



Focus on the CZECH REPUBLIC School Program

“If is an ugly word, though I have to say, that if it weren’t for my AFS experience, my life would be completely different. Not that it would be more or less happy, it would certainly be less useful, since tolerance is, luckily, catchy.... I am very sure, that if there wouldn’t have been an AFS experience; I wouldn’t hold my today’s position.”

*Doc. MUDr. Jaroslava Moserová, DrSc., Senator in Czech Republic
participant to USA 1947-49*

Czechs are said to be the most urbane and liberal of Central Europeans, which in recent years has helped elevate Prague, capital of the Czech Republic, into a mecca for contemporary artists working in all media. The famous and the unknown arrive from around the world to display their efforts in a city crowded with centuries of distinguished architecture—from gothic and baroque to art nouveau and cubist. Throughout the Republic—in Prague as well as in fashionable spas and rustic hills that shelter castles, caves and medieval towns—Czechs are notably down-to-earth, egalitarian and hospitable to visitors.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Czech Republic has been in existence since 1947 when it sent abroad some of the first AFS exchange students. Unfortunately, it had to cease activity from 1948 until after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Today, AFS volunteers across the country work hard year-round to provide the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the school year, AFS Czech Republic hosts approximately 45 AFSers from as many as 11 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in the Czech Republic

When you land in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, you and your fellow AFSers will pass through customs and be met by AFS Czech Republic staff and volunteers who will take you to your first Czech orientation.

Arrival Orientation

The arrival orientation camp, organized by staff and run by volunteers, is an eight-day stay that will help you prepare for life in the Czech Republic. This orientation includes five lessons of Czech language. This camp will give you a chance to relax, meet other AFSers from around the world, ask questions and learn about AFS in the Czech Republic as well as about Czech culture.

There will be a one-day trip to a local attraction, such the famous Karlstejn Castle, where you will discover one of the thousands of historical sites in the country. You will also learn how to barbecue in the Czech style. To present a bit of your national culture and your own personal talents, there will be a talent show one evening.

After this week of meeting new friends, you will be picked up by your host family and travel to your new home.

Living in the Czech Republic

Lifestyle and Family Living

Czech host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives. Students are generally placed with traditional two-parent families in a variety of settings. These can include the major urban areas such as Prague and Brno, small towns and the rural areas of both Bohemia and Moravia.

Families are hospitable and friendly. They are usually close-knit, and it is not uncommon for members of the extended family to be living at home, especially grandparents. Like most Europeans, Czechs must deal with limited space. This influences the Czechs' perception of distances. Even a one-hour drive is a significant undertaking. On the other hand, Czechs like to travel within the country as well as internationally. Building and housing space is also influenced by considerations of geography. The vast majority of the population, even in small towns, lives in apartment block buildings. Czechs are very conscious of the cleanliness of their private environments. When entering a home, shoes must be taken off. It is considered bad manners to step in one's shoes on something used for sitting, or to put up your feet with shoes on.

Often both parents in a family work outside the home. Parents are protective of their children and expect them to help with the housework and to keep them informed of when and where they are going. Many Czechs leave the city to spend the weekend visiting family and friends or to stay at a summerhouse or cottage, called *chata* or *chalupa*. Gardening is a common pastime, and some families grow most of their vegetables.

Modesty is an important value. For example, a proper response to a compliment is not to say thank you but to disagree. The elderly have certain prerogatives by virtue of their age such as expecting younger people to relinquish their seats on public transportation.

Dress and Appearance

The Czech proverb *šaty delaj cloveka* (clothes make a man) is very appropriate. In general, Czechs frown on shabby or untidy clothing and disregard for appearance.

However, they tend to dress less formally for work and more formally for entertainment. Even a visit to the movies or a restaurant, not to mention the theater, requires better clothing. Wearing jeans in an opera house is a surefire way of identifying you as a tourist.

Czech teenagers like to dress casually. They wear T-shirts and jeans or corduroys. You should also bring a pair of comfortable walking shoes. For the winter months, you will need a warm waterproof coat, heavy boots, sweaters, mittens and warm socks. For special occasions more formal dress is expected: for girls a dress or blouse and skirt; for boys a jacket, slacks and tie.

Students are not required to wear uniforms at school.

Diet and Meals

Czech families love to eat. Czech cuisine is basically Central European, with German, Hungarian and Polish influences. Meat is the main dish, along with big portions of dumplings, potatoes or rice topped with a thick sauce, and a heavily cooked vegetable or sauerkraut. The standard quick meal is *knedlo-zelo-vepro* (dumplings, sauerkraut and roast pork). Caraway seed, bacon and lots of salt are common flavorings. Bread, rolls and cheese are popular too. There is not much emphasis on vegetables and fruits, and so, vegetarians may find the country difficult. Many restaurants advertise “meatless” meals, which may, however, contain ham (*sunka*) or be made with lard (*sádlo*). It is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods, to prepare separate food for themselves or to raid the refrigerator.

Table etiquette is very important. It is considered a sign of bad upbringing not to use your knife and fork in the continental manner. Making slurping noises while eating is impolite.

Make the Czech cuisine a part of your discoveries. You will soon begin to like it, especially if you get to sample a grandmother’s cooking.

School

AFS students are placed in either public or private high schools called gymnasiums. These schools are intended to prepare students for further academic education. AFSers are placed in the junior class, the second-to-last year of high school. The senior class or last year is oriented to preparing Czech students for their final examinations to qualify for entrance into university.

AFSers take a special language course, which is designed to help them learn the Czech language quickly and to help them integrate into the culture. Other courses available include German, English, history, physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics and physical education. Schools try to adjust students’ schedules so that the course content is not too heavily dependent on their Czech language ability. Even though Czech can be difficult, a lot of AFSers take State exams in the Czech language.

High schools usually have 500-600 students with class sizes of 25-30 and run from September to June. Classes are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Czech students, your future schoolmates, are very friendly and ready to help. Students are expected to attend classes regularly. You will not be graded, but evaluated verbally. At the end of your program you can receive a certificate of completion.

Teen Life

Czechs enjoy various sports like hiking, bicycling and swimming in the summer and skiing in the winter. They also like to visit historic sites, go to the theater and art galleries and participate in cultural events. Teenagers can participate in extracurricular activities at school such as sports, drama and computer sciences. In addition, community and youth organizations organize many out-of-school activities.

Traditionally, Czechs are early risers. Shops open at 7 a.m. and offices at 8. Factory workers often clock in even earlier. This practice dates to the 19th century insomniac emperor Franz Josef II who liked to start business at 6 in the morning. This practice trickled down to the entire population.

At the other end of the day, everything closes early. This affects the average Czech's daily schedule. You may get up at 6–7 a.m. and start school between 7 and 8. Lunch is between 12 and 1. You may get home at 4 or 5 p.m., have dinner at 6 or 7 and go to bed at 10 or 11. If you want to socialize with Czechs you have to adapt to this schedule. Even your Czech friends probably will not go out later than 8 p.m. and often as early as 6 p.m. Parties rarely run past midnight; typically people go home around 11 p.m.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Czech Republic will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) to talk about expectations for the future program and experiences from their pasts. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

Around the Christmas holidays, an orientation will allow you to renew friendships, share experiences and ask questions. You will learn how to prepare a traditional Czech Christmas: bake cookies, decorate a Christmas tree and sing carols.

One highlight, organized by AFS Czech Republic, is a trip to Moravia. You will stay in a simple speleologist's house, cook by yourself with other exchange students, visit castles and caves and relax in the beautiful natural environment.

Then at the End-of-Stay orientation, you will get together with other AFSers right before you return home. The End-of-Stay is about looking back at your exchange sojourn and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

During your time in the Czech Republic, there will be additional activities held by your local AFS chapter, community, friends, church, family members and relatives. If you take the initiative and express your genuine interest, you will discover the never-ending Czech hospitality.

Language

Czech is the language of the Czech Republic. As mentioned earlier, you will have an intensive five-hour course at the arrival orientation. We also recommend taking

additional private classes in your new community, which are usually offered at special language schools.

It is very important to distinguish between formal and informal language and among situations to determine appropriate forms of address. Different forms of address are used even among people of same age.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in the Czech Republic, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Czech Republic. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to join, but they may pay for some of your personal activities. When you do things with your friends or alone, such as going to a movie or taking special lessons, the related expense is your responsibility.

Czech young people are not used to carrying or spending large amounts of money. AFS recommends that \$1,300 in traveler's checks or on a credit card should cover a year's worth of spending needs. But remember, spending more than your peers may create a distance between you and them. It is wise to learn to spend as they do.

Safety and Support

Like your country, the Czech Republic can be a safe place if you are aware of the potential dangers and act accordingly. Host families, as well as AFS Czech Republic, educate students to enable them to have a safe and rewarding experience.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Czech. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Czech Republic may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for the Czech Republic (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant your medical expenses are covered for illness or accident injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country. Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

The Czech Republic is located in Central Europe and is bordered by the Slovak Republic on the east, Austria on the south, Germany on the west and north and Poland on the north. It is a beautiful country surrounded by mountains and made up of farmlands and forests.

Administratively the Czech Republic is divided into two main parts: Bohemia with the capital city Prague and Moravia with the capital city Brno.

The climate is moderate. The average winter temperature is around -1°C(30°F). In summer, the weather is warm but not hot.

Population

The population is approximately 10.4 million. Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic and has a population of 1.2 million.

Government

In January 1993, Czechoslovakia split into two sovereign states: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy with a president as head of state.

Religion

The Czech people are predominantly Roman Catholic (39.2%). Other religions represented within the country are Protestant (4.6%), Orthodox (3%) and others.

Czech Pride

Ice hockey, soccer, classical music and opera, jazz, humor, ingenuity, history, science, film, architecture, food and beer. Famous people born in the Czech Republic include Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State, born in Moravia; Sigmund Freud, Austrian psychologist born in Příbor;; and Tom Stoppard, English dramatist born in Zlín. One of the country's best-known citizens is Vaclav Havel, chief initiator of the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the Czech Republic's former President and holder of numerous prestigious international prizes for his literary work, civic and human rights activities.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving home have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Czech words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in the Czech Republic, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about the Czechs and their culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to the Czech Republic. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Czech. If you do not know alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Czech Republic will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information before you leave home.

Czech people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Czech

- The Czech town, Vêstonice, is the world's oldest settlement. Archeologists believe it has been inhabited since 27,000 B.C., when Europe was still in the Ice Age.
- The world's largest ancient palace is Prague Castle, in the Czech Republic's capital city. It was built in the 9th Century and covers 18 acres.
- The world's longest traverse—a rope stretched above a canyon or a river—measured 953.6 m. (3128.3 ft.) across the Elbe River in the Czech Republic. On July 3, 1998, Czech cave explorer Zdenek Kadlec inched his way across it, hand over hand, suspended in a harness. The feat took him an hour.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival) 15y to 18y 6m

Country data

Size	78,866 sq.km
	30,449 sq.mi
Population	10,264,212
Official Language	Czech
Government	Parliamentary democracy

Currency Czech Koruna, divided into 100 halers

Useful website www.bohemica.com

AFS Czech Republic website www.afs.cz

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>