

SPECIAL REPORT: CZECH REPUBLIC NATIONAL DAY

Relationship powers ahead

Trade soars thanks to hi-tech products and diverse cultural and arts mix, writes Wilson Lau

Relations between the Czech Republic and Hong Kong are flourishing, thanks to the growing commercial collaboration, and diverse cultural and arts exchanges. The Czech Republic, a member of the European Union, enjoys increasing turnover derived from its robust trading activities with Hong Kong, says Jaroslav Kanturek, consul general of the Czech Republic in Hong Kong and Macau. "Despite the euro zone economic crisis, the Czech Republic's turnover from its trade with Hong Kong achieved annual increases of more than 10 per cent from 2009 until 2011. The strong growth rate only moderated slightly last year."

The strengthening trade relations are reflected by the standing Hong Kong has achieved among Czech Republic's top trading partners in the Asia-Pacific. "The city ranks as our fourth biggest trading partner, following [the mainland], India and South Korea ... a lot of Czech exports to Hong Kong are re-exported to other countries in the Asia-Pacific," he says.

The Czech Republic has a strong tradition in engineering and advanced technological products. Its main export commodities to Hong Kong include electronics, information technology, semi-finished electrical products, and machinery. Many Czech enterprises also supply costume jewellery and semi-precious gemstone jewellery to the city. Hong Kong exports electronic and electrical products to the Czech Republic mainly. Among

the best-known exports from the Czech Republic are its designer crystal glassware and decorative lighting products. World-renowned for its exquisite artistic designs and premium quality, the crystal and glassware industry has been thriving in the Bohemian region since the 13th century. Two leading crystal glass product specialists – Lasvit and Preciosa – have established their presence with branch offices in Hong Kong. "A lot of the exclusive crystal glass lighting designs decorating five-star hotels and luxurious residences in Hong Kong and across the Asia-Pacific are produced in the Czech Republic," Kanturek notes.

By teaming up with celebrated designers around the world, Czech crystal glassware and lighting designs have scaled new heights in their artistic expression and contemporary aesthetic. "Czech crystal glassware and lighting specialists are relied upon for their superior technical know-how and assurance for top-quality materials and expertise in installations," he adds.

Kanturek believes future trade between the Czech Republic and Hong Kong will grow to include more cutting-edge technological developments. "Czech Republic has had a strong tradition of machinery production and has cultivated a skilled workforce with high professionalism," he says. "The country has been making the transition into hi-tech research and development in recent years. "We are making significant



Charles Bridge, a pedestrian zone separating Prague Castle and the Old Town, straddles the River Vltava.

strides in nanotechnology. There are joint ventures [focusing on nanotechnology] between companies in the Czech Republic and China and the United States.

"We are also growing our expertise in the ecological technology sector, particularly in water treatment and waste management. Czech companies have showcased

their latest technologies in several environmental technologies fairs in Asia. Czech companies are also developing solutions for alternative energy."

Czech Republic shares its rich artistic and cultural heritage with Hong Kong. There are active exchanges between the country and Hong Kong in music, visual art, cinema and literature. Among these art forms, classical music is the first and foremost, thanks to the immense popularity of such composers as Antonin Dvorak. He notes that many top Czech musicians perform in Hong Kong. "I am proud to see that leading orchestras in Hong Kong, such as the Hong Kong Philharmonic, regularly feature works by Czech composers in their repertoires."

The Czech Philharmonic, one of the world's leading orchestras, last performed in Macau in 2011. It will give two concerts in Hong Kong in 2014 as part of its Greater China tour.

Internationally famed mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kozena will perform in the city next month.

As part of the "Lasting Legacies of Eastern Europe" cultural festival, a satire by former president of the Czech Republic and well-known dissident and playwright, the

late Vaclav Havel, will be staged. There will also be screenings of two films representative of the New Wave cinema of the country in the 1960s, when it was known as Czechoslovakia. The festival, staged by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, continues until mid-November.

Meanwhile, educational collaboration between the Czech Republic and Hong Kong is also flourishing. "We have recorded a 25 per cent annual increase in the number of students enrolled in exchange programmes organised by universities in both places," Kanturek says. Students from Hong Kong attend programmes in international relations, business and journalism at the Prague School of Economics, Charles University in Prague (established in 1348 and the oldest university in central Europe), and the Brno University of Technology in the second city of Brno.

"Czech students enrol in similar programmes in six universities in Hong Kong," he says. "They enjoy the city's vibrancy."



The 'Dancing House' in Prague stands out among historical buildings.

Czech Republic
Land of Stories

If you only knew
that there is an oasis of Baroque art in the Czech Republic, you could already be exploring it.

In the midst of the countryside, far from civilization, you will find a small oasis of land which one man turned into a renowned spa centuries ago. Strolling through the tranquil garden here today, it is hard to believe that it once was the site of boisterous celebrations of virtue and vice. The fountains here used to flow with wine, but it took only one night for a terrible flood to wash away this lifestyle forever. A testament to the former glory of Kuks is the extensive open-air gallery of Baroque sculptures, which continues in the surrounding woods. The forest rocks, transformed into colossal sculptures, still exude a healing energy.

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MESSAGE

Today, we are celebrating the Czech Republic's National Day, commemorating the 95th anniversary of Czechoslovak independence and the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Czech Republic.



The Czech Republic is a young country with a rich history and old tradition. As late as at the beginning of the 20th century, the Czech lands were still a part of the Habsburg Empire, with the country only declaring its independence in 1918.

Thirty years later, following the end of the second world war, Czechoslovakia became a communist country and a part of the Soviet bloc. The short period of liberalisation under the reform communists in the 1960s, known as the Prague Spring, was crushed by a Soviet invasion in August 1968, resulting in the country remaining under Soviet influence. The communist regime eventually resigned in November 1989 after a week of demonstrations known as the velvet revolution.

Subsequently, the popular dissident and dramatist Vaclav Havel was elected president. In 1993, the former Czechoslovakia peacefully split into two countries – the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The history of the past 20 years is also an excellent example of the European integration process, highlighted by the fact that the Czech Republic will also be celebrating its 10th anniversary of joining the European Union next year.

Regardless of the Czech Republic's economy being one heavily dependent on external factors, it has managed to achieve an increase in GDP by more than 2 per cent in the past two terms,

maintaining financial stability. The country continues to see the ongoing crisis as an opportunity to diversify its highly Europe-g geared economy, consequently innovating and enhancing its competitiveness. Czech exports to Asia and Hong Kong have grown by more than 30 per cent during past three years.

Moreover, increasing numbers of students annually partake in various university exchange programmes, while Czech culture is regularly presented at a variety of Hong Kong festivals. The beautiful historical city of Prague, alongside other regions of the country, remains a popular tourist destination for Hong Kong visitors.

Consequently, the Czech Tourist Authority decided to set up a new CzechTourism branch office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific region in Hong Kong – a promising sign for future growth in tourist numbers.

It is my great pleasure to extend, on this festive occasion, warm greetings and best wishes to the Czech community in Hong Kong and Macau.

Jaroslav Kanturek
Consul General of the Czech Republic in Hong Kong and Macau



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