

A photograph of a narrow street in a European city, likely Prague. The buildings are multi-story and painted in various colors like pink, yellow, and green. There are black street lamps and a yellow 'ORANGE BAR' sign hanging from a building. Several people are walking on the sidewalk, and a dark SUV is parked on the right. A blue '20' speed limit sign is visible on the right. In the background, there's a red sign with Chinese characters and a sign for a conservatory.

# COUNTRY

# OVERVIEW

# & PACKING

# GUIDELINES

**Czech Republic: Arts Studios in Creative Writing,  
Contemporary Dance, and Photography**

Summer 2024

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# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Please note that information is subject to change based on shifting conditions in the US and the Czech Republic.

Located in central Europe, the Czech Republic is situated southeast of Germany and shares a border with Austria to the south, Poland to the north, and Slovakia to the southeast. Prague is the capital and largest city, with a population of 1.2 million people. The majority of the 10.5 million inhabitants of the Czech Republic are ethnically and linguistically Czech.

Following WWI, the closely related Czechs and Slovaks of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire merged to form Czechoslovakia. After WWII, Czechoslovakia fell within the Soviet sphere of influence. With the collapse of Soviet authority in 1989, Czechoslovakia regained its freedom through a peaceful “Velvet Revolution.” On January 1, 1993, the country underwent a “Velvet Divorce” into its two national components, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The Czech Republic is a multi-party republic with two legislative houses; its chief of state is the president, and the head of government is the prime minister. The president is elected by parliament for a five-year term. The prime minister is appointed by the president, as is the cabinet. The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004.

The economy, privatized since 1990, is now largely market-oriented. Major industries in the Czech Republic include fuels, ferrous metallurgy, machinery and equipment, coal, motor vehicles, glass, and armaments.

## CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

In the summer, you may experience fine warm weather that may last for weeks; but the weather varies greatly and can be quite cold. You will need to be prepared for both warm and cool weather. It is a good idea to pack clothing that can be worn in layers.

## LOCAL CUSTOMS

There are a few local customs and habits that may be useful to know before arriving. Upon entry to a personal home, it is polite to take off your shoes, introduce yourself quite formally with a handshake, and bring a small gift such as wine or flowers if it is a special event.

Prague, Czech Republic: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)				
MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT
67/47	71/51	76/55	75/55	66/48

There are a number of expectations surrounding behavior on public transportation. There are two seats reserved in each train or trolley carriage for elderly people, children, or people with physical disabilities. You are expected to stand up and offer your seat to these people, regardless of whether you are in those designated seats.

Finally, upon entry to a shop, gallery, or other public space, it is polite to acknowledge whoever is there—the clerk, gallery assistant, or other person—with *dobrý den* or *Good Day*, as you will learn during your first week of language study.

## DIET

### Special Diets:

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies where possible, but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions or non-medically mandated diets can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally (including with your host family) from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of

choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

You may already know that meals, cafés, and pubs are an integral part of Czech culture and perhaps you have also heard that the traditional meal includes meat and heavy carbohydrates. But many Czech families do not adhere strictly to the traditional Czech cuisine, especially in Prague and other major cities. Many familiar food brands and fresh fruit and vegetable markets are as readily available today as they are in the United States. There are also many restaurants catering to a variety of tastes and cultures and serving international (even vegetarian) cuisines when you are not with your homestay family.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.



## SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends doing your own research to stay up to date on [CDC guidelines](#). It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel, and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. SIT encourages students to have an informed

discussion with your doctor and/or a travel clinician about what vaccines and other prophylactic medication you should receive.

Consider your normal routines for maintaining your physical and mental health & wellbeing. How might your program impact your ability to continue these routines? With this in mind, SIT strongly recommends bringing a full semester's supply of prescription medication(s). Getting a prescription filled outside of one's home country is very difficult, if not impossible. Equally challenging is receiving medication from home by mail. Therefore, students should bring an entire semester's worth of medication with them. Students are also advised to bring several extra inhalers and/or Epi-pens if prescribed.

Students should speak with their health care provider and/or a travel clinician and consult [CDC guidelines](#) regarding required and recommended immunizations and country regulations. Students participating on programs that require the yellow fever vaccine, will receive a signed and stamped "yellow card" after getting vaccinated, known as the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP, which can be printed here). It is important to bring this card with you when traveling to the program. SIT recommends that students insert this document into their passport so that it is easily accessible when requested by immigration officials. Even if yellow fever is not a requirement for your program, it is good practice to bring a copy of your immunization record with you, including your Covid 19 immunization card(s).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health Office](#).

While Prague is a generally safe place, the same general rules for safety and security apply as they would in other major cities. The biggest criminal threat in Prague is pickpockets on the public transportation system who often take advantage of tourists and other English speakers. Speaking English loudly on the metro or tram will ensure you receive unwanted attention by would-be pickpockets.

While it sounds obvious, you are advised to cross the streets only at crosswalks due to the notorious speed and inattention of Czech drivers and to

ensure that cars have actually stopped before you cross the street in front of them. Likewise, crossing tram tracks at any point other than designated crosswalks is ill-advised as oncoming trams are sometimes not visible as the one from which you have disembarked pulls away.

While Czech beer has a worldwide reputation, abuse of alcohol is not tolerated at any time during the program. Reckless behavior and impaired judgment due to alcohol consumption will be disciplined appropriately.

Please consider your needs for medical and health prior to departure, including any medications you may require for the duration of the stay. The medical center in Prague is staffed with English-speaking doctors and specialists across a spectrum of health areas. Appointments are usually possible a day or two in advance, as well as on weekends in the case of an emergency.

## HOMESTAYS

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.

Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities and expectations.

Each program’s homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay**



**placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

In this program, you will be staying with families in districts around and just outside of Prague; the families welcome you as part of their family. The program staff will speak with you personally about homestay during the orientation week; the family size, type of home, and activity schedule of the family varies as greatly in Czech society as it does in the United States. The commute time is also very much like the US, where one travels daily 30-50 minutes into town. The homestay is a rewarding and unique experience, challenging you to put into practice what you learn in the classroom about cultural sensitivity and to practice your language skills as well as other practical skills like getting around by bus and tram.

Most homestay families are non-smoking families, but both smoking and non-smoking families take part in the program: your preference in this regard is one of the important items program staff will discuss with you in-person during orientation week.

## OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations during academic excursions include small pensions and hotels.

## TRANSPORTATION

You will be commuting **30 to 50 minutes** from your homestay to the SIT classroom each day, by public transportation. You will travel by tram (or trolley cars) and the underground (or metro) or public bus;



you might also use the local train transport or private family transportation.

## COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call



home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

## PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

A local SIM card in the Czech Republic will cost between CZK 200 – 500 (USD \$8 - \$20), and if you buy a local smart phone that will be CZK 1,000 – 5,000 (USD \$40 - \$200), or you **may borrow a**

**second-hand phone from SIT.** Keeping your phone topped up with credit will usually cost around USD \$25 a month.

Upon arrival, you are advised to check in with your parents and other loved ones by email—wireless is available at the pension where you will be staying—and you can also confirm your new telephone number with them in the first days of the program.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours. As mentioned above, the internet is accessible through the wireless connection at the school, so you should be able to access your email there during the day. There are cafés with free WIFI throughout Prague.

## MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged.



For this program, **DHL, FedEx, and UPS services are available in country.** Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package. The local mailing address will be provided to you during orientation week.

## MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the

group, students will be given a stipend to cover related expenses. SIT will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary.

The Czech Republic's currency is the Koruna (Crown), and uses the identifier CZK. ATMs are found everywhere in the Czech Republic and the rest of Central Europe. It is recommended that you have the majority of your money in a checking account in the US and access it using a debit/ATM card. One credit card (Visa or MasterCard) is also advisable for purchases and emergencies. All major credit cards are used in Prague and Central European cities, with VISA, MasterCard, and Maestro being the most common. In the Czech, Polish, and Slovak regions, American Express is less common. It is good to have a small amount of cash for traveling and emergencies. It is safe and recommended that you keep your valuables with your other belongings at your homestay.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages**.

A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US \$1,500 to \$2,000**. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional

expenditures you may have on the program, including travel costs for your planned ISP or a specific personal expense.

Check current exchange rates:  
<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Please budget approximately:

<b>Personal spending:</b> (from past student suggestions)	\$20-30 /day
<b>Books, printing, supplies:</b>	\$200
<b>Up-front medical costs:</b> (you will get reimbursed for medical costs)	\$300
<b>Phone Expenses:</b>	\$100-250
<b>Estimated total:</b>	\$1,500- 2,000

## VISITORS AND FREE TIME

**SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term**, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the Attendance and Participation section of the [Student Handbook](#).

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to

understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist. Please note that you will not have a long break during the program.



# PACKING GUIDELINES

## LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. It is highly recommended that your one small or medium bag is a backpack, as this type is much more appropriate for excursions, where longer walks with your bags may be necessary.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

## CLOTHING GUIDELINES

You will find that the dress in Prague is the same as in the United States, especially fashion for young people. You should feel free to bring a lot of tidy casual clothing—for home, school, and even attendance at the alternative theatres and shows we visit where casual clothing is welcome—and something that is more formal (rather nice-casual) for classical concerts or perhaps some special events with your family. Keep in mind that in summer the weather is warm, but even these months are unpredictable. The best solution is to bring clothes that can be layered plus a warm coat. You will be outside for long periods of time: while traveling to and from class, during lectures in the field, and on the walking tours we do during excursions. **Good walking or hiking shoes** are essential. In Prague, you will be doing a lot of walking on wet cobble stone streets, so your shoes should be low-heeled, waterproof, comfortable, and rubber-soled. Most importantly, good outdoors

walking shoes are necessary for walks and hikes during excursions outside Prague.

In short, casual dress is the norm, and jeans, good walking shoes, and layers are key.



## COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is **strongly recommended** that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. SIT does not provide personal property insurance and it is recommended that you insure your computer or other valuables for full coverage. For details on SIT's insurance, please see the full Description of Coverage on our [Student Insurance](#). SIT is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss. The program center has two PC computers, a student printer, and wireless internet that students may access during school opening hours. Free wireless is also readily available at cafés and restaurants throughout the city as well.

Most students in the past have brought their laptops and can get support at local service centers or at the school itself when technical problems occur. It is also possible to rent a laptop for a short-term period should the need arise. Students do not often take their laptops with them on excursion.

**Students should be warned:** ensure that equipment can be stowed safely and locked; otherwise it is advisable to keep equipment with you at all times.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters.  
<https://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>.

The program site has a couple of adaptors available for temporary use, but it is recommended that you bring the adaptor with you or buy one in Prague (which will likely be more expensive).

## GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy.. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your



personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family.

## WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

The good news is that most items you can find in drugstores and other shops in the United States can be found in Prague. As a general rule clothes and equipment are much more expensive in Europe. Toiletries are readily available, as are school supplies so there is no need to over-pack in these areas. You will do your laundry at your homestay; should you have hand-washable clothes (not

recommended), soap for this purpose may also be found.

## ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or [Contact a Former Student](#).

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page! These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.

# PACKING LIST

## GENERAL

- Underwear (ten-day supply)
- Socks (two-week supply)
- 1 pair comfortable, everyday shoes that are fairly dressy and good for walking
- 1 pair of very good hiking shoes that will be necessary for rough terrain on excursions
- 1 pair summer sandals
- 1 pair wet weather shoes
- 1 pair of nicer shoes
- 2 pairs pants (dressy and casual)
- 2 pairs neat jeans
- 2 or 3 pairs of shorts or summer skirts
- 5-6 shirts (at least two nicer shirts, or more if you think you'll need them)
- 2 sweaters
- 1 cold weather coat
- House slippers (worn by members of almost all host families...you should have your own pair)
- Warm pajamas or nightgown (not all buildings have central heating)
- Skirt/dress or dress pants for some cultural outings or sports jacket and tie

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport

## HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Extra pair of glasses or contacts, if needed
- Contact cleaning/soaking liquid, if needed
- Adequate supply of prescription medication (including birth control pills) and vitamins, if needed

## OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Travel alarm clock
- Travel umbrella
- School supplies to get you started during orientation (journal, pens, index cards, etc.)

## OPTIONAL

- 1 nicer coat or jacket to wear when dressing up or going out
- Swimsuit

