

# What to do in Prague *when it's almost Christmas 2023*

Stuff everybody knows  
but nobody tells you



# The season of anticipation

Your breath turns to mist and ice crystals in the air poke at your nose. The low sun briefly sparkles through the hanging clouds and gives way to blue shadows, dotted by festive lights.

A new year is nigh and the old one is about to close with a bang.

If the high autumn takes the gold in terms of Prague beauty, Christmas time must surely be considered close silver. The ancient magic carved into the baroque and gothic bones of the city pours back on the long wintry evenings, as you sip mulled wine and stroll through the racuous markets and narrow cobblestone streets under the blanket of a million lights.

## „Prosinec” ”December”

*Supposedly derived from old-slavic „prosinoti”, the occasional flashes of sun through the clouds. The much more popular folk explanations has it for „Prasinec”, a month of the pigs: That is, getting slaughtered and eaten, as a living pre-industrial food can, for the cold season when you must rely on what you have stocked.*



# Weather or not

Hope for snow.  
Expect rain.

*On average:*

-1 to +5°C  
30 to 40°F



1-2 days of rain  
or snow per week



45 hours  
of sunshine



Dawn: 7:35 → 8:00  
Dusk: ~16:00

Fundamentally, there are two possible Decembers: One of warm, wet air coming from the southwest with clouds and rain; Or the other of cold, dry winds from the northeast, with clear skies and frost. Somewhere, over the rainbow, a magical intersection of these phenomena results in a few brief hours of Prague sprinkled with a white coat of pure Christmas...

*Cold bits of white bitterly bite  
as wind drives them into your face  
Sparkless of grace in LED light,  
shining on Christmas-time fates*

Original photo by Klára Hášová, CC



The feast of **St.Nicholas** is a mini-version of the classic US Christmas, with the Saint, accompanied by an angel and a devil/Krampus visiting children on the eve and leaving minor presents in stockings, for the morning.

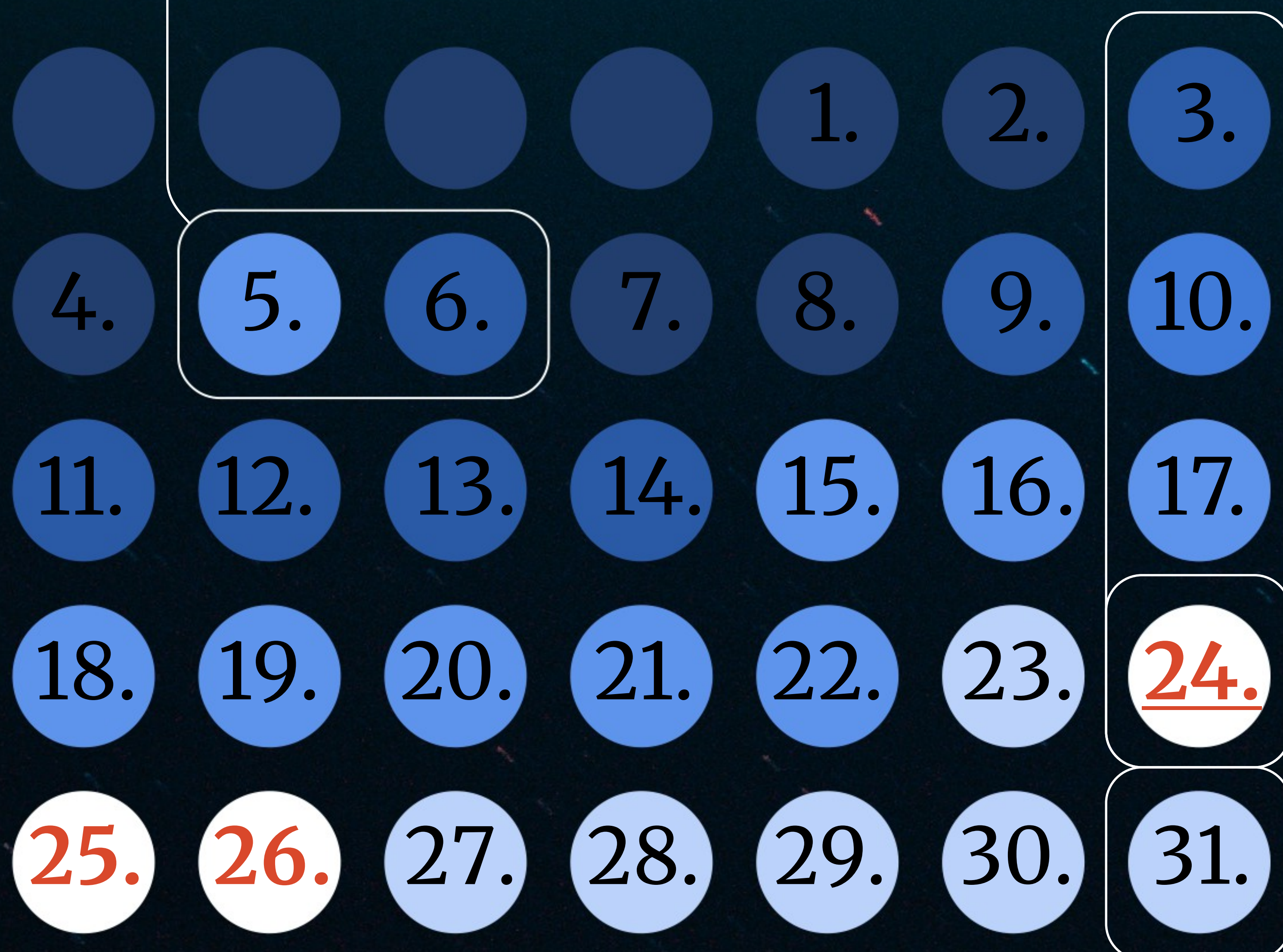
# Map of the Czech December

The Catholic tradition of „**Advent Sundays**” (the four prior to the 25th) is broadly observed with the lighting of candles.

Nothing really gets done  
from the 15th on.

# The Bountiful Evening („Štědrý večer“)

## „Silvestr” (New Year’s Eve)



2024

**The New Year's Day**  
is a day off, to give  
you the time to over-  
come your hang-  
over

**The Three Kings**  
Feast signals a  
conclusion to the  
Christmas season  
and decorations

- *A day like any other*
- *Hints of festivity*
- *Noticeable atmosphere*
- *Holiday-adjacent*
- *Full-blown Christmas*
- *National holidays in red*



# The Spirit of Christmas Czech

As a testament to the deeper spiritual nature of Homo Sapiens, even we Czechs, with our thoroughly non-religious way of being, appreciate and celebrate the time of Christmas.

It's The One Special Occasion. A happening valuable precisely for taking place only once every year. It *can't be* done more often – if you had Christmas every week, it would just be Sunday. This much energy needs to gather first, before its release against the darkness of winter.

Then life can briefly step outside of its everyday chain and you can again observe the great cycles of things with a renewed sense of wonder.

Families get together and spend at least a couple of days in close proximity. Friends and schoolmates flock back to their hometowns and often use the opportunity for a little reunion. People try to pause their lives, even for a short while, and have a look at it all, one year wiser.



The Christmas day itself is celebrated a little earlier than is customary in the Anglosaxon countries, on the eve of the 24th.

The old tradition is to avoid food all day, until the festive dinner. Those who hold out are said to be able to see the image of a fabled "golden pig" for their efforts. Much fuss is made about food preparation, with the most traditional way involving a still-alive-in-the-morning carp, parked in the bathtub a couple days earlier.

For families, the proper order of things is to have an excruciatingly slow dinner, tormenting the impatient children, followed by the singing of carols, during which the sound of a magical bell will announce that Ježíšek (The newborn baby Jesus, in German Christkindl, later also americanized as Kris Kringle) has magically placed the gifts under the Christmas tree, for all to collect and unwrap and rejoice over.

This then usually devolves into an evening of adults lazily lounging while kids excitedly play with their new toys (though later pub-meets for the more energetic grownups are not uncommon, these days.)



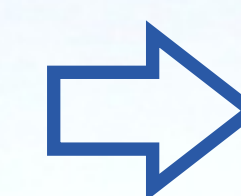


# The Carols

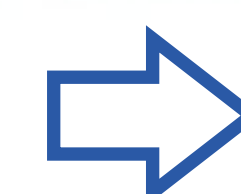
Literal soundtrack to Bohemian & Moravian Christmas. The tradition of actual living carolers, going door to door, has mostly been abandoned, but playing these at some point is an indispensable element of the full festive experience. You have the opportunity to enjoy the pure atmosphere, without any understanding of the content.

The three greatest classics:

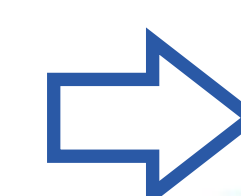
*Narodil se Kristus Pán*



*Půjdeme spolu do Betléma*



*Nesem vám noviny*



And as a bonus:  
a Three Kings' Feast song

*My tři králové jdeme k vám*



a non-religious parody song

*Vánoce, Vánoce přicházejí*



or a serious baroque composition

*The Christmas Mass*



*by Jan Jakub Ryba*




# The Food


This should give you some idea of how terribly poor people used to be...

Fish was kind of fancy. Also had the advantage of not counting as meat for the purpose of religious fasts. And if you could even fry the fish in eggs and breadcrumbs, as was the latest fashion in Viennese imperial circles, that was an outright luxury and delicacy. Normally, you'd get boiled barley with mushrooms for dinner!

Let's face it, by today's standards, the classical festive menu of fish soup, fried carp and potato salad sucks and is usually at least supplemented with chicken and pork schnitzels as an alternative. Never the less, we recommend that you try the original dish and suffer through the weird meat and finicky, annoying bones. It will grant you an authentic perspective on our current state of hypermarket bounty.



*Every year, emergency rooms are flooded with people choking on the tiny insidious bones. Sacrificed on the altar of cultural cohesion.*





# The Good Food

On the other hand...

Christmas confectionary, aka „*Cukroví*”, is a whole other kettle of not-fish. Absolutely decadent in its shameless fat-and-sugar oversaturation, these nutrition bombs should be actively sough-out and consumed with gleeful abandon, as a fleeting seasonal opportunity to treat yourself. The traditional way to obtain them is to have a colleague who has an aunt whose neighbor makes awesome *cukroví*, you just tell me how many kilos you'd like to buy and she'll make it for you.

Another commendable tradition is that of the St.Stephen goose, usually roasted and served on the 26th with dumplings, to feed the broad relations and in-laws, commonly congregating around a joint family table that day.

Some of the venerable varieties include vanilla rolls („*vanilkové rohlíčky*”), Linzer cookies („*linecké*”) or wasp nests („*vosí hnízda*”), but as long as its prepared with plenty of butter, eggs, sugar and love, you can't go wrong.



# The Traditions

The problem of **cycles** is literally as old as life itself. Creatures have had to deal with day and night, low and high tides, winters and summers, since time immemorial. December is the **solstice** month, no way around it.

Sun dips to its lowest point and then infallibly rebounds, promising a **new spring** and pointing to cycles greater than humans can hope to comprehend.

No wonder many of the old rituals involve **fortune telling** and other attempts to glimpse into moments-yet-to-come:

Floating **walnut shells** on water, to see who stays together and who sails apart. **Throwing dancing shoes**, to check whether the toe is pointing out the door or in. Or simply **cutting an apple** in twain, to reveal a fortuitous (star) or ominous (cross) seed pattern...

(Also a good moment for those once-a-year-tasks, from general cleanup to providing calcium to fruit trees by burying the bones from the dinner beneath.)

*Pouring molten lead into a bowl of water and divining future from the resulting shapes is one of the more primordial rituals to perform; Particularly in that it involves authentic risk of serious injury and/or heavy metal poisoning. But that shouldn't stop you from unleashing your inner soothsaying blacksmith and peering Beyond.*



## *Tři oříšky pro popelku*

### Three hazelnuts for Cinderella

Story of the most independent, decisive and agentic poor-girl got-lucky not played by Julia Roberts.

1973, 75 min

dir. by Václav Vorlíček



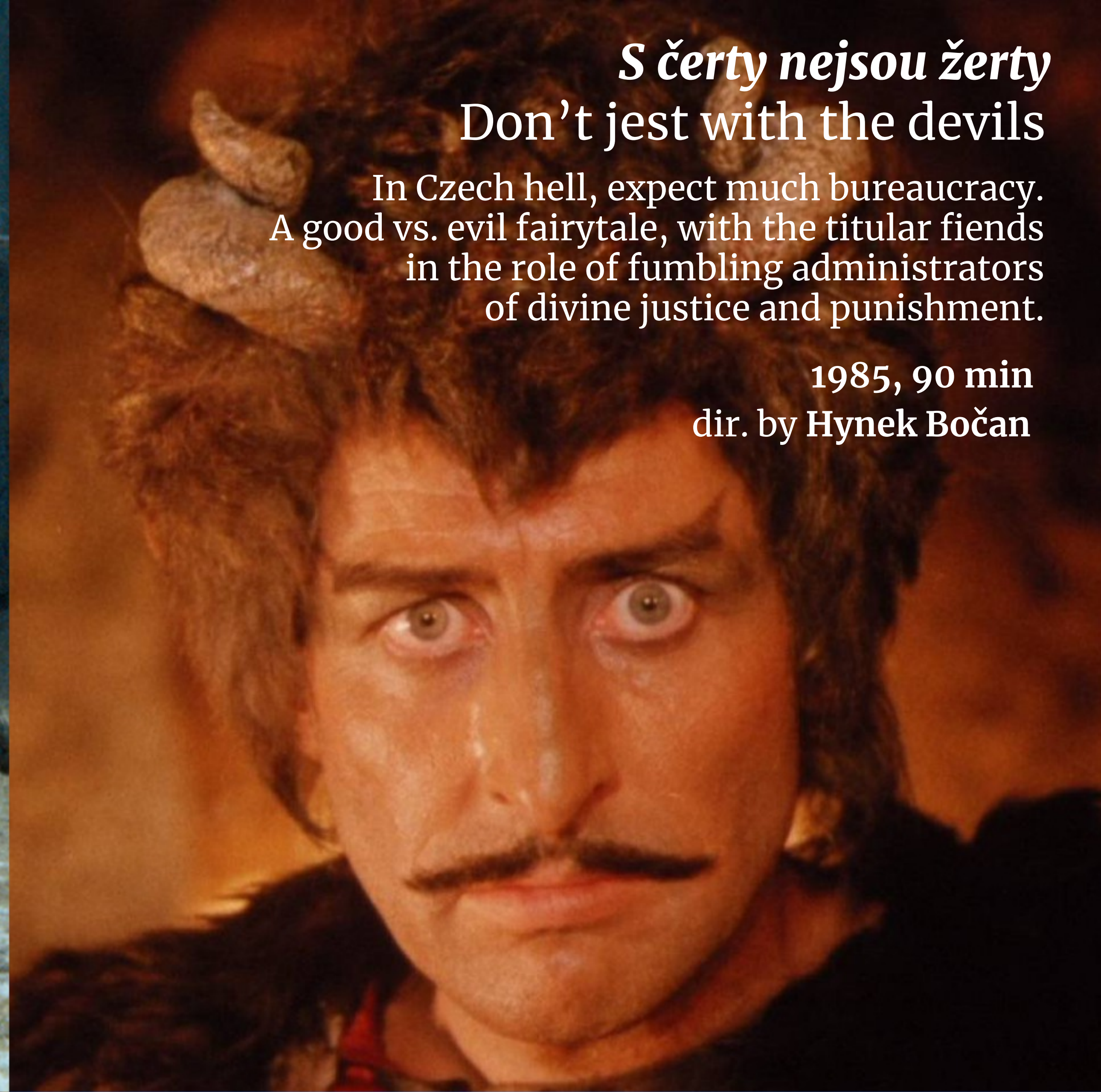
## *S čerty nejsou žerty*

### Don't jest with the devils

In Czech hell, expect much bureaucracy. A good vs. evil fairytale, with the titular fiends in the role of fumbling administrators of divine justice and punishment.

1985, 90 min

dir. by Hynek Bočan



## *Pelíšky*

### Cozy little dens

A bitter-sweet collective memory of the late 1960s, a brief breath of freedom, crushed under the tracks of Soviet tanks.

One of the most recent additions to the Christmas movie pantheon.

1999, 115 min

dir. by Jan Hřebejk



# The Films

Where other nations have religion, Czechs have culture. Shared stories serve as our common base of mutual understanding and Christmas is the proper time for a ritual national re-experience of The Canon Narratives.

This short list of Czech Christmas classics is by no means exhaustive, but you can be near-certain to find a topic of some shared interest, should you bring one of these up with a Czech.



# Christmas Markets?

a pity to miss completely  
a shame to waste much time on

The mulled wine is overpriced, the portions of "Prague ham" are criminally tiny, the crowds are suffocating, the trinkets have Instant Garbage written all over them and the musical ambience violates all four Geneva conventions and two of the protocols.

For best user enjoyment, we recommend that you pick one of the less touristy locations (Náměstí Míru or Jiřího z Poděbrad) and use the market as either the start or the end-point of an independent scenic stroll.

**Staroměstské náměstí**  
**Václavské náměstí**  
**Náměstí Republiky**  
**Jiřího z Poděbrad**  
**Náměstí Míru**  
**Anděl**

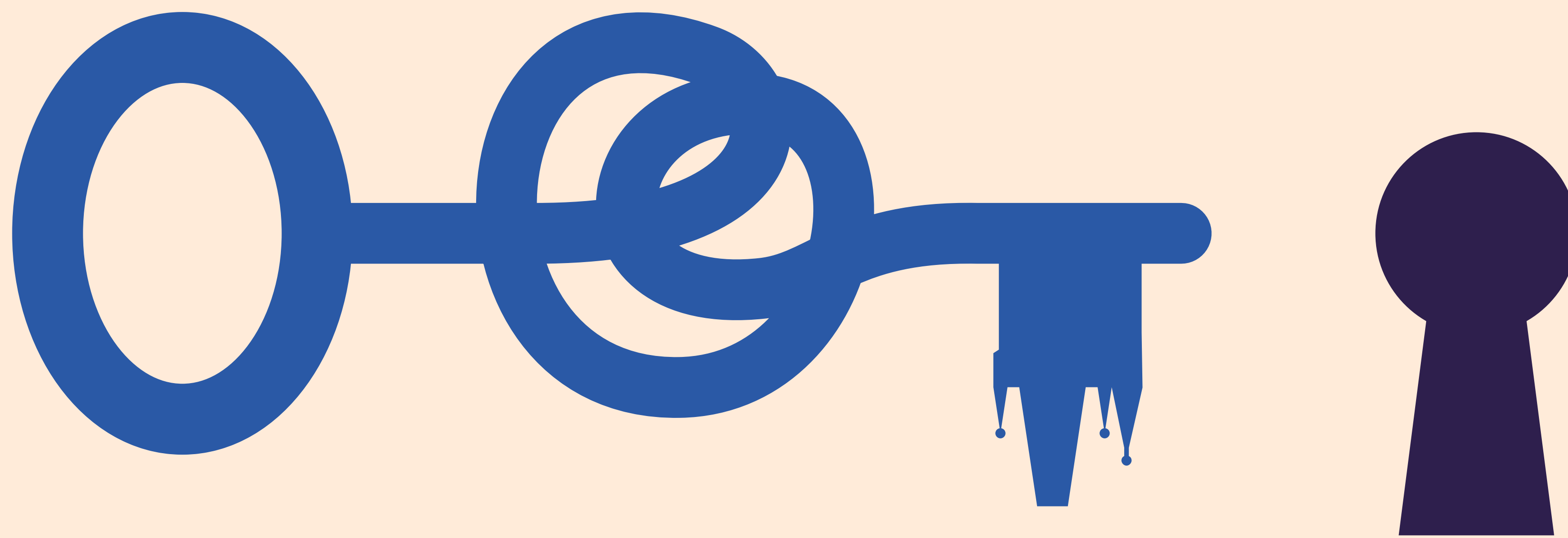
2.12.-6.1. 10:00-22:00  
2.12.-6.1. 10:00-22:00  
25.11.-24.12. 10:00-22:00  
29.11.-23.12. 10:00-20:00  
20.11.-24.12. 10:00-19:00  
24.11.-24.12. ?

Original photo by Karelj, CC

What to do in Prague, December '23 by 🏠 PRAGate.cz



# Apartment trouble?



Difficulties dealing with Czech landlords?

Uncertain about your contract or deposit?

Simply looking for a better place to live?

## We're here to help.



**PRAGate.cz**



# WHAT NOT TO MISS

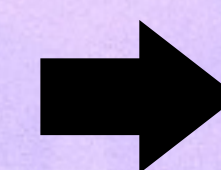
## Jethro Tull

Tue. 5th, 20:00

### CONGRESS CENTER

The legends of prog-rock rock-Prague on their near-annual tour stop.

Expects classic hits as well as new original material.



Original photo by Denis Poltoradnev

## Hosier

Wed. 6th, 20:00

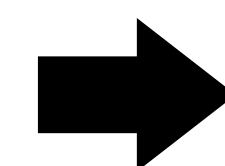
### FORTUNA ARENA

The famed Irish musician, author of "Take me to church" visits Prague as a part of his Unreal Uneath Tour, promoting his latest album.



## Lighting of the Christmas tree

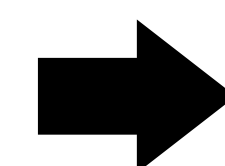
2nd at Staroměstské náměstí



## GDS Prague

Games development & tech

8th-9th at the Congress Center



## Christmas Oratorio

By Johan Sebastian Bach

14th/15th at the Municipal House







Monument of the month

# The church of St. Nicholas ➡

„Svatý Mikuláš” 50.0879753N  
14.4032150E

at Malá Strana (not to be confused with the St. Nicholas church at the Old Town Square)

Constructed over the span of a century from 1673 on by the Dietzenhofer dynasty of architects, upon the base building of the Jesuit house of clergy, this baroque gem presents a complex floor plan and interior with the tallest ceiling in Prague, 58 meters above the ground. The town hall insisted on having both principal spires of the same height, so the builders employed every visual trick in the book to make it work.

**Open daily from 9am to 5 pm**

**Tickets CZK 130/70 for students  
or 200/120 for commented tours**

The church hosts a 5 pm concert every December Friday and Saturday, until the 16th, with Christmas concerts performed on the 25th and 26th.

**Tram stop: Malostranské náměstí**

Original photo brought to you by Ludek, CC

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# Murders, Martyrs and Monarchs

*OR: a morbidly amusing  
presentation on the  
feudal family feuds of  
medieval Bohemia*



**9th of December  
18:00 at Art-n-Coffee** →

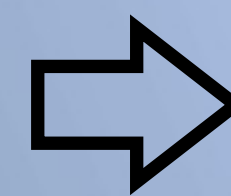
CZK 150 at the door  
CZK 120 if you pre-sign on FB



# A hidden gem „Pražské Jezulátko”

## Infant Jesus of Prague

50.0857153N  
14.4034722E



Not *especially* well hidden inside the Church of Our Lady of Victories at Malá Strana, this wax-covered wooden statuette of Jesus in his childhood years was made in Spain in the mid-16th century and sent as a wedding gift to Princess Polyxena of Lobkowitz, who later donated it to the White Carmelite monks. The statue is venerated and usually displayed on an altar, cloth by the nuns in extremely ornate fabrics. It draws numerous pilgrims, many believing it may be swayed to perform miracles on their behalf.

Particularly noteworthy in that it represents one of the rare physical depictions of the concept of „Ježíšek”, lit. Little Jesus, i.e. the person locally responsible for bringing the gifts on Christmas Eve, instead of Santa Claus, who performs his duty early here. All in a ”He was born today and already he brings us great treasures” spirit.





# Silvester New Year's Eve

1. Head out.

You're in Prague, the world capital of discrete debauchery. The only excuse for skipping the biggest party of the year is a broken leg.

2. Dress well

Keep your body warm and dry, wear a hat and bring at least one rain-resistant layer. Favor practicality over fashion in your shoes.

3. Hole or a hill

Best parties happen either in a basement club or on the top of a hill: Vítkov, Petřín, Letná, Riegrovy sady, Parukářka... Pick one nearby.

4. Bring drinks

No matter where you're partying, you will want to head outside for the midnight gong. Best to have your New Year bubbles on hand.

5. Bring food

If you're already hauling the bottle and cups, you might as well pack some snacks, water and cushions to sit on. They will come in handy.

6. Grab a tram

Don't give up on the potential of public transit. It will be running reinforced all night. Use it to hop from one party to another.

7. Wenceslas square is the eye of madness and chaos



# Classifieds

This space is dedicated to the readers of this publication, with the three individual fields allocated monthly in accordance with the utterly arbitrary decisions of the publication board, based on vibes, order of arrival, reverse order of arrival, inscrutable games of chance, astrological readings, subjective amusement value, irrational emotional appeal, desire to spread chaos, desire to foster world peace and/or sheer crass bribery.

Submissions accepted at  
[info@pragate.cz](mailto:info@pragate.cz)

anomalpanda ⇨  
Jan Špáta photography

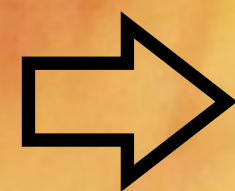
home-made Organic

COSMETICS

LIP  
BALM



learn how to  
do your own



workshop 4dec 7p

SPIRAL DRIVE (GERMANY)  
+ SÉPIE Z HOR  
13.12.2023 ⇨





*Curious about*  
**What to do**  
**in Prague**  
*when it's January?*

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