
Christmas Time at Charles University in Prague

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Decorating Gingerbread Biscuits to Commemorate the 25th Erasmus Anniversary, Making Czech Potato Salad and Trying out the Handicraft of our Great-grandparents

For many, the Erasmus exchange is too short – especially if they arrive at their host university only for the few short months of the winter semester – and their home university requires them to return for the start of the next term already in January. For these students, the month of December is mostly about preparing for and attending exams. The more lucky ones, allowed to stay longer – be it till the very end of the winter semester in February or even until the end of the summer term in June – can join the various programs of the International and Erasmus Clubs prepared especially for the Christmas season. As well as the obligatory parties and trips to popular cities within the Czech Republic and neighbouring countries, smaller excursions are offered to the open-air museums surrounding Prague which show traditional life in the Czech villages. Also on offer to the students are Christmas theatre visits or Czech Christmas Afternoons during which the students can find out more about Czech seasonal traditions.

The Christmas season in the Erasmus Club at the Faculty of Arts usually starts with a trip to an open-air museum (usually Pferov nad Labem, since it's the closest museum of this type to Prague). The attending students are able to explore the well preserved Central Bohemian country houses neatly decorated for the Christmas season such as was typical in the late 19th and early 20th century. Usually, the participants are also invited to try out the handicraft of our ancestors. This year it was e.g. possible to learn how to create wooden decorations; last year they learnt how to work with felt. The making of laces, beeswax candles or metal products such as horse shoes is also usually shown.

As the days grow shorter with the coming winter season, the ideal time comes for theatre and concert visits. The traditional event of the Christmas period in the Erasmus Theatre Club is to visit The Nutcracker / A Christmas Carol ballet performance in the National Theatre in Prague in which the famous Christmas story by Charles Dickens is combined with the traditional libretto and music of The Nutcracker ballet. This year it was attended by over 70 Erasmus students.

As for the Christmas concerts, all Charles University students are each year cordially invited to the Christmas concerts of Charles University Chorus and Orchestra, offering Jan Jakub Ryba's famous Czech Christmas Mass, fondly nicknamed "Rybovka" by the Czechs. The first public performance in the winter semester 2012/13 is held on 19th December 2012 at 7:30 p.m. in the Catholic academic church St. Salvator at Křižovnické náměstí. You can read more about this event in the article about the [Charles University Chorus](#).

Czech Christmas traditions are mostly introduced to the interested students during Czech Christmas Afternoons. At the Czech Christmas Afternoon offered by the Erasmus Club of the Faculty of Arts on 14th December 2012 the students learnt that the typical Czech Christmas Eve dish was fish soup and fried carp with potato salad and were also able to learn how to make the potato salad and taste it.

As Czech people are very fond of Christmas biscuits, the production of the non-cooked sorts of Christmas sweets was also part of this event (milk and cocoa coconut balls were made) as well as the decoration of gingerbread and butter biscuits in shapes well suited to the season (stars, good-luck-wishing pigs or four leaves, hearts, fish, etc.). Since the year 2012 is also the year when we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Erasmus programme, the students were also asked to decorate some of the biscuits to commemorate this anniversary. You can judge how well they managed in our picture gallery.

Another Czech Christmas Afternoon was held by the Erasmus Club of the Faculty of Education – here, the Christmas seasonal traditions such as casting lead were introduced to the participants.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our international students and staff as well as friends of Charles University.