just across the mill channel from Bezruč gardens, via the footbridge guarded by the four statues of Hercules.
- **Commercial Art Galleries** Czech and Moravian artists produce a lot of very unusual ceramic/pottery pieces and small works of art, which make great original souvenirs or gifts, and there are several shops/galleries in Olomouc filled with them. Some of the best are situated on Ztracena Ulice, which heads off the square from the Caesar fountain. Next to Cafe Caesar in the town hall building is Gallery Caesar. It almost always exhibits contemporary art from local Olomouc or Czech artists. Gallery Mona Lisa (also a café), on the corner of the square near the Arion fountain (turtle fountain) is a similar exhibition space focused on contemporary art. In the beautiful Villa Primavesi right next to St Michael's Church there is another small gallery worth visiting if only for the chance to wander through the entrance hall of this historic house. On the top floor of the local art museum there is a small exhibit about Villa Primavesi, its history and role in the Art Nouveau movement.
- **The Ice Hockey stadium** is on Hynaisova, behind the supermarket. Olomouc is more of a football than a hockey town, but Ice Hockey is a great spectator sport, a real piece of local life and probably the best two hours' entertainment you will find for under 50Kc.

- **The Letní Kino (summer cinema)** is only open in the warmer months and shows films four nights a week, beginning as soon as it gets dark enough. The entrance is from Pekarska Ul. You can't see the cinema from the street but it's the same entrance as the mini-golf and you will walk past a large outdoor beer garden before finding the entrance to the cinema. The cinema is an amphitheatre that can hold 3000 people. You can see it quite well on the town model in the main square.

## Events

- **Flora Olomouc** In Spring, you should not miss the **Flora Fairgrounds** and nearby parks full of flowers. Check the [Flora Fairgrounds site](#) for information about exhibitions.
- The **Easter Music Festival** involves performances of international musicians in the cathedral and largest churches of Olomouc.
- **Academia Film** is an international festival of documentary films. Most venues are close to the fine arts faculty of the university, with some being shown outdoors on a screen in the main square.
- **Dvořak's Olomouc** is a series of concerts of classical music taking place during May and June. The Moravian Philharmonic and visiting orchestras perform on the square and in the churches.
- The **Song Festival** in early May gathers choirs from as far as Singapore and the United States to perform and compete. The choirs often burst spontaneously into song as they walk together around the streets and squares and it's a delightful time to be in Olomouc.
- **Olomouc City Festival** in June is ten days of concerts, theatre, sculpture and ceramics demonstrations, a whipped cream battle, and at least two lamplight processions.
- The **Marshall Radetzky Celebrations** on the first weekend of September draw military bands from across Europe to honor the legendary Austrian general, onetime commander of the Olomouc Fortress and subject of Johann Strauss' immortal 'Radetzky March'.
- **International Organ Music Festival** is organized by the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra and takes place in various venues around the city, including on the largest pipe-organ in central Europe-in St Moritz church.
- **Crossroads** is a festival of Central European cultural exchange between artists, writers, musicians and translators from neighboring countries. For the public there are readings, films and concerts.
- **Traditional Christmas Markets** take over the main square from the beginning of December. There are free concerts every day, roasted chestnuts, mulled wine and other warming foods and traditional crafts ranging from blacksmith-work to the finest beeswax and honey products.

## Get in

### By train

From Prague, the easiest way to get to Olomouc is to take the direct train that leaves every few hours. Depending on the type of the train, the journey can take from 2 hours and 15 minutes to 3 hours and 30 minutes. Always state the type of the train at the cash desk. If you are not sure, tell the salesperson the time of departure. Note that the Pendolino departs from Prague Holešovice, not the Main Station. If you are travelling in a group (two or more passengers are considered a group) ask for a group ticket, which entitles you to a 30% discount on domestic tickets. You should receive the discount automatically without requesting it, but if you want to be sure, 'group discount' in Czech is 'sleva pro skupiny'. You are required to pay a small surcharge when travelling by Intercity and Eurocity trains.

Another good way to pay the fare is to obtain the "Kilometrická banka", a small book with prepaid 2000 kilometers. The route from Prague to Olomouc is 250 km long. Up to three passengers can use one KB and two kids (6-15 yrs) are considered one passenger. You don't have to pay any surcharge when travelling with KB. You can use KB when going by Pendolino, but you have to buy a seat reservation. During peak times (Friday and Sunday afternoon) it is advisable to obtain a seat reservation.

From Krakow in Poland the best connection leaves early in the morning and travels direct to Olomouc in around four hours. The later connections involve a change at Katowice and takes around an hour longer.

From Vienna, the best connections take just under three hours to reach Olomouc and involve a change of trains at either Breclav or Prerov. Trains leave Vienna from either Sudbahnhof (south) or Wien Nord (north) stations.

The best place to check timetables and connections are the **online timetables** <http://jizdnirady.idnes.cz/vlakyautobusy/spojeni/> . Fares for international journeys originating in the Czech Republic can be checked on the online **tariff calculator** [http://www.jizdenka.cz/\(S\(buqbtsvxgsio2hnhxwfc3vu\)\)/IT.aspx?Lang=69](http://www.jizdenka.cz/(S(buqbtsvxgsio2hnhxwfc3vu))/IT.aspx?Lang=69) .

## By bus

Travelling by bus can be cheaper for individuals but is usually most suitable for shorter trips within the Czech Republic. Buses are operated by the official government transport authority and a private company, **Student Agency** [www.studentagency.cz/](http://www.studentagency.cz/) . Student Agency offer competitive prices on some journeys, their buses are modern and extra services such as tea, coffee and films are included.

Some journeys however are more suited to trains. From Olomouc to Prague, the train trip is 250km. The bus trip is 286km, because the route leads all the way down to Brno, before turning up towards Prague on the D1 freeway, which is notorious for traffic jams at busy times of the week.

## Get around

Public transportation is cheap and easy to use in Olomouc. Ticket machines stand at every major bus and tram stop and tickets are also available from newspaper kiosks. A single trip ticket is 10 Kč. If you have the ISIC card, the one-day pass costs under 20 Kč. This pass will work on both trams and buses. Be sure to insert the ticket into the time-stamper as soon as entering the bus or tram. You only have to do this once.

Ticket Controllers will sometimes ride the trams and buses dressed in plain clothes. They will show you a badge, and this is the indication for you to show them your ticket. They do not usually speak English. Controllers will sometimes stand at the tram exits at the most popular stops. The fine for riding without a ticket is 400 Kč.

## By tram

It's easiest to get around using the tram system. Leaving the train station, the trams 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 will all take you to the city centre. Usually, you would get off at the stops Koruna (2, 4, 6), Náměstí Hrdinů (4, 6, 7) or Okresní soud (1).

## By taxi

Taxis gather in the CarPark at the front of the train station, and the ride from there to the centre should be around 100Kc. The free-call number is 800 223030

## Eat

There are dozens of excellent restaurants in the city, and most have English menus. Local favorites include Cafe Caesar, which is located in the Neo-renaissance Town Hall Building on the main square. Hanacka Hospoda and Pod Limpou are more traditional Moravian Restaurants, and are located in the nearby lower square. On Riegrova Ul. is the Svatovaclavsky Pivovar, which has the large vats for making the beer actually by the bar...excellent beer and food, and with an upstairs section reserved for non-smokers.

- **The Hanácká Hospoda** (pron- 'hanatska hospoda') is your best chance to try the traditional food of the region and it comes in big portions, for not much money. They also have a beer hall in the basement but the main restaurant is on street level. The Menu is in the local Hana dialect with a Czech translation, but is also available in English and German. Haná is the name of the culturally unique region surrounding Olomouc, and Hospoda just means pub. An example from the menu is "Chicken-a-la-Duck" Half a roast chicken with cabbage and potato dumplings.
- **Cafe Caesar** serves pizzas and pastas and is located on the ground floor of the Town Hall. In summer they have a large outdoor area right on the main square, which is the perfect place to pass a gentle summer's evening.
- **U Andela** is one of the best restaurants in Olomouc. The menu and wine list are extensive, and the rear rooms of the restaurant look out from the top of the city walls across the park. The interior is decorated with lots of interesting antiques

- and hundreds of potted plants. An example from the menu is the "Dinosaur Steak", which is a chicken fillet on top of a pork cutlet on top of a beef steak.
- **Restaurant Nostalgie** has Olomouc's best vegetarian options. Next door to U Andela (At the Angel's) its rooftop terrace also looks out across the park. Examples from the menu are: Cabbage leaves stuffed with mushrooms and rice, topped with cheese. Grilled eggplant with yogurt sauce, Baked broccoli with cheese sauce and almonds, Wild rice and sautéed mushrooms, topped with cheese.
  - **Green Bar** is a vegetarian lunch canteen, just a few paces from the main square along Ztracena Ul. It's self serve and the food all costs the same. Just load your plate and pass it to the girl at the checkout, she'll weigh it and tell you how much you owe. The food's good, the price is a bargain, and it's Olomouc's best vegetarian option.
  - **Pod Limpou** is a beer hall in a gothic stone cellar that serves traditional Czech specialties like pork knuckle and roast duck, sometimes grilled over the open fire. They also have large outdoor area on the lower square in the summer months, with live music two nights a week. Slovakian Halušky with sheep's cheese 90Kc, Lunch specials include soup.
  - **Hlava 21** is a new restaurant on Uhelna Ulice. The space is clean and modern and the well-priced and delicious meals keep the place busy. They also have an extensive selection of cocktails. Chicken with broccoli and steamed vegetables.
  - **Restaurant Pizza U Jana** This is a little way out of the centre, past the Bus Station, but it serves some of the best food in the city, especially the steaks.

## Drink

**Wine** is the lifeblood of Moravia. Look into any 'vinarna' (wine bar) or 'Vinný sklep' (wine cellar) and you'll see an array of characters partaking of the nectar of the vines. Most vineyards are in South Moravia but that has no affect on the drinking abilities of northern Moravians. You can buy good Moravian wine for a picnic from a vinny sklep in plastic bottles that you either bring yourself or you can find there.

If anyone has told you that Moravian wine is inferior to French or German wine, don't believe them. The taste and aroma of Moravian wines vary from their Western European cousins because they are made from totally different varieties of grapes. Svatovavrinecké is a strong, drier red wine, Modrý Portugal is a medium dry and Frankovka is a sweeter red wine. Good white wines are Muller Thurgau and Veletinské.

**Beer** The best beer in Olomouc is available from one of the Microbreweries making their own beer on the premises.

- **St Wenceslas Brewery** (Svatovavclavsky pivovar) on Riegrova Ul. is a cavernous bar serving five brews including wheat and cherry beer. The walls are covered with murals depicting traditional brewery life and processes and an area is set aside upstairs for non-smokers. The food is also very good and lunch specials start from 60Kc.

- **Moritz** is a completely non-smoking microbrewery, which is impeccably furnished in an early 20th century style. Large internal windows allow patrons a view of the brewing room.

## Bars

- **Vertigo** is a great subterranean bar, packed with local and international students, and mock cave paintings on the wall. It's a good place to meet people because you almost always have to share a table.
- **Jazz Club Tibet** has regular program of concerts. Everything from Jazz to Blues to funk to reggae.
- **9a** is a spotless new bar that is popular with university students. And rock climbers. There's a climbing wall in one of the back rooms.
- **Rasputin** is a Russian themed bar in the water barracks, the long low brick building beside Freedom avenue (Tr.Svobody), which was once part of the city walls.
- **Belmondo** is one of the better places in the centre for dancing. Also in the water barracks, there's a cover charge only on Friday and Saturday nights. Regular and visiting DJ's
- **Klub 15 Minut** is in the gothic cellars beneath the university library. It's one of the best live music venues in the city.

## Sleep

You can find really cheap accommodation in the student dorms in the outer suburb of Neredin, between the airport and the cemetery. There are always a few vacant rooms. Unfortunately there is not much information in English about the dorms, but the tourist information office should be able to help.

Another cheap option is the railway station hostel, along the tracks to the north of the main station. The old communist era building is run down, and neither the hostel nor the area around the train station can be recommended for females travelling alone.

- **Poets' Corner Hostel** on Sokolska offers the cheapest beds in the centre of Olomouc. An independent hostel that receives consistently high reviews, it is open year round and can be booked on any of the major booking websites, or contact them directly. <http://www.hostelolomouc.com/>

## Get out

The most enjoyable way of exploring the Olomouc region is by bike. You can rent a bike at the Main Railway station and follow one of many well marked bicycle tracks. You should not miss the woods and meadows along the river Morava between Olomouc and

Litovel The best time for the visit is Spring. There are carpets of white flowers everywhere. You can purchase a map of the tracks in some news stands and in every bookstore.

There are a lot of castles and castle ruins in the vicinity. Most of them can be visited by bus.

For more info see: [www.wikitravel.org](http://www.wikitravel.org)

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