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URBAN ADVICE FROM REPORTERS WHO LIVE THERE

Prague looks back 20 years

Dinah Spritzer reports on events in Prague to mark the demise of Communism

Prague is in a reflective mood as it marks Nov. 17, the 20th anniversary of the start of the Velvet Revolution that removed the Communist regime.

There are bars and cafés to visit, of course, but around the city, a host of events commemorating the revolution explore the grueling struggle for freedom.

There is an outdoor exhibit titled "We Didn't Give It Up" that will display photos and stories of anti-Communist and anti-Nazi resisters until Nov. 23 on giant panels at major sites around town.

Some 1,500 Communist-era artifacts, including a hot-air balloon used to smuggle dissident literature, are on display at the "Bee Free" show from Nov. 17 to July 8 at the National Museum (Vinhohradská 1; 420-2-24-49-71-11; www.nm.cz).

Take time for a Thai massage

And while in Prague, Dinah Spritzer advises, go native and get a Thai massage

Prague is in the middle of a Thai mas-

sage craze. There are more than 40 Thai massage centers in the city, about half of which opened in the last five years.

During a recent visit, I lay back on a leather chair under the scrutiny of passers-by while a hospital-trained Thai massage therapist performed some foot reflexology. I emerged with an extra bit of swing in my step.

So why has Prague become interested in Thai massage?

There is a deep Czech affinity with massage therapy in general, but then there is the business spirit.

"Czechs are savvy business people and when they started going to Thailand in large numbers over the last few years, they saw an opportunity to bring something back," said Chairiri Anamarn, Thailand's ambassador to the Czech Republic.

A Fontana retrospective in Paris

Claudia Barbieri takes in the inaugural show at the Tornabuoni Art Gallery in Paris.

Lucio Fontana was so handy with a knife that he probably could have made a living as an old-school hit man. Instead, he became an artist, and a pivotal one at that. Through what he called his "concetto spaziale," or spatial concept, he exerted a huge influence on 20th-century modernist art.

A retrospective of his work — much of it intentionally cut, pockmarked by cigarette burns, torn by bullet holes or rat bites — is the inaugural show at the new Tornabuoni Art Gallery in Paris.

The gallery (16 Ave. Matignon, 33-1-53-53-51-51; www.tornabuoniartrfr; Metro: Franklin Roosevelt) opened in September. The show runs through Nov. 30.

State of the art for cinephiles

In Amsterdam, Joel Weickgenant reports on the construction of a new home for film

On the harbor across from Centraal Station, a symbol of Amsterdam's next cultural evolution is rising from the ground — and, by sometime in 2011, cinephiles in the city will be rejoicing.

The organizers behind Filmmuseum, an Amsterdam institution that has been an important agent in screening and preserving old movies, broke ground in September on a site they hope will widen the museum's audience and appeal.

The new museum will offer state-of-the-art, modern viewing spaces, and organizers hope to draw more than 200,000 visitors a year to the new building.

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