

SAFEABROAD



**SITUATION REPORT**

December 29, 2023

# Charles University Shooting

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT TRAVELERS IN PRAGUE

SAFEABROAD.COM

## Overview

---

On December 21, a mass shooter opened fire at the Faculty of Arts building of Charles University in central Prague, Czech Republic, killing 15 and wounding 25.<sup>1</sup> Three foreign nationals were injured in the attack – two from the United Arab Emirates and one from the Netherlands. At the time of this writing, there is no indication that any American travelers were among the casualties. Expect an increased prevalence of demonstrations, such as vigils for victims, related to the shooting and heightened security on the Charles University campus and in the surrounding areas in the wake of the shooting.

## Key Takeaways

---

1. **Charles University is a top destination for university students studying abroad, and the school puts a great emphasis on international mobility and education abroad.** Charles University hosts over 9,000 international students annually, making it one of Europe's most popular study abroad destinations. It is the singular most frequented destination for university students from abroad taking part in the EU's Erasmus student exchange programme.<sup>2</sup> The biggest and oldest program offered by the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), a U.S.-based international education exchange organization, is Central European Studies, which is deeply intertwined with Charles University.<sup>3</sup>
2. **Czech National Police have announced increased security presence and preventative measures across the country, especially at schools.** Although it is not clear how long the heightened security measures will last, police have specified that there is no current credible threat.<sup>4</sup> While there have been few lasting disruptions otherwise, Prague has canceled New Year's fireworks displays and the Czech Interior Minister has recommended all towns and villages to do the same in light of the massacre.<sup>5</sup>
3. **Widespread unease persists nationwide amid concerns about potential copycat incidents.** Despite the unlikelihood of a copycat event, an increase in disturbing rhetoric regarding the incident including expressions of approval and declarations of intent to replicate such actions have contributed to a sense of general unease in Czech society.

## Incident Details

---

**At roughly 3:00 PM on December 21, 24-year-old David Kozák opened fire in the Faculty of Arts building across from Jan Palach Square at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. Kozák killed 15, including himself, and wounded 25 others in the shooting.**

At approximately 12:30 PM, authorities received a tip about Kozák before the incident from a friend claiming that they had received concerning messages from him regarding wanting to take

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/22/prague-university-shooting-what-we-know-the-day-after>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cuni.cz/UKEN-316.html>

<sup>3</sup>

<https://english.radio.cz/czech-republic-increasingly-popular-study-abroad-destination-us-students-8201775>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/prague-shooting-czech-charles-university-rcna130889>

<sup>5</sup>

<https://english.radio.cz/prague-city-hall-offers-free-admission-some-sites-place-fireworks-or-video-8804181>

his own life and was now not responding to calls.<sup>6</sup> Police had no information indicating that the shooter was a threat to anyone other than himself, therefore only began evacuations an hour after he had been determined by Prague Police to be armed. Despite there being multiple buildings for the Arts program at the University, police only evacuated the building where Kozák's upcoming 2 PM lecture was located before the shooting began.



Police first received reports of gunfire at 2:59 PM in the main faculty building at Jan Palach Square. Within 20 minutes, police had cornered the shooter on the rooftop of the building, who then took his own life before he could be apprehended by authorities. The victims consisted of students and university staff, two of which were Saudi Nationals, and another of which was a Dutch National.

The Erasmus Programme is a European Union student exchange programme established in 1987 that aids over 300,000 students and faculty travel abroad annually.<sup>7</sup> Charles University continues to be the most popular destination for university students taking part in the Erasmus Programme, with most travelers studying under the Faculties of Arts and Law.

Czech authorities have reported that at least four people have been arrested for making copycat threats since the incident.<sup>8</sup> On Christmas day alone, 7 people were investigated for reasons ranging from making direct threats to glorifying the shooting.<sup>9</sup> Police have claimed to be monitoring at least 60 social media posts regarding the event. In addition, a man was arrested for claiming he intended to do “what happened in Prague;” however, it is not entirely clear that any real plan existed.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67802094>

<sup>7</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/statistics-and-factsheets>

<sup>8</sup> <https://today.rtl.lu/news/world/a/2151388.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/2023/12/27/czech-police-chase-copycat-threats-after-prague-shooting/>

The Czech Republic has relatively lax gun laws compared to the rest of the European Union; however, experiences very few shooting-related incidents per year. The Czech Interior Minister reported that stricter gun law reforms were already being discussed in Parliament before the incident. Previously, the worst mass shooting in the Czech Republic was a shooting in the southeastern town of Uhersky Brod in 2015, killing nine, including the gunman himself.<sup>10</sup> More recently, in 2019, an active shooter killed eight people at the Ostrava University Hospital, including himself.<sup>11</sup>

This active shooter incident is the deadliest mass murder event in the Czech Republic since World War II and had one of the largest death tolls of any mass shooting by a lone gunman in Europe this century.<sup>12</sup>

### Implications for International Education

**SafeAbroad Analysts predict that Prague's risk level has not been elevated in light of this incident. The shooting was the result of a lone gunman who did not claim allegiance to any cause or group, and related events are unlikely. Czech police remain incredibly vigilant, investigating copycat threats and taking preventative measures to avoid further violence.**

Travelers to the Czech Republic should continue to expect heightened security measures in and around Charles University and other major Czech institutions in the foreseeable future.

**Safety Concerns | Major incidents such as the recent mass shooting inevitably give rise to widespread safety concerns among travelers.** The implications of such events extend beyond the immediate impact, influencing the travel experience for those planning journeys to or residing within the affected region. Beyond the physical safety considerations, the emotional impact on travelers is profound. The compromised confidence in the safety of their travels can prompt travelers to reconsider their travel plans. This might involve modifying itineraries, opting for alternative destinations, or even postponing or canceling trips altogether. Travelers may actively seek information on enhanced safety measures implemented by travel providers, accommodation establishments, and public spaces.

- Regularly check reliable news sources and official channels for updates on the security situation in the affected area. Stay informed about any travel advisories or safety measures implemented by local authorities.
- Take advantage of support services provided by both home institutions and Charles University,<sup>13</sup> local authorities, and travel assistance programs including emergency hotlines and informational resources.
- Travelers should register their travel with the U.S. State Department STEP system to receive emergency alerts. Keep family, friends, and university contacts informed about your travel plans and itinerary. Establishing a communication plan ensures that aid can be provided as necessary regardless of travelers' whereabouts.
- Travelers should familiarize themselves with emergency procedures and contact

<sup>10</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/prague-shooting-dead-injured-9a383bc6919c1b0d929cf06aa4818341>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50725840>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67830858>

<sup>13</sup> <https://cuni.cz/UKEN-1913.html>

information for local authorities. Take all threats related to the incident or copycat attacks seriously, online or in person, and report them to the police.

**Perception of Host Country and Institution | The aftermath of a mass shooting carries significant implications for the perception of the Czech Republic and Charles University, especially among international students.** International students, already navigating the challenges of studying abroad, may develop a negative perception of their host country following a major incident such as the recent mass shooting. This perception, influenced by safety concerns, could deter future students from choosing the country as a study destination. This is particularly critical for a prestigious institution like Charles University that has historically attracted a diverse international student body. This decline could have academic, cultural, and economic repercussions for both the university and the Czech Republic as a whole. Beyond the academic sphere, the local tourism industry faces challenges as a result of decreased visitor numbers; businesses and livelihoods reliant on tourism may experience economic hardship.

- Stay informed about safety measures and improvements implemented by the university and local authorities. Engage with campus resources to stay updated on support mechanisms and to address any concerns.
- Actively participate in community-building initiatives organized by the university. This can include cultural exchange programs, international student forums, and events that promote positive interactions between local and international communities.
- Participate in discussions about safety improvements and contribute constructive ideas to enhance security on campus. Traveler input can be valuable in shaping policies that address the concerns of the international student community.

**Academics and Policy Changes | The aftermath of the mass shooting has prompted immediate changes at Charles University; however, the implications for travelers extend beyond the initial response and may shape the academic environment in the weeks and months to come.** While classes were canceled for the week following the shooting and security measures were tightened immediately after the incident, there is potential for continued disruptions to academic activities. Travelers may face further delays or cancellations of classes and exams, impacting their academic progress and creating additional stress. Both home universities and Charles University will likely implement robust strategies for academic support in response to these challenges, which may involve providing flexible academic accommodations, additional counseling services, and communication channels to address the specific needs of affected students.

- Regularly check official university communications for updates on academic activities, policy changes, and security measures. Stay informed about any adjustments to the academic calendar and any additional support services being offered. Participate in discussions or feedback mechanisms where students can advocate for their needs and concerns regarding academic and policy changes.
- Establish open lines of communication with university authorities. For concerns or questions about academic changes, security measures, or support services, reach out to relevant university departments for clarification and assistance.
- Explore options for flexibility in academic plans. Understand any alternative arrangements or accommodations being offered to students affected by disruptions.

**Mental Health Impact | Individuals who witnessed or were otherwise affected by the recent**

**mass shooting at Charles University in Prague may grapple with profound mental health repercussions.** This is especially pertinent for international students, who are already far removed from the familiar support systems of their home countries. A traumatic incident like a mass shooting can exacerbate feelings of isolation and culture shock, making it harder to integrate into the community. Fear and anxiety stemming from the incident might lead to temporary social withdrawal among some travelers, and they might hesitate to engage in social activities or form connections, impacting their overall experience of studying abroad.

- Seek mental health support, either from on-campus counseling services, local mental health professionals, or trusted friends and family.
- Join support groups or community forums where individuals can share their experiences and feelings with others who may be going through similar challenges.
- Self-care practices including exercise, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques, can help manage feelings of stress and anxiety.

