

PRAGUE, THE CAPITAL CITY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

'... And there we were, my dear, in the middle of the night with nowhere to go and nothing to eat.

'And so we drove to The Royal Hongkong Yacht club, drank gallons of beer and ate egg sandwiches until the wee hours of the morning.

'Of course, one can only do such things when one is young, you understand.

'Then, it was back into the motor car for a drive to the New Territories and home.

'Can you imagine, being surrounded by thousands of Chinese!

'My word! My dear, what a time that was!

'I remember it, all, as though it were yesterday!'

The above conversation was overheard by **TARGET** (泰達財經) on entering The Blue Duck (Restaurant V Modrè Kachničkv) on the first night of this medium's stay in Prague, the Capital City of The Czech Republic, a city with a resident population of about 1.20 million people.

The conversation – which was, in fact, mostly a monologue – was between an Englishman and a middle-aged, British lady who, obviously, had only been known to this gentleman for a very short space of time because, just prior to their leaving the restaurant, this English lady handed her companion of the evening with some Czech koruna, saying something along the lines: *'This is my share of the dinner.'*

To which the Englishman responded:

'Hmm. I, really, can't bring you back to The Mandarin Oriental, Prague, my dear. Wouldn't be right, you know ... Not done, you see!'

The middle-aged, English lady put her index finger to her lips, indicating that the Englishman was speaking too loudly.

However, the next morning, at about 8 o'clock at breakfast at The Mandarin Oriental, Prague, there was the same British lady, smiling at the Englishman over cups of tea – and without the requirement of the walking stick that she sported the previous evening.

Not done!!!

What happened to that noble creed: An English gentleman is as good as his word?

To have travelled many thousands of miles and, then, to be forced to overhear twaddle out of the mouth of an philander, posing as an Englishman, one who, obviously, was engaging in a little extra-marital affair with a near stranger, was a little hard to take.

It was especially hard to take when one knew, only too well, that a great deal of the monologue was bespattered with half truths and outright lies.

TARGET had determined that, in view of the fact that Prague is just a 7-hour train journey from Hamburg, Germany, it would be a pity not to visit this ancient, fairyland city, located in the central Bohemia Region, situated on both sides of the River Vltava (Moldau River in German).

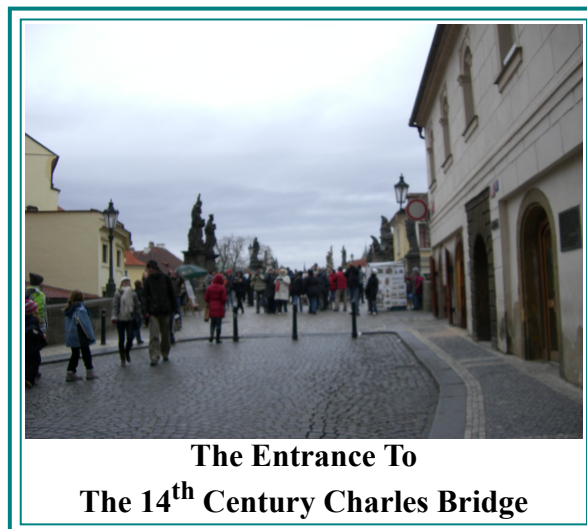
Prague has been a cultural and economic centre since the 13th Century when its old town was built. Its new town was constructed about 100 years later.

During the Renaissance and Baroque Periods, many churches and buildings of outstanding beauty were added to the city, as were examples of art nouveau and early modern architecture in more recent times.

While the city's resident human population, relative to its size of the land area, is small, it is, without doubt, one of the most beautiful cities in Europe.

The Charles Bridge, for instance, dates back to the 14th Century; it separates the old town and what is known as the lesser town.

On this bridge, day and night, one may view unique scenes of this amazing city, with floodlit ancient castles, perched on the hills, overlooking the city.



On one occasion, during **TARGET**'s 5-day stay at The Mandarin Oriental, Prague, which lasted from Wednesday, December 17, 2008, until Monday, December 22, 2008, the following conversation was recorded between an elderly English mother and one of her little children as they walked over The Charles Bridge, named after The Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV:

Young English Girl: Caw! Mom! Look at this!
(pointing to the swirling waters of the Vltava River)
The Mother: Yeh. It's jus wa'er, you know.
Young English Girl: But its dir'y wa'er, Mom!
The Mother: Yeh! Czech river wa'er.
Young English Girl: What are those men, doing, Mom?
(pointing to some workmen on the bridge)
The Mother: Repairing this old bridge, I suspect.
It's in bloody terrible condition!
Young English Girl: Why don't they just build another one, then?
The Mother: Yeh.

Young English Girl: It's a very dir'y bridge.

Look! The statues are all dir'y and crumbly!

The Mother: Yeh.

Young English Girl: Is it safe, you think?

The Mother: I suspect so otherwise they wouldn't allow people to use it.

Young English Girl: I'm tired, Mom. Why can't there be buses on the bridge?

The Mother: Yeh. They should put buses and taxis on this bridge. My feet are killing me, too, 'cause of all these bloody uneven cobbly stones.

The Trip From Hamburg To Prague

The trip from Hamburg to Prague started at about 0445 hours on Wednesday, December 17, 2008, because the management of Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten strongly suggested that **TARGET** eat a hearty breakfast before boarding the train for Prague due to the fact that the food on the train was not known to be haute cuisine.

It was very good advice as **TARGET** came to understand, during the train ride.

The trains between Hamburg and Prague are old and are not particularly clean.

This is in stark contrast to the French commuter trains, most of which are state-of-the-art.

Travelling by train is not recommended, at least not on the Hamburg-Prague run.

Arriving in Prague at about 1318 hours on Wednesday, December 17, 2008, the **TARGET** duo was shepherded to The Mandarin Oriental, Prague, in a Mercedes van.

This hotel had only been open for about 2 years when **TARGET** arrived and comprises 99 rooms, 22 rooms of which are suites.

The daily rates, charged at this charming hotel, range from about €400 for guest rooms to €4,000 for the most-expensive, Presidential Penthouse Suite.

The hotel was, officially, opened on September 12, 2006, after what must have been an extremely expensive and lengthy renovation period in order to transform the 14th Century monastery into a modern, 5-star hotel.

Since its opening, it appears that the hotel has not, exactly, caused tourists to flock to this hotel.

The hotel's management refused to state the occupancy levels since the hotel's opening.

However, according to certain hotel sources, it averages in the low 40-percentile level – which means that the hotel is losing money, hand over fist.

This is not, really, surprising for a newly opened hotel, anywhere in the world.

The Mandarin Oriental, Prague, is located in the city's oldest quarter: Malá Strana.

It has only one restaurant, a bar-cum-lounge, and a small but adequate gymnasium, which was hardly ever used by most of the guests, during this medium's stay.

The outstanding feature of the hotel is its spa where one can obtain the best massage in the world at a price that is about one third of the cost for a similar service as the best, 5-star hotel in Hongkong.

However, it is very difficult to book a time to enjoy the spa, probably due to a lack of adequate staff.

TARGET was only able to enjoy the spa for 90 minutes on one occasion, during the 5-day stay, with the usual statement from the spa's receptionist: *'Sorry, fully booked for the day.'*

The hotel has a modern communication facility and high-definition television is standard for all rooms.

The menu at the lone restaurant is small and, aside from breakfast, one would be advised to go out of the hotel in order to sample Czech cuisine which, as one would imagine, abounds in this magical city.

There is no question that quite a number of the Czech residents of the city enjoy their cultural heritage and this medium went to view 2 Verdi Operas – La Traviata and Nabucco – and a Christmas Concert.

After the Verdi Operas, **TARGET** ate at what was thought to be among the best restaurants in the city.

Of all of the restaurants, sampled by this medium, the outstanding ones were, in **TARGET**'s opinion, Le Terrior, a French restaurant with an amazing wine list, and an outlet, owned and operated by the Potrefená Husa Group.

It was at an outlet of the Potrefená Husa Group that **TARGET** experienced an incredible, 2-hour meal at the cost of about \$HK500.

It comprised 2 wonderful Moravian soups, 2 kilos of pork knuckle and a similar amount of baked goose (hind quarter), 2 glasses of mulled wine, a desert of pancakes, and a cup of coffee.

This is not a fancy restaurant, by any stretch of the imagination, but, for the tourist, it should be considered a must since one is able to taste food, prepared for local residents where, among other things, the Czech residents bring their dogs and their recently born babies as talking points.

The restaurant even supplies stainless steel dog plates so that the dogs may, also, partake of the food.

In Prague, there are at least 2 distinct types of Czech food: Bohemian and Moravian, the latter-named cuisine, being distinctive for its sweeter taste, created by the wide use of fruit, fruit juices and sugar, during the cooking process.

Eating At Potrefená Husa Group: Come With A Very Good Appetite



This Is Baked Goose (Hind Quarter) With Dumplings



This Is the 2 Kilos Of Pork Knuckle With All The Trimmings

TARGET was not impressed with the night life of the city because, aside from the crush of the tourists, flooding into the city, daily, the local residents tend to drink far too much alcohol and, as a result, many of them are prone to vomit on street corners.

The Mandarin Oriental, Prague, has little to nothing to offer its guests in the evenings which, in the month of December, start at about 1600 hours.

For Asian tourists, visiting this beautiful city with its cobble-stoned, narrow streets and electric trams, with only a scant knowledge of the English and German languages, they are at a terrible disadvantage because English and German are the predominant languages of the television.

While **TARGET** is unlikely, ever, to return to The Mandarin Oriental, Prague, at the same time, there is little to criticise this hotel and/or its management.

The service is adequate, but aside from the wonderful spa, the hotel can easily become burdensome and extremely boring due to its lack of guest services and food outlets.

Also, Internet connection, at least with regard to Suite 427, during **TARGET**'s stay, was spotty and, for the final 3 days, it was non-existent.

And so, on Monday, December 22, 2008, at noon, it was back to Hamburg and Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten in order to enjoy Christmas 2008.

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