

Kutná Hora

(former

Cuthna Antiqua)



Let's go and discover Kutná Hora with a mine kobold!

In the beginning we have to introduce who is a mine kobold. According to some old legends they are two kinds of kobolds – first ones are evil creatures. The second ones are beneficial as well.

In medieval mining towns, people prayed for protection from these bad beings. They were blamed for the accidents, cave-ins, and rock slides that plagued human miners. One favoured kobold prank was to fool miners into taking worthless ore. For example, 16th-century miners sometimes encountered what looked to be rich veins of copper or silver, but which, when smelted, proved to be little more than a pollutant and could even be poisonous. These ores caused a burning sensation to those who handled them. Miners tried to appease the kobolds with offerings of gold and silver and by insisting that fellow miners treat them respectfully. Nevertheless, some stories claim that kobolds only returned such kindness with more poisonous ores. Miners called these ores “cobalt” after the creatures from which they were thought to come. It is interesting that in 1735, Swedish chemist Georg Brandt isolated a substance from such ores and named it cobalt rex. In 1780, scientists showed that this was in fact a new element, which they named *cobalt*.

In Kutná Hora it used to be believed that mine kobolds are beneficial beings that help the miners. They were treated respectfully and miners in Bohemia reported hearing knocking in the mines. They interpreted such noises as warnings from the kobolds to not go in that direction. Other miners claimed that the knocks indicated where veins of metal could be found: the more knocks, the richer the vein. Kobolds are sometimes indifferent to human miners so long as they are left alone. They are content to simply mine ore themselves, collect it, and haul it away by windlass.

Today the mine kobold will be your guide. He will tell you about the history and legends of the town of Kutná Hora, the most interesting sights and some rumours from the medieval age.

Kutná Hora, originally Cuthna Antiqua, has origin of the name connected with a legend about monk Antonín. One day while relaxing, he dreamt about three silver bars, found in the place, where he was lying. When he woke up, he left there his frock (KUTNA in Czech) and went to the monastery to tell the others about the discovery.

Nevertheless the reality is different. The origin of the word Kutná is from middle-German word *kutta*, which means a pit or a hole. The original inhabitants of Kutná Hora were mostly from Germany, that's why many names and words here have their German origin.

The territory of later Kutná Hora had been inhabited from 6000 years B.C. The arrival of the Celts in the 4th century can be considered as a beginning of processing and using of silver ore. Between 8th and 10th century old village Malín (5km from Kutná Hora) was situated on the very important merchant path and first silver coins, so-called denars, were coined there. In the 12th century in Sedlec Cistercian monastery was founded and owing to the rich fields of silver ore first minting villages were established in the surrounding. In 1300, Czech king Wenceslas II introduced minting reform and new set of laws called *Ius Regale Montanorum*. According to it, coining of Prague groshen started and Kutná Hora became the seat of the central royal mint and the 2nd biggest and most important town after Prague. Lots of great historical monuments were built, gothic churches and patrician houses, which we can see till nowadays.

Silver had the most important influence on the life in Kutná Hora, the grid of mines extended under the town, minting gave a job to thousands of people, silver rush started. Gothic period changed the city face as famous architects were coming to show their art.

Our kobold is waiting for us in front of the oldest sights is former fortified castle and royal mint, so-called the Italian Court. It had started to be built at the end of 13th century and during the government of Wenceslas IV served as his summer seat and meeting place of a high political importance. From the historical events we can name for instance the signing of Decree of Kutná Hora in January 1409 which solved the complicated situation at Charles University in Prague or royal election of the king Vladislaus Jagiello. Both these moments are extant on the walls of the Italian Court as two Art Nouveau paintings made by brother Špilarský and Charles Klusáček in the beautiful royal audience hall.

Nearby the Italian Court the mine kobold is going to show you another gothic sight – St James' church, built during the 14th century by famous Peter Parléř's workshop. It is also called the Tall church, because originally it should have had two high towers, but the project had to be changed significantly during the construction, as the unstable undermined base of the church did not allow erecting the second tower. Nowadays we can hardly imagine the panorama of Kutná Hora without this 85m high tower of St James' church.

Church is not so comfortable for the small creature and so the mine kobold is just now running up in front of us to show us a small lane called Ruthardka. It was given its name according to a legend about burgher family of Jiří Ruthard and his daughter Rozina. He was so miserly that instead of marrying off Rosina, arranging her wedding and endowing her, he had her immured in a small room in the cellar of his house. Rosina starved to death and her father died soon after. Rosina then kept returning often as a ghost predicting perdition to the house. And eventually in 1648, the house suddenly collapsed leaving 15 dead behind.

Several steps from there and we are in front of the Small Castle, former medieval stronghold and patrician residence. The first written reference dates from the beginning of 14th century,

but the biggest reconstruction to comfortable palace was carried out at the end of 15th century, when the owner of Small Castle was forced to sell it to Jan Smíšek of Vrchoviště. He is said to become illegally rich by secret melting of silver in the premises of the Small Castle, thus stealing from the sovereign. Remarkable interior decorations include an oriel chapel with wall paintings depicting Czech patron saints, evangelists and Jan Smíšek and his wife. The masterpiece of the first floor is the painted early Renaissance coffered ceiling in the big hall. It is lined by a decorative frieze with vegetable motifs and evokes the atmosphere of opulent castle halls. Nowadays the building serves as the Czech museum of silver and as a part of a guided tour there is a possibility of visiting silver mine – the most favourite place of our little guide.

Leaving the depths of the earth, we are approaching to the greatest architectonic jewel of Kutná Hora – St Barbara's cathedral. The gothic chapel started to be built at the end of 14th century, also by Parlér's workshop and finished after 500 years. It is a witness of golden age of the town and its failure as well. Broad-minded plans of five bodies cathedral was not possible to keep because of absence of financial sources and two bodies have never been finished. Mainly the reconstructions of the roof were often very dramatic and they changed the shape of the cathedral very much. Inside the masterpiece of fine arts are fresco decorations of the chapels, depicting religious motifs as well as scenes inspired by mining of silver and minting of coins. Such themes genuinely characterize the atmosphere of medieval Kutná Hora – hard labour, immense wealth and humility materialized in the eternal house of God.

Let's stay in the city centre for some time. He is already very impatient, because we still have not seen many interesting monuments. What about for instance something as important as a source of water? In 1495 the famous architect Mathias Rejsek built a monumental polygonal fountain, nowadays known as the Stone Fountain. It shows the respect of Kutná Hora's inhabitants to the water. A lack of drinking water in the Middle age made people to establish a system of wooden piping conducting the water for the whole town to the Stone Fountain.

Not far from the Stone Fountain there is another gothic jewel – Stone House. The most famous burgher structure dates back to the pre-Hussite period, traces of which are still to be seen in the cellars. In the 1460s, the house went in the hands of the Kroupa family; as Prokop Kroupa became the highest mining official in the town in the 1480s and received the noble title of Chocevice, he decided to rebuild it to a sumptuous patrician residence. The distinct oriel and the triangular gable rank among the masterpieces of Czech Gothic architecture. It is lined by a moulding decorated by a relief with pastoral motifs. Above the moulding there are knights fighting in a tournament to remind of Prokop's nobility. The crest of the miners' guild indicates the source of Prokop's fortune and the municipal coat-of-arms is to emphasize the importance of Kutná Hora.

However we still do not know what does the coat-of-arms of Kutná Hora look like. It formed mostly from the 14th to the 16th century. The crossed mining hammers had been already used on the town seals accompanying all the lists, contracts and juridical texts. Also is known that Kutná Hora had for a long time an exceptional position among the others royal towns, therefore the royal symbols – eagle and lion were put on the coat-of-arms of Kutná

Hora. During the government of Charles IV the imperial crown was added, but in the 2nd half of 15th century it was substituted by the Hussite calix as a symbol of utraquist Church. In the 17th century the coat-of-arms was changed by a privilege of emperor Ferdinand III and the calix was substituted by F III. But in the 19th century we have gone back to the type from 15th century for patriotic reasons.

It is necessary to say that in Kutná Hora there are not only the gothic monuments, but also Baroque ones as well. The mine kobold would like to show you mainly two of them – Plague column and the Church of St John of Nepomuk. Plague column is a work of the Jesuit sculptor František Baugut, the author of statues along Jesuits College, created between 1713 and 1715 as a reaction to plague epidemic that struck Kutná Hora in 1713 and left more than five thousands of victims behind. The top of the column is adorned by the statue of Immaculate Virgin Mary. It is decorated also by work motifs, specifically by sculptures of miners, what is typical for Kutná Hora, as you already know from the previous information. Little bit up from here we can find the Church of St John of Nepomuk, valuable and consistent piece of Baroque architecture with splendid decorations.

And now, your little guide is leading you to **Hotel Opat** and it is a time for some information about its rich history.

Husova Street was a very important and frequent communication of medieval Kutná Hora, connecting the Kouřimská gate, the town hall, markets and the minting zone. In 16th century its importance had risen and it became a centre of merchants and handicraftsmen, because it was an advantageous place for trading and catering sphere of business. The original houses of medieval handicraftsmen having only marginal value were rebuilt in the Renaissance and Baroque style and merged, with shops, taverns and workshops in the ground floor. The social position of their owners had changed as well; with decreasing influence of mining businessmen, they became a chief-branch of town inhabitants and minting was their secondary investment. More and more it was better to invest to purchase of lands and agriculture business than to declining minting. The ownership of land had been for a long time the privilege of noble families; therefore the most successful townsfolk make an effort to get a title. Just like that in this time from minting businessmen became estate owners and founders of small land nobility. To own several houses in the near town, except of a generic countryside mansion, was a part of their lifestyle. These houses were partly inhabited by their owners or they were rented for living or practicing of a trade. Houses N°138 and N°139 met the same destiny.

We do not know the very oldest history of this house, the newer one is written from the 12th century before the arrival of Cistercian monks to Sedlec. In the 14th and 15th century less important houses were here, but in the 16th century we can find many notes about this house in the local chronicle. Firstly the house N°138 was called “Prokšovský”, but in the 15th century it was bought and owned by Hanykýř’s family, who became rich mostly through owing of the black market of silver and copper. By the time they got lands and a title. Their neighbours from N°139 were the members of Materna’s family, whose way to the richness was same: strange business machination, wealth, titles and so on. Nevertheless they could

not escape from human destiny, which is connected and complicated mostly in the little town. Before they were neighbours, "...Vilém Hanykýř found his beautiful wife with Jan Materna...". It was two years after their wedding and Jan Materna had to waive Alžběta Hanykýř in the court. But later Vilém Hanykýř married Hana Materna, a relative of his rival.

But maybe the most known owner of the house N°138 is Anna, the wife of Matyáš Dačický from Heslov, the nephew of one famous personality of Kutná Hora – Mikuláš Dačický from Heslov, whose reputation is immortalised in Kutná Hora history as an important writer and a dedicated Renaissance gourmand, hearty imbiber and womaniser.

Very close to this house an important event of Mikuláš's life had happened: one day he was going with his friends to the local tavern, where he met sir Šťastný Novohradský from Kolovraty, already drunk. He sat down and drank with him, when suddenly sir Šťastný drew a weapon against him and injured him, because Mikuláš Dačický did not take off his hat. Then sir Dačický in self-defence, as he said, killed him. Because of this story Mikuláš Dačický had been judged and kept in prison for several times and it influenced very much the rest of his life. After the death of his wife he changed from the Renaissance debauchee to serious embittered old-man. He died in 1626, when Jesuits came to Kutná Hora and confiscated St Barbara's cathedral.

From the period of Jesuits a legend about friendly patron of the Hanykýř's house has been preserved. The patron is a monk, later the abbot of Sedlec monastery, who was a confessor of Alžběta Maternová, the faithless rich wife of Vilém Hanykýř, the house owner. As her uneasy conscience he has been rambling in the walls of the house and controlling honourability of the inhabitants. Because of it he carries a book, where he notes their acts – good ones and bad ones as well. The good acts are rewarded nice dreams; the bad ones are punished by insomnia.

Let's move back to the hotel's history. As a proof of the ownership by members of high society families can be named broadminded reconstructions at the end of the 18th century and in the 19th century. Despite of them, the hotel has preserved medieval bottom, stonemason components and very nicely decorated ceilings in the Baroque style. In the 19th century and during the communists' era the house fortunately was not destroyed, only the interior was changed to lodging house and the collecting point of raw materials in the ground floor. After the Velvet revolution in 1989, as restitution, it was given back to a descendant of former owners. He started with the project of a hotel and a manufactory and shop with meat products, but this project was not finished. Today's owner bought the house and started the reconstruction to the stylish hotel and restaurant. It was in April 2007. In March 2008 the hotel was given the final appearance - maximum of the original components are left, as they grew together into an indivisible complex now adapted for the new function and utilization as well.

So now the mine kobold says you goodbye and we are happy to say:

Welcome to Hotel Opat in Kutná Hora !