



The beautiful Czechoslovakian countryside is enticing after the congestion of Hong Kong.

77,000 Jews were killed by the Nazis at Terezin concentration camp, only 60 km north of Prague. Today, in the two square-acre Jewish cemetery in Prague, 12,000 tombstones mark the graves of the dead, who, from the 15th to the 19th centuries were buried up to 12 deep, since Jews were confined within the ghetto of the Old Town in life and in death.



Fascinating architectural details catch the eye of many visitors.

Guide books, which are quickly outdated in fast-changing Prague, warn you to make reservations for dinner. However, crowds of tourists and a more open economy have encouraged residents to open scores of Czech, Italian, German and American restaurants. There are still crowds of tourists in Prague during the busy summer months, but now you'll see many empty cafés as higher prices and crowds have driven Europeans to other holiday spots.

A trip into the countryside provides a glimpse of life before economic reform. Small quiet towns with few signs of a functioning economy are the norm. Farm-

ers hard at work in nearby wheat, poppy and sunflower fields toil with what we would consider obsolete machinery. Although the economy in Prague is booming, many rural residents have not seen any benefits of economic and political transformation, and are understandably nervous about what they see as the loss of their state-provided livelihoods.

My favorite place was Cesky Krumlov, about 150 km south of Prague, where local debate is raging about the pace of change and its transformation to a tourist economy. Attracted by what is commonly acknowledged to be one of the most picturesque towns in Europe, tourists are beginning to discover this small medieval town, dominated by a 13th century Gothic castle and town square. Local businesses are keen to see the historic buildings renovated as quickly as possible; some



Street entertainers are just part of the flourishing arts scene in Czechoslovakia.

## If you go...

- Louda Airlines has reasonably priced, direct flights from Hong Kong to Vienna, where you can get a connecting flight or train to Prague.
- Pragocar and Esocar rent Czech cars at about one-third the rate of western rentals at chain car rental companies. An international driver's licence is required.
- Canadians need a visa to go to the Czech Republic, available through the Czech Embassies in Tokyo or Bangkok.
- Local English-language newspapers provide up-to-date tourist information and restaurant reviews.
- The Czech Republic is a safe and easy place to travel, especially if you speak some German. However, watch for pickpockets, overpriced taxis, and hidden prices at restaurants.
- Popular souvenirs include cut crystal, puppets, leather purses, Russian dolls and pottery.
- Accommodation is tight during the busy summer season. Highly recommended and in the mid-price range is Penzion Hotel Louda, a spotless bed & breakfast with a hilltop location and stunning view of Prague, only a 20-minute tram ride from city centre. Address: Kubisova 10, Prague 8, telephone: 84-33-02, C\$55 for two.
- Transportation in Prague is cheap and efficient, due to the extensive subway and tram system established by the former Communist government.
- On July 31, 1993, new Czech money replaced the former Czechoslovak currency. Any bills labelled Ceskoslovensky Korun are worthless.

say without regard to the authenticity of original designs. Others see the rush to cater to the tourist industry a tragic mistake that will rob the town of its history.

Whatever the result of the debate in Cesky Krumlov, the unrelenting temptation of the tourist dollar on some local residents, who are eager to own the fast cars and expensive clothes of their German and Austrian neighbors, has created an urgency to resolve the debate, as residents set a path for their future. ♦

