



PAINTING THROUGH PRAGUE

My love for sketching took me to the Prague Pleinair festival, where I experienced the city more intimately as an observer, not a tourist

words by
Shikha Shah

Europe has an undeniable charm—especially for romantics and artistic souls. It never fails to inspire. As a passionate watercolour illustrator who documents her journeys through art, Prague—the storybook capital of Czechia—had long been on my wish list.

So when I discovered that my visit would coincide with Prague Pleinair—an annual four-day celebration in which the city itself transforms into an open-air studio—I was thrilled.

Plein-air painting involves creating art on location, capturing the scene's fleeting light, atmosphere, and movement through direct observation, often in a single sitting. Popularised by the Impressionists in the 19th century, the practice values spontaneity to preserve a moment in time.



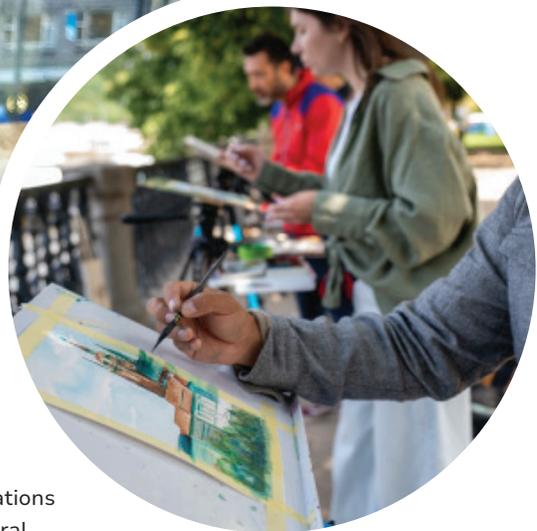
The author's sketch of Charles Bridge, one of Prague's most iconic structures



TRY IT OUT

This four-day festival brings together artists of all skill levels to paint at some of the city's most inspiring locations. Participants receive an art-supply goodie bag and access to artist demos, sponsor giveaways, and more.

24th-27th June 2026
praguepleinair.com



Sketching a path

Skautský Institut, the event hub, is tucked inside a historic building beside the Astronomical Clock (that has been ticking faithfully for over 600 years) on one of Old Town's cobblestone alleys. One of the smaller community spaces was dedicated to the festival. There, we picked up goodie bags filled with art supplies, attended indoor demonstrations, shared a Czech beer, and regrouped between sketching sessions.

With my Prague Pleinair badge doubling as my event pass, I was ready to kick off my sketching adventure at Duplex, one of the city's iconic rooftop bars. Drinks in hand, we settled in to capture the view of Wenceslas Square. Red

rooftops, domed turrets, bustling shops and cafés, and the red trams offered endless visual details to translate onto paper. As I finished the linework and added washes of colour, it struck me: this was the perfect start—a sip-and-paint session, friendly conversation with kindred spirits, and the skyline glowing in warm hues.

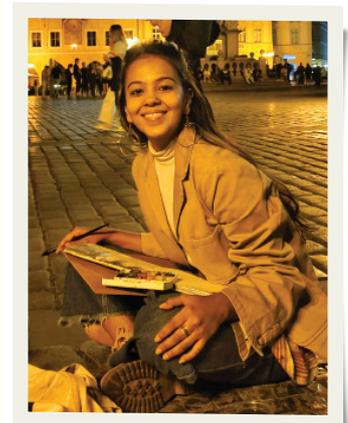
Open-air adventures

The following morning, we gathered to paint in and around Staroměstské náměstí (Old Town Square), Prague's oldest, dating back to the 12th century. With its Roman, Gothic, and Baroque architecture, and the commanding statue of Czech reformer Jan Hus, the square has witnessed royal

proclamations and several other historic events. I claimed a spot on a bench, directly facing the Church of Our Lady before Týn. Few buildings capture the essence of Prague as powerfully as this Gothic masterpiece of worship. It felt only fitting to render it on paper.

Fineliner in hand, I began appreciating the intricate stonework. A curious local peering into my artwork shared that the church's construction began in the mid-14th century and spanned over a hundred

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
 A sketch of Wenceslas Square; Artists of all skill levels can enrol in the festival; The author at a night painting session in the Old Town Square.



Clockwise from top left: Shikha Shah; Prague Pleinair; Shikha Shah

The Church of Our Lady before Týn, rendered in paint by the author

years. Working in muted neutrals and browns, I exchanged quiet smiles with fellow artists—one from Peru, another from Mexico.

By midday, hunger nudged me toward Havelské (or Havelský) Market, dating back to 1232. Stalls brim with fresh produce, flowers, handcrafted jewellery, wooden toys, ceramics, and Czech souvenirs—from postcards and magnets to bags and artwork. Post-lunch hours were spent hopping between art and stationery shops.

As night fell, we met in Staroměstské náměstí for a twilight session. Low light makes *plein-air* painting challenging, but perfection was never the goal—connection with the place was. With easels, stools, and sketchbooks on knees, we quietly became part of the square's rhythm.

A paint picnic

On my final day, I set off on foot toward Park Cihelná in Malá Strana (Lesser Town), where locals gather to picnic, feed swans or lose themselves in a book. From here, I could savour uninterrupted views of the Charles Bridge, the green-domed Church of St Francis Seraph, and the spires of Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. Drawing the Bridge from afar made clear why it has captivated artists, photographers, and travellers for generations.

For the wrap-up party, we gathered in a cosy pub, raising glasses to days well

WHERE TO STAY

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spent. We lingered over each other's work—finding inspiration in the way each artist infused the same subject with their own personality.

We assume travel experiences are meant to be shared with those closest to us. Prague challenged that. Sometimes, strangers with a shared passion can elevate your experience in a way even loved ones can't. I gained a community bound by curiosity and creativity, and a reminder that the way you engage with a place determines what it gives back. Rather than moving from landmark to landmark, I slowed down long enough to see Prague as a collection of lived moments, not a checklist of sights.



GETTING THERE

Fly to Prague with Air India's Codeshare Partner, Lufthansa.

