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A Hidden Gem On the 49th Parallel

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The city of Prešov is the third largest city in Slovakia. It is the only city in Slovakia through which the 49th parallel passes. Prešov is a city of many epithets, e.g. Athens on the Torysa, The Slovak Seattle, or Little Vienna, but the people are what make this city so beautiful. Together, let us wander through the old alleys, squares and old parks, breathing in the rich history of this city while we think back

to the fateful events of centuries past. We can explore the historical centre, enjoy a refreshing cup of coffee right in the city square, or sip on hot mead at the Christmas market under romantic street lights. In any season of the year, the atmosphere in Prešov breathes friendliness and relaxation, since Prešov offers numerous leisure opportunities not only right in the centre, but also in the surroundings

and the wider area. I believe our city will find a place in your hearts. I am looking forward to seeing you soon!

Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

Some facts about Prešov

The city of Prešov lies on a territory between 49 degrees latitude and 21.15 degrees longitude with an elevation of 296 meters. The

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*The Co-Cathedral of Saint Nicholas on the main square in historic core of Prešov.
Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD*

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Hidden Gem On the 49th Parallel...

cont. from front cover

49th parallel crosses the city in the middle of the main square. It spreads over both banks of the rivers Torysa and Sekčov, at the northern tip of the Košice Basin surrounded by the Slanské Mountains and the Šariš Highlands. The city of Prešov, including its adjacent territories, has more than 100,000 inhabitants who live on a territory of 125 square kilometers. Prešov became the natural centre of the Šariš region as early as the Middle Ages. After the origination of the Slovak Republic in 1993 and the subsequent new administrative organisation, the city became the centre of both the district of Prešov and the Prešov Region. The Prešov Region is the largest of the eight regions of Slovakia. Home to many county and regional self government offices, regional court and prosecutor's office in addition to some universities and high schools. Prešov is also significant in terms of ecclesiastical administration as it is the main centre of Slovakia's Greek-Catholic Archdiocese, covering all parishes with the exception of those of the Košice region. Prešov is also the seat of the District Bishopric for the Eastern district of the Evangelical Church in Slovakia, covering the eastern and northern parts of the country. In addition, it is home to one of only 15 Orthodox churches in the world, which covers both Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Prešov highlights

- Prešov is one of the oldest royal towns in Slovakia and is the historical centre of the Šariš Region
 - With 254 historical monuments, Prešov's historical centre has been registered as an Urban Conservation Area since 1950
 - Prešov is a town where western and eastern cultures overlap in symbiosis
 - Prešov is home to a unique Salt-works, a complex of buildings used for salt mining dating back to the 16th century
 - The 49th parallel of north latitude runs through Prešov (similarly to Paris, Regensburg, Karlsruhe, České Budějovice and many other towns)
 - Prešov was the second Slovak city (after Bratislava) where electric trolleybuses started to run (1962)
 - Prešov was the capital of the Slovak Republic (1918) and the Slovak Soviet Republic (1919)
 - Prešov owns the official replica of the Shroud of Turin
- Ján Adam Rayman, who lived in Prešov, was the first person in Europe who used vaccines against smallpox (1720)
 - In Prešov, for the first time in the Kingdom of Hungary was produced a sugar from sugar beet (1802)
 - In 1859 was built in Prešov a famous state horse stud farm
 - The first meteorological measurements in Slovakia were performed in Prešov
 - The first Jewish museum in Slovakia was founded in Prešov
 - In Prešov the first Masonic lodge in Slovakia was founded in 1769
 - The first official football game in Slovakia was played in Prešov (25th May 1898). On this day, the first football club in Slovakia was also founded
 - In 1878 Karol Divald established the first collotype printing in the Kingdom of Hungary
 - In the 1920's were published in Prešov 25 Slovak, 11 Hungarian, 3 German, 3 Ukrainian and 3 Russian newspapers
 - Prešov simply has a pleasant, remarkable and unique atmosphere

HERE ARE THE TOP 10 TOURIST SITES IN PREŠOV FROM MY PERSPECTIVE:

The Co-cathedral of Saint Nicholas

(Photo is on the front cover). It is one of the most important historical buildings in Prešov. It is the oldest and the only preserved Gothic sacral building in the city. The church is a Gothic structure with three naves; it is a hall-type church, common mainly in German areas. In the past, it was considered one of the most sophisticated hall-type churches in the former Kingdom of Hungary. When compared with the structures of the same type in Slovakia, by its size, it is third largest after St. Jakob's Church in Levoča and St. Martin's Cathedral in Bratislava. Its origin dates back to the period before Prešov was granted town privileges, and probably as early as in the 13th century a church of the German settlement stood at that place. The construction of the church dates back to 1347, when Queen Elizabeth allowed Prešov's people to break stones in the Šariš area for this purpose. The church burned down six times, last time in 1887. It served as a Catholic parish church until 1531, when most townsmen and priests accepted Luther's teaching. Over the next 140 years, it served as an

evangelical temple of the German nationality citizens. After the Habsburg army occupied the city in 1671, the church was made Catholic; during Imrich Tököly's revolt in 1682-1686, it was made evangelical again. During Franz II Rákoci rebellion in 1705-1711, it served as a German evangelical temple for the last time. From then on, it has been the Roman Catholic parish church. The church originally had 12 Gothic altars. Most have been destroyed in fires, especially as a result of religious struggles during the anti-Habsburg uprisings. Out of the Gothic objects that have survived, the following are extraordinarily valuable: the sculpture of the Crucified from the first half of the 14th century, the statue of Suffering Christ by Master Paul of Levoča, and the Archangel Gabriel's sculpture from the 15th century that was exhibited at the World Show in Vienna in 1873. In 2008, the parish church of St. Nicholas was elevated to the status of co-cathedral. From the church tower you will have a unique view of the historical plaza of Prešov, of the roofs of the feudal town houses and of the surrounding region. The tower at the Co-cathedral of St. Nicholas is open daily during the summer season for both groups of visitors and individuals. If your group plans a visit out of season, try contacting the Parish Office.

College ("Collegium") with a vaulted covered corridor. The church burned down several times. From the original interior of the church, some Renaissance benches from the end of the 17th century and late-Baroque stools from the last third of the 18th century survived. The organ from 1642 is one of the most spectacular Baroque relics of Prešov. One of the blankets decorated with the thistle theme, exhibited at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900, dates back to the 18th century. The dominant feature of the church is the altar built in the Classicist style in 1865. In the middle is a painting of Jesus with Samaritan woman. The original painting was painted by Karol Brocký, a court painter of British Queen Victoria. Beneath the left-hand staircase is a side crypt with the remains of four victims of Prešov bloody court in 1687. In the church crypt are remains of 17 Jesuit monks and superior who were buried there during the 18th century. The church and the neighboring Evangelical College, both serve as a chronicle of the history of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. For full 89 years, Jesuits used the place; after the order was abolished, the church and the Collegium were put into public auction, and in the 18th century, the Evangelicals succeeded in obtaining (buying) it back.

Church of the Holy Trinity



Church of the Holy Trinity also located in the main square of Prešov. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

It is a Renaissance church, one of few Protestant churches built during the Reformation. Both the Evangelicals and the Calvinists mostly used older Gothic, formerly Catholic, churches, and only exceptionally built new ones. The foundation stone was officially laid on July 25, 1642. For several years, the church was connected with the southern wing of the Evangelical

Cathedral of St. John the Baptist



The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

In the first half of the 14th century, on the southern outskirts of Prešov, a town hospital was built; in the very same century, a small chapel was added to the building. A century later, in 1429, a new hospital church, consecrated to the Virgin Mary, was built there. In its neighborhood were a hospital and an old people's home. After the reformation, the hospital church became the

Evangelical Church of the Slovak population of Prešov. After the order of Leopold I, in 1673, the church was relayed to the Order of Friars Minor (Minorites) who came to Prešov in the same year. Besides the church, the Minorites came into possession of a hospital, too. In the 17th century, the church was connected with the Minorite monastery; in the 18th century, it was reconstructed in a Baroque style, and it has remained so until now. In 1757, four larger frescoes portraying St. John the Baptist's life were made. To this day, they are preserved on the church nave ceiling. Since 1818, the church has belonged to the Greek Catholic Bishopric. In the northern chapel, in front of the altar is a sarcophagus with the remains of Bishop Peter Paul Gojditz. His remains were laid in the sarcophagus upon his beatification in 2001. On the northern wall of the cathedral, protected by a glass shield, is attached a copy of the Turin Canvas which Prešov's Cathedral received as a gift from the Archbishop of Torino, Italy in 2003. This is a facsimile that was made only in four specimens. In the 1950s, when the Greek-Catholic Church was abolished in Czechoslovakia, the church was given to the Orthodox Church. The Greek-Catholic Church received it back in 1968, after the re-establishment of the Greek-Catholic Church. Undoubtedly, the most significant event in the history of the cathedral was the visit of Pope John Paul II on July 2, 1995.

Orthodox Synagogue



The Orthodox Synagogue built in 1898 in Moorish style. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

Today, this is the city's only functioning synagogue. It was built in 1898 according to a synagogue project in the city of Tokaj as a sacred building in Moorish style with several Oriental elements. Inside, particularly valuable are the lectern ('almemor') and the Holy Ark

('aron hakodesch'). The entire interior is adorned with beautiful ornamental paintings, which, despite the considerable damage to the building and without thorough reconstruction, have preserved their original richness, distinctiveness, and shape. The Synagogue had served its function until 1942. In the spring and summer of that year, the synagogue and the adjoining area were the place where Prešov's Jews were assembled just before the deportation. From here, several thousand citizens of the city were transported to concentration camps. During the occupation of Prešov, the German Army established stables and garages in the synagogue. After the necessary repairs and replenishment of the indoor unit, it was officially consecrated in October 1948. Being the most beautiful functioning synagogue in Slovakia, between 1989 and 1990, Jews of Los Angeles attempted to get it in possession and transfer it to the US, however unsuccessfully. In August 1991, in the presence of the highest Slovak officials, a monument to more than six thousand Holocaust victims from Prešov and the surrounding area was revealed in the courtyard at the entrance to the synagogue.

St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral



The St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Prešov, Slovakia. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

This church is the main cathedral of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Slovakia. The Eastern Orthodox Church is a minority religion in Slovakia. According to the last statistics, about 0.9% of the population of Slovakia claims the membership. Orthodox believers live mainly in the eastern part of the country. The history of the Orthodox Church in Slovakia is not old. Orthodox believers grew in number especially after the establishment of Czechoslovakia by converting from the Greek-Catholic

Church after 1950. The construction of the church in Prešov started in 1946 and was completed in 1950. On 11 February 1950, it was sanctified with the blessing of the Prague metropolitan bishop Jeleverij archimandrite Andrej. The church is built in the spirit of the Orthodox Russian architecture traditions. It is decorated with five bulbous domes that resemble the typical architecture of the old Czarist Russia. It is devoted to the Prince Saint Alexander Nevsky, whom the Orthodox Church regards as the guardian of Orthodoxy. The dominant feature of the interior is a two-dimensional wooden iconostasis separating the church nave from the altar. The spiral Bell Tower was built between 1969 and 1970. In 2004, the church was expanded and rebuilt into a richly structured sacral building.

Evangelical College



Prešov Evangelical College. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

It is one of the most important educational institutions and certainly the most important memory of Protestant education in Slovakia. Prešov Evangelical College was founded as a counterweight to the Jesuit University in Trnava; it was decided by Upper Hungary Protestant representatives at a meeting in Košice on November 18, 1665. The construction was financially supported by Upper-Western Protestant barons, country gentlemen, the free royal city, as well as the Swedish king, Transylvanians, and some German princes. From the beginning, several important teachers from all over Hungary and from abroad taught there. Thanks to the notable figures as well as modern teaching methods, the college reached such a level that the representatives considered its transforming into an evangelical university. In its history, of great importance is the year of 1815 when law started to be lectured there. In the first half of the 19th century, the Collegium had become

one of the most important higher education schools in the whole Kingdom of Hungary. Among his students were many prominent figures such as Imrich Tököli – the leader of the anti-Habsburg revolt, Jakub Bogdani – a famous Baroque English painter, politicians and culture figures such as Michal Miloslav Hodža, Jonash Záborský, Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav, Lajosh Kossuth, Janko Jesenský, Arisztid Dessewffy – the 1848/1849 Revolution General, František Pulsky – a politician and archeologist, and others. The most beautiful room inside the building is the auditorium. It houses college library historical collections, and contains more than 40,000 book volumes. In 1908, in the northwest corner of the building, a memorial to 1687 Caraffa's bloody court victims was built, along with a memorial plaque with the names of the executed. At this monument, on July 2, 1995, during his visit to Prešov, Pope John Paul II worshiped the memory of the martyrs of Prešov. After renovating the interior of the college, the building began to serve the Episcopal seat of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the spring of 1998.

Bosák's House



An art nouveau building built in 1923-24 for the purpose of a bank named after Michal Bosák, an American-Slovak. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

Between 1923 and 1924, on the corner of Hlavná and Levočská streets, an Art Nouveau building was built with the intention to serve as a financial institution. On the corners of the building, little roofed domes are placed. On the front façade is sculpted decoration called Calmness and Love, Affluence, Thriftiness, and Science. On the back wing seen from today's Levočská Street is an allegory of four seasons; below, a steamship, steam locomotive, and aircraft are sculpted in relief. The building was named after Michal Bosák,

a Slovak emigrant from Okružle, a nearby village of Prešov, who, in a short time, rose to become one of the leading American bankers. He owned several banks in the USA, and was a member of the board of directors of several banks, e.g. Bank of Europe in New York or First National Bank in Olyphant. His signature can be even found on a US ten-dollar bill that the US government allowed his bank to issue. Furthermore, on May 30, 1918, Michal Bosák signed the Pittsburgh Agreement, according to which Slovakia should have an autonomous status in future Czechoslovakia. In 1920, he founded the American-Slovak Bank in Bratislava; it had 9 branches, and one of them was in Prešov. At present, the building houses Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav Regional Library.



A couple standing on either side of the 49th Parallel that runs through the center of Prešov. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

49th parallel

Prešov is the only Slovak city through which the 49th parallel runs, measuring 26,263 km. Other cities that this parallel cross include České Budějovice, Regensburg, Karlsruhe, Chalons-en-Champagne, the suburban Paris area Roissy with Charles de Gaulle Airport, and the town of Sarcelles. After leaving the European continent, it continues to the Canadian island of Newfoundland and crosses the town of Gander. In Canada, the parallel immerses into Lake of the Woods, and in the length of 2000 km it forms the Canadian-US border up to the Pacific coastline at Vancouver. After crossing the Pacific Ocean, it reaches the northern part of the Kuril Islands; then it continues through the Sea of Okhotsk, the southern part of Sachalin Island and

the Strait of Tartary; then it passes through the Russian city of Sovetskaja Gavan and the city of Birakan in the Jewish Autonomous Region of Russia. After crossing the Amur River, it moves first across China and then continues to Mongolia, specifically to the towns of Erdénet and Olgij. At the intersection with Kazakhstan, over 4,000-meter-high Altaj mountain barrier is overtaken. After a long journey through Kazakhstan, it returns to Russia and continues to Europe again. At Dubovka, north of Volgograd, it crosses the Volga River and enters Ukraine at the towns of Severodoneck, Rubizne, Komsomolsk, and Kalush. It returns to Slovakia, to Prešov, along the northern part of Snina.



Solivar, a district of present-day Prešov that was site of a salt spring. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

Solivar (literally Saltern in English)

Nowadays, Solivar is a Prešov district that came into being in the area of salt springs, from which the salt was extracted by evaporation. This was the primary way of obtaining this important raw material. The unique complex for salt extraction from brine dates back to the 17th century, although salt mining as such began in the 16th century. In 1571, this salt mine, as the first of its kind in the territory of Slovakia, started to extract rock salt. Later, salt was again produced by being boiled from brine. This technology gradually improved and advanced. The list of sites includes Leopold shaft, brine reservoirs, salt works, a brewery, a salt warehouse, blacksmith rooms, and a flap bar. Mining took place in the Leopold “hole”, also called Imperial, which reaches a depth of up to 155 meters. After almost a century of mining, a building with ditches and capstans (*gápel'*) was built over it to carry the extracted salt to the surface. After the hole (shaft) was flooded, the salt was extracted from brine

that was pumped into leather bottles with the help of horses. The building with ditches and capstans was one of the largest in Central Europe. Wooden bins for extracted brine were built in 1815 and allowed to store up to 10,560 hectoliters of rare raw material. The tanks stood on stone bases under shelters and the brine was transported into them by wooden pipes from sludge tanks. From these tanks, salt brine passed into preheating tank, then into the evaporation tank, and subsequently to the guttering chambers and the drying house. From there, crystalline salt was transported to the warehouse by rail and dispatched. The construction of the main salt warehouse was completed around 1825. Salt spa, a machinery room, a carriage house, and other buildings were also on the site. In 1970, Solivar, as a unique complex of technical objects for extracting and cooking salt from brine, was declared a national cultural sight. In 1986, the salt warehouse burned down. Almost 30 years later, the building was renovated, and since September 2015 its premises have served not only for the exhibition of salt mining but also for other exhibitions, presentations, as venues of congresses or educational activities. Solivar is one of the most important technical sights in Slovakia.



The Prešov Town Hall, on the list of National Cultural Sites. Photo courtesy of Branislav A. Švorc, PhD.

Town hall

The Town Hall of the medieval Prešov stood originally elsewhere. It was a detached two-storey stone building built in the place of today's park with a Red Army

monument. During the 17th century, the authorities left it for unknown reasons (probably due to the damage caused by fires) and moved to the building that serves this purpose to this day. It is not known what the original town hall looked like; the only remnant is the stone municipal coat of arms from the first half of the 16th century, secondarily placed in the portal of the later town hall. The new building was a magnificent burgher house in the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the 16th century, it was rebuilt to a wine cellar and served this purpose for almost two centuries. From the Gothic period, only some fragments in the interior, the portal, and the late Gothic window/door lining were preserved. In the second half of the 16th century, the wine-house was extended by the annex above the street passage, connecting two squares of the plaza; it was decorated in the renaissance style. The interiors were rounded by Renaissance vaults and finished with elaborate Attica style. Thorough reconstruction took place after the fire in 1768. It was finished in 1788, in a late-Baroque style with typical high-rise front windows and a balcony. The last reconstruction took place after the big fire in 1887, during which the second floor was built. In the more recent history, the Town Hall left an imprint in 1919. On June 16, 1919, after the occupation of the town and a large part of Eastern Slovakia by the Hungarian Red Army, the town hall balcony was the scene of proclaiming the Slovak Soviet Republic. Between 1945 and 1990, the building was the seat of the City National Committee; after 1990, it has been the seat of the Municipal Authority. In 1961, the town hall was entered in the list of national cultural sites.

About the Author:

Branislav A. Švorc, PhD was born in 1987. Dr. Branislav fell in love with Prešov during his university studies of geography (MA) and later tourism management (PhD.). He works for Prešov Town Hall as a tourism representative and he is responsible for tourism development in the city. He is author of popular audio guide and many useful travel brochures and travel guides in Prešov. He will be glad to show you the city and its surroundings from his perspective.