



Charles Bridge



Source: <https://www.amazingczechia.com/sights/charles-bridge/>

History

Charles Bridge, one of Prague's most iconic landmarks, has a rich history dating back to the 14th century. It was commissioned by King Charles IV in 1357 to replace the earlier Judith Bridge, which had been destroyed by a flood in 1342. Construction began under the direction of the architect Peter Parler, who also worked on St. Vitus Cathedral. The foundation stone was laid on July 9, 1357, at 5:31 a.m., a time chosen for its numerical significance (the palindrome 135797531).

Initially known simply as the Stone Bridge or Prague Bridge, it wasn't called Charles Bridge until 1870. For centuries, it served as the only means of crossing the Vltava River, connecting Old Town (Staré Město) with Malá Strana (Lesser Town), making it a crucial trade route between Eastern and Western Europe.



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The bridge played a significant role in the history of Prague, witnessing numerous historical events, including battles during the Thirty Years' War and the defenestration protests of the 15th and 17th centuries. Its construction, steeped in Gothic tradition, was sturdy enough to withstand centuries of use and natural disasters, although it has been restored multiple times.

Description

Charles Bridge is a stone Gothic bridge spanning 516 meters in length and about 10 meters wide. It is supported by 16 arches, each reinforced to withstand the strong currents of the Vltava River. The bridge is flanked by two magnificent Gothic towers: the Old Town Bridge Tower on the east and the Lesser Town Bridge Towers on the west. These towers were built as defensive structures and are richly decorated with symbols of Bohemian royalty and saints.

A defining feature of the bridge is its 30 Baroque statues and statuary, added between 1683 and 1714. These statues, depicting saints and religious figures, were crafted by leading Baroque artists, including Matthias Bernard Braun and Ferdinand Maxmilian Brokoff. Among the most famous is the statue of St. John of Nepomuk, a Czech martyr thrown into the river from the bridge in 1393. Legend says that touching the plaque beneath his statue brings good luck and ensures a return to Prague.

The bridge's cobblestone surface adds to its historic charm, and it is exclusively for pedestrians, offering stunning views of the Vltava River, Prague Castle, and the surrounding cityscape.

Cultural and touristic significance

Charles Bridge is not only a historical monument but also a vibrant cultural space. It is a hub for artists, musicians, and street vendors, making it one of the most atmospheric spots in Prague. The bridge's popularity has made it a symbol of the city, and it is one of Prague's most photographed landmarks.



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Despite centuries of wear, Charles Bridge remains a testament to medieval engineering and a key piece of Prague's architectural heritage. It continues to draw millions of visitors annually, captivating them with its timeless beauty and historical significance.