



Nick
From
Burlington Lakeshore
to
Czech Republic

Say Yes To Everything!

I am living in the small town of Pisek in the Czech Republic. It is about one hour south of Prague. This has been the most amazing time of my life so far. Pisek is quite a small town of about 34,000 people but it is considered large here. It dates back to the 13th Century when the city was in the midst of a gold rush. The cities name "Pisek" roughly translates to "sand" in English because during the gold rush the citizens would pan the gold out of the sand in the river which left massive piles of sand on the banks of the river. My city is absolutely gorgeous with the old architecture and the cobblestone roads. Pisek also contains the oldest bridge in central Europe, older than the Charles Bridge in Prague.

My school here is really good. At first I was put into an all boys school which I switched out of and I am now in a school called Gymnazium Pisek. There are many specialized schools in the Czech Republic which students choose to go to, to study a specific trade such as agriculture, business etc. The normal schools you will find all over the Czech Republic are called Gymnaziums (it is not pronounced like the "g" in gym but like the "g" in game). It is also referred to as grammar school. These schools are much like high schools in Canada in that they teach a wide variety of classes. You are not able to choose classes and your classes vary on each day but you are always with your home room class and rotate to each class with them. I take part in English class as well as biology class but during most of my other classes I am encouraged to study the language instead of doing class work.

My friends here are amazing. I actually feel like I am closer to the ones I have here than some of my friends back home. My best friend is a girl named Anna and we do almost everything together. She was an exchange student to the USA last year so her English is perfect. My next best friend is a girl named Daniela and she speaks some English but we connected almost immediately after meeting and she has encouraged me to continue learning the language in depth. My advice to anyone reading this is SAY YES TO EVERYTHING!!!

I met all of my friends on accidental occasions. An example of that is when a friend of my host Moms son who is in the USA right now for exchange contacted me and said he wanted to meet me at a restaurant. I arrived and he had brought along some people from his class. I introduced myself and started talking with them and eventually I was drawn to talking a lot with my now best friend Daniela. We met at a coffee shop the following day and became instant friends. Later that week she brought me to a festival in my town and everyone from my school was there so I met many new people. One of the people I talked to was my friend Anna and at first I honestly didn't pay attention to her. Two days later I was in the main square of the town and recognized her sitting alone and randomly decided to go see her and say hi. We talked for a good hour just sitting on a bench and we became the best of friends from then on. So my advice is ALWAYS SAY YES and DO NOT BE AFRAID TO TALK WITH PEOPLE, it could lead to an amazing

friendship.

My host family here is nice but it does lack the structure of a family. I only have a host mother and sometimes I do feel a bit sad that I am not in a family. She works a lot and is always out of the house which allows me to explore and gives me a huge level of independence.

So far I have been to many places. I have been to Prague three times and watched an opera in a 17th century theatre. I have been to Cesky Budejovice which is one of the biggest cities in the Czech Republic and the home of the original Budweiser (the North American Budweiser is an imitative rip off). Also Cesky Krumlov which is a beautiful city with a massive castle. I have been to Plzen which is the home of the very famous Pilsen beer.

I also saw a concert by a famous Czech violinist Pavel Sporcl. I went to the Bavarian forest in Germany hiking, to the Sumava mountain range, and on both a 34 km and a 61km bike ride around the country side. Czech people love to bike.

I travelled to Vienna, Austria with my schools art class which was the best day of my exchange so far (Vienna is the most beautiful and amazing city on earth), this weekend I will be going to a One Republic concert in Prague with my best friend Anna and then to Munich, Germany on Monday. Many more trips are planned and are coming soon.

The language is extremely hard to learn. I am picking it up the best I can and I am learning something new everyday if you thought learning French in Canadian high schools was tough, try learning a Slavic language). I have Czech lessons six hours a week, three hours after school on Monday and 3 hours after school on Wednesday. I am always tired.

Some random things I can share with you. Czech people are notorious for beer drinking, they hold the record for having the largest consumption of beer out of every country in the world. Czechs love beer and you will be exposed to it a lot! It is custom and not uncommon that here you share a beer with your family, friends and even Rotarians. It is treated like going to Tim Hortons and having coffee in Canada (to the Rotarians reading this ;)). You relax and talk a lot with the person

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you are sitting with while tasting the finest beer on the planet. Czechs also love to bike as I said above, it is not uncommon to go for a casual 10km bike ride on a random afternoon. Everything is EXTREMELY CHEAP if you are coming from Canada. The conversion rate is about 20 CZK for 1 CAN so with this rate I have bought a ton of cloths for a fifth of the price it would be in Canada. Energy drinks become a daily part of your diet. I am always extremely tired after a long day of doing things and school so a red bull or monster helps me stay awake.

This is all I can think of to share. I am having the best time of my life.

Sincerely

Nick Stephen
