

Cafés and coffeehouses in Praha (as of September 25, 2007)

After -back in May 2000- I secured my monthly Metro pass, moved into my crash-pad, and got all of the visa, residence, and working permit paperwork half-way done, the real problem started: Where to get a coffee that actually deserves its name? Plus, **what café or coffeehouse in good old Praha 1 (roughly) can you sit in comfortably and read, write, watch people, and/or chat?** Back then, Prague didn't have much that compared favorably to the coffeehouses in Vienna¹, or even some Starbucks branch.

Things have improved since then. Now we have at least five CoffeeHeaven outlets (a Polish coffee and sandwich chain that has modeled itself after Starbucks). (No Starbucks yet!) Plus there are a number of half-way decent places where you can have a good kava and read, write, and chat comfortably.

Below are the results of my diligent research in matters kava in Praha 1. Suggestions for places I missed, or even dissenting opinions, are always welcome. Send to andreas.ortmann@cerge-ei.cz.

Acknowledgments: I'm deeply indebted to Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. kava Angelika Weber -- a world-renowned expert in Viennese cafes and coffeehouses -- for her diligent independent testing of many of the locations reviewed below. And ... I'm proud to report that my list now has its very own link on Ariel Rubinstein's

A Worldwide Guide for Coffee Places where you can not only work but also think! at

<http://arielrubinstein.tau.ac.il/univ-coffee.html>

I take responsibility for all remaining errors in judgement.

Final hint: You can find great 360 degree scans of some of the cafes here plus a google map of their locations here:
<http://www.prague360.com/> Take the cafes link at the top.

Favorites (in approximate order of preference; places I really don't like have their own section at the end):

Astra

¹ As Lenka Reinerova puts it, "Where, so I ask myself often when I wander through my Prague, have all the coffeehouses gone; those coffeehouses where, over a cup of good black coffee, you could spend much of the day discussing, making plans, hearing the latest gossip, watching - or getting to know -- interesting people, making friends, or even falling in love." (Das Traumcafé einer Pragerin [my café in the sky, 1996; my translation.)

Vaclavské náměstí 4, Praha 1

I discovered this only a couple of years ago although it has been around for a long time apparently: A café on the second floor of the Kanzelsberger bookstore. Really quite delightful (and beating the Academia bookstore café at Vaclavské náměstí 34 on all dimensions - service, coffee, cake, ... - by a wide margin.)

Prices are reasonable. Good breakfast.

Open: mon - sun 9 - 20, tel: ?.

coffeeheaven

Na Příkopě 3-5, Praha 1.

Vaclavské nám. 794\38, Praha 1.

Parizská 1, Praha 1.

Three of the five branches of a Polish coffee and sandwich conception that models itself after Starbucks. (They have another branch on Na Příkopě, which you have to enter through the T-kom shop on the ground floor, and now also a branch at the airport, terminal 2) Literally a few meter away from Old Town Square, and from Vaclavské náměstí, they surely chose superb locations. The staff behind the counter is friendly and pleasant. The offerings are standard but surprisingly good: Espressos, lattes (really quite good!), frappes (dito), sandwiches (dito), sweets (excellent!), chocolate (excellent!), and now also a frappe cup with vegetable slices from cucumber, celery, carrots, and a delicious dip. And ... they have coffee z sebou (to take away) - they were some of the first to introduce it. I'm such a regular there, they even gave me a VIP card :).

Open mon - fri 8.00-20.00, sat - sun 9.00 - 20.00

tel: 222 311 967 (Parizská) and 224 240 750 (Na Příkopě) and ??? (Vaclavské náměstí). See also www.coffeeheaven.eu.com

Café No. 1

28 října 9, Praha 1

Located smack in the middle of the tourist zone, it is a surprisingly stylish and nonetheless pleasant place. Little lunches (testoviny) such as spaghetti and tagliatelle, good cakes, breakfast, and, yes, the coffee is quite good. The waitstaff professional and unobtrusively friendly. (Note: *Café No. 1* has been authenticated by renowned coffeehouse connoisseur Ariel Rubinstein; see

<http://arielrubinstein.tau.ac.il/univ-coffee.html>)

Open: mon - sun 8:30 - 23, tel: 224 231 036

Café Grossman

In der Grossmannova pasaz. Little café. A couple of years ago switched its stylish yellow to a less stylish purple. Yes, purple. A couple of months ago they enlarged and actually got a tasteful renovation done. If you ever wanted to have a great view of a bland pasaz, I can't think of a better place than sitting outside on the "patio". Interesting crowd: in the mornings and evenings what looks suspiciously like some local mafia, or may be some pimps finishing off the night. Fascinating to watch (although you might not want to watch too intensely.) Food is surprisingly good. So's the coffee, especially the espresso is

thick and creamy and always worth a visit. Goes very well with the cheese omelette that they now offer or the medovnik (honey cake, a Czech speciality that you ought to try) that they have offered for ages. The service is good although the two waitresses that run the place are putting in long, long hours.
Open mon - sun 8 - 22, tel: 224 232 640

*Divadelni Restaurace a Kavarna V Divadle Radka Brzobohateho
Opletalova 5, Praha 1*

Off the Grossmannova pasaz. About 100 meters away from the Café Grossman, underground, it's stylish little place where you can eat well for lunch but also hang out nicely in the afternoon hours. They have two daily, typically quite delicious lunch specials such as gulas and knedele, or tagliatelle al salmone, or rabbit and they have good coffee and medovnik. Service fine. Prices very reasonable. That's because tourists have no chance to discover the place.
Open mon - fr 11 - 6, tel: 222 243 895

Café Savoy

Zborovska 68/124, Praha 5

A recent entry (November 2004). Located in Mala Strana/Ujezd, the Café Savoy has a history that goes back to 1893. Over the last few years, its fortune declined with a series of owners and their failed attempts to make it into a up-scale restaurant. The new Café Savoy, now part of the Ambiente group of restaurants and cafés (e.g. the various Ambiente restaurants but also the Tonio Lamborghini cafes at Vodickova 8 and Vezenska 1), is a spectacular L-shaped place that in the shorter room has wine bottles as wall decor, and at the end of the longer room a transparent kitchen on top of which there is more seating. The coffee is quite good (the caffe latte came with an extra portion of milk and foam). So it the service: Friendly but unintrusive. Cuisine aspires to be French and Czech. How's that for an interesting combination? (Also one of my favorite cafes for relaxed evenings with special friends.)
Open: mon - sun 8 - 22, tel: 257 311 562

Prague Bakeshop

Kozi 1, Praha 1 (shop, unfortunately since June 2007 under reconstruction!)

It's not a place where you could work. And clearly they don't want you to work there, as their in/out pricing scheme suggests. (The saving grace are the wooden benches outside, though.) In fact, that's where you find me many Saturday and Sunday mornings. That's because it's the best place in downtown Prague to get a good coffee at 7 a.m. every day of the week. (Yes, that includes Saturdays and Sundays.) Plus, the area in which the Prague Bakeshop is located (very very close to Old Town Square) is absolutely peaceful and gorgeous that early in the morning. A great way to start the day. In fact, I can't think of a much better way to start it. Try their croissants, dorty (cakes), kolaces (tarts, tortes, pies), sandwiches, or quiches. Or their coffee. Open every day 7 - 19, tel: ...

Ebel Coffee House

Tyn2/640, Praha 1.

Excellent caffe latte (well, most of the time), good cheesecake, great continental breakfast (with jumbo latte, bagel, orange marmelade, cream cheese, yoghurt and granola, and juice). The express breakfast is a good deal, too. Friendly service. Nice ambience (even after they, early this year, expanded the space by breaking through the wall and taking over what used to be some antique shop next door) including often great music. That's where I heard both the Balanescu Quartet and Tockolotoc the first time. And Jablkon's Pisnický. And most recently BenediktA's Punky & Dumky. All are still in heavy rotation on my disc-player. Hands-down one of the best coffeehouse in good old Praha although service has become a bit spotty recently.

Open mon - sun 9-22, in the summer, outside patio.

Tel: 224 895 788. See also www.ebelcoffee.cz.

(Note: The Ebel Coffee House has been authenticated by renowned coffee house connoisseur Ariel Rubinstein; see <http://arielrubinstein.tau.ac.il/univ-coffee.html>)

Since july 2001, the Ebel people have another location:

Café Ebel

Retezova 9, Praha 1.

The ambience is similar to the Ebel Coffee House at Tyn. The same wood tables and chairs, etc. The menu is the same (with slightly lower prices). Located in the parterre of a newly renovated residencia, it was at first something of a cheap imitation of the real thing. But things have improved. In fact, it has become a viable alternative to the real thing. Two competitors next door: to the left the Café Montmartre (see below) and to the right the Ethno Café (see below).

Open mon - sun 9-22, tel: 222 222 018.

Since december 2003, the Ebel people have yet another location:

Café Ebel

Karprova 15, Praha 1.

A colleague reports that this is a little take-away; no place to sit down and read and write. Thanks, Dirk.

Open mon - sun 7-22, Tel: 6xx 5xx 4xx2

Tynska Literarni Kavarna

Tynska 6, Praha 1

An interesting little place close to the Ebel Coffeehouse. You can sit outside in a peaceful oasis that is delineated by walls and houses. Coffee is quite good (and cheap - show me the place in Prague where you can get a decent café au lait for a mere 25 korunas). The service is reasonably friendly.

Open mon - sun 9 - 23

Tel: 224 827 807

STOP THE PRESS: Prague Post Editors" Choice Best of Prague 2004: "Prague's most literary café: Writerly celebrities come here so

often that it's less about whom we have seen here -[names]- but whom we haven't."

(Note: *Ctynska Literarni Kavarna* has been authenticated by renowned coffee house connoisseur Ariel Rubinstein; see <http://arielrubinstein.tau.ac.il/univ-coffee.html>)

Au Gourmand

Dlouha 12, Praha 1

A French bakeshop and café nearby the Prague Bakeshop (see entry above.) You can sit between quiches and sandwiches on one side, and cakes on the other in the front room. Or, in the back room. Pleasant atmosphere. The quiches and sandwiches and cakes are all quite good. The coffee is not up to par but drinkable.

Open mon - sun 8 - 20, tel: 222 329 060.

Kava Kava Kava

Narodni 37, Praha 1 (Platyz).

You find Kava Kava Kava mentioned in every guide and, yes, sometimes the caffè latte is the best in town (thick, creamy, etc.) Unfortunately, too often it is just plain bad. Prices are ridiculously high - a jumbo latte a cool CzK 110 - on good or bad days. Plus, too often the service is poor, or at least thoroughly disinterested in the customer. And then not even the peaceful ambience - "an oasis in the center of the city", as they like to say on their website - can make up for it. This peaceful ambience has, in any case, suffered after - a couple of years ago - a pizzeria set up shop on the other side of the courtyard. So, on good days ... it's well worth visiting; on bad days ... keep away. I haven't yet figured out what day is what. For the time being I don't go there that often any more.

Open mon - fri 7 - 22, sat - sun 9-22, tel: 222 268 409

Lidicka 42 (Andel)

Dagmar Kierans, the "coffee/internet specialist" that runs Kava Kava Kava, also runs a Kava Kava Kava branch at the Andel/Carrefour center. So, if you do your shopping at Carrefour (or whatever it's name is now) you might as well drop by.

!!!Both KKK places have WIFI capability. Unfortunately not free any longer.!!!

The website at www.kava-coffee.cz has 360 moving scans of interior & exterior, a photo gallery, and the drink, food and breakfast menus for both places.

Platyz (café - bar)

Narodni 37, Praha 1

In the same courtyard/passage as Kava Kava Kava. Very spacious, Italian-style (quite stylish) café run by the wife of some well-known actor, so I've been told. A place with promise. The coffee (Lavazza!) is good, so are the sandwiches (excellent, actually) and the pancakes. The service is o.k.

Open mon - fri 9-23, tel: ...

Grand Café Orient

Dum u Cerne Matky Bozi (House of the Black Madonna, House of Cubism, Ovocny trh 19, off Celetna)

The reopening of this café in March 2005 made news not just on Czech tv; it was also noted duly by our esteemed friends from BBC radio: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4380877.stm>

The original Orient opened in 1912 in the House of the Black Madonna, a department store designed by Josef Gocar, one of the founders of the Czech Cubist movement. These days you can buy Cubist artifacts (beautiful and quite reasonably priced) on the ground floor, then move up to the museum of Cubism on floors 2 - 4, and then stop on the second floor that is wholly occupied by the Orient. It is, indeed, a wonderful space - even nicer than the Café Savoy; note the outside balcony! - but the food and drinks, while edible and drinkable, are modest: breakfast, sandwiches, cakes, and Alfredo coffee. Service is often sub-standard (even by Prague standards which are definitely not exacting.)

Open: mon - sun ???, tel: 224 224 240

Kavarna Adria

Palac Adria, Narodni 40, Praha 1

Hard to find (entry next to the book antiquariate, follow the signs to the Chinese restaurant and go up one more flight of stairs.) A place with lots of promise (e.g., the spectacular balcony two levels above the Jungmanova Namesti, with a splendid view of the CSOB Bauhaus style building vis-a-vis, or the huge L-shaped kavarna like room), it opened in late 2006. The coffee's good (the espresso corretto is really generous) and prices are fairly low. Unfortunately, the prices that they advertise on the balcony railings are not what they charge if you sit outside. Plus, the waitstaff could use a bit of training at Coffeeheaven university (see above). And someone ought to teach the owners the value of repeat business and customer service.

Fuzion café

Vodickova 38, Praha 1

A new place that has take-out coffee, and opens (weekdays) at 7 in the morning, and is located at the Vaclavske Namesti tram stop. One of my colleagues gets his morning fix of coffee there often and says that he prefers it over that of the coffeeheaven outlet about half a kilometer away (on Na Prikope). Clearly, my colleague's taste nerves are shot. I gave the fuzionists at least three tries and each time the coffee was bad. The service, in addition is modest at best and can be outright irritating. What's good are the sandwiches. And the free wifi. And they don't seem to mind if you sit there and work (especially in the upstairs.)

Open: 7 - 19, tel: 224 215 146

Café Emporio

Vaclavske namesti (on Jindrisska, next to the H&M store, and about two hundred meters away from the Fuzion café), Praha 1

A spiffy new place also smack in the tourist zone, with a fashion tv screen and all. Prices are accordingly. They do have

breakfast, sandwiches, toasts, salads, cakes (all quite good). And they do make good foam (although they should learn to start the day with new milk). Nothing's lost yet but I've kept away lately. The coffeeheaven take-away is clearly the better deal. Even the Fuzion coffee place is preferable.
Open mon - sun 8 - 23, tel: ?.

Dolce Vita

124 Josefov, Praha 1

As the name maybe suggests, this is a place that tries to cater to the schicki micki crowd. But sitting in the upstairs is actually quite nice, especially with enjoyable company. Service, while par for the Praha course, is mediocre.

Kaaba

Manesova 20, Praha 2 (Vinohrady)

Only about 5 minutes walk from the National Museum up the hill (or take the 11 to the Italska stop). Nice little café that reminds you of the 50s in its decor (or, at least what you were told how decor looked in the 50s). About 80 kinds of coffee, a great selection of domestic wines, and good honey cake (medovnik). Plus reasonable service.

Open mon - sat 8 - 24, tel: 222 254 021.

Meduza

Belgicka 17, Praha 2 (Vinohrady)

And talking about out-of-the way places, this little run-down but charming café is a stone's throw away from Namesti Miru and FX Radost, so if you had your Saturday or Sunday brunch at FX Radost you might as well go for a good coffee and some pleasant atmosphere to this café. Here's a camera scan of it:

www.praque360.com/fs.html?loc=locations/café/meduza.p36

They not only offer the usual café fare but also all kinds of other goodies to serve the small- to medium sized appetites. The place is a bit dark, so bring your glasses if you want to read. But the coffee is good.

Open mon - fri ???, sat - sun ???

Www.meduza.cz

Only about 5 minutes walk from the National Museum up the hill (or take the 11 to the Italska stop). Nice little café that reminds you of the 50s in its decor (or, at least what you were told how decor looked in the 50s). About 80 kinds of coffee, a great selection of domestic wines, and good honey cake (medovnik). Plus reasonable service.

Open mon - sat 8 - 24, tel: 222 254 021.

Fantova Kavarna

hl. nadrazi

Yes, the café in the main station. Named after its architect Josef Fanta who created what must have been - in 1918, for sure - a spectacular place. Now run-down, it cries for rehabilitation.

Like so much of Prague. Still, it's open from 6 - 23 and the coffee is drinkable (although, I suspect, instant) and cheap. Make sure you sit on the seats near the roundel and watch people stream from and to the platforms.
Open all days 6 - 23, tel.: ???

Down Town Café

Ujezd 489/19, Praha 1

Curious name this place has. Soundly on the other side of the river from downtown, this stylish new thing lies in the outer reaches of Malastrana and can't decide what it wants to be: Café/restaurant (front), Lounge (back), or beer garden (well, garden). A place to watch. Too early to say what will become of it - tourist trap or place worth hanging out.

Café Vescovi

Ujezd 36, Praha 1

More or less across the street from the *Down Town Café* this is a tiny neighborhood café whose economics I don't understand. But what the heck: great sandwiches, good bread, excellent espressos, espressos machiato, decent lattes, and even decent services (well, most of the time), and that all at unbeatable prices. Plus ... they have free wifi!

Chez Marcel

Hastalska 12, Praha 1

French-style, spacious bistro. Reasonable food. Reasonable prices. Reasonable service. Reasonable atmosphere. Marginal café latte. No must-see but o.k., tel: 222 315 676

Café Montmartre

Retezova 7, Praha 1.

Apparently part of a chain of cafes/restaurants that include the Café Konvikt (Bertolomeska 11, P1), Jazz Café (Opatoricka 14, P1), Café Galerie (Sternbersky palac, Hradcanske nam. 15, P1), the Montmartre has relaxed atmosphere. No café latte here but a pretty good café au lait. As a matter of fact, easily the best café au lait in town as far as I'm concerned. Eatable offerings are a bit weak but then it's the Café Montmartre, not the Restaurant Montmartre.

Open ???, tel: ...?

Ethno Café

Husova 10, Praha 1.

In principle a place with potential. It's fun sitting outside or in the window places and see tourists file by. But the caffè latte I had was meager and the place is just too touristy and noisy. (It's interesting to see how the Montmartre, its name notwithstanding, is quite the opposite. Hundred meters off the main tourist trek can make a hell of a difference in Prague.)

Café Louvre

Narodni 20, Prague 1

Quite a view: a long, spacious room, with two smaller ones

attached. The Prague Post writer called it cheerful, and come to think of it, that's is an apt descriptor. Prague Post Readers' Choice Best of Prague 2004. Clearly, the readers of the Prague Post don't know what a decent coffee is. Or, halfway decent service. Anyway, walking up the stairs to the second floor where the Café Louvre is located, you wouldn't expect such a place. Food is fine but nothing special. Dito for the coffee. The kind of place where you can take you mom, or even your significant other. Sneak preview: www.kavarny.cz/louvre. Tel: 224 930 949 or 224 930 912. Mon through Sun 10 - 22.

Kavarna Arco

Hybernska 16, Praha 1

A café with tradition (Kraus' snide remark about the Prague Arconauten - es werfelt and brodelte, es kaskat und kischt" - refers to that place!), remade as sterile cafeteria where you can also have a mediocre café latte if you ask nicely and are so lucky to find a waiter or waitress who speak English. For some strange reason the 2006 Merian issue on Prague (in German) recommends it. Good luck.

Open: M - F 15 - 21, Sa/Sun 10 - 21.30, tel: ?

Kavarna Rudolfinum

Alsovo nab. 12, Prague 1 (namesti Jana Palacha)

What a waste. This café is located in the Rudolfinum concert hall and next to the Rudolfinum art gallery. A spacious room with high ceilings and simple, somewhat worn-down elegance, this place has a lot of potential. Unfortunately, not much variety is offered. And what little there is, must have been three days old (the sandwiches were soggy, the chocolate cake was dry) the last time I was there. The coffee was fine though although my concept of a café au lait is not a cup of coffee with milk in a little plastic container. Way to go, folks. Tel: 224 893 317

Deminka

Skretova 1, Praha 2.

Another waste. This café is in a great location (5 minutes away from National Museum) and has in fact a spectacular interior design. But the furniture is cheap, the service is pitiful, the café latte is not much better, and the honey cake was several days old when I was there. (A colleague of mine claims that management has changed in the summer of 2003 and that things have somewhat improved. Blame him.) Tel: 224 224 915

Kavarna Imperial

Na porici, Praha 3.

Spectacular interior: imperial tiling indeed. Coffee and latte are pretty good; Latte Macchiato and Eis Cappucino dito. Service used to be good but has become spotty and obnoxious (with the occasional waiter charging you generously for that bread and butter that you never ordered, or even the item you never ordered, etc.). You still get, occasionally, a free donut, staler though than in the past. Diverse crowd.

CURRENTLY UNDER RE-CONSTRUCTION !!!

Malostranska Kavarna

Malostranske nam. 5, Praha 1.

A place with history ("Once a regular haunt of Franz Kafka and other literary types ..." says my AVANTGUIDE PRAGUE). Nice interior and good atmosphere. Good coffee, good cake, good service. Nothing special but fine. Was under reconstruction in the summer and fall of 2001 and now bills itself as "Square", easily one of the more silly names for a café or restaurant that I have come across. Mon - sat 8 - 22, tel.: 257 532 109.

Samss café-bar

In the Lucerna passage, opposite Jarmark, Praha 1

Nothing special but a good coffee can be had. And it's a good place to work in the morning or early afternoon. Don't go there later in the afternoon. Too crowded.

Kavarna Lucerna

Also in the Lucerna passage, the café that comes with the movie theatre. It's next to the horse that hangs upside down from the ceiling in the middle of the passage. Coffee (Segafredo) is o.k. at best. So is the service. A place with lots of potential, unfulfilled.

C(k)afé

Senovazne nameski 23, Praha 1

What a waste. A really cool interior design (note the upstairs!), good coffee, even good apple strudel, but what a pitiful service. Not to mention the pitiful lunch options. It always amazes me how people execute 80 - 90 % of a project flawlessly and then don't go all the way on the remaining 20 - 10 %. (Come to think of it, that sounds like me and my papers. Oh well.) Anyway, back to c(k)afé: its saving grace is that it's in the neighborhood of where I work.

Much to do about little (places I don't like):

Obecni Dum Kavarna

nam. Republiky 5, Praha 1.

Spectacular interior. Apparently recently renovated in great style. It's a view to be seen. And a place to be seen. The service is o.k. Coffee and food, however, are ... average. (That's no recommendation here in Prague.)

Café Europa

Vaclavske nam. 25, Praha 1.

Its location should warn you right away. The interior is quite a view (although that may depend on the expectations that you have after having read about in a Prague guide). The place though is run-down, the coffee is not impressive, and the service ... well. 'Nuff said.

Café Slavia

Narodni trida 1, Praha 1.

A historic place. Plus a nice view if you sit in the right spot.

Forget about the rest. [The otherwise often reliable AVANTGUIDE PRAGUE says: "Once known as a dissidents' café, Slavia is so closely linked with the Velvet Revolutionaries that its recent reconstruction was an important political event. The café's late-1997 re-opening ... made international news. Situated on a window-wrapped corner, across from the National Theater, the new Slavia is once again a great place to waste time, linger over coffee, juice or tea and enjoy a light meal. ...]." I warned you.