

I am back in my room now. It is not far to travel here from London, but in the post-9/11 world flying anywhere is more hassle than one would like. I got up at 6:00 this morning and was out the door by 6:45 to take the tube to Saint Pancras station for a train down to Gatwick, and then to sit waiting for my flight. They have an interesting system at Gatwick. They don't tell you your gate until just before boarding time. You all just mill around in the duty-free lounge waiting for the notice that boarding has begun, then you run to your gate (it can take 20 minutes to walk to some of them) and again, they let the boarding lounge fill up before they begin boarding. Then you all kind of flood into the plane, and off you go. It is probably more efficient, but seems strange. Then again, everyone is flying for like £30 so who's going to complain.

Now I know you're thinking, Gee, poor guy, had to get up at 6:00. Well, I am used to getting up at 6:00 back home, but when adjusting for jet-lag I never made a complete adjustment. I normally get up around 9:00 here, and stay up longer, till 2:00 most nights.

So, the flight got here early. I was supposed to arrive at 13:45 local time, which is GMT +1. In other words I am now 6 hours ahead of New York or 7 hours ahead of Milwaukee. We arrived quite early, and baggage claim, customs, etc. was nothing. My driver was a Canadian who came here to teach English just months after the Velvet Revolution and has been here ever since. We had a nice chat on the way in. He gave me plenty of tips, and told me how to avoid pick-pockets. I was in my hotel before my flight was supposed to have landed!

After getting myself settled I went right out onto the streets. I started towards Old Town Square, thinking I could knock that off while it was still light, and get my bearings for tomorrow. Well, I walked about two blocks, took some snaps, and then took a wrong turn. I strolled a few more blocks and pulled out a map to orient myself. I must have looked lost because a very polite older gentleman with a lovely accent stopped and helped. He looked at my little map, squinted worse than I did, and then pointing with the bunch of roses he had in his hand and said "Old Town is that way." What he meant was "You are obviously a tourist, and since you have no idea where you are and I have no idea where you are going, I am going to send you to where all the other tourists are." The thing is, I knew that's what he was saying, and that was fine, because that is exactly where I wanted to go.

This is a very different experience than the last three weeks in London. Aside from the fact that they drive on the right here, instead of the left, I am an unabashed tourist here. I only have three days, and I am not trying to gain fluency. I just want to see some of the places that I have been reading about and such for so long.

I wasn't going to write this much right now, but I need to charge batteries, and I have to do that before I lock everything in the room safe and go back out again. Everyone warns about thieves and pick-pockets, and I have decided that I just don't wish to learn how serious it is. For the 9 extra dollars I have paid for the safe and will lock up my computer and camera so that I don't have to lug it all around with me all the time. The two issues, thievery and pick-pocketry, are a binding problem: If I leave stuff in the room it is not assured safe but if I take it all with me then it still isn't. If I leave it in the little safe, at least I believe it will be there upon my return.

So, where was I... Oh, I took the nice man's advice and found my way to Old Town Square. It is just stunning. You imagine that these spaces are so large, the pictures one sees show just so much different architecture and it is so fabled, but once one gets there it is not that big, the buildings are just that gorgeous and are hard up against each other and there really are all of those different styles mashed together. Oh, and thousands of people milling around. No wonder there is a bustling trade in pick-pocketing, this is a target-rich environment. I made a loop of the square, and branched off into most of the little side streets and closes, checking in with a number of small art galleries and antique shops (I have yet to see a single "shoppe" on this trip).

The first antique shop I stopped in had "A Thousand Kisses Deep" by Leonard Cohen playing

on the hi-fi, and I wanted to buy something just in recognition of that fact. Alas, nothing caught my eye. I listened whilst I browsed, and then shuffled off back on boogie street. □ I had missed the display at the Old Town Hall clock-tower at 16:00 but made a point to be there at 17:00, snacking on a smoked sausage and hot chocolate while waiting. The clock is fascinating in that they just kept adding more stuff to it over the years. There is a normal clock tower. Then they added an astronomical clock which shows which signs the moon and sun are in. Then a calendar was added, then an elaborate set of allegorical decorations and a passel of apostles who appear from behind some opened shutters on the hour and two by two march past the windows and almost seem to nod to the masses below. The crowd really packs in for this every hour.

The square is lined with souvenir shops, as one would expect, much like Piccadilly Circus or Times Square, but in Prague a souvenir may well be Bohemian Glass or crystal, amber, or some other high-priced bauble. It was odd to walk by a store which was hawking blown glass, crystal and rubber masks. (No, I am not making that up!).

Okay, all for now. The cell phone is charged and the computer will be shortly. I will try to figure out what I'm doing tomorrow, and I am told that there is a very funny little bar downstairs. Oh, I have a telly, too. I haven't watched the tube in three weeks, so that will be a treat, even if I don't speak the language.

Ciao ciao!

(I heard a man answer his mobile phone that way in the square today, and I kind of like it)