

High Tatras



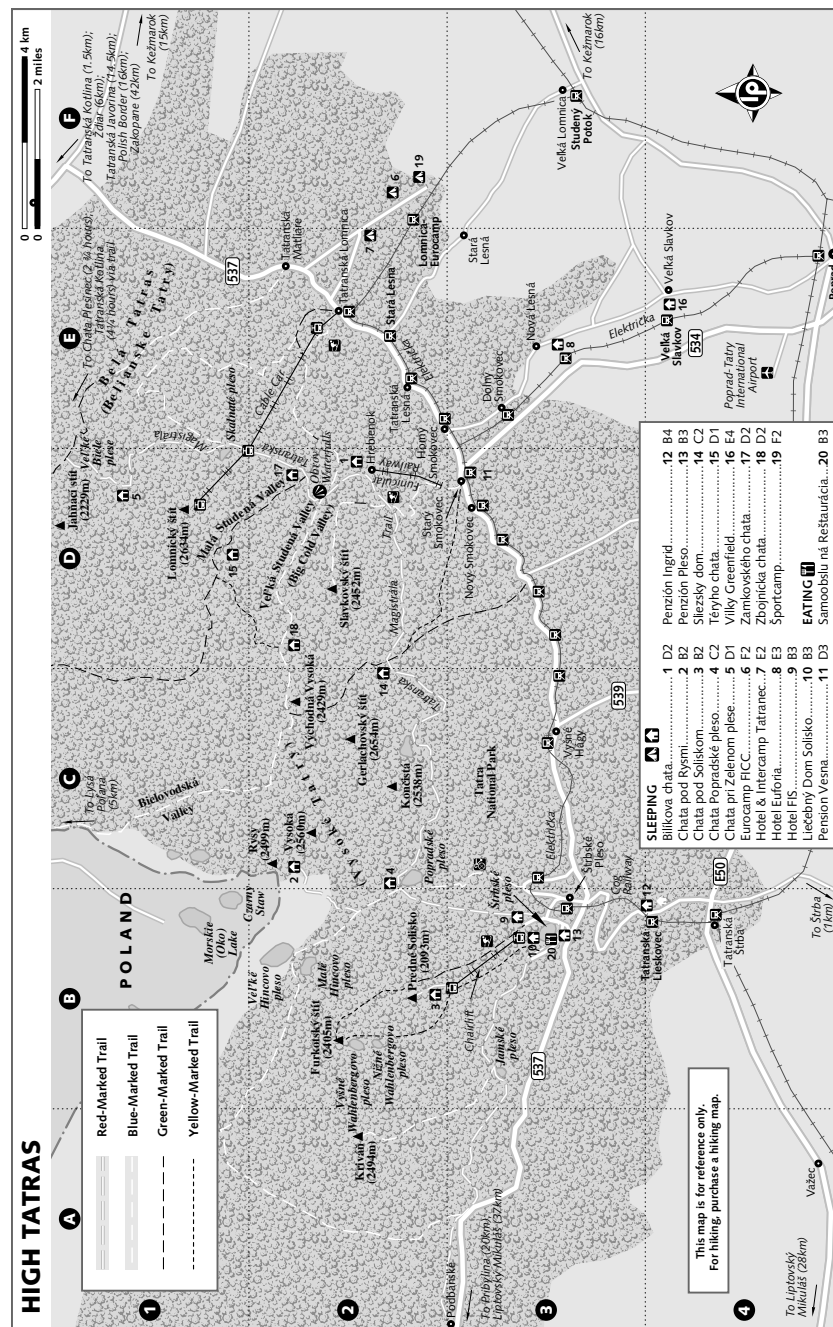
When you first see the alpine, snow-strewn High Tatras jutting out of the valley floor north of Poprad, you may do a double take. This isn't Switzerland after all. But Gerlachovský štít (2654m) is the highest peak in the entire Carpathian range, and the Tatras tower over most of Eastern Europe. Photo opportunities at higher elevations can get you fantasising about a career at *National Geographic* – pristine snowfields, ultramarine mountain lakes, crashing waterfalls. Sadly, a massive windstorm roared through in late 2004, uprooting much of the dense pine forest at mid-elevation, especially near the resort towns of Starý Smokovec and Tatranská Lomnica. Huge swaths will look barren – war ravaged even – for years to come. Tree trunks have been cleared and shipped off for building, leaving fields full of massive upturned stumps and clumps of dirt, but this hasn't stopped the crowds from showing up.

Some five million people a year come to walk, climb, cycle or ski here. A 600km network of hiking trails, chairlifts and cable cars reach all the alpine valleys and some peaks, with *chaty* (mountain huts) to stop at along the way. In high summer and winter seasons, trails are densely crowded. You'll need to climb further than in Slovakia's other mountains to have some of it to yourself, but the rewards are breathtaking.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Have a shot of vodka at the *bufet* (cafeteria) atop the 2634m summit of **Lomnický štít** (p403), just don't tell anyone you took the cable car up
- Hike from Hrebienok past the Obrov waterfalls and reward yourself with a night at the alpine chalet **Zamkovského chata** (p401)
- Ski by day, by night stay in an atmospheric old log house in **Ždiar** (p405), part of the Belá Tatras.
- Enjoy a hot wine and spit-fired chicken; food for the hiker's soul at **Zbojnická Koliba** (p404)
- Soak away your aches at the thermal pools of the environmentally aware **Aqua City** (p399) in Poprad

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 052



Hiking in the Tatras

Going for a walk in the High Tatras can be anything from a few hours to a five-day trek. Cable cars, chairlifts and a funicular give you a head start, so even couch potatoes can get some superb views. It's easy: take a chairlift up, go for a short hike, take the funicular down and ride public transport back to your start. Then again, the High Tatra mountains are the most well situated in Slovakia for multiday hiking. There's no free camping allowed in the national park, but there are a series of well-spaced *chaty* that line the upper trails. A bed goes for 300Sk to 500Sk a night, and meals (about 150Sk for dinner) or a full restaurant is available at all. In July and August especially, contact the *chata* directly to book ahead and guarantee you have a bed.

We've listed hikes and *chaty* according to the lower-elevation, trailhead resort towns they're accessed from – Štrbské Pleso, Starý Smokovec or Tatranská Lomnica. Don't overlook less traversed hiking possibilities in the Belá Tatras, to the east. The main artery of the trail network is the 65km, red-marked Tatranská magistrála trail, which runs along the southern flank of the High Tatras, and is accessible via dozens of branch trails. Some of the higher trails involve steep scrambling and climbing in exposed situations with the aid of chains and metal rungs – not recommended unless you have a head for heights.

Trail advice from the park's **Mountain Rescue Service** (Horská Záchraná Služba; ☎ 4422 820, emergency 18 300; ths@tanap.sk; Starý Smokovec 23) goes a long way. When planning your trip, keep in mind that the higher trails are closed from November to mid-June (a list of closings is available on www.tanap.org), and avalanches may close lower portions as well. Note that it is technically illegal for visitors to walk across the Slovak–Polish border in the mountains – if caught doing so you could be fined.

BOOKS & MAPS

Our High Tatras map has trails, *chaty* and some of the outlying lodging mentioned throughout the chapter. It is intended for orientation only, not as a hiking guide. For anything more than a day hike, you'll need a decent map. The best hiking map is the VKÚ *Vysoké Tatry* 1:25,000 map (No 2; 120Sk) although, due to its size, it can be a bit awkward to manoeuvre. You might be more comfortable with the 1:50,000 map (No 113; 120Sk). With 45 detailed hikes

explained in English, *The High Tatras* (240Sk) by **Dajama** (www.dajama.sk), part of the *Knapsacked* series, is a good book to have.

Orientation

For all their majesty, the High Tatras are surprisingly compact at only 55km long. They form part of the 795-sq-km **Tatra National Park** (Tatranský národný park), Czechoslovakia's first national park, founded in 1949. The High Tatras are geologically young, with sharp, frost-shattered summits and broad valleys carved by glaciers. Three dozen valleys contain over 100 *plesy*, or tarns (small glacial lakes). The pine forest, skirting the range below 1600m, has been damaged by windstorms. Some 25 peaks measure more than 2500m, with the 2634m Lomnický štít in second place after Gerlachovský štít.

The main east–west regional highway (E50) passes through Poprad, the park's administrative centre and the main gateway to the Tatras. An upper road following the base of the mountains links all the village resorts. Starý Smokovec (990m) is the biggest resort town, with the most facilities and connections, and a clear view of the mountain peaks without a pine forest to look through. Eleven kilometres to the west is the overdeveloped Štrbské Pleso (1350m), which still has trees, and 5km to the east is the more peaceful, but barren Tatranská Lomnica (850m). Poprad is linked to all the resorts by road, bus network and electric train.

Climate & When to Go

There's snow by November that lingers at least until May. June and July are especially rainy. July and August are the warmest (and most crowded) months. Hotel prices, and crowds, are at their lowest from October through April. September may just be the ideal month to visit, but in any month there's an off chance of snow at higher elevations.

Information

Each of the main resorts has an information office; they can provide lodging contacts, but do not book accommodation. A selection of guidebooks (some in English) and information booklets of varying usefulness are available from tourist offices, gift shops, travel agencies and top-end hotels. Good online sources of info include www.tanap.sk, www.tatry.sk and www.tatry.net.

BETTER TO BE SAFE

Around 15 to 20 people die every year in the High Tatras, due mainly to extremely capricious weather conditions – it can change from warm, brilliant sunshine to snow, rain, hail or wind within a few minutes. Beware of sudden thunderstorms on ridges and peaks where there's no protection. Stay off the ridge tops if they're in cloud. Check the weather forecast at the Mountain Rescue Service before setting out for overnight trips. Take their advice seriously. The emergency assistance of the Mountain Rescue Service is not free; you will pay to be rescued.

It's a good idea to carry your own water and some food, even if you have a *chata* booking with meals; you'll burn up a lot of energy and will need snacks along the way. Wear hiking boots and layered clothing; the highest elevations are cool year-round. Carry a whistle for emergencies; six blasts is an internationally recognised distress call.

The rules: stay on the trails, don't pick the flowers, take your rubbish with you and don't cut wood or build open fires.

Sleeping

Frequent, cheap transport means you can stay almost anywhere. Lodging rates are high in the three main resorts, if you're looking for bargains you have to go down hill. In villages like Nová Lesná, Stará Lesná, Tatranská Štrba and Veľký Slavkov you'll find plenty of signs advertising private rooms. Most are near train stops. To make sure you have a place, it's best to book private rooms (from 300Sk per person) via the internet (www.tatry.sk and www.tanap.sk/homes.html have listings). Though no free camping is allowed, there are a couple of organised camping grounds near Tatranská Lomnica.

Rates given below are for the high winter (December to March) and summer (June to August) season. In spring and autumn prices dip by at least 20%.

Getting There & Away

Few buses go directly to the Tatra resort towns from far afield, for most you will need to switch in Poprad. Trainwise, you can change in Poprad from the main Bratislava–Kosice line to take the electric train to mountain resorts, or you could switch at Tatranská Štrba, and take the *ozubnicová železnica* (cog railway) up to Štrbské Pleso.

Poprad airport has a few London-bound flights each week. See the individual town sections for more information about getting there and away.

BORDER CROSSINGS

The closest border crossing between Slovakia and Poland is at Lysá Polana near Tatranská Javorina, 30km from Tatranská Lomnica via Ždiar by bus. Buses depart from Poprad and

Tatranská Lomnica. From the Polish side of the border crossing there are regular public buses and private minibuses to Zakopane (26km).

Getting Around BICYCLE

Places renting mountain bikes are mentioned throughout the chapter.

BUS

Local buses run between the resorts every 20 minutes and tend to be quicker than the train – they have fewer stops. From Starý Smokovec it takes 10 minutes to Tatranská Lomnica (10Sk) and 30 minutes to Štrbské Pleso (28Sk). Schedules are posted on major bus stops.

Buses from Poprad travel to Starý Smokovec (18Sk, 20 minutes, every half hour), Tatranská Lomnica (25Sk, 35 minutes, hourly) and Štrbské Pleso (45Sk, 50 minutes, every 45 minutes).

TRAIN

The **Tatra Electric Train Service** (Tatranská električká železnica, ŤEZ) links most of the towns and villages in the Tatras at least hourly (schedules at www.zsr.sk). There are so many stops that it's likely one is near your lodging. A 20Sk ticket covers a 6km to 14km ride. It's easier to buy a one-/three-/seven-day pass for 100/200/360Sk. If there's no ticket window at your stop, buy one from the conductor. Validate it on board.

One line runs from Poprad via Starý Smokovec (30 minutes) to Štrbské Pleso (one hour). Another line connects Starý Smokovec to Tatranská Lomnica (15 minutes), so you have to change to travel from Štrbské Pleso to Tatranská Lomnica. A third route from Tatranská

Lomnica through Studený potok (15 minutes) loops round to Poprad (25 minutes).

A cog railway connects Tatranská Štrba (on the main Žilina–Poprad railway line) with Štrbské Pleso (30Sk, 15 minutes, hourly).

POPRAD

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Views of the High Tatras' jagged peaks accost you at every turn in Poprad. This valley town, just 13km south of Starý Smokovec, is the major transport hub for mountain-bound nature lovers. You could also use this big little city as a base for seeing not only the mountains but also the surrounding Spiš Region (p412).

Poprad was originally a 13th-century Spiš town. Little of the Germanic influence remains on the main square, but you'll see broad gables and carved timber in Spišská Sobota, a neighbouring suburb. Much of the city is highly industrialised and there's no real reason to make a special trip, but if you're passing through...

Orientation

From the bus and train stations (and the electric train terminal above the main station) it's

1km southeast to the main square, Nám sv Egidia, which is lined with shops and eateries. Poprad-Tatry airport, the highest in Europe, is about 5km west of town.

Information

City Information Centre (☎ 772 1700; www.poprad.sk; Nám sv Egidia 15; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat Jul–Aug; 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat Sep–Jun) Tatra and town info, including private-room accommodation.

Ludová banka (Prior, Nám sv Egidia 124) ATM and exchange.

Post office (Mnoheloňa 11)

Sinet (Nám sv Egidia 28; pr hr 50Sk; ☎ 9am–9pm Mon–Sat, from 1pm Sun) Internet café.

T-Ski Travel (☎ 788 2911; www.slovakiatravel.sk; Hviezdoslavova; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) High Tatras accommodation booking and sports store, near the bus and train stations.

Sights

The Gothic **Church of St Egidius** (Nám sv Egidia; adult/student 20/10Sk; ☎ 9.30am–noon & 1–4pm Mon–Fri, or by appointment), in the middle of the square, sports Spiš-style gablets on the roofline. The

Bell Tower (adult/student 10/5Sk; ☎ 8am–noon, 1–4.30pm Tue–Sun) has views over the town towards the magnificent High Tatras.

The colourful Renaissance merchants' and artisans' houses lining the central square of **Spišská Sobota**, 3km northeast of the main square, are quite charming (and contain the town's best places to stay). Look for the altar made by Master Pavol of Levoča in 1516, inside the Gothic **St George Church** (Kostol sv Juraj; adult/student 30/15Sk; ☎ 9am–5pm Sun–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat). To get here walk northeast on Štefánikova and turn north on Kežmarská, or take bus 2 or 3 from the station.

Aqua City (☎ 785 1222; www.aquacitypoprad.sk; Športová 1397; ☎ 9am–9pm), Poprad's urban water park, tries hard to be environmentally friendly. The water, heat and most of the electricity come from geothermal sources on site, and 15% of the park's profits goes back to the town (as will electricity some day). Prices for the different sauna, swim and slide zones differ; access to the thermal pools and slides is 450/250Sk per day for adults/students.

Sleeping

The City Information Centre has a big list of private rooms (about 300Sk per person) around town and T-Ski Travel can book rooms in the Tatras.

Hotel Cafe Razy (☎ 776 4101; www.hotelcaferazy.sk; Nám sv Egidia 5; d 900/1600Sk; ☎) The unadorned bedrooms in this renovated old town hotel, with wood beds and floors, are really pretty sane. Perhaps it's the hotel's Irish pub patrons that have inspired the name CRazy?

Penzión Barborka (☎ 776 2545; www.penziobarborka.sk; Pod bránou 4, Spišská Sobota; r 800Sk) Dark wood trim sets off the white plaster of this rustic old house. Inside, oak panelling and a homey mishmash of furnishings, along with a publike restaurant, make this a comfortable choice.

Also in Spišská Sobota:

Sabato (☎ 776 9580; www.sabato.sk; Sobotské nám 1730/6; r 1400–3800Sk) Medieval luxury: me thinketh I be in the wrong century, me lord.

Hotel Sobota (☎ 466 3121; www.hotelsobota.sk; Kežmarská 15, Spišská Sobota; s/d 1750/2200Sk; ☎ ☎) New hotel with an old slate-and-timber aesthetic.

Eating & Drinking

Numerous restaurants, bars and cafés line Nám sv Egidia.

Pizzeria Utopia (☎ 773 2222; Dostojevského 23; pizzas 100–200Sk) Head south across the E18 for everybody's favourite pizza and pasta. Eclectic bric-a-brac decorate the rambling houselike restaurant.

Hostinec Spišský Dvor (☎ 0903706929; Sobotské nám 58; ☎ 9am–10pm Sun–Thu, until midnight Fri & Sat) Your friendly Spišská Sobota neighbourhood pub has a billiard table and wine bottles melted into art.

There's a large **Billa** (cnr Wolkerova & Slovenského) grocery store 200m west of the bus station, and just outside town on the E50 motorway to Žilina is a 24-hour Tesco Hypermart (Teplická cesta) with a supermarket and all kinds of camping essentials.

Getting There & Away

Sky Europe (NE; ☎ 02-4850 4850 reservations; www.skyeurope.com) flies between London Stansted and the **Poprad-Tatry International Airport** (TAT; ☎ 776 3875; www.airport-poprad.sk; Na Letisko 100) on Wednesday and Saturday. Bus 12 takes you the 5km from the airport to Poprad city centre. **ČSA** (OK; ☎ 678 2490; www.czechairlines.com) runs a two-hour bus service from Poprad-Tatry airport to Košice, in conjunction with flights to Prague (billed as one ticket, from 5042Sk).

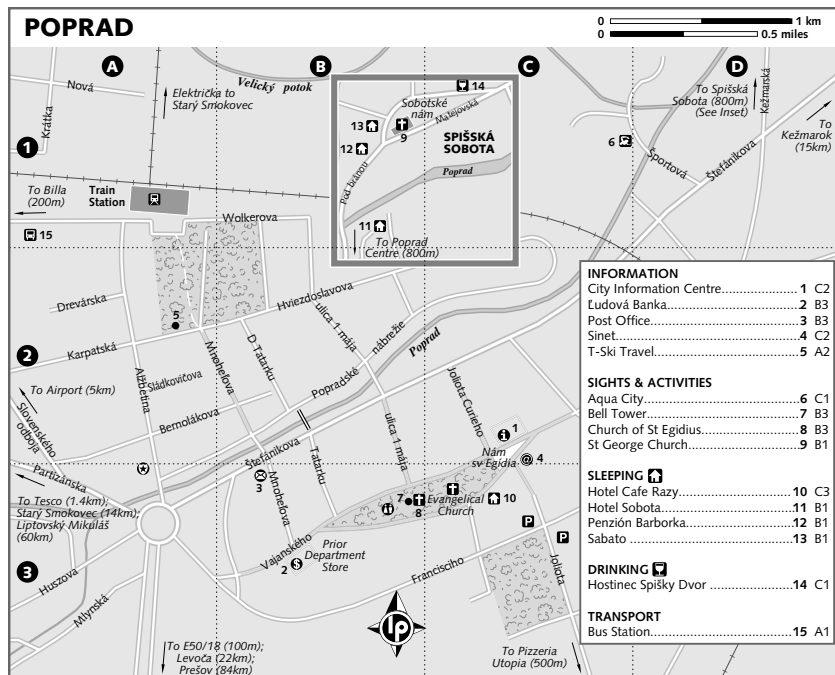
For longer land distances in the region, trains are your best bet. Up to 11 fast trains a day run to Bratislava (420Sk, five hours) and Košice (154Sk, 1½ hours). Night trains connect Poprad with Brno (679Sk, 7½ hours) and Prague (1180Sk, nine hours), plus 174Sk for a sleeper supplement.

On Thursday and Saturday mornings (currently at 6am) a bus goes directly to Zakopane (300Sk, 2¼ hours). Otherwise, you can take a bus from Poprad to Tatranská Javorina, Lysá Polana stop (58Sk, 1¼ hours, four daily), near the Polish border. Walk across to the buses waiting to take you to Zakopane.

For more on getting to mountain resorts, see p397.

ŠTRBSKÉ PLESO

A 20-hectare, alpine *pleso* (lake), the second biggest in the park, defines the High Tatras' westernmost resort. Hotel after hotel lines the banks, and though the place is overdeveloped (and in the high seasons, over-run), Štrbské Pleso retains a natural beauty because it was spared by the 2004 storm. Pine trees still snuggle up to the shoreline and the reflective waters, crowding out some of the ugliness.



North of the lake are a number of runs that make up the park's most popular ski area, and a year-round chairlift takes you up to trails.

Orientation & Information

The red-marked Tatranská magistrála trail that travels the length of the Tatras winds around the southern end of the lake here at 1346m. To pick it up in the easterly direction, walk north from the station and after 500m bear right towards the Helios sanatorium; the trail is on the left, just past a small stream. Most of the town is arranged around the large lake, Štrbské Pleso, northeast of which is the ski area in the Areál FIS. Southwest is the smaller Nové Štrbské Pleso. None of the buildings have proper street addresses; they can be located by finding one of these three areas.

The staff at the **Tatra National Park Info Centrum** (☎ 449 2391; www.tanap.sk; Štrbské Pleso; ☹ 9am-4pm) are quite knowledgeable about trails, including closures. There's an ATM across the parking lot, by the Hotel Panorama. Two computers in the lobby of **Hotel FIS** (☎ 449 2221; Areál FIS; per hr 100Sk; ☹ 24hr) are available for internet rental.

Activities

A relatively easy (and crowded) walk from Štrbské Pleso is up the magistrála to and even more idyllic pond, **Popradské pleso** (1494m), which takes one to 1½ hours one way. From there a more demanding two-hour blue trail takes you to **Velké Hincovo pleso** (1946m), the biggest and deepest of the park's tarns. From Popradské pleso you could also continue east on a challenging zigzaggy section of the Tatranská magistrála about 3½ hours to **Sliezsky dom** hiker's hut and about five hours to **Hrebienok** (1285m), where a funicular goes down to Starý Smokovec.

There is also a year-round **chairlift** (☎ 449 2343; www.parksnov.sk; adult/student return 200/140Sk; ☹ 8am-3.30pm) from the ski area north of Štrbské Pleso to the **Solisko** mountainside terminus (1830m) near a chata, from here it's a steep one-hour walk north along the red trail to the 2093m summit of **Predné Solisko**.

You can hire skis, snowboards, even mountain bikes (all about 300Sk a day) from **Crystal Ski** (☎ 449 2834; www.crystalski.sk; Areál FIS; ☹ 8.30am-4.30pm). When there's snow, there's usually a guy (in the field on the side of the road) hawking rides on a **snowmobile** (snížky scooter; 10 min 600Sk) to the chairlift and Areál FIS.

Sleeping

Penzión Ingrid (☎ 0905108088; www.ingrid.sk; Tatranská Štrba 1121; apt per person 400-800Sk; (P) ☹) This tidy new accommodation opened 500m from the cog railway stop, 3km south of Štrbské Pleso in late 2005. Apartments each have a two-burner cooktop, a small fridge and an electric kettle.

Penzión Pleso (☎ 449 2160; Nové Štrbské Pleso 11; www.penziopleso.sk; r per person 650Sk, ste per person 800Sk; (P)) The contemporary inside of this refurbishment-in-progress is well ahead of the outside. Choose suite 11 because of the mountain views from full-length corner windows. Breakfast is 90Sk.

Old-fashioned **Liečebný Dom Solisko** (☎ 478 0722; www.solisko.sk; Štrbské Pleso 27; s/d 2350/3900Sk; (P) ☹) and modern, off-kilter A-shaped **Hotel Patria** (☎ 449 2591; www.hotelpatria.sk; Štrbské Pleso 48; s/d 2400/3260Sk; (P) ☹) are both lakeside.

MOUNTAIN HUTS

Chata pod Soliskom (1800m; ☎ 0905652036; www.chatasolisko.sk) Nine beds, nice terrace, no hiking required (it's next to the chairlift).

Chata Popradské pleso (1500m; ☎ 449 2177; www.popradskopleso.sk) Sizeable chalet with restaurant and 132 beds in two- and eight-bed rooms. The attic floor sleeps 25 in sleeping bags.

Chata pod Rysmi (2250m; ☎ 0903181051, 4422 314; ☹ 15 Jun-Oct) Highest and smallest of them all. Sleep mattress to mattress under the eaves. Board available.

Sliezsky dom (1670m; ☎ 442 5261; www.sliezskydom.sk) Doubles and four-bed dorms (131 rooms) in a 1971 concrete block with restaurant and cafeteria.

Eating

All the hotels and *pensions* have restaurants.

Samoobslužná Reštaurácia (☎ 478 1011; Hotel Toliar, Štrbské Pleso 21; mains 40-70Sk; ☹ 7am-10pm) This self-service cafeteria serves one-pot meals (goulash, chicken stir-fry) and some vegetarian options.

Janova Koliba (☎ 449 2422; Areál FIS; mains 60-250Sk) Sure, the rustic restaurant by the ski slopes is a little kitsch, but sharing an evening of beer and folk music with German-speaking tourists can be lively.

SMOKOVCE RESORTS

At the turn of the 20th century, fancy-hat ladies and topcoat gentlemen strolled past grand alpine hotels and churches with half-timber decoration. Some of that grandeur remains in restored old buildings in the Smok-

ovce Resorts – the collective name we use for Old (Starý), New (Nový), Upper (Horný) and Lower (Dolný) Smokovec. The villages run together but have separate electric train stops. It will take years for the trees around the resorts to grow back after storm damage, but in the meantime, some hotel rooms have much clearer views of the peaks above. Is that a silver lining?

Information

Junior Sport (Starý Smokovec 29; per day 38Sk; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri-Sun) Left luggage storage in sport store above train station.

Slovenská Sportelňa (Cesta Slobody 24, Starý Smokovec) Bank on the main road, has an ATM and exchange.

T-Ski Travel (☎ 442 3200; www.slovakiatravel.sk; Starý Smokovec 46; ☹ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Fri-Sun) Books lodging, including some huts, and arranges ski and sport programmes. It's in the funicular station.

Tatra Information Office (TIK; ☎ 442 3440; www.tatry.sk; Dom služieb 24, Starý Smokovec; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Regular area info.

U Michalka Café (Starý Smokovec 4; per hr 80Sk;

☹ 11am-10pm) One internet terminal.

Activities

HIKING

From Starý Smokovec a **funicular railway** (pozemná lanovka; ☎ 446 7618; www.tldtatry.sk; adult/student return 100/60Sk; ☹ 7.30am-7pm), or a 55-minute hike on the green trail, takes you up to **Hrebienok** (1280m). From here you have a great view of the Velká Studená valley and a couple of hiking options. You could follow the magistrála trail west to the Sliezsky dom (two hours), and down a small green segment to the yellow-marked trail back to Starý Smokovec (two hours).

Head northeast from Hrebienok on the red magistrála trail (or past the **Biľkova chata** on the steeper, streamside green trail) for about one to 1½ hours to the **Obrov waterfalls** (Obrovsky vodopad). If you're fit, a recommended option is a blue-trail turn-off before the falls and the four-to-five-hour climb up Velká Studená Valley to a hot meal and warm bed at the **Zbojnícka chata**; make sure to prebook.

From the Obrov waterfalls you could instead continue west on the red magistrála to **Zamkovského chata** (past more waterfalls) and on to Skalnaté pleso (1½ hours), where there's a cable car down to Tatranská Lomnica. Or at Zamkovského chata turn up a green trail into the Malá Studená valley. Two hours will see you at the **Téryho chata**, which is beside a lake at about 2010m. You could stay there and the next day continue on the green trail over a 2373m pass and down the long Bielovodská valley five hours down to Tatranská Javorina in the **Belá Tatras** (p404) near the Polish border, where there are buses back to Tatra resort towns.

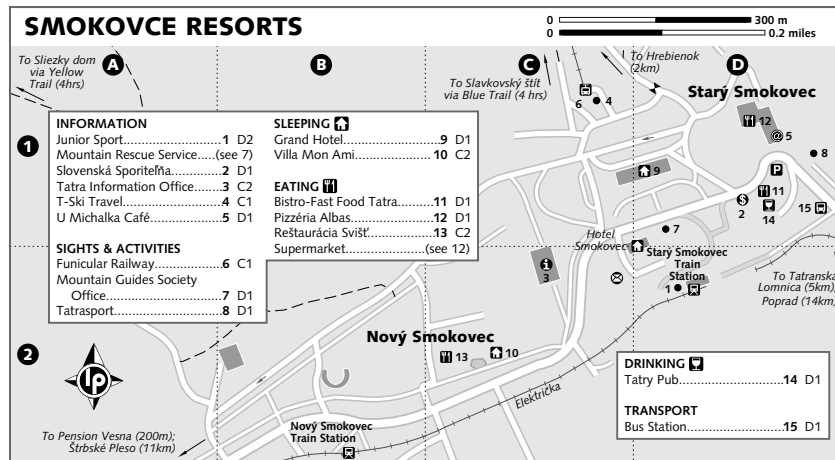
MOUNTAIN CLIMBING & BIKING

You can reach the top of **Slavkovský štít** (2452m) via the blue trail from Starý Smokovec (seven hours return), but to scale the peaks without marked hiking trails (Gerlachovský štít included) you must hire a mountain guide (members of recognised climbing clubs who've checked in with the mountain service are excluded). In addition to guide service, the **Mountain Guides Society Office** (☎ 442 2066; www.tatraguide.sk; Starý Smokovec 38; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) has climbing classes and climbing and biking tours.

FROM WEST TO EAST ACROSS THE TATRAS

So you want to hike across the High Tatras? The Tatranská magistrála is going your way. It has some definite elevation changes, but it starts off easy. From Podbanské, you walk along a valley edge past Jamské pleso (3¼ hours) before skirting the parking lots of resort town Štrbské Pleso (one hour), where you can stop, or press on to **Chata Popradské pleso** (opposite) for the night (total 5½ hours). One of the most difficult sections is right after Popradské pleso, where you crest a ridge. A five-hour day hike lands you at **Zamkovského chata** (p402) for the night. The third day you pass the cable cars at Skalnaté pleso bound for a night at **Chata pri Zelenom plese** (p404); a five-hour day, with a steep section at the end. You're only 30 minutes from the end of the trail at Velké Biele. Instead of backtracking, take the green trail 3½ hours down to Tatranská Kotlina (p405) where you can catch a bus onward.

Buses go to Podbanské from Starý Smokovec (40Sk, 38 minutes) three times a day in summer. Make sure you check in with the Mountain Rescue Service (p396) for trail conditions before setting out on any multiday hike.



Rent mountain bikes (and skis and snowboards, each about 300Sk a day) from **Tatraspport** (☎ 442 5241; www.tatry.net/tatraspport; Starý Smokovec; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-6pm) above the bus station parking lot.

Sleeping

Pension Vesna (☎ 442 2774; vesna@stonline.sk; Nový Smokovec 69; r per person 600Sk; (P)) Both family-oriented and friendly. Most of the seven rooms at this guesthouse have three beds and a separate living area. Vesna's below Nový Smokovec train stop, behind the sanatorium.

Hotel Euforia (☎ 478 3061; www.hoteleuforia.sk; Nová Lesná 399; s/d 1150/1550Sk; (P)) With blonde wood and cobalt-blue rugs, Euforia is fresher and brighter – newer, frankly – than most of what's up the hill. A big terrace closes off in winter. It's 3km south of Starý Smokovec, near the Nová Lesná train stop.

Grand Hotel (☎ 487 0000; www.grandhotel.sk; Starý Smokovec 38; s/d 2300/3900Sk; (P) ☎) More than 100 years of history are tied up in this full-service property that's front and centre in Old Smokovec. The basement pool, sauna, Jacuzzi complex is quite refreshing.

Other mid-elevation options:

Vilky Greenfield (Map p395; ☎ 422 4600; www.greenfield.sk; Veľký Slavkov; 4-/6-person bungalow 1330/1930Sk; (P)) Red two-bedroom cottages sleep six in bedrooms, 10 with couches. It's 7km south of Starý Smokovec on the back road to Poprad.

Villa Mon Ami (☎ 478 0940; www.monami.sk; Nový Smokovec 31; r 1800-2200Sk; (P) ☎) Scrolled ironwork beds and chandeliers; very romantic.

Atrium Hotel (Map p395; ☎ 542 2422; www.atriumhotel.sk; Nový Smokovec 42; s/d 1975/2575Sk; (P) ☎) Super modern cylindrical hotel. High-speed connections.

MOUNTAIN HUTS

Bilikova chata (Map p395; 1220m; ☎ 442 2439, fax 4422 267) Hotel-like chalet with restaurant and one-, two- and three-bed rooms with shared bathrooms.

Zbojnická chata (Map p395; 1960m; ☎ 0903638000; www.zbojnickachata.sk) Sixteen beds, dorm style, restaurant (breakfast included).

Zamkovského chata (Map p395; 1475m; ☎ 442 2636; www.zamka.sk) Alpine chalet with 24 beds in four-bed rooms; board available.

Téryho chata (Map p395; 2015m; ☎ 442 5245) Twenty-four beds in bunks, and a restaurant.

Eating & Drinking

All the hotels, and some of the guesthouses, have restaurants; the *saláš* (rustic restaurant specialising in traditional shepherd dishes) at Vilky Greenfield is quite popular locally.

The big hotels usually have discos or bars, but Atrium Hotel goes one better with both an upscale wine bar and a fun-loving bowling bar (two lanes for rent).

Pizzeriá Albas (☎ 442 3460; Albas shopping centre, Starý Smokovec; pizzas 100-170Sk) Everyone under 30 you talk to seems to recommend this big, antiseptic pizzeria. It's the pizza, not the place.

Reštaurácia Svišť (☎ 442 2545; Nový Smokovec 30; 120-200Sk) Dine on the pleasant log terrace. All the typical pork options are available, but they also have tofu and a children's menu.

Tatry Pub (☎ 442 2448; Starý Smokovec; ☎ 1-11pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri-Sun) The official watering hole of the Mountain Guide Club provides a convivial atmosphere.

For cheap eats, there's a convenient **supermarket** (potraviny; Albas shopping centre), below the pizzeria, and **Bisto-Fast Food Tatra** (Starý Smokovec; mains 30-100Sk; ☎ 8am-7pm) northwest of the bus station, near Hotel Smokovec.

Getting There & Away

There's one direct bus from Bratislava (5.40am) to Starý Smokovec (434Sk, six hours), and one (5.05am) from Trenčín (326Sk, five hours).

For more on getting between mountain villages and to Poprad, see p397.

TATRANSKÁ LOMNICA

A lazy stream runs through the easternmost of the High Tatras' three main resorts, and that's about the pace of life here. It's quieter, smaller and a bit removed from its resort counterparts. Several of the c 1900 buildings are disintegrating. (Anyone have money to invest?) Unfortunately, the massive wind-storm devastated the landscape here too. The east view doesn't green up again until you get to the Belá Tatras. The real attraction here, apart from relative peace, is the cable car up to Lomnický štít, the second-highest peak in the range.

Information

Bookshop (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Next to an ATM, this well-stocked bookshop has hiking maps, guidebooks and gifts.

Tatra Information Office (TIK; ☎ 446 8118; Cesta Slobody; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) On the main street diagonally opposite Penzión Encian.

Townson Travel (☎ 478 2731; Tatranská Lomnica 94; per hr 80Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Has one computer with internet access, as does the Grandhotel Praha.

Activities

An extremely popular **cable car** (kabínová lanovka; www.tldtatry.sk; adult/student return 390/270Sk; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Jul-Aug, to 3.30pm Sep-Jun) links Tatranská Lomnica with the bustling lake and winter sports area of Skalnaté pleso (1751m). From there, another **cable car** (adult/student return 550/350Sk; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Jul-Aug, to 3.30pm Sep-Jun) goes on to the precipitous 2634m summit of **Lomnický štít**. Queues are long during peak season, and tickets may sell out, so get there early to reserve a time. The narrow summit

ridge (site of a meteorology research station) can be crowded. One way to beat the queues is to walk up to Skalnaté pleso (2½ hours).

There's also an ordinary **chairlift** (sedačkova lanová dráha; adult/student one way 150/110Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Jul & Aug, 9am-3.30pm Sep-Jun) from Skalnaté pleso to **Lomnické sedlo**, a 2190m saddle below the summit. Pack warm clothing – it's very cold, even in midsummer.

It's a rollercoaster, it's a summer bobsled. No, it's **Tatrabob** (☎ 446 7951; Tatranská Lomnica 29; per ride 50Sk; ☎ 9am-10pm Jul & Aug, 9am-7pm Sep-Jun). Located in town, individual riders get hauled up on a track and are then let go to control their own undulating descent.

HIKING

An easy (and popular), all-day walk starts with an early cable-car ascent to Skalnaté pleso. From here the red magistrála trail reveals grand views on its way west to Hrebienok (three hours), where you can catch the funicular railway down to Starý Smokovec and the electric train back to Tatranská Lomnica. An alternative is to walk down from Hrebienok to Tatranská Lomnica on a blue trail (five hours) through the Veľká Studená valley.

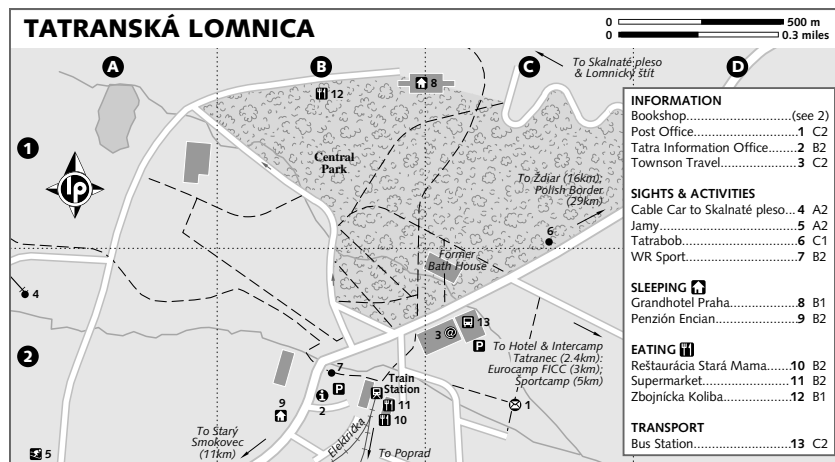
Go north three hours from Skalnaté pleso and you're at **Chata pri Zelenom plese**, on your way into the Belá Tatras and **Chata Plesinec** (p405), 2¾ hours further. You could stop overnight at one then continue over the mountains down to Tatranská Kotlina buses.

SKIING

Expert-level ski runs are at higher altitudes up by Skalnaté Pleso and Lomnické sedlo. They are accessed by cable car and chairlift. More moderate is the **Jamy** ski area (east of the village), with a rope pull and night skiing. Lift tickets for the whole area cost 690/480Sk per day for adults/children six-12, six days is 2900/2030Sk. Students aged 12-26 get a 20% discount, kids under six are free. You can rent skis (and mountain bikes) at **WR Sport** (☎ 446 3440; Hotel Slalom, Tatranská Lomnica 94; ☎ 8am-6pm) for about 400Sk a day.

Sleeping

Eurocamp FICC (Map p395; ☎ 446 7741; www.eurocamp-ficc.sk; per person/tent 110/80Sk, 2-/3-/4-bed bungalows 1200/1400/1600Sk; (P) ☎) Row upon row of caravans line up at this 1500-capacity ground. On site are two restaurants, a bar, billiards, a supermarket, a swimming pool and sauna,



and ball courts. It's five minutes northeast of the Lomnica-Eurocamp train station on the line to Studený potok.

Sportcamp (Map p395; ☎ 446 7288; <http://sportcamp.host.sk> in Slovak; per person/tent 100/100Sk; **P**) Two kilometres south past Eurocamp FICC is a less hyper, 100-site camping ground with tennis and volleyball courts.

Hotel & Intercamp Tatraneč (Map p395; ☎ 446 7092; www.hotelatranec.com; per person/tent 100/80Sk, r 800Sk; **P**) Six-person cabins with shared facilities (450Sk) and a motel surround the large field for tents. There's a *koliba* (rustic restaurant with open fire) on site.

Penzión Encian (☎ 446 7520; penzion.encian@sinet.sk; s/d 1000/1500Sk; **P**) You couldn't ask for better hosts than Zdenka and Štefan Unák. They've warmed up the small restaurant with a fire in the hearth and old skiing memorabilia on display. Eave-top room 13 has a great view of Lomnický štít.

Grandhotel Praha (☎ 446 7941; www.grandhotel.praha.sk; s/d 2900/3900Sk; **P** **X** **Q** **R**) Remember a time when train travel to mountain-hotel destinations was elegant? OK, so we're all too young, but the 1899 Grandhotel isn't. Rooms are appropriately classic, and there's a new spa.

MOUNTAIN HUTS

Three hours northeast from Skalnaté pleso is **Chata pri Zelenom plese** (Map p395; 1540m; ☎ 446 7420; www.zelenepleso.sk), a large, lakeside hikers lodge with four- to 12-bed rooms. You could also hike west from Skalnaté and be within

a couple hours reach of the huts above Starý Smokovec (p402).

Eating

Reštaurácia Stará Mama (☎ 446 7216; shopping centre Sintra; mains 65-172Sk) Substantial soups and homemade dumplings are the reason hikers frequent this rustic fave, but the menu is actually quite extensive.

Zbojnícka Koliba (Tatranská Lomnica; mains 150-350Sk) Musicians play gypsy songs on the cimbalom while your chicken roasts over the open fire. Sit back, order some *bryndza* (sheep's cheese) to spread on bread, have some hot spiced wine and wait. The chicken takes an hour to cook. This *koliba* is on the road up to the Grandhotel Praha.

There's a supermarket (*potraviný*) just east of the train station, where there are also several food stands.

Getting There & Away

From Tatranská Lomnica buses leave for Kežmarok (22Sk, 30 minutes) at least every 1½ hours, and for Tatranská Javorina (30Sk, 45 minutes), at least five times daily. From the latter the Polish border crossing at Lysá Polana is 2km north. Walk to the Polish side, where there are regular public buses and private minibuses to Zakopane (26km).

BELÁ TATRAS

Go east in the High Tatras and you start to hear a Polish accent. The traditional Goral folk culture is still going strong in the small

northeastern arm of the High Tatras. The Belá Tatras (Belianské Tatry) are only 64 sq km. This part of the Tatras was off-limits until 1993 (protecting nature or state secrets?) Limestone prevails here, and there is a large cave system at Tatranská Kotlina. The local culture is evident in the wooden cottages in Ždiar.

Tatranská Kotlina

Over 1km of the **Belianska Cave** (☎ 446 7375; www.ssj.sk in Slovak; adult/student 150/130Sk) is open to the public, with hourly tours from 9am to 4pm Tuesday to Sunday, from mid-May to August, and every 1½ hours from 9.30am to 2pm the rest of the year.

From the south end of Tatranská Kotlina it's a two-hour hike up the green trail to **Chata Plesinec** (1290m; ☎ 0905256722; dm 350Sk). Another two hours takes you past the alpine meadow, **Rakúska poľana**, and limestone formations before you get to **Veľké biele pleso** (Big White Lake) at 1613m. Forty minutes further and you're at **Chata pri Zelenom plese** (opposite), where you can stay overnight, or continue three hours to the cable car, which will take you down to Tatranská Lomnica from Skalnaté pleso.

Ždiar

Decorated timber cottages line the long and narrow **Ždiar** (www.zdiar.sk), the only substantial settlement predating the High Tatra resorts (inhabited since the 16th century). Goral traditions have both been bolstered and eroded by alpine tourism. Several sections of the village are historical reservations, including the **Ždiar house museum** (Ždiarsky dom; ☎ 449 8142; adult/student 20/10Sk; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun May-Sep, 10am-3pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr). Inside you can see the colourful local costumes and furnishings.

Cross over the main road from the museum and a green trail skirts the river through Monkova Valley (880m) for a half hour before climbing over **Širkové sedlo** (1826m) to get to **Kopské sedlo** (1750m) in about three hours. At this point you've pretty much crossed out of the Belá Tatras and Chata pri Zelenom plese (opposite) is an hour away.

The northern part of the village is a big ski area with seven tow lines and 10 moderate to easy runs, as well as cross-country paths at **Strednica** (www.strednica.sk; ski pass adult/child per day 350/250Sk). Ski rental is available at the base (about 250Sk a day). **Penzión Strachan** (☎ 449 8189; Ždiar 530; ☎ rental hours 8am-8pm) rents bikes (200Sk a day) in summer and sledges (100Sk a day) in winter.

The town museum has a small restaurant, as does **Penzión Strachan** (mains at both are 80Sk to 160Sk). There are *bufets* by the ski hills and a few small grocery stores in town. The Goral *krčma* (pub), near the museum, is part of **Penzión Ždiar** (☎ 449 8138; www.penzionzdiar.sk; Ždiar 460; s/d 500/700Sk; **P**). At the far north end of town, **Penzión Vasko** (☎ 449 8133; www.pensionvasko.sk; Ždiar 631; s/d 400/800Sk; **P**) is a new wood-and-stone lodge near the ski area.

Getting There & Away

There are four buses daily to Ždiar from Poprad (53Sk, one hour) via Starý Smokovec (40Sk, 45 minutes), Tatranská Lomnica (31Sk, 35 minutes) and Tatranská Kotlina (10Sk, 10 minutes). Four daily buses travel from Ždiar to the Polish border at Lysá Polana (22Sk, 25 minutes), 2km north of Tatranská Javorina. More buses go on weekends and during July and August. From there you can walk across the border. On Thursday and Saturday, two morning buses go directly to Zakopane (196Sk, 1½ hours).

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