

The historical capital of Moravia (216 m, 389 970 inhabitants), the second largest town in the Czech Republic, seat of the Constitutional Court of Law and the Supreme Court of the Czech Republic.

Industrial centre (engineering, electrical works, textile mills, food processing). Seat of Masaryk University and a number of research institutes. Since 1928 with a tradition of exhibitions and trade fairs. (The International Engineering

Trade Fair dates from 1959). Important traffic junction linked with Prague by motorway, international airport. Historical monuments, the core of the town being a Historic Town Reserve. Numerous theatres, museums and exhibition halls, seat of the bishopric.

Settlement dates back to the Stone Age. A Slavic hill-fort arose during the Great Moravian Empire. In the 11th cent. a demesne castle of the Přemyslid princess with a Romanesque church at what is today Petřov, and below the castle a settlement arose at the crossroad of trade routes. This gradually became a walled town and acquired a town charter in 1243.

From the late 13th cent. Land Diets and courts were held in Brno. The town flourished under the margraves of the Luxembourg dynasty in the 14th cent. (John Henry, Jost and Procopius). In the course of the Thirty Years' War the town suffered considerable damage and was twice unsuccessfully besieged by the Swedish

army (1643 and 1645). In the second half of the 17th cent. it was turned into an important fortress, which was unsuccessfully besieged also by King Frederick II of Prussia. Manufacture and factory production developed from the middle 18th cent. By c. 1850 the number of inhabitants had risen to 50 000. The town was badly damaged in the course of the struggle for liberation in April 1945.

The dominating feature of the town is the **Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul** on Petrov Hill. In 1091 a prince's castle and a Romanesque basilica stood here. The Gothic cathedral dates from the 14th cent. with Baroque alterations in the 18th and Neo-Gothic additions in the 19th and early 20th cent. Stone statue of the Madonna from c.1300. The bells ringing at 6 o'clock recall to this day the Swedish attack of 1645. (General Torstensson had decided he would withdraw if Brno did not fall by noon. At the critical moment of the

the bells at Petřov an hour early, and the Swedes broke up their attack).

The largest square is the **Zelný trh** ("Cabbage Market") where fruit, vegetables and flowers are sold to this day. In the middle stands the fountain of Parnassus (end of 17th cent., J.B. Fischer of Etlach). In the upper part of the market place is a Baroque Trinity Column, "Spáříček" (town houses with Gothic cores) and the buildings of Dietrichstein Palace (Ditrichštejnský palác - early Baroque) and the Bishop's Court (Biskupský dvůr - now used by the Moravian Museum, founded 1817: Moravian nature, history exhibition). Further the building of Reduta, the oldest theatre in Brno. From the adjacent Kapucinské náměstí (Capuchin Sq.) there is an interesting view of Petřov and its terraces. Early Baroque Capuchin monastery, in the crypt below the church mummies, including that of the leader of the Pandours, Baron Trenck, who was imprisoned on Spilberk.

Radnická street leads from Zelný trh to the **Gothic Old Town Hall** (Stará radnice) with a late Gothic portal by A. Pilgram (1510-11), which has five little towers with the central one leaning off its axis. This was to bring to mind the "crooked justice" of the Aldermen, who promised to Pilgram good remuneration but gave him little). The tower roof with a gallery (view of the town) and the arcades in the courtyard are Late Renaissance. In the passageway there is a dragon to which numerous legends relate. (In reality it is a crocodile, which Emperor Matthias received as a gift from the Turkish deputy). And there is a wheel (The wheelwright master at Lednice made a bet that he would fell a tree, fashion a wheel and roll it to Brno, a distance of 45 km, in one day, and he won his bet). Inside the town hall there are state rooms, exhibition halls, and concerts are held here.

In Dominikánská street and on Dominikánské náměstí Sq. there are further important monuments. The **House of the Squires of Kunštát** (Dům pánů z Kunštátu) with a Renaissance courtyard is used for exhibition purposes (e.g. graphic collections).

The monastery Church of St Michael (kostel sv. Michaela) dates from the 17th cent. There is a gallery of statues on the ramp outside the church. The **New Town Hall** (Nová radnice) served as the headquarters of the Moravian Land Administration from the middle 14th cent. until 1784. Now it is used by the town authorities. In the Assembly Hall there are interesting fresco decorations depicting Homage of the Olympian Gods to Moravia, coat-of-arms of the Moravian Barons in the Knights' Hall.

The main square in Brno is called **Náměstí Svobody** ("Freedom Square"). In its centre stands a 1680 Plague Column. Among the houses there is the outstanding Klein Palace (Kleinův palác) with cast-iron decorations on the facade and the Renaissance House of the Squires of Lipá (dům pánů z Lipě) with sgrafitto decorations (also known as Schwartz House - Schwartzův dům). This is the **crossroad of the main shopping streets** of Brno: Masarykova třída, with trams lines, leading to the Main Station, Česká street, a pedestrian zone with many shops, similarly Kobilžná street with the Ethnographic Museum at its beginning, showing an exhibition of life in the Moravian countryside (formerly the 17th cent. Institute for Noblewomen). Finally ulice 9. května street (likewise tram lines) with the **Church of St James** (kostel sv. Jakuba), the main town church in the style of 15th and 16th cent. Late Gothic with the tomb of the defenders of Brno against the Swedes, Reduite de Souches, a wooden Cross from the late 13th cent. a stone pulpit of 1525 and the highest tower in Brno, 92 m, tall.

Other monumental buildings and promenade parks on the one-time fortifications, taken down c. 1861: On Moravské náměstí Sq. the Church of St. Thomas (kostel sv. Tomáše) at the former Augustinian monastery, a Gothic building with nave and aisles, Baroque adaptations 1665-75, with a stone Pietà of 1385 by J. Parler. The Moravian Gallery is located in the monastery building as is the State Philharmonic Brno. On the way to the station is the modern Janáček Theatre (Janáčkovo divadlo) 1960-65, and the Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Baroque Mahlen Theatre (Mahlenovo divadlo) of 1881-82. Almost below Spilberk are buildings from the late 19th and early 20th cent.: e.g. the Court of Law, the Neo-Gothic Protestant Church of J. Amos Komenského), the building of the Janáček Academy of Music (Janáčkova akademie muzických umění) the Besední dům (in the 19th cent. the social and cultural centre of Brno, and the Neo-Renaissance Moravian Gallery. The Castle and fortress of **Spilberk** dates from the reign of King Přemysl Otakar II (1277). It was rebuilt in the 17th cent., turned into a Baroque fortress in 1742, from the end of the 18th cent. to 1853 served as Prison of the Nations for members of the anti-Habsburg nationalist movement in Europe (Italians, Hungarian Jacobins, Polish patriots). Finally it was turned into barracks and became a prison again during the second world war. Now, after extensive reconstruction, it houses museum and gallery exhibitions. Splendid view of the town of Brno.

From Spilberk Castle it is possible to go down past the Orthodox Church to Uvoz street and Mendlovo náměstí Sq., the area of **Old Brno**. Here are the extensive grounds of the former **Cistercian monastery** founded 1323 by Queen Elizabeth Richeza. (It is said that she threw three flags from Spilberk to decide the choice of the location, and one of them fell straight on Old Brno). The convent church from the second half of the 14th cent., adapted in Rococo style, is flanked by a cloister and a Chapter Hall. Here Gregor Mendel, who formulated the laws of genetics (1822-84), worked, and his experimental garden has been maintained with an added exhibition.

At far away are the **Brno Exhibition grounds**. The first exhibition on Contemporary Culture was held in 1928 and some of the pavilions, e.g. A, date from that time. Others were added in the late fifties. The first International Engineering Trade Fair was held in 1959, and at that time Pavilion Z with a cupola 93 m in diameter and a high-rise administration building were erected.

Places of interest in the suburbs:

Villa Tugendhat at Černé Pole, the most important work of the German architect Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), built 1928-30, and used for official functions of the town authorities. At Pisárky, by the R. Svratka, is the **Anthropos pavilion**, a museum exhibition devoted to paleontology and anthropology. Race grounds where motorcycle and car racing is held on a special circuit (Grand Prix of the Czech Republic).

Brno reservoir - built 1935-39. The dam is 34 m high and holds a 9 km long reservoir, regular boat transport, recreation area. On a rocky spur above the reservoir stands **Veveří Castle**, 13 km NW of the town centre. It was originally a royal castle, built in the second half of the 13th cent. and has recently been reconstructed.

Zlatochovice - town (190 m, 3 179 inhabitants) 18 km S., with an original Renaissance chateau, several times rebuilt, after 1918 the summer residence of the Presidents of the Republic.

Tišnov - town (256 m, 8 480 inhabitants) 22 km NW, on the R. Svratka. In the suburb of Předklášteří stands a Cistercian Convent for nuns, Porta Coeli, founded in 1233 by the widowed Queen Constantia, who was buried here. Gothic convent church of 1240-60 with a magnificent portal with plant and figural ornamentation, with Christ Enthroned on the tympanum, columns with the figures of the twelve Apostles.

Pernštejn - castle 38 km NW of Brno, the family seat of the leading Moravian House of the Pernštejns. One of the best preserved and fortified castles in the country, standing on a long rocky promontory. The core of the castle from the 13th cent. was rebuilt by Vilem of Pernštejn and his successors from the second half of the 15th cent. for a period of 100 years. The result was a horseshoe-shaped barbican, halls with diamond vaulting, a Renais-

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lavkov (Austerlitz) near Brno - see separate entry
Moravian karst district (Moravský kras) - see separate entry

Old Tales

As Brno is an old town, there are numerous tales related to it. Among the best known is the tale about the Brno dragon and the wheel, both of which now hang in the entrance to the Old Townhall and which are familiar to every visitor.

Brno Dragon

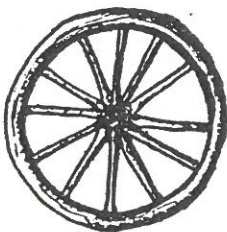
One of the versions of this tale says that many years ago, a crocodile ran away from a wandering group of comedians to the river Svratka and became a real scare to the town and its inhabitants.

A smart prisoner in Špilberk thought of a trap – they decided to use a dead sheep as a bait and put quicklime inside it. When the crocodile ate the sheep, it took a drink of water, the lime began to slake and his good idea and the councillors had the "dragon" hung at the entrance to the townhall as a reminder. Another tale claims that the "dragon" appeared in the river Svltava just by itself and was killed in a similar way. Still another tale has it differently: servants of Lord Trutnovský caught it roughly in the place where the town of Trutnov was founded later. Duke Oldřich donated it to Brno later. We know however, that the crocodile, – alias dragon, was donated to the city by the margrave (later king Matthias) in 1608, when he received it as a gift from a Turkish delegation. He wanted to dispose of a rare and precious, nevertheless a somewhat inconvenient gift.



Brno Wheel

Under the same vault at the entrance to the townhall hangs a wooden wheel. They say that the wheel was made by a farmer far from Brno, who was sentenced to death for a serious crime. He promised to fall a tree, make a wheel out of it and roll it over to Brno in a single day. He managed to do it and was pardoned. The truth is a bit different: master wheelwright Jiří Birk from Lednice, about 40 kilometres from Brno, made a bet that he was going to make the wheel and arrive at the gates of Brno being they closed. He won, the city council hang the wheel next to the dragon and rewarded Birk with ducats. There are several versions as to how many ducats Birk actually got but there is probably no way of knowing today.



Portal With a Slanting Turret

When you walk out of the Old Townhall and stand in front of the building you will notice a splendid Gornic portal. The turret in the middle is slightly slanting. It is said that Antonín Pilgram himself did it to the council out of spite. They promised to pay a great deal of money for the work on the portal, and they gave him very little in the end, and the slanting turret above the figure of Justice was supposed to point at their unfairness. On the request of the councillors, a new straight turret was set in the portal by another sculptor, but, somehow it was bent overnight.

