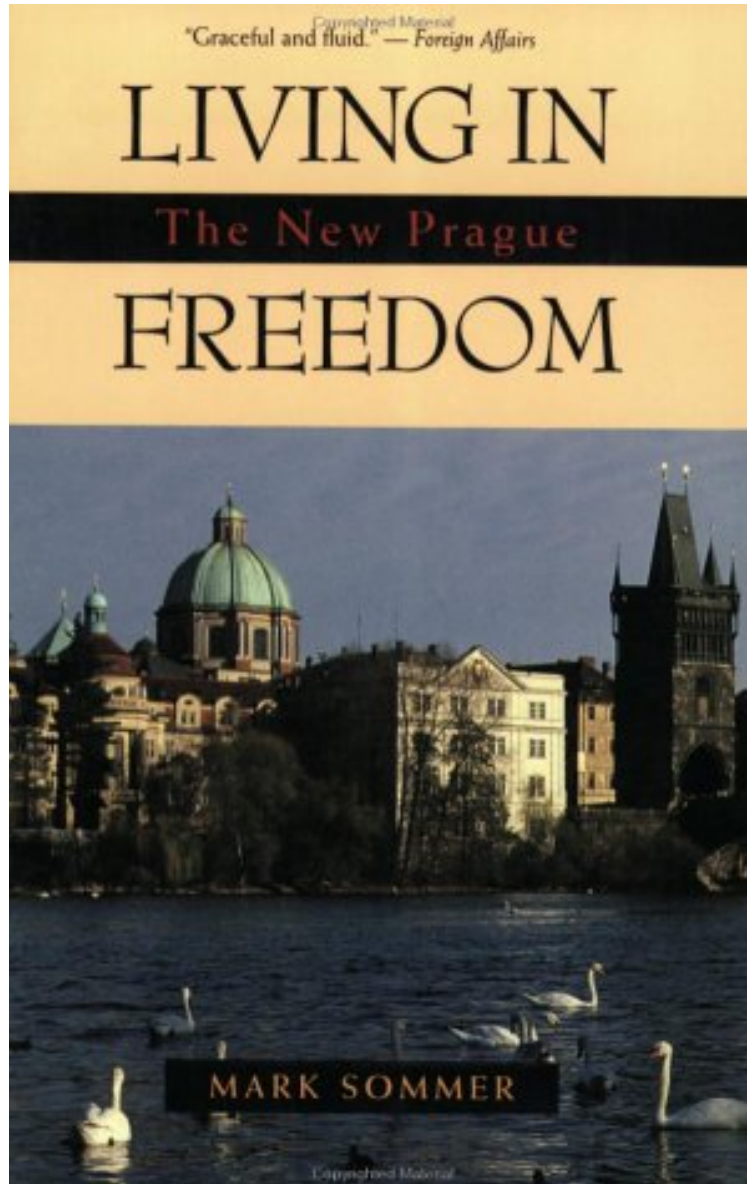


[Free] Living in Freedom: The New Prague

Living in Freedom: The New Prague

Mark Sommer

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Mark Sommer : Living in Freedom: The New Prague before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Living in Freedom: The New Prague:

A fascinating tale of three journeys to Czechoslovakia at pivotal moments in its recent history. Sommer believes that

Czechoslovakia offers an object lesson to the West--as the East struggles toward freedom, the West stumbles into the temptation of curtailing its own liberties in the illusory hope of shielding itself from the disorder of unpredictable change.

From Publishers Weekly "Some of us . . . have been searching vainly for an alternative to both totalitarian communism and corporate capitalism," bemoans Sommer, who has journeyed three times to Czechoslovakia--1983, 1990, 1991--and briefly to Russia during his second trip to Eastern Europe. "You wanted us to be wonderful," observes an astute Czech to the obviously disappointed author and his wife Sandi, self-described dropouts and organic farmers in Northern California. On the couple's initial trip to Prague all was sullen and oppressive; in 1990 the Czechs were in a mood of euphoria; spring of 1991 found them again oppressed, this time by the shadow side of democracy: unemployment, crime, self-responsibility and loss of security. Winning "freedom from" also inflicted "freedom to" on a populace once assured jobs and housing by the State but now about to be ruled by market forces. "It was a kind of sweet life," reminisces a one-time dissident about the pre-velvet revolution days; "If we could just remove the disagreeable parts and keep the old way of living," this from another Czech. By turns naive and telling, this book will be informative mainly to those who haven't closely followed events in Eastern Europe; Sommer despairs that the Czechs, who never achieved socialism with a human face, will not accomplish capitalism with compassion, either. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal In this engaging account of visits made to Czechoslovakia in 1983, 1990, and 1991, Sommer reports on the enormous political and cultural changes in the country, as seen through the eyes of its own citizens, and contrasts the optimistic Czech mood with some rather bleak observations from Russia in the spring of 1990. Concerned with understanding both the "attractions and complications of freedom," Sommer talked with a wide range of average people and some government officials and also engaged in random conversations that gave him revealing insights into the daily life of Czechoslovakia. He effectively patterned his approach after that of de Tocqueville when he visited America in the 1830s. In spite of his realization that "all across the East today, the tyranny of the state is being replaced by the tyranny of the marketplace," Sommer is encouraged about the future of democracy in Czechoslovakia. His book--part travelog, part philosophical reflection--is a worthy addition to the growing shelf of literature on the future of Eastern Europe.- Thomas A. Karel, Franklin Marshall Coll. Lib., Lancaster, Pa. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.