



FEBRUARY 2021
DEAR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS OF
THE REACH BEYOND MINISTRY TO THE PEOPLES
OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA

OUR COVID RECOVERY IN MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ / MARIENBAD

Very seldom we take „time off“ from our ministry routine. Usually, our travels are in some way ministry related. This time we took off for medical reasons. The Czech health system takes care of people after surgeries, serious and chronic illnesses or, in a newly added program, post-Covid recovery. Pavel was hospitalized and his case was rated by the medical system as serious. The family doctor and other specialists recommended spa treatment in Mariánské lázně / Marienbad / Maria Spa.

The whole country and most of Europe has been in lockdown for months under the highest Covid restrictions mode. This spa opportunity was a welcomed change of place and pace. The health spa business in the Czech Republic until recently was mostly favored by well-to-do Russians and elderly Germans. Covid quarantine and travel restrictions have changed all that.

This was our first experience with something like that. Our first impression of the famous spa was of a people-less ghost town; the Covid curfew plus a blanket of snow and subfreezing temperatures did it. No tourists, no visitors, no living soul in the streets. All hotels, except the one we stayed in, restaurants, shops, except pharmacies, drugstores, and food supermarkets were closed.

However, in the summertime when it is full of guests and tourists its story dramatically changes.

TAKE A LOOK AT THE SPA; IT'S SOMETHING

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWMd0Np5ZiQ>

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

First, we underwent an initial medical examination with a doctor originally from Kazakhstan, and another from Belarus. They scheduled us for 24 therapies per week or 72 for all three weeks.

Pavel was prescribed seven kinds of therapies: (1) oxygen therapy, (2) inhalations of mineral water vapors, (3) an hour-long stay in a salt cave inhaling salty air, (4) partial classical massages, (5) a mineral water bath, (6) a dry CO₂ bath, and (7) a paraffin hand wrap. If you are wondering what a dry gas bath could be, hold your breath. The person is put in a large plastic bag that is inflated by natural CO₂. The patient kind of „floats“ in a horizontal position in the bag for 20 minutes. He or she looks like a huge insect.

Since Klara's lungs were not affected she had different procedures: (1) gas injections to the shoulder, (2) classical partial massages, (3) a mineral water bath, (4) a dry CO₂ bath, (5) peat wraps, (6) inhalations of mineral water vapors, (7) body exercise, (8) interference currents (electrotherapy), (9) oxygen therapy, (10) an ultrasound procedure, and (11) a dry-water massage. The dry-water massage sounds funny; the person rests on a waterbed with rollers inside, and it is wonderful.

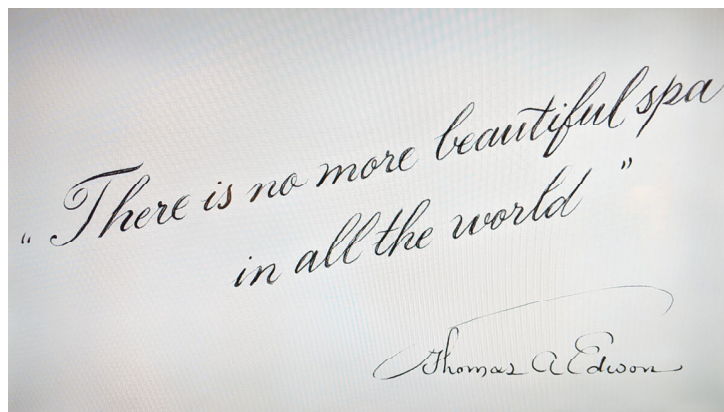
In the adjoining and connected buildings, there are several therapeutic rooms. Some procedures are not only medical, rehabilitative, but also of a recreational healing character. For guests' convenience, there is a fitness center and a quality Aqua-wellness center. Part of the stay is full or half-board. There is a delicious and excellent selection of food. After dinner we felt pleasantly fatigued. In the morning, our bodies felt a few aches and pains. In our free time, we enjoyed the comfort of our room, rested, and listened to our favorite preachers. The ZOOM Bible class on Thursdays and Fridays as well as Sunday sermons kept us connected.

Klara started to write a journal of our spa stages; from novices, to confident users, to well-seasoned veterans. She described in a light tone, each procedure, and the history of Marienbad from the golden age at the crossover of the 19th and 20th centuries, the era of royalty and the rich and famous, to communist era of working-class privileges, to the fall of communism and to the present era. We mailed it on a weekly basis to about 190 friends from all walks of life. We got many feedback messages of appreciation and many memories. It was amazing. One friend from Canada wrote “My friend in Prague has a son-in-law at Marienbad and he is a pastor there. Visit him.” We did, and spent two afternoons together. It was priceless. What a joy it was to find that the magazine we have published for so many years was on the table with other printed materials. Unfortunately, one of the readers was homebound because of the Covid. The biggest surprise was that the pastor remembered the broadcasting of HCJB in the Czech language from Ecuador although that ceased in 2000. Amazing.

The time spent with him helped us to refocus on how we can minister in the current situation and how to be more personally involved in previously unknown territory.

HISTORY OF MARIENBAD, AND HOTEL STERN /HVĚZDA/ STAR

The healing powers of natural springs, located in an uninhabited region of forests and swamps, have been known since the Middle Ages. Marienbad was dedicated to the public as a resort in 1818. The Hotel Stern, Star, Hvězda, was built by the Lords of Kriegelstern, the Knights of Sternfeld. It stands on the site of a folk pub of local villagers. The stately 1818 palace hotel had state-of-the-art amenities such as central heating, lifts, modern en suite bathrooms, and telephones. The menus were printed on silk, meals served from silver dishes, and drinks served in gilded goblets. Flashy banquets were held here and the most important personalities met. Famous personalities such as Goethe, Chopin, and King Edward VII of England, Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, important nobility, industrialists, and artists spent their time here. Famous personalities such as Thomas Alva Edison, Richard Wagner, Maxim Gorky, and Johann Strauss sought inspiration here; Gustav Mahler, Friedrich Nietzsche, Alfred Nobel, Franz Kafka, and Rudyard Kipling, and many others. The hotel level was comparable to the most luxurious hotels in NY and London. Thomas Alva Edison wrote:



We stayed in the reconstructed historic building of the Stern/Star/Hvězda hotel, with 79 luxury rooms with about five different categories. The peak period of the spa belonged to the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Marienbad retained its reputation even after the end of the First World War. The Second World War and the onset of the communist government in the Czech Republic changed everything. The nationalized spas began to serve the working-class people. In the 1950s, around 40,000 workers were treated here every year. The lack of investment in infrastructure, despite such intensive use, has led the spa to obsolescence and decay of buildings.

After the fall of communism, great efforts and investments were made to restore the original character of Marienbad. The most important spa buildings and facilities were gradually renovated and modernized to meet the demands of foreign guests,

especially wealthy Russians and elderly Germans. At the time of the Covid measure, the absence of guests, tourists, and patients reveals the vulnerability of the spa. Expenditures and costs for the operation and maintenance of buildings are enormous, income is essentially zero and huge economic losses are growing.

In the midst of all the travel restrictions, a few Russian guests with their families checked in. When asked how they came, they answered in the Russian language: "We arrived by car."

We praise the Lord we had the opportunity to recharge, and look forward to new ideas and challenges. Once again, we realized that the most important thing is to build bridges for eternity. Overall, we had a wonderful experience.

PRAYERS AND PRAISES

- For faithful friends who pray for the Czech and Slovak ministries.
- We marvel how Covid frustrations are motivating believers and missionaries to seek new ways to reach out.
- We have much more to give, to encourage and restore contacts which were put aside for a while.
- We wish everyone sunshine and well-being in the joyful anticipation of the arrival of spring.

**Thank you for your prayers,
Support and participation
In our life and the
Czech & Slovak ministry**

**In His Sovereign Grace,
Pavel and Klara Steiger**

pavel.steiger@gmail.com

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