

Getting Started

In many ways the Czech and Slovak Republics are a traveller's dream destination: the distances aren't immense, and both natural and manmade beauty abounds. The streets of Prague and the trails of the High Tatras are well trod. And it doesn't take too long to get off the beaten path and find a medieval gem in the form of an old town, or a deserted hiking path.

Though lodging prices are rising, you can still plan an itinerary to suit any budget – from student dorm with sandwiches to go, to top end with trendy dining.

You may want to plan and book ahead if: (1) you're going to the mountains in peak winter/summer seasons; (2) you want to rent a holiday *chata* (mountain hut or cabin) or apartment; (3) you're visiting Prague from June to August; or (4) you're flying between towns. In the smallest, most easterly village, tourism drops way off during low season; small guesthouse owners may not be on site full time, so booking ahead means you can set a time to meet. Otherwise, a few nights mulling over what you'd like to see (and the transport required to get there) will make your travels more fluid by the time you hit the road.

Note: in this book where you see two italicised words separated by a slash (/), this indicates the Czech and Slovak terms, respectively.

WHEN TO GO

For the majority of Czech and Slovak destinations, the best time to visit is in May or September, when the weather is mild and the crowds fewer. A large percentage of museums, galleries, castles and the like are open only during high season (May to September). April and October are chillier but you'll benefit from smaller crowds and cheaper rooms. In winter you'll likely get to see it all under a blanket of snow; camping grounds are closed, as are attractions in the smaller towns. High in the mountains, November to March is an additional high season.

Most Czechs and Slovaks, like residents of the rest of Europe, take their holidays in July and August, then again over the Easter and Christmas/New Year holiday periods. Accommodation facilities are often booked; crowds, particularly in Prague and the mountain resort areas, can be unbearable; and prices spike to their highest. On the other hand, most festivals take place during the summer months and the supply of cheap sleeps in university towns increases as student dorms are thrown open to visitors.

The seasons are distinct. Summer (June to August) receives the highest temperatures and heaviest rainfall. The cold, bitter winter months of December, January and February often see temperatures reaching as low as -5°C in the cities and -10°C to -15°C in the mountainous areas (-30°C at higher altitudes). Tailor-made for skiing and other winter pursuits, the mountains receive about 130 days of snow a year, but other areas get coverage as well.

See Climate Charts (p439) for average temperatures and precipitation.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Health insurance – it's technically required for all visitors (p465)
- Insect repellent – for hiking and camping (p467)
- A little language – knowing a few key phrases goes a long way (p469)
- Thirst – there's really great Czech beer (p68) and Slovak wine (p68) to be had

TOP TENS

Must-See Films

For more information see p44.

- *Stesť* (Something Like Happiness, 2005) directed by Bohdon Sláma
- *Kolya* (1996) directed by Jan Svěrák
- *Vesničko má středisková* (My Sweet Little Village, 1985) directed by Jiří Menzel
- *Sedím na konáři a je mi dobře* (I'm Sitting on a Branch and I'm Fine, 1989) directed by Juraj Jakubisko
- *Smrt si říká Engelchen* (Death Calls Itself Engelchen, 1963) directed by Ján Kádár
- *Žert* (The Joke, 1970) directed by Jaromil Jireš
- *Všetko, čo mám rád* (Everything I Like, 1992) directed by Martin Sulík
- *Obchod na korze* (The Shop on Main Street, 1965) directed by Ján Kádár & Elmar Klos
- *Swimming Pool* (2001) directed by Boris von Sychowski
- *Markéta Lazarová* (1967) directed by František Vláčil

Top Reads

Immersing yourself in a good novel is the perfect way to get a sense of people and place. The following translated page-turners have won critical acclaim in the Czech and Slovak Republics and abroad. For more information see p47.

- *The Book of Laughter & Forgetting* by Milan Kundera
- *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka
- *Closely Watched Trains* by Bohumil Hrabal
- *Babička* by Božena Němcová
- *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* by Michael Chabon
- *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera
- *Year of the Frog* by Martin Šimečka
- *Bringing up Girls in Bohemia* by Michal Viewegh
- *Summer Meditations* by Václav Havel
- *Utz* by Bruce Chatwin

Our Favourite Festivals

The following list represents our Top 10, but numerous other festivals and events take place year-round. For those on an international scale see p443. Individual town celebrations are covered throughout the book in the relevant destination chapters.

- Prague Spring (Prague), May (p122)
- International Festival of Spirits and Ghosts (Bojnice), May (p380)
- Ride of the Kings Festival (Vlčnov), May (p328)
- International Folk Festival (Strážnice), June (p326)
- Východná Folk Festival (Východná), June/July (p390)
- Open-Air Cinema Festival (Prague), June to September (p122)
- Karlovy Vary Film Festival (Karlovy Vary), July (p215)
- European Folk Craft Market (Kežmarok), July (p414)
- Salamander Festival (Banská Štiavnica), September (p375)
- Bratislava Jazz Days (Bratislava), September (p347)

Spring (late March to May) brings changeable, rainy weather and sometimes flooding. Autumn is also variable but temperatures can be as high as 20°C in September.

COSTS & MONEY

By European standards, the Czech and Slovak Republics are fairly reasonable. Food, transport and sights are still a bargain; accommodation less so. Consumables like cosmetics remain relatively inexpensive, but clothing, CDs and electronics are on a par with European prices. A surprise cost in both countries is having to fork out as much as 100Kč/Sk to take a camera or video into museums, castles and caves.

How much you spend will depend on how you travel. If you're a budget backpacker who likes to stretch your koruna as far as it will go, 800Kč/Sk will get you from one place to another, a bed in a dorm, entry to a museum or castle, two cheap meals a day and three or four beers a night. Those who like a little more comfort can expect to pay around 2300Kč/Sk per day for a *pension* or hotel, train trip between cities, lunch and dinner at a decent restaurant (including coffee and/or wine) and entry to a couple of big-ticket attractions. If money is no object, 6000Kč/Sk is sufficient to cover all your needs, including a night in a top hotel and car hire for the day. Prague, however, is another story: whack on another third to the prices mentioned.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Bratislava Guide (www.bratislavaguide.com) Loads of in-town listings.

Czech Republic (www.czech.cz) Informative official site with all the practicalities.

Czech Tourism (www.czechtourism.com) Get to know the Czech Republic.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Supposedly a fantastic site for travellers, but we're a bit dubious.

Prague TV (www.prague.tv) Insider's perspective on the city.

Slovak Tourist Board (www.slovakiatourism.sk) Good theme-related pages (hiking, spas, caves, castles).

Slovakia Document Store (www.panorama.sk) Buy books, travel info and maps of Slovakia before you leave home.

HOW MUCH?

Night in a dorm
350Kč/300Sk

Average double room in a
pension 1500Kč/Sk

Pork and potatoes
130Kč/Sk

Shot of *slivovitz* (plum
brandy) 35Kč/45Sk

Postcard 9Kč/6Sk

LONELY PLANET INDEX

1L petrol 40Kč/44Sk

1L bottled water
30Kč/40Sk

Beer – glass of Budvar
draught 30Kč/35Sk

Souvenir T-shirt
300Kč/250Sk

Street snack – ice cream
8Kč/6Sk

there's been no massive wave of private land sales. In general, families are doing OK, if not great. Most city dwellers have at least one car, and eating out every once in a while is a possibility. In the villages, both cars and restaurants are usually beyond reach. Prices for everyday items like food and dry goods have risen since 2004, while wages have only crept forward. The fear is that once the republics adopt the euro, the cost of consumables will rise even higher. This may explain the large number of communist officials elected in 2006 – it's not unusual to hear the older generation waxing nostalgic about the days when everyone had a state-subsidised job.

The discrimination against minorities, primarily the Roma people, which caused major headaches in the lead-up to EU entry hasn't died down much. A recent sensational court case garnering international attention suggested that in the 1990s doctors in East Slovakia may have performed sterilisation treatments on Roma women without adequately informing them. Today, the governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are funneling money into support programmes to promote Roma language, culture, education, housing and social welfare, and recent human rights reports have sighted progress. But advocates say more can be done. In one suburb of the East Slovak town Prešov, 1700 people live in just 174 public-funded apartments. (For more on the Roma minority see p35.)

Outside the Czech and Slovak borders, EU nations expressed concerns that Roma immigrants would flood into cities like London. (And it would be fair to say some Czechs and Slovaks hoped large numbers of the Roma would emigrate.) Though some families set off, reports are that many have already returned to their home towns and villages. The final results of this (and other EU-related issues) are yet to be seen. Time will tell if the Czechs and Slovaks adopt the euro by 2010, and if the people end up viewing it as a positive or negative.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

PRAGUE TO SOUTH BOHEMIA

10 days

Take your time in **Prague** (p79); get up early to see Charles bridge without the mobs, buy an architectural walking map and follow the architectural style of your choice, and by all means make enough time to stop in as many summer beer gardens as suit you. Three nights is the minimum, but spend five so you can go on day trips. In **Kutná Hora** (p156), for example, you can see the soaring cathedral of St Barbara and the creepy art (made out of 40,000 skeletons) at Sedlec ossuary. The next morning decide between the photogenic clusters of turrets at **Karlštejn castle** (p148) or the medieval-cum-neo-Gothic **Konopiště chateau** (p152), a grand hunting lodge of sorts. Or you might opt to do a day trip to the evocative, heart-rending **Terezín** (p231), a transit camp for European Jews during the Holocaust that is known for the art made by its youth.

On day six, take the train to **Plzeň** (p219) for the night; there you can tour the brewery where Pilsner Urquell is made and visit the brewery museum. From there, you might as well make this a beer-flavoured tour and stop for one night in **České Budějovice** (p164), the home of the Budvar brewery. The next day, it's an easy 50-minute ride to the Unesco-recognised beauty of **Český Krumlov** (p170). Spend one day wandering around in awe of the Renaissance and baroque buildings, and a second taking a float down the Vltava river before heading back up to Prague.

This 10-day, 600km route radiates from Prague before following the beer trail from Plzeň to South Bohemia.



ALL OF CZECHIA

Three to four weeks

Start by following the 10-day itinerary from Prague to South Bohemia (p17), adding a couple of days if you want to do all the day trips from Prague, or if you want to add a trip to a West Bohemian spa town like **Karlovy Vary** (p211) or **Mariánské Lázně** (p206) before Plzeň.

From Český Krumlov, transfer in České Budějovice to **Telč** (p313), where you can relive the Renaissance. Stroll over the narrow bridges spanning ancient fish ponds and tour the ornate chateau before settling into a sidewalk café for the evening. Move on to **Brno** (p295), the country's second city, for a night before heading to **Mikulov** (p321), another baroque and Renaissance beauty with an ancient synagogue. Here you're in the heart of South Moravian wine country. Do stop at a local winery, or rent a bicycle and spend a couple of days exploring a few wineries in the surrounding hills.

Afterwards, move on to **Olomouc** (p269), which has a great old town and a large student population that makes the eating and drinking fun. This is one of the best value towns in the Czech Republic, so spend a night or two. Then peek at the Renaissance façades of **Pardubice** (p249) and, overnight, among the architectural mix that is **Hradec Králové** (p245) before going to see one of the rock towns. Choose from the sandstone shapes and spires in the **Adršpach-Teplice Rocks** (p260), probably the most dramatic, or those in **Český ráj** (p255), which are slightly easier to access. After you're done hiking (or rock climbing), it's back to the capital and your transport home – if you can bear to leave.

This 1040km, one-month route circumnavigates the Czech Republic, from Prague to the spa towns of West Bohemia, then south and east to the gentle hills of South Moravia, then north to Bohemia's rock towns.



SLOVAK & CZECH REPUBLICS

One month

Two days can easily be spent on the old-town streets of **Bratislava** (p337), stopping in cafés and taking time to seek out the views from atop the old castle or the communist-era New bridge. Then take a day trip to **Devín castle** (p353), where among the restoration and the ruins you can trace the development of Slovakia's medieval fortifications. The castle in **Trenčín** (p363), where you're off to next, is a lot more complete, romantic, embellished – you pick the adjective. Make sure you track down the chocolate shop while in town a night or two. **Žilina** (p376), a university town with reasonable restaurants, isn't anything special, but you have to transfer here to get to the **Malá Fatra National Park** (p380), which is. Spend a couple of days hiking the mountain tops, aided by an excellent system of trails and chairlifts.

Continue on to the **High Tatras** (p394) for higher altitude hiking and splendid vistas of rocky mountain peaks. Spend at least two nights, maybe three, or if you prefer steep trails and waterfalls to mountain peaks, head south to **Slovenský raj** (p420) to hike. Then from gateway city **Poprad** (p398), take an overnight train to **Prague** (p79); three days is enough to see the sights and get sick of the crowds. Afterwards head for one of the spa towns, **Karlovy Vary** (p211) or **Mariánské Lázně** (p206), for a night's rest, and **Plzeň** (p219) for some golden elixir (ie beer).

From there, it's on to **České Budějovice** (p164), the home of the Budvar brewery, and the Unesco-recognised beauty of **Český Krumlov** (p170) for two days before heading to Renaissance **Telč** (p313). It's up to you whether you head back to Bratislava or Prague from there.

Take in the highlights of the Slovak and Czech Republics; from Bratislava to the High Tatras, then Prague to South Bohemia, you'll cover about 1550km if you make it a round trip.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

LESSER KNOWN SLOVAKIA

Two weeks

The obvious starting point is **Bratislava** (p337); spend a couple of days wandering the old town and sampling the restaurants and bars. Then get off the beaten track by taking a day trip to the **Small Carpathians** (p356), where you can tour Červený Kameň, a 16th-century fortress and falconry yard, or taste wine and buy ceramics in Modra. The next day take the bus to **Banská Štiavnica** (p374), a steep little town that looks much like it did in the 15th century when it was a mining centre. It's a pleasant place to spend a night. Transfer to **Banská Bystrica** (p371), a bigger city, where you can learn about Slovakia's involvement in World War I and II at the nation's most high-tech museum.

Ride the twisted hillside roads to get to the **Low Tatras** (p388) and spend a day or two hiking in Demänova valley, or hook up with a paragliding outfitter in **Liptovský Mikuláš** (p389). Don't pass up the opportunity to eat in a *saláš* (rustic restaurant specialising in sheep's cheese).

Next it's on to the walled city of **Levoča** (p416), where the Church of St James is treasured for Master Pavol's Gothic altar. The ruins of **Spiš castle** (p418), about 15km east, deserve a day, too. Last stop is **Bardejov** (p427), a Gothic-Renaissance marvel. Tour the icon museum before going to nearby spa town **Bardejovské Kúpele** (p429), where you can sign up for a treatment and tour the *skanzen* (open-air museum) to get a feel for village life. Make your way down to **Košice** (p408) and from there you can get a bus, train or plane back to Bratislava.

Going from Bratislava to middle Slovakia, up to the Low Tatra mountains, through the Spiš region and down to Košice will take you about two weeks and cover 700km.



TAILORED TRIPS

WORLD HERITAGE SITES

The historic centre of **Prague** (p79) must be on everyone's list, but Unesco has also recognised the historic centres of **Český Krumlov** (p170) and **Telč** (p313). **Kutná Hora** (p156) is noted for the Gothic cathedral of St Barbara and the creepy bone art at **Sedlec**. In **Brno**, contemporary Villa Tugendhat (p302) was one of the first open-plan homes ever, and the church of St John of Nepomuk (p313) in **Žďár nad Sázavou** was constructed in a star shape. Also in Moravia, Holy Trinity column (p271) in **Olomouc** is a baroque medley of gold and grey.

Several Czech castles have made the list: the baroque chateau at **Kroměříž** (p332), the Renaissance castle at **Litomyšl** (p254) and the **Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape** (p323), a compendium of castles and grounds. **Holašovice** (p169) is a fine example of a baroque village, and the Jewish quarter and St Procopius' basilica in **Třebíč** (p316) remind us of the coexistence of Jewish and Christian cultures in the Middle Ages.

In Slovakia, the mountainside village of **Vlkolínec** (p390) is on the World Heritage List for the age and homogeneity of its log dwellings; the mining town of **Banská Štiavnica** (p374) for its uniform Renaissance architecture. The sprawling ruins of **Spiš castle** (p418) epitomise a medieval castle, and **Bardejov** (p427) is a supreme example of a fortified medieval town. The **caves of Slovak Karst** (p424) are recognised by Unesco, along with the adjacent Aggtelek Karst in Hungary.



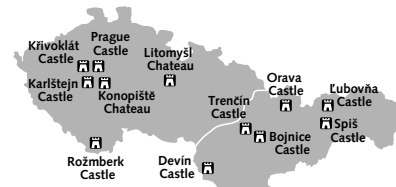
CLASSIC CASTLES

Prague castle (p87) is in the record books as the world's largest ancient castle, but it's more like a city than a fortified dwelling. Close by, **Karlštejn castle** (p148), with its stunning exteriors (and immense crowds), and **Konopiště chateau** (p152) are stand-alone wonders. The nature around **Křivoklát castle** (p151), which once belonged to the Přemysl Dynasty, is part of the attraction.

On the romantic side: lovely **Rožmberk castle** (p181) is said to be haunted by a pining White Lady; the intricate sgraffito design of **Litomyšl chateau** (p254) may be too prissy for some.

In Slovakia, **Bojnice castle** (p379) is by far the most ornate and Disneyesque (it hosts the fabulous Festival of Spirits and Ghosts for a week in May), but **Orava castle** (p386) comes a close second. Both are fairly complete, as is **Trenčín castle** (p363). Less perfect, and more evocative in some ways, are the partial ruins of **Lubovňa castle** (p415) and **Devin castle** (p353). **Spiš castle** (p418) is the granddaddy of them all, spreading across four hectares. The view from below is one of the most photographed in Slovakia.

Castles are generally open from May to September; to see the interior you'll probably have to take a native-language tour, so ask for the written English narrative (*anglický* text).



FOLK LIFE & ART

The colourful local folk culture has been preserved in Moravia and central and East Slovakia. The best place to see it is at a *skansen/skanzen*, an open-air museum where folk-furnished regional buildings have been collected for you to tour. The best ones even have an operating pub – a village staple. Costumed dancers and musicians perform at summer weekend programmes at the museums.

The **Moravské Slovácko region** (p325) is filled with villages that still have a strong folk flavour; Strážnice (p326), for example, has a *skansen* and hosts the country's biggest folk festival. In North Moravia, walk among beehives carved with faces straight to the *hospoda* (pub) at the **Wallachian open-air museum** (p289).

In central Slovakia, a few villages stand out as living examples of folk vernacular. The dark log cabins with white geometric designs in **Čičmany** (p379) are highly photogenic (one is a museum). Up in the mountains, the log houses in Unesco-listed **Vlkolínec** (p390) are mostly plastered, some painted in pastels.

Slovakia has several open-air museums, including the **Museum of the Slovak Village** (p384) in Martin, the country's largest. The dark log homes of **Orava Village Museum** (p387) are arranged along a creek, true to the layout of a proper mountain village. Thousands of people gather in late June at the *skanzen* of the **Museum of Ukrainian-Rusyn culture** (p433) in Svidník for the annual folk festival.



SPA LIFE

Once considered purely medicinal, spas in the Czech and Slovak Republics these days are focusing more on relaxation treatments that might interest a short-stay traveller.

Františkovy Lázně (p201) is the prototypical quiet, leafy spa town, where after you soak, you stroll. There's a bit more life to **Mariánské Lázně** (p206), West Bohemia's prettiest spa town, which has all the requisite treatments and drinking cures plus sights and history. **Karlovy Vary** (p211) is bigger still and attracts a larger number of international visitors. If you ignore the communist development, you can still see the 19th-century spa complex at the heart of **Teplice** (p236). Less frequented and lower key is the spa at **Luhačovice** (p331) in Moravia.

Piešťany (p360) is Slovakia's biggest spa town, a complex of neoclassical and modern communist buildings that contain pools, baths and treatment rooms for its signature mud wraps. **Bardejovské Kúpele** (p429) is a spa town with some romantic old villas set in a forest. The drinking cure is big there. For your soaking pleasure there are several outdoor and indoor pools at **Bešeňová Thermal Park** (p390), and the pools at Aphrodite in **Rajecké Teplice** (p378) look like surreal Roman baths. Though water parks at heart, **Aqua Park Tatralandia** (p389), in the Low Tatras, and **Aqua City** (p399) in Poprad do use natural thermal springs and both have spa and sauna zones.



Snapshot

Parliamentary elections in June 2006 brought changes to the leadership of both the Czech and Slovak Republics. The left-of-centre parties won a few seats more than the right-of-centre ones in the Czech Republic, but when the Green party went with the more conservative coalition (so as not to be lumped with the communist party), the process was thrown into a stalemate. Months went by without an agreement or a prime minister until September 2006 when Mirek Topolánek of the Civic Democrats (ODS) assumed leadership. He stepped down one month later when his party failed to garner the necessary vote of confidence in the lower house. Negotiations began again, the power vacuum continued and many called for a new general election. At the time of writing, the government was undecided.

In Slovakia, elections brought to power parties that have at times been antireform. The coalition is headed by Prime Minister Robert Fico of Smer, a left-wing party, but also includes Vladimír Mečiar's isolationist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS); see p31. It's feared the nationalist tendencies of the coalition could stunt economic growth if it repeals the business deals and market reforms started by PM Mikuláš Dzurinda's previous government. Indeed, Fico used a technicality to nix the already agreed-to sale of Bratislava's airport to a consortium that included the owners of the Vienna airport. It's now unclear who will pay for needed airport upgrades. Despite contradictory statements early on, however, Fico promised to keep Slovakia on fiscal track to adopt the euro by 2009.

Though both the Czech and Slovak Republics joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, the subject of the euro still remains a hot topic. The ramifications are endless. Every new thought on monetary issues is now scrutinised in light of whether it will adversely affect the republics' readiness to adopt the euro. Currently the Slovaks are aiming for 2009, and the Czechs 2010, but that's likely to change.

Visas are another EU-related issue that comes up a lot. Though the immigration policies of both states were good enough to qualify them for EU membership, they weren't in line enough for membership of the Schengen agreement, which allows member states to eliminate internal EU borders. For the time being, you still have to go through (now somewhat nominal) checkpoints to get into the bordering countries of Austria, Germany, Hungary and Poland. The Czech and Slovak Republics have been hoping for Schengen inclusion by the original October 2007 target, but at the time of writing that deadline had been pushed back at least a year by the European Commission. In the meantime, for those that need them, a visa for the Czech and Slovak Republics is not good in other EU states, and vice versa. For more information see p450.

While EU inclusion is, for the most part, seen as a step towards higher living standards and a brighter future for subsequent generations, especially by the younger generation, many are still sceptical. They see bitter irony in the fact that they paid for border crossings to be erected between the republics in 1993, only to be negotiating to tear them down a little more than 10 years later. There are also concerns about the possibility of EU nationals taking advantage of comparatively low land prices and buying up prime real estate.

So far most financial indicators suggest positive change. Foreign investment has been pouring in, with auto manufacturers investing in both countries. GDP (gross domestic product) growth is up since EU induction and

FAST FACTS

Population Czech Republic/Slovakia:	10,249,034/5,384,822
GDP growth:	5%/5.5%
Inflation:	2.8%/3.3%
Unemployment:	8.3%/18.2%
Average monthly wage:	18,903Kč/17,274Sk
Area:	78,869 sq km/49,034 sq km
Total combined railway system:	13,130km
Per capita annual beer consumption:	157L/89L

The Authors



LISA DUNFORD

A fascination with the Czech–Slovak region has gripped Lisa since childhood, probably because her grandfather came from the Carpathian mountains. She studied junior year in Budapest and arrived in Bratislava, Slovakia, after graduation. Various projects led to a job with the embassy at the US Agency for International Development. While living in Slovakia, Lisa danced with the country as it became an independent nation, learned the language and made lifelong friends. Lisa, her husband and their dog now live on a riverfront in southeast Texas, but assignments and personal travel take her back to Slovakia often. It still feels like going home.

My Favourite Trip

The first night in Bratislava I'd drink Frankovka modra red wine at a café with friends to stay up late and ward off jet lag. It never really works, so a few slow-paced days wandering the city's historical centre (p344) would follow. I'd then fly to Košice and drive to Tatranská Lomnica (p403) in the High Tatras. No, better yet, maybe this is the trip where I'll have time to rent a log cabin for a week outside Slovenský raj National Park (p420), where I can hike past waterfalls and go horseback riding. I'd time it so I could spend the last weekend at the European Folk Craft Market in Kežmarok (p414) or the Východná Folk Festival (p390) before flying back to Bratislava. Sorry, Prague – I'm a Slovakia kind of gal.



BRETT ATKINSON

Brett's first experiences of Eastern Europe were Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, when the Iron Curtain was still pulled tightly shut. He has since returned to write about Hungary's communist legacy, island-hopped in Croatia and honeymooned in Sarajevo. During eight weeks' research in the Czech Republic, he furthered his hobby of beer appreciation, especially while watching Friday night ice hockey at the local *pivnice* (pub). When he's not travelling for Lonely Planet, Brett lives in Auckland, New Zealand. He advises never to drive a Škoda Fabia across a narrow bridge leading to a castle, especially if there's no room to turn around on the other side.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.



NEIL WILSON

Neil first shuffled round a Czech castle wearing cotton overshoes and gripping an *anglický* (English) text, back in 1995, and soon became fascinated by the country's combination of deep history, weird scenery and off-the-wall humour. He has returned regularly for a fix of the world's finest beers and the opportunity to hike yet another obscure trail. A full-time freelance writer since 1988, Neil has travelled in five continents and written about 45 travel and walking guides for various publishers. In recent years he has been working on Lonely Planet guides to Prague, Eastern Europe and the Czech & Slovak Republics. He is based in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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