

Is the Czech Republic a cycle tourism superpower?

Cycle tourism is booming in the Czech Republic. At least, that's how it appears from the rate at which cycling routes are expanding. There are now more than 37,000 km of bicycle routes and trails in the Czech Republic, according to a survey by CzechTourism. That is roughly the same as in Germany, which country is 4-1/2 times larger. Does this mean that the Czech Republic is a paradise for bicycling lovers?

CzechTourism has learnt that the current length of cycle routes and trails in the Czech Republic totals around **37,000 km**, of which less than 3% run along routes intended solely for cyclists. As for routes of **international significance**, these have a total length of about **2,500 km**. Among these are the so-called Prague–Vienna Greenways, the Amber Trail, the Moravian Trail, the Elbe Trail, and others. Thematic trails, such as the South Moravian wine route (1,254 km) or the Radegast cycle track in the Beskydy Mountains (306 km), are also highly popular.

Prague has the greatest density of routes and trails (98 km per 100 km²), followed by the Pardubice (81 km) and Liberec (69 km) regions. On the other hand, the lowest density is found in the Usti Region (30 km) and in Vysočina in the Czech-Moravian Highlands (35 km). The greatest growth in cycle routes has been recorded in Karlovy Vary, where, over the course of 6 years, the density has increased from 11 to 60 km per 100 km². The situation has changed too little in the Zlín and Moravian-Silesian regions, which in 2002 had the greatest density of marked cycle routes but today are only average.

The density of marked cycle routes in the Czech Republic is unique in Europe. This is underscored by the fact that neighbouring Austria reports only around 10,000 km of cycle routes and trails, Switzerland 8,500 km and Slovenia 5,500 km. These numbers, however, probably do not include routes and trails of purely local significance.

Jaroslav Martínek, from the Centre for Traffic Research, admits that **the quality of routes, to a certain extent, lags behind the quantity**: *"The good news," he says, "is that many regions are definitely aware of this and are preparing extensive cycling projects whereby the quality of cycle routes will be improved."*

A further problem is the level of complementary services for cyclists. While routes in Austria and Switzerland provide a network of quality catering and accommodation services, this is only just developing in the Czech Republic. A **national certification of services** for cyclists is being undertaken by Nadace Partnerství (the Partnership Foundation), which checks the services and facilities offered at catering and accommodation establishments, camping sites and tourist destinations (www.cyklistevitani.cz). The certification incorporates standards comparable with the systems in other European countries (e.g. Bett & Bike in Germany or RADfreundliche Betriebe in Austria).

CzechTourism actively promotes cycle tourism through, for example, its www.kudyznudy.cz ("escape from boredom") web site, where tourists will find more than 200 tips for trips, as well as a high-quality cycling map

Sources: www.cyklostrategie.cz, www.cyklistevitani.cz, KČT (Czech Tourist Club), regional administrative offices, Wikipedia.

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<http://www.czechtourism.com/eng/uk/docs/press-centre/latest-news/trends/cycle.html>