

# Europe

**Czech Republic Hiking  
— Vienna to Prague  
(guided group hiking)  
9 days from \$2,899  
for members, \$3,199  
for non-members,  
REI Adventures,  
rei.com/adventures,  
800-622-2236**



Photo: Don Mankin

In many respects this is a perfect trip for active seniors. The hiking is just challenging enough (about 6-7 miles a day on mostly flat trails) to compensate for the wine and rich meals you ingest at the end of every day but not so challenging that you throw yourself into the plush soft beds in your hotel room in the late afternoon and refuse to stir until the next morning.

Scenery is as gentle as the hiking. It isn't a wild and dramatic landscape of wilderness, steep mountains and gorges but a peaceful countryside of vineyards, farms and gently rolling hills. You also pass many historic sites along the way – castles, chateaus, stately manor houses, monuments, formal gardens and villages with medieval squares lined with classic houses. The villages are so picture

perfect they could be Disneyland attractions or a set for a Czech remake of the *Sound of Music*.

The most charming village of all was the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Cesky (pronounced Chesky) Krumlove (pronounced Krumlove). More town than village, Cesky Krumlove is the second most popular tourist destination in the Czech Republic after Prague. What makes the town so picturesque are the huge castle complex and the cathedral on a hill in the middle of the town.

A fast-flowing river goosenecks through the town, affording views of castle, cathedral and river from almost everywhere. And of course there is Vienna where the trip starts and Prague where it ends. You can't get a more perfect blending of activity,

comfort, history, culture, bucolic scenery and vibrant, old world city life.

**For more information read my article, "Limping Through the Czech Republic," and the blog posts under the category, "Czech Republic."**

Its worth noting that I had a great deal of difficulty choosing between this trip and a self-guided hiking trip along the Rota Vicentina, a coastal trail in SW Portugal offered by *Macs Adventure* (macsadventure.com, 720-487-9898). Since this trip, like the Ireland self-drive trip, also runs along the Atlantic Coast In Europe, I decided to choose the Czech Republic hiking trip. Both trips are great. You can read about the Portugal trip in my article, "Hiking in SW Portugal" and in my blog posts under "Portugal."



**Driving the Wild Atlantic Way on the West Coast of Ireland. (self-drive auto trip) length and cost TBD, Discover Ireland, wildatlanticway.com**

The biggest challenge of this trip is driving on the opposite side of the car on the opposite side of some very narrow roads. This is made even more difficult by the constant temptation to avert your eyes from the road to the stunning scenery on your left (or your right if you are heading south).

The intense blue sea reaches to the horizon and carves the rugged, emerald green countryside into cliffs, bays and sweeping, curving white sand beaches. The scenery is broken up only by quaint villages where you can stop for a meal of fresh seafood plucked out of the water just a couple

of hours before. Since you're there, you might as well spend the night in a bed and breakfast a short walk from a convivial pub where you can schmooze (a Gaelic expression) with the locals and listen to them play Irish music while you sip a Guinness or whiskey.

Highlights of our 10 day trip included hikes on the Beara Peninsula, through the Gap of Dunloe, along the legendary Cliffs of Moher, around Blasket Island off of Dingle and Inishbofin Island in Connemara, and up Diamond Hill, also in Connemara.

Among the other highlights were a very wet ride in an open boat to visit

Skellig Michael, the spooky site of an ancient monastery at the top of a rugged cliff, a day of fishing in Dingle Bay and eating the fruits of our labors in a restaurant on the docks. And you can't beat the people – friendly, warm and playful with a twinkle in their eye. Or in the words of my wife, "they always seem to be channeling their inner leprechaun."

**See my article, "Driving the Wild Atlantic Way on the West Coast of Ireland" and the blog posts listed under the category "Ireland 2013" for more information.**

Photo: Don Mankin

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