



A sketch of the town's history

On the banks of the Otava River, about a hundred kilometres south of Prague, the kings of Bohemia founded the castle and town of Písek just before the middle of the 13th century. It was formed to protect the panning areas of the gold-bearing sand as well as the trading 'Gold Route'. The first written mention of the town is from a document from King Václav I dated 1243. The town's active trade and manufacturing led to its rapid growth, also enjoying the favours of the Czech monarchs Přemysl Otakar II, Karel IV, and Václav IV, who were frequent guests to the town. Even in the high Middle Ages, the town was the centre of a vast region named Prácheň, and it assumed a significant territorial area of southwestern Bohemia. Písek was already inclining towards the Hussite movement even before the Hussite Wars, and from 1419 to 1452 it was even an independent municipal Hussite Republic, oftentimes the temporary residence of Jan Žižka of Trocnov, the seat of the Hussite bishop Mikuláš Biskupec, while the general property was managed by hetman Matěj Louda of Chlumčany. The period following the Hussite wars was also prosperous to the town, with many costly buildings erected and purchases of municipal properties.

The first interruption to the town's promising development was the unsuccessful anti-Habsburg uprising in 1546-47 and its stance against the Monarchy at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War. Písek was invaded three times in 1619-20, conquered every time, and the final capitulation on 30. September 1620 marked the town's veritable destruction. Habsburg soldiers slaughtered a large part of the population and set most of the houses ablaze. Revitalization came slowly and was hindered by a number of fires, epidemics, and passing troops, such as the months-long occupations of French and Bavarian soldiers in 1741-42.

The town completely changed its shape from the 19th century. It grew beyond its fortification walls, streets full of tenant homes extended through the suburbs, Czech became the official town language, cultural institutions and associations appeared, and this town surrounded by forests became sought out as a popular summer residence and a destination for hikers. Písek was also witness to the industrial revolution, with the industrial production of hats, a tobacco plant, and a malthouse being established here. On June 23, 1887, František Křižík introduced arc lamp lighting and with it the first public electric lighting in the Czech lands.

The Nazi occupation brought great hardship to Písek which was alleviated with the arrival of American troops on May 6, 1945. Following the war, the town's periphery saw the formation of new factories, the best known of them perhaps being Jitex, and new residential complexes. Luckily, the ambitious period of socialism didn't bring heavy industry into Písek, and this pearl of the Otava River managed to retain its calm historical character. Even recently, the town was faced with one of its history's most difficult challenges – the thousand-year flood of August of 2002.



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Visit the Town of Písek



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Welcome to Písek, to a former royal town, a town of gold...

...a town with 30 thousand residents at the northern edge of the South Bohemian Region, once a town on the Gold Route, now on a favourite tourist route between Prague and Český Krumlov. It's been called the Athens of South Bohemia, a town of schools and students, a town of pensioners, a Mecca for violinists, and a town in a sea of forests. Písek also offers a unique connection between the river and historic town centre, since the town's most attractive feature is the oldest preserved bridge in Bohemia. It was built before the end of the 13th century to cross the Otava River, whose gold-bearing sandy bed gave the town its name.

The dominant feature of the town is the Dean's Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary with its 72 meter high tower, now open to the public. The early Gothic royal tower with its preserved Knight's Hall is now home to the Prácheň Museum, awarded as European Museum of the Year in 1996.

Recent investments into the historic centre's revitalization have brought about a number of remarkable improvements. After a stroll on the reconstructed promenade between the Otava River and the town fortification walls, you can visit the former mill which has now been rebuilt into a functional hydroelectric plant and museum of lighting. This path will lead you to where the Putim Gate stood, well known to the Czechs from a national student song. Relax in the comfortable park, converted from a former fortification moat, or on Bakaláře Square in front of the Dean's Church.

Continuing along the streets of 'Leoše Janáčka' or 'Fráni Šrámka', you'll reach the centre at 'Alšovo' or 'Velké' (Great) Square with a number of other monuments. The 'Sladovna' (Malthouse) is in one of the courtyards behind the Baroque Town Hall, and after a costly reconstruction has become a centre for children's illustrations and the town gallery. It also holds the Infocentrum. At the eastern edge of the town, the Písek Mountains immediately greet you with excellent conditions for strolls, longer hikes and bicycle trips. The area contains a number of natural attractions and offers views onto the South Bohemian landscape with its ponds and the Šumava foothills.

The town is also returning to the tradition of the grand parade of 'Švejk's Fiftieth', reminiscent of the 'Budějovice Anabasis' of this literary hero in the local region. Písek is also an ideal starting point for single day trips, for example, to the Orlík water reservoir, Zvíkov Castle, and the castles of Orlík, Blatná, and Hluboká, the fortress of Kestřany, the monastery in Milevsko, or to any of a number of picturesque villages.

Písek has a vibrant cultural life. The 'Šrámek's Písek' theatre festival, the Town Celebrations, and the film and folklore festivals are all a part of it. The largest and most recent event is the 'Čipískoviště' which features sand sculptures on the banks of the Otava River near the Stone Bridge and the modern architecture of Čechova Street, just before the beginning of summer vacation.

Písek's 'genius loci' has attracted a number of artists, poets, writers, painters, and filmmakers, all who find a continuous source of inspiration in the town and its surroundings.

We trust that you'll have plenty of memorable pleasant moments in Písek, and that you'll be glad to come back!



1 Stone Bridge

Seven granite arches have held this 111 meter long bridge over the Otava River since the late 13th century, making it the oldest preserved structure of its type in the country. The bridge was originally protected at both ends by towers. It is decorated by a cross and Baroque statues from the 18th century, now replaced with replicas. This important national cultural monument even withstood the floods of 2002.



2 Royal Castle / Prácheň Museum

This, the best preserved municipal castle in Bohemia, was built in the latter half of the 13th century for the Czech King Přemysl Otakar II. It originally had a square layout and three protective towers. Today only the western wing above the river has survived, including the great gothic hall, called the Knight's Hall. These spaces, and those adjacent to it, now house the Prácheň Museum, which documents the history, culture, tradition, and nature of the region. This is a good place to become acquainted with the history of gold mining in the area, the mineral Písekite, the fauna of the South Bohemian waters, the original statues from the Stone Bridge, and many other interesting exhibits.



3 Town Hall

The late Baroque Town Hall, built between 1740 and 1765, dominates the present-day main square. This used to be the site of a castle moat which one crossed to reach the castle (nowadays in the courtyard behind the Town Hall, with the Malt House or 'Sladovna' in the adjacent courtyard). The building is decorated with the coat of arms of the town, decorative vases and statues of Power, Patience, and Justice, and a balcony from where the independence of The Republic of Czechoslovakia was declared on October 14, 1918.



4 Sladovna (Malthouse)

In what is today the municipal gallery, malt was produced for the breweries in Písek and Protivín from 1864 to 1973. The building later served as a storehouse and gradually fell to ruin. Then between 2005 and 2007, it underwent extensive reconstruction and now serves as a cultural building with 1700 m2 of exhibition space and six beautiful galleries, including permanent exhibitions of Czech illustrations for children and the works of Písek native Radek Pilař, the creator of the popular cartoon character Rumcajs. The reception of the building has incorporated a tourist information centre since 2011.



5 Municipal Electric Power Plant

The residents of Písek made use of an old mill on the Otava River for a hydroelectric power plant when the electrotechnical equipment of František Křížík was installed here in 1888 to illuminate the town. The mill wheel was replaced by two Francis turbines at the beginning of the 20th century. The original technical equipment was put back into operation after reconstruction in 1994. A museum of municipal lighting was also opened here in 1997.



6 The Monastery Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

This church, the facade of which is decorated with Renaissance sgraffito, is what remains of the Dominican Monastery which stood here from the time when the town was founded until the time of Joseph II, only halting its activities temporarily during the time of the Hussite uprisings. After the monastery was discontinued, the orientation of the church was changed to make it accessible from the Great Square.



7 Putim Gate and the Gothic Moat

Around the former Putim Gate, made famous to the Czechs by a student song, one can admire the backdrop of the medieval fortifications of Písek. The gate, demolished in 1836, stood between today's houses 'U Zlaté Koule' and 'U Kouli', the facades of which were decorated with cannonballs found during the gate's demolition. The Gothic moat was renovated in 2006 and converted into a park for relaxation. The rampart bastions here are decorated with Písek's flag bearing blue and yellow.



8 Memorial to the Fallen at Melegnano and Solferino

The year 1861 saw the erection of the first memorial in Písek to commemorate the heroic deaths of 872 soldiers of the 11th Písek Infantry Regiment in the battles of northern Italy in June of 1859. Emanuel Max's sculpture shows a lion stepping on two snakes as this war's enemies to Austria – Sardinia and France.



9 Bakaláře and Deanery Church

The area in front of the Church of the Birth of the Virgin Mary was named after the schoolhouse that stood here from 1565 to 1853. During the reconstruction completed in 2009, modern elements were introduced that were intended to be reminiscent of both the school and the fountain that once stood here. In addition to this, two medieval wells were uncovered, as were graves and burial mounds from about 1500 B. C. Visitors can enjoy the ascent to the great church tower (reservations in the Infocentre), which was built to a height of 72 meters at the end of the 15th century in contrast to the original concept of the church from the 13th century.



10 Synagogue

The Jewish community built a magnificent synagogue in 1871 between the streets of Smetanova and Soukenická. Its religious function was not restored after WWII, and it is currently undergoing interior reconstruction.



11 Hotel Dvořáček

Today a restaurant and café, this was once one of the most luxurious hotels in South Bohemia. It was built by the local pharmacist Dvořáček in 1899 near the former Budějovice town gate. He managed to hire the nationally renowned artist Mikoláš Aleš to decorate the facade, who painted a strip of 11 pictures from the history of Písek. This was also the location of the renowned violin school of Prof. Ševčík in the early 20th century.



12 Alšovo Square and the Plague Column

Also known as the 'Small' square, it was evidently once the main marketplace of medieval Písek. The royal magistrate was at house No. 38. In the centre of the square stands the Marian Plague Column with statues from 1715. The town Library is located in building No. 85, built in Empire Style, while house No. 76 is the oldest preserved schoolhouse in Písek. Building No. 50 dates back to 1890 and, with its sgraffito adorned walls, is a prime example Neo-Renaissance architecture; it currently serves as a polyclinic.



13 Baroque houses

Houses No. 31 and 32 in Jungmannova Street are richly decorated and have withstood the fires and reconstructions of preceding centuries. Today, they recall the town's former Baroque appearance and bear witness to how the wealthy townspeople lived. Both houses originally bore arcades, of which only one has survived. Notice the statue of St. John of Nepomuk in the niche of the red house.



14 Statue of St. Florian

This likeness of the patron saint of firemen and chimney sweeps was placed here by the local inhabitants in 1735. The square beneath it was known as 'Kozí břesk', likely for the goat markets held here.



15 Palacký Gardens

This town park was created in the 19th century on the site of a former moat and mound in front of the city walls. It holds the Schrenk Pavilion and a monument to František Palacký, Adolf Heyduk, and recently to pilots of the RAF. A statue of Neptune decorates the space between the Fráňa Šrámek Theatre and the music pavilion. The park holds a number of dining facilities, places to relax in the shade, and cultural productions in the summer.



16 House of Adolf Heyduk

The Adolf Heyduk memorial is located in the house in Tyršova Street built for this famous poet in Neo-Renaissance style in 1900. The house features the original furniture of the study, dining room, and social parlour.



17 House signs

Up until 1770, when numbered addresses were implemented in Písek, the houses were often marked by a symbol denoting the name of the owner, his profession, some event, or just for decoration. Walk through Písek's Old Town and find the houses 'At... the Elephant, the Golden Boat, the White Lamb, St. Anne'... and more. The house 'At the Silver Denars' in Drličov Street, with its facade that was decorated with historical themes in 1940, is worth particular mention.