

# Czech Cuisine



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*Come and taste!*

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## Introduction

*Travelling is by far the best way to acquaint oneself with different countries. Needless to say getting to know the basic features of the culture and traditions of the visited country also involves tasting the specialities of its national cuisine. Sometimes this may require some courage on the visitor's part, sometimes it may provide agreeable palate sensations to be remembered for years. In our opinion, a piece of expert advice may always come in handy. And this is the aim of the publication you have in your hands.*



# Going Back in Time

*Nature has been generous to the original inhabitants of the Czech Republic giving them a wealth of gifts to live on, including an abundance of fish in the rivers and game in the forests, as well as fertile fields. Besides that, poultry, cattle and sheep breeding thrive in the Czech lands. Popular meals included soups, various kinds of gruel and dishes prepared from pulses. The Czech diet was varied and substantial, and before long it was supplemented by beer and wine since vine-grapes have from time immemorial been cultivated successfully in the warm climate of the Moravian and Bohemian lowlands. No wonder then that the art of cooking was one of the most valued crafts and skilled cooks have been held in great esteem.*

*Present generations of cooks by no means lag behind their predecessors, as can be shown by the numerous awards they have brought from various international gastronomical events and competitions.*

*Let us now explore the dishes currently popular in Czechia, which, from a historical point of view, consists of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. In the course of centuries, the Czech cuisine has been exposed to influences from neighbouring countries. As part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy for two centuries (until 1918), the Kingdom of Bohemia had readily responded to the influences which spread from the monarchy's other members. As a result the Austrian, Hungarian, Czech and German cuisines feature a number of common dishes, for example, goulash, Wiener schnitzel and gnocchi.*





The traditional Czech cookery is distinguished by a great variety of dishes, an impressive spectrum of flavours, the wide use of lean and fat streaked pork, and a rich choice of meals and side dishes prepared from flour. Pride of place among the dishes from flour is held by dumplings, a unique phenomenon of Czech cuisine. Dumplings once formed the basic component of Czech fare, as they, along with tasty sauces, served to satiate the hunger of hard working peasants at times when meat only appeared on their tables during holidays. Besides that, folk inventiveness has contributed to the development of a variety of dishes prepared from potatoes. Sauces play quite an exceptional role in the Czech cooking, since they form an indispensable part of a range of meals, especially in combination with meat and the aforementioned dumplings. Another characteristic feature of the Czech cuisine is the frequent use of cabbage (sauerkraut). Prepared in various ways, cabbage is served warm as a side dish to a number of meals.

Then there are several traditional dishes associated with various holidays:

**The Easter Holiday** - cross buns (*mazance*), a kind of tea-cake with a cross marked on top. Prepared from fine raised dough, they contain raisins and are sprinkled with shredded almonds. Other characteristic Easter dishes are doughnuts (*koblihy*),



hard-boiled eggs with their shells painted in colourful designs, and a special stuffing prepared from bread rolls and spring nettles.

**Christmas:** Christmas Eve (December 24) - fillets of carp (dipped in egg batter and bread crumbs and fried), and potato salad (*smažený kapr* and *bramborový salát*) are indispensable parts of the festive menu. Some families also prepare an Old Bohemian dish called Kuba. This is made from pearl barley and dried mushrooms browned in hot fat and seasoned with garlic and marjoram. Another must is a plaited tea-loaf (*vánočka*) which is served at breakfast on Christmas Day. The dough is made in the same way as for the above mentioned cross buns and decorated with raisins and shredded walnuts or almonds. The dough is divided into strips and then formed into rolls. Then three or four of those rolled strips are plaited to form a base. On top of this are laid three more plaited strips and then again on top two strips intertwined are placed forming a kind of pyramid. Finally more shredded nuts are sprinkled on top and the loaf is ready to go into the hot oven. Traditional Czech favourites are eaten for Christmas Day dinner - crisply roasted goose or duck with dumplings and sauerkraut, washed down with a glass of delicious beer. Christmas is also the time of family gatherings over a cup of coffee or tea and trays abounding in a delicious variety of Christmas confectionery. The old tradition of eating sour mashed split peas (*čočka na kyselo*) on New Year's Day, which was sure to bring money into the family for the next year, is now becoming rare.

**Pig killing and butchering** (*domáci zabijačka*) is a traditional event which has survived predominantly in village households as a living proof of the inventiveness of our predecessors and is reflected in their ability to process almost every part of this domestic animal. In rural areas especially, this is an occasion for a small family celebration. At the end of winter, a hired butcher slaughters a pig which was either purchased or bred by the family themselves. Assisted by the whole family, the butcher prepares a number of exquisite delicacies ranging from a special soup, goulash, *ovar* (various kinds of boiled pork) to brawn (*tlačenka*) and black and white pork pudding (*jelítka* and *jaternice* - skins filled with a seasoned mixture of meat, pearl barley and bread crumbs).

There is a host of other **rural celebrations**, including Shrovetide and a variety of feasts and country fairs. If you happen to attend some of these events, don't forget to treat yourself to golden roast goose or savoury pork loin sprinkled with caraway seeds. You can also relish the round, homemade tarts specially prepared for these particular occasions - Moravian stuffed tarts, or large, thin Wallachian tarts (made in the northern



part of Moravia and called *frgály*), or intricately decorated tarts characteristic of the Chodsko area in western Bohemia. Stuffed or garnished with cottage cheese, plum-jam, poppy-seeds and fruit marmelades, they can also be obtained from baker's shops all the year round. What about sampling some of them?

The dietary habits of the inhabitants of Czechia do not differ from those common in other European countries.

The day opens with **breakfast** consisting of a warm beverage (coffee or tea) and bread, morning rolls or buns with butter, supplemented usually with honey, jam, sliced ham or salami and sometimes also eggs. Breakfast is followed by mid-morning snacks - usually warm or cold smoked meat, a filling soup or a small warm dish, or a homemade sandwich.

Other popular refreshments include special, open-face sandwiches (slices of soft bread with a variety of delicacies). This Czech speciality can be obtained in many delicatessen shops.

Served around noon, **lunch** is composed of soup, a main course and dessert. The latter, however, is gradually giving way to fruit or salads. Czech people increasingly tend to take their mid-day meals in restaurants or fast-food establishments, especially in towns which offer a great choice of such places.

**Dinner**, usually consisting of one warm course or small cold hors d'oeuvre, is served in the early or late evening, depending on the lifestyle of individual families.

As for the popularity of individual dishes, goulash is item number one on the menu of the majority of ordinary restaurants.

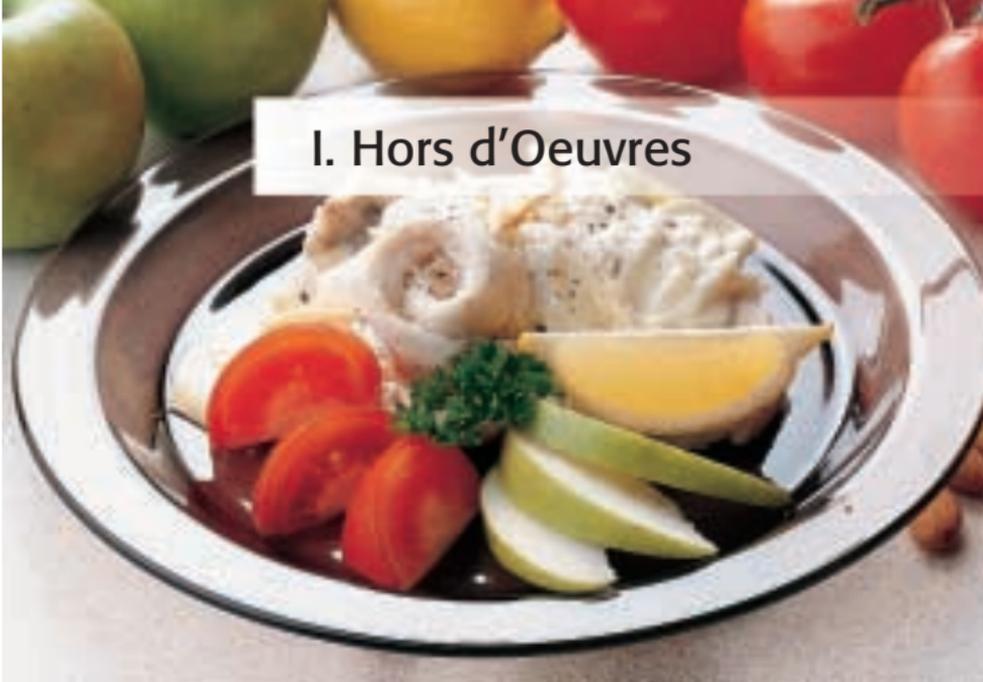
Believed to have originated in Hungary, goulash has acquired a special dimension in Czechia.



*The following part will introduce you to a selection of dishes characteristic of the Bohemian and Moravian cuisines, listed according to individual kinds you may come across while thumbing through restaurant menus. The term specialities denotes typical national dishes, whereas the attribute popular marks ordinary meals which most frequently appear on the menus of common restaurants and inns. Gourmets and those who are just experimenting will find typical recipes for individual foods attached to each section.*



## I. Hors d'Oeuvres



The Czech cuisine knows both warm and cold hors d'oeuvres which are mostly served on more festive occasions. Exploring restaurant menus, you will encounter small cold and warm dishes, mostly prepared from smoked meats, fish and eggs. Specialities include garnished eggs, whereas popular starters are boiled Prague ham and smoked tongue. There is also a wide selection of food prepared on toast.





## II. Soups

Served mostly as the first course, soups form a traditional and indispensable part of the mid-day menu, as reflected in a wide selection of soups, especially thickened ones.

Bouillons - beef broth or chicken consommé with noodles, rice or vegetables seasoned with salt and fine spices form a standard choice in all restaurants.

Speciality - bouillon with delicious little liver dumplings (*játrové knedlíčky*), a special ingredient seasoned mildly with marjoram, pepper and garlic.

Garlic soup (*česnečka*) is one of the most popular dishes for two reasons. Firstly, it is quite gentle to one's stomach and head in the morning following an evening overindulgence in food and drinking. It is also very easily prepared.

Thick soups - prepared from meat, vegetables or pulses, these filling, thickened soups are sometimes served as part of mid-morning snacks.

Speciality - potato soup (*bramborová polévka*), a typical national dish with regional or family varieties, seasoned with marjoram and sometimes pepper or caraway seeds to which this delicacy owes its special flavour.



### Recipe:

500 g peeled potatoes cut into small cubes, 100 g root vegetables, 50 g onion, 1 - 2 cloves of garlic, browned butter thickening, 100 g fresh or 30 g dried mushrooms, marjoram, pepper or caraway seeds

Boil potatoes and root vegetables cut into cubes in 1 litre of salted water until soft. Prepare thickening from butter and flour, thin with cold water, mix thoroughly and add, with mushrooms, to boiling potato cubes. Boil another 15 minutes and season to taste with garlic, marjoram and chopped parsley leaves.

Although tripe soup (*dršíková polévka*) may sound to certain foreign visitors like a rather exotic food, it is one of the most popular in Czechia.

Tripe (boiled beef stomach cut into fine strips) are further cooked with a powdered paprika mixture which gives the soup a pleasantly sharp, spicy flavour.

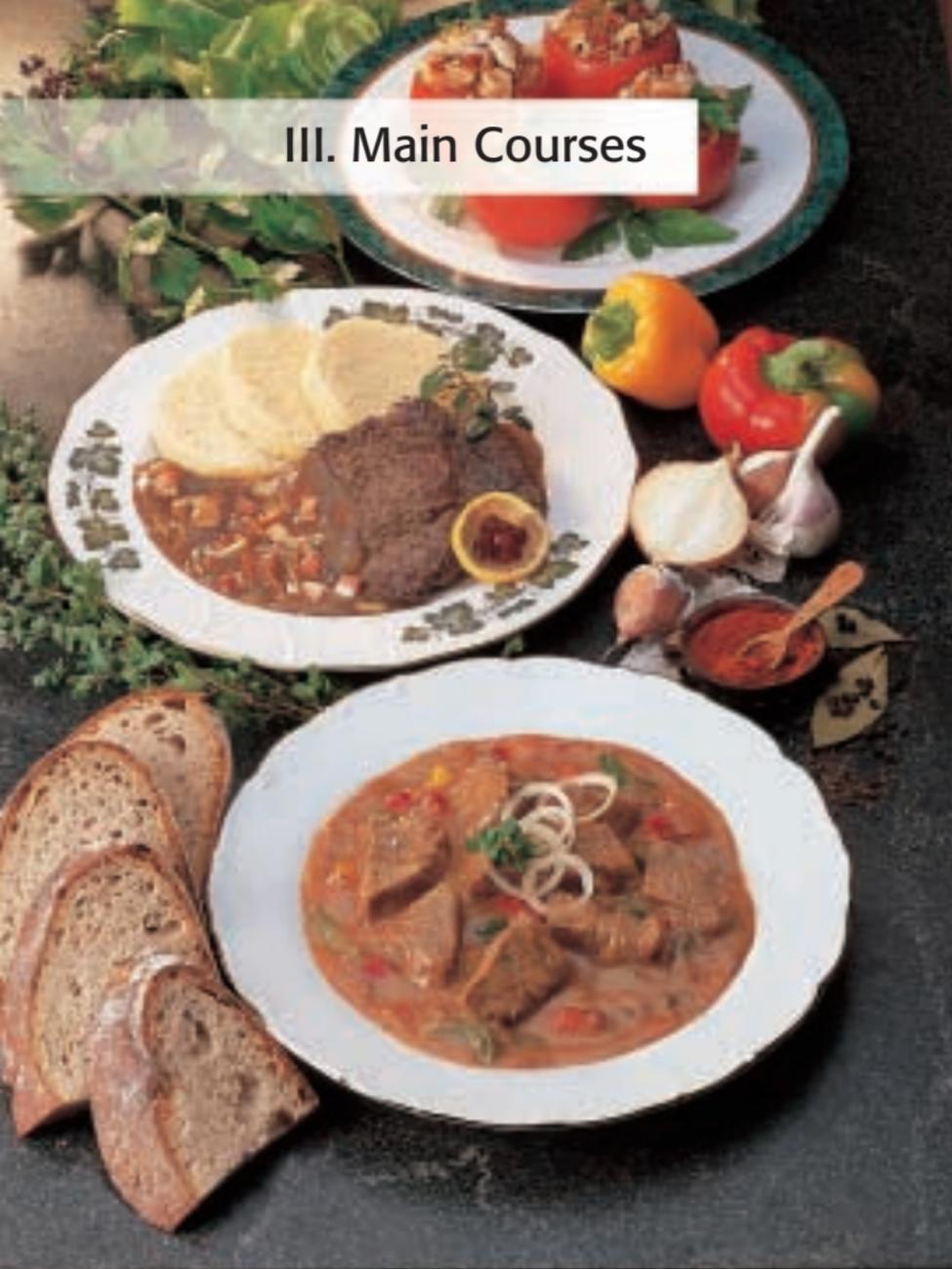
Lentil soup with smoked meat (*čočková polévka s uzeninou*), pea soup (*hrachová polévka*) with croutons and bean soup (*fazolová polévka*) are all excellent and popular dishes, although they appear on the menus less frequently.

Some soups enjoy greater popularity in individual regions where they are cherished as regional specialities. Practically everywhere you can encounter sour soup (*kyselice*) or cabbage soup (*zelňačka*). The basic ingredient for these soups is fresh cabbage or sauerkraut, supplemented with potatoes and smoked meat. Both soups are thickened with cream.

Regions in the foothills of the Czech mountain ranges (Krkonoše, Šumava) boast their own speciality called *kulajda*, an excellent sour thick soup made from cream, potatoes, eggs and mushrooms and seasoned with dill.



### III. Main Courses



## Meat Dishes

### Beef

Boiled, stewed and roast beef dishes are the features of the Czech cuisine. Beef is usually offered with various sauces, whereas roast beef is served with its own juice. Individual dishes owe their special flavours and names to sauces and the spices which are used to season the meat.

Sauces - from days of old the Czech folk cookery has used a variety of sauces to add a special flavour to boiled beef. Sauces, together with side dishes, created the characteristic quality of specific warm meals. Thickened and smooth, the Czech sauces, distinguished by their robust taste, are a necessity in meals.

Sweet tomato sauce (*rajská omáčka*) smelling of thyme, aromatic dill sauce (*koprová omáčka* - vegetarians can substitute meat with hard-boiled eggs), pungent horse radish sauce (*křenová omáčka*), delicate garlic sauce (*česneková omáčka*) or the renowned mushroom sauce (*houbová omáčka*) are all the most characteristic representatives of the most common Czech sauces. These, as well



as other sauces listed on the restaurant menus, may pleasantly surprise even the lovers of delicate French sauces.

Roast fillet of beef in cream sauce (*svíčková*) is the most famous representative of the rather complex burghers' cookery and a Czech speciality par excellence. Marinaded beef, threaded with strips of bacon, is stewed with coarsely chopped root vegetables and wild spices. The gravy from the meat is pureéd, thickened and softened with cream. Served with sweet cranberries and a slice of lemon and garnished with whipped cream, this delectable dish with its unique spicy, piquant, sweet and sour flavour will certainly gladden every palate. Svíčková is traditionally served with Czech dumplings.

*Recipe:*

600 to 700 g beef (undercut, sirloin or round), 200 g root vegetables, 1 onion, 1/4 litre sour cream, 50 g bacon, 50-80 g fat, 5 pepper corns, 2 corns of all-spice, bay-leaf, thyme, salt and 1 teaspoon flour

Melt fat and brown the chopped vegetables in it, add onion and spices a little later. Add the meat threaded with strips of bacon and sautéed on all sides. Add hot soup or water and let the meat roast in the oven. Baste from time to time. After the meat is tender, take it out and pureé the vegetables. Mix flour evenly into the juice and add cream.





The town of Znojmo in southern Moravia boasts not only a glorious history but also a long tradition of cucumber growing. Znojmo gherkins, steeped in piquant sour-sweet pickle juice, enjoy a great reputation even with foreign gourmets. It is no wonder then that the name Znojmo roast beef (*Znojmská pečeně*) denotes a dish prepared from beef pierced with bits of bacon and pickled cucumbers. The meat is served with gravy seasoned with minced pickled cucumbers which give it a piquant, sweet-sour flavour. The well-known Czech dumplings, potatoes or rice provide a tasty side dish to this meal.



## Mutton/Lamb

This kind of meat will most probably be offered roasted with garlic (*skopové na česneku*) and combined with spinach and potato dumplings as side dishes, or with marjoram (*skopové na majoránce*). Other traditional ways of preparing mutton include grilled breast of mutton and lamb chops, pilaf, stew or goulash.



## Pork

*Vepřo-knedlo-zelo* - is the immediate response to an inquiry about a typical Czech meal. Officially called roast loin of pork with dumplings and cabbage (*vepřová pečeně s knedlíkem a zelím*), it consists of roast loin of pork (leg, shoulder or spare rib) seasoned with caraway seeds, warm cooked cabbage and dumplings, all sprinkled liberally with salted gravy. He who fails to sample this dish cannot claim to know what the Czech people like to eat. The same meal is popular in Moravia, the only exception being the style of cabbage which is prepared according to a somewhat different recipe. Needless to say that it is just as good as that common in Bohemia. To wash this palatable dish down with a beverage other than Czech beer would simply be a great mistake.

### *Recipe:*

750 g loin, salt and caraway seeds

Place the pork meat seasoned with salt and caraway seeds in a roasting pan. Add some water and put to roast in the oven. Brush with gravy liberally during the roasting (approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours) so that the loin remains juicy.

Side dishes: any kind of dumplings - traditional Bohemian or potato dumplings and freshly prepared cabbage. The cabbage is cooked with chopped and browned onion. When the cabbage is tender, sprinkle it with flour and season with sugar and vinegar to achieve a sweet-sour flavour.

Farmer's pork loin (*selská pečeně*) - a variant of the above mentioned dish which can be seasoned moderately with garlic.





Moravian Sparrow (*Moravský vrabec*) - roasted small pieces of fat and lean pork.

Creamed roast pork loin (*vepřová pečeně na smetaně*) - a variant of the same dish prepared from cooked lean pork leg with gravy thickened with cream. The usual side dishes include traditional dumplings, rice or bread rolls.

Fried slices of pork loin (*smažený řízek*) - these slices are dipped in flour, then in beaten egg and finally in bread crumbs and fried in oil. They are served with cold potato salad as a side dish on ordinary as well as festive occasions. This dish should appear on restaurant menus among the made-to-order meals because it is most delicious when served freshly fried. Children especially relish fried fillets of pork with mashed potatoes.



Smoked meat (*uzené maso*) - originally the result of conservation of pork meat when refrigerators and freezers were appliances only being dreamed of. Today this is a widely used, very special treatment of top-quality meat. Smoked meat is served either cold as an hors d'oeuvre in the form of mixed meat slices, or warm as a main course, usually combined with spinach, potato dumplings or mashed peas or potatoes. Specialities include the famous Prague ham (*Pražská šunka*) and Moravian smoked meat (*Moravské uzené* - steeped in pickled garlic prior to smoking).

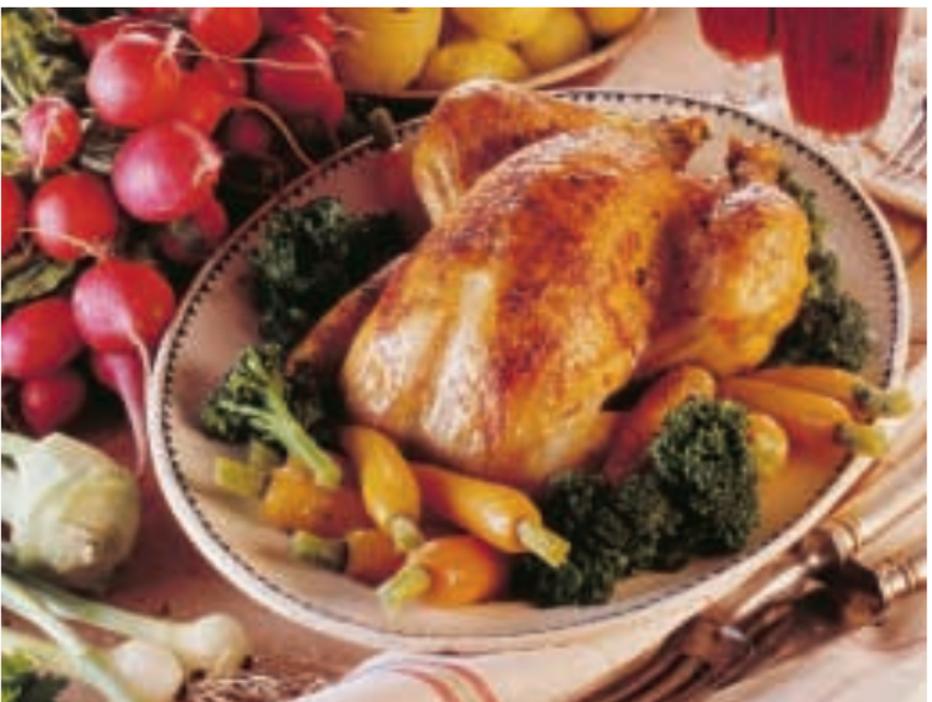


## Poultry

Roast goose or duck (*pečená husa* or *kachna*) - although their preparation is relatively simple, with meat seasoned only with caraway seeds and salt, they are considered traditional festive meals to be served at family celebrations. Side dishes naturally consist of cooked white or red cabbage and the usual or potato dumplings.

Chicken dishes (*kuřecí jídla*) - range from the simple to the exotic. They are regular items on the menu of practically every restaurant. Just follow your taste and instinct.

Rabbit (*králík*) - a very popular, although rather exceptional item on restaurant menus. If you are lucky, you might be able to sample this dietary lean meat in a range of recipes - in cream sauce (*se smetanovou omáčkou*), roasted with garlic (*pečený na česneku*) or prepared au naturel with vegetables and onion (*na zelenině s cibulí*).





## Fish

Fresh water fish especially are ranked among the specialities of the southern parts of Bohemia and Moravia. In present-day restaurants, you will most probably find carp (*kapr*), a fresh water fish which has earned fame abroad for south Bohemian lakes even as far back as the Middle Ages. Particularly enticing are fried fillets of carp (*smažený kapr*), but carp baked (*pečený*) with caraway seeds or garlic might be considered equally delicious. Also worth noting is a more piquant alternative - carp prepared with vegetables or mushrooms. A fresh fish distinguished by its rather rich, juicy meat, carp is a popular dish all year round. However, carp is also an indispensable part of the traditional Christmas Eve dinner, being served in the form of fried fillets, or with a sweet, spicy black sauce (a speciality).



Trout (*pstruh*) - another fish which occurs in the local waters. Restaurant menus usually feature trout baked à la miller (dipped in flour), with caraway seeds, almonds or boiled and served in aspic (*vařený na modro*).

Southern Bohemia and southern Moravia, the chief fish-breeding regions, offer a larger choice of fresh water fish. Missing pike or eel prepared in butter (*štika* or *úhoř na másle*) or baked catfish (*pečený sumec*) would be a bad choice. Candat is another irresistible delicacy.

## Game

Game is ranked among the choice delicacies of the Czech and Moravian cuisines. Game meat has a special flavour and typical aroma derived from aromatic plants which form the base of the animal's fare. Game meat is boiled, steamed, roasted, or sometimes it is prepared as a short order dish. It is served with piquant sauces and a variety of garnishes.

Roast leg of venison (red deer, fallow deer) or shoulder (*pečená srnčí kýta* or *hřbet*) can be prepared au naturel or in a cream sauce.

### *Recipe:*

*1000 g leg of venison or shoulder, 50 g bacon, 80 g butter, 50 g onion*

### *Au naturel:*

*4 juniper beans and 25 g flour.*

*Clean and bone the meat, remove the bits of fine skin, thread the meat with fatty bacon and brush with hot melted butter. Leave the meat in a cool place overnight. Brown the finely chopped onion in the remaining fat, add the meat and sauté on both sides. Add water and spices and let the meat roast. Baste with juice from the meat from time to time during roasting. Lastly sprinkle the flour evenly into the juice.*

### *In cream sauce:*

*120 g root vegetables, 50 g flour, 1/2 litre sour cream, salt, 5 pepper corns, 2 juniper beans, 3 all-spice corns, 1 bay-leaf, the juice of one lemon, sugar and vinegar to taste.*

*Prepare according to the above-mentioned recipe. Brown the onion and root vegetables, add meat and sauté. Add spices and water and put the meat to roast. Take the meat out of the oven, cook the meat juice until the water evaporates, sprinkle with flour, mix and dilute with cream. Pureé the vegetables and season the sauce to taste. Serve with dumplings and cranberries.*

In recent times you can encounter more exotic kinds of meat in Czech restaurants, for example, kangaroo and ostrich, prepared according to a variety of recipes.





## Meatless Dishes

While in the past meatless dishes prevailed in the folk fare, today they are increasingly found on restaurant menus. This applies especially to meals prepared from potatoes and potato dough.

### Potato dishes

A simple, but very popular meal is new potatoes brushed with butter, sprinkled with cottage cheese and washed down with milk. There is also a variety of potato pancakes, potato dumplings (these are often stuffed with meat or fruit), and potato rolls seasoned with salt or sugar. One can say that the Czech and Moravian cuisines feature potatoes prepared according to a thousand recipes.



Pride of place, however, is taken by potato pancakes made from raw potatoes (*bramboráky*), a typical Czech folk dish, whose enticing smell you may catch coming from street stalls where they are sold. The raw potatoes are grated and mixed with flour and eggs and seasoned with garlic and marjoram. Bramboráky are rarely offered in restaurants as a main dish. And if so, it is usually in combination with raw sauerkraut. They are served rather in the form of small pancakes as a side dish with meat meals, usually restaurant specialities.

*Recipe:*

*1000 g peeled raw potatoes, 120 g flour, 1 egg, 4 cloves of garlic, salt, pepper, marjoram, fat (lard would be best for frying)*

*Grate raw potatoes, leave them to rest and then drain the excess liquid. Add the egg, flour, pepper, powdered marjoram, shredded garlic and salt. Blend all the ingredients together thoroughly. Ladle the dough into a frying pan with hot fat and fry until golden on both sides.*

*Bramboráky taste best when served freshly fried and hot.*

## Pulses

Czech restaurants offer

mashed peas (*hrachová kaše*) with smoked meat

devilled lentiles (*čočka na kyselo*) - usually offered with sausages, this warm dish might also be relished by vegetarians as it can also be served with eggs.





## Mushroom Meals

Meals prepared from mushrooms rank among special features of the Czech cuisine. From time immemorial mushroom picking has been a supplementary source of an interesting raw material for cooking. Today mushroom picking is a widespread national hobby and many people have become genuine experts on edible mushrooms, of which there is an unbelievable range for use in households. *Smaženice* (a mixture of several kinds of cooked fresh mushrooms and eggs) is an extremely popular and highly delectable dish. Fried mushroom fillets and pickled mushrooms are also favourites. There is also a variety of mushroom soups, sauces and other delicacies prepared according to regional recipes. The use of mushrooms in public catering is subject to extremely strict health and hygienic regulations, and consequently restaurants and other catering establishments prepare predominantly champignons and other farm-produced species. That is why you can safely sample a dish containing mushrooms in Czechia.

## Vegetables

Cabbage (*zelí*) - both fresh and as sauerkraut - is prepared according to a plethora of traditional recipes. During the summer season restaurant menus may feature fried cauliflower (*smažený květák*), whereas cooked kohlrabi (*dušená kedlubna*) is rather an exception. Carrot (*mrkev*) will be offered most probably raw in the form of a salad. Naturally, the menus also list various kinds of salads prepared from fresh raw vegetables.

## Egg Meals

The most common among this kind of fare are the so-called farmer's omelet (*selská omeleta*), egg omelet with fried potatoes, and fried dumplings with eggs (*knedlíky s vejcem*) and pickled gherkins.

Fried cheese (*smažený sýr*) - hard cheese or blue cheese (*Hermelín*) fried in an egg and flour batter and served with boiled potatoes is an increasingly popular gastronomic delight.

## IV. Sweet Dishes and Desserts



Existing in a plethora of kinds and enjoying great popularity, sweet dishes are another characteristic feature of the Czech cuisine.

And once again it is dumplings that should be mentioned first - this time a kind stuffed with fruit. Listed among typical national dishes, sweet dumplings are prepared from a variety of doughs, including raised dough, semolina dough, potato dough and cottage cheese dough. They are stuffed with fresh or canned fruit, sometimes also with some preserve or plum-jam. Sweet dumplings are served sprinkled with melted butter and powdered sugar, cinnamon, grated cottage cheese or ground poppy seeds, or less typically, ground walnuts. Every family is accustomed to a different combination, tradition and preference. If you happen to encounter a menu featuring strawberry (*jahodové*), apricot (*meruňkové*) or bilberry (*borůvkové*) dumplings in summer or plum (*švestkové*) dumplings in autumn, do not hesitate to order them - you won't be able to try such a dish anywhere else.

*Courageous experimenters may try to prepare a rather simpler variant of sweet dumplings according to the following recipe.*

*Cottage cheese dumplings with fruit (tvarohové knedlíky s ovocem)*

300 g cottage cheese

700 g coarse ground flour (semolina)

0,2 litre milk

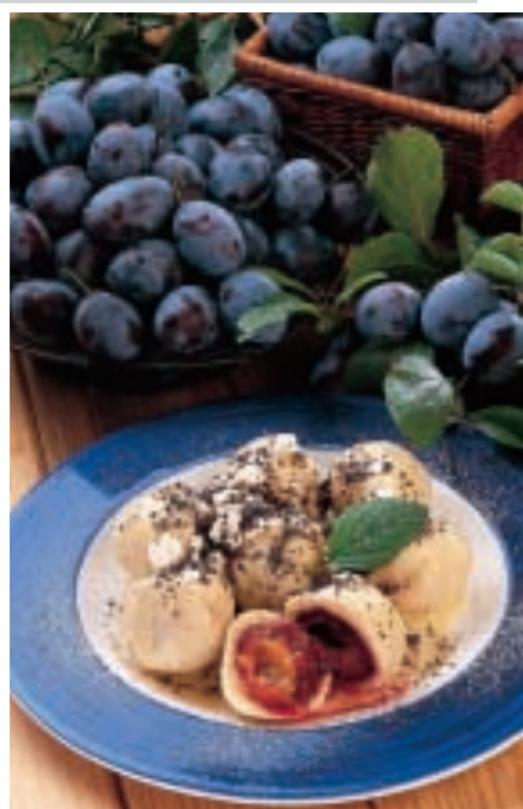
3 eggs

100 g fat

100 g sugar

Pinch of salt

*Mix softened fat with sugar and eggs, add cottage cheese, flour, milk and a pinch of salt. Work the dough and leave it to rest for a while. Make a roll and cut it into small pieces large enough to wrap around a plum (or another kind of fruit). Place the dumplings into boiling water and boil for approximately 6 minutes. Take the dumplings carefully from the water (using a sieve), prick them with a fork to let the steam out and serve on plates sprinkled with powdered sugar and grated cottage cheese, browned bread*





*crumbs or ground poppy seeds. Lastly sprinkle with melted butter. Bon appetit!*

Potato cones (*bramborové šišky*) - small rolls made from potato dough and served with ground poppy seeds or browned bread crumbs form a more substantial dish. Another irresistible variant is small pies (in the form of little bags) prepared from potato dough and stuffed with thick plum- or other jam and sprinkled with grated cottage cheese.

Crumpets (*lívance*) - these griddle cakes are made from raised dough and fried in fat. Originally they were served as a main course, but nowadays they are highlighted among warm sweet desserts in restaurants.

The same applies to pancakes (*palačinky*) which are served with the most fantastic kind of sweet garnish, including chocolate, fruit, ice cream, whipped cream or walnuts.

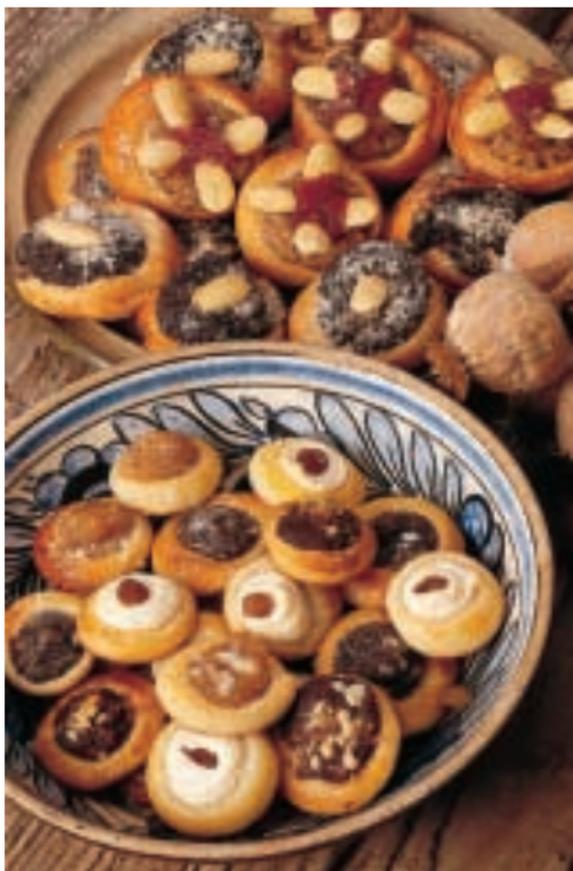
Czech yeast buns/muffins and tarts (*buchtý and koláče*) - another characteristic phenomenon of the Czech cuisine which appears even in a number of national fairy tales. Yeast buns and tarts are small pieces of raised dough stuffed with sweet cottage cheese, ground poppy seeds, plum-jam, or another special regional filling, and baked in the oven. Yeast buns are usually sprinkled with powdered sugar. Served after a substantial soup, they once formed the main course. Today yeast buns are quite a rare item on restaurant menus, most



probably because their preparation takes a lot of time. They are, however, available among the sweet items in practically every baker's shop and are on the breakfast tables in many Czech families.

As for desserts (*sladké mouč-níky*), the highlights and typical representatives of the Czech cookery are the plum tart (*švestkový koláč*), or other fruit tart, and apple strudel (*jablečný závin*), a familiar dessert throughout Europe.

Fruit salads and ice cream sundaes are made here, but they are not part of the traditional Czech cuisine, although they provide ample space for fantasy and skill. Perhaps, it would be worth to compare Czech products with those available elsewhere.



Czech restaurants usually offer a wide selection of desserts. With the choice not restricted to traditional cakes, they display interesting shapes and garnishes. The work of skilled confectioners, Czech desserts include whipped cream and cream desserts, fruit desserts, walnut desserts, and cocoa and chocolate desserts. All of them are delicious and worth sampling.



## V. Side Dishes



Varied as they are, Czech side dishes will hardly come as a surprise to foreign visitors as boiled potatoes, fried potato chips, croquettes, mashed potatoes, rice, all manner of pasta, bread (predominantly dark and semi-dark kinds) and morning rolls can be encountered in different corners of the world.

There is, however, a side dish which makes the Czech and Moravian national cuisines very special and easily recognizable. Dumplings (*knedlíky*), of course! Although their name suggests an affinity with German or Tyrol Knödeln, Czech dumplings are quite unique. A lump of dumpling on the end of a fork allows one to take a large portion of sauce or gravy. Combined with a lump of meat (and cabbage in some meals), it will melt in your mouth creating a gastronomic bliss of myriad flavours.

You will not encounter traditional Czech dumplings (a large boiled porous roll of dough, served sliced) anywhere else in the world. Although their preparation is quite simple, present households use predominantly ready-made dumplings which can be purchased in shops, or dumplings made from dumpling mixes which are worked with water into a soft dough, then formed into large rolls and boiled. We recommend that visitors who would like to present their families with this unique side dish purchase dumpling mixes.

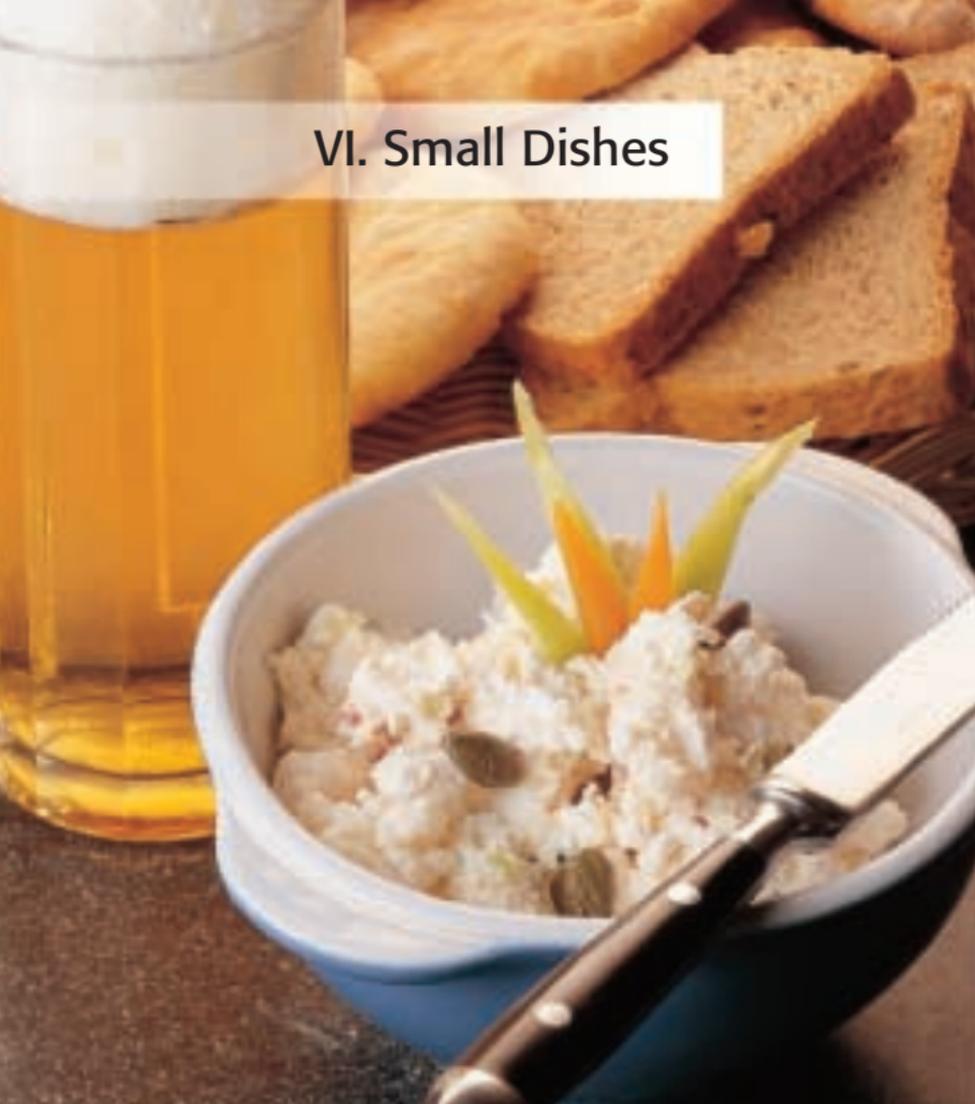
*Those who fail to get them, may try the following traditional recipe:  
500 g coarse ground flour (or a mixture of fine ground flour and semolina)  
0,3 litre milk  
1 egg  
10 g yeast or a tea-spoon of baking powder  
half tea-spoon of salt  
2 bread rolls*

*Sift flour blended with salt into a bowl, add yeast or baking powder, milk with beaten egg and work the dough until moderately stiff. Cut the rolls into small cubes and mix them in the dough. Divide the dough into two parts, forming two large rolls, then boil them in salted water for approximately 25 minutes. Take the boiled dumplings out carefully, prick them with a fork to let the steam out and slice. Serve warm as a side dish to sauces and meat.*

Sticking to the potato tradition, folk cooking has used potatoes to invent several variants of potato dumplings (*bramborové knedlíky*). These are prepared from fine-grated potatoes boiled the previous day. The potatoes are worked with egg, vinegar and coarse ground flour (semolina) into stiff dough from which rolls are formed and boiled in salted water.

Raw potato dumplings (*chlupaté knedlíky*) - a variant of the same dish prepared from raw potatoes. Used usually as a side dish, they can also be served as the main course with browned onion and raw or cooked sauerkraut. Raw potato dumplings are a rather unique variant of Czech dumplings.

## VI. Small Dishes



These are offered in inns and beer parlours to quell the guests' hunger caused by drinking plenty of beer. However, spiced and salted liberally, they in turn bring on thirst.

Toasted slices (*topinky*) - although *topinka* is usually translated as toast, it is in fact, quite a different meal. *Topinka* is a slice of semi-dark bread fried in fat and sprinkled with salt and brushed liberally with garlic. If your group or family decide to sample this dish, you have no choice other than to join them. Forget the rights of the minorities.

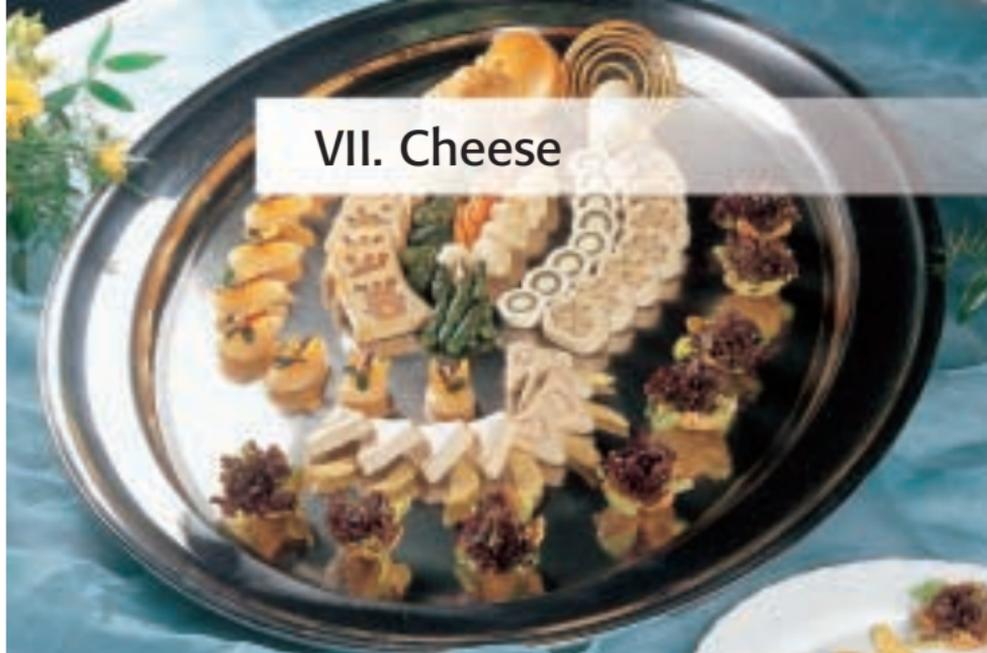
Pickled sausage slices (*utopeneci*) - *utopenec* is an onomatopoeic name for smoked meat steeped in vinegar juice with an abundance of onion. This salty and peppered delicacy is a popular emergency means to be resorted to in case of a hangover. The same applies to brawn (*tlačěnka*) which is served with finely chopped onion, diluted vinegar and some good bread.

Beer cheese (*pivní sýr*) or piquant cheese spread (*pikantní sýrová pomazánka*) meet the requirements of the vegetarian cuisine although in terms of flavour and compatibility with beer they are as satisfying as the aforementioned dishes.

Other small dishes which continue to enjoy great popularity are open-face sandwiches in a plethora of kinds.

Yogurts (*jogurty*) are very good and delicious, cream and low-calorie, with or without fruit. They have become an indispensable part of breakfasts, mid-morning snacks, dressings and desserts.

## VII. Cheese



Restaurants serving international cuisine offer a rich selection of renowned foreign trademarks. Other catering establishments usually provide two or three kinds of cheese listed among cold dishes. Some local products are really excellent, for example, a blue cheese called Niva (resembling Roquefort), the Eidam and the Hermelín (a kind of Camembert). They, however, still have to earn their reputation on world markets, and even at home they are considered a supplementary food in local fare. Processed cheese, spread on bread or rolls, is more popular and is provided in an impressive choice. There is a renowned speciality called Olomouc cakes of cheese (*Olomoucké tvarůžky*), a strongly aromatic curd cheese, served with butter and fresh bread. Tvarůžky form an ideal supplement to excellent beer! In some regions (especially in central Moravia), they are also offered as a warm dish - fried in batter and served with whole or mashed potatoes. A genuine culinary delight, they form an unbelievably low-calorie meal compared to the local sustaining cuisine.



## VIII. Beverages



When writing about beverages in Czechia, there is no other way than to begin with beer, the most widespread of all the beverages on sale here. You can get an excellent local beer in every restaurant, small pub or beer parlour. Czech beer enjoys a good name worldwide and all the Pilsners available throughout the world recede into the background when compared with the beer brewed in the west Bohemian town of Plzeň. Its trademark alone, Pilsner Urquell, points to the origin of the general term Pilsner used to describe light lagers.

How old is the tradition of beer-brewing in Czechia? Beer has been brewed here from time immemorial. The first written record related to beer dates from 993, whereas the craft of beer-brewing was first mentioned in historical annals in 1038. Beer was, however, undoubtedly brewed and drunk long prior to these dates. With beer being a popular beverage (sometimes even substituting for food) as well as an excellent commodity, the production of beer soon became subject to a variety of rules and regulations which in principle delegated the right to brew and sell beer to individual burghers' houses. In later periods brewing licences were transferred to local breweries. It is no wonder then that prospering large and small breweries mushroomed in Czech and Moravian towns, big and little, meeting the growing demand from local customers. Although many of them were forced to wind up their operations owing to the introduction of the large-scale production of beer, a range of small breweries have survived to this day and their products enlarge the assortment of beers on the local market. Some of these breweries run sightseeing tours of their premises, including, naturally, beer-tasting. Moreover, they participate in the organization of a host of beer festivals, including Beer Festivities in České Budějovice (June), In Search of Beer across the Chodsko Region (April), Day of Open Cellars in Polička (June), Beer Festivities in Humpolec (August), Hedgehog Day in Jihlava (September), Černá Hora Beer Country Fair (September) and Praha-Pivovarský dům Beer (a cold autumn week with warm beer in November).

The history of beer-brewing in Czechia can be explored in the unique and the oldest Brewery Museum in Plzeň (**Veleslavínova Street 6; [www.prazdroj.cz](http://www.prazdroj.cz)**), as well as in a range of smaller breweries located in Czech and Moravian towns, for example, at Chodovar in Chodová Planá. Also worth visiting is the Hops Museum in Žatec which charts the history of hop-growing in the Czech lands from primeval times to this day.

Although a range of beer trademarks have earned a reputation even on foreign markets, tasting them in the country of their origin has undoubtedly a special appeal. Pride of place among beers is held by Pilsner Urquell (Prazdroj), claimed not only by the Czechs to be the best beer in the world. This is followed by Budvar (Budweiser, in the USA Czechvar) from České Budějovice, the capital city of southern Bohemia, to list at least some of the numerous trademarks.



# WINE

Wine-growing in Bohemia and Moravia boasts a long and glorious tradition. Viniculture has always been subject to regulations, first unwritten and later written. In modern times, wine-growing has even been administered by law.

As for wine varieties, the most wide-spread are white wines, specifically Grüner Veltliner (*Veltlínské zelené*), Müller-Thurgau, Italian Riesling (*Ryzlink vlašský*), Pinot blanc (*Rulandské bílé*), Rheine Riesling (*Ryzlink rýnský*), Malvasia (*Veltlínské červené rané*), Neuburg (*Neuburské*), Tramín, Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Moravian Muscat (*Muškat moravský*) and Pinot gris (*Rulandské šedé*).

The red varieties include St Lawrence's (*Svatovavřinecké*), Frankovka, Zweigeltrebe, Blue Portugal (*Modrý Portugal*), Pinot noir (*Rulandské modré*) and André.

Villages in the wine-growing regions of Czechia boast rows of picturesque wine cellars to which they owe their specific local colour. In these cellars, the local people produce and store wine for their own consumption, as well as for the joy of their guests. Like all other ancient crafts, viniculture has its own rituals which should be known and respected. If you happen to visit such a wine cellar, don't forget that the drinking of wine itself is a ritual.

## White Wines:

Grüner Veltliner - pale yellow in colour and possessing a light linden or aromatic almond-like bouquet (it depends on the composition of soil in which vine grapes were grown), this wine can be combined with a variety of dishes. The most proper choice will be cold meats, fish and neutral sauces.

Italian Riesling - this pale yellow-green wine with a neutral smell and piquant taste provides a perfect supplement to hors d'oeuvres, fish meals and patés. It can also be used as an appetizer with not so strong-tasting dishes.

Rhine Riesling - this wine is pale yellow-green in colour and has a delicate flower-like spicy aroma. Delicious with hors d'oeuvres, veal, fish and poultry. Served with small dishes, it is a perfect companion for pleasant moments of relaxation.

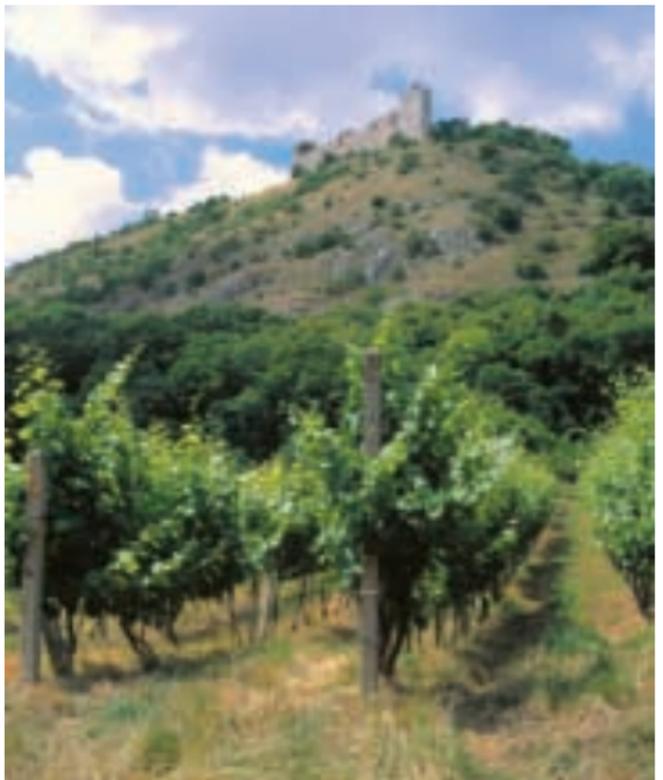




Pinot blanc - distinguished by its pale yellow colour and neutral to almond-like bouquet, this wine is well compatible with filling but not so strong-tasting beef and pork dishes, as well as with venison, patés and smoked meats.

Pinot gris - this golden yellow dry wine with neutral bouquet is best when served with filling poultry dishes and sustaining soups.

Müller Thurgau - pale green in colour, this wine with delicate muscat or nettle-peach bouquet provides a fine supplement to vegetable soups, fish dishes and white soft cheeses. Excellent for meetings with friends.



Malvasia - in contrast to its name - it contains the attribute red in its Czech name - this wine is golden yellow in colour. It has a completely neutral aroma which determines its use as a supplement to thick soups and cold meat mixes.

Neuburg - this pale, green-yellow wine with neutral bouquet is a pleasant companion for moments of relaxation in good company. It goes well with boiled meats, beef prepared au naturel, filling but neutral dishes, white cheeses and vegetable soups.

Tramín - golden yellow in colour and having a distinctive spicy bouquet reminiscent of the smell of roses, this wine seems to be created as a supplement to sweet hors d'oeuvres, desserts and blue cheeses.

Sauvignon - with its pale green-yellow colour and distinctive peach-nettle-like bouquet, this wine is compatible with hors d'oeuvres, poultry, fish and sweet desserts.

Chardonnay - distinguished by its pale yellow colour, neutral but distinctive flower-like aroma and piquant taste, this wine is excellent with Camembert-style soft cheeses, thick soups, oysters, fish, veal and poultry dishes.

Moravian Muscat - this light wine with a pale yellow colour and the distinctive aroma of ripe grapes combines well with desserts and patés.

## Red Wines:

St. Lawrence's - this wine displaying dark, almost mauve garnet-like colour and delicate tannic bouquet is gratifying when combined with heavily seasoned pork dishes, dark meat meals, game, goose, duck and pasta.

Frankovka - with its dark ruby-like colour and pleasantly coarse aroma, this wine will enhance your culinary experience from well prepared game, dark kinds of meat, pasta and refined cheeses.

Zweigeltrebe - this medium-dark red wine, with a fruit-like bouquet slightly reminiscent of St. Lawrence's wine is delicious with delicately spiced meats, pheasant, partridge, beefsteak, pasta and fine hard cheeses.

Blue Portugal - a pleasant wine recognizable by its ruby-like colour and delicate flower-like bouquet. Blue Portugal can be served with poultry dishes, pheasant, duck, goose, fine beefsteak, pasta and mixed cheeses.





André - with its medium red-mauve colour, this wine can be offered with dark meats, cheeses and smoked meat. New wine is wild, but the mature features a distinctive flavour of fruit.

Pinot noir - this wine is pale ruby in colour. In the course of maturing it first has a distinctive aroma of walnuts and then of plums and raspberries. The wine combines well with fine game dishes and dark meat meals, fine kinds of refined cheeses and small desserts.

This list of wines would be incomplete without sparkling wines. These are produced in Czechia in three basic variants - dry, semi-dry and sweet.

The foreign visitors who would like to get to know Moravian wines directly in wine cellars will probably appreciate the so-called wine-related programmes prepared for them especially in the **Znojmo and Mikulov regions**. Many travel agencies offer thematic routes combined with wine-tasting and visits to ethnographical events and wine celebrations. All of them provide a welcome opportunity to explore various regions of Moravia.

Wine celebrations are staged, usually in September, in the focal points of the wine-growing regions, with the most renowned taking place in **Mělník** (35 km to the north of Prague) and **Znojmo** (on the Austrian border). No less popular are the celebrations held in the **Pálava** region in southern Moravia and at **Karlštejn** (not far from Prague). Another interesting event is the **Valtice Wine Fair** held in May in Valtice, one of the major centres of Moravian viniculture.

Those who are pressed for time and would nevertheless like to become familiar with the production and quality of wines in Czechia are recommended to visit the National Viniculture Centre and the National Wine Show Room at the Valtice Chateau (located in southern Moravia, the chateau is part of the UNESCO-protected Lednice-Valtice Complex).

## Non-alcoholic Beverages

Even the smallest catering establishments offer a range of well-established foreign trademarks of non-alcoholic beverages, as well as fruit juices and lemonades. Visiting a country abounding in spas with their curative springs (Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and others), you should make it a point to taste the excellent local mineral water, both natural and flavoured. Coffee and tea are quite common beverages in this country, whereas a request for a glass of milk may take a restaurant's personnel by surprise.

## Alcoholic Beverages - Specialities

Speaking about spas, Karlovy Vary boasts 12 natural springs with curative water and Becherovka. Referred to as the 13th Karlovy Vary spring, this original sweet herb liqueur has been produced according to a secret recipe since the last century. Having invigorating digestive properties, Becherovka is a proper beverage for a spa renowned for treating digestive disorders. This liqueur is excellent both as an apéritif and digestif.

The hilly areas of Moravia abound in plum trees which provide raw material for another characteristic beverage - plum brandy (*slivovice*). This strong, pellucid brandy is easily recognizable by its delicious plum bouquet.



## IX. Some Useful Advice



- When dumplings are served in a restaurant as a side dish on an extra plate, they should be transferred one by one to the guest's own plate and cut into small pieces with the use of cutlery. Dumplings should not be taken by hand like bread or rolls.
- If you drive a car, you should remember that the Czech Republic has one of the most strict regulations regarding driving under the influence of alcohol. A single beer with a content of 0,5 litre (the so-called big beer) disqualifies you as a driver for approximately two hours. If you are party to an accident and are found guilty of driving under the influence of alcohol, you are automatically designated as guilty. We recommend that you rather leave your car in a car park if you intend to drink alcoholic beverages.
- Draft beer is served in mugs with a content of 0,5 litre (big beer) or in glasses with a content of 0,3 litre (small beer).
- Guests who are either pressed for time or do not want to be acquainted with the traditional Czech cuisine step by step can order in many restaurants a dish called *bašta* (locally compounded with the attribute *selská* (Farmer's), *jihocheská* (South Bohemian), and others). *Bašta* consists of a mix of meats prepared according to typical recipes (roast pork, roast poultry, smoked meat), red or white warm cabbage and a mix of classical Bohemian dumplings, potato dumplings and raw potato dumplings.
- A gratuity of 5-15% is expected, although it is not compulsory.





This symbol denotes official tourist information centres



This symbol denotes official certified accommodation facilities

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