

Slovakia

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Spiš Castle** Explore ridgetop ruins spread over 4 hectares (p996)
- **Cafés** Wander Bratislava's old town streets and see how many sidewalk cafés you can frequent in a day (p991)
- **Best journey** Hike from *chata* (mountain hut) to *chata* along the 65km-long Magistála Trail below the alpine peaks in the High Tatras (p994)
- **Off-the-beaten track** Face east – towards the wooden churches and icons of Bardejov (p996)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 49,035 sq km (two-thirds the size of England)
- **ATMs** Widespread
- **Budget** 900Sk per day in Bratislava
- **Capital** Bratislava
- **Country code** ☎ 421, international access code ☎ 00
- **Famous for** Ice hockey (Slovakia makes more ice-hockey pucks than any other country) and beautiful women
- **Languages** Slovak
- **Money** Koruna (Sk); A\$1 = 20Sk; CA\$1 = 26Sk; €1 = 38Sk; ¥1 = 4Sk; NZ\$1 = 18Sk; UK£1 = 55Sk; US\$1 = 30Sk
- **Phrases** *Ahoj* (hello), *Dovidenia* (Goodbye), *Ďakujem* (Thank you), *Este pivo prosím* (Another beer please), *Kde je WC (veyt-say)?* (Where's the loo?)



- **Population** 5.4 million
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visas** Citizens of the EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan can enter Slovakia for 90 days without a visa.

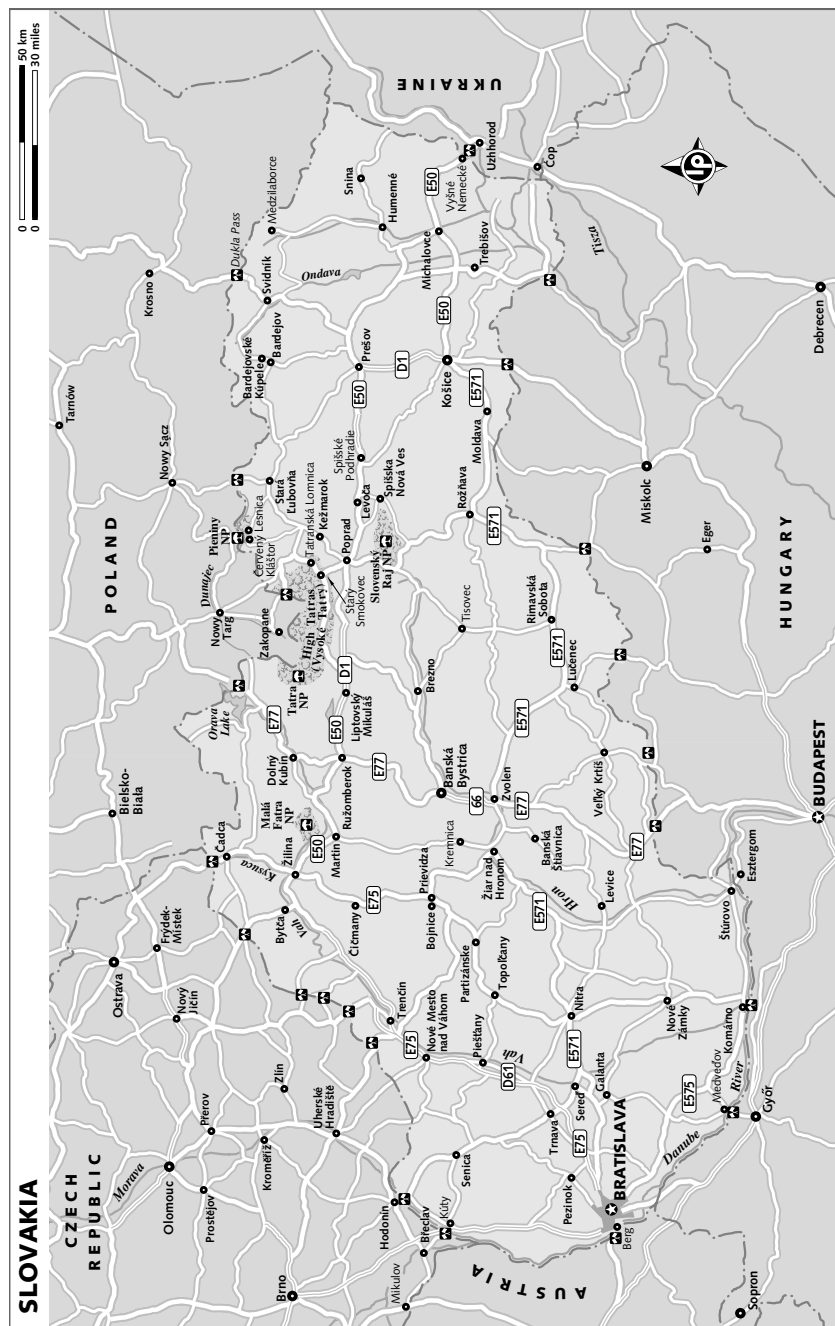
TRAVEL HINTS

Buy a national map, locate a castle-ruin symbol and start hiking. In addition to the many reconstructed fortresses open to the public, there are dozens of castle relics accessible on public trails. You may find only a hearth remaining, but the view and the adventure are free.

ROAMING SLOVAKIA

When you're done café hopping in Bratislava, take the two-hour train ride northeast to explore the castle in Trenčín. Continue east to hike the hills or climb the peaks in the High Tatras.

Slov-what-ia? Aren't they at war? Ok, so wee, peaceful Slovakia isn't among the most-touted destinations. Big mistake. Here, you can climb alpine peaks, see over 100 castles, hike from end to end and sit in as many old-town cafés as your rear can stand. Bratislava has emerged from its frumpy, communist-era chrysalis in time to welcome a horde of low-cost carrier junkies. Increasing numbers of flights and EU membership have pushed costs up in the capital. Outside the city and you'll find traditional villages, terrific trails and prices a fraction of those in Western Europe.



HISTORY

Slavic tribes wandered west into what would become Slovakia around the 5th century; by the 9th, the territory was part of the short-lived Great Moravian Empire. Subsequently the Magyars (Hungarians) moved in next door and laid claim to the whole territory for the next 800 or so years.

In the 19th century Slovak intellectuals cultivated ties with the Czechs, and after WWI took the nation into the united Czechoslovakia. The day before Hitler's troops invaded Czech territory in March 1939, a fascist puppet state set up the first independent Slovakia as a German ally. It was not a populist move, however, and in August 1944 Slovak partisans instigated the ill-fated Slovak National Uprising (Slovenské Národné Povstanie, or SNP), inspiring countless future street names.

After the communist takeover in 1948, power was again centralised in Prague until the 1989 Velvet Revolution brought down the curtains on communism. The 1992 elections saw Vladimír Mečiar and the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) come to power, bringing with them antidemocratic laws, discrimination and nationalism. By July 1992 the parliament had voted to declare sovereignty and the Czechoslovak federation dissolved peacefully on 1 January 1993. In 1998 a new right-leaning prime minister, Mikuláš Dzurinda, launched a policy of economic and social reforms that got Slovakia into NATO and the EU by May 2004.

Elections in 2006 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 Mečiar's isolationist HZDS. For now, Fico is promising to keep Slovakia on track to Euro conversion in 2009. Time will tell which direction the government decides to go.

THE CULTURE

A deeply religious (60% Catholic) and familial people, Slovaks have strong social ties and a deep sense of folk traditions. Young people are warm and open, but there can be a reserve about the older generations. Just show interest in their country or ask for help, though, and the shell cracks to reveal generosity and warmth. Thankfully, surly service is now the exception rather than the rule in the tourist industry.

Government statistics estimate that Slovakia's population is 86% Slovak, 11% Hungarian, 1.2% Czech and 1.7% Roma (though some nongovernmental groups estimate the Roma population as high as 4%). The Roma are still viewed with uncompromising suspicion and some live in settlements with substandard conditions. About a quarter of Slovakia's population resides in the nation's five largest cities. Families are typically nuclear units, with divorce common. Views on women's and gay rights aren't enlightened, but activism isn't common either.

SPORT

Wander into any bar or restaurant during puck-pushing season (September to April) and 12 large men and an ice rink will never be far from the TV screen. Although they brought home the bronze in the 2003 world championships, Slovakia was knocked out of the Olympic's medal race by rival Czech Republic during the quarter finals in Torino, 2006, and they finished eighth in the world cup in 2006. The fact that Slovakia will host the 2011 world championships (and Bratislava will get a new multibazillion-koruna hockey stadium) is sure to perk up fans.

Football fills the summer months, SK Slovan Bratislava being the nation's most successful team.

ARTS

Traditional folk arts, from music to architecture, are at the heart of Slovakia's charm. Úľuv is the national folk-art collective, with stores all over the country. Slovakia has some striking examples of religious art and architecture, including the sculpted altar at the Church of St Jacob in Levoča (p996) and the Cathedral of St Elizabeth in Košice (p997). The brutalist architecture of the communist epoch, as evocative as it is ugly, still holds sway over many of Slovakia's towns and cities.

ENVIRONMENT

Culminating in the icy peaks of the High Tatras, Slovakia is a crescendo of forested hills and jagged mountains. With all this natural beauty it's not surprising that more than 20% of the country is designated as protected parkland and weekend walks in nature are a national obsession.

On the other hand, the communists left more than their fair share of grimy factories

READING UP

Stanislav Kirschbaum's *A History of Slovakia – The Struggle for Survival* is a very readable history. Martin Simečka's *Year of the Frog* is an interesting portrayal of life in the communist '80s. For more in-depth travel information about Slovakia, don't mind if we recommend Lonely Planet's *Czech & Slovak Republics*.

behind. The refineries and steelworks are starting to clean up their act, but big centres such as Bratislava and Košice do suffer from air pollution.

TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Bratislava's **MR Štefánika Airport** (code BTS; www.airportbratislava.sk) receives flights from across Europe. **SkyEurope** (code NE; ☎ 02-4850 4850; www.skyeurope.com) has the most connections (22 cities) and **Czech Airlines** (code 0K; ☎ 5296 1042; www.czechairlines.com) flies between Prague and both Bratislava and Košice. **Slovak Airlines** (code 6Q; ☎ 4870 4870; www.slovakairlines.sk) connects the capital with Brussels and Moscow, albeit infrequently. To get here from beyond the Continent, use **Vienna International Airport** (code VIE; www.viennaairport.com), 60km from Bratislava, which is connected by hourly buses.

Boat

Slovak Shipping and Ports (Slovenská plavba a prístavy; ☎ 02-5293 2226; www.lod.sk) hydrofoils ply the Danube river. Boats depart from the **Hydrofoil Terminal** (Fajnorovo nábrežie 2) and head to Vienna and Budapest daily from April to September.

Bus

Eurolines (☎ 5541 4438; www.eurolines.sk) connects Bratislava by bus with most major European cities, including London (€100, 23 hours, five weekly), Munich (€40, eight hours, three weekly) and Vienna (€6, one hour, hourly).

Car & Motorcycle

All foreign drivers' licences with photo ID are valid in Slovakia. As well as your vehicle's registration papers, you need a 'green card'

(which proves drivers travelling through Europe have insurance that complies with the minimum requirements of the places that they drive through). Your vehicle must display a nationality sticker and carry a first-aid kit and warning triangle.

Train

Direct trains connect Bratislava with Prague (655Sk, 4½ hours, six daily), Budapest (486Sk, three hours, seven daily) and Vienna (297Sk, one hour, 30 daily). One night train links Bratislava with Moscow (2738Sk, 32½ hours) and one with Warsaw (1410Sk, 10½ hours). A daily train to Kiev (1913Sk, 21 hours) passes through Košice on its way from Budapest.

GETTING AROUND

Bicycle

Roads are often narrow and in towns cobblestones and tram tracks can be a dangerous combination. Theft is also a problem, so a lock is a must. The cost of transporting a bicycle by rail is usually 10% of the train ticket.

Bus

Intercity buses run by **Slovak Bus Transport** (Slovenská autobusová doprava, SAD; www.eurolines.sk, in Slovak) are slower and less convenient than trains for most destinations in this chapter. To search for schedules, go to www.busy.sk; it's in Slovak, but decipherable if you remember 'odkial' means 'from' and 'kam' means 'to'. When looking at bus schedules in person beware of footnotes (many fewer buses go on weekends).

Car & Motorcycle

To use Slovakia's motorways (denoted by green signs) vehicles must have a *nálepka* (motorway sticker) displayed on the windshield. You can buy stickers at border crossings and petrol stations (120Sk for a week, 600Sk for a year; for vehicles up to 1.5 tonnes). Rental cars already have them. Parking restrictions are eagerly enforced: always buy a ticket from a machine, or the person wandering around with a satchel, and display it on your dashboard.

Hitching

Hitchhiking is not unheard of in the hinterlands. You'll see plenty of others holding up destination placquards roadside. If you do hitch, it is safer to travel in pairs.

Local Transport

City buses and trams operate from around 4.30am to 11.30pm daily. Tickets are sold at public transport offices, at newsstands and from ticket machines, and must be validated once you're aboard.

Train

Slovak Republic Railways (Železnice Slovenskej republiky; www.zsr.sk) provides a cheap and efficient national service. Most of the places covered in this chapter are on or near the main railway line between Bratislava and Košice.

BRATISLAVA

☎ 02 / pop 425,533

Cobblestone alleys, pedestrian plazas, pastel 18th-century rococo buildings and sidewalk cafés galore: Bratislava's old town may be petite, but it is eminently strollable. You can't miss the institutional housing blocks and bizarre communist constructions around old town's edges, though. Some of them can be quite interesting in a morbidly fascinating kind of way. New bars and restaurants continually pop up as the centre fizzes with Eurochic trimmings in the wake of EU accession. You could say the city's been discovered. At weekends, it'd be surprising if you didn't spot a group or two of English-speaking blokes roaming the pedestrian streets. Still, Bratislava's smaller scale makes it more manageable than Prague or Budapest, which it's halfway between. And locals always far outnumber the tourists here.

ORIENTATION

The old town centre is bounded by Hodžovo nám to the north, the castle to the west, Šafariková nám to the east and Hviezdoslavovo nám and the Danube to the south.

INFORMATION**Bookshops**

Next Apache (Panenská 28; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun) Loads of used English books and a comfy café.

Discount Cards

The Bratislava Culture & Information Centre (right) sells the **Bratislava City Card**, which includes city transport and provides discounted museum admissions (one/two/three days 200/300/370Sk).

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

■ Ambulance, Fire & Police ☎ 112

Emergency

Main Police Station (☎ foreigner assistance 09 61 03 12 65; Gunduličova 10)

Internet Access

Internet Centrum (☎ 09 03 69 35 77; Mikalská 2; ☎ 9-4am) Four of the six computers have web cam and Skype access.

Wifi Café (Ground fl, Tatracentrum, Hodžovo nám 2; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) Smoke-free café with flat-screen terminals.

Medical Services

Poliklinika (☎ 5296 2461; Bezručova 8) Hospital.

Money

Old town has an excess of banks and ATMs, with several convenient branches on Poštova and around Kamenné nám. Bus, plane and train stations have ATMs.

Post

Main post office (Nám SNP 34)

Tourist Information

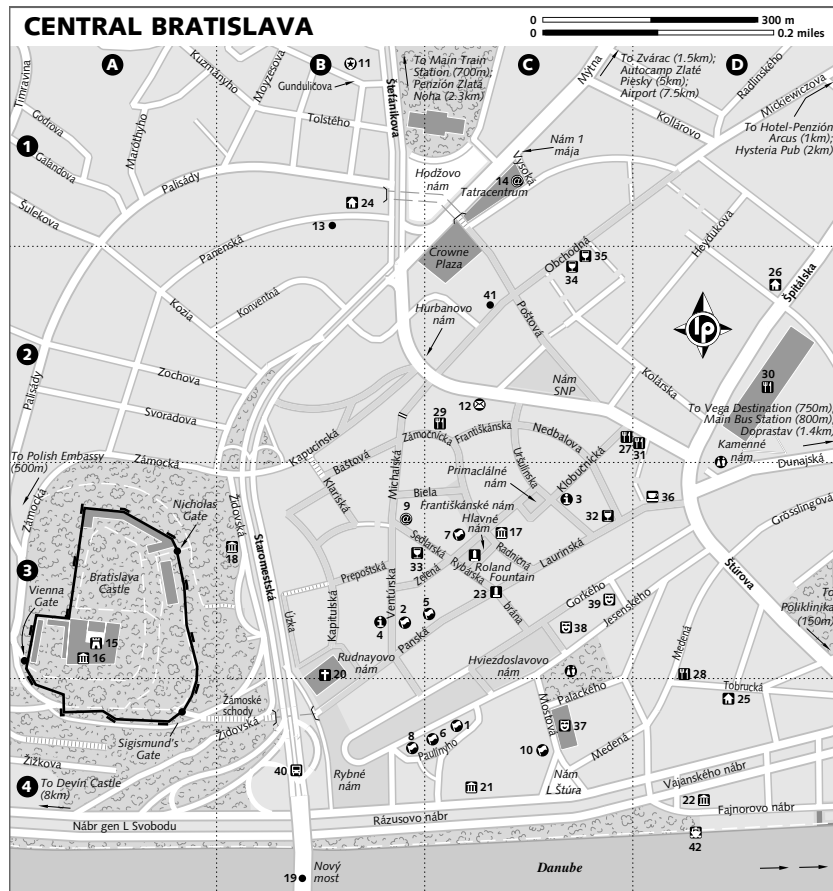
Bratislava Culture & Information Centre (BKIS; ☎ 5249 5906; www.bratislava.sk; Kloboučnícka 2; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) Official city office.

GETTING INTO TOWN

The main train station, Hlavná stanica, is about 1km north of the centre. To get there walk down to Šancová, veer right and cross over the pedestrian bridge, then continue south down Štefánikova. You can also take bus 93 to Hodžovo nám or tram 13 to Nám L Štúra.

The bus station (*autobusová stanica*) is 1.5km east of the old town. Turn left out of the main doors and make a quick right to follow Mlynské nivy (which becomes Dunajská) into the centre. Bus 206 connects the bus and train stations, stopping centrally at Hodžovo nám.

Bratislava's MR Štefánika Airport is 7km northeast of the centre. Bus 61 links it to the train station.



Bratislava Tourist Service (BTS) (☎ 5464 1271; www.bratislava-info.sk; Ventúrska 9; ☎ 10am-8pm) Tiny space, but more helpful staff.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bratislava Castle (Bratislavský hrad; grounds admission free; ☎ 9am-8pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar) Lords over the west side of town. Winding ramparts and grounds make for a great walk overlooking the city. During the Turkish occupation of Budapest, this was the seat of Hungarian royalty. A fire devastated the fortress in 1811 and most of what you see today is a reconstruction from the 1950s (bland white interiors and all). The saving grace of the castle's ho-hum **Historical Museum** (Historické múzeum; ☎ 5441 1441; www.snm.sk; adult/student 100/40Sk; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-

Sun) is the vertiginous tower you can climb. At research time the tiny **treasury (klenotnica)** was closed indefinitely for reconstruction. When it reopens, the highlight will still be the unbelievably ancient *Venus of Moravany*, a 25,000-year-old fertility amulet carved from a mammoth tusk.

Moving displays about the city's former Jewish community are exhibited at the **Museum of Jewish Culture** (Múzeum židovskej kultúry; ☎ 5441 8507; Židovská 17; adult/student 200/100Sk; ☎ 11am-5pm Sun-Fri). Across the street, a relatively modest interior belies the elaborate history of **St Martin's Cathedral** (Dóm sv Martina; admission €1.25; ☎ 9-11am & 1-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun). Eleven ruling monarchs were crowned here between 1563 and 1830. The busy highway almost touching

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St Martin's follows the moat outside former city walls. To construct the road and the UFO-like **New Bridge** (Nový most; ☎ 6252 0300; www.u-f-o.sk; Viedenská cesta; observation deck 100Sk; ☎ 10am-11pm) in the 1970s, an ancient synagogue and other old buildings were destroyed. The multicoloured lights flashing from the spaceship after dark come from a sky-high disco.

Further along the Danube, check out the first-floor exhibits of the **Slovak National Museum** (Slovenské národné múzeum; ☎ 5934 9122; www.snm.sk; Vajanského nábrežie 2; adult/student 60/20Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) for an overview of folk cultures and customs countrywide. An 18th-century palace and a Stalinist-modernist building make interesting cohorts for the **Slovak National Gallery** (Slovenská národná galéria; ☎ 5443 4587; www.sng.sk; Rázusovo nábrežie 2; adult/student 80/40Sk; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) and its eclectic collection – from Gothic art to graphic design.

The pedestrianised old town is great just for walking around and looking. If you tire, take a rest at one of the many **cafés**. In summer the sidewalks sprout bunches of tables and chairs. Around major holidays such as Christmas and Easter, Hlavné nám fills with a craft market and food and drink stalls (try the hot spiced wine in winter).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bratislava's best events are music-related. Classical music takes centre stage at the **Bratislava Music Festival** (Bratislavské hudobné slávnosti; ☎ 5443 4546; www.bhsfestival.sk, in Slovak), which runs from late September to mid-October. **Bratislava Jazz Days** (Bratislavských jazzových dní; ☎ 5293 1572; www.bjd.sk) swings for a long weekend in September.

SLEEPING

The Bratislava Culture & Information Service (p989) has a list of college dormitories open to all in the summer.

Camping

Autocamp Zlaté Piesky (☎ 4425 7373; kemp@netax.sk; Senecká cesta 2, 7km northeast of Bratislava; per person/camp site 90/70Sk, three- to four-person hut 570-900Sk; ☎ May-Sep; ☎) The facilities are old and the place is packed, but it's your only choice for camping. At least it's lakeside. Tram 2 from the train station terminates here.

Hostels

Patio Hostel (☎ 5292 5797; www.patiohostel.com; Špitálska 35; dm 450-550Sk; ☎ ☎) Clean and fresh and just like a college dorm (100 beds) – that is if you were allowed to paint the concrete block walls with bright colours and stylised graffiti at college. The three computers and a games room make up for the tiny kitchenettes.

MAN AT WORK

The castle? The UFO Bridge? Nope, the most photographed sight in Bratislava is a bronze statue called **The Watcher** (Čumil). He peeps out of an imaginary manhole at the intersection of Panská and Sedlárska, below a Men at Work sign. And he's not alone. There are other quirky statues scattered around the old town. See if you can find *The Frenchman* leaning on a park bench and *The Photographer* stalking his subject paparazzi-style around a corner.

Downtown Backpackers (☎ 5464 1191; www.backpackers.sk; Panenská 31; dm 500-600Sk, d 2000Sk; ☒ ☑) If you'd rather have lively conversation and laid-back Bohemian charm (exposed brick, red common walls) than a lock on your door, you've found your place. No TV, but the gathering room has a bar.

At workers' hostels, no frills equals good value. Accommodation is usually in one- or two-bed rooms, with two rooms sharing a bath. Try **Doprastav** (☎ 5023 0204; www.doprastav.sk; Košická 52; dm 280-360Sk, s/d 625/952Sk), not far from the bus station, or **Zvárač** (☎ 4924 6600; www.vuz.sk; Pionierska 17; s 700-900Sk, d 1100-1400Sk) in Nové mesto (take tram 3 from the train station to Pionierska).

Pensions

Penzión Zlatá Noha (☎ 5477 4922; www.zlata-noha.sk; Bellova 2; s 1350Sk, d 1700-1900Sk; ☒ ☑) Tranquility and personal attention come standard at this quiet, modern family-run guesthouse on a hill above town. Take bus 203 five stops from Hodžovo nám to Jeséniova; ring for the stop.

Hotel-Penzión Arcus (☎ 5557 2522; www.hotelarcus.sk; Moskovská 5; s 1400-1800Sk, d 2600Sk; ☒ ☑) Though updated in 2001, the varied rooms (some with balcony, some with courtyard views) still seem a little like they're from the late '80s. All the bathrooms are sparkling white, though. The family will let you check email on the computer at reception.

EATING

The best deals in town are the worker-oriented (daytime) self-service cafeterias called *samoobsluha*, *bufet* or *jedáleň*. Student-oriented eateries line Obchodná.

U Jakubu (☎ 5441 7951; Nám SNP 24; mains 59-65Sk; ☒ ☑ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) Self-service casseroles and cutlets: point and pay (as little as 90Sk for a soup-and-main menu).

SPLURGE

Hotel Marrol's (☎ 5778 4600; www.hotelmarrols.sk; Tobručká 4; s 7000Sk, d 7300-9600Sk; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑) Black-and-white movie stills, sleek leather chairs, sumptuous fabrics: Hotel Marrol's is straight off the silver screen, c 1940. It's hard to imagine more retro refinement packed into one cultural landmark townhouse.

Prášna Bašta (☎ 5443 4957; Zámčovnícka 11; mains 100-185Sk; ☒ ☑ 11am-11pm) Good, reasonable Slovak fare. The arched, vaulted interior oozes Bratislavan charm.

Vega Destination (☎ 3352 6994; Malý trh 2; mains 120-220Sk; ☒ ☑) Space-age décor serves as the backdrop to creative vegetarian meals. Completely nonsmoking.

Pizza Mizza (☎ 5296 5034; Tobručká 5; mains 99-250Sk) The city's best pie, in small or large sizes. Hulking salads, too.

For self-catering, head to the huge supermarket at **Tesco Department Store** (Kamenné nám; ☒ ☑ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, until 7pm Sat & Sun) or to the vegetable and fruit stands of the **Old Market** (Stara Tržnica; Nám SNP 25; ☒ ☑ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 7am-6pm Sat, 1-6pm Sun). Both have hot food stands nearby.

DRINKING & CLUBBING

Kréma Gurmánov Bratislavy (☎ 5273 1279; Obchodná 52; ☒ ☑ 10-2am Mon-Fri, 4pm-3am Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun) Drink a dark and smoky toast to a statue of Stalin under the Soviet flag at the KGB bar.

Hysteria Pub (☎ 09 10 44 77 44; Odbojárov 9; ☒ ☑ 10-1am Mon-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat, 11am-midnight Sun) Murals depict inebriated cowboys and *muchachos* at this popular disco-bar-Mexican cantina.

U Anjelov (☎ 5443 2724; Laurinská 19; ☒ ☑ 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 1.30am Fri, 1pm-1.30am Sat, 1pm-midnight Sun) Bratislava's gay scene is small, but stop in this gay-run café, which serves creative mixed drinks, to find out more.

Café Štúdio Club (☎ 5443 1796; cnr Laurinská 13; 10am-1am Mon-Wed, to 3am Thu & Fri, 4pm-3am Sat) Bop to the oldies or chill out to jazz – most nights there's live music of some sort.

To meet English speakers (but for no other reason), proceed to the **Dubliner** (☎ 5441 0706; Sedlárska 6; ☒ ☑ 11-3am Mon-Sat, to 1am Sun) or **Slovak Pub** (☎ 5441 0706; Obchodná 62; ☒ ☑ 10am-midnight Mon-Thu, 10-1am Fri & Sat, noon-midnight Sun).

ENTERTAINMENT

See opera and ballet on a budget (tickets €10 to €30; half price for students) at the **Slovak National Theatre** (Slovenské národné divadlo; www.snd.sk; Hviezdoslavovo nám). The **Booking Office** (☎ 5443 3764; cnr Jesenského & Komenského; ☒ ☑ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is behind the theatre.

Reduta Palace (Palač Reduta; cnr Nám L. Štúra & Medená) has a theatre for the **Slovak Philharmonic** (Slovenská filharmónia; ☎ 5920 8233; www.filharmonia.sk; ☒ ☑ ticket office 1-7pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 8am-2pm Wed).

HC Slovan (☎ 4445 6500; www.hcslovan.sk, in Slovak; Odbojárov 3), Bratislava's hallowed ice-hockey

WORTH A TRIP

Hardcore castle aficionados should trek to **Devin Castle** (☎ 6573 0105; Muránská; adult/student 80/30Sk; ☒ ☑ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, until 6pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr-Oct), 9km west of Bratislava. Once the military plaything of 9th-century warlord Prince Ratislav, Devin is packed solid with historical intrigue. Peer at the older bits that have been unearthed and tour a reconstructed palace museum. Bus 29 links the castle with Bratislava's Nový most stop, under the bridge.

team, plays at a stadium northeast of the old town. Get tickets at www.ticketportal.sk.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air
For more on flying to Bratislava from abroad, see p988. **SkyEurope** (code NE; ☎ 4850 4850; www.skyeurope.com) has flights to Košice (50 minutes, three daily) for as little as 190Sk (plus 300Sk in taxes) if you book early.

Be careful when booking flights to Bratislava or Vienna to be sure you know which city the plane lands in; airlines may advertise a Vienna-Bratislava destination because the cities are so close together. Sky Europe only flies into Bratislava (and has shuttle buses to Vienna).

Boat

From April to September you can get to Vienna and Budapest by hydrofoil (see p988).

Bus

The **Main Bus Station** (☎ 5556 7349 for reservations; www.eurolines.sk, in Slovak), is 1.5km east of Hlavné nám. Locals call it *Mlynské nivy*, after the street it's on. Buses leave from here heading to towns across Slovakia, including Žilina (203Sk, three hours, seven daily), Poprad (345Sk, seven hours, four daily), Košice (441Sk, eight hours, nine daily) and Bardejov (491Sk, nine to 11 hours, three daily).

Train

The **Main Train Station** (Hlavná stanica; ☎ 18 188; www.zsr.sk) is about 1km north of the old town. At least 12 trains a day, including four Intercity (IC) expresses, connect Bratislava to Košice (518Sk, 5½ to nine hours), most via Žilina (268Sk, 2¾ to four hours) and Poprad (420Sk, 4¾ to eight hours).

GETTING AROUND

Bus & Tram

Dopravný Podnik Bratislava (DPB; ☎ 5950 5950; www.dpb.sk) runs an extensive tram, bus and trolleybus network. To search for routes and schedules, go to www.imhd.sk. You can buy tickets (14/18/22Sk for 10/30/60 minutes) at the **DPB office** (Obchodná 14; ☒ ☑ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri), from newsstands and from machines at some stops. Passes (one/two/three days 90/170/270Sk) are sold at the DPB office and train and bus stations. Validate them on board.

Taxi

Getting around greater old town shouldn't ever cost more than 300Sk. For low rates and reliable drivers, try **Super Taxi** (☎ 16 616).

WEST & CENTRAL SLOVAKIA

TREŇCÍN

☎ 032 / pop 56,850

What's not to like about a place with a mighty cliff-top castle, pretty Renaissance buildings and a lively university population? Roman legionnaires were the first tourists to arrive here, establishing the outpost of Laugaricio in the 2nd century.

From the bus and train stations walk west through the city park and under the highway past the Tatra Hotel, where a street bears left uphill to Mierové nám, the main square. The **AiCES information centre** (☎ 161 86; www.trencin.sk; City Office, Sládkovičova; ☒ ☑ 8am-6pm May-Sep, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) is really helpful. There are several banks and ATMs on the main square. The **main post office** (Mierové nám 21) is quite close to **Mike Studio** (Mierové nám 25; ☒ ☑ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun; per min 1Sk), where you can check email.

The structure of **Trenčín Castle** (Trenčiansky hrad; ☎ 7435 657; off Matusova; adult/student 80/40Sk; ☒ ☑ 9am-5.30pm May-Oct, to 3.30pm Nov-Apr) dates from around the 15th century. Medieval life is re-enacted during night tours in July and August. Carved in the rock below the castle is a Roman inscription from AD 179 that recalls the 2nd Legion's victory over the Germanic Kvad tribes. To see it you have to ask inside **Hotel Tatra** (Gen MR Štefánika 2).

Autocamping na Ostrove (☎ 7434 013; http://web.viapvt.sk/autocamping.tn; Ostrov; per car/camp site 50/70Sk, hut per person 200Sk; ☒ ☑ May-15 Sep) sits on an island in the

middle of the Vah River. Nonsmoking **Penzión Svorad** (☎ 743 03 22; www.svorad-trencin.sk; Palackého 4; s 450-800Sk, d 700-1200Sk; ☒) is falling to pieces, but the price – and the castle views – are right.

For a late-night meal, **Bistro Central** (Štúrovo nám 10; mains 42-86Sk; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4am Fri, 7pm-4am Sat) food stand is convenient. For a sit-down meal, rustic **Restaurant Lánius** (☎ 7441 978; Mierové nám 20; mains 90-190Sk) is the place for filling Slovak dumplings and schnitzels. The ground floor **Steps Pub** (☎ 744 62 52; Sládkovičova 4-6; ☎ 10.30-1am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) has imports on tap; an upstairs bar attracts a *beautiful*, college-age crowd.

Most trains from Bratislava (180Sk, two hours, seven daily) continue on from here to Košice (420Sk, four hours) via Žilina (180Sk, one to two hours). Bus prices are comparable, but rides take longer.

MALÁ FATRA NATIONAL PARK

☎ 041

A 200-sq-km swathe of its namesake mountain range is incorporated into Malá Fatra National Park (Národný park Malá Fatra), where pine-clad slopes are topped with eerie, sentinel-like formations. From **Vrátna Valley** (Vrátna dolina; www.vratna.sk), 25km east of Žilina, you can access the trailheads, ski lifts and a cable car. The long, one-street town of Terchová is at the lower end of the valley. **Združenie Turizmu Terchová** (☎ 569 5307; www.ztt.sk, in Slovak; Sv Cyrila a Metoda 96, Terchová; ☎ 9am-6pm) can help with accommodation and bike rental.

Buses link Žilina with Terchová (40Sk, 45 minutes) and Chata Vrátna (52Sk, one hour), at the top of the valley, at least every two hours. Žilina is on the main railway line between Bratislava (268Sk, 2½ hours, 12 daily) and Košice (316Sk, three hours, 10 daily).

EAST SLOVAKIA

Alpine peaks, old towns and even older castles: East Slovakia is one of the most attractive touring areas in Central Europe.

HIGH TATRAS

☎ 052

The High Tatras (Vysoké Tatry) dwarf most of Central Europe; at 2654m, Gerlachovský štít is the loftiest peak in the entire Carpathian range. In terms of breadth, the Tatras are small (25km across), but in terms of natural

beauty, the massif is monumental, with pristine snowfields, ultramarine mountain lakes and crashing waterfalls. Sadly, a huge wind storm ripped through in late 2004, uprooting the dense pine forest surrounding midlevel towns. Huge swathes will look barren and war-ravaged for years to come.

Starý Smokovec, a 20th-century resort town, is roughly central, with peaceful Tatranská Lomnica 11km east and overdeveloped, lakeside Štrbské Pleso 16km west. A comprehensive network of tourist trails and ski tows, lifts and runs covers the range.

To protect the environment, higher trails are officially closed from November to mid-June. Snow can block others from November to June. June and July can be rainy, July and August are the warmest (and most crowded) and August and September are the best for high-altitude hiking. For the latest weather and advice contact the **Mountain Rescue Service** (Horská služba; ☎ 18 300; http://his.hzs.sk/; Starý Smokovec 23).

Information

Tatra Information Office (TIK; www.tatry.sk) Starý Smokovec (☎ 4423 440; Dom služieb 24; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat); Tatranská Lomnica (☎ 4468 118; Cesta Slobody; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Provides basic information on the area.

Tatra National Park Info Centrum (☎ 4492 391; www.tanap.sk; Štrbské Pleso; ☎ 9am-4pm) Next to Toliar department store; staff can give good advice about trails.

T-Ski Travel (☎ 4423 200; www.slovakiatravel.sk; Starý Smokovec 46; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Fri-Sun) Books lodging, including some hikers' huts, and outfits skiers.

Activities

More than 600km of hiking trails stretch across alpine valleys and up to some peaks, with hikers' huts to stop at along the way. From Starý Smokovec a **funicular railway** (pozemná lanovka dráha; ☎ 4467 618; www.tldtatry.sk; adult/student return 100/60Sk; ☎ 7.30am-7pm) takes you up to **Hrebienok** (1280m) on the 65km-long **Magistrála Trail**. An extremely popular **cable car** (kabinová lanovka dráha) links Tatranská Lomnica with the bustling lake and winter sports area of **Skalnaté pleso** (1751m; adult/student return 390/270Sk; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, to 3.30pm Sep-Jun) and another continues on to the precipitous 2634m summit of **Lomnický štít** (adult/student return 550/350Sk; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, to 3.30pm Sep-Jun).

Sleeping

Along the trails, a *chata* (mountain hut) may be anything from a shack to a chalet (300Sk to 500Sk per bed). Food is usually available. Hotel prices drop by a third from October to May.

The best way to book private rooms is ahead of time over the internet (see www.tatry.sk and www.tanap.sk/homes.html).

STARÝ SMOKOVEC & AROUND

Pension Vesna (☎ 4422 774; vesna@stonline.sk; Nový Smokovec 69; r per person 580Sk) Family-run and friendly. Most of the seven rooms in this guesthouse have three beds and a separate living area.

Hotel Euforia (☎ 4783 061; www.hoteleuforia.sk; Nová Lesná 399; s/d 1150/1550Sk) With blond wood and cobalt-blue accents, Euforia is fresher and brighter – and newer – than most of what's up the hill. It's 3km south of Starý Smokovec, near the Nová Lesná train stop.

Mountain huts above the town:

Bilíkova chata (1220m; ☎ 4422 439, fax 4422 267) Hotel-like chalet near Hrebienok.

Zamkovského chata (1475m; ☎ 4422 636; www.zamka.sk) 24 beds in four-bed rooms; board available. Between Hrebienok and Skalnaté pleso.

Zbojnícka chata (1960m; ☎ 0903638000; www.zbojnickachata.sk) Sixteen dorm-style beds; one hour above Hrebienok.

TATRANSKÁ LOMNICA & AROUND

Eurocamp FICC (☎ 4467 741; www.eurocamp-ficc.sk; per person/camp site/car 110/80/80Sk, 2-3-/4-bed bungalows 1200/1400/1600Sk; ☎) Party central, capacity 1500. Eurocamp has restaurants, bars, a pool and ball courts. Walk five minutes northeast of the Lomnica-Eurocamp train station.

Sportcamp (☎ 4467 288; http://sportcamp.host.sk, in Slovak; per person/camp site/car 80/80/50Sk; ☎ Jun-Sep) Less hyper but fewer amenities at this 100-site camping ground 2km north of Eurocamp FICC.

Penzión Encian (☎ 4467 520; penzion.encian@sinet.sk; s/d 1000/1500Sk) Since there are no trees in the way (*sigh*), some rooms have great views of Lomnický štít. The owners have personalized the small restaurant with old skiing memorabilia.

From the top of the cable car you can hike to the huts above Starý Smokovec, or you can make the strenuous 2½-hour trek from Skalnaté pleso to lakeside **Chata pri Zelenom plese** (1540m; ☎ 4467 420), with 50 beds.

Eating & Drinking

Almost all accommodation in the area has restaurants and each of the three main towns has a *potraviny* (grocery store).

Reštaurácia Stará Mama (☎ 4467 216; Shopping centre Sintra, Tatranská Lomnica; mains 65-172Sk) A rustic fave for substantial soups and homemade *pirohy* (like Polish pierogies, half moon-shaped dumplings served with sheep's cheese and bacon).

In Starý Smokovec, **Pizzéria Albas** (☎ 4423 460; Starý Smokovec; pizzas 100-170Sk) comes recommended by just about every resident under 30. **Tatry Pub** (☎ 442 2448; Starý Smokovec; ☎ 1-11pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri-Sun) is the official watering hole of the Mountain Guide Club.

Getting There & Away

To get to and from most destinations by public transport you'll have to switch in Poprad.

BUS

One daily, way-early-morning bus links Bratislava with Starý Smokovec (460Sk, 6¼ hours). From Poprad buses go 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

A main train line runs through Poprad; from there switch to narrow-gauge electric trains (see below). Starý Smokovec has a left-luggage office of sorts inside the adjacent sport shop.

WALKING INTO POLAND

There's a highway border crossing at Lysá Polana, 2.5km north of Tatranská Javorina, which is accessible by bus from Tatranská Lomnica (30Sk, 45 minutes, at least five daily) and Poprad.

Getting Around

Local buses run between the resort towns every 20 minutes and tend to be quicker than the train: Starý Smokovec to Tatranská Lomnica costs 10Sk and takes 10 minutes, to Štrbské Pleso costs 28Sk and takes 30 minutes.

Electric trains run hourly from Poprad via Starý Smokovec (30 minutes) to Štrbské Pleso (one hour). To get to Tatranská Lomnica (15 minutes), change at Starý Smokovec. A third route is from Tatranská Lomnica through

Studený Potok (15 minutes), around to Poprad (25 minutes). A 20Sk ticket covers trips of 6km to 14km. It's easier to buy a one-/three-/seven-day pass for 100/200/360Sk. Validate tickets on board.

POPRAD

☎ 052 / pop 53,000

Poprad is an important transport transfer point. **Sky Europe** (☎ reservations 02-4850 4850; www.skyeurope.com) flies to and from London Stansted and the **Poprad-Tatry International Airport** (☎ 7763 875; www.airport-poprad.sk; Na Letisko 100) on Wednesday and Saturday for as little as 1700Sk one way.

Intercity (IC) or Eurocity (EC) trains are the quick and cost-effective way to get in and out of Poprad; four a day run to Bratislava (420Sk, 4¼ hours) and Košice (154Sk, 1¼ hours).

If you want to go to Poland, you can take a bus from Poprad to Tatranska Javorina (58Sk, 1¼ hours, four daily) near the border at Lysá Polana. Walk across to the buses waiting to take you to Zakopane.

LEVOČA

☎ 053 / pop 14,600

Fairly complete medieval walls protect the age-old centre from onslaught. Thank goodness no hypermart developer is getting in here: the 15th-century Gothic Church of St Jacob and its fabulous altar are the pride of the Slovak nation's religious art collection.

To get to the centre, walk 1km north of the train and bus stations via Michala Hlaváčka. The **AICES information office** (☎ 451 37 63; www.levoca.sk; Nám Majstra Pavla 58; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr) is at the top of the square near a bank. Check email at **Levonet Internet Café** (Nám Majstra Pavla 38; per hr 80Sk; ☎ 10am-midnight).

Nám Majstra Pavla, Levoča's central square, is chock-a-block with superb Gothic and Ren-

aissance buildings. Main stage at the spindles-and-spires **Church of St Jacob** (Chrám sv Jakuba; ☎ 4512 347; www.chramsvojakuba.sk; adult/student 50/30Sk; ☎ tours 11.30am, 1, 2, 3 & 4pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, 11am-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat Jul-Aug) is a 16m-high carved wooden altar (1517) by renowned Master Pavol of Levoča. Buy tickets in the Municipal Weights House opposite the north door. The Gothic **town hall (radnica)** contains the so-so **Spiš Museum** (Spišské múzeum; ☎ 4512 449; adult/student 30/15Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm). Adjacent is a 16th-century **cape of shame** for naughty boys and girls.

The information office can refer you to private rooms (from 300Sk per person). If you camp at **Recreačné Zariadenie** (☎ 4512 705; www.rz-levoca.web2001.cz; Levočská dolina; per person/camp site 85/70Sk, two-bed hut 380Sk, three-bed hut 570Sk; ☎ mid-Jun-Aug), 5km northwest of the centre, you can also rent one of its bikes. The rambling guesthouse **Oáza** (☎ 4514 511; www.ubytovanieoaza.sk; Nová 65; d/q with shared bathroom per person 300Sk) is in the old town. For meat-free dishes head to no-fuss **Vegetarián** (☎ 451 4576; Uholná 137; mains 45-90Sk; ☎ 10am-3.15pm Mon-Fri). At the other end of the spectrum, **Reštaurácia u Janusa** (☎ 4514 592; Kláštorňá 22; mains 70-120Sk) has all the fried pork dishes you could want.

Bus travel is most practical to Poprad (40Sk, 30 minutes, 21 daily) and Košice (128Sk, two hours, five daily). Buses also run to Spišská Nová Ves (18Sk, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes), where you can switch to the main Bratislava-Košice train line.

SPIŠSKÉ PODHRADIE

☎ 053

The eerie ruins of **Spiš Castle** (Spišský hrad; ☎ 053-4541 336; www.spiskyhrad.com, in Slovak; Spišské Podhradie; adult/student 100/60Sk; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Oct, by appointment Nov-Apr) crown the ridge on the eastern side of Spišské Podhradie. This Unesco World Heritage site covers more than 4 hectares and even the broken remains are impressive. Historic

chronicles first mention Spiš Castle in 1209, and the central residential tower, at the highest elevation, is thought to date from that time. The Romanesque palace contains weaponry exhibits upstairs and torture chambers below.

A kilometre west of Spišské Podhradie is the still-active **Spiš Chapter** (Spišská kapitula; ☎ information 0907388411; adult/student 20/10Sk; ☎ 11.15am-2.45pm), a 13th-century Catholic complex encircled by a 16th-century wall.

A secondary railway line connects Spišské Podhradie to Spišské Vlachy station (11Sk, 15 minutes) on the main line from Poprad to Košice. Departures are scheduled to connect with the Košice trains. Buses from Levoča (20Sk, 15 minutes, hourly) arrive 1km west in the village centre. Cross the tracks near the train station and follow the yellow markers up the hill.

KOŠICE

☎ 055 / pop 235,000

Wander down the long town square, crane your neck to admire the Gothic Cathedral of St Elizabeth, then rest with the locals on benches near the musical fountain before going underground to explore the ancient city's archaeology. Slovakia's second city has a real sense of cohesion and community that's missing in the capital. Though industry forms the city's backbone, its old-town heart is going strong.

Košice received its city coat of arms in 1369 and, skipping forward, it was here on 5 April 1945 that the Košice Government Program – which made communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia a virtual certainty – was announced. US Steel is the town's main employer today

Orientation & Information

The adjacent bus and train stations are a spit east of the old town. Walking five minutes along Mlynská brings you onto Hlavná.

The large and official **City Information Centre** (☎ 6258 888; www.kosice.sk; Hlavná 59; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) has loads of maps and books, as well as internet access (30Sk per hour). The youthful staff at the **Municipal Information Centre Košice** (MIC; ☎ 16 168; www.mickosice.sk) Tesco Department Store (Hlavná 111; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4.30pm Sat); Dargov Department Store (Hlavná 2; ☎ 8am-7pm) often has a more helpful attitude though.

Ludová Banka (Mlynská 29), with exchange desk and ATM, is between the train and bus sta-

tions and the centre. The **main post office** (Poštová 18; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-2pm Sat) is to the west of the main square.

Sights & Activities

The dark and brooding 14th-century **Cathedral of St Elizabeth** (Dóm sv Alžbety; ☎ 0908667093; adult/student 70/35Sk; ☎ 1-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) wins the prize for the sight most likely to grace your Košice postcard home. In a **crypt** on the left side of the nave is the tomb of Duke Ferenc Rákóczi, who was exiled to Turkey after the failed 18th-century Hungarian revolt against Austria. You can climb the church **tower** to see the heights. Adjacent is the 14th-century **St Michael's Chapel** (Kaplnka sv Michala; adult/student 30/15Sk; ☎ 1-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat). To the north, **Urban Tower** (built in the 14th century, rebuilt in the 1970s) now contains a cheesy **Wax Museum** (Muzéum voskovy figurín; ☎ 6232 534; adult/student 120/80Sk; ☎ noon-4pm Tue-Sun).

You can explore the defence chambers and waterways of medieval Košice in the mazelike **archaeological excavations** (☎ 6228 393; adult/child 25/10Sk; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), discovered during city building work in 1996. More buried treasure lies in the basement vault of the **East Slovak Museum** (Východoslovenské múzeum; ☎ 622 0309; Hviezdoslavovo 3; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun). A secret stash of thousands of 15th- to 18th-century gold coins was unearthed during the renovation of a Hlavná nám house in 1935. Anyone have a shovel?

Sleeping

The City Information Centre has a list of summer student dorms and a few private rooms (from 300Sk per person). Budget pickings are slim outside July and August.

Kosmalt (☎ 6423 572; www.kosmalt.sk; Kysucká 16; s/d 590/630Sk; ☎) This big apartment-block hotel has tolerable rooms and antique elevators. There's a games room, a bar and restaurant, and it's located near a market. Take tram 6 from the train/bus station to the Kino Družba stop.

Penzión Slovakia (☎ 7289 820; www.penzionslovakia.sk; Orliá 6; s 950-1150Sk, d 1350-1750Sk) The rooms here, named after Slovak towns, have more character than most – wood-panelled ceilings, skylights, midcentury furnishings in the apartments...and Boffo grill restaurant downstairs.

WORTH A TRIP

All steep roofs and flat fronts, pastel hues and paint-and-plaster details: it may as well be the 15th century, the Gothic-Renaissance town square in **Bardejov** (www.e-bardejov.sk) has been so enthusiastically well-preserved. (Unesco thought so too, adding it to the World Heritage list in 2000.) Today the quiet square is the tourist draw, but there's also an excellent icon museum that sheds light on this region's eastern-facing religion. Nearby **Bardejovské kúpele**, 3km north, is a spa town with a rustic village museum. Greek Catholic and Orthodox wooden churches dot the surrounding area. There are no trains to Bardejov, but buses make the run to/from Košice (98Sk, 1¼ hours, eight daily).

Slightly ragged year-round hostels:

Ubytovňa Mestský Park (☎ 6333 904; www.ubytovna-ke.sk; Mestský Park 13; dm 2205k)

K2 (☎ 6255 948; Štúrova 32; s/d with shared bathroom 350/7005k)

Eating & Drinking

Dargov Department Store (Hlavná 2; mains 20-80Sk; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-3pm Sun) Dig into sausages and stuffed cabbage at the store's ground-floor cafeteria. There's a supermarket here as well.

Góvinda (☎ 6200 428; Puškinova 8; mains 80-120Sk; ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Sat) Hare Krishna owners dish up divine vegetarian Indian food.

Plzeňská Pub (☎ 6220 402; Hlavná 92; mains 80-150Sk; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri-Sun) Czech Pilsner on tap, roast pork and bread dumpings in the kitchen. Have your fill in the beer garden out back.

Piano Café (☎ 0915517339; Hlavná 92; pizzas 100-169Sk; ☎ 10-midnight Mon-Thu, 10-1am Fri, 3pm-1am Sat, 3pm-midnight Sun) Enjoy pizza with your piano music at street level; in the cellar you can get down to more of a disco beat.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Košice International Airport (code KSC; ☎ 622 1093; www.airportkosice.sk) is about 6km southeast of the centre. **SkyEurope** (code NE; ☎ Bratislava 02-4850 4850; www.skyeurope.com) has two to three daily flights to/from Bratislava (one hour). From Košice, **Austrian Airlines** (code OS; ☎ 02-4940 2100; www.austrianairlines.com) flies to Vienna and **Czech Airlines** (code OK; ☎ 6782 490; www.czechairlines.com) flies to Prague.

BUS

Regular buses wend their way to/from Levoča (1175k, 2½ hours, two daily) and Poprad (1345k, 2½ hours, four daily). You can also bus it to Uzhhorod, Ukraine (1405k, 2½ hours) at least once daily and to Miskolc, Hungary (1205k, two hours) on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

TRAIN

Up to 10 express trains a day run to/from Poprad (1545k, 1¼ hours). To Bratislava, an Intercity or Eurocity train (5185k, 5½ hours, four daily) is your quickest option.

A sleeper train leaves Košice every morning for Kyiv (19135k, 22½ hours) in the Ukraine. Two trains (one overnight) a day head for

Prague (11405k, 11 hours), two for Budapest (9675k, four hours) and three to Kraków, Poland (8445k, 6½ hours).

Getting Around

Transport tickets (125k, one zone) are good for buses and trams in most of the city; buy them from newsstands and validate them on board. Bus 23 between the airport and the train station requires a two-zone ticket (195k).

SLOVAKIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Many budget lodgings are the same price year-round. At pensions, high season runs from May to September, but prices go up further during the Christmas and Easter holidays. We quote high season rates; prices drop 10% to 50% October through April.

Camping

Most camping grounds open May to September and are often accessible by public transport. They'll usually have a snack bar and small cabins that are cheaper than a hotel. Camping wild in national parks is prohibited.

Hostels

Outside Bratislava there are no backpacker-style hostels. Student dormitories throughout the country open to tourists in July and August. For cheap sleeps in other months, *ubytovňa* is the word to know. These are hostels for workers (in cities) or tourists (near natural attractions) that have basic, no-nonsense dorms or shared-bathroom singles and doubles.

Hotels, Pensions & Private Rooms

Sleeping in Bratislava is considerably more expensive than in the rest of the country. Pension rooms start at 1300/19005k for singles/doubles and private rooms start at 11005k.

ACTIVITIES

The High Tatras (p994) have just about every outdoor activity you can think of: mountain biking, mountain climbing, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowboarding and hiking.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most museums and castles are closed on Monday and tourist attractions outside the capital are sometimes only open from May to September.

Banks ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri

Bars ☎ noon-midnight or 1am. Clubs stay open until 4am weekends

Post offices ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat

Restaurants ☎ 11am-10pm

Shops ☎ 9am-5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat.

Department stores have longer hours

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The crime rate is low compared with the West, but pickpocketing does happen. And never leave anything on the seat of an unattended vehicle, even a locked one. That's just advertising you don't want it any more.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Embassies & Consulates in Slovakia

Australia and New Zealand do not have embassies in Slovakia; the nearest are in Vienna and Berlin, respectively. The following are all in Bratislava.

Austria (☎ 02-5443 1443; www.embassyaustria.sk; Ventúrska 10)

Czech Republic (☎ 02-5920 3303; www.mzv.cz/bratislava/; Hviezdoslavovo nám 8)

France (☎ 02-5934 7111; www.france.sk; Hlavné nám 7)

Germany (☎ 02-5920 4400; www.pressburg.diplo.de; Hviezdoslavovo nám 10)

Ireland (☎ 02-5930 9611; bratislava@iveagh.irlgov.ie; Carlton Savoy Bldg, Mostová 2)

Poland (☎ 02-5441 3174; www.polskevelyslancetwo.sk; Hummelova 4)

UK (☎ 02-5998 2000; www.britishebassy.sk; Panská 16)

USA (☎ 02-5443 0861; www.usembassy.sk; Hviezdoslavovo nám 4)

Slovakian Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Australia (☎ 02-6290 1516; 47 Culgoa Circuit, O'Malley, Canberra, ACT 2606)

Austria (☎ 01-318 905 5200; www.vienna.mfa.sk; Armbrustergasse 24, 1-1190 Wien)

Canada (☎ 613-749 4442; 50 Rideau Terrace, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 2A1)

Czech Republic (☎ 02-33 11 30 51; www.praha.mfa.sk; Pod Hradbami 1, 160 00 Praha 6)

France (☎ 01 44 14 56 00; www.amb-slovaquie.fr; 125 Rue de Ranelagh, 75016 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-8892 6 200; www.botschaft-slowakei.de; Friedrichstrasse 60, Berlin 107 07)

Hungary (☎ 1-460 9010; www.budapest.mfa.sk; Stéfania út 22-24, H-1143 Budapest XIV)

Ireland (☎ 01-660 0012; www.dublin.mfa.sk; 20 Clyde Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

UK (☎ 020-7313 6470; www.slovakembassy.co.uk; 25 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QY)

USA (☎ 202-237-1054; www.slovakembassy-us.org; 3523 International Court NW, Washington, DC 20008)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Folk festivals take place all over Slovakia in June and August; the biggest is the **Východná Folklore Festival**, 32km west of Poprad.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's & Independence Day 1 January

Three Kings Day 6 January

Good Friday and Easter Monday March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Victory over Fascism Day 8 May

Cyril and Methodius Day 5 July

SNP Day 29 August

Constitution Day 1 September

Our Lady of Sorrows Day 15 September

All Saints' Day 1 November

Christmas 24 to 26 December

INTERNET RESOURCES

The website of the **Slovak Tourism Board** (www.slovakiatourism.sk) has loads of information on the country's attractions. **What's On Slovakia** (www.whatsonlovakia.com) lists events. Check the news from Slovakia at www.slovensko.com and find yourself on the Slovak map site www.kompas.sk.

MONEY

Slovakia's currency is the Slovak crown, or Slovenská koruna (Sk), containing 100 halier (hellers). There are coins of 50 hellers, and one, two, five and 10 crowns (Sk). Bank notes come in denominations of 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000 and 5000 crowns.

Almost all banks have exchange desks and there are usually branches in or near a city's old town square. ATMs are quite common even in smaller places. Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted in Bratislava, less so in the rest of the country.

Your Slovak friends will likely complain you're spoiling the waiters if you don't just round up to the next 105k, but tips of 5% to 10% are appreciated in restaurants.

POST

Slovenská pošta (www.slposta.sk) service is fairly efficient and not too expensive.

Mail to Europe (automatically airmail) is 12Sk for letters and postcards up to 20g; to anywhere else it costs 16Sk.

TELEPHONE

Slovakia's country code is ☎ 421. When dialling from abroad drop the initial 0 from the area code. To dial internationally from inside Slovakia, dial ☎ 00, the country code and then the number. International phone cards such as **EZ Phone** (www.ezcard.sk; per min to UK & USA 2Sk) are the easiest and cheapest way to reach out and touch home. Some internet

cafés even have web cams or headsets for Skype calling.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Association of Information Centres of Slovakia** (AICES; ☎ 16 186; www.aices.sk) is an extensive network of city information centres.

VISAS

Citizens of EU countries, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan and the USA can enter Slovakia visa-free for up to 90 days. South Africans do need a visa. For a full list, see www.mzv.sk (under Ministry and then Travel Advice). If you require a visa, it *must* be bought in advance – they are *not* issued on arrival at the border.