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Film screening and discussion: Citizen Vaclav Havel Goes on Vacation

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This 90-minute documentary recreates a trip around Czechoslovakia that its future president Vaclav Havel took in 1985 when he was still the country's most prominent dissident. In the course of one week, he was twice thrown into jail for 48 hours of preventive detention and followed by over 300 plainclothed policemen, who would helpfully point out to him the right way whenever he got lost. Contrasted with the authentic Czech TV news of the period (the harvest was going swimmingly), the stories of Havel and his dissident hosts show that you can live a great life even under the staggering pressure of a totalitarian juggernaut.

JAN NOVAK is the co-author and co-producer of Citizen Vaclav Havel Goes on Vacation. He was born in the Czech Republic and emigrated to the United States at the age of 17. He was educated at the University of Chicago and has been making his living as a writer. Most recently he was awarded the Czech Republic's most prestigious prize, the Magnesia Litera, for So Far, So Good, Petrov, the Book of the Year of 2004. He has also won two Sandburg Prizes for Chicago's Book of the Year (The Willys Dream Kit, 1985, fiction; Commies, Spooks, Gypsies, Crooks & Poets, 1995, non-fiction). Among his other books are a novel, The Grand Life, and the co-authored autobiography of Milos Forman, Turnaround, which was translated into sixteen languages. His play Ax murder in St. Petersburg was the finalist for the Slovak Play of the Year in 2001 and has been playing in the repertory of Bratislava's Astorka Theater ever since.