

Karlštejn Castle

Karlštejn Castle is located approximately 20km west of Prague. It is the most visited and one of the most beautiful castles in the Czech Republic. Construction of the castle was completed in 1365 under the reign of Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV. There is a national forest around the castle with some very nice hiking. Nearby in the village of **Svatý Jan Pod Skalou** you can visit a beautiful monastery including the 'holy cave' that it was built upon.

Understand

Karlštejn sits well up on a hill overlooking the Berounka river and what used to be a quaint Czech village

While Karlštejn is one of the most beautiful castles in the Czech Republic, it is also the most exploited by the tourist industry. The village below the castle is filled with tacky souvenir stalls, very expensive restaurants, and to complete the carnival an 'erotic city' porn shop. Fortunately you can make your visit a lot more enjoyable by taking 12km or 20km hiking trips in the unexploited forests of the Český kras protected area around Karlštejn, hopefully relieving you of some of your unease after visiting the Castle itself.

Get in

You can take a train from the main station (Hlavní nádraží) in Prague to Karlštejn or from Smichov train station (see time schedule at <http://jizdnirady.idnes.cz>). Trains run every 30 min. For groups of 3 or larger the cost for a return ticket is 30kč per person.

Return tickets for a single person will cost 61Kč.

Trains run every hour, you can pick them up either in Srbsko, Beroun, or in Karlštejn. If you are in **Svatý Jan Pod Skalou**, you can hike to Srbsko (8 km), take a taxi to the Beroun train station, or take a bus that runs from the village to Prague every two hours or so. Check the bus schedule at the bus stop or ask at the restaurant when the next bus will be to Prague. The taxi to the Beroun station is the easiest option.

Get around

Everything is within walking distance. When you arrive at Karlštejn you cannot actually see the castle but just follow the flow of tourists and you'll get there. The village starts about 300 meters from the train stop, the castle is a short (but slightly tiring) half kilometer hike up a large hill

Do

- **The Castle**, www.hradkalstejn.cz.

All of the tourists aside, the castle itself is really impressive. Once you arrive at the Castle you can enter within the walls for free but access to the inside of the castle requires paying for a guided tour (200kč). The English tour of the main rooms is approximately 1 PM, but that is subject to change. Call in advance to determine the exact times. There is also a 70-minute tour option that visits other rooms, including the Chapel of the Holy Cross.

Unless you are particularly interested in Ancient Holy Roman Empire history you may want to take only the 50-minute tour, or limit yourself to walking on the castle parapets, enjoying the view and reading the outdoor information boards with the castle's history. This will give you more time for hiking to **Svatý Jan Pod Skalou**, which is a bit more authentic Czech experience.

- **Svatý Jan Pod Skalou**

The name of this monastery translates to "Saint John under the rock", which is quite an apt description for the monastery. The monastery was built on a natural spring at the base of a 100m sheer cliff (the cliff being crowned with a large cross). Prior to the monastery being built a "saintly" hermit took up residence in a deep cave next to the spring where he "fought great battles with satanic spirits." The monastery is open daily, donations are requested at the door (but not obligatory). Don't miss the little door directly opposite from the main entrance, this is the entrance to the 'holy' cave. The cave contains 5 large rooms, all of which have been modified for religious purposes. One part becoming a crypt, another having a large altar, others for saintly relics, etc. Before entering pick up one of the laminated explanation papers laid out on the pews next to the door. They are done in all of the major European languages and explain what each room in the cave was use for. Outside the monastery if you look around you'll find the natural spring located in a small grotto just around the corner from the Monastery entrance. The spring water is drinkable and quite tasty.

- **Hiking**

A trip to Karlštejn starts with a trip to the castle, which was the seat of Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV. The 50-minute tour is delightful, and well worth the time. There is a lovely and picturesque hike available to the Svatý Jan Pod Skalou monastery through the Český kras protected area (Bohemian Karst or Czech Karst in English). While at times rugged (it actually is 12 km, and not the 8 km marked), it is more than doable for those who are in good shape and have the proper equipment. It begins at the castle walls (look for the red markings near the trailhead at the castle walls).

A caveat: the hike is likely to be too challenging if you are not in good physical condition and lack proper hiking shoes. Specifically, the path meanders through forest, stream,

several steep uphill, some slippery rocks and tricky downhill. There are numerous locations during the hike where you have no cellular service, and you are unlikely to see another human being for kilometers at a time.

Another thing to remember is that the path markings while clear after some experience reading them, first appear rudimentary, so always follow the red markings on the trees. The green trail marks also are fine--they track the red markings until approximately 1km before the monastery, and there is a clear sign marking the turnoff to the monastery.

Once you arrive at the monastery (which closes at 4 PM), you have the choice to take another hike to the town of Srbsko, where you catch the train back to Prague. The hike from the monastery to Srbsko actually is 8km, and not 5km, as indicated. The yellow signs purportedly indicating the path to Srbsko are nearly impossible to find. Alternatively, if you call a taxi from the local restaurant in Svatý Jan Pod Skalou (75 meters from the monastery, on the right), this is a 12km hike, punctuated by round-trip train rides and taxis. This option is highly recommended, and there is someone at the restaurant that speaks English. If you choose to hike to Srbsko, be prepared for an all day, 20 km hike. If you do decide to hike to Srbsko (and assuming you can find the yellow signs), the Srbsko train station is directly across the blue bridge. There is no place to purchase tickets. Those can be purchased on the train, however. Although you will see little mention of it on the signs, the town of Beroun is closer and larger, making for an easier and faster train journey back to Prague. The best choice is to ask the manager of the pub near the monastery to request a taxi to take you to the Beroun train station.

- **Rock Climbing** Some of the best rock climbing near Prague is in Srbsko and Svatý Jan Pod Skalou.
- **Little and big America mine** For the more adventurous, there are also several open pit abandoned mines that have filled up with water and have become a popular place for Czechs to go swimming. They are a bit difficult to find but if you ask around and have a good map you should be able to find them. Be warned that they are officially closed to the public because access to them is somewhat dangerous.

Buy

Karlštejn has shops selling Czech garnet, Bohemian crystal, tasteless t-shirts, wares from local blacksmiths, etc.

If you want to buy food for hiking there is a **small village-style grocery store** about a third the way up the hill. It is located on your left (heading up the hill). Don't buy any food, drinks or water from the small shops at the base of the village. They have extremely over inflated prices, a bottle of water costs 50kč. Find the small village style grocery store!!!

Eat

Around the castle there are plenty of expensive restaurants but you'd be best to avoid them. If you are not planning on hiking and want to eat in Karlštejn, your best option is to get on the red marked trail (trail head is right next to the entrance in the castle walls at the top of the hill, marked with a red and white square marker usually painted on a tree or wall), walk down the trail (going down hill) about 300 meters, you'll come to a road on which there is a nice authentic Czech pub.

In **Svatý Jan Pod Skalou** there is a very nice pub 75 meters from the monastery. The prices are reasonable, the beer is good and the food is very Czech.

Sleep

If you want to camp, there is a very crowded campsite near Karlštejn but it is not recommended that you stay here. If you hop on the train and go one stop further down there is a very nice campsite in the village of Srbsko (about 5km from Karlštejn) with a little outdoor restaurant serving traditional 'klobasa' and other Czech camping foods. You can also walk to the campsite along the Berounka river.

Get out

- **Beroun**
- **Křivoklat**
- **Prague**

For more info see: www.wikipedia.org

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