

East Slovakia



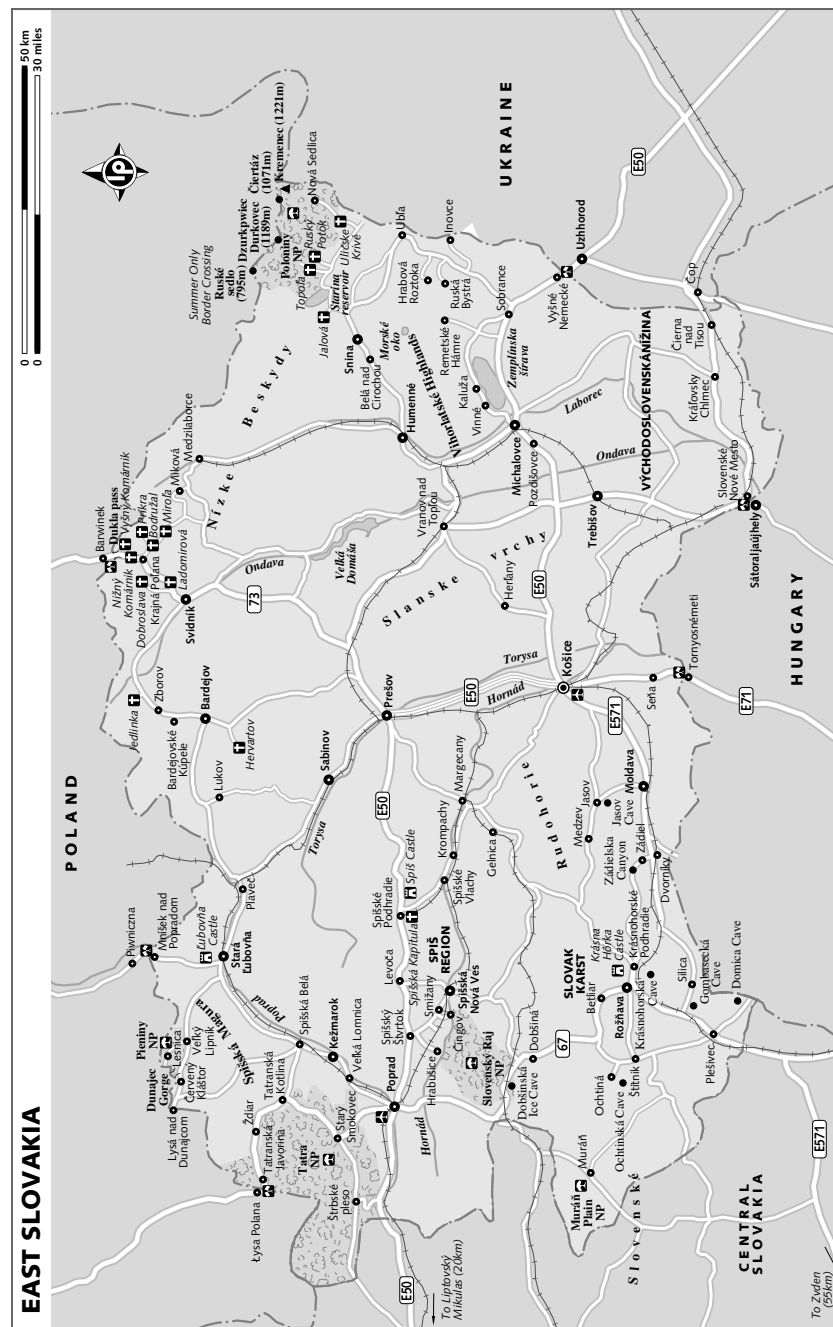
Wooden churches, sprawling castle ruins, crashing waterfalls – just beyond the High Tatras lies the most intriguing, and least accessible, region in Slovakia. Its isolation has for centuries preserved many folk customs, as well as protected a rich architectural heritage and natural beauty. Here you can step back into the 15th century in Spiš, or explore one of four national parks. Visit the wooden churches, or a *skanzen* (open-air village museum) in the borderlands and Sáriš areas to experience the traditional culture.

If you're craving city life, the east has that too. Košice, the country's second-largest city, is a grand mix of old and new, with a lively bar and café scene and a towering Gothic cathedral. Among all this eastern beauty is spread a fair share of industrial ugliness, but in general the region still has a rural tranquillity and sense of remove worth discovering.

Much of the Spiš region is within easy day-trip distance from the resort towns of the High Tatras.

HIGHLIGHTS

- View the striking Renaissance square in Unesco-listed **Bardejov** (p427)
- Climb a ladder alongside a waterfall at **Slovenský raj National Park** (p420)
- Hike to **Spiš castle** (p418), the largest castle in Slovakia
- See Slovakia's greatest Gothic altar at the Church of St James in **Levoča** (p416)
- Take a break in the pleasant town square beneath the Tatras in **Kežmarok** (p412)
- Float gently down the river between the towering cliffs of **Dunajec gorge** (p414)
- Go deep into the earth in the caves of the **Slovak Karst** (p424)



Getting There & Away

If time is short, it's easiest to fly into Košice and start exploring East Slovakia – and the High Tatras – from there. The E50 highway from Bratislava dissects the Low and High Tatras and has motorway sections. Bus and train connections running across the northern part of the country (via the High Tatras) are quicker and, in general, more frequent than connections across the southern part of the country.

Getting Around

Train and bus services west of Prešov and Košice are reliable and reasonably frequent. East of Prešov and Košice regular public-transport links become scarce and most places can only be reached by (sometimes infrequent) buses. Car rental in Košice is a good option. The majority of roads are rural lanes in good condition. The only stretch of motorway in the east runs between Košice and Prešov, but construction is underway to augment this.

KOŠICE

☎ 055 / pop 235,000

People just naturally seem to congregate along the long town square where café terraces line the streets and monumental architecture fills the centre. Buildings range from 12th-century Gothic to 20th-century Art Nouveau. Crane your neck to admire the massive Cathedral of St Elizabeth, before you head underground to explore the ancient city's archaeology. Come evening, gather with the locals on the benches near the musical fountain, stop in a café for a drink or attend a performance at the State Theatre. Slovakia's second city has a real sense of cohesion and community in the old town, which is missing from the capital. The industrial outskirts and vast residential districts built during the communist era do leave something to be desired though.

History

Košice received its city coat of arms in 1369 and became an eastern stronghold and manufacturing centre in the Hungarian Empire. Transylvanian prince Ferenc Rákóczi II had his headquarters in Košice during the Hungarian War of Independence against the Hapsburgs (1703–11), which failed. He was shipped off to Turkey and reburied here only in 1905. To this day Košice has a strong Hun-

garian accent and the Magyar language can often be heard on the street.

The town became part of Czechoslovakia in 1918 but was occupied by Hungary from 1938 to 1945. On 5 April 1945 the Košice Government Program – which made communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia a virtual certainty – was announced here. Subsequently, the communists built a large steelworks on the outskirts of the city. You can't miss US Steel's influence today – from the stacks at the steelworks to the new ice hockey stadium it sponsored.

Orientation

Košice is 20km north of Hungary, 90km south of Poland and 80km west of the Ukraine. The adjacent bus and train stations are less than 200m east of the main square, Hlavná, which broadens into Nám Slobody and Hlavné nám.

Information

Plane, train and bus stations all have ATMs. **Artforum** (☎ 623 2677; Mlynská 6) Coffee-table pictorials and fiction in English, some by Slovak authors.

City Information Centre (☎ 625 8888; www.kosice.sk; Hlavná 59; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat) The large, busy official tourist office has books and maps galore, and internet terminals for 30Sk per hour. It also runs info stands at the airport and train stations (same hours).

Faculty hospital L Pasteura (Fakultná nemocnica L Pasteura; ☎ 615 3111; Rastislavova 43) One kilometre south of the main square.

Left Luggage (train station; per day/item 40Sk; ☎ 3.30–noon & 1pm–12.30am)

Ludová Banka (Mlynská 29) Bank and ATM.

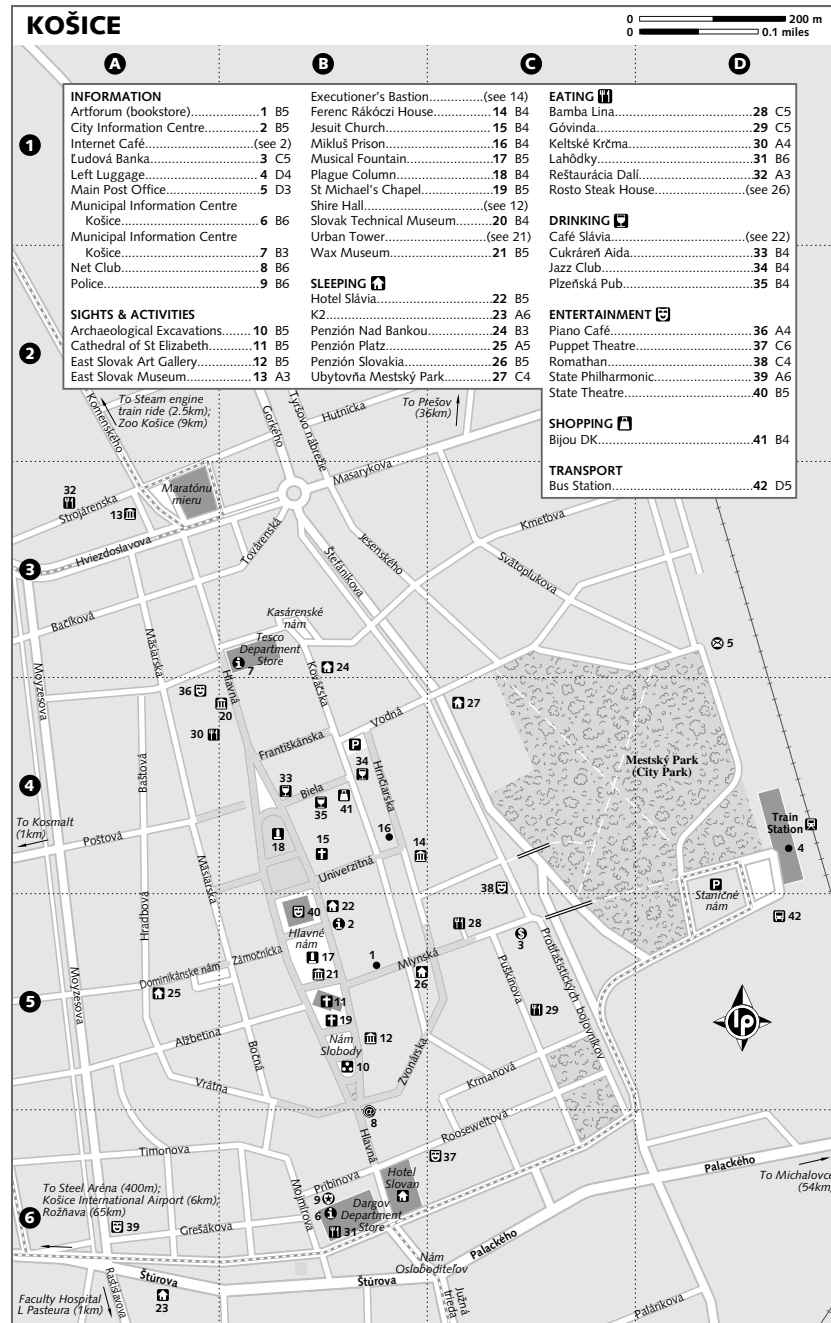
Municipal Information Centre Košice (MIC; ☎ 16 168; www.mickosice.sk) Tesco Department Store (Hlavná 111; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 8am–4.30pm Sat); Dargov Department Store (Hlavná 2; ☎ 8am–7pm) Small, personal info stands, with vibrant staff and tons of knick-knacks for sale.

Net Club (Hlavná 9; per hr 50Sk; ☎ 9am–10pm) Fast internet connections.

Police (☎ 622 4289; Pribinova 6)

Sights

The dark and brooding **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 sight most likely to grace your Košice postcard home. Europe's easternmost Gothic cathedral (first built in about 1380 but remodelled many times) dominates the square.



Frescoes decorate the interior, as do the stone sculptures by Master Štefan, a local 15th-century sculptor. Ferenc Rákóczi II is buried in the crypt on the left side of the nave. For grand views of the town climb the cathedral's ornate tower. To the south of the cathedral is the 14th-century **St Michael's Chapel** (Kaplanka sv Michala; adult/student 20/15Sk; ☎ 1-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat). Entry to the cheery **Wax Museum** (Múzeum voskových figurín; ☎ 623 2534; www.waxmuseum.sk; Hlavná 3; adult/student 120/80Sk; ☎ noon-4pm Tue-Sun) gets you inside **Urban Tower** (built in the 14th century, rebuilt in the 20th), on the other side of the church.

Go underground to explore the buried remains of medieval Košice – defence chambers, fortifications, waterways and the cathedral foundations – in the mazelike passages of the **archaeological excavations** (☎ 622 8393; adult/student 25/10Sk; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), unearthed during roadwork in 1996. More hidden treasure is on display at the **East Slovak museum** (Východoslovenské múzeum; ☎ 622 0309; Hviezdoslavovo 3; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun). Workers found the secret stash of 2920 gold coins, dating from the 15th to 18th centuries, while renovating a house on Hlavná in 1935. (Anyone have a shovel?) In the museum yard there's a relocated 1741 wooden church that's rarely open.

Historically, Košice was known for its tinker tradesmen, and the **Slovak Technical museum** (☎ 622 4035; Hlavná 88; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 8am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun) shows examples of old machines and wrought-iron ornamental work. A mix of traditional and out-there art characterises the **East Slovak Art gallery** (Východoslovenská galéria; ☎ 622 6667; Hlavná 27; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 2-5.30pm Sat & Sun) inside **Shire hall** (Župný dom; 1779), where the 1945 Košice Government Program was proclaimed.

Ferenc Rákóczi House (Hrnciarska 7; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) contains some of the Hungarian heroes personal effects. The museum complex was built in and around the 15th-century **Executioner's bastion** (Katova bašta), part of Košice's ancient fortifications. Buy tickets here for **Mikluš prison** (Miklušova väznica; Pri Miklušovej väznici 10; adult/student 30/10Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), a connected pair of 16th-century houses that once served as a prison and torture chamber.

Young and old gather on the benches facing the **musical fountain**, near the ornate, c 1900

State Theatre (opposite). To the north there is a large **plague column** (1723).

Košice for Children

Puppet Theatre (Bábkové divadlo; ☎ 622 0455; www.bdkc.sk; in Slovak; Roosewelta 38) Holds daytime performances throughout the year.

Steam engine train ride (☎ 622 5925; Črmel; adult/student 20/10Sk; ☎ Sat & Sun May-Aug) Great for the kids during summer. Located north of the centre. Take bus 89 from outside the East Slovak Museum.

Zoo Košice (☎ 633 1517; Široka 31; www.zookosice.sk; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Oct, 10am-3pm Nov-Apr) Located in the small village of Kavečany, 9km north. To get there, take bus 29 from near the East Slovak museum to the final stop.

Festivals & Events

Košice Days On 1-7 May the city lets its hair down for a celebration of its city's founding that involves nightly concerts on the square, as well as food and beer stands.

East Slovak Folk Festival This annual festival takes place in mid-June.

Race for Peace On the first Sunday in October, sports people from many countries participate in this marathon, held here since 1924.

Sleeping

The City Information Centre puts out a booklet that lists student dormitories open to travellers in summer.

Kosmalt (☎ 642 3572; www.kosmalt.sk; Kysucká 16; s/d 590/630Sk; ☎ P) This big apartment-block hostel has a common game room, a bar and restaurant, antique elevators and tolerable rooms. Take tram 6 from the train/bus station to the Kino Družba stop.

Penzión Slovakia (☎ 728 9820; www.penziionslovakia.sk; Orliá 6; s; 950-1150Sk, d 1350-1750Sk) Stay at the small city guesthouse if you can – it's often booked. The broadband-connected rooms, named after Slovak towns, have more character than most – wood-panelled ceilings, skylights and midcentury mod furnishings. There's a boffo restaurant downstairs, too.

Penzión Nad Bankou (☎ 683 8221; www.penziónnadbankou.holiday.sk; Kováčska 63; s/d 1000/1400Sk; ☎ P) Whitewashed walls and pine furniture characterise the simple *penzion* 'above a bank'. The owners can arrange a light airplane ride for 1950Sk.

Hotel Slávia (☎ 622 4395; www.hotelslavia.sk; Hlavná 63; s 2100-3050Sk, d 2700-3900Sk; ☎ P) Colourful mosaic murals are the icing on this 1902 Art Nouveau cake. The flourish continues

inside with serpentine, flower-shaped lights and candy-coloured pastel walls in the rooms. Don't skip the pastry-and-coffee tradition at the grand 1st-floor café.

Other options:

Ubytovňa Mestský Park (☎ 633 3904; www.ubytovna-ke.sk; Mestský Park 13; dm 220Sk) Workers' hostel, mostly male guests.

K2 (☎ 625 5948; Štúrova 32; s/d without bathroom 350/700Sk) Bed-only singles and doubles that fill fast.

Penzión Platz (☎ 622 3450; www.platz.sk; Dominikánske nám 23; r 1500-1800Sk) It's a modular veneer world behind the pretty plaster façade.

Eating

Though this city isn't far behind the capital in population, don't expect exotic food options; most menus have a generic international mix.

Lahôdky (Hlavná 2; mains 20-80Sk; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-3pm Sun) The ground-floor cafeteria at the Dargov Department Store serves hot dishes – sausages, stuffed cabbage rolls – as well as sandwiches and salads. There's a supermarket too.

Góvinda (☎ 620 0428; Puškinova 8; mains 80-120Sk; ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Sat) Enjoy divine vegetarian Indian food at a small eatery run by Hare Krishnas. At midday there's usually a symbol-tapping chant parade.

Bamba Lina (☎ 622 0180; Mlynská 22; pizzas 110-160Sk; ☎ 11am-1am Mon-Thu, 11am-3am Fri, 6pm-3am Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun) The young and the hip fill the modern, loftlike dining room at all hours. They have a pretty good selection of veggie pizzas, including broccoli.

Keltské Krčma (Celtic Pub; ☎ 622 5328; Hlavná 80; mains 160-300Sk; ☎ 10am-11.30pm Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat, 3pm-11.30pm Sun) Vaulted ceilings, ancient-looking masks and wood booths do create a Celtic sort of vibe that is conducive to leisurely eating or drinking. The eclectic menu includes Slovak pork in an apricot sauce, English roast beef and Mexican enchiladas.

Still hungry?

Reštaurácia Dali (☎ 625 1908; Strojárska 21; mains 200-400Sk) Timepieces hang from the ceiling where upscale Slovak dishes are served.

Rosto Steak House (☎ 728 9820; Penzión Slovakia; Orliá 6; mains 100-250Sk) Tasty grilled meats with various dipping sauces.

Drinking

Pilzeňská Pub (☎ 622 0402; Hlavná 92; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri-Sun) Czech beer on tap

and roast pork and dumplings in the kitchen (mains from 120Sk to 250Sk). Imbibe to your heart's content out back in the beer garden.

Drink your coffee or cocktail in turn-of-the-20th-century style at **Café Slávia** (☎ 623 3190; Hotel Slávia, Hlavná 63; ☎ 7am-11pm) or indulge in a creamy cake with your java down the street at locally revered **Čukráreň Aida** (☎ 625 6649; Hlavná 81; ☎ 8am-10pm). Snacks cost 30Sk to 100Sk. Ice cream for breakfast, yum.

Entertainment

The free monthly publication *Kam do mesta* has comprehensive entertainment and restaurant listings in Slovak and is relatively easy to decipher.

The City Information Centre sells some tickets for the opera and dance performances at the **State Theatre** (Štátne Divadlo Košice; ☎ 622 1231; www.sdke.sk; Hlavná 58; ☎ box office 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat). The city's orchestra, the **State Philharmonic** (Štátna Filharmónia Košice; ☎ 622 4514; www.sfk.sk; Moyzesova 66), has extra performances in May during the spring music festival. Though staged rarely, a performance by **Romathan** (☎ 622 4980; www.romathan.sk; Štefánikova 4), the country's only Roma theatre group, is a mix of song, dance and exuberance worth seeing.

A dance music DJ spins most nights in the cellars of the **Jazz Club** (☎ 622 4237; Kováčska 39; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11am-2am Fri, 4pm-2am Sat, 4am-midnight Sun) and at the **Piano Café** (☎ 0915517339; Hlavná 92; ☎ 10-midnight Mon-Thu, 10am-1am Fri, 3pm-1am Sat, 3pm-midnight Sun), but each occasionally has live jazz. The latter also has an enclosed courtyard where a pianist plays while diners chow down on pizza.

In February 2006, the town's revered ice hockey team HC Košice got a new home: **Steel Aréna** (www.steelarena.sk; Nerudova 12) will co-host the 2011 hockey world cup with Bratislava. Buy tickets at the Municipal Information Centre Košice or at www.ticketportal.sk.

Shopping

Wander onto Hrnčiarska for some truly unique shopping. Along this traditional craftsman alley there's a potter's shop, an ironworks master, a semiprecious gem specialist, a baker and an herbalist store. The leather-maker is just around the corner at Kováčska 19.

Bijou DK (☎ 6259 859; Biela 7; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri) Buy hand-painted art you can wear (scarfs), drink from (wine glasses) and sparkle in (jewellery).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Košice International Airport (KSC; ☎ 622 1093; www.airportkosice.sk) is about 6km southeast of the centre. **Sky Europe** (☎ reservations 02-485 04850; www.skyeurope.com) has two or three daily flights to and from Bratislava (one hour) that can cost as little as 500Sk one way (with tax), if you book ahead. **Czech Airlines** (CSA; ☎ 678 2490; www.czechairlines.com) has three daily flights to and from Prague. For more on getting to Košice from beyond the Czech & Slovak Republics, see p453.

BUS

Buses wind their way to and from Levoča (117Sk, 2½ hours, two daily), Bardejov (98Sk, 1¾ hours, eight daily), and Poprad (134Sk, 2½ hours, four daily). Buses also travel to Uzhhorod in the Ukraine (140Sk, 2½ hours) at least once daily (twice from Tuesday to Sunday) and to Nowy Targ in Poland (180Sk, four hours) on Thursday and Saturday. A bus goes from Košice to Miskolc (120Sk, two hours) in Hungary on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. For longer distances the train is usually best, having comparable prices and shorter connection times.

CAR

Big international chain rental agencies **Hertz** (☎ 789 6041; www.hertz.sk) and **Europcar** (☎ 683 2132; www.europcar.sk) are represented at the airport, but **Alimex** (☎ 729 0100; www.alimex.sk) is cheaper, especially if you're willing to drive around with adverts painted on the car (as little as 699Sk per day with unlimited kilometres).

TRAIN

Frequent express trains run to and from Poprad (154Sk, 1¼ hours, up to 10 daily) and Žilina (316Sk, 2¾ hours, 14 daily). If you're commuting all the way to and from Bratislava it can take six to seven hours on a fast train (518Sk); an Intercity or Eurocity train (IC or EC, five hours, four daily) is a better bet. It's the same price, except you need a seat reservation, which is 20Sk to 40Sk extra. For domestic schedules visit www.zsr.sk.

A sleeper train leaves Košice every morning for Kiev in the Ukraine (913Sk, 22½ hours), stopping at Čop (193Sk, 2½ hours), 14km from Uzhhorod. Two daily trains (one overnight) head for Prague (1140Sk, 11 hours), two for Budapest in Hungary (967Sk, four

hours) and three to Kraków in Poland (844Sk, 6½ hours).

Getting Around

Transport tickets (one zone 12Sk) are good for buses and trams in most of the city centre; buy them from newsstands and public transport kiosks, then validate on board. Bus 23, which runs between the airport and the train station, requires a two-zone ticket (19Sk).

SPIŠ REGION

A singular blend of Slovak and German culture, and a whole lotta Gothic art, are the defining characteristics of a Spiš town. In the 13th century Hungarian King Bela IV invited Germanic-Saxon craftsmen and mining experts to settle this area (which had been depopulated by wars) and to protect against further invasion. What developed was an administrative area with a distinct Germano-Slavic style architecture with elaborate roofline ornamentation evident in all the towns. Also look for landmarks like the Church of St James in Levoča. The region's most arresting sight is the stoic ruin of Spiš castle.

Not all the region's beauty is manmade though. Steep waterfall-filled ravines call out to be climbed at Slovenský raj National Park and you can float through the 500m-high cliffs of Dunajec river gorge in Pieniny National Park.

Though rich in history, the Spiš region has pockets of abject poverty and some of the area's large Roma population lives in shanty-town settlements in below-standard conditions.

KEŽMAROK

☎ 052 / pop 12,740

Snuggled beneath the brooding peaks of the High Tatras, Kežmarok may not seem dramatic, but it's a truly pleasant place, with numerous architecturally distinct churches, a pocket-sized old town with resident castle... All those ice-cream shops and sidewalk cafés alone make it worth a day trip from the Tatra resort towns, but you might want to use this as a base to explore further north.

Kežmarok was granted free royal town status in 1380 and was the second most important Spiš town after Levoča, from medieval times until the 19th century. Native son

Imre Thököly was a contemporary of Ferenc Rákóczi who, like him, revolted against the Hapsburg takeover of Hungary and died in exile in Turkey. Things have slowed since and the relative quiet is part of the attraction.

Orientation & Information

Kežmarok is 14km from Tatranská Lomnica and 16km from Poprad. The bus and train stations are located about 500m northwest of the town centre.

Alter Ego (☎ 452 5432; Hlavné nám 3) Has one of the best bookstore map selections in the country.

Internet Netca (Hlavné nám 62; per hr 35Sk; ☎ 10am-9pm) Email available.

Kežmarok Information Agency (☎ 452 4047; www.kezmarok.net; Hlavné nám 46; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun Jun-Sep) Stocks heaps of brochures and souvenirs. The staff can help with info about the eastern Tatras, too.

Všeobecná úverová banka (VÚB; Hviezdoslavova 5) Has an ATM and exchange.

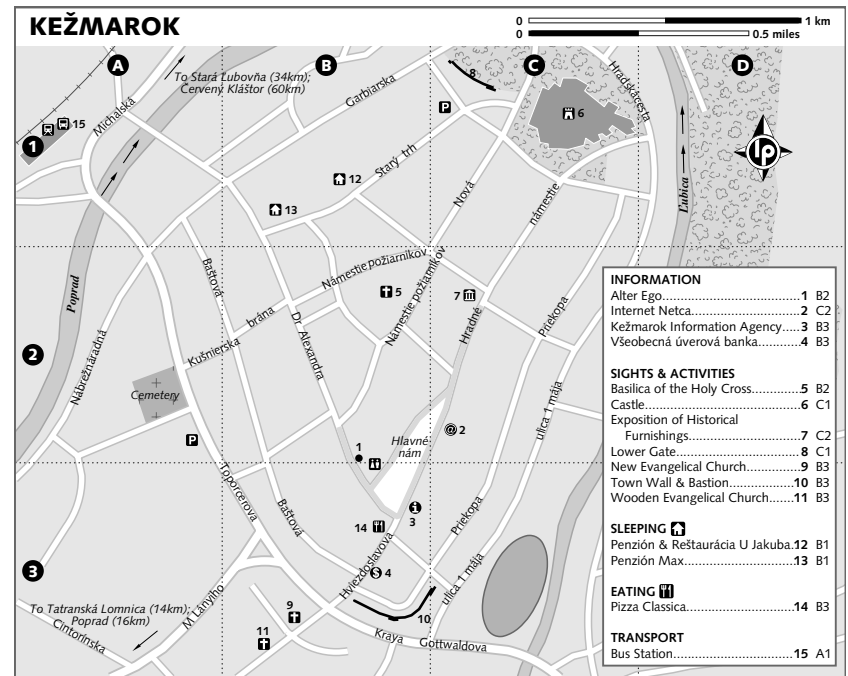
Sights

The massive pea-green-and-red **New Evangelical church** (Nový Evanjelický kostel; ☎ 452 2242; nr

Toporcerova & Hviezdoslavova; admission 30Sk; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Sat May-Sep) is a pseudo-Moorish fortress of a 20th-century church. Inside is Imre Thököly's mausoleum. Next door is the plastered old **Wooden Evangelical church** (Drevený Evanjelický kostol; ☎ 452 2242; admission 30Sk; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Sat May-Sep), built without a nail in 1718. The cross-shaped interior of carved and painted wood is beautiful.

On the site of one of the Germanic settlers' original churches is the late-15th-century **Basilica of the Holy Cross** (Bazilika Svätého Krížu; ☎ 452 2220; Nám požiarnikov; admission 10Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep), whose wooden altars are said to have been carved by students of Master Pavol of Levoča (Majster Pavol z Levoča). The finely sgraffitoid, Renaissance belfry to the south was erected in 1591.

The whitewashed **castle** (hrad; ☎ 452 2618; Hradné nám 45; adult/student 60/30Sk; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep; on the hour 8am-3pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) houses a museum with archaeology, town history and period furniture exhibits. Constructed in the 15th century, it was later surrounded with massive bastions set off by delicate Spiš-style battlements. A few remaining bits of the



original town walls linger, including the **lower gate** (nižná brána). The Szimary house, lived in until 1973 by a baroness, now shelters the **Exposition of Historical Furnishings** (Expozícia bytovej kultúry; ☎ 452 2906; Hlavné nám 55; adult/student 30/155k; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun May-Aug, 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-Apr). At the southern corner of the old town, along Priekopa, are fragments of a reconstructed 14th-century **town wall and bastion**.

Festivals & Events

On the second weekend of July, the **European Folk Craft Market** (Európske ľudové remeslo; www.kezmarok.net) attracts artisans from across the country. There's oodles of fine craft work, live music, food, drink and general merriment to enjoy.

Sleeping & Eating

The Kežmarok Information Agency has a list of private rooms (250Sk per person) for rent, some of which are also posted on its website. There are no fewer than six *cukráreň* (pastry cafés) serving cakes and ice cream in the pedestrian area.

Penzión Max (☎ 452 6324; www.maxpenzion.kezmarok.net; Starý trh 9; r per person 550Sk; 📍) Many of the extremely large rooms have three or four beds. Somebody here loved upholstery: there's heavy-duty multicoloured fabric on all the furniture.

Penzión & Reštaurácia U Jakuba (☎ 452 6314; www.penzionujakuba.sk; Starý trh 39; d 880-1190Sk) An authentic, folksy Slovakness pervades this guesthouse and restaurant. Take a seat at a communal wooden bench near the open fire and be waited on by servers in area folk dress. (Rooms upstairs are more simply outfitted in pine.) Remember to call a day ahead if you want a whole roast pig.

Pizza Classica (☎ 452 3693; cnr Hviezdoslavova & Hlavné nám; pizzas 90-170Sk) The cellar dining room is kind of small, but in summer they also serve their pizzas around the corner on the main square (see waiter run). The *bryndzové* (sheep's cheese) pizza with bacon is an interesting take on a traditional fave.

Getting There & Away

Area buses are faster and more plentiful than trains at similar cost. Buses run hourly to and from Poprad (22Sk, 30 minutes) and every 1½ hours to and from Tatranská Lomnica (22Sk, 30 minutes). From Monday to Friday,

there are three buses a day to Červený Kláštor (58Sk, 1½ hours) and four to and from Levoča (40Sk, 50 minutes). Unless you take the one weekday bus from Košice (2½ hours, 138Sk) at 2.55pm, to get here you have to switch at Poprad.

PIENINY NATIONAL PARK

☎ 052

The main reason people come to the tiny, 21-sq-km Pieniny National Park (Pieninský národný park; Pienap), is for a chance to float on a raft through **Dunajec gorge**. The park was created in 1967, in combination with a similar park near Szczawnica in Poland to protect the 9km gorge near the village of Červený Kláštor and its eponymous monastery. A bit further downstream, Lesnica is the terminus for rafting trips in Slovakia. Past 500m-tall cliffs, the gentle waters of the Dunajec carry tourists in a *plteň* (shallow, flat-bottomed wood rafts), complete with a pole-wielding, costumed guide.

A small **Information Centre** (☎ 482 2122; www.pieniny.sk; 🕒 9am-5pm May-Oct) is about 2km west of the monastery. **CK Pieniny Klub** (☎ 439 7303; www.sl.sinet.sk/pieniny; Lesnica 62, Červený Kláštor) travel agency books accommodation and hires out guides. Pick up VKÚ's 1:25,000 *Pieninský Národný Park* map (sheet No 7) for detailed exploring on foot.

Sights & Activities

At the mouth of the gorge is the fortified **Red Monastery** (Červený Kláštor; ☎ 482 2955; adult/student 50/25Sk; 🕒 9am-5pm May-Oct). Built in the 14th-century, it's now used as a park administrative centre and museum with a statuary collection, folk crafts and frescoes. The park in front of it is one of the launch sites for **river float trips** (adult/student 250/100Sk; 🕒 May-Oct), the other is 1km upriver, west of the village. A raft may wait until it has as many passengers as possible (capacity 12) before setting out. Don't be expecting white-water thrills – the Dunajec river is a rather sedate 1½ hour experience. There's an interesting riverside trail from the monastery (4km to Lesnica), which you might opt for instead.

From the downriver terminus near Lesnica (the water landing is 1km north of the village) you can hike back to Červený Kláštor along the riverside trail through the gorge in a little over an hour. Or you can walk to Chata Pieniny (opposite) in Lesnica; it rents out bicycles

RAFTING IN POLAND

The Dunajec river divides Slovakia and Poland, though once on the river it's something like an international free-for-all. The Poles offer much longer trips, including a two-day, 50km voyage from Katy to Krościenko. Depending on your stamina and visa status, it may be worthwhile crossing over into Poland to do your rafting from there. There's a pedestrian-only **border crossing** (🕒 9am-9pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar) from Lesnica to the Polish town of Szczawnica. From there frequent daily buses go to Nowy Targ (38km) where you switch to a bus going to the main rafting centre at Katy. By car, you can cross the Slovak-Polish border at Lysá nad Dunajcom (6km west of Červený Kláštor).

one way (100Sk per day) for the riverside trail. Ride back to the monastery where you return the bikes. The lodge also runs a shuttle bus to Červený Kláštor (50Sk, 20km by road).

Festivals & Events

Brightly attired dancers perform at the annual **Zamaguria Folk Festival** (Zamagurský folklórny slávnosť) near the monastery in the middle of June. Each September the **International Pieniny Canoe Slalom** (Medzinárodný pieninský slalom) is held on the river here.

Sleeping & Eating

CK Pieniny Klub travel agency handles private rooms (some are posted on their website) for about 250Sk per person. Also look for private signs on the main road in Červený Kláštor. Food stalls stand between the monastery and the river launch.

Chata Pieniny (☎ 439 7530; www.chatapieniny.sk; Lesnica; dm 280Sk) Cheap and cheerful Chata Pieniny is an old log lodge with two- to six-bed rooms at the raft terminus. There's a restaurant, minimarket and bike rental.

Dunajec Recreational (Rekreáčne zariadenie; ☎ 439 7105; www.dunajec.sk; s/d without bathroom 300/600Sk; 2 persons in hut 580Sk, per person/tent 60/50Sk; 📍) One kilometre south of the monastery, toward Veľký Lipník, this complex has five huts for rent (sleeping six), a restaurant, a bar, bike rental, a camping ground and sports courts.

Penzión Holica (☎ 439 7114; lesnica 156; r/apt 700/1000Sk) Spotless, if bare, rooms here are worth seeking out, 1km south of the village. This *penzión* and small restaurant are quite popular with groups.

Hotel Pltník (☎ 482 2525; Červený Kláštor; www.hotel.pltnik.sk; s/d 720/870Sk, per person/tent 60/50Sk; 📍) The not-so-youthful hotel has small rooms with wood-panelled ceilings and not much else. It runs a camping ground in the big riverfront field adjacent.

Getting There & Away

Getting here is a challenge unless you have a car. Buses run to Červený Kláštor from Kežmarok (58Sk, 1½ hours, three daily) and to and from Poprad (89Sk, 1½ hours, three daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday). From Košice (152Sk, 3½ hours) there's one direct afternoon bus, otherwise you have to change in Stará Ľubovňa (40Sk, 35 minutes, six daily).

STARÁ ĽUBOVŇA

☎ 052 / pop 16,200

Skip the nondescript town; head to the castle overlooking the Poprad river, and the *skanzen* below. From the adjacent bus and train stations, walk up to the main road and turn left, follow the 2.5km red-marked trail to the castle. If you turn east instead and go 1km, you'll get to Nám sv Mikuláša, the main town square, with the **City Information Centre** (☎ 432 1713; www.staralubovna.sk; Nám sv Mikuláša 12; 🕒 9-11.30am & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) and a couple of banks with ATMs.

Sights & Activities

Striking **Ľubovňa castle** (Ľubovniansky hrad; ☎ 432 2030; adult/student 60/30Sk; 🕒 9am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) lies half in ruins, half in reconstruction, but the mix of Gothic, baroque and Renaissance styles makes for an interesting self-guided tour. The sky-clad location of its top tower (think lots of climbing) provides views across the valley to the Spišska Magura mountains, as well as the Roma shanty town on the edge of Stará Ľubovňa. Different parts of the palace contain exhibits on the castle history, weaponry and period furniture. Every June, a **medieval encampment** gathers below the gates to reenact an ancient battle; just one of many summer weekend festivals.

The few plastered wooden houses and a church in the **skanzen** (adult/student 30/155k;

☞ 9am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-3pm Oct) reflect a blend of the styles typical of the Spišská Magura region – Slovak, Polish, Rusyn and German.

Sleeping & Eating

Ubytovací hostinec Peters (☎ 432 4891; Pod hradom; s/d 200/400Sk; P) If you're stuck on the way up to the castle, this place has basic rooms and a restaurant.

Salaš U Franka (☎ 436 9292; Popradská 34; mains 100-150Sk) This sprawling, rustic eatery lies 3km south on the road toward Poprad. It serves a fresh variety of dumpling dishes topped with *bryndza* (sheep's cheese) and bacon, cabbage, onions or *kielbasa*. Occasional folk nights include live bands.

Getting There & Away

Buses connect with Červený Kláštor (40Sk, 35 minutes, six daily), Bardejov (78Sk, 1½ hours, seven daily) and Kežmarok (44Sk, 45 minutes). There are up to 11 trains a day between Stará Ľubovňa, Kežmarok (36Sk, 50 minutes) and Plaveč (24Sk, 20 minutes), where you change trains if you're bound for Poland. Five daily buses run to and from Košice (143Sk, 2½ hours).

Getting Around

Up to eight town buses travel to and from the castle and the train and bus stations (12Sk) Monday to Friday, but services are rare on weekends.

LEVOČA

☎ 053 / pop 14,400

Medieval walls stand stolid and defensive, protecting the age-old centre from onslaught. Levoča is one of the few Slovak cities to have its ancient old town defences largely intact. The pride of Slovakia's religious art collection, an 18m-high altar carved by renowned artist Master Pavol of Levoča, resides within the centre square's Church of St James. Surrounding the church is a panoply of ancient houses with mostly Renaissance façades.

History

Like other Spiš towns, Levoča was settled and enriched by a wave of Saxon artisans in the 13th century. It prospered from trade in gold and woodcarving for centuries. Much of its present Renaissance personality comes from a building boom after a huge fire in the 16th century.

Levoča's fortunes collapsed in the 17th century after an area anti-Hapsburg uprising failed. Again on the temporarily losing side, a Slovak army garrison from Levoča joined in the short-lived, antifascist Slovak National Uprising in 1944. German troops occupied the town until its liberation by the Soviets in February 1945.

Orientation

Levoča is on the E50 motorway between Poprad (28km) and Košice (94km). The centre is 1km north of the train and bus stations. Most buses also stop at Nám Štefana Kluberta, a few blocks east of the main square, Nám Majstra Pavla.

Information

Levonet Internet Café (Nám Majstra Pavla 38; per hr 80Sk; ☎ 10am-midnight)

Post office (Nám Majstra Pavla 42)

Tourist Information Office (☎ 451 3763; www.levoča.sk; Nám Majstra Pavla 58; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Oct; 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr) Ask for the free photocopied map staff hide under the counter.

Všeobecná úverová banka (VÚB; Nám Majstra Pavla 28)

Sights

The Gothic spindles-and-spires **Church of St James** (Chrám sv Jakuba; ☎ 451 2347; www.chramsvojakuba.sk; adult/student 50/30Sk; ☎ tours 11.30am, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, 11am-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat Jul & Aug) is basically a museum of medieval religious art and rare furnishings, though everyone comes to see the splendid three-sided wooden altar (1517) created by Master Pavol of Levoča. At more than 18m high, and 6m wide, it's said to be the world's largest. Exquisite 3-D representations of the Last Supper and the Madonna and Child decorate the structure. (Think Mary looks familiar? Her face appears on the 100Sk banknote.) The **church ticket office** (kasa; ☎ 11am-5pm) is inside the **Municipal Weights House** (Budova mestských váh). Off season, if there are fewer than five people at a tour time, the keeper may not open up.

The originally Gothic **town hall** (*radnica*) and tower got a Renaissance face-lift in 1551, creating what is now one of Levoča's most beautiful buildings. Inside is the **Spiš museum** (☎ 451 2449; www.snm.sk; adult/student 50/20Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm), which displays folk dresses and town artefacts in wood-panelled chambers. South of the town hall is the **Cage of Shame** (Klietka hanby), where naughty boys and girls were publicly punished.

The pedestrian centre is chock-a-block with Gothic and Renaissance eye candy. The finest is the **Thurzov house** (Thurzov dom; 1532) at No 7, with its characteristic frenetic Spiš Renaissance roofline. At No 20, **Master Pavol House** (Dom Majstra Pavla; ☎ 451 3496; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm), run by the Spiš museum, is devoted to the town's famous sculptor son.

From town you can see the **Church of Marián-ska hora**, on a hill 2km north.

Festivals & Events

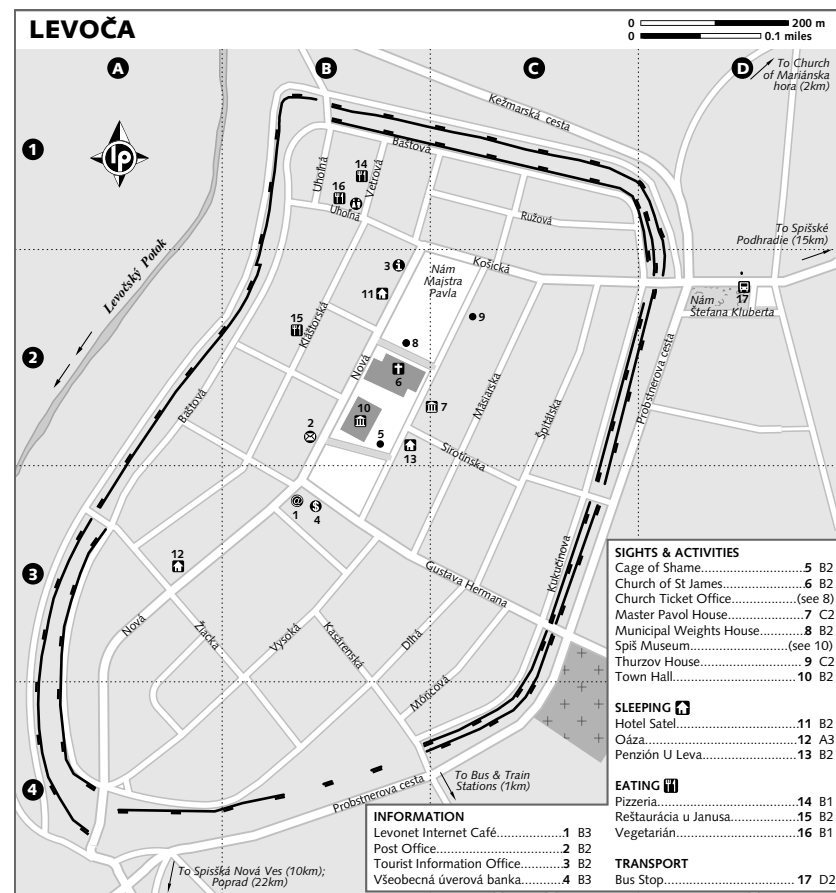
On the first weekend in July up to a quarter of a million pilgrims converge on the Church of Mariánska hora for a **Marian Pilgrimage** (Marian pút). Mass is celebrated hourly from 6pm

on Saturday, but the one to wait for is at 10am on Sunday.

Sleeping & Eating

Oáza (☎ 451 4511; www.ubytovanieoaza.sk; Nová 65; per person 300Sk) The two-bed rooms with shared bathrooms, and the four-bed en-suite rooms with kitchen, are just what the budget doctor ordered. There's a big garden with a lawn, vegetable garden a chicken coup. The super-personable owner speaks several languages.

Penzión U Leva (☎ 450 2311; www.uleva.sk; Nám Majstra Pavla 24; s/d/apt 1100/2000/2400Sk; P) A new elevator is a welcome addition to these two town-square buildings turned modern, reader-recommended lodging. Apartments have kitchens.



Hotel Satel (☎ 451 2943; www.hotelsatel.com; Nám Majstra Pavla 55; s/d 1765/2730Sk; 📍) Float into the swish luxury of the town's top hotel. You can tell the building dates back to the 14th century by the rooms' arched, vaulted ceilings and the atrium arcade. However, its amenities are modern, and it has wi-fi and a massage service.

Vegetarián (☎ 451 4576; Uhoľná 137; mains 45-90Sk; 🕒 10am-3.15pm Mon-Fri) Wholesome smells and a no-fuss menu make this basic veggie haunt a hit. Casseroles and tofu dishes are on the rotating list of dishes.

Reštaurácia u Janusa (☎ 451 4592; Kláštorská 22; mains 70-120Sk) Choose from all the fried pork favourites at the locals' pick for Slovak food. Tables fill up quick at lunchtime.

Pizzeria (☎ 0905396528; Vetrová 4; pizzas 100-160Sk) For such a smoky, nameless place, they really don't serve bad pizza. Upstairs, two apartments with kitchens (1000Sk) and one small single room (500Sk) are for rent.

Getting There & Away

Buses travel to Spišské Podhradie (22Sk, 20 minutes, 11 daily) and to Poprad (40Sk, 30 minutes, 21 daily), which has onward train connections on the main Bratislava-Košice line. Two to five buses a day wend their way to and from Košice (128Sk, two hours). Buses also run to Spišská Nová Ves (18Sk, 20 minutes, every half hour), which is not a great town, but it is on the main train line (and is a gateway to Slovenský raj National Park).

SPIŠSKÉ PODHRADIE & AROUND

From far down the motorway you catch glimpses of eerie outlines and stony walls crowning a ridge. 'Can it really be that big?' you think. Once you're upon it you realise how truly daunting the sight of Spiš castle

must have been for ancient enemies. Sitting hilltop 200m above a broad valley floor the 4 hectare spread still inspires awe today – and it's in ruins.

In the 12th century a settlement, Spišské Podhradie, appeared below the neighbouring castle. It developed into an artisans' town in the 13th century when, to the west, Spišská Kapitula (Spiš Chapter) developed. The village itself isn't the attraction, it's the Unesco-listed castle that's one of Slovakia's true wonders.

Orientation & Information

Spišské Podhradie is 15km east of Levoča, off the main E50 highway between Košice and Poprad. Most long-distance buses stop in the main square, Mariánské nám, where there's a post office, an ATM and a bus stop. The Spišské Podhradie train station is 1.5km east of the centre, below the path to the castle.

Spišská Kapitula is on another ridge 1km west of Spišské Podhradie, and has its own bus stop. For a day trip arrive early and give yourself at least 4½ hours (including walking time) to see both the castle and Spišská Kapitula. You may be able to leave your bags at the train station (ask the stationmaster very, very nicely).

Sights & Activities

SPIŠ CASTLE

You may think you're experiencing *dějů* the first time you catch a glimpse of the photogenic ruins of **Spiš castle** (Spišský hrad; ☎ 454 1336; www.spiskyhrad.com in Slovak; adult/student 100/60Sk; 🕒 9am-6pm May-Oct, by appointment Nov-Apr); the castle appears on so much Slovak promotional material (showing the field below it alternately covered in snow or flowers). One of the biggest castles in Central Europe, it has been a Unesco World Heritage site since 1993.

References to the castle first appear in a 1209 chronicle, and the central residential tower, at the highest elevation, is thought to date from that time (there are great views from the top). Defenders repulsed the Tatars in 1241, and the rulers and noble family owners kept adding on to the place during the 15th and 16th centuries. By 1780 when a fire hit, much of the military threat had abated and it was largely deserted. Few structures remain whole today, but there's a cistern, a chapel and a rectangular Romanesque palace, which holds the museum. Descend to the dungeon to see the meaty bits – it's incredible the torture devices the human mind can think up.

Throughout summer the castle hosts medieval festivals, which consist mainly of music and mock battles. To get to the castle, cross the tracks near the train station and follow the yellow markers up the steep trail. By car, the easiest approach to the castle is via the main highway from the east (Prešov) side.

SPIŠSKÁ KAPITULA

Another national treasure is a short distance away. The partially active Spišská Kapitula (Spiš Chapter) is an ecclesiastical complex built in the 13th century, completely encircled by a 16th-century wall. Charming Gothic houses line the single street running between the two medieval gates. Buy tickets and pick up a guide from the **Information Office** (☎ 0907388411; adult/student 20/10Sk; 🕒 11.15am-2.45pm). At the upper end is the magnificent Romanesque **St Martin's Cathedral** (Katedráľ sv Martina; 1273) with twin towers and an ancient Gothic sanctuary. Inside are several trifold painted Gothic altars from the 15th century that are impressive. On either side of the cathedral are the **seminary** (seminára) and the Renaissance **bishop's palace** (biskupský palác; 1652).

Sleeping & Eating

Penzión Podzáмок (☎ 454 1755; www.penziopodzamok.sk; Podzámková 28, Spišské Podhradie; s/d without bathroom 300/650Sk; 📍) Three family houses cobbled together make a 42-bed guesthouse (meals available) with a unobstructed castle view from the garden. It's at the end of the street east of the bridge, between Mariánské nám and the train station.

Spišsky Salaš (☎ 454 1202; www.spiskysalas.sk; Levočská cesta 11; s/d 420/800Sk; 📍) What rustic fun! Dig into lamb stew at the folksy restaurant (or have grilled chicken by the outdoor fire)

and then settle into a simple wood-panelled room for the night. This log-cabin complex is on the road to Spišské Podhradie, 3km west of Spiš Chapter.

Kolping House (☎ 0905790097; www.hotelkolping.sk; Spišská Kapitula 15; s/d 1100/1600Sk; 📍) A romantic little outfit actually inside the walls of Spišská Kapitula. Antiques and reproductions fill the rooms and restaurant.

Getting There & Away

A railway line connects Spišské Podhradie to Spišské Vlachy (12Sk, 10 minutes, eight daily), a station on the main line from Poprad to Košice. Relatively frequent buses run to and from Levoča (22Sk, 20 minutes, 11 daily) and Poprad (55Sk, 50 minutes, eight daily). If you're travelling to Spišská Kapitula by bus from Levoča, get off before the main town at Spišské Podhradie, Kapitula.

SPIŠSKÁ NOVÁ VES

☎ 053 / pop 39,200

You may have to stop at this unfortunate town on the Hornád river before going to nearby Slovenský raj National Park; there are few markets within the park's boundaries and to get to most of the park villages requires a transport change here. No need to linger though.

The bus and train stations are northwest of the centre; walk south on Odborárov and turn left on Dulianska, which morphs into the main square Radničné nám, bounded by Letná and Zimná (Summer and Winter).

There's an ATM at the train station and at banks on the main square. Help at the **Tourist Information Centre** (Map p421; ☎ 442 8292; Letná 49; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat Jun-Sep, 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) is hit or miss. Connect to the wider world at **Internet Klub** (Map p421; ☎ 441 4402; Letná 4; per hr 50Sk; 🕒 9am-9pm).

Opposite the bus station is a massive Billa supermarket (Map p421), which is the best thing about the place. If you're waiting for the tourist office to open after a break, you could eat at **Café Nostalgia** (Map p421; Letná 49; mains 95-250Sk). The '50s memorabilia goes with the names of the dishes (like James Dean chicken salad).

Spišská Nová Ves lies on a main line served by 11 daily express trains between Bratislava (450Sk, 5¼ hours) and Košice (104Sk, one hour), with a stop at Poprad (56Sk, 20 minutes). There's a frequent bus service to and

WHO THE HECK IS MASTER PAVOL?

Why, he's from Levoča, of course, just ask anyone. But the nation's premier medieval artist is a bit more elusive than that. He was a sculptor and carver who did amazing Gothic things with wood during the 15th and early 16th centuries – OK we've got that. And he had a woodcarving workshop in Levoča, where he married a wealthy woman and sat on the town council. But where was he born? When did he die? No one can say for sure. A damaging fire swept through Levoča in 1550, taking with it most of the town's archives and Mr Pavol's last name.

What else do we know? Well, he worked an awful lot. To this day there are intricate altars and engaging statues he and his students carved scattered across the Spiš region. Rumour has it that one of the 12 apostles in the *Last Supper* on the St James altar in Levoča is really a self-portrait. Maybe you can figure out who he is.

from Levoča (18Sk, 20 minutes, every half hour). For onward destinations near Slovenský raj National Park (see p422) connections aren't the best (you may want to consider springing for a car in Košice).

SLOVENSKÝ RAJ NATIONAL PARK

Rumbling waterfalls, steep gorges, sheer rock faces, thick forests and hilltop meadows: **Slovenský raj** (Slovak paradise; www.slovenskyraj.sk; admission 20Sk) is a national park for the passionately outdoorsy. The park is 90% covered in dense pine and deciduous forest, and has several rare species found only within its borders, including 17 butterfly types and 20 wildflower varieties. Easier trails exist, but the one-way ladder- and chain-assist ascents are the most dramatic. You cling to a metal rung headed straight up a precipice while an icy waterfall splashes and sprays a metre away. And that's after you've scrambled horizontally across a log ladder to cross the same stream down below. Pure exhilaration. Poprad is the gateway to Slovenský raj National Park as well as the Tatras.

Orientation

Slovenský raj National Park starts just 9km south of Poprad. Most public transport access to the park is through Spišská Nová Ves, which is 23km southeast of Poprad, at the eastern end of the Low Tatras. The main trailhead villages on the northern edge of the national park are Čingov, 5km west of Spišská Nová Ves, and Podlesok, 2km southwest of Hrabušice. There are lodgings in park villages but for full town services, you'll have to go into Spišská Nová Ves or Hrabušice. Dedinky, at the south end of the park, is a regular lakeside village with a pub, *potraviny* (supermarket) and houses.

Information

Before you go trekking buy VKÚ's 1:25,000 *Slovenský raj* hiking map (No 4), available at many tourist offices and bookshops country-wide. This can be complemented by the 40 walks found in *The Slovak Paradise* (No 2) book, part of the Knapsacked Travel series.

For the best trail and weather information, and help in booking a *chata* along the way, contact the park's **Mountain Rescue Service** (Horská služba; ☎ 053-449 1182; Čingov; ☎ 8am-6pm). There's a small **Tourist information Office** (☎ 053-429 9854; Hlavná, Hrabušice ☎ 8am-6pm Jul & Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri

Sep-Jun) in Hrabušice, not far from the **Ascona Café** (Hlavná 99; per hr 25Sk; ☎ 1pm-midnight Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat), which has internet. Helpful park websites include www.slovenskyraj.sk and www.slovenskyraj.org.

Sights & Activities

Most campgrounds and hotels have bike rentals, including the Hotel Flora and Park Hotel in Čingov, and skis are available for rent at the base of the hill at Dedinky. Mlynky, 3km east of Dedinky, is the area's ski central with five T-bar lifts. Equipment rental (about 250Sk a day) is available from the **Hotel Mlynky** (☎ 053-449 3523; www.hotelmlynky.sk; Mlynky-Biele Vody 252).

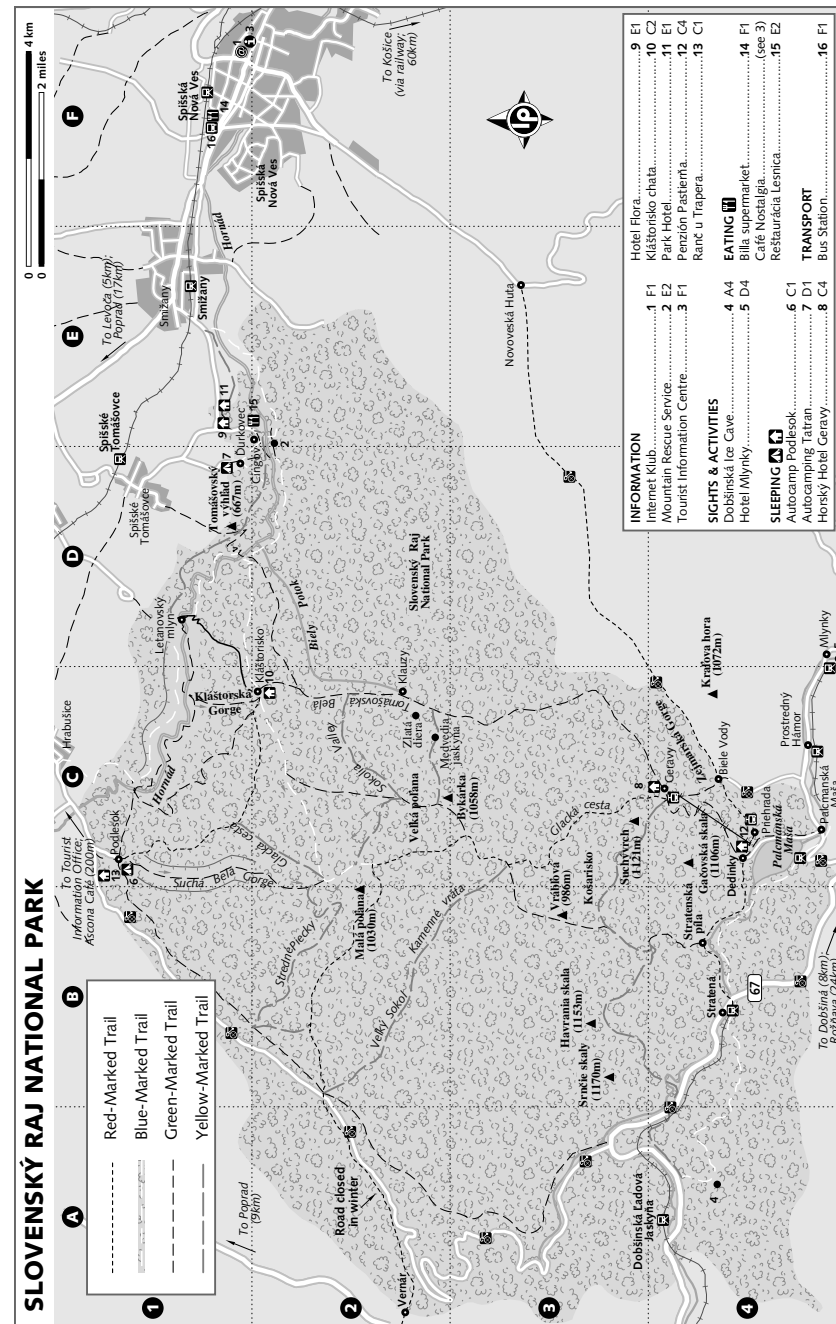
HIKING

The 326km of trails through the park's rugged gorges include some fun and challenging sections equipped with 'technical aids' (ladders, chain handrails, and metal steps). These stretches are one way (marked with arrows on maps), and slippery when wet, so plan ahead. Note that fines of up to 5000Sk are payable on the spot for going the wrong way, littering, lighting a fire or picking plants within the park.

The shortest hike that includes a one-way *roklina* (gorge) ascent is the one-hour **Zejmar-ská gorge** hike on the blue trail. It starts at Biele Vody (25 minutes northeast of Dedinky on the red trail). To get back, follow the green trail down to Dedinky (40 minutes), or there's a **chairlift** (adult/child 30/15Sk; 9am-5pm) between Geravy and Dedinky that, if it's working, goes on the hour.

From Čingov a yellow trail heads to the ever-popular lookout point, **Tomášovský výhľad** (667m), and on to **Letanovský mlyn** and the **Hornád river**. From here, head west again along the Hornád to **Kláštorská gorge**, south up a one-way technically aided section to **Kláštorská chata**, where there's a restaurant, small cabins and a great meadow for picnics. Follow the green trail back along the ridge towards Čingov. Allow at least six hours for the circuit, lunch at Kláštorská chata included. To hike from Čingov to Dedinky takes about eight hours; head west to Biely potok and follow the green trail by the stream to the photogenic lake at Klauzy, continuing on a ridge trail that eventually leads down to Dedinky.

From Podlesok an excellent day's hike heads up the **Suchá Belá gorge** (with several steep ladders, the tallest 30m). At the top of



the gorge it's possible to head east and wind your way down to Kláštorisko and the Hornád river, before following the river west back to Podlesok (or heading on to Čingov). Allow at least six hours for a round-trip.

DOBŠINSKÁ ICE CAVE

The unusual **Dobšinská Ice Cave** (Dobšinská ľadová Jaskyňa; ☎ 058-788 1470; adult/student 150/130Sk; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 9.30am-2pm Tue-Sun May & Sep) is 6km west of Dedinky and 12km south of Podlesok (via a summer-only road). The ice in the Veľká sieň (Grand Hall) can be up to 20m thick, and smooth and flat enough to skate on (as demonstrated by former world champion Karol Divín in the 1950s). The frozen formations are most dazzling in May, before they start to melt (no matter the date the ambient temperature is only a few degrees above freezing). The cave entrance is a steep 20-minute hike south from the bus stop and adjacent restaurant. Tours leave every hour or less.

Sleeping & Eating

Free camping is not allowed within the park. Surrounding towns such as Hrabušice and Smižany have private and *penzion* rooms for rent (many posted at www.slovenskyraj.sk); those below are closer to the trails. Almost all area restaurants are inside lodgings.

AROUND ČINGOV

Autocamping Tatran (☎ 053-429 7105; www.durkovec.sk; per person/tent/dm 80/60/220Sk, 2-person hut without bathroom 190Sk; (P) (☎)) Tents crowd together in the pasture surrounded by tiny huts, a big dormitory and multiroom rental houses with satellite TV (2500Sk). Take a 2.2km tramp west of the Čingov bus stop.

HotelFlora (☎ 053-449 1129; www.hotelfloraslovenskyraj.sk; s/d 750/1200Sk; (P) (☎)) The lobby and worthwhile restaurant are mountain-fabulous, with a stone fireplace, leather chairs and big windows. Pity the rooms didn't come along for the renovation ride.

Park Hotel (☎ 053-442 2022; www.parkhotel.vitek.sk; s/d 950/1200Sk; (P) (☎)) All rooms have a balcony or a terrace. Pool tables, volleyball and tennis courts, and a sauna up the fun factor. Nicely isolated 1.2km before Čingov village.

Also in the area:

Kláštorská chata (☎ 053-449 3307; cabins per person 250Sk) Small mountain huts and restaurant located midtrail. Book ahead.

Reštaurácia Lesnica (☎ 053-449 1518; Penzion Lesnica; mains 90-200Sk) Residents' favourite; kids like the ice-cream sundaes.

AROUND PODLESOK

May to September there are food stands open near the Podlesok trailhead parking lot and a small but full-service restaurant.

Autocamp Podlesok (☎ 053-429 9165; slovrajbela@stonline.sk; Podlesok; per person/tent 60/60Sk, huts per person 230Sk; (P) (☎)) Big, big, big. Pitch a tent in the field or choose from the A-frames, small huts or cottages with two to 12 beds and a bathroom. The camping ground is a 2km walk from Hrabušice; there are two restaurants on site.

Ranč u Trapera (☎ 0911987231; www.rancutrapera.sk; Podlesok 16; r per person 450Sk) Stay the night in a large log cabin dream and take a horseback ride in the morning. This ranch B&B even has front porch rocking chairs. It's about 2km south of Podlesok (on the summer-only road toward Dedinky).

AROUND DEDINKY

The pub and the *potraviný* (supermarket), the two staples of any village, are on the north side of the lake, near where the chairlift terminates.

Penzion Pastierňa (☎ 058-798 1175; Dedinky 42; s/d 300/600Sk; (P) (☎)) A small wooden guesthouse waits at the edge of the village, near the forest and green trailhead. There are only five rooms, so book ahead.

Horský Hotel Geravy (☎ 058-798 1179; www.geravy.com; Geravy; dm 250Sk) At the top of the chairlift above Dedinky sits this mountain hotel with pub and picnic tables. Bunkroom accommodation is basic but the meadow views are unbeatable. Full board available.

Getting There & Away

A few buses run directly from Poprad to Dedinky (53Sk 1¼ hours, three daily) and to Hrabušice (25Sk, 40 minutes, five on weekdays, one on weekends). Other than that Spišská Nová Ves is the main transfer point to Slovenský raj. From there two buses (no trains) a day run to Hrabušice (22Sk, 35 minutes), two to Čingov (10Sk, 12 minutes) and three to Dedinky (53Sk, one hour). Few buses are scheduled midday.

The daily Horehoronec fast train from Bratislava (6.16am), through Banská Bystrica (10.04am), stops at the Dobšinská ľadová

Jaskyňa (420Sk, 5¼ hours), Dedinky (420Sk, five hours 50 minutes) and Mlyny (420Sk, six hours). In reverse it leaves Košice at 2.50pm stopping at Dedinky (146Sk, two hours) etc. Otherwise, to get between Dedinky and Košice requires a switch at Margecany (84Sk, 1½ hours, six daily).

Getting Around

Getting around is not so easy really, unless you hike or drive. One bus a day goes each way between Čingov and Hrabušice (10Sk, 45 minutes), Hrabušice and Dedinky (18Sk, one hour), and Dedinky and Čingov (25Sk, two hours).

SLOVAK KARST

☎ 058

Boat along the river Styx, traipse through a fairytale castle and admire an aragonite flower. Do all this and more, among the fanciful underworld formations of the Slovak Karst (Slovenský kras).

This region of limestone canyons and caves lies at the eastern end of Slovenské rudohorie (the Slovak Ore Mountains), a major range that reaches the border with Hungary. Its most spectacular landscapes are within the 440-sq-km Slovak Karst National Park, promoted to a Unesco World Heritage site in 1995. Five of the subterranean domains are open to the public.

Above ground the area has the dramatic Krásna Hôrka Castle and ornate Betliar Palace. In this region all roads lead to the administrative capital, Rožňava, and transport is infrequent. This makes it hard to see more than one sight in a day without a car.

ROŽŇAVA

pop 19,260

Scattered outside the region's central city are some interesting monuments and natural wonders. Rožňava is a good base for exploring the Slovak Karst National Park, as well as the area's castles.

This former mining town, 20km north of the border, has an understandably big Hungarian-speaking minority. It was the region's main gold, silver and iron ore centre until the 17th century. Nám Baníkov, the town centre, is 2.5km north of the train station via Šafarikova and the bus station is one

block southeast of the centre, on Zeleného stromu. The staff at the **Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 732 8101; www.roznava.sk; Nám Baníkov 32; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) willingly help you sort out the bus schedules to various caves.

Stuck in town? Nám Baníkov's buildings include the 1654 **watch tower** (strážna veža; adult/student 30/15Sk; ☎ 10-11.30am & 1-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3.30pm Sat, noon-3.30pm Sun Jun-Aug; at 10am, 11am, 1pm & 2pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) and the **Cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary** (Katedrála Nanebovzatia panny Márie; adult/student 30/15Sk), with a Renaissance altar depicting miners at work.

Restaurant Penzion Alfa (☎ 788 0701; Nám Baníkov 33; r per person 600Sk) opened on a busy street corner in late 2005. It has a stonework restaurant (part Slovak, part Italian menu) and comfy rooms with pine beds. **Hotel Čierny orol** (☎ 732 8186; www.ciernyorol.sk; Nám Baníkov 17; s/d 700/1100Sk; (P) (☎)) is the main town hotel, restaurant, beer cellar – everything. It is right next to the visitor centre.

Five fast trains a day connect Rožňava with Košice (118Sk, one hour), and there are more frequent milk runs. One daily bus connects to and from Poprad (100Sk, two hours) and three to and from Dedinky (53Sk, one hour) in Slovenský raj.

AROUND ROŽŇAVA

Betliar

The attraction of this town 4km north of Rožňava is grand **Betliar Manor House** (Kaštieľ Betliar; ☎ 798 3118; adult/student 100/50Sk; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 9.30am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr). Built in the 18th century for the Andrassy family, it's stuffed with elegant furnishings, relics collected in Africa and Asia, and a library of 20,000 books. That really was the life. A stately garden encloses the estate.

The former family stables now contain the **Penzion pri kašтели Betliar** (☎ 788 2002; www.kastielbetliar.sk; Kaštieľna 16; s/d 600/900Sk; (P) (☎)) and its first-rate restaurant serving delectable Hungarian and Slovak dishes (mains 80Sk to 150Sk) and desserts. Rooms aren't fancy, but they are new.

There are near-hourly buses through Betliar from Rožňava (10Sk, 10 minutes).

Krásnohorské Podhradie

Eight kilometres east of Rožňava, on a hill above the village of Krásnohorské Podhradie, **Krásna Hôrka Castle** (Hrad Krásna Hôrka; ☎ 732 4769;

adult/student 100/70Sk; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, by appointment 9.30am-3.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr) was built in 1320. In the 16th century the Andrassy family bought it, 'Renaissanced' it and reinforced it. Most buildings burned in 1817, but in the early part of the 20th century, Count Dionysius Andrassy restored it and turned it into a family museum.

The green, shady **Camping pod hradom** (☎ 058-732 5457; person/tent/130/40Sk) is just beyond the village on the way to the castle.

Seven to 11 buses serve Krásnohorské Podhradie from Rožňava (10Sk, 10 minutes). The closest train station is 1km south, at Lípovník; slow trains (*osobný vlak*, Os) between Rožňava (12Sk, 10 minutes) and Košice (84Sk, 1¼ hours) stop there. The castle, visible from everywhere, is a 3km walk east, up from the village.

CAVES OF THE SLOVAK KARST

Slovak Karst National Park (Národný park Slovenský Kras) encompasses more than 34,000 hectares and contains many of the 47 known *jaskyňa* (caves) in the region. It connects to a similar park on the Hungarian side of the border. In 1995 Unesco put 12 of the caves in both parks on the World Heritage list (including Dobšinská Ice Cave, p422). Below are the five in or near the park that are open to the public. Public transport in the district is a bit rare, especially on weekends. None of the caves are set up for the mobility-impaired. The Tourist Information Office in Rožňava can help with transport details. Tours take 35 to 45 minutes.

Many of the delicate aragonite formations in the **Ochtinská Cave** (Ochtinská Aragonitová Jaskyňa; ☎ 488 1051; adult/student 120/100Sk; ☎ tours 9am-4pm hourly Tue-Sun Jun-Aug; 9.30am, 11am, 12.30pm & 2pm Tue-Sun Apr, May, Sep & Oct) are 14,000 years old. The inside-out stalactites grow from thin limestone tubes that water passes through, leaving deposits at the growing end. The minerals form into white and orange twists and spikes, shapes resembling flowers and sea anemones. A tour takes about 35 minutes.

Perhaps the most accessible, **Gombasecká Cave** (Gombasecká Jaskyňa; ☎ 788 2020; adult/student 70/60Sk; ☎ tours 9am-4pm hourly Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 10am, 11am, 2pm & 3pm Tue-Sun Apr, May, Sep & Oct) is only 10km south of Rožňava. Thin, straw-like stalactites up to 3m long are what this cave is known for, but the mineral-dyed orange walls are also striking. Overall, this

35-minute tour requires the least physical exertion of the Slovak Karst cave tours, though there are some stairs. Buses connect to Rožňava (13Sk, eight daily) from Tuesday to Friday only.

Domica Cave (Jaskyňa Domica; ☎ 788 2010; adult/student 80/40Sk, with boat trip 150/130Sk; ☎ tours 9am-4pm hourly Tue-Sun Jun-Aug; 9.30am, 11am, 12.30pm & 2pm Tue-Sun Apr, May, Sep & Oct) is the biggest, best-known and most beautiful cave, full of colour, and with some stalactites as thick as tree trunks. Almost 2km of the 5km length can be seen by boat along the underground river Styx. (With a boat ride the tour takes 85 minutes, without, half that.) The cave is part of a 22km-long system, most of which is in Hungary (where it's called Baradla). Domica is 28km south of Rožňava, via Plešivec. Buses depart up to 10 times a day from Tuesday to Friday (36Sk, 45 minutes) and three times on weekends. You can hike to Domica from Gombasek (15km) on a yellow and then a red trail via Silica.

Two less visited caves are **Krásnohorská Cave** (Krásnohorská Jaskyňa; ☎ 788 2020; group admission 230Sk; ☎ tours by appointment), containing a mighty tall stalagmite (32.6m), and **Jasov Cave** (Jasovská Jaskyňa; ☎ 055-466 4165; adult/student 60/30Sk; ☎ tours 9am-4pm hourly Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 10am-3pm Tue-Sun Apr, May, Sep & Oct), which has been open to visitors since 1846. It bears some graffiti apparently left by Hussites in the 15th century. The first cave is 6.5km southeast and the second 40km northeast of Rožňava.

Woods surround the **Hotel Hrádok** (☎ 486 0110; r 700-900Sk; ☎ ☎ ☎), 2km before the Ochtinská cave entrance. This holiday house has tennis courts and volley ball courts, a swimming pool, bike rental and a restaurant. From Tuesday to Friday five buses (32Sk) run the 22km from Rožňava west of the cave. Buses drop to two on weekends.

MURÁN PLAIN NATIONAL PARK

Thirty-five kilometres west-northwest of Rožňava is **Murán Plain National Park** (Národný park Muránska planina; www.muranska-planina.net, in Slovak), a limestone massif dotted with wildflowers and meadows. Truth is, there's a reason not so many people come here. It's out of the way, difficult to get around by public transport, and does not have as many facilities as the nation's other parks. Murán is the main village (and a trailhead), five buses a day arrive from Rožňava (74Sk, 1¼ hours).

ŠARIŠ REGION

Each region of Slovakia has its own particular folk tradition, with a distinct singing style, folk costume, dances and the like. The Šariš region, of which Prešov is the economic centre, has protected and perpetuated its culture more than most. Locals even have their own dialect, derived from a shepherding lifestyle, that is mutually unintelligible to Bratislavans. Bardejov is the region's star with a Unesco-quality town square, a neighbouring spa town and area wooden churches.

PREŠOV

☎ 051 / pop 91,700

If one of the local folk ensembles is performing, by all means go see it. Prešov is a city proud of its culture. Unlike other towns, here you can readily buy folk crafts and music at reasonable prices. The local museum does an excellent job illuminating colourful local shepherd traditions. Though this is basically an industrial city, the historical buildings on the main square have been nicely restored (most were heavily damaged during WWII).

History

Archaeologists say there was a Slav settlement here by the late 8th century. Hungarian colonists arrived in the 11th century and in 1687, 24 Protestants were executed here for their support of Hungarian Imre Thököly and his anti-Hapsburg uprising. Prešov (Eperjes in Hungarian), instead of joining the Czechoslovak nation, tried to proclaim itself a socialist state (the Slovak Republic of Councils) tied to Hungary. The Czechoslovak army took the city and shooed the Hungarian troops out. Today, Prešov is the third-largest city in Slovakia.

Orientation

Hlavná, Prešov's main street (literally), is a 20-minute walk north up busy Masarykova from the adjacent bus and train stations (or you can take trolleybus 1 or 4 north for two stops).

Information

A couple of banks with ATMs line up along Hlavná, and both the bus and train stations have ATMs.

I-Netcafé (Nám Legionárov 1; per hr 42Sk; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) On the upper floor of the Tesco Department Store.

Post office (Masarykova 2)

Prešov Information Service (PIS; ☎ 773 1113; www.prešov.sk; Hlavná 67; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Maps, books, souvenirs.

Sights

The 16th-century Rákóczi Palace contains the **Regional museum** (Krajské múzeum; ☎ 759 8220; Hlavná 86; adult/student 30/10Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-6pm Sun). Seek out the ethnographic displays hidden up an interior staircase to see playful displays of the felt-wearing, axe-wielding, romanticised life of a *bača* (head shepherd).

Assembled at the **Šariš gallery** (☎ 772 5423; Hlavná 51; adult/student 20/10Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-6pm Sun) is a collection of 20th-century Slovak art that includes painters from the Rusyn culture (p434) of east Slovakia.

It was at the 17th-century **town hall** (radnica; Hlavná 73) that the short-lived, socialist Slovak Republic of Councils – backed by the Hungarian Red Army – was proclaimed a nation of sorts in 1919. Accessible through the building's arcade is a cellar **Wine Museum** (Múzeum vína; ☎ 773 3108; Floriánova; adult/student 20/10Sk; ☎ 8am-noon & 12.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) that looks suspiciously like a wine shop, but the sampling's fun.

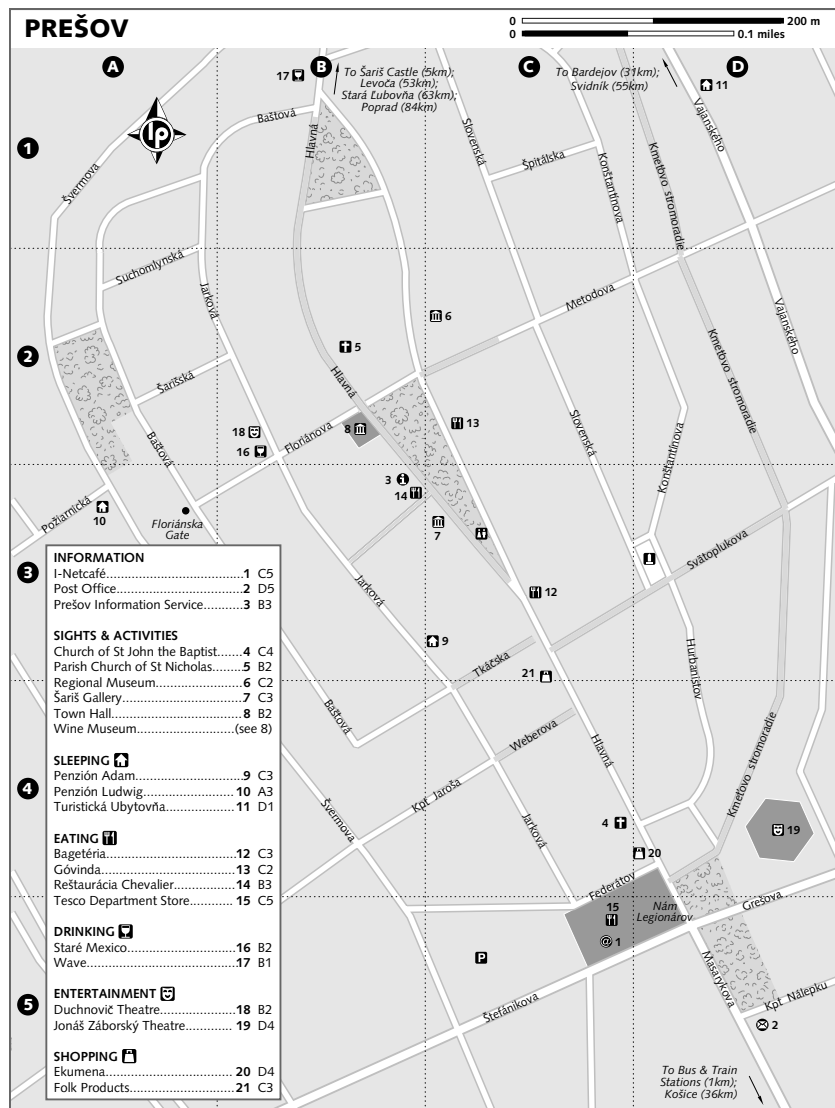
Master Pavol of Levoča's workshop created some of the sculpture in the Gothic Roman Catholic **Parish church of St Nicholas** (Farský kostol sv Mikuláše), first remodelled in 1515. Peek inside the ornate Greek Catholic **Church of St John the Baptist** (Kostol sv Jána Krstiteľa) to see the handsome iconostasis.

Five kilometres north of Prešov you can hike up to the few remaining ruins of what was Slovakia's largest fortification, **Šariš castle** (Šarišský hrad). Built in the 13th century, it lasted only until the 17th century when a Polish king burnt it down. Follow the yellow trail 1½ hours from the village of Veľký Šariš.

Sleeping

Turistická ubytovňa (☎ 772 0628; www.pis.sk/turisticka-ubytovna; Vajanského 65; s/d 350/600Sk; ☎) Bare-bones basic – a bed (though we'd hardly call that a mattress), table, and chair. There is a kitchen for guests though.

Penzión Adam (☎ 758 1789; www.penziadam.sk; Jarková 16; s/d 1300/1500Sk; ☎) Something about this *penzión* feels especially sunny and bright. Maybe it's the superhigh ceilings, orange bed spreads and modern furniture, or golden



exterior. Or maybe it's just that it's so new (opened mid-2006). Top-notch staff.

Penzión Ludwig (☎ 0908254211; www.penzionludwig.sk; Požiarická 2; s/d 1900/2200Sk; (P) Sloping eaves and half-timber beams add to the old-world feel of this elegant inn. Duck in to your room, sit down on the brocade and carved-wood settee, and connect your laptop to the internet.

Dining downstairs is under panelled ceilings and glittering chandeliers.

Eating & Drinking

National law says you have to have nonsmoking sections in restaurants; guess local eateries must be classed as pubs because there are few with nonsmoking sections.

Góvinda (☎ 0911309108; Hlavná 70; mains 80-150Sk; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri) This is one of three Indian vegetarian self-service restaurants run by Hare Krishnas in Slovakia.

Reštaurácia Chevalier (☎ 758 1590; Hlavná 69; mains 100-250Sk) Drink from stone goblets in a vaulted cellar and imagine Prešov in the middle ages. Slovak specialities here are well executed.

For fast cheap eats, stop at the **Bagetéria** (Hlavná 36; sandwiches 30-75Sk; ☎ 6am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am Sat & Sun), or in warm weather, at one of several cafés that put up covered platforms on the main square. The Tesco Department Store has a grocery.

Staré Mexico (☎ 0915308285; Jarková 63; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 10am-1am Fri & Sat) pub has occasional live bands, or you can get funky at the gallery-internet café-disco **Wave** (Hlavná 1; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Thu, 10am-1am Fri, 4pm-1am Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun), with various live sets Fridays and DJs throughout the week.

Entertainment

There are several folk ensembles in town, including **Šarišan** (www.sarisan.sk), that play traditional songs and dances at various venues. The **Duchnovič Theatre** (☎ 772 3261; www.divadload.sk; Jarková 77) is a Rusyn minority playhouse where the folk ensemble Puls performs.

Jonáš Záborský Theatre (☎ 772 4622; www.djz.sk; in Slovak; Nám Legionárov 6) presents classical concerts and plays from September through May.

Shopping

The usual Ulúv store is on the main square, but it's better to stop at the excellent **Folk Products** (☎ 773 2694; www.oliviasimports.com; Hlavná 21; ☎ 11am-7pm) for handmade wood-carving, embroidery, lacework, as well as *fujary* (metre-plus horns made out of wood) and *valašky* (shepherds' staffs that resemble a decorative axe). Down the block you can buy hand-painted icons at **Ekumena** (☎ 772 0477; Hlavná 1).

Getting There & Away

Prešov is 36km north of Košice and 21 daily trains (38Sk, 45 minutes) connect the two. No matter where you're coming from, you'll have to transfer in Prešov for Bardejov (56Sk, 1½ hours, five daily). Buses with a dozen or more departures a day connect to and from Košice (47Sk, 35 minutes), Bardejov (58Sk, 50 minutes), Svidník (78Sk, 1½ hours), Levoča (89Sk, 1½ hours), Poprad (124Sk, 1¾ hours) and Stará Lubovňa (89Sk, 1¾ hours).

BARDEJOV

☎ 054 / pop 33,400

It may as well be the 15th century, this old town centre has been so enthusiastically preserved. All steep roofs and flat fronts, the Gothic-Renaissance burghers' houses on the main square seem strikingly homogeneous at first. Look closer and you notice an ethereal sgraffito decoration or a pastel hue and plaster detail that sets each apart – get your camera ready. Unesco must have been impressed too, they put Bardejov on the World Heritage list in 2000. The quiet square is the main drawcard today, but there's also an excellent icon museum that sheds light on this region's eastern-facing religion.

Nearby in Bardejovské Kúpele (p429) you can take the cure at a hot spring spa and explore an open-air village museum. The wooden churches in the area reflect the Carpatho-Rusyn heritage shared with neighbouring parts of the Ukraine and Poland.

History

Bardejov received its royal charter in 1376 and grew rich on trade with Poland and Russia. In the 17th century many of the Gothic town square buildings were made over in Renaissance style (porticos and arcades added), and some had rococo elements (ornamental plasterwork) tacked on in the 18th century. The Thirty Years' War, an anti-Hapsburg revolt and the plague ended the town's development but saved the fine centre square. None of the original 80 buildings has been lost, and only four houses have been added since the 1600s. Restoration is an ongoing process, so expect to see a building under scaffolding at all times.

Orientation

Radničné nám, the town's main square, is about 400m southwest of the bus and train station. The old town walls hide the centre from the main road between Prešov and Svidník. If walking from the stations enter through the gate off Slovenská at Baštová.

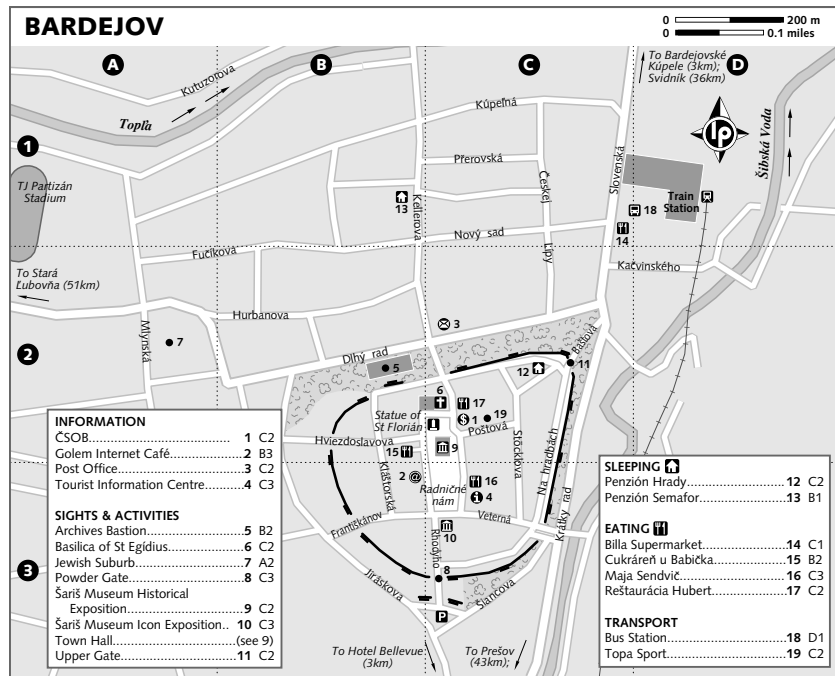
Information

ČSOB (Radničné nám 7) Bank and ATM.

Golem Internet Café (Radničné nám 25; per hr 25Sk; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, 1-11pm Sat & Sun)

Post office (Dlhý rad 14)

Tourist Information Centre (☎ 474 4003; www.e-bardejov.sk; Radničné nám 21; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri year-round, also 11.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun May-Sep) Info, souvenirs and guide service.



Sights

There are two branches of the **Šariš museum** (Sarišské múzeum; ☎ 472 4966; www.muzeumbardejov.sk; adult/student 40/20Sk; 🕒 8am-noon & 12.30-4pm Tue-Sun) on the square. At the **Icon Exposition** (Expozícia ikony; Radničné nám 27) you can see more than 160 dazzling icons from the 16th to 19th centuries. Originally, the stylised portraits of Christ Pantocrator, the Mother of God and a whole flock of saints decorated Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches east of here. The other branch, the 1509 **town hall** (radnica; Radničné nám 48), centre square, houses the **Historical Exposition** (Historická expozícia). The building is a unique piece of early Renaissance architecture: note the bay staircase, the carved stone portals and the wooden inlay ceiling in the Meeting Room. The rooms contain local paintings, coins and weaponry.

A fine example of late Gothic architecture inside and out, the 15th-century **Basilica of St Egidius** (Bazilika Sv Egidia; adult/student 30/20Sk, tower 40/20Sk; 🕒 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) is packed with no less than 11 winged Gothic altarpieces built from 1460 to 1510. West of the square the 18th-century **Jewish suburb** (Židovské

suburbium; Mlynská 6-7) has a synagogue in need of restoration and a small Jewish cemetery.

Remnants of the town's ancient defences include the restored **Upper gate** (Dolná brána), on Baštová, the **Powder gate** (Prašná brána) to the south and the chunky, 14th-century **Archives bastion** (Archívna bašta) to the north-west, now occupied by a bar.

Festivals & Events

Friday evenings in July there are often concerts on the square as part of the **Bardejov Musical Summer** (Bardejovské Hudobné Leto). The nearby *skanzen* in Bardejovské Kúpele (opposite) has events all summer long.

Sleeping & Eating

Penzión Hradý (☎ 0903211865; www.penziönivana.sk; Štöcklova 8; s/d/tr 495/750/880Sk; 📍) Need your hair cut? There's a salon across the hall, and an eatery downstairs, in this busy, old-town building. The wood veneer rooms are nothing special.

Penzión Semafor (☎ 0905830984; www.penziönsemafor.sk; Kellerova 13; s/d 700/900Sk, ste 800-1100Sk; 📍) If the large, bright doubles are good, the 'apart-

ments' (larger rooms) are even better. All share a communal kitchen in this family-run guesthouse recommended by our readers.

Hotel Bellevue (☎ 472 8404; www.bellevuehotel.sk; Mihalov 2503; s/d 1900/2600Sk; 📍 📞 📺 📺 📺) As swank as Bardejov gets: stay high on the hill above the old town, with great views from the glass-enclosed pool, sleep atop classic but modern cherry-wood beds and eat at a darn good full-service restaurant. Bellevue is 3km south of the centre; take bus 8 from the train station.

Reštaurácia Hubert (☎ 0908982738; Radničné nám 4; mains 100-169Sk; 🕒 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun) Game dishes and other meaty fare top the list in this cellar restaurant. There are a few animal-protein-free pastas available too.

Cukráreň u Babička (Radničné nám 49; cakes 30-100Sk) On the main square, in a Renaissance arcade, Babička serves pastries and cakes like your Slovak grandma used to make.

Maja Sendvič (☎ 091941064; Radničné nám 15; sandwiches 40-50Sk; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri, 3-11pm Sat & Sun) Sells baguette sandwiches to go.

Billa supermarket (Slovenská) A bit further afield, the supermarket is next to the bus station.

Looking for an adult beverage? Several cafés, pubs – and a pizzeria with cold beer – front the main square. A few more drinkeries are along Štöcklova near Penzión Hradý.

Getting There & Around

Local trains run regularly between Bardejov and Prešov (56Sk, 1¼ hours, nine daily). But the bus is faster if you want to go to and from Košice (100Sk, 1¾ hours, eight daily) or Poprad (135Sk, 2½ hours, 12 daily). From Bratislava, three daily buses make the nine- to 10-hour journey (590Sk) direct.

Topa Sport (☎ 474 4282; Poštová 1; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) rents bicycles for 120/450Sk per day/week.

BARDEJOVSKÉ KÚPELE

At least six species of evergreen shade the paths of pedestrian-only Bardejovské Kúpele, 3km north of Bardejov. And then there's the abundant shrubbery, flowers and other kinds of trees. This could be an arboretum instead of a leafy little spa town. Couples meander about with birdsong as the only noise pollution and relaxing their only goal. Several of the 19th-century rooming houses still exist, but they are mixed in among 1970s-modern

institutional structures to surreal effect. In addition to spa treatment facilities, lodging and shops, among the trees is one of Slovakia's best village museums (*skanzen*). A good time to visit is mid-July, for the annual two-day **Rusyn-Šariš Folk Festival**, but the museum often has programmes on summer weekends.

Orientation & Information

The bus station and parking lot (no cars allowed in the main town area) are at the base of a slope on the town's southeast end. It's all uphill from there. The Spa House and the *skanzen* are toward the top of town.

Herkules (☎ 474 4744; www.herkules.sk; Kino Žriedo; 8am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) is the local travel agent/tourist information office. Staff can arrange a week-long spa stay with treatments and food.

Sights & Activities

To experience the local waters, make an appointment for a mineral bath at the **Spa house** (Kúpeľný dom; ☎ 477 4255; www.kupele-bj.sk; spa services 150-300Sk; 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Sat), on the east side at the top of the main path. Or maybe you'd like a whirlpool soak, or a Scottish shower (where they line you up against a tile wall and squirt you with what looks like a water canon in the name of massaging).

The main cure people come for can be sipped at the **colonnade** (kolonáda; admission free; 🕒 6-8am, 10.30am-1pm & 4.30-6.30pm). Each of the eight springs that feed the water taps has different mineral properties. A huge wall chart details which spring treats what ailment; brush up on your periodic table before trying to decipher it and stick close to a bathroom after imbibing.

To the west of the colonnade is the **Museum of Folk Architecture** (Múzeum ľudovej architektúry; ☎ 472 2070; adult/student 40/20Sk; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, to 3pm Oct-Apr). The onion-domed dark wooden church from Zboj is among the 25 area buildings moved to this *skanzen*, composed of sparsely furnished log and plaster cabins, barns and smithy workshops, beehives and haylofts. Peer into the simple dwellings and see how some rural folk still live. In 2005 the church from Mikulašova (1730) was completely reconstructed here (thus the light wood) and put in use for Sunday liturgy.

Sleeping & Eating

The majority of spa guests are still those with medical prescriptions for three- to six-week

WOODEN CHURCHES AROUND BARDEJOV

At the crossroads of Eastern and Western Christianity developed a particular form of sacral architecture – the *drevený kostol* (wooden church). The simple, yet somehow sublime outward appearance belies the rich interiors packed with religious images. At the front you have the iconostasis, or icon screen, lined with the venerated representations of Christ and the saints. The most precious icons have been moved to the Sariš museum (p428) in Bardejov and replicas put in their place.

Some of the churches are still used for services but most remain locked during the week. The caretaker, upon seeing a stranger in the small village, may wander up and offer to open it. If not, politely asking the nearest older person – smile, point at the church, make a key gesture – seems to lead to finding someone who can let you in. (At least a 20Sk donation to the key guy and one to the church is appropriate.)

The most easily accessible wooden churches around Bardejov:

- Two Greek Catholic churches from the area are now in the open-air museum in Bardejovské Kúpele, 3km north of Bardejov. Both have striking iconostasis, the latter is newly reconstructed and in use on museum grounds.
- The small three-dome Greek Catholic church (1763) in Jedlinka, with a baroque interior, was built in honour of the Mother of God, of whom there is a highly prized icon. It's 14km north of Bardejov, and frequent buses between Svidník and Bardejov stop here.
- The Roman Catholic exception to the rule resides in Hervartov. This St Francis of Assisi is the oldest wooden church in Slovakia (built around 1500, reconstructed in 1990). The interior of the nave is from 1665, and is richly decorated with frescoes. It's 9km southwest of Bardejov; at least three buses daily travel between the village and Bardejov.

For more information buy the full-colour English language booklet *Wooden Churches near Bardejov* from the Bardejov tourist office. *Carpathian Wooden Pearls* is a map of 27 wooden churches (also online) put out by the **Prešov Diocese** (www.grkatpo.sk/drevenecerk/). There are also clusters of wooden churches in villages near Svidník and Snina in the Eastern Borderlands.

stays (nice, huh?). Their programme includes buffet meals, so restaurants around town aren't great. Several of the lodgings take individual travellers, and you can opt for full board. The Herkules tourist office arranges private rooms (across the path from an ice-cream shop).

Alžbeta (☎ 477 4470; www.kupele-bj.sk; r €20-27) This Victorian lady sits at the top of the hill next to the Spa House. She's a bit old fashioned – with dark wood and small spaces – but that's what makes you able to imagine the time when empresses stayed here. There's a salt-cave treatment room on the ground floor.

Afroditá (☎ 472 7148; mastery@slovanet.sk; r 750Sk; ☒) The town's pizzeria rents out two flats above the restaurant, one with high-speed internet connection. It doesn't make a bad slice o' pizza either (pizzas 90Sk to 115Sk).

Salaš Lesná (☎ 474 2433; mains 55-90Sk; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) Has all the Slovak specialities at their folksy best. Dig into your fresh *halušky* (small, *gnocchi*-like dumplings usually topped with sheep's cheese and bacon bits) while admir-

ing the hand-carved chairs and rustic décor. Lesná is 1km south of Bardejovské Kúpele on the main road from Bardejov.

Getting There & Away

If you like you can walk the 3km north from Bardejov, with the last 1.5km meandering through wooded countryside. Bardejovské Kúpele is connected at least hourly to the Bardejov bus station (18Sk) via city bus 1, 2, 7, 8, 10 and 12. The last bus back is at around 7.30pm.

EASTERN BORDERLANDS

Shingled onion domes rise above the dark wooden churches as Old Church Slavonic chants float from within; you know that there's something different about this part of the country. The borderlands are home to a large Rusyn minority (see the boxed text,

p434) that also has members in neighbouring Ukraine and Poland. In fact, many of the village signs are written twice, once in the Cyrillic alphabet. Life here is generally quiet, rural, industrial and poor. The wooden churches spread throughout the region are the attraction, but they are located in tiny villages with few services. A hearty hiker could reach a few from Snina in a day.

At the far eastern edge of the country, Poloniny National Park is a striking expanse of hilly forest largely untouched by man. The surprise of the district is the Andy Warhol museum in Medzilaborce, near where his family came from.

Unless you have lots of time to explore the borderlands, it's best to rent a car in Košice; buses here are infrequent and train service all but nonexistent.

MICHALOVCE

☎ 056 / pop 39,842

A sterile little town centre, with one heck of a socialist-realist 'happy peasant' statue at its heart, provides little reason to stop. In a few shops on the square you can buy the well-known rustic brown-glazed pottery, decorated with graphic patterns and folk symbols, that's produced south of here in towns like Pozdišovce. Otherwise you can connect to the Ukraine from this eastern outpost.

Bus is the best way to get here from Košice (89Sk, 1½ hours, at least 10 daily). An hourly bus service connects to Humenné (44Sk, 30 minutes). Up to four buses a day make the one-hour drive to Uzhhorod in the Ukraine (296Sk).

HUMENNÉ

☎ 057 / pop 35,008

This peaceful town on the Laborec river has a French-style baroque chateau, which began as a Gothic castle turned museum and a *skanzen*. Everything is on the main square, Nám Slobody, where you'll also find banks and the **Internet Klub** (Nám Slobody 4; per hr 40Sk; 10am-7pm Mon-Fri). The adjacent bus and train stations are 500m due west of the vast, pedestrian-friendly square; the **Information Office** (☎ 788 1051; 8am-noon & 1-6pm) is in the train station.

The local palace now contains the **Vihorlatské museum** (☎ 775 2240; adult/student 35/10Sk; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun May-Oct), with exhibits on archaeology, local history and feudal housing. Uphill from there is the as-

sociated **skanzen** (adult/student 30/15Sk; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Oct), with about 10 Rusyn rural wooden houses from around the region, dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Pride of place goes to a wooden church built in 1754. Summer festivals enliven the place with folk song and dance.

The up-to-date suites at **Penzión Albina** (☎ 775 6303; Nám Slobody 61; r 1900Sk; ☐) are very close to the museums. The restaurant is quite popular at lunchtime. You can have a meat fest with four of your best friends at the cavernous beer hall/grill restaurant **Yes** (☎ 0903655770; Nám Slobody; mains 100-150Sk; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Thu, 9am-2am Fri & Sat, 2-11pm Sun); for 480Sk you get ribs, wings, sausage and bacon for four.

Humenné is on a rail spur line from Michalovce (52Sk, 30 minutes, 10 daily) and Medzilaborce (56Sk, 1¼ hours, 11 daily). Buses are better for other destinations: Košice (128Sk, two hours, five daily), Prešov (100Sk, 1½ hours, five daily), Svidník (100Sk, two hours, four daily).

SNINA

☎ 057 / pop 21,382

Plonked between the Vihorlatské Highlands and Poloniny National Park is this nondescript refinery town that is valuable as a base for exploring the area's wooden churches (see the boxed text, p432). The dynamite little **CKU** (☎ 768 5735; unitur@stonline.sk; Strojárska 102; ☎ 9-11am & noon-5pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, closed Sat Oct-May) travel agency/tourist office is a real revelation. They have tons of literature about the churches, including *Icon Cyclotour* booklets that have a map and colour photos of area churches, and one family member or other of the staff knows all the lodging owners personally. Don't forget to pick up the VKÚ map *Bukovské Vrchy* (1:50,000, No 118, 90Sk) for hiking. Hotel Kamei rents bikes.

The modern town centre is a bit run down, but inside one of the blocky buildings the **Caravella** (☎ 758 1071; www.caravella.s-n.sk; dm/apt 300/1000Sk; pizzas 75-115Sk) pizzeria and *penzión* has been recently renovated (rooms redone in 2006). Apartments have colourful paint on the wall and Ikea-like furnishings. Outside of town, in the woods, 3km east of the centre, is the holiday-oriented **Hotel Kamei** (☎ 768 2187; www.kamei.sk; s/d 1100/1600Sk; ☐ ☒). A five-minute walk from here leads to two local lakes for swimming (free to guests) and

WOODEN CHURCHES AROUND SNINA

Near the Ukrainian border are some beautiful examples of the traditional wooden churches reflective of the local Rusyn culture. By car, bike or foot is the only way to get around, as buses between villages are sporadic at best, and most don't run on weekends. Churches are locked except for services; ask around for someone who can let you in.

The first wooden church is 3km east of Snina in the village of **Jalová**. This tiny 1792 church was completely rebuilt by traditional methods in 2004. High on a hill, **Topoľa**, 13km east of Snina, is more impressive. The 18th-century iconostasis and 1819 Old Church Slavonic liturgy book are still inside the church.

From Topoľa, instead of following the road, you can hike over the hill via the blue trail (2½ hours) to **Ruský Potok**, 24km east of Snina. The church itself dates from the 1740s, but the rare liturgy books date from 1626 and 1654. Note the richly carved woodwork. A further 1½-hour hike east on the blue trail brings you to **Uličské Krivé** (1718), 35km east of Snina. The structure is quite large, as wooden churches go, with correspondingly elaborate iconography inside. Look for the Jesus Pantocrator icon (with his two right fingers held up in blessing), which was painted in the 1500s.

The end of this particular road is 7.5km further at **Nová Sedlica**. The church has been moved to the village museum in Humenné (p431), but this town – the furthest east in Slovakia – is the point for leaping into **Poloniny National Park** (below).

If you have your own transport, don't stop here: look for the church symbol and words *drevený kostol* (wooden church) marked on regional maps, then explore on. You'll find many more wooden churches throughout the area.

fishing, and the hotel rents bikes and skis. Full board at the restaurant is 550Sk.

Trains (32Sk, 40 minutes, 10 daily) and buses (31Sk, 40 minutes, four daily) run between Snina and Humenné.

POLONINY NATIONAL PARK

Bordering both Poland and Ukraine is the 29,805-hectare Poloniny National Park (Poloniny národný park), a wild area 90% forested with beech and fir-oak trees, and home to the likes of wolves, lynxes and wildcats. You can walk for ages without seeing another person or anything man-made. Even the undulating drive, over steep hills, past forest vistas, is refreshing.

The park engulfs the village of Nová Sedlica. A popular day walk begins here and makes a beeline for the highest point in the park, Kremenec (1221m), which marks the converging borders of Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine (four hours on the red trail). An elevation change-free hour and a half follows a ridge west along the Polish border to Čiertáz (1½ hours), where you can turn south on the green trail to get back to Nová Sedlica (2½ hours). Or continue on past Čiertáz and Dzurkpwiec Durkovec (1189m) before dropping down to the Ruské sedlo (795m). From here it's possible to cross into Poland (a summer-

only border crossing) to a small camping ground and *chata*. There's no wild camping in the park, but you can stay at the comfy **Penzión Kremenec** (☎ 769 4156; www.kremenec.sk; r per person 350Sk) in Nová Sedlica, amid the village houses on the highest street. The friendly family will serve you meals too.

There are five buses Monday to Friday from Snina to Nová Sedlica (66Sk, 1¼ hours), one on Saturday. You have to switch in Snina to get here from anywhere else.

MEDZILABORCE

☎ 057 / pop 6650

It is a bit surreal to see a large Campbell's soup can in a small village in the far northeast corner of Slovakia. The town has exactly one claim to fame: the **Andy Warhol Family Museum of Modern Art** (☎ 748 0072; Andyho Warhola; adult/student 100/50Sk; ☎ 10am–4pm Mon–Fri, noon–4pm Sat & Sun). Though the artist Andy Warhol (1928–87) was born in Pittsburgh, USA as Andrej Varchola, his parents came from the village of Miková, 8km northwest of Medzilaborce. Warhol never acknowledged his roots, even though he could speak Rusyn. The museum was founded after his death by his US and Slovak relatives, especially his brother John.

Inside are family memorabilia and many Warhol originals, including *Red Lenin*,

Campbell Soup II, Hammer & Sickle and *Mao Tse Tung*. There are also paintings by his nephew James Warhol and older brother Paul Warhola. Paul, a chicken farmer living near Pittsburgh, took up painting at the age of 61; his *Heinz Ketchup Bottle* painting sold for \$US10,000. To get there from the train station, turn left onto Andyho Warhola and keep going straight for 800m – look for the Campbell's soup cans out front.

Opposite the museum is **Penzión Andy** (☎ 732 1640; www.penzionandy.sk; Andy Warhola 121; 3-person r 1800Sk; ☎), with large apartments and a decent restaurant adorned with Warhol prints.

Medzilaborce is up a rail spur line from Humenné (56Sk, 1¼ hours, up to 10 daily). Almost all buses from Prešov and Košice require a change at Humenné (89Sk; 1½ hours, up to six daily). One morning bus a day connects to Svidník (66Sk, 1¼ hours).

SVIDNÍK

☎ 054 / pop 12,534

Get up close and personal with Rusyn culture. This eastern outpost has some first-rate Rusyn ethnographic sights and events, including a huge hillside *skanzen* accessed through the Rusyn museum in town, and an annual festival celebrated since 1956. This area was also significant in WWII; military history buffs enjoy the roadside tanks that stand as battlefield monuments and the Military Museum. The town itself was all but destroyed in both world wars and the town square today is unfortunately functional looking; the area is industrial.

The best alternative to staying the night in the dismal town with great sights is to sleep in Bardejov (35km away) and take a day trip.

History

Svidník evolved from Vyšný and Nižný (Upper and Lower) Svidník, which had as much as an 80% Rusyn population according to the 1930 census. German and Soviet forces clashed here in November 1944. The Germans knew that if the Soviets breached German defences around the Dukla Pass they could easily advance across the plains to the south, so some of the most ferocious fighting of WWII took place in and around Svidník. Communist Slovakia outlawed the Greek Catholic faith and declared the Rusyn minority Ukrainian (and thus Orthodox). Still, around 15% of the population once again claims Rusyn as their ethnic identity. For more see the boxed text, p434.

Orientation & Information

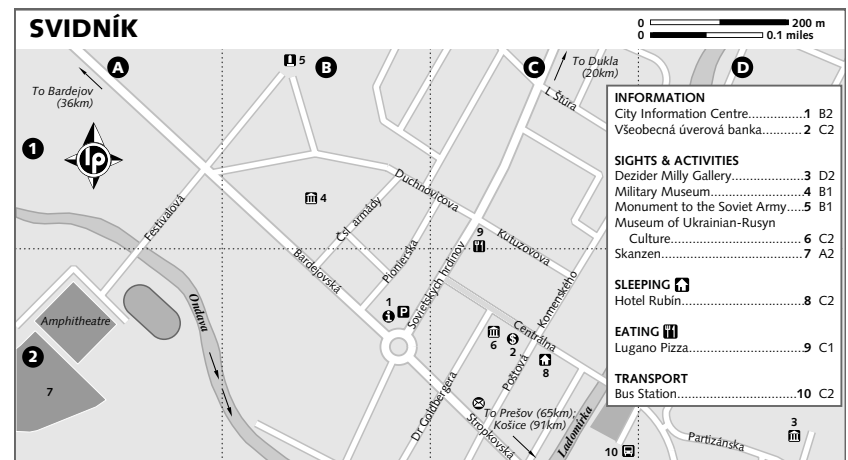
The bus station is 200m east of centre, just off Centrálna, the main pedestrian square. The sights are spread out along Bardejovská.

City Information Centre (☎ 752 0461; Sovietskych hrdinov 38; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) Pretty unhelpful.

Všeobecná úverová banka (VÚB; Centrálna) Has an exchange desk and an ATM.

Sights

The **Museum of Ukrainian-Rusyn culture** (Múzeum Ukrajinsko-Rusinskej kultúry; ☎ 752 2271; www.muk.sk; Centrálna 258; adult/student 60/30Sk; ☎ 8.30am–4pm Tue–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun) offers a good look at



THE RUSYNS & RELIGION

Scholars disagree about when the east Slavic people arrived in the Carpathian mountains, but their connection to Eastern Christianity is clear. If you had asked a Rusyn what ethnicity he was before WWI, he would likely have told you he was Greek Catholic. This hybrid faith originated in the Carpathian region that is now part in eastern Slovakia, part in the Ukraine and part in Poland. In 1596 and 1646 the Union of Uzhhorod and the Union of Brest brought the local Orthodox churches back in union with Rome (Christianity had split into east/west Byzantine/Roman around 1054). Many of the traditions of Orthodoxy were maintained – plain-chant liturgies, onion dome architecture, icon veneration, married priests – but the leader of the church is the pope, and the theology Catholic. Most of the wooden churches you see in the region were originally Greek Catholic, also called Uniate and Byzantine Catholic, until history intervened.

During WWI the many Rusyns who had emigrated to find work in the coalfields of the Eastern US took part in negotiations that resulted in the Pittsburgh Agreement recommending that Podkarpatska Rus (Subcarpathian Ruthenia) become a part of a newly created Czechoslovakia. This lasted until after WWII, when the territory was mostly annexed to the USSR, with little pieces left in Slovakia and Poland. (On a side note: an independent governorship existed in Podkarpatska Rus for several months in 1939. Once Hitler fully controlled the Czech Lands, the governor declared his territory a nation – the Carpatho-Ukraine. Hungarian troops rolled in the next day and nixed that.)

The Rusyns that were left in Czechoslovakia under communism were declared 'Ukrainian' and some Greek Catholic churches turned over to Orthodoxy, if they were allowed to continue at all. (In the Ukraine, Greek Catholic churches were confiscated wholesale.) Post-Velvet Revolution, many of the Greek Catholic properties were returned to the church and there is once again a bishop sitting in Prešov.

Thanks in part to the vocal émigré population, the Rusyn language was codified in 1996 and Rusyns have become a recognised minority in Slovakia. Svidník is probably the closest there is to a Rusyn cultural centre, with a dedicated museum, a *skanzen*, an art gallery and a festival. Prešov (p425) has a theatre and a Rusyn dance troupe, as well as a Greek Catholic cathedral and several churches. Step into any wooden church in the eastern borderlands, or admire the icons at the Bardejov Icon Exposition (p428) and you're witnessing a part of a uniquely Carpathian culture.

traditional Rusyn culture and history. The best bits are the folk dresses and painted Easter eggs; unfortunately, everything is labelled in Slovak and Rusyn only.

Operated by the museum, the **skanzen** (☎ 752 2952; Festivalová; adult/student 60/30Sk; 🕒 8.30am–6pm Tue–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun May–mid-Oct) has a fine collection of traditional Rusyn architecture and furnishings. This includes old houses from the region, barns, a school, fire station, ceramics and weaving workshops, saw and grist mills and wooden church built in 1776. Some time-honoured farming and sheep-raising is done on the expansive green grounds, and the working village pub serves welcome refreshments.

The **Dezider Milly gallery** (☎ 752 1684; Partizánska; adult/student 30/10Sk; 🕒 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun), in an old mansion, was created to house paintings by its namesake, a contemporary painter, as well as by other Rusyn artists. The 16th- to 19th-century icons on display are equally impressive.

Opposite the *skanzen*, on the other side of Bardejovská, stands a 37m-tall **Monument to the Soviet army** (Pamätník Sovietskej armády) and a common grave for 9000 Soviet soldiers. Outside the **Military museum** (Vojenské múzeum; ☎ 752 1397; Bardejovská; adult/student 30/15Sk; 🕒 8am–4pm Tue–Fri, 8.30am–5pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug; 8am–4pm Tue–Fri, 9.45am–2pm Sat & Sun Sep–Jun), tanks, armoured vehicles and a US-made Dakota transport aircraft with Soviet markings stand about like a military *skanzen*. Inside you can study photographs and maps of the Dukla battle.

Festivals & Events

Each year in late June Svidník hosts the weekend-long **Rusyn-Ukrainian Cultural Festival** (Slavnosti kultúry Rusínov-Ukrajincov Slovenska; www.muk.sk), with Rusyn music and dance troupes not only from Slovakia but from the Ukraine, Germany, Scandinavia and elsewhere. Upwards of 30,000 visitors come to see the shows in the amphitheatre below the *skanzen*.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Rubin (☎ 752 4210; hotelrubin@stonline.sk; Centrálna 274; s/d 500/900Sk; 📍) The somewhat dingy Hotel Rubin is on the main square, across from the Ukrainian-Rusyn museum. Rooms are modern enough and there's a restaurant and nightclub.

Eating options are generally grim – you can dine on pizza and calzone at **Lugano Pizza** (☎ 752 3990; Sovietskych hrdinov 467; pizzas 90–150Sk), or there are a couple of places along Centrálna.

Getting There & Away

You can bus to and from Bardejov (53Sk, 50 minutes, 15 on weekdays, four weekends), Prešov (89Sk, 1½ hours, nine daily), Košice (128Sk, two hours, three daily) and Dukla (32Sk, 40 minutes, four daily).

AROUND SVIDNÍK

The road north of Svidník leads to Dukla Pass on the Polish border, where there is a huge war memorial. This area is an open-air collection of WWII weaponry – mainly Soviet, some German – left where it was abandoned in the battle for the pass. The many onion-domed wooden Rusyn churches in the area are a bit more uplifting. A car is really useful here.

Sights & Activities

The **Valley of Death** (Údolí smrti) lies along the first major road to the left after heading north from Svidník on the road to Ladomirová; at the crossroads is a monument made of a Soviet T-34 tank crushing a German Panzer. This road leads to the village of **Dobroslava** and its 1932 wooden church with three large onion domes. Along the road are preserved Soviet tanks, seemingly frozen in the act of advancing across the fields.

Ladomirová, the first village on the main road northeast of Svidník, has a handsome, onion-domed church built in 1742. Take the southeast turn-off at Krajná Poľana to reach

a second church at **Bodružal** (1648) and, on a brief detour almost to the Polish border, the three-domed church at **Prikra**, built in 1777. A few kilometres south of Bodružal is a photogenic three-domed church at **Miroľa** (1770).

Back on the Svidník–Dukla road, in **Nižný Komárnik**, is one of the region's newer wooden churches (1938), with bright-yellow doors, bits of stained glass and unusually broad domed towers.

The last village with a church before the Dukla Pass is **Vyšný Komárnik**. A few hundred metres before the Vyšný Komárnik turn-off, on the left (west) side of the highway, is a marker for a 30-minute loop trail past fox-holes and anti-aircraft guns.

The **Dukla Pass** (Duklianský priesmyk), about 20km from Svidník, is the lowest point in the Laborec range, and is named after the Polish town of Dukla on the other side. Czechoslovak units fighting with the Soviets crossed here and liberated Vyšný Komárnik on 6 October 1944. The battle for the pass lasted from 8 September to 27 November 1944, during which 85,000 Soviet soldiers and 6500 Czechoslovaks died or were wounded.

About 1km south of the 24-hour border crossing to Poland is a 49m stone **war memorial** (admission free; 🕒 8.30am–5pm Tue–Fri, 9.30am–6pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr–mid-Oct), on the spot where the Czechoslovak General Svoboda had his observation post. The surrounding area is littered with rusting machine guns, mortars and other weapons that act as monument and museum.

Getting There & Away

There are two buses a day Monday to Friday to Dobroslava from Svidník (18Sk, 15 minutes). Buses run to the wooden churches along the main Svidník–Dukla road at fairly regular intervals on weekdays, but to reach the others you'll need a car. Four buses a day connect Svidník with Dukla (32Sk, 40 minutes).

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