

contents

introduction

	Alb	Bul	Cro	Cze	Hun	Mac	Pol	Rom	Rus	Slk	Sln
	11	51	91	131	171	211	251	291	331	371	411

pronunciation

vowel sounds	12	52	92	132	172	212	252	292	332	372	412
word stress	12	52	92	132	172	212	252	292	332	372	412
consonant sounds	12	52	93	133	173	212	253	293	333	372	413

tools

language difficulties	14	54	94	134	174	214	254	294	334	374	414
numbers	15	55	95	135	175	215	255	295	335	375	415
time & dates	15	55	95	135	175	215	255	295	335	375	415
weather	17	57	97	137	177	217	257	297	337	377	417
border crossing	17	57	97	137	177	217	257	297	337	377	417

transport

tickets & luggage	18	58	98	138	178	218	258	298	338	378	418
getting around	19	59	99	139	179	219	259	299	339	379	419
car, motorbike & bicycle hire	20	60	100	140	180	220	260	300	340	380	420
directions	21	61	101	141	181	221	261	301	341	381	421

accommodation

finding accommodation	23	63	103	143	183	223	263	303	343	383	423
requests & queries	24	64	104	144	184	224	264	304	344	384	424
checking out	25	65	105	145	185	225	265	305	345	385	425

communications & banking

the internet	26	65	105	145	185	226	265	306	346	385	425
mobile/cell phone	26	66	106	146	186	226	266	306	346	386	426
telephone	26	66	106	146	186	226	266	306	346	386	426
post office	27	67	107	147	187	227	267	307	347	387	427
bank	28	67	107	147	187	227	267	307	348	387	427

sightseeing

getting in	29	68	108	148	188	228	268	308	349	388	428
tours	29	69	109	149	188	229	269	309	349	389	428

shopping

enquiries	30	70	110	150	189	230	270	310	350	390	429
paying	31	71	111	151	190	231	271	311	351	391	430
clothes & shoes	32	71	111	151	191	231	272	311	352	391	431
books & music	32	72	112	152	191	232	272	312	352	392	431
photography	32	72	112	152	192	232	272	312	352	392	431

meeting people

	Alb	Bul	Cro	Cze	Hun	Mac	Pol	Rom	Rus	Slk	Sln
--	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

greetings, goodbyes & introductions	33	73	113	153	192	233	273	313	353	393	432
occupations	34	74	114	154	193	234	274	314	354	394	433
background	34	74	114	154	194	234	274	314	354	394	433
age	35	74	114	154	194	234	275	314	354	395	434
feelings	35	75	115	155	194	235	275	315	355	395	434

entertainment

going out	35	75	115	155	195	235	275	315	355	395	435
interests	36	76	116	155	195	236	276	316	355	396	435

food & drink

finding a place to eat	36	76	116	156	196	236	276	316	356	396	436
ordering food	36	76	116	156	196	236	276	316	356	397	436
drinks	37	77	117	157	197	237	277	317	357	397	436
in the bar	37	77	117	157	197	237	277	317	357	397	437
self-catering	38	78	118	158	198	238	278	318	358	398	438
special diets & allergies	38	78	118	158	198	238	278	318	358	398	438
menu reader	39	79	119	159	199	239	279	319	359	399	439

emergencies

basics	41	81	121	161	201	241	281	321	361	401	441
police	41	81	121	161	201	241	281	321	361	401	441

health

medical needs	42	82	122	162	202	242	282	322	362	402	442
symptoms, conditions & allergies	43	83	123	163	203	243	283	323	363	403	443

dictionary

	44	84	124	164	204	244	284	324	364	404	444
--	----	----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

index

449

festivals

455

Eastern Europe

Albanian

Bulgarian

Croatian

Czech

Hungarian

Macedonian

Polish

Romanian



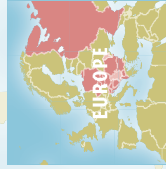
Russian

Slovak

Slovene



Note: Language areas are approximate only. For more details see the relevant introduction.



eastern europe – at a glance

One of the most rewarding things about travelling through Eastern Europe is the rich variety of cuisine, customs, architecture and history. The flipside of course is that you'll encounter a number of very different languages. Most languages spoken in Eastern Europe belong to what's known as the Indo-European language family, believed to have originally developed from one language spoken thousands of years ago. Luckily for English speakers, most of these languages also use Roman script.

The Slavic languages are a branch of the Indo-European language family and share a large amount of basic vocabulary. They originated north of the Carpathians and are now divided into Eastern (Russian), Western (Czech, Slovak and Polish) and Southern (Bulgarian, Croatian, Macedonian and Slovene) subgroups. The languages traditionally associated with the Orthodox Church (Russian, Bulgarian and Macedonian) use Cyrillic alphabet, while those influenced by the Catholic Church (Czech, Slovak, Polish, Croatian and Slovene) use Roman alphabet. Romanian, the only representative of the Romance languages in Eastern Europe, is more closely related to French, Italian or Spanish. The freedom with which English has borrowed Latin-based vocabulary means you'll quickly recognise many words from Romanian. Albanian forms a single branch of the Indo-European language family. Finally, Hungarian is part of the Ural-Altaic language family, which includes languages spoken from Europe to northeast Asia. Its closest European relative is Finnish.

did you know?

- The European Union (EU) was established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. It developed from the European Economic Community, founded by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Since the 2004 enlargement, it has 25 member states and 20 official languages.
- The EU flag is a circle of 12 gold stars on a blue background – the number 12 representing wholeness.
- The EU anthem is the 'Ode to Joy' from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.
- Europe Day, 9 May, commemorates the 1950 declaration by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman which marked the creation of the European Union.
- The euro has been in circulation since E-Day, 1 January 2002. The euro's symbol (€) was inspired by the Greek letter epsilon (ε) – Greece being the cradle of European civilisation and ε being the first letter of the word 'Europe'.
- The Eurovision Song Contest, held each May, has been running since 1956. For the larger part of the competition's history, the performers were only allowed to sing in their country's national language, but that's no longer the case.

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