



**Saxon-Bohemian
SWITZERLAND**

(Un) known Places of the Bohemian Switzerland region

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WELCOME TO BOHEMIAN SWITZERLAND!

Barely 30 years ago, no one even really knew where the Bohemian Switzerland region was. But then the national park was created and shortly after that the Bohemian Switzerland non-profit organisation. The region woke up and its local municipalities realised that tourism would only benefit the area. Today it might be said that everyone now knows about the Bohemian Switzerland region. But does anyone really know all of it?

On the following pages we have decided to mainly focus on those unknown places. The popularity of the place is not important – each and every one of them will be given equal treatment because the beauty of the region is endless and everywhere. Everything you will read about shortly is equally worthy of your attention, since it is a pleasure for all real explorers to know the landscape in its context and entirety, as no part can exist without the other. So please excuse us for choosing the slightly overused word ‘discover’ as we invite you to DISCOVER Bohemian Switzerland in all its beauty.

Come and enter the landscape of grand, towering cities of rock, mysterious gorges with their icy morning breath, a land of breathtaking lookouts and

deep forests. A place where rock walls and solitary sandstone towers glisten in the sun among a paradise of crystal streams and rivers. Enter the land of black storks, falcons, owls, deer and kingfishers. Come and marvel at the traces of human life – little jewels of human architecture, small sacred monuments hidden in forests or rocks and noble towns full of surprises. Discover the Czech Lowlands too and admire with eyes wide open their rugged rolling landscapes, Stations of the Cross and remarkable cities.

Before you read on and venture into the countryside, we have one big request to make: please be a considerate and responsible visitor. Be careful of the trees which the bark beetle has in places turned into monuments threatening to fall. Leave nature be inside the national park and be sure to walk only on the marked trails. Don't drive if you don't have to. You'll also save yourself the hassle of parking as in the summer some places get very crowded. And remember, Bohemian Switzerland is beautiful all year round! Thank you for wanting to be an asset rather than a threat to this beautiful natural landscape.



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1. TISA ROCKS (TISKÉ STĚNY)

A labyrinthine city of giants



From time to time people start to wonder about where exactly Bohemian Switzerland begins. So, here it is – it's where Krušné hory (the Ore Mountains) ultimately end after their descent down into the valley. They are cut off by the table mountain Děčínský Sněžník – that's where this extraordinary land of rocks, gorges, streams and canyons begins. If Bohemian Switzerland were a kingdom, it would have an imposing watchtower to guard it on its western outpost, and indeed it does. It might be imagined as a castle of giants, and the village of Tisá, united around the late baroque church of sv. Anna (St Anne) could be thought of as a kind of castle village to this magnificent fortified settlement built by these ancient giants. Above the village, as far as the eye can see stretches a high rock face which often seems as though it reaches up to the clouds with 'battlements' around it made by erosion. You enter the mysterious world of these cliff faces by an ascending path from the church. It leads to a basin which ends in an extraordinary square. At this point, visitors to this world of giants have two options – on the left are the Little Tisa Rocks, a charming and very intricate

rock town which lies on a bed of sand, while on the right the rock gate invites you on a pilgrimage through the monumental rock town of the Great Tisa Rocks. The Little Tisa Rocks are ideal for children, since no matter how enthusiastically they climb on any of the rocks here not much is likely to happen to them. And how about those stray paths, views and caves! The highlight is a walk up to the top of the highest cliffs with a big reward – the incredible view. You will see the Great Tisa Rocks, skální věž Doga (the Doga Rock Tower) in front of them and far, far beyond these, the rest of the region laid out before you. The Great Tisa Rocks are a fascinating expedition into the world of giant rock formations. They feature bizarre shapes that have captivated the human imagination which has given them their names for centuries. At the end of this trip, at the famous Hřib (Czech for cep mushroom) and Želva (The Turtle) formations, the return journey begins along the very edge of a long rock face with stunning views and a descent along a stone staircase to the rocky valley below. This trip is sure to be a great experience but please just remember that this is a protected natural monument.

2. OSTROV

Through rocky towns to the lookout of your dreams



A charming and beautiful path will take enchanted visitors from the Tisa Rocks to an idyllic valley where the thread of the Biela (Ostrovská Bělá) creek interweaves throughout, forming several lovely areas with mirror reflections on the water. The path passes through another small rock 'town' where little-known rock formations called Volské Kameny (The Ox's Rocks) line a birch grove. This is a 'promised land' for rock climbers but they are not the only ones who will delight in wandering around the foot of these sandstone towers or in standing amongst the massifs of rocks. For those who keep following the path, they will soon have some 'eyes' blinking at them. These eyes are the ponds which lie at the bottom of an unusual rock 'cauldron' formation lined with rock walls and towers. Sandstone rock climbing started at Ostrovské skály (Ostrov Rocks) a long time ago and it remains a rock climber's paradise to this day. At the centre of the valley is the well-known and popular Hotel Ostrov, which has excellent food and pleasant spa facilities. The creek rushes on only to suddenly hear its name change from Bělá to Biela as it crosses the border into Saxony

a few hundred metres away. Follow its path and you will go through wonderful lowlands all the way to a place by the Elbe, where you will find the Königstein fortress. But if you choose not to go that way and stay closer, you can take the Hraniční cesta (Border Trail), part of the Zapomenuté pohraničí (Forgotten Borderlands) educational trail. You'll be able to walk all the way to the completely unexplored but effortlessly beautiful Rajecké skály (Rajecké Rocks). However, real aficionados of views will want to go up the slope from the riverbed and along the footpath which follows the border in order to reach the rock formations on the Saxon side. But this is already quite high above the valley of the creek and once there they might also be tempted to walk along a narrow path running to the edge of the rock formations. Waiting for them there is a huge rocky plateau and the Grezplatte lookout, whose beauty is legendary. Behind the tops of the rock towers is a view of the forested valley, to the east lies a parade of the Ostrov Rocks, and there on the horizon, like a monumental steam boat, floats the Děčínský Sněžník table mountain with a stone watchtower for a chimney.

3. DĚČÍNSKÝ SNĚŽNÍK

To the top of a table mountain



On the highest ridge of this table mountain a column rises to the clouds. It is a grand tower, like something out of a gigantic chessboard, and the oldest stone lookout tower in the Czech lands. Count Thun had the tower built in 1846 to serve as a triangulation point for geodesy. However, because he was also a man of vision, he made sure to also include an observation deck. It is always an experience to reach the tower, whether it be through the wonderful landscape of the plateau, with its tangled stacks of grass, sparse trees and meadows, or to wade here through a coating of fresh snow. The view from the gallery of the tower is amazing and reaches far and wide. You'll see Saxony's table mountains and the whole of Bohemian Switzerland. But you will also see the České středohoří (the Bohemian Central Mountains), Lužické hory (the Lusatian Mountains) and Krušné hory (the Ore Mountains). And when there is a weather low, there is an unforgettable view of a sea of fog and clouds covering the landscape. There are also other views to be seen from this peak, the most popular of which is Dresden. When the weather is good it lives up to its reputation as an enchanting city.

It's a great idea to set off from here on a bike, scooter or on foot down to the surrounding forests. One spot to visit for example is Vlčí jezero (Wolf Lake), a romantic bit of water hidden in the reeds and birches, where being near the calm surface of the water creates a sense of peace. Or you could go into the depths of the forests along the border to the little castle Kristín. This is a Baroque hunting lodge built by the Thuns and now rebuilt into a cosy pension and restaurant which is acclaimed for its cooking. Or you could go even further still, up to Maxičky and its surrounds, a place famous for years for its abundance of blueberries and forest mushrooms. From Maxičky you can undertake wonderful expeditions through the forests, perhaps even into Saxony, since other table mountains are literally within reach from there. Or one could take the almost dreamlike Baroque era stone path Kamenka, which winds its way through Hluboký Důl gorge up to the banks of the Elbe to Dolní Žleb. The forests around Maxičky are interwoven with even more delightful paths on which you can find yourself wonderfully alone.

4. DOLNÍ ŽLEB

Take a unique ferry to a romantic waterfall



Dolní Žleb is the last Czech village on the left bank of the Elbe before the German border. It's not so long ago that it was only possible to travel to Dolní Žleb by rail or by ferry. Today, people can also get there by car along the Elbe cycle path, but hikers will still be grateful for the benefit of the railway or boat. And what a boat! The northernmost ferry in the Czech Republic is a technical wonder. It is one of the last vessels operating as a reaction ferry, that is, with a steel cable which is anchored firmly underwater. It transports its passengers from one side to the other only with the sheer force of the river. It can also ferry across cyclists, motorbikes and even cars. But why venture here? In the surrounding area there are amazing rock climbing terrains, the already mentioned Baroque stone path Kamenka, as well as charming folk architecture buildings. However most important of all, the green trail starts from here. Along its path inquisitive explorers will walk through the former village of Klopoty, which was destroyed

by the army after the expulsion of German settlers, to the Klopoty waterfall, a place which is especially captivating.

The Klopoty waterfall: a four metre high column of water shattering the surface of a pond that washes a gloomy rock face. Although it was created by people when they needed water to run a nearby mill, its beauty gives the place the same romance as a purely natural one. The marked trail continues through the valley of the Klopotský Creek, runs carefree onto Saxon territory and offers detours to the local table mountains, only to lead to the symbolic Česká brána (Czech Gate) and then return to Czech territory. Part of the route is shared with the remarkable Forststeig / Elbe Sandstone Forest Trail. Anyone feeling adventurous can turn off on to it and set out on a journey of several days through the forests along the border and the tops of mountains - through a landscape that's little explored, but endlessly beautiful.

5. DĚČÍN

Thun Castle, the soul of the city on the Elbe



The soul of the city, which is the gateway to one of the most beautiful river canyons in Europe, is the bleached Thun castle towering up to the sky on a rocky hill high above the shimmering Elbe River. Although it is somewhat difficult to believe today, this Baroque-Neoclassical castle has had a very turbulent history. You can take one of the castle sightseeing tours of the interior, enjoy the private rooms of the Thun family, hear the melody of Chopin's Děčín Waltz written by the composer in one of these very rooms, marvel at the splendour of the blooming Rose Garden, look out of the Baroque gloriollette onto the city, and walk through the mysterious corridor to the choir of the church of Povýšení svatého Kříže (the Exaltation of the Holy Cross). You could also try out the acoustics in the chateau stables, walk through the terraces of the southern gardens and the adjacent Mariánská louka (Marian meadow), fall under the spell of the Baroque period, marvel at the magnificent copy of Caspar David Friedrich's Děčín Altar, walk along the winding

Baroque bridge, or climb up to the castle again via the Long Driveway - the longest walled driveway to an aristocratic residence in the world. All this somehow doesn't fit with the fact that barely 30 years ago the castle was dilapidated, an uninhabitable ruin destroyed by its intense overuse when it served as a central infirmary for Soviet troops. This castle is a miracle, a miracle of human will and courage, and it represents the rebirth of beauty. Anyone who loves beautiful views can best enjoy the wonderful beauty of the chateau grounds which overlook the glistening river below from two places. The first one is the Císařská vyhlídka (Emperor's Lookout) at Kvádrberk, a hill whose slopes are covered by a pleasant and extensive forest park. From there the city looks as though it is held in the palm of a playful giant. Moreover, this lookout has an air of history about it, since the obelisk on it was built in 1879 to honour the silver wedding anniversary of Emperor Francis Joseph I and Empress Sissi.

6. DĚČÍN AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

A fun world of animals on a rocky cliff



The second place where you can get an amazing view of the castle, river, the city and its surroundings is the lookout at the Pastýřská stěna (Shepherd's Wall). A few steps from the former stone inn, an imitation of a romantic castle built in 1905, the entire amazing river valley which crowns the chateau in a dignified manner opens up to visitors. Some come here by car, others walk up the steep hill on foot, while others still climb up the vertical wall up from the Elbe embankment along the via ferrata (a protected climbing route). But without exception, everyone is amazed by the view from the top. It is a view which has been competing with the Kvádrberk lookout for the prize of the most beautiful view for over a hundred years. What's more, on the top of the Shepherd's Wall there is a zoo which has been beautifully integrated into the forest, and which is quite possibly the most interactive zoo in the Czech Republic. At every step, aside from the animals of course, you'll encounter a task, a quiz, a riddle, or a test. Apart from

exotic animals, visitors also get to see the fauna of Bohemian-Saxon Switzerland which we often miss when walking in the countryside up close. And even lower, at the foot of the hill, are the Rajske ostrovy (Paradise Islands), a multi-level animal exhibition full of aquariums and terrariums, including the largest marine aquarium in the region. But the Shepherd's Wall is also a paradise for lovers of Nordic walking, and inventive routes for this have been built around here. Whether it's with or without poles, hikers hungry for unusual experiences could choose the Shepherd's Wall as the start of a long trek. They will be guided by the European long distance route E3 marked in red, which will take them through beautiful terrain to the top of Děčínský Sněžník, and if they are especially competent walkers then even further, to Ostrov, Rájec, Petrovice and even beyond... but at that point they will already be climbing the ridge of the Krušné hory (Ore Mountains) and from there they could venture to Klínovec via Komáří vížka then on to the border through Cheb.

7. JÍLOVÉ

Visit a Thun residence as well as three other attractions



Most people on the way to Děčín will just pass through Jílové. This is a shame. What's there to see here? Perhaps that remarkably tall school or... wait no, that's not a school, it's a chateau, though at first glance it doesn't look like one. In the 1930s, it became the family home of the Děčín branch of the Thun-Hohensteins when they bequeathed Děčín Castle to the government and moved here. At that time, this Renaissance chateau also acquired a modern look for that era and this is why today it reminds us more of a stately communal building. To this day there is also a Baroque stone bridge, which replaced the former drawbridge, as well as a park with a pond, a gloriette and paths which are the remnants of a former promenade for the nobility. Visitors can see the ground floor and first floor of the chateau which has an exhibition on the history of the city in it and of course also the 'hellish' Renaissance cellars with their mysterious chamber. In the immediate vicinity of the town there are definitely three sights worth seeing. There is no

need to look for the first one, because it constitutes the centre of the neighbouring village of Libouchec. It's a Renaissance farmstead with a fortress which was gradually rebuilt into a chateau over time, one of the few monuments in the region built in the style of the Saxon Renaissance. Guided tours of the chateau take place only on pre-advertised set dates, but they are worth it. The second place however you'll have to look for, although all you have to do is climb to the top of a (not very high) tree covered hill above Libouchec. At the top you'll find an Art Nouveau chapel with a crypt in which members of the family of Friedrich Botschen, the owner of a velvet and silk spinning mill, are buried. Volunteers are now in the process of trying to save this unique building. The last attraction is the church of sv. Mikuláše (St. Nicholas) in the village Petrovice. The building which was in an advanced state of decay was rescued by the district and crowned with a unique glass truss which illuminates the interior of the church and the small exhibition in it.

8. BENEŠOV NAD PLOUČNICÍ

A town full of chateaux



This picturesque small town on the river Ploučnice will surprise everyone. Were a person only to drive through the town, they would be unlikely to think that it was the most important Czech town in terms of monuments which are in the unique style of the Saxon Renaissance. And it wouldn't even occur to them that they might find more chateaux here than in any other Czech city. But nevertheless, that's the case. All you have to do is stop in the middle of the square at the beautiful Baroque Mariánský sloup (Marian column) and scan the palace complex before you. There are no less than three chateaux (Horní, Dolní and Volfův) out of a total of five which can be visited! Taking a tour of them will significantly improve your understanding of the day to day life of the nobility during that time. However, the remarkable historical jewels of the town don't end with the chateau buildings. Nearby, the Gothic-Renaissance chrám Narození Panny Marie (Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary) with its magnificent Salhausen Chapel, rises with dignity to the sky. There are a number of rare Renaissance and early Baroque

tombstones and epitaphs in the church which visitors can admire. Real lovers of historic city architecture know full well that the most beautiful view of an entire city is from the surrounding hills. From the north at the lookout at Táborský Vrch, and from the south from the newly renovated Ploučnická Lookout, which is a brick gazebo from the beginning of the last century. A short climb to the ruins of Šarfštejn Castle, (these days called Ostrý) will reward with a lovely view of the Ploučnice River valley. Lean your back on the seven hundred year old round stone tower when it's been warmed by the sun and let your eyes float on the silver ribbon of the river meandering through the valley - a sight for sore eyes! However Ploučnice has also proved to be a very good guide for cyclists. The recently completed Ploučnice cycle path will take bike lovers around the village of Jedlka with the very interesting Gothic church of St Anna, through the lovely valley of Soutěsek, to the bottom of Děčín's Thun Castle and then to the confluence of the Ploučnice and the Elbe rivers.

9. THE BELVEDERE (BELVEDER)

Walk along the Rose Ridge to a Baroque lookout



The Růžový hřeben (Rose Ridge) is a long rock face above the right bank of the Elbe. It starts just behind the lookout at Děčín's Kvádrberk and provides impressive views of the Elbe Canyon, the deepest (and also the most beautiful) sandstone canyon in Europe. Walking this route is wonderful. The trail winds its way, at one point to the edge of the rock face, letting us look deeper and further, enjoying the rock towers and needles - for instance the famous duo of Mnich (Monk) and Jeptiška (Nun) separated by the river, while at another point it runs through the forest again. The parade of lookouts is diverse. Sněžnická vyhlídka (Sněžnická Lookout) lives up to its name, Labská stráž comes with a grandiose stone pavilion lookout building, and the most famous is the Růžová vyhlídka (The Rose Lookout), and deservedly so. The view from there will forever write itself into your heart. However this promenade along the ridge will also take enchanted visitors to the most majestic lookout, the Belvedere. It was built by the Clary-

Aldringen family in 1711 when they created a massive rock plateau, provided it with a stone barrier wall and built a hall on the far side of it. Concerts and theatre performances used to take place there. Later, a pub was built in the immediate vicinity, which is the Belvedere Hotel today. The view from here is fantastic, it can't be said any more modestly. In the Baroque period a road for carriages led here from Bynovec, where the Clary-Aldringen chateau stood until a devastating fire. If you go to Bynovec today, you'll find several Baroque statues and the only remnant of the chateau grounds, the Estates Office building. The return journey to Děčín leads to an almost unknown small rock city. A green trail leads to it, crossing forests dotted with rock formations along the way. At its end is the rock formation Slunečná brána (the Sun Gate) which is made up of several carved steps leading up to a sandstone window. The surrounding rocky outcrops are also remarkable - and crowd free!

10. THE KAMENICE GORGES (SOUTĚSKÝ KAMENICE)

Through a romantic ravine on board a small boat

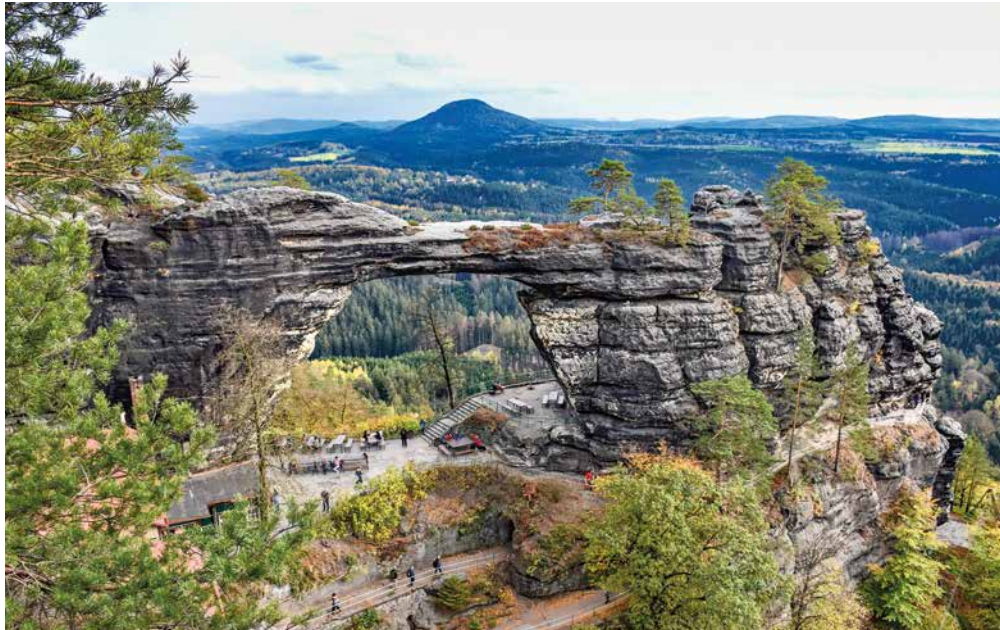


Almost everyone knows the Hřensko region. People usually pass through it as quickly as possible to avoid the somewhat over the top "smurf" houses and hurry to the nearby pearls of Bohemian Switzerland. The charm of the village crammed into a rock crevice therefore completely passes them by. They miss one of the most picturesque buildings in the Czech Republic, a former acetylene gas works which has now been turned into a pleasant restaurant. When the nearby rock formations which they are heading to beckon them, they don't bother stopping at sv. Jana Nepomuckého (St John of Nepomuk), a church with the lowest elevation above sea level in the country. The promenade there, which winds its way through the ever more narrowing gorge of the Kamenice creek and has to break through rocks in places along the way, or which at times runs on to paths stuck to rock walls, soon leads curious visitors to the first weir, which is the bottom end of where the boats stop. From here on visitors can only continue by a flatboat in the care of the boat master who not only propels the boat, but also tells them about the area, his task primarily being to amuse and elicit a smile. At the bottom of the 100 metre gorge the calm water of the creek

shimmers, but when it floods here, it can even rage. Visitors float by with their heads craned, staring at the bizarre rock formations, 'balconies' and overhangs, oohing and aahing in wonder at the artificial waterfall, which is operated by an ordinary rope. Edmundova Soutěska (Edmund's Gorge) is a place where you'll be amazed by the perfection of wild nature. Beyond here it's once again on foot along paths and then on to the second weir and the Divoká Soutěska (Wild Gorge), which is calmer, more pensive and shorter. The next path after this is also only on foot. But those who are not afraid of steep climbs will be rewarded by the picturesque Mezná, the only village located inside the national park, which lies between the two gorges, just past the Mezní můstek. You'll be able to have an enjoyable meal at Mezná and then head off through one of the most beautiful paths in the region to the neighbouring Mezní Louka. And just one tip: come here in spring, autumn or winter (even though the boats aren't in operation then, which means you won't be able to go through all of the gorges). Coming here in the off season means that you won't be surrounded by crowds and you'll have the gorges all to yourself.

11. PRAVČICKÁ GATE (PRAVČICKÁ BRÁNA)

Around rock walls to the gate of gates



You can get to Pravčická brána (Pravčická Gate), one of the wonders of the world, in several ways. Undoubtedly the most romantic route is the one from Mezní Louka, which you'll be able to reach from the valley of the river Kamenice after you cross both gorges. The once abandoned clearing with the forest master's lodge has completely changed in the last 150 years. There are two hotels there today and one of them, U Fořta, serves very good food. There's also an information centre and the Rysí educational trail for children. During the holidays crowds of people camp here - a procession leading all the way to the rock gate, which everyone should see for themselves at least once in their lives. But in the off season you might even get the opportunity to be here alone. Gabrielina stezka (Gabriela's path) gently touches the base of the rock walls, meanders around the rocky outcrops, following the breathtaking theatre of millions of years of erosion, and then runs off into lookouts over a sea of forests crowned by the majestic Růžák. It's always different and that makes it addictive. You'll be

walking along the path and then all of a sudden, you'll be sad that it has ended. Fortunately right there at the end of the trail there's a completely unique rock gate called Pravčická brána (Pravčická Gate) which rises up to the skies. It is a gigantic rock window looking far into the region on one side and on the other looking at Sokolí hnízdo (the Falcon's Nest), a little summer chateau built by the enlightened Prince Edmund Clary-Aldringen in 1881. For the last 40 years it has no longer been possible to walk on the rock bridge, but the gate itself is nonetheless surrounded by many lookouts. Some are directly adjacent to the rock face itself, while to reach others you need to climb a stone staircase to the group of peaks opposite. And from there, Pravčice Gate is at its most beautiful. Standing on the top of the rocks opposite the gate, you'll feel like a bird circling over an astonishing, 16 metre high and almost 27 metre wide gate. But you'll also be looking out over the captivating scenery of Pravčická mine, with its Small and Large Pravčické kužely (Pravčické Cones), and the monumental Stříbrné stěny (Silver Walls).

12. JANOV AND RŮŽOVÁ

Two villages from which you can see a lot of beauty



On the ridge above the deep Kamenice gorges lie two charming villages which are near each other. The one closer to Hřensko is called Janov. On the edge of a small grove and a break in the terrain, a metal lookout tower has sprung up to a respectable height of 40 metres. There's no other place quite like here from where you can see the whole core of Bohemian Switzerland and look out at the Saxon Table Mountains and the western Lusatian Mountains. Růžová, the second village, has a lookout tower of a completely different kind. It's a legacy of little concrete fortresses, which there are many of in the area to this day. The concrete dome which is slowly getting overgrown by climbing greenery, was crowned the Lookout Tower of 2019, despite the fact that Pastevní Vrch, the hill on which it stands, is also low - only 402 metres above sea level, and the tower itself is only six and a half metres high. Yet the view from here has been sought out since time immemorial. Sometimes it's just better to be in between rather than to be up high. And Růženka is in the middle of such beautiful

countryside that no one wants to leave her beauty. However both villages are attractive for other reasons as well. There's a good lifestyle here. This place has an inexhaustible number of events, races, festivities, exhibitions and fun. The Baroque church of sv. Petra a Pavla (St Peter and Paul) makes up the centre of Růžová, while the local Mýdlárna Rubens (Rubens Soap Factory) is extremely charming - an experience filled with the scent of herbs and soap. And every summer you can visit the adventurous little 'American Indian village' of Rosehill, which is halfway between the two villages. From Janov it's definitely worth going to Hřensko, for instance along the yellow trail, which emerges out from the forest in a beautiful place, at an Elbe lookout looking out over both rivers and Hřensko. This place is called skála Elisalex (Elisalex Rock) because it was here that Prince Edmund wanted to build a magnificent mansion for his beautiful wife Elisalex. It was ultimately never built, but regardless, the view from here is extraordinary.

13. VYSOKÁ LÍPA

Three lookouts to melt the heart



The little village of Vysoká Lípa boasts one of the most beautiful views in Bohemian Switzerland. Through beautiful meadows divided by wooden fences where sheep graze idyllically, almost the entire horizon is filled by the Jetřichovice Walls with renowned views hemmed on the sides by the mighty Koliště and the dominant Jedlová. It is a view that lifts the soul.

But lovers of lookouts can do even more. First of all, a great idea is to head to Zámecký Vrch, which is above the village and owes its name to a nobleman's hunting lodge. Unfortunately only its cellar carved into the sandstone rock remains today. From the magnificent Teuschel's Cross, which was recently restored to its original look, the view of the region is made even better by the overview of it that visitors get thanks to their altitude. For the third amazing view at Vysoká Lípa you need to walk through the village to a place called Pod Loupežákem, where two pleasant restaurants press against each other.

From there, a marked path leads to a rock formation which can even be seen along the way since it looks like it is hovering over the forest. Getting to the rock plateau where the guard castle Šaunštejn once stood is very adventurous. You'll need to climb a system of ladders and steep stairs, through crevices so narrow that you'll practically need to hold your breath. The result of this climb is a magnificent reward - a panoramic, opulent view of Bohemian and Saxon Switzerland, the sea of forests and rock formations, the table mountains in the horizon and the cottages in the valleys, scattered like beads. From Šaunštejn the trail leads further, meandering between the rocks, with views looking back over the orphaned rock, but above all - it ends at another of the wonders of Bohemian Switzerland, at the Little Pravčická Gate. Compared to its big brother, this rock window is about one-eighth of its size, but then you can climb the rock bridge of this one and through the branches look around at the surroundings.

14. DOLSKÝ MILL (DOLSKÝ MLÝN)

The most romantic place in Bohemian Switzerland



A soft mist rolls in from Kamenice and the valley, which is surrounded by rock formations, sleeps and waits until the sun reaches so far in the sky that it can touch the most romantic place in the whole region with its soft rays. The ruined buildings of Dolský Mlýn awaken the imagination and at the same time have a calming effect, since these walls have aged with the wisdom of stone. Sometimes on weekends there are volunteers here who work on the mill, but they are not trying to return the mill to its original form but rather to maintain its current condition and prevent its collapse - to allow it to continue to be what it is: a witness to a time long gone, as well as a magical place where to visit means to step back in time. All you have to do is lean against a wall and listen to the stories, walk through the rooms where the youngsters and millworkers with grey bags stumbled through, browse the half dry mill race, wet your feet in the icy Kamenice...and then dream. And it doesn't matter how you get here. It could be by car across one of the first reinforced concrete

bridges in the country, by climbing the rock path along the right bank of the river, or by descending the steep ravine from Vysoká Lípa, by walking along the forest path from Srbská Kamenice, through the valley from Jetřichovice or along the slope from Kamenická Strána. Regardless, you'll always experience that majestic moment at the birth of beauty and you'll always be surprised by how impressive the place is. Now and again you'll be able to spot filmmakers there as they refashion the mill's buildings into the likeness of their film - it's little wonder, since Dolský Mlýn is extremely photogenic.

The most popular access road of all mentioned is evidently through the lovely valley from Jetřichovice. This route is as beautiful as the destination it leads to. This is due to the little river that follows the road all the way. Jetřichovická Bělá is undoubtedly the most beautiful waterway in Bohemian Switzerland, with bright white sand, clear water and the long green hair of water sprites and the floating stems of the river water-crowfoot plants. It is sheer beauty.

15. JETŘICHOVICE WALLS (JETŘICHOVICKÉ STĚNY)

A trip along a lookout ridge



This is a magical journey from one lookout to another, with views of the region which change from day to day and even hour to hour. They are different in the morning, when cloudy mists rise from the gorges of Bohemian Switzerland, different in the evening, when the sun floods the landscape with liquid gold and the shadows lengthen, different at noon, when vertical rays pierce the sun soaked landscape, and different in the rain, when the clouds crawl with their bloated bellies against the tops of the hills. The views from Jetřichovice are beautiful at any time. We owe thanks for these lookouts to the Kinský family as well as to the growing popularity of hiking in the 19th century. The most famous is Mariina skála (Maria's Rock), with a handsome gazebo on top, which you have to ascend to from Jetřichovice along the path around Havraní Skály (Havraní Rocks), a place now returning to life after being scorched by fire, and then up the steep hill. It is the newest of these three lookouts, named after Maria Anna Josefa Kinská and opened in 1856.

To set out from it along this rugged ridge, to descend and ascend, to walk along a path hewn into the rock, to rest at Balzerově ležení (Balzer's Camp), a rock overhang where grouse hunters once gathered - it's like going back in time. The path among the blueberries takes us to the very edge of the Černá stěna (Black Wall), which was renamed the Vilemína Wall in 1825 in honour of Rudolf Kinský's bride Countess Vilemína Elisabeta. The lookout is located on the top of a rock tower separated from the rest of the rock formation by a narrow crack. To cross it means to get one of the most beautiful views of Bohemian Switzerland, with the neighbouring „Marijanka“ as its crown. This journey back in time continues through the Purkartice forest to the rock formation once called Vysoký kámen (Tall Stone). Around 1820 the young prince Rudolf Kinský climbed up here and was so enthralled by the views that he had a gazebo built on this spot. Today, the rock bears his name, Rudolfův kámen (Rudolf's Stone).

16. JETŘICHOVICE

All the way around the heart of Bohemian Switzerland



If the Pravčická brána (Pravčická Gate) is a magnet drawing tourists to Bohemian Switzerland, Jetřichovice is the heart of the region. At Jetřichovice you'll find everything that this blessed landscape has to offer. The lookouts have already been discussed however there are also several interesting trails for tours laid out by the enthusiastic locals in the district. The first will take you from the Baroque church of St Jan Nepomucký around a remarkable sheer rock face called Kočičí kostel (the Cat Church), up to Pfeiferův lesík (Pfeifer's forest) crowned by the newly opened Treppenstein lookout. This little forest is Bohemian Switzerland in a nutshell - mysterious rock formations, unexpected views, cryptic inscriptions from the depths of the past and niches carved into the rock. The second trail goes around Čedičák Hill and leads to a lookout with benches which have views of Děčínský Sněžník and the Saxon Table Mountains. The third trail, called Kostelní, rises from the Frahlochkreuz cross around the picturesque chapel of St Prokop, up to Rynartice via the former church path, and returns around the popular Trpasličí skály (Dwarf Rocks).

A chapter of its own is the reopened ruins of the rock castle Falkenstein. Stairs and observation decks have been built there by the national park authorities. As you walk along the decks notice that the entire massive structure has been literally laid out on top of the rock - there was almost no drilling into the stone, so your comfort was not created at the expense of nature. And there is also the lovely educational trail Pavlinka. Why is it so lovely? Well, because it will take visitors through a rock wall via an opening which was cut into the rock, then they'll come out at a former mill and go around Grieselův rybník (Griesel's Pond) all the way to Rusalka's Cave. By far, not the least of the attractions of Jetřichovice is the irresistibly charming exhibition Leporelo Zadní Země in the reverently renovated building of the former Worm hostinec (Worm Tavern). Due to the benevolence of the painter Ivo Švejnoha, visitors will be visiting Dolský mlýn at the time of its greatest glory. They'll be able to chat with the bird keeper, sit behind a school desk and get to know Princess Kinská.

17. PAVLINA'S VALLEY (PAVLINO ÚDOLÍ)

Through a silent valley to a mysterious path



Another charming place in Jetřichovice is the picturesque valley of the Chřibská Kamenice creek. Today, few people know that it is called Pavlino after Pauline, the wife of thread maker Josef Müller. She loved to walk through the valley, so it was a wonderful idea to name it after her.

It is best to start your walk at the very popular Jetřichovice swimming pool, then find the riverbed and stick to it like glue. But maybe not quite so literally, since right at the start, the Pavlínka educational nature trail, which we have already mentioned, will lead you away from the riverbank. When you go around it, you'll wander across footbridges from one side of the creek to the other, in some places up a steep path to a rock cliff where at times the rocky outcrops literally fall into the water. But you'll mostly go along a comfortable path along the riverbank under a blanket of rustling trees, through riverside plains and around rock formations which more and more defiantly peek out of the forest. This walk is a big injection of inner peace and calm. And then, where the path itself ends, there is a choice.

If you turn right, Studený potok (Cold Creek) will take you around the restored Johnova kaple (John's Chapel) to the little village of Studený, which has a friendly self-help information centre and a very active group of people who also happen to be the ones behind the educational trail. After the village you could go to Lehmannovy pomníky (Lehmann Memorials) which commemorate a battle in the Seven Years' War in 1757, or even more so, to the forest Lipnice Chapel of the Virgin Mary, built in the Baroque, which is literally a magical place. If however, you choose the path on the left which crosses the creek, you'll be able to walk up to the meadow near Rynartice and from there go back to Jetřichovice along an unmarked path, which is one of the most beautiful and also one of the most mysterious paths in the region. This is because there is a possibly carved, possibly hewed unique depression in the bedrock, which you can walk through only in a crouched step. How did it come about? To this day this is not entirely clear, but it's without a doubt beautiful. The forest path then continues along the top of the ridge and ends at the thoughtfully renovated Grieselův křiř (Griesel's Cross).

18. THE CZECH ROAD (ČESKÁ SILNICE)

Along the road of drivers and reindeer

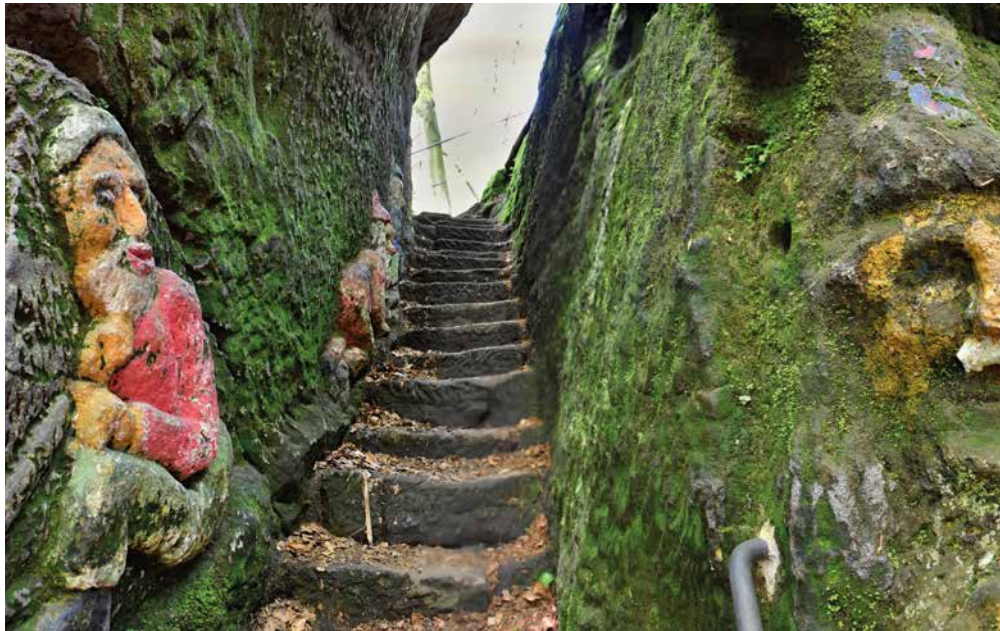


At first, only animals came this way. However, people then soon started to use the well-trodden path, since it was the shortest and most comfortable route from Saxony to Bohemia. And after this, cart and lorry drivers, as well as merchants, drove through here, then armies too. Today we know this peaceful beautiful road as the Česká silnice (the Czech Road). The brand new educational trail of the same name will lead hikers from the crossroads, under the remains of Šaunštejn Castle, through a wild and rocky forested landscape. All of its individual stops along the way are a reminder of forest crafts and life – you'll see a model of a tar furnace, animals that once lived here – bears or reindeer, and for a moment you'll find yourself back in prehistoric times. You'll be able to see a charcoal burner's cottage, which will no doubt be familiar to you, since this is where the famous fairy tale Pyšná princezna (The Proud Princess) was filmed. The trail ends on the banks of the border creek Křinice, in Zadní Jetřichovice, which is a place of captivating charm. Although after the Second World War all the local

buildings were abandoned and nature again seized the valley, if you are perceptive, you'll immediately recognise traces of civilisation. Yes, there used to be the very popular Křinická Restaurant – Kirnischtschänke in German, as well as a customs house and a guard station of the finance authorities. Tourists loved this place. Looking out at the round valley on the Saxon side, lined with the dignified Rabenstein rock wall, from the terrace of the pub while sipping beer – it must have been beautiful. And it still is today, only without people and houses. A group of volunteers have been rehabilitating the foundations of the former houses here for several years, and from the information boards you'll at least learn where the forest master's house stood and where the barn and hotel were. From here, it would be a great idea to cross the border bridge to the Rabenstein lookout. And if you come here by bike, and you feel like getting to know Křinice a little better, you will be able to go to the Saxon side along the Křinice cycle path through the river valley, all the way to its confluence with the Elbe.

19. RYNARTICE

In search of unique views and dwarves



On a hill above Jetřichovice, at the foot of Křížový vrch, lies the quiet village of Rynartice. Picturesque half-timber cottages are crammed around a former hunting lodge which was built sometime in the mid-18th century by Count Kinský. You'll be able to eat very well here, as well as indulge in local spa treatments, since the hunting lodge has now been turned into Hotel Zámeček. However, the biggest attractions in Rynartice are its views as well as its dwarves. Let's start with the views, because they are really some of the most beautiful. From the village itself there is a beautiful view of the Pavlino valley tucked into the treetops, as well as the majestic Studenec, the first hill of the Lusatian Mountains. But a real connoisseur of views ought to climb to the top of Křížový vrch. The bare hill, with its fluffy green top, provides truly unusually beautiful views of Bohemian as well as Saxon Switzerland, the Saxon Table Mountains, the western Lusatian Mountains, the majestic Růžák and above all, you'll see the Jetřichovice Walls with their views from

a completely unique angle. And if you want some advice, don't bother coming here without a camera, since it would be going against human nature not to try to capture all that beauty. The second magnet here is the Trpasličí skála (Dwarf Rock), a cracked through rock formation on the road down to Jetřichovice. It was once bought by a local chronicler, Ernst Vater, and he and his son carved into the walls lining the crevices (which were big enough to climb up) the colourful reliefs of the Seven Dwarfs and the Rynartice widow. According to legend, the widow was saved by the dwarfs who took her home when she was injured. Rynartice is also a unique starting point to visit an area that tourists don't know much about, and which is at the same time overflowing with beauty. If you follow the blue trail, you'll walk through a wonderful forested rocky landscape through Tokán, around Panenská jedla and Zadní můstkový dol, to a little known wonder - the mysterious rock Černá brána (Black Gate) on the banks of the Křinice.

20. VŠEMILY

A trip up to the largest rock overhang in the country



The wide floodplain of the Chřibská Kamenice River, reachable over the hill from Jetřichovice, hides the magical little village of Všemily. People have been coming here to relax and take care of charming, even breathtaking, houses for many decades. For instance, it has a school built in the Upper Lusatian half-timber house style with a turret - you won't see this anywhere else. But Všemily is also a place where miracles happen. A group of enthusiastic volunteers decided to beautify this already picturesque hideaway. And so the pride of Všemily, the chapel of sv. Ignáce (St Ignatius), which is hewn into the rock, was cleaned and arranged, as was Dutý kámen (Hollow Rock), one of the largest rock overhangs in the Czech Republic. This is a beautiful and strong place. After all, humans once camped here in Neolithic times. The greatest miracle, however, was resurrecting the Všemily cemetery from complete oblivion. Through the selfless efforts of a group of people, none of whom knew any of the buried, the mossy and grassy place near

the forest was transformed into a fenced cemetery with restored tombstones, statues, and a new chapel. It is good to first enjoy Všemily in the greatest possible peace and quiet and only then explore its surroundings. Its numerous forest gorges and valleys are mysterious and beautiful - meeting doe and deer is nothing special. Beautiful, and little known, is the road from Všemily to Kunratice, and from there to the meadows below Větrný vrch (Windy Peak). You simply won't find a more panoramic view of the whole region, and a more complete parade of Saxon Table Mountains. Or on the other hand, those who choose to go up the rocky slope which Všemily leans against will find themselves in a place that has a very special atmosphere and beauty - Všemilská folga. The landscape there has the character of a plateau, with wide meadows and a horizon full of imposing hills. The path flows around a beautifully restored painted cross and the Marian Chapel, until it reaches the neighbouring Jetřichovice. Všemily is simply „nice to everyone“ as its name suggests in Czech.

21. SRBSKÁ KAMENICE

Over the fields there and back



The wild Kamenice River meanders through the meadow, and alongside it, as if in a race, run pearls of folk architecture in the form of beautiful Upper Lusatian half-timber houses. They keep up with the river as much as possible, but eventually they get tired and come to rest in their places on the shore. Here and there they run into the hillside, but only as far as the rock formations, wetlands and forests allow. Srbská Kamenice is a captivatingly beautiful place. The lovely church of St Wenceslas, with its wooden bell tower, is the picturesque centrepiece of this village, which stretches out over a long distance. Below the church, those paying attention will notice an early Baroque relief of the Coronation of the Virgin Mary carved into the rock – something truly unusual and very valuable. Above the village there is a sandstone rocky cliff with a beautiful view and the Kriegsloch or “Swedish hole”, a rock cave in which people once hid to escape Swedish troops. Nearby, one of the most beautiful rock theatres in the country hides among the rocks for most of the year, only to come alive in the summer with amateur productions. And those beautiful houses in the village! There are only

a few places where Upper Lusatian half-timber houses are so nicely scattered, cared for and lived in. Anyone who passes through Srbská Kamenice will notice how well this village functions. They have built a truly completely original nature trail through the former fields, around the Arba nature reserve and have created a non-invasive alternative path through the village so that people no longer have to walk on the road. The path is decorated with wooden sculptures from the Kytlice painter and carver Ivo Švejnoha, and it is simply wonderful. At the end of the village the locals created a small via ferrata (a protected climbing route), not far from an inconspicuous path that will take hikers from the last buildings in the village to Sluneční údolí (the Sun Valley). It is lined with ten fortresses from a row of fortifications built in the late 1930s. These are more properly bunkers, yes – bunkers, built by the Czechoslovak state to protect against the rising threat of Nazi Germany. You can even experience how cramped the spaces inside are, as tours and events are conducted here. Srbská Kamenice is a village you could easily walk up and down and not get bored.

22. STARÁ AND NOVÁ OLEŠKA

Take the church path around the ponds



There was once a time when an unprecedented number of alder trees grew around Chlupatý Creek, hence the name for the two Oleškas (from the Czech word olše, which means alder). If you were to walk from Srbská Kamenice around the many ponds on the Bynovecký Creek and turn left at the crossroads, a small area of water will soon appear in front of you, lined in an old world fashion with bollards. On the one side there is a slope leading to a pine forest, on the other, a combination of cottages and houses, some of which are particularly beautiful Upper Lusatian half-timber houses. Nová Oleška is a charming village that is worth walking through. And, if nothing else, you should definitely head into the forest on the way to Stará Oleška, and walk all the way to Bubnový kámen (The Drummer's Rock), which is today rightly called Vyhlička (the Lookout). The drummer no longer calls serfs to work from there as in the olden days, but the view is amazing from there – especially of the imposing peak Růžák, which shows itself off in a great way. Stará Oleška has a much more famous and larger pond, and people have been swimming here

for more than a hundred years. Since then the popularity of this beautiful recreational pond with sandy and grassy beaches has only grown steadily. But you don't have to get here just through Nová Oleška. You can take the Hadergrund, the very old church path which leads from the last cottages in Srbská Kamenice, and along the green marker around niche chapels hewn into the rock. The path leads onto a road, where it is wise to first go up the hill along it, up to the Lužná settlement, which everyone here calls Filipínka (the Philippine), as the settlement was originally named after Countess Philippine Thunová. Only real lovers of lookouts know about the panoramic view from here, but it will take everyone's breath away. Olešnička, a stream that rushes down a rocky gorge, flows out of the Stará Oleška pond into Janská. There is a charming trail which leads along here, but this was not always the case. Back in the 1920s, boats with day trippers came down here and, to this day, there are visible remains of weirs in the rocks, which allowed for proper navigation.

23. ČESKÁ KAMENICE

Go on a trip back in time from one of the most beautiful squares around



As you lean back against the edge of a nonagon-shaped Renaissance fountain, let yourself get carried away for a while by the never-ending charm of the square at Česká Kamenice. Its prettiness has accumulated, like fragments of vibrant and colourful mosaics, for centuries. As far back as the 16th century, there were some burgher houses built here, and each successive age has added to these other buildings in their own styles. There are Baroque tradesmen's and craftsmen's houses with mansard roofs, as well as later Neoclassical buildings. They are pleasingly harmonious as a whole. The crossover of the three styles is represented in a sublime town hall with the inscription "Palladium Civitatis" - Safeguard of the City. Truth be told, there are few squares as beautiful as the one in Česká Kamenice. But this town offers much more, and some time ago it was in fact named the historic "City of the Year". It's lovely to walk along its streets and discover hidden gems, such as the beautiful Gothic-Baroque church of sv. Jakub Větší (St James the Greater), where the young composer Antonín Dvořák secretly learned to play the organ.

From its tower there is a wonderful view, and anyone eager to search for other historical gems can easily orient themselves from the tower. Particularly notable are the Salhausenský zámek (Salhausen Chateau) built in the style of the Saxon Renaissance, the estate brewery (where beer is now brewed again), the neo-Gothic building of the town's poorhouse, the beautiful Baroque hospital, which now houses a pleasant restaurant, Kamenice Castle with a newly built and open lookout tower, and a beautiful cemetery chapel of the city's benefactors, the Preidl family. The biggest jewel of the city however, is the beautiful High Baroque pilgrimage chapel of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, built by Ottavio Broggio himself. You'll feel like on an island back in another time in its Baroque curved cloisters. There are tales in this town about the story of a miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary, which crowds of singing pilgrims used to travel to. These days however, it is so quiet you could hear a pin drop here. It's a place you'll want to walk around on your tiptoes.

24. ČESKÁ KAMENICE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Around the Ponorka rock formation all the way to Jehla and an altar in the forest



The town of Česká Kamenice has very beautiful and attractive surroundings. Its location certainly plays a significant role in this, since it lies exactly on the tri-border of the three protected landscape areas of the Elbe Sandstone Mountains, the Bohemian Central Mountains and the Lusatian Mountains. So the region is quite unique in that it has something of all three of these in its character. Tourists most often head to the peak Jehla. From the beautiful 'old world' swimming pool in the city, there is a marked route that will lead hikers first to the rock formations of Ponorka (the Submarine) and Žába (the Frog), then to the Tell-Platte lookout, and around a rock chapel to a place which is mysterious and imbued with spiritual power - the Brotherhood Altar with its Stations of the Cross. On the edge of the rocky ravine, in the middle of the forest, visitors will be surprised by a stone altar and statues, as well as paintings which depict Christ's last journey. Those whose branch of the Christian faith didn't happen to be the popular one of the time, would secretly come here to worship. The route then culminates in a magnificent lookout from a rocky outcrop formed by basalt columns. From this

'deck', one can look out at the whole city and its rugged and rolling surroundings. A view of the region from elevated spots in the surrounding area is a wonderful experience. For instance, from the lookout tower of the Kamenice Castle ruins on Zámecký vrch. Or from the rocky outcrop below the ruins of Fredevald Castle, where there is a captivating view of the Kamenice River gorge and the first set of peaks of the Lusatian Mountains. A trip to the beautiful Rabštejn Valley on the other hand, will bring an experience of a completely different kind. Enchanting scenery of the river flowing between the steep forest covered slopes evokes a feeling of idyllic calm. But the traces of history in this spot are chilling. Firstly there are the remains of the WWII Rabštejn concentration camp, which also served as an internment camp for German soldiers and ethnic Germans before they were expelled from Czechoslovakia after the war. And then there are the underground corridors of the Nazi airplane factory which were dug into the rock. But time has swept away this chilling chapter of history and now only nature remains, mercifully covering the traces of past human hatred.

25. KYTLICE

From valley to valley in search of peace and quiet as well as beauty



There is one magical valley that guards the upper course of the little river Kamenice and Mother Nature practically went overboard here when she was doling out beauty. It doesn't matter if you travel here by train on one of the most beautiful railway lines in the country, or if you get here by bike or go on foot - you will be in awe whichever way you come. The valley leads from Česká Kamenice through Mlýny to Kytlice. Right from the start you'll be amazed by the gigantic fossilised spread out wall of Pustý zámek, before your eyes settle on the beauty of the landscape and the traces of human life in it. The route culminates in Kytlice, where you can practically feel its laid-back vibe. It's no coincidence that so many famous personalities have built their summer houses here. Visitors might even feel a little ashamed to disturb the obvious peace and quiet of the locals, so they often venture even further 'upstream' to just behind the charming viaduct, straight into the countryside of the Lusatian Mountains. There they are captivated by the beauty of the Hraniční forest pond and the mystery of Valdštejnská skála (Wallenstein Rock), where someone

long ago carved some mysterious marks. But there is also a second magical valley. You simply need to go from Kytlice over a little hill to Polevsko which is famous for its winter cross-country skiing terrain. All year round however, visitors will be in awe of the magnificent Baroque Church of the Holy Trinity and the neo-Gothic tomb of the glassmaker Handschke. The road then continues on to the stretched out village of Prysk, where there are once again houses which have an almost fairytale prettiness to them, lining the road along the way. There is another Baroque gem - the church of St Peter and Paul with a separate bell tower. The village is surrounded by an excursion trail which leads from one gorgeous place to another, through meadows, pastures and forests, until it finally reaches below the basalt peak of Střední kopec (Middle Hill). Climbing it means enjoying an indescribable 360° view. Want to go further still? Then there is, for instance, Kamenický Šenov, a glassmaking town with a Glass Museum, the historic cemetery, or the picturesque ruin of the famous Art Nouveau factory Eliáška.

26. CHŘIBSKÁ

Go exploring in search of waterfalls and orchids



A gently rising town square crowned by a church is a lovely sight. This is the view on offer to visitors of Chřibská, a town that's more famous than anyone would have guessed. The furnaces of the glassworks were already hard at work here when the church of Sv. Jiří (St George) was still wooden, and it would be nearly two hundred years until its Gothic renovations. What's more, the excellent botanist, chemist and traveller Tadeáš Haenke (Thaddäus Haenke) was born here. He is a man to whom we owe a lot, and a man who became more famous in South America than in his home country - among other things he discovered the Royal Victoria, the world's largest water lily, and he was the first to use calcium nitrate as a fertiliser. It's a great idea to start your tour of this extraordinary town by visiting his very interesting museum first. After the museum visit, how about a coffee at U Tadeáše, followed by a walk? Around the neo-Gothic town hall, up a small hill to the church, which is surrounded by remarkable statues and tombstones and a unique cloister, then around the statue of St John, along the tame

Chřibská Kamenice Creek, to Dolní Chřibská to see beautiful Upper Lusatian half-timber houses, then up a gentle slope to the Brodský and Marschner meadows, where Czech orchids grow. Then, on to the popular restaurant Na Stodolci, the alcove chapel with the image of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary and then even further, to the remarkable stone viaduct which drained water from the river into the brick drive of a small textile factory. But you could also head off in a different direction, for example to the natural swimming pool or to the cascading Chřibské waterfalls, which have created a stream rushing from the slopes of Plešivec. Heading further south, along the blue marker and then along the nature trail called Okolím Studence (Around Studenec) will lead you to an almost dreamlike place. But you must visit it on the cusp between end of May and start of June, because it is then in the Měsíční údolí (Moon Valley) that perennial honesties (Lunaria rediviva or perennial moon flowers) bloom, and smell intoxicating. The slopes above the valley are literally covered with the flowers, and their scent practically carries you away.

27. THE NARROW STAIRS (ÚZKÉ SCHODY)

Through a crack made for elves up to an unknown city



The beautiful hunting log cabins in the middle of the forest, at a place called Na Tokáni, acquired their current appearance in the 1930s, and these days they are protected as a cultural monument. However this kind of protection doesn't mean much if a cabin is engulfed by a fire - and this is exactly what has happened several times already, most recently in May 2020. Two of the rare log cabins were reduced to ashes, and we can only hope that they will be rebuilt again, as has happened many times before. This magical place is also a great starting point to a less well known part of Bohemian Switzerland, as well as the start of the famous „yellow trail” to Doubice. This section of the trail is less than five kilometres, yet it is one of the most attractive trails in the region. The first point of interest is the wide valley under the cliffs, from where you can choose to walk along two different paths - through the gorge, or by the Úzké schody (Narrow Stairs).

The rock crevice there used to be called the Elf's Gap, the Dwarf's Gorge, and also Angels' Stairs. However all this was only after Prince Kinský had the first set of ladder steps installed here. The author of the first travel guide to Bohemian Switzerland, forest assistant Ferdinand Náhlík, gave a charming account of the fact that the place attracted tourists as far back as 150 years ago: "There is very little room left here, especially for crinolines of the latest fashions, so a nature loving female tourist's dress might easily suffer. People with rotund bodies are not advised to climb here - there is no guarantee that corpulent individuals will not get stuck." Today's metal steps are an obvious progress, but the rock formations are still as narrow as ever, so Ferdinand Náhlík's warnings apply even today. At the top of the stairs there are wonderful views, as well as an almost unknown rock town hidden in the forest, with a mysterious rock hall and strange formations scattered among the trees.

28. DOUBICE

A place where people love their houses



The village of Doubice is a charming little beauty. Since the 1960s, almost every house has been pampered and lovingly restored by its owners, the unsung saviours of a lot of beauty and memorable buildings. No, this is not an open-air museum, this is a living and lived in collection of Upper Lusatian half-timber houses. If you are a temporary visitor and you are not one of the chosen ones who own something here to restore, don't despair. A walk through the village, a stop in the former factory where a wonderful jazz club is located, lunch in the popular Stará hospoda (Old Pub) surrounded by a picturesque set of wooden statues and places to play which will especially delight children - all this is on offer in Doubice. The surroundings are, as always, amazing. Above all, there are two wonderful and little known lookouts. The first one is literally above the village. The top of Spravedlnost hill (Justice Hill) is less than two kilometres away. At the top there is a railing, a bench and an amazing view of the wavy western Lusatian Mountains.

To see the second lookout you need to go through the forest to a place where there used to be a lime kiln, where the bats wait out the winters now, and where there's a remarkable nature reserve today. From there, go along the old Farská road to the top of Široký vrch. Not far from it, behind the jagged Dračí skála (Dragon Rock), a rock plateau surrounded by railings rises above the slope. This is Karlova výšina (Charles' View-point). From here you will see far off into the region, especially to Bohemian-Saxon Switzerland, but also to the České Nizozemí (Czech Lowlands). You won't want to leave here, but the path nonetheless continues on and leads inquisitive wanderers to the village of Rybníště. Aside from the Art Nouveau church of St Josef, the greatest assets of Rybníště are, unsurprisingly, the ponds. Especially Velký rybník (The Great Pond), which forms the centre of the nature reserve and is the nesting ground for many species of birds. And those who crave even more experiences could continue on and climb from Rybníště to Malý Stožec, and enjoy magnificent views for the third time on the trip.

29. JIŘETÍN POD JEDLOVOU

The depths and peaks of a mysterious border region



A mysterious land full of the ancient power of the earth. A tectonic meeting place of sandstone and phonolite as well as the border between Bohemian Switzerland and the Lusatian Mountains. Since the Middle Ages, people have mined rare metals here and established settlements and towns. This is how Jiřetín pod Jedlovou was founded, a village that has far more to offer visitors than one might expect. It has the kostel Nejsvětější Trojice (Church of the Holy Trinity) and next to it a beautiful Baroque rectory with a small museum. Add to that a cobbled square, greenery, historic benches and fountains. And all around the square it has narrow alleys with picturesque and stately Upper Lusatian half-timber houses, Baroque statues and more. Wherever you go from here, you'll be enchanted. Nearby, the earth literally opens up in the form of a tour of the old štola sv. Jana Evangelisty (St John the Evangelist mine shaft). Above the town, on Křížová hora (Cross Hill), visitors will marvel at one of the most beautiful Stations of the Cross in the Czech Republic. At the top, between the chapel of the Povýšení sv. Kříže (Exaltation of the Holy Cross) and Boží hrob

(the Holy Sepulchre) is a grassy area, and right in between, massive readings of telluric currents, the earth's electric energy, have been measured here countless times. In this spot the magnetic needles positively dance! Nearby, the statue of the Virgin Mary, known as the Mariánský gloriét (Marian Gloriette), protects a spring which is considered to be miraculous. The path then continues underneath the queen of the western Lusatian Mountains, the mountain Jedlová, which is crowned with a stone lookout tower at the top, and which dresses itself whimsically in winter in a snow white coat. It has equally great views towards Růžák, as well as to Klíč. It also has a cozy restaurant, a rope centre, and downhill rides on carts and scooters. Tolštejn Castle is unfortunately already a ruin, but one of the most friendly ones - you can eat here while you enjoy some views from the top of the former dungeon, from the rocky ridge and from other parts of the peak. Down below, the friendly town of Jiřetín will beckon you and offer some activity options for the end of your trip, for example at its sporting complex.

30. KRÁSNÁ LÍPA

A small town which could fit in the palm of a hand



How to capture the soul of a place that is the eastern gateway to Bohemian Switzerland and at the same time sits on the slopes where the Lusatian Mountains begin? It is as though this town, founded around a beautiful linden tree, lay on the slightly clasped palm of a benevolent giant. At the bottom is a pleasant square that has changed beyond recognition over the last 20 years. A white brewery, a sweet smelling chocolate factory, an even more fragrant bakery, a nostalgic café as well as a modern café, the Bohemian Switzerland House with its interactive exhibition, a uniquely designed hotel, stairs leading up to the gates of the Mary Magdalene church, a sports complex, the glistening pond Cimrák, the largest functionalist building in the country, industrial buildings, a city park with an architecturally rare tomb of the Dittrich family which is even heated, amazing villas - all of this is cared for, inviting and beautiful. And under it all hums the young Krinice River, which was forced underground from the square some 150 years ago.

But as the edge of the giant's palm rises up, spacious meadows decorated with pearls in the form of Upper Lusatian half-timber houses appear, and behind these, deep forests hem the city. It is a real delight to do trips anywhere from here. For example, in search of the lifeline of the city, to the source of the river Krinice, which like a border river meanders between the two national parks before flowing into the arms of the Elbe. The Krinice springs are only two kilometres away from the town and despite this they are in the midst of lush nature, in the middle of the forest, covered by a gazebo and decorative bars. But it would be a mistake to simply turn around and return back from here straight away, since the path goes on and soon leads to a wonderful world of long tangled grass and conifers, almost like a picture of scenery from the Šumava region. And the road leads even further, to the Světlík pond, where even Don Quixote would leap up and get ready to fight, because the windmill here raises its blades to the sky, as though from an old painting.

31. VLČÍ HORA

Through the meadows up to the lookout tower



The landscape of the Krásná Lípa region is wavy like a stormy sea and one of its highest waves, north of Krásná Lípa, is Vlčí hora (Wolf Mountain). The houses, which line the small road running along the contour at the foot of the Vlčí Hora mountain, form an unpretentiously beautiful village. Anyone who finds themselves here for the first time will be enchanted by Žebrácká kaple (Beggar's Chapel) and will be won over by the bluish views of the Lusatian Mountains. The centre of the village has long been the chapel of Panny Marie Karmelské (Our Lady of Mount Carmel), as well as the now famous manufacturing workshop of Nobilis Tilia natural cosmetics, with its shop and tea room. It is housed in a visitor's centre built in the former school, which has a permaculture botanical garden attached to it. Beautiful Upper Lusatian half-timber houses line the path to the forest, which runs further on to the top of the magnetically peculiar Vlčí hora (Wolf Mountain). The top of the hill makes compass arrows go crazy and run off course due to the mountain's mineral make up. But far more important to someone who

longs for a view, is the fact that at the top of the hill is the oldest lookout tower in the Šluknov region, which has been lovingly cared for by hikers from Krásná Lípa. From the glass observation deck there is a magical panoramic view, making you feel as though you are on the captain's bridge of an ocean liner floating in the waves of hills and meadows. Yes, you can even see the meadows in an area called the Pětidomí, fields with the beautifully placed Hesse cross, as well as the brand new chapel of St Antonín Paduánský (St Anthony of Padua), built by hikers from Krásná Lípa a few metres away from the place where it stood since the Baroque period, before time eroded it. You can also see the cemetery, which is dominated by the monumental Nitsche tomb, as well as the neighbouring Zahrady (Gardens). In the garden of one of the houses there you can still see a uniquely etched geological map, a model of the surrounding landscape composed of local rocks created in the 1930s by the amateur naturalist Rudolf Kögler. We will discuss the Rudolf Kögler educational trail shortly.

32. THE KÖGLER TRAIL

In search of the soul of the Krásná Lípa region



Rudolf Kögler, from the village Zahrady, was a textile designer. But he was also a man who was very sensitive to nature, a passionate botanist, an astronomer and, above all, a geologist. When he was in the midst of building his now famous geological map of the surrounding region, in the garden of a house in Zahrady (near Krásná Lípa), it occurred to him that it might also be worthwhile to mark out a trail and provide information along it, which would be in some way educational. At that time, the term "educational trail" didn't exist yet, and the only one other such trail which already existed in Bohemia was the geological educational trail „Hibschweg“ in the Bohemian Central Mountains, which opened in 1927. In 1941, the Kögler Trail was therefore only the second Czech educational trail to be set up. After the war it disappeared and it wasn't until 2006 that it was resurrected and expanded. The original 12 kilometres became 23 kilometres. To walk this wonderful trail means to see the Krásná Lípa region in all its colours and tones. From Krásná Lípa it runs from the city park through the picturesque Kamenná Horka, with some views well into the distance,

and then through the Lužický Zlom (the Lusatian Fault) around the limestone quarries above Doubice. In Kyjov the trail takes a peek up to the edge of the Kyjov valley of the Křinice Creek only to then climb along the edge of the national park through beautiful forests over Kamenný Vrch, to the meadows near Vlčí Hora (Wolf Mountain) and to the Vlčí hora lookout tower. From there, around Veroničina studánka (Veronica's Well), it leads hikers to Kögler's house (with its geological garden), which is accessible to the public. The trail then goes around a lovely chapel above Sněžná, along a black path, and then returns through Krásný buk to Krásná Lípa square. Anyone who walks the entire Kögler Trail – in one go or over several visits – can proudly declare not only that they already know the Krásná Lípa region, but that they have immersed themselves into the beauty of this landscape, that they have touched the spirit of those unique Bohemian-Switzerland rock formations, gorges and forests, and that they have been given a small taste of the unpretentious charm of the raw and wavy České Nizozemí (Bohemian Lowlands).

33. KYJOV VALLEY (KYJOVSKÉ ÚDOLÍ)

A place where the river tells stories



One of the most famous places in the eastern part of the national park is definitely Kyjovské údolí (Kyjov Valley). This pleasant valley created by the little river Křinice is perhaps also so popular because the course of the river is lined by a little road which doesn't get any traffic on it, so it's possible to also walk along here with a pram or a wheelchair. But the truth is that the Kyjov Valley offers much more than just a walk by the river. For instance, in Kyjov itself, if you head to the old school and walk along a narrow path around the old cemetery all the way up to Kinský vyhlídka (Kinský Lookout) instead of heading to the valley, you will have the valley far below you and a colourful and attractive rocky path copying the flow of the river will be waiting for you there. This path will be full of descents and ascents up stone steps through rock fissures, past a mysterious female face on a rock and around the rock formations Pekelná brána (Hell's Gate), Kočka a pes (Cat and Dog), Skalnií bratři (Rock Brothers), Lví doupě (Lion's Lair), Obří hlava (Giant's Head), Praporek (Little Flag), and Vikingská loď (Viking

Ship), as well as the remains of a castle (which is more likely to have been an old prospecting settlement). When you descend back down to the river again, the path will detour to a huge rocky "hall", called Klenotnice, which will take you away from the river. And when you stand on the banks of the Křinice river again, the path will then head to the Turistický most (Tourist Bridge) and beyond, following the meandering river to the extinct settlement of Zadní Doubice, to the rock Vlčí deska, or across the border, to the former Český mlýn hotel and further still, to places which we will visit in a few pages. But true lovers of nature's beauty might just enjoy sitting in the lush grass and staring at the falcons circling up high, or even a black stork rising from the riverbed and flying over their heads, or they mightn't believe their eyes at the sight of a kingfisher flying over the river. There is peace here, but never silence. The river itself whispers ancient stories, the bees sing and the trees hum. And when the valley starts to lose its colours, Lady Winter conjures up fairytale ice stalactites in the Vinný sklep and Jeskyně vlí caves.

34. RUMBURK

A city with beautiful architecture



There are some people who are a little upset by the thought that the city of Rumburk used to be called the 'Little Paris' of the north in the 19th century. But that's most likely either because they don't know Rumburk, or more likely perhaps because they're not the best at searching for and discovering beauty. If you have even a bit of a feel for beautiful architecture you will be overjoyed here. Gorgeous villas built by industrialists, historic and modernist burgher houses, a neoclassical fitness hall, a neo-Gothic school, a monumental secondary school in the style of the Viennese Art Nouveau and even expressionist buildings. And if we go deeper into the past, there are several Baroque gems such as the church of sv. Bartoloměje (St Bartholomew) or the truly unique Trojiční sloup (Trinity Column) which is in the square along with statues of the Virgin Mary and seven saints. And then there is the biggest Baroque jewel of Rumburk, the beautifully decorated Svatá Chýše (Santa Casa) chapel which is surrounded by cloisters with corner chapels, stunning ceiling paintings and thoroughly original Holy Stairs which are complemented by exceptionally abundant sculptural

decoration. It is the northernmost Loreto chapel in the world and is the work of the famous Baroque architect Johann Lucas Hildebrandt. The Loreto forms a Baroque complex along with a former Capuchin monastery and the church of sv. Vavřinec (St Laurence) and is visitor friendly - it has interesting tours including night tours with candles, there are several exhibitions and here and there you can even get a peek into the 'behind the scenes' of the building. The weaver's alley with Upper Lusatian half-timber houses of ancient craftsmen is also a unique sight. As with many cities in the region, Rumburk is surrounded by nature which beckons and entices visitors to explore it. Those that climb the hill Dymník will be able to best orientate themselves in the surroundings. This is because there is a historic lookout tower on the hill, and from it you can see the city and its surroundings as well as far off landmarks. What's more, you might just experience a strong spiritual moment in the Strom života (Tree of Life) area which is imbued with energy and which consists of 22 slender obelisks.

35. JIŘÍKOV AND FILIPOV

The Lourdes of northern Bohemia



The town of Jiříkov is nestled on the 'island' of České Nizozemí (the Czech Lowlands), where Czech and Saxon elements still naturally mix, since in many places you only need to look over the garden fence and you're looking into Saxony. As is the case in this region, life developed mainly around water, and it is even so in this town, as the Jiříkov stream flows through the town square, which is lined by remarkable mostly Baroque Upper Lusatian half-timber houses. In Jiříkov there are an unusually large number of statues. They are mostly Baroque or neoclassical, and you will see them at every turn. The most valuable one is a Baroque sculpture which depicts St John of Nepomuk surrounded by St Karel Boromejský and St Florian. This was to protect Jiříkov from fire and the plague. In the square, the statues which have withstood the ravages of time are those of the Virgin Mary Immaculate, St John the Baptist and St John of Nepomuk, while nearby the archangel Michael stands ready to fight, and at another of the Baroque half-timber houses a statue of Christ looks down on the goings on in the town.

The Baroque church of sv. Jiří (St George) in the middle of the old cemetery is surrounded by a cemetery wall with the Stations of the Cross all along it. The corner cemetery chapel, which also dates from the Baroque, is also very interesting. But anyone who ventures to nearby Filipov (today it is part of the town of Jiříkov), will find themselves transported straight from the Baroque into a time when architecture was ruled by historicism. They will be awestruck at the truly gigantic neo-Romanesque minor basilica, consecrated to Panna Marie pomocnice křesťanů (Virgin Mary the Helper of Christians). Its history is amazing. Back in 1866 there was a simple house here inside which 19 year old Magdalena Kade lay dying. The Virgin Mary appeared to her saying, „From now on, you will be healthy.“ An altar was quickly built in the house, which was soon followed by a chapel, which also soon wasn't enough for the onslaught of pilgrims so in 1885 a church was built here. And so Filipov became known as „the Lourdes of Northern Bohemia“.

36. ŠLUKNOV

A city of statues and a castle that rose from the ashes



Šluknov is the northernmost town of the Czech Republic. It used to be the imaginary tip of a Catholic wedge driven into the local largely Protestant congregation. These days we are used to noticing other things about cities, but those who are able to look with an eye for history will see countless pieces of evidence which point to this religious development. Šluknov is literally a city of statues - the entire stone pantheon of Catholic saints. Even the opulent Trojiční morový sloup (Trinity Plague Column) in the square was conceived as the coronation of the Virgin Mary with the saints looking on. These statues accompany you on the way through the Stations of the Cross, others are gathered around the church, at the rectory and elsewhere around the city. An exceptionally beautiful allegory of fatherhood is displayed in the statue of sv. Josef (St Joseph), which contrasts with the rigid sv. Antonín Paduánský (St Anthony of Padua) - a parade of emotions embodied in stone. But the younger statues are also amazing - the Art Nouveau allegory of Spořivost (Thrift) on the front

facade of the former savings bank and the mystical knight Rieber at the monument to the fallen. Šluknov has two significant dominant features. The first is the early Baroque church of sv. Václav (St Wenceslas) and the other a beautiful chateau built in the style of the Saxon Renaissance. It is actually a large manor house, well balanced in appearance and in its own way simple, dignified and beautiful. No turrets or other such nonsensical decoration - this is a purpose built dwelling. And to think that it was due to be torn down in 1986, since that's when it burned down - it lost its roof, rafters, third floor and part of the second. The fact that it is standing again today, that there are tours taking place in it, that it is surrounded by a beautiful park with a Rose Garden, is comforting proof of the fact that there are still master craftsmen alive who can make coffered ceilings, decorative door linings or inlaid parquet floors. In its history Šluknov has had its share of fires and plagues. The second of these left behind a rare monument in the city - a plague gate under the church, through which the dead were taken out of the city.

37. BRTNICKÉ ICE FALLS (BRTNICKÉ LEDOPÁDY)

Through a valley of icy beauty



When you say Brtnické ledopády (Brtnické Ice Falls) today, most people know what you are talking about. The photographs of beautiful and fragile ice scenes created year after year by Mother Nature herself are famous, but not everyone knows where to look for the ice falls, and nothing at all about how they are actually created. They grow - or rather run down from - predominantly sandstone overhangs or walls, and they are not actually frozen waterfalls as many people think. They are formed when melting snow freezes. During the time when winter starts to come to an end they tend to be at their biggest. Some are barely noticeable, others are huge and monumental. What's more, they come in colours ranging from shades of yellow through to green, brown and even black. The route along the „Brtnice“ ice falls in the Vlčí potok (Wolf Creek) Valley is well marked in winter, leading from icefall to icefall, so you can get to see Velká a Malá kaskáda (The Large and Small Cascades) to Opona (The Curtain), which is the best known and most admired ice fall due to its dark orange icy drapery. Then on to Konírna (The Stables), Betlém (Bethlehem),

Varhany (The Organ), Vlčí stěna (The Wolf Wall) and to Velký ledový sloup (The Great Ice Pillar), which can grow to a truly impressive size. However, the entire Kyjov Valley is interwoven with ice falls, since they are a particular feature of the local gorges. Having said this, Brtníky is also nice at other times of the year, especially as a starting point to visiting Velký Pruský tábor (The Great Prussian Camp), Soví jeskyně (The Owl Cave) and the Kyjov Valley. History lovers also no doubt won't want to miss the Stations of the Cross and the Column of Our Lady of Sorrows. The neighbouring settlement of Kopec is unique in its location and atmosphere. It has the unique pub U Oty, small sacred monuments and charming cottages. From Kopec you'll be able to walk along the Brtnice stream towards Křínice via a different gorge, with some remarkable rock formations along the way. From Brtníky you can then go along the little known red trail to Zelený kříž (The Green Cross) and even up to Volský kámen, in search of beautiful views and captivating forests.

38. MIKULÁŠOVICE

In between two worlds



This town around the massive Baroque church of sv. Mikuláše (St Nicholas) is the imaginary border between Bohemian Switzerland and the Czech Lowlands. The strange rock formations and deep gorges end and turn into a contemplative land of slightly undulating forests. Raw and beautifully rugged, it is the landscape of the wizard Křabát, wandering alchemists, and huge crosses in the fields. At Easter, men on horses dressed in suits and top hats, decorated with black and gold sashes and accompanied by a band and walking singers pass through this landscape. This is the old tradition of Easter riders which has been restored in recent years. In Mikulášovice, the old meets the recent past and the present. You'll find renovated small sacred monuments, the beautiful triangular chapel of Nejsvětější Trojice (The Holy Trinity), kaple Tří otců (The Chapel of the Three Fathers) with a new roof created by local craftsmen, but also remarkable industrial buildings that are monuments to a time which is showcased by the small museum above the Information Centre in the centre of the village.

However Mikulášovice will also surprise you with a beautiful swimming pool, which has a very First Republic feel to it, as well as a working historical observatory. This city is ideal as a starting point for day trips. It's a great place to set off from to visit the beautiful brick lookout tower Tanečnice, to the Zlodějská cesta (Thief's Path) which is at times panoramic, at other times hidden in the forest, to walk through the rocky valley of the Bílý potok (White Creek) all the way up to Křínice, or to go to Saxon Switzerland, which is really just behind the old wheat thrasher. The neighbouring Vilémov is also worth exploring though, since it is also historic. By train you'll get there along a high viaduct from 1904 which spans the Vilémov Valley. Once in the town, when you stand at the foot of a massive staircase leading to the church of Nanebevzetí Panny Marie (The Assumption of the Virgin Mary), with the Stations of the Cross and a niche chapel which covers a miraculous spring, you'll immediately feel as though you are back in the Baroque period.

39. DOLNÍ POUSTEVNA

Take the way of the cross all the way up to our neighbours



Dolní Poustevna is literally and figuratively a border town, as only a bridge over the Vilémovský stream separates it from the Saxon town of Sebnitz. It's wise to walk through these 'twin' joined towns with your eyes wide open, because that way you'll come across many obvious and hidden sights. To start with, it's a good idea to go to the Centrum setkávání (The Meeting Centre), which is a restored evangelical church with a gallery and a lookout tower. From here you'll be able to see the whole city. There is an interesting educational trail along some stone monuments which will take you across the town and its surroundings, literally from cross to cross, from statue to monument, all the way up to Karlín, Nová Víska and Horní Poustevna. You will also see the Poustevenská pieta (The Hermitage Pieta) from 1748, which is a Baroque sandstone sculpture of the Virgin Mary holding Christ in her arms after he has been taken down from the cross. Once you reach the beautifully restored crucifix from 1824, which is wonderfully decorated with figures including flying angels, let yourself be led off the track to a turnoff

under Poustevník hill (also popularly known as Špičák). Anyone that manages to climb the hill will be rewarded with a panoramic view from the Patriarchal cross which is there. They'll see the sweeping and ruggedly beautiful, unpretentious, and yet still picturesque, landscape of the western Šluknov region, but also the rolling hills of the Upper Lusatian Highlands. Lovers of excursions should also follow the yellow marker through beautiful forests, Maxova bouda (Max's Hut) up to the border with Saxony and beyond, to the Solný sloup (Salt Column) and up to Ungerberg, where a tourist hut with a 75 metre high lookout tower will be waiting for them. The neighbouring town of Sebnitz is lovely just for wandering around and admiring the local churches and town houses. You could also go to the famous Museum of Artificial Flowers and Homeland Studies or to the House of German Artificial Flowers, or the African House, the Railway Museum with its Tillig trains, the Prehistoric Park with four hundred sculptures of prehistoric mammals and small animals, or to the Western Village.

40. LIPOVÁ

Around the northernmost places in the Czech Republic



Lipová is the Czech Republic's 2019 Village of the Year and the village certainly didn't receive such an honour lightly. There is a strong community of people here who care and who know how to take care of their community and its visitors. The heart of the village is a beautifully renovated Upper Lusatian half-timber house which was built by the local resident Zacharias Hoffmann, the most important Baroque builder for miles. Today it has a gallery, a museum, areas for group activities and cultural events, and most importantly an information centre open seven days a week throughout the whole year. The sacred jewel of the village is the Baroque church of sv. Šimona a Judy (St Simon and Judy), which has also undergone a thorough and generous restoration and which has an interesting exhibition in its attic. The chapel in nearby Liščí and two dozen other small sacred monuments have also been repaired. The dominant feature of the district is the ruins of the Salm chateau and there is a challenging reconstruction of it currently underway. However the charming Baroque chateau garden has already been restored to a state where it has become a focal place for

games and a meeting place for locals and visitors alike. On the other side of the chateau, the surface of the chateau pond glimmers. The pond also has an educational trail all the way around it. Lipová buzzes with many events and incidentally, the most famous of these - the Lipovský dřevák - which is a competition of wood sculptors, leaves remarkable sculptures dotted around the village every year. But the surroundings of the village are no less beautiful. It isn't far from here to get to Lobendava, which has the church of Navštívení Panny Marie (The Visitation of the Virgin Mary) and which was built by the already mentioned Zacharias Hoffmann. The charming road then takes visitors to Severní, which lives up to its name since it is the northernmost village in the Czech Republic. From there you can walk through the seductive landscape to the northernmost spot in the country called Nordkap. Creeping meadows with herds of cows and a narrow footpath around the border stream will lead you to a memorial obelisk with two plaques, each of which speaks the language of the country it is looking into.

41. THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Take the Stations of the Cross to places where there is heavenly silence



The křížové cesty (Stations of the Cross) in České nížozemí (the Czech Lowlands), as the Šluknov area has been called since ancient times, are special places, hidden away natural nooks touched by humanity, which are imbued with a strong feeling even for non-believers. There are 14 of them, the same number as the stops along the Stations of the Cross. Maybe it's a coincidence, maybe it's intentional. It was here that two irreconcilable currents of Christianity met in the Baroque, and the Catholic peninsula which ran into a Protestant sea surrounding it in the region tried to show off in a spectacular way. That's why there are so many statues, that's why the region has the northernmost Loreta in the world and that's why there are sacred sites even on the most remote rock formations. The oldest and also the largest Stations of the Cross, the one in Šluknov, dates back to the Baroque. It is considered to be a "passion" Way of the Cross, which means that in addition to the usual 14 stops that culminate in Christ's tomb, it also has Getsemanská zahrada (the Garden of Gethsemane), grottos, and several chapels. The Stations of the Cross in Jiřetín pod

Jedlovou and Vilémov are also from the Baroque, while the others are younger. All these places have their own unique atmosphere and all of them will transport visitors elsewhere, even for a moment. One of the most evocative Stations is the one on Annaberg, also a passion Way of the Cross, with magnificent views of Lobendava. The neighbouring town of Jáchym has been experiencing a fundamental change, in that after decades, its buildings have been restored in a dignified way and the chapel of St Jáchym is also in the process of being renovated. On the other hand, the fourteen Stations of the Cross in Království have a very special charm, while a mysterious experience awaits visitors in the grove above Brtníky. Aside from these Stations, the road above Velký Šenov provides a pleasant dose of solitude on the edge of the forest. In some places the Stations of the Cross surround the church and form a part of the cemetery wall - in Staré Křečany, Varnsdorf and Jiříkov - while elsewhere the ravages of time have almost eroded them - in Krásná Lípa and of course also in Fukov, where the entire village itself disappeared, not just the Stations of the Cross.

42. ROCK THEATRES

Theatre returns to this rocky region



Theatre used to be performed among the rock formations and rock scenery of Bohemian Switzerland over 100 years ago. This tradition disappeared after the war, when almost everything disappeared from Sudetenland, especially joy. Theatre IS joy and joy cannot be banished for ever. And so amateur enthusiasm returned and with it the rock amphitheatres have come to life again. There very likely isn't a more amazing stage than one whose scenery is made up of fantastic rock formations and humming trees. These days you'll find theatre enthusiasts at four beautiful outdoor rock theatres - in Mlýny, Srbská Kamenice, Chřibská and Prysk. The oldest is the theatre in Srbská Kamenice. It was established in 1924, when the U Růžáku inn where local amateurs performed burned down. They had no choice but to move outside, among the rocks. And it paid off - there isn't really anywhere else with such a dramatic and rugged rocky backdrop. Before the war the theatre was demolished, and it was not resurrected again until 2013. A path leading to it starts on the bridge next

to the municipal office. Above the beautiful valley of the river Kamenice, between Mlýny and Kytlice, back in 1931 the glassmaker Franz Marschner transformed the clearing in front of a jagged rocky outcrop into a theatre. Operettas and carols used to be played there - but then came the war. It wasn't until practically 50 years later that this theatre, which leans against a massive rock wall, resumed its activities. In 1931, the townsfolk of Chřibská also built a forest theatre - in a former quarry just above the town in the direction of Česká Kamenice. Its fate was similar to that of the other local natural theatres, only it was resurrected earlier, back in 1996. The rock theatre in Prysk on the other hand has a completely different history. It also arose from an abandoned quarry, but not until 2018! Rock theatres are beautiful even when they aren't putting on a show. These amphitheatres in amongst the cliffs and rocks have a special atmosphere. At least here, a person wouldn't be too embarrassed to break out into song just for fun.

43. THE NATIONAL PARK RAILWAY

Take the train to all the beautiful sights in both national parks



A train ride is always a great experience, no matter what day it happens to be. And no more so than when you ride on the National Park Railway, which got going in 2014 at the railway station in Dolní Poustevna. The original railway connection with the sister town of Sebnitz across the border was interrupted after the Second World War and in 1948 the railway tracks were even ripped out by the officials. But the trains are back in operation today and so much so that a unique circuit has been created, literally crammed with beautiful sights which you can view straight out of the window as you ride past. However the route is also ideal if you want to be able to get off anywhere and comfortably get to any of the attractions in both national parks. Just imagine - you get on the train in Děčín and travel through the beautiful Elbe Canyon into the Saxon Table Mountains. Then behind the spa town of Bad Schandau you are surrounded by a landscape of rock towns, while in Sebnitz you cross the border back into the Czech Republic and travel through the towns of Dolní Poustevna, Mikulášovice

and Šluknov until you arrive at Rumburk. You can also choose an alternative route in the summer - change to route U27 in Mikulášovice and then go to Rumburk via Brtníky and Krásná Lípa. The circuit of the National Park Railway then continues on via another beautiful route called U8. It runs from Rumburk and Krásná Lípa between the first hills of the Lusatian Mountains, then through Chřibská, Jedlová, Kytlice and Mlýny to Česká Kamenice and beyond, then through Benešov nad Ploučnicí back to Děčín. There is no other railway circuit in the country that offers so much. And that freedom! No fighting for parking spaces in Hřensko or anywhere else. You just get off the train and go. The ferry from Schmilka will take you to Hřensko in a flash, in Bad Schandau you can take a tram and travel through the Křinice Valley to the rock formations, or climb to the rock town of Schrammsteine. Literally every station offers trips that are unforgettable. So hop on, we're heading off in search of beauty!

44. HALF-TIMBER HOUSES

The never-ending charm of folk architecture



If someone thought about what makes Bohemian Switzerland, the Czech Lowlands and the Lusatian Mountains unique they would certainly come up with many beautiful natural wonders, but soon after they would think of folk architecture. Like beads strung on the strings of streams and scattered across meadows or glued to rock formations, houses with a "look" typical for this region are the colour of it, and an expression of human life in its landscape. Since the Czech and German elements lived together here side by side for centuries, their customs and traditions as well as their way of building houses intertwined. And so the Upper Lusatian half-timber style of house came into being sometime in the Baroque period. Typically these houses consist of a Czech timber ground floor surrounded by wooden columns with beam lintels which carry the weight of the timber frame storey, a building element characteristic of Saxony and Upper Lusatia. The lighter timber frame storey effectively doesn't burden the ground floor at all, since the weight rests on the beam base.

These houses are simple and brilliant - born from the minds of farmers and home owners. And what's more, aside from the structure outlined, there is no other unifying feature. On the contrary, each house is different and many have beautiful gables decorated with slate, others have decorative sandstone lining on the door frame, while others still have amazing dormers. A specific feature of these houses in the Upper Lusatia and Lusatian Mountains areas are what are known as Lusatian windows, a kind of elongated dormer - a long row of tiny windows in the bottom half of the roof. But the most charming thing is that you can find these Upper Lusatian half-timber houses practically everywhere in the region. There is no village where there isn't at least one. Srbská Kamenice, Všemily, Kamenná horka, Jiřetín pod Jedlovou, Lipová, Kamenická stráň, Jetřichovice, Vysoká Lípa, Doubice, Kytlice, Chřibská.... There is no point in making a list of places, half-timber houses are really everywhere and people still live in them. It is no different on the Saxon side of the border. In Ebersbach, there is even an exhibition called Alte Mangel, which puts these houses under a microscope, giving visitors even the smallest of details on them.

45. ROCK CASTLES

Witnesses of a time long gone



Bohemian Switzerland has its own medieval past, and the evidence of this is its rock castles - foundations cut into rocky outcrops in order to build exclusively wooden guard castles. There are six of them, and their origins and function are still not well documented, which is only a good thing for travellers, since secrets are what spurs on the imagination. Šaunštejn (Shaunstein) and Falkenštejn (Falkenstein) were certainly guard castles, while the others perhaps just bases for prospectors. Anyone who thinks that these little castles are randomly scattered around the region, would be wrong. The castles form an arc, and its ends are barely eight kilometres apart, so these individual rock nests are actually only two to four kilometres away from each other. It looks like a thoughtfully constructed line. The castles were probably built sometime from the second half of the 13th century to the end of the 14th century. At that time, many trade routes led through the rocky outcrops and forests of Bohemian Switzerland - the Salt Route, the Czech Road, the Lusatian Route, and all of these had to be

protected. A similar system of castles is also of course on the Saxon side. What's impressive is that whether it was the ends of rocky outcrops or solitary rock formations, the places were chosen so carefully that not even to this day have there been any encroachments of other human settlement where they stand. That's why all six places still have a unique atmosphere, although of course there are no remains of buildings left - only some modifications which were done to the land. But anyone who sets out to conquer them all will experience a memorable expedition. If they start from the west and head east, they'll see Šaunštejn (with one of the most impressive lookouts in the region), Falkenštejn (with completely new installed stairs and viewing platforms), Chřibský hrádek (above the dead end path which is under the peak Spravedlnost), Kyjov Castle (on the already mentioned rocky path which runs above Kyjovské údolí), Vlčí hrádek (hidden away near the valley of the Malý vlčí creek), and Brtnický hrádek (above Hluboký důl which slopes down to Kyjovské údolí).

46. SMALL RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS

Traces of faith in the countryside



The 18th century saw a huge surge of faith. The Baroque period opened wide the doors of churches and spiritual power spilled into the countryside like a river. It was no different in the land of rocks and gorges. Road crosses, wayside shrines, little chapels, statues of saints and alcove chapels with pictures, simple crosses as well as wonderfully decorated crosses accompanied by figures and flying angels. The people living at that time had a need to build all of those in the outdoors. The owners of the estates, the clergy, but also the ordinary people, were the initiators and donors of small buildings, which often lined church and corpse roads, which people walked on to attend masses, baptisms and weddings and where processions with coffins walked along. The crosses, paintings and statues on them often copied pilgrimage routes. The vast majority of them had, and still have, their own unique story - for instance they were often an expression of prayer or thanks for the fact that someone was healed - incidentally, when they are renovated it is not uncommon to find something from the time they were made written on the back

of a painting or on an attached piece of paper. The post WWII and normalisation period during communism seemed to make these monuments of faith invisible. They were forgotten about, fell into disrepair, and often times they even fell apart and were overgrown with weeds. But in the last three decades, they have experienced a resurrection. People have looked for them, repaired them and decorated them with flowers. As with half-timber houses, it doesn't make much sense to name specific places, as you will come across small sacred monuments in Bohemian Switzerland and the Czech Lowlands almost everywhere. Especially amazing are the niches carved into the rocks, where paintings have gradually made a return. For example, Navštívení Panny Marie (the Visitation of the Virgin Mary) in Dolní Chřibská, the Lipnická chapel near Studený, the cross on Zámecký or Křížový vrch, the wayside pillar shrine in Kamenická stráň, the Trinity chapel near Mikulášovice, the cross in Staré Křečany and Dolní Poustevna. You'll need to walk through the countryside and keep your mind and eyes open.

47. CONCILIATION CROSSES

Witnesses to crimes committed long ago



Even the saddest aspects of the past are also remembered in the form of stone crosses scattered around the countryside. Despite their name however, not all of them could be described as conciliatory. Perhaps only those crosses for which captured murderers themselves had to pay for, or even carve and place in the spot where they committed their horrible act. The others types of crosses were simply those which were erected at a spot where someone died. When we think about it, we don't behave any differently today - just look at the hundreds of various small memorials and monuments on the edges of roads. In any case - conciliatory or erected as an eternal memory to someone - they are impressive features of the landscape and interesting fragments of the lives of our ancestors. Though in the spirit of these old crosses, a stone cross was recently carved and embedded in the spot where pensioner Sonja Homolková was murdered near Krásná Lípa. We know a lot about that cross. About the old ones, only very little. In some places, only a legend has survived. For example, at one of the most beautiful ones, Riedel's cross by the side

of the road from Růžová to Srbská Kamenice. A glass merchant was allegedly murdered here in 1792 by two thugs. But the murderers didn't escape punishment and they were apparently found out because of the squawking crows who witnessed the murder. Veronika's cross above Růžová on the other hand stands witness to a murder out of jealousy. This cross is of interest today mainly because after it was destroyed, a replica of it was put back in the place where the cross had stood since 1836. The surroundings of Růžová are full of conciliation and stone crosses - near the Nový svět settlement, Dietze's cross testifies to the death of a Růžová farmer, even closer to the village is Sturm's Cross and not far from neighbouring Bynovec is the beautiful Gaudernack's Cross. There by the side of the road between Libouchec and Tíša stands the oldest of all - Fleischer's cross from 1626. Then in the Czech Lowlands there is Krause's cross on the slope of Světlý kopec near Nové Křečany, in Brtníky there's Engel's cross and near Tomášov a nameless cross dated 1753.

48. BASALT ORGANS

Stunning scenes of basalt columns



Just about everyone knows Panská skála near Kamenický Šenov. There are few examples of columnar jointing of basalt in the world that are even more perfect - perhaps only somewhere in Iceland. At the same time, there are countless places where similarly large areas of basalt columns were discovered in Bohemian Switzerland and its surroundings. But how did such amazing geological scenery come about? First there had to be volcanic activity, then hot liquid magma appeared, and this always had to have a larger volume than the subsequent cooled mass - and then the magma had to cool down in such a way that the mass could shrink, creating gaps and pentagonal or hexagonal columns. The slower it happened, the bigger and longer the columns were. In some places, the columns resembling organ pipes have eroded. This can be seen on the hill Jehla above Česká Kamenice, under the Stations of the Cross in Šluknov (Malé varhany or Small Organ), on Malý Stožec or under the peak of Střední vrch nad Přyskem. However, it is more often the case that the 'organs' appeared as a result of mining activity. Thus the already

mentioned Varhany (Organ), i.e. Panská skála were 'discovered'. It was originally a bare hill with three crosses on top. Then farmers began to mine the basalt columns at the end of the 18th century. These columns were used to build dykes as far away as the Netherlands, and through mining the shape we know today was uncovered. It wasn't easy, but the mining was finally stopped once and for all as far back as 1913. Just a little bit further away, there is an almost unknown quarry called Klučka, where the lava probably cooled even more slowly, because the columns here are even more massive. But by far the most spectacular site of these columns is at a practically unknown place - on Zlatý and Stříbrný vrch (Gold and Silver Peak) above the village of Líška, near Česká Kamenice. There used to be a quarry here too but there hasn't been any mining here since 1973. Mining revealed columns of up to 30 metres, which is twice as high as at Panská Skála. The wall at Zlatý vrch is impressive and will take anyone's breath away, whether they're a geologist or just an ordinary admirer.

49. HERCULES' PILLARS

Through a rocky valley to Hercules' pillars



There is a beautiful trip, which only a few Czech hikers know about, which goes from Ostrov along the Ostrovská Bělá creek (the name of the creek turns into the Biela after a few hundred metres once it crosses the Czech German border, which is really only a stone's throw away). For about eight or nine kilometres you'll be able to keep walking through fairly rugged and surprising countryside along one of two marked paths. Either along the more direct red one, which leads around the amazing Grenzplatte lookout and along the forest covered ridge to Ottomühle, a settlement named after a former mill, or to the same destination via the uneven yellow path along rock walls and formations. Near Ottomühle, in a forest-covered hillside, hides one of the pearls of Saxon Switzerland, a Herculean rock town with its main drawcard - Hercules' pillars, wonderfully shaped rock towers that seem to defy the earth's gravity. The surrounding 'halls', caves, openings and rocky 'streets' are quite simply captivating. However Bielatal, which is the valley of the Bělá creek, doesn't finish here. When you walk along it, it

really doesn't matter which side of the creek you walk on from here. If you stick to the right and therefore continue walking away from the pillars of Hercules there is a rock town waiting for you with many lookouts, the most beautiful of which is the somewhat mystically placed stone gazebo from 1880 on the edge of the rock plateau called the Kaiser Wilhelm Feste (The Kaiser Wilhelm Lookout). From there you will have a wonderful view of the pillars of Hercules - in fact they are perhaps even more amazing from a distance. The path on the other side of the valley however has equally fascinating views. By walking up to the Johannishwachte, Sachsenstein or Nachbar, you will see the surrounding collection of rock formations and the idyllic valley from a different angle, which is definitely worth it. The trip ends in another settlement which is named after a mill - Schweizermühle. And what about the return journey? Of course choose the other direction to the one you came from so you can see the whole route. In all, this is a roughly 18 km circuit full of extraordinary beauty.

50. FORSTSTEIG

A trek through a wild landscape



The Forststeig is a 100 kilometre trek. In other words, it's a challenging hike for a few days through wild terrain. The trail is marked in forests and rock formations along the left bank of the Elbe in the area between Děčinský Sněžník and Bad Schandau. The experience is a little like from another world - a world far removed from everyday stress, the trap of electronic devices and the constant communication that has long since closed in on our everyday lives. The trek is a wonderful journey split into six sections through nature without most of the crutches of civilisation to which we, as pampered tourists, have long become accustomed to. And most of it without a phone signal - which is a cure for the soul. The trek is also the perfect way to clear the head and to learn a little more about yourself. No, this trip is not for everyone, it's a challenge for the brave. You need health, fitness, good equipment and responsibility for yourself. You also need a clear plan and plenty of reserves. You should definitely end each stage while there is still light, you should be clear on where

you will sleep, you shouldn't go completely alone and someone else should know roughly where you are. And you also need to not underestimate the weather and to not go at any cost - and you need to take enough food and drinks and spare clothes with you (good shoes are a matter of course). The Forststeig is open and walkable between April and October. You can sleep either in one of the five simply equipped trekking huts, where there is a common room for about 12 people, or in one of the three bivouacs with protective shelters, each for five small tents. The Forest Trail/Forststeig starts at the station in Schön, opposite Hřensko, and leads through the border forests of Bohemian Switzerland along forest trails, paths, slopes and stone steps, across 12 table mountains and ends in Bad Schandau. One hundred kilometres, seven to eight days of travel and the total sum of all the elevations comes to 2770m. This is a difficult but breathtaking and captivating journey through nature that is still untouched by humans.

51. THE GREAT WINTERBERG AND KIPPHORN

In the footsteps of painters up to a picture perfect lookout



The village of Schmilka lies a few hundred metres beyond the Czech German border, on the right bank of the Elbe. From the Czech side (which is opposite to Schmilka) there is a ferry which crosses the river from the train station, so you can travel here by train and then take the ferry to Schmilka if you like. Schmilka is often perceived as a starting point to get to rock cliffs and formations (which it undoubtedly is), but it's definitely worth looking around first since this 'organic village' has a charming atmosphere. It has lovely half-timber houses, cosy, inviting pensions, a historic mill which still mills flour the traditional way, an organic bakery, an artisanal organic brewery, a cake store and more. And it's not just a pretty facade, it's a living place. You can watch craftsmen work and then get to enjoy their products in restaurants or in a beer garden. If you love views and cliffs and are not afraid of steep climbs, then there's the opportunity to set off on a roughly seven kilometre circuit, which you can extend almost arbitrarily as you wish. If you do, you'll pile on the sights and experiences to dizzying heights.

The Bergsteig trail which is marked green (and it is part of the legendary Malerweg) rises 426 metres over two and a half kilometres, so it really isn't a walk in the park. This is the highest peak of Saxon Switzerland on the right hand side of the river, but unfortunately you'll only be able to look at the lookout tower and the remarkable Ice House (a historic 'refrigerator'), from the outside. They are now closed, but they should reopen in 2021 with a small Saxon Switzerland National Park information centre. Despite this though, you definitely won't be robbed of lookouts. The red path will take you to a turn off to the most popular lookout for miles, which is especially loved by photographers. The Kipphornaussicht offers quite possibly the most beautiful view of the Elbe valley from Saxony. This is due also to the fact that, among other things, Kipphorn is the highest of all lookouts on the Elbe. All of the surrounding table mountains, including the rocky gem Lillienstein, show off from here like models on a catwalk. If you descend along the yellow trail marker, you'll complete a circular route that you won't forget in a hurry.

52. TABLE MOUNTAINS

All aboard these rock ships



Imagine the countryside as a sea and the table mountains like the cruisers, ships and boats on it. These table mountains are a specific feature of the left bank of the Elbe in the Bohemian-Saxon Switzerland region and the first of these large 'steamers' is Děčinský Sněžník, with a stone 'chimney' courtesy of its lookout tower. After that the whole fleet of Saxon Table Mountains follows, as these mountains are also called. They are actually solitary ridges, with slopes rising steeply above the surrounding landscape and a top which is made up of plateaus. Some of the Saxon Table Mountains are easily reached on foot - for example from Schmilka, but this time from the left bank, from the station. An almost 20 kilometre circular route starts at Schmilka, which is hemmed on two sides by the rock formations and table mountains which visitors have come to see. On the right with several lookouts is Kaiserkrone, a table mountain romantically eaten away by erosion, then there is Zirkelstein, the smallest but beautifully shaped table mountain, with an impressive 360° view.

This circular route will lead visitors from the smallest mountain to the largest, since Grosser Zschirnsstein is the highest mountain in Saxon Switzerland. And it is this mountain which largely gives the region its character, its huge rocky outcrop which resembles the head of a mythical creature is visible from a large distance. The whole mountain seems to be broken up into two parts - the 'bow' rises up in the south - this is the Great Zschirnsstein, while the 'stern' of this giant is in the north - it's the Little Zschirnsstein. On the 'captain's bridge' (that is, on the top of Great Zschirnsstein), there is a rocky plateau with a viewing map and a very old stone geodetic stone column along with some incredible views. While wandering along the top, you'll encounter wonderful rock formations such as huge rock 'bowls' filled with water. The plateau also hides an ancient quarry and a pseudokarst cave. The outstanding views from Little Zschirnsstein are just the cherry on the top of this whole trip.

53. BAD SCHANDAU

From a spa town up to the rock formations, even by tram

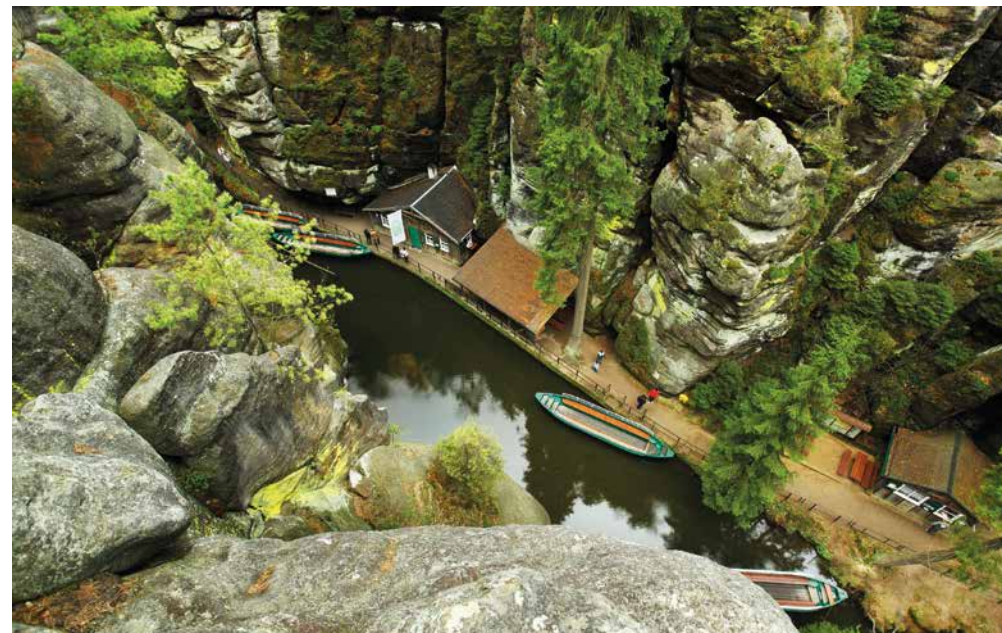


The heart of Saxon Switzerland is the oldest Saxon spa town of Bad Schandau. From Hřensko you'll get there in a flash and in fact the National Park Railway itself stops right there. Bad Schandau is a charming city. Manicured, romantic and friendly streets, picturesque half-timber houses overflowing with flowers as though glued to the rocky cliffs, with a festive atmosphere even on weekdays. The town has a botanical garden, churches, an extensive interactive exhibition on "The Saxon Swiss House" (at the NationalparkZentrum), sports equipment rentals, good restaurants, an interesting city museum, a complex of swimming pools (which are part of the unique thermal baths Toscana Terme) and, last but not least, the 'Schandau Eiffel Tower' - a 50 metre high historic elevator which will take you up to the rock cliffs, to the suburb of Ostrau. Right here is one of the possible starting points from Bad Schandau to perhaps the most beautiful rock 'town' in Saxony, the spectacular Schrammsteine, where fantastic rock formations and steep paths, stairs,

ladders, footbridges, and stunning views all wait for visitors. In short, a thoroughly unique experience. Quite possibly the biggest attraction of this smiling city is the „old lady on the tracks“, as the Saxons good-naturedly call the historic yellow tram. It has been driving through the Křinice valley from Bad Schandau to the interior of the rock formations since 1898. The journey alone through the forested valley of the Křinice river is an experience. When you get off the final stop and enjoy the artificial Lichtenhain waterfall, which is regularly switched on, and then head up to the Kuhstall rock gate, you are guaranteed a unique experience. You can get off the tram anywhere - there are hiking trails leading to forests and rocks with clear markings from most stations, but Kuhstall is the biggest drawcard. The narrow 'stairs to heaven' will allow you to walk up to the top of this rock massif to lovely views of Small Winterberk and the Idagrotte cave, which are not far from here.

54. OBERE SCHLEUSE

The most beautiful village situated above a gorge



Even as you wander through Křov Valley, which was itself created by the Křinice creek, it is clear that the beauty of the journey downstream won't end at the border, because fortunately beauty knows no boundaries. Following the Křinice creek is of course still wonderful even beyond the border. Not far from the ruins of the Český Mlýn hotel, which was a popular hotel before the war, you'll see the historic Niedermühle buildings which guard the path to the nearby Obere Schleuse, (Upper Weir) gorge. Awestruck visitors have been carried down on flatboats here since 1879 and to this day it is still an out of the ordinary experience. There is a serene silence which is guarded in the skies by rock giants, as well as islands and tufts of grass which jut out of the water. From the boats you can then either take a beautiful path above Křinice along the blue marker, where you will walk through rock tunnels, admire the highest spruce in Saxony and the meandering Křinice creek, or conquer the slope along the red marker, climb a narrow staircase to the Hermannseck peak, then climb under the overhangs and squeeze through crevices to the Königsplatz lookout, where you can see the gorge in all its beauty.

But where the boats stop, you can keep going along on the water and back, or return via the path on the slope. About three kilometres above the gorge, the friendly village of Hinterhermsdorf adds to the beauty of the surrounding landscape, since it is one of the most beautiful villages in all of Germany. There is a lovely walk in the village along an educational trail that will show curious visitors 71 picturesque half-timber houses, and in one of them - the Heimatsube - there is also a small museum with a perfect reconstruction of a typical room which forest workers would have lived in at the end of the 19th century. What's more, there is the Waldhusche forest nature area with two circular routes (one is passable with a pram) - a children's nature trail that can be walked repeatedly up to four times, each time with different types of questions and competitions. There's also a children's via ferrata (a protected climbing route) and an information centre with an exhibition about forest care and about caring for the massive riverbed (onto which harvested wood used to be lowered there from the slopes above).

55. WEIFBERG AND WACHBERG

Walk along the Zlodějka in search of glorious views



There is a really luxurious trip from the old school swimming area in Mikulášovice which is about 10 kilometres long. It is a circular route which all hikers will no doubt appreciate, since what's the point of returning the same way you came. Just the Zlodějská cesta (the Thief's Path) alone is an experience, especially when the forest suddenly thins out and opens up a view far into the countryside. On Hančův vrch (Hančův Hill), the path marked yellow will guide you on where to go next and it leads hikers all the way above the village of Hinterhermsdorf to the beautiful and still relatively new Weifbergturm lookout tower on Weifberg Hill. Its vertical steel columns are foundations for a wooden structure that culminates in an observation deck almost 40 metres above the ground. And what about the view from there? You'll see Bohemian-Saxon Switzerland, the Lusatian Mountains and a nice chunk of the Bohemian Central Mountains. At the edge of the forest the path runs along to a legendary tourist destination of Saxon Switzerland,

the Wachberg. The first inn was established there as a place of rest for tourists back in 1851! Although there is no lookout tower there, the view from Wachberg is really very impressive. You can see the Table Mountains, Eastern Ore Mountains and of course, Bohemian-Saxon Switzerland. Children especially like Hutberg hill which translates into Czech as Strážní vrch. It features wooden statues of people and animals, massive teepees, but most of all, a beautiful miniature fairytale village with a church, which children can climb all over and settle in for a while. All this is enriched by the typical welcoming Saxon atmosphere, because if there's anyone that really enjoys hiking and trips, it's the Saxons. It is inconceivable that you would meet anyone here who wouldn't greet you from afar with the typical „Hallo!“ and it's comforting to be able to reciprocate this nicety. Lovers of half-timber houses and those typical Saxon rural colours might also be interested in heading down to Saupsdorf to enjoy a different section of the picturesque Zlodějská cesta (Thief's Path) on the way back.

56. GROSSSCHÖNAU

Through fairytale villages in search of Damask and a bandit



On the river Mandava, right on the border between Czech Republic and Germany, there's a village that's as pretty as a picture. In fact it's two villages - Grossschönau and Waltersdorf - and you can even see them from Varnsdorf. Walking around them is a little like wandering around a model train set. The half-timber and timber houses here are so neat, cared for and perfect and there are loads of them here, arranged into rows of all sizes and colours. It's a little like being in a dream. The village's textile past goes back a long way and fabrics still give the place its character. There is an unusual German Museum of Damask and Terry Cloth (both fabrics are still produced here) with a demonstration workshop, the huge House of the Zittau Mountains Nature Park with a very adventurous exhibition, a Museum of Mills and Folklore and a very interesting Museum of Motorcycle Veterans. But the most beautiful thing is to walk among the hundreds of gems of folk architecture which people still live in very happily.

Grossschönau is a convenient starting point from which to see the Zittau Mountains, but you could also take time to just relax here, for example at the tropical Aquapark Trixi which has an indoor and outdoor section - so it is fun all year round. About 10 kilometres away (and about five from Rumburk) is another magical village called Seifhennersdorf. Apart from its unique "colours", Seifhennersdorf also has the very popular Karask Museum. Thanks to local enthusiasts, the famous robber Karásek, who was known as "Prague Honza", has a whole house devoted to him, which is filled with various artefacts, personal items and of course stories of his robbery exploits. We don't even need to mention that there is another parade of half-timber houses, but it's worthwhile to point out at least one of them, since it has the Doll Museum in it. Two thousand dolls in all - not "model" pieces but real toys which someone used to play with once. And last but not least, the town also has a Railway Museum, which features a massive model railway.

57. EBERSBACH-NEUGERSDORF

A walk along the border to a slightly different world



A chain of villages dots the border from Jiříkov to Lipová, each only a few steps from the other. These villages are in the same region and yet they are quite different. For example, Jiříkov is literally a stone's throw from the town of Ebersbach-Neugersdorf and yet even its Lutheran church with a slender tower above a picturesque pond seems to say "you are somewhere different". Ebersbach-Neugersdorf's perfectly renovated historic water tower, its stone lookout tower Bismarckturm (from 1902), which stands on the border between the two countries, and the amazing and massive half-timber house which is the headquarters of the foundation for the preservation of half-timber houses (it's open to visitors several times a year), make powerful first impressions of the town. As you venture further into town, you'll discover a beautiful historic half-timber merchant's house, a cosy Museum of Coffee and you'll be able to walk to one of the sources of the river Spree.

There is a nearby village of Oppach that neighbours the former Czech village of Fukov, which no longer exists. In 1960, the school and the church were blown up

here, which tragically resulted in the village becoming extinct. But life didn't stop in Oppach on the other side of the border. In 1979 a modern Catholic church of St Anthony was built here, which meant that a branch of a slightly different faith was added to the historic evangelical church already there. Oppach also has a remarkable building which was for sale until recently. Most would no longer recognise the neo-classical chateau that it once was, since after the war the building was used for everything from a boarding house to a school. Adjacent to Lipová is Sohland an der Spree, a village with, as usual, beautiful half-timber houses, a Lutheran church and a small observatory. From Rožany you can easily walk to Taubenheim, a lovely village which has been dubbed „Sundial village“. At the information centre, visitors from Czech Republic can collect a map in Czech and can then go looking for all of the 33 sundials which are located mainly on individual, often very beautiful, houses. At the end of the 20th century, the graphic artist Martin Hölzel brought these beautiful sundials to life, and the village continues to take care of them carefully to this day.

An Invitation to our Neighbours

58. THE GATE TO BOHEMIA

Three attractive locations within easy reach



Czech Switzerland is one of the four tourist destinations in the Ústí nad Labem region. It is one of the four cornerstones of the Gate to Bohemia, as this region has been rightly called for quite some time. It hides many gems and even more unexpected surprises. It is closest to the Central Bohemian Mountains, which border Bohemian Switzerland in many places, and the two landscapes practically grow into each other. The picturesque volcanic Central Bohemian Mountains don't have an equal elsewhere in the world, since they are so unusual due to their individual conical, often bare hills, which are frequently crowned by the ruins of medieval castles. They are complemented by forest covered hills and among them the Central Mountains queen, Milešovka. The vital artery of the region is the river Elbe, which is lined with slopes so fertile that while fruit trees do very well here, grape vines do even more so. Porta Bohemica, as the breathtaking Elbe valley is called, gave the whole region its name. And what about its cities? Undiscovered Roudnice nad Labem,

the historical gem Litoměřice, the fortified Terezín and Ústí nad Labem which is surrounded by a dizzyingly beautiful landscape – each place in this region has its own countless sights to see and historical story to tell. Another neighbour is the Ore Mountains, its long ridge falling sharply into the foothills, with the spa town of Teplice at the bottom as well as the historic Osek, Duchcov (where the famous Casanova lived out his life), the undiscovered Litvínov, the modern city of Most and then Chomutov with its beautiful historic heart. These bountiful mountains, which were mined and conquered for centuries, hide mysterious peat bogs and practically unknown lakes. They are a paradise for winter sports, cycling and hiking. The last of these gateways is Dolní Poohří, which has a bewitching landscape made up of the royal cities of Kadaň, Žatec and Louny. This is a region flushed by the silvery river Ohř, a region of hops and beer, the kaolinite lakes of the Podbořany region, the region of castles and chateaux and the mystical Panenský Týnec, as well as stone liths and rows dotted around its fields.

59. SAXON SWITZERLAND

The other half of the painting, divided by a border



The beautiful and varied landscape of Saxon Switzerland, one of the most attractive and most visited places in Germany, is simply a larger part of an overall region divided by the border with the Czech Republic. But borders are simply lines on a map, which nature doesn't care about. Nevertheless, to this day, there is a strange shyness when it comes to Czech tourists travelling just a few kilometres away to see the beauties of the Saxon half of the land of rock formations and gorges. And this is despite the fact that there is good signage, the hospitality of the locals is great and you can easily overcome the language barrier. Not to mention the inexhaustible beauty there – the Bastei rock formation with its bridge – the world's first tourist structure to be built. Then there are the table mountains Papststein, Lillienstein and Königstein with its unique fortress on top, or Pfaffenstein with one of the most famous symbols of the region – the Barbarine rock tower. In addition there is the castle and town of Stolpen, the rock "towns" of Schrammsteine and Affensteine, the amazing rock columns of Winterstein

with its spectacular view into the interior of the region and Frienstein with the Ida Grotto, Kuhstall, both of the Winterbergs, hundreds of incredible views and lookouts – in addition to the already mentioned Kippborn we could add „the balcony of Saxon Switzerland“ (the “Brand over Porschdorf” lookout), the friendly as well as treacherous paths, the wide paths (even along footbridges and ladders), as well as unique, picturesque towns and villages, dreamy river valleys and streams. It would be an unforgivable sin not to discover such a massive amount of beauty when it is literally at our doorstep. Most of the most beautiful places are connected by the 122 kilometre long Mallerweg trail, which is divided into eight stages. The historic path has been renovated and re-marked and information signs have been added. It is named after the painters who wandered around there in awe of the scenery as far back as the end of the 18th century. In fact it all started with two Swiss painters – Adrian Zingg and Anton Graff. The countryside around the Elbe reminded them of their Swiss homeland and hence how this whole region got its name.

60. UPPER LUSATIA– OBERLAUSITZ

In search of the westernmost Slavs



How little space there is for such a big topic! Let's at least introduce the topic of the westernmost Slavs who settled in the area around the river Spree in the 7th century. From 1312–1635, the region was part of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Historically, it is actually two regions – Lower Lusatia lies in the north while Upper Lusatia is in the south – it is adjacent to the Czech border and our two languages are quite similar, and Lusatian Sorbs have been fighting to this day to preserve their language – not against a ban on it, but against its extinction. The assimilation with the dominant Germanic element has been considerable over many centuries. To this day however, in Upper Lusatian towns and villages in Saxony you'll come across bilingual signs. It makes sense to go to Upper Lusatia for many reasons, perhaps for its beautiful nature or its historical sights. You should also visit one of the historic Six Upper Lusatian cities (Hornjokůžiske šěšćiměsta), which operated as part of a league in the years 1346

–1815 and which have been re-established today for tourist reasons as the Seven Cities. These cities are the beautiful historic Bautzen (Budyšin), Kamenz (Kamenec), Zittau (Žitava), Löbau, (Lobava), Görlitz (Žořelec) – its Polish part is now the seventh city, and the city of Lauban (Lubań) in present day Poland. Or visit the Cistercian monastery Marienstern in Panschwitz-Kuckau (Pančicy-Kukow in Sorbian), see the beautiful church in Rosentahl, or in particular, go to Oybin (preferably take the railway Zittauer Schmalspurbahn with its narrow track). Oybin is a collapsed guard castle and a former Celestine monastery built by Charles IV on the foundations of a rock castle above the trade route from Prague to Görlitz. The beautiful Gothic church which bears characteristics of the work of Peter Parler's building school in Prague lost its roof in 1577 during a fire when its vault also collapsed. But the power of the place is absolutely extraordinary, since the new vault is the sky itself.

61. LUSATIAN MOUNTAINS

The undiscovered beauty of these picturesque mountains



The Lusatian Mountains are a perfect link between the surrounding regional formations. They have inherited sandstone formations and rock “towns” from Bohemian Switzerland. From the Bohemian Central Mountains they have adopted a volcanic character as well as conical peaks protruding from forested hills, while their long ridges are courtesy of the Jizera Mountains. They combine all this into a unique whole, a wavy landscape which visitors can feast their eyes on. Looking at them is soothing – peaks such as the highest Luž, the sprawling Hvozď, the powerful Klíč, the contemplative Studenec and Queen Jedlová (with a stone lookout tower for a crown), all stand out with dignity from the ridges of the ‘curly’ mixed forests. Then there are the extensive rubble fields, surprisingly steep forest covered slopes and deep valleys, picturesque rock formations, forest temples with silver beech columns, sprinkles of folk architecture, sacred monuments and stunning rock reliefs generously scattered in the forests. As if this wasn’t enough, there are also the awe inspiring Pustých Kostelů (Desolate Churches)

caves chiselled out by people, historic towns with chateaux, castles, churches and basilicas, wild streams and creeks rushing into the arms of the Elbe, glassy ponds and unusual clusters of round rock formations. And then there are also traces of human activity – glassworks, rock theatres, lookout towers and tourist huts. But the meadows of the Lusatian Mountains are quite possibly the most beautiful and noteworthy. They are wide, wonderfully covered by flowers, crawling and then rising along the slopes, sprawled in the valleys, with solitary ancient trees and inviting for you to roam barefoot through the grass. And when summer ends, the Lusatian Mountains turn into an intoxicating palette of ‘in your face’ colours and muted tones. Then when the winter comes over the landscape and the colours disappear, there are endless white mountain plains and forests covered by a white powder which sparkle in the sun like diamonds. The Lusatian Mountains are simply worth exploring because, apart from how beautiful and attractive they are, tourists have also not yet discovered them.

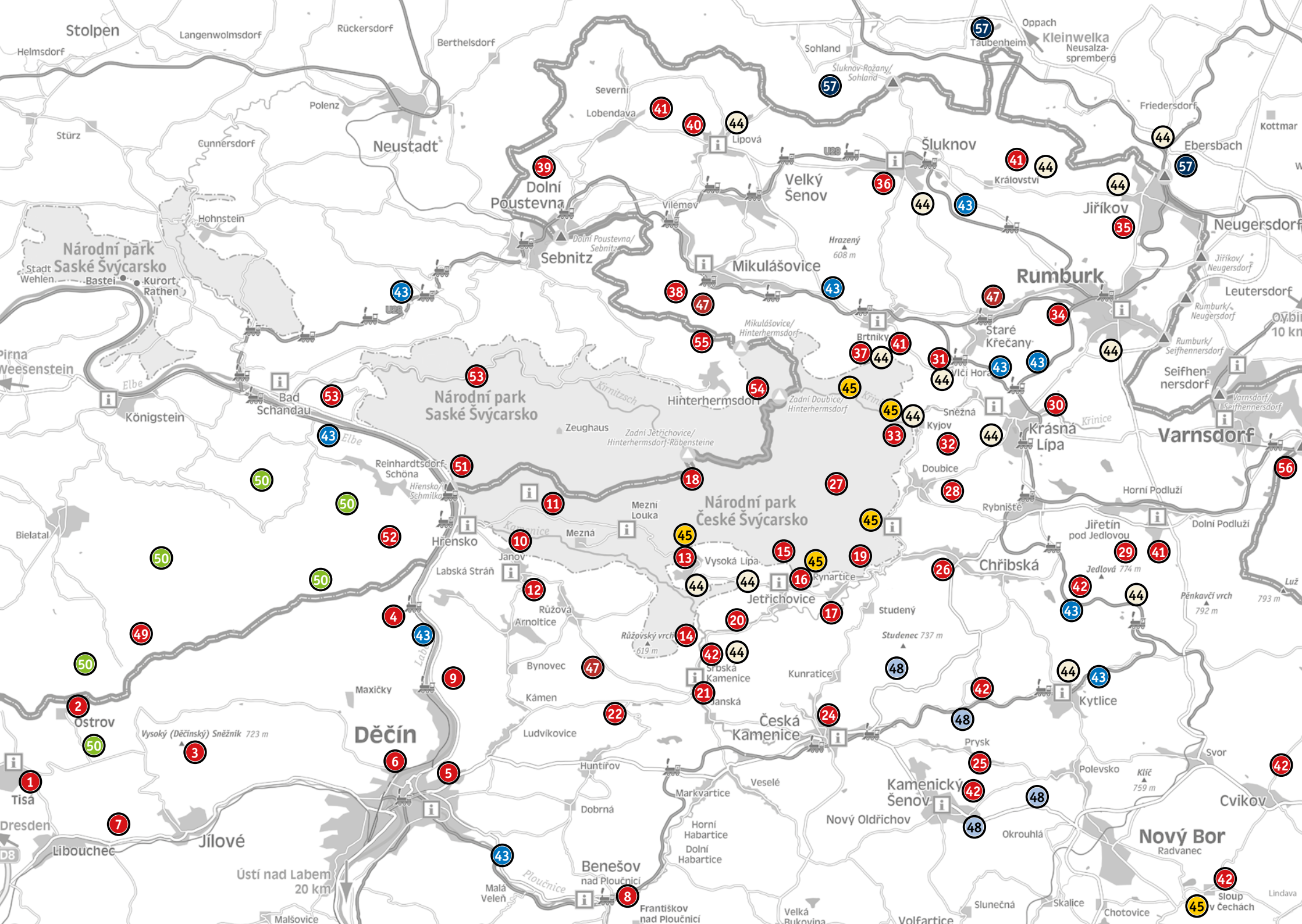
62. CRYSTAL VALLEY

Where the most fragile beauty is born



The countryside between Kamenický Šenov and Harrachov is very diverse. It is difficult to find a common denominator for the Lusatian Mountains, which are rich in meadows, the Jizera Mountains with their rampant plains, the rocky Český Ráj (Bohemian Paradise) and the majestic Krkonoše (Giant Mountains). And yet there is something that has united them for more than 300 years – glass. Czech glass to be exact. Glass has been produced here since the second half of the 17th century and since that time it has become famous all over the world. North Bohemian glassmakers began to cut, paint and engrave transparent Czech crystal. Then came composite stones and jewellery from them, followed by glass beads and then stunning crystal chandeliers which soon lit up even the most magnificent rulers’ residences all over the world. There are almost as many glass varieties as there are stories about glass. Stories about the glassmakers – people who were if not the first in the world, then always one step ahead – more creative and more inventive – and this is still the case. This is how the Křišťálové údolí

was born, known to the world today as Crystal Valley. The valley is a chain of loosely connected glass sites – glassworks, workshops, factories, museums, schools, art studios etc. Křišťálové údolí (Crystal Valley) regularly organises various events, open days and special excursions, and it is at those that it is possible to get to know this unique area as a unified whole, connected by glass. But you can also discover its individual parts separately, for example the Sklářské Muzeum (the Glass Museum) in Kamenický Šenov. There are dozens of places in Nový Bor, including the new and much appreciated Lasvit – Skleněný dům (Lasvit – Glass House) as well as the famous Sklářské Muzeum (Glass Museum), then the Lasvit Ajeto glassworks in Lindava, the truly unique Muzeum Skla a Bižuterie (Museum of Glass and Jewellery) in Jablonec nad Nisou, the Muzeum Českého Ráje (the Bohemian Paradise Museum) in Turnov, a workshop tour of glass beads and Christmas decorations in Poniklá (protected by UNESCO!), a glassworks with a museum and a brewery in Harrachov. And that’s just a fraction of the potential sights!





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