

Slovakia

A 200-year-old log cabin with perfectly preserved white geometrics just waiting to be photographed. The smell of strong coffee enjoyed midday with pastries in an old town square café. Whimsical, foot-tapping folk music punctuated by a yee! ha! yip! The crunch of fresh snow under your boot at 2000m. Slovakia is not about overwhelming sights or superlatives, it's more about the experience of a place where nature and folkways still hold sway.

Bratislava bustles these days as post-EU membership investment pours in and new restaurants seem to open daily. The rabbit-warren old town is certainly worth a day or two's distraction. Get outside the city though and you can still find ancient castles, traditional villages, well-protected nature preserves and tourist walking trails connecting the country from end to end. Dense forests cover the low hills, and remnants of fortresses top the craggy cliffs. Medieval towns sit in sight of alpine peaks. You can hike past a waterfall in a gorge one day and search out nail-less wooden churches the next.

That's not to say that Slovakia's architecture wasn't affected by communism. Industrial blight and truly ugly concrete buildings are a part of the whole. But the country's come through it all with its folksy spirit intact. So pull up a plate of dumplings with *bryndza* (sheep's cheese) and dig in.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 49,035 sq km
- **Capital** Bratislava
- **Currency** koruna (Sk); €1 = 37Sk; US\$1 = 29Sk; UK£1 = 55Sk; A\$1 = 22Sk; ¥100 = 25Sk; NZ\$1 = 19Sk
- **Famous for** ice hockey, beautiful women, mountain hiking, folk traditions
- **Official Language** Slovak
- **Phrases** *ahoj* (hello); *dovidenia* (goodbye); *ďakujem* (thank you); *este pivo prosím* (another beer please), *kde je WC* (veyt-say)? (where's the loo?)
- **Population** 5.4 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ + 421; international access code ☎ 00
- **Visas** citizens of the EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan can enter Slovakia for 90 days without a visa



HOW MUCH?

- **Night in hostel** 300-600Sk
- **Double room in pension** 1500Sk
- **Day's ski hire** 300Sk
- **Pair of hiking boots** 1800Sk
- **Postcard** 65k

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 44Sk
- **Litre of bottled water** 40Sk
- **Beer** 39Sk
- **Souvenir T-shirt** 250Sk
- **Street snack (hot dog)** 15Sk

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ride one cable car then another to get to the precipitous summit of Lomnický štít in the **High Tatras** (p801).
- Turn your gaze east to the icon museum in **Bardejov** (p812), and at nearby Greek Catholic and Orthodox wooden churches.
- Delve into Slovakia's stony past at the country's largest extant fortress, now in ruins, **Spiš Castle** (p809).
- Climb the ladder- and chain-assist trails to get personal with the limestone gorges and rushing water of **Slovenský raj** (p811).

ITINERARIES

- **Three days** Spend two days wandering the pedestrian streets and stopping in the sidewalk cafés of Bratislava's old town. Climb up castle hill (or take a ride up the New Bridge elevator) for a citywide view. On day three head for one of the castles within day-trip range: Devín and Trenčín are especially stunning.
- **One week** Add on a couple of days' hiking among the alps-esque peaks of the High Tatras. Further east, Bardejov beckons with a medieval town square, wooden churches, a nearby spa town and an excellent open-air village museum.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The moderate climate averages -2°C in January and 25°C in August. Spring and autumn can be quite rainy and spring floods are not

unheard of. Snow stays on the higher slopes of the High Tatras well into June, and standing snow is common in April even in the lower ranges.

The tourist season is from May to September. Lodging prices are lower outside those months (except for student dorms), but many sights in outlying areas aren't open. September is still quite warm, young wine is being harvested, and the mountains are snow-free (usually), making it one of the best times to visit. Rates skyrocket for the Easter and Christmas holidays nationwide.

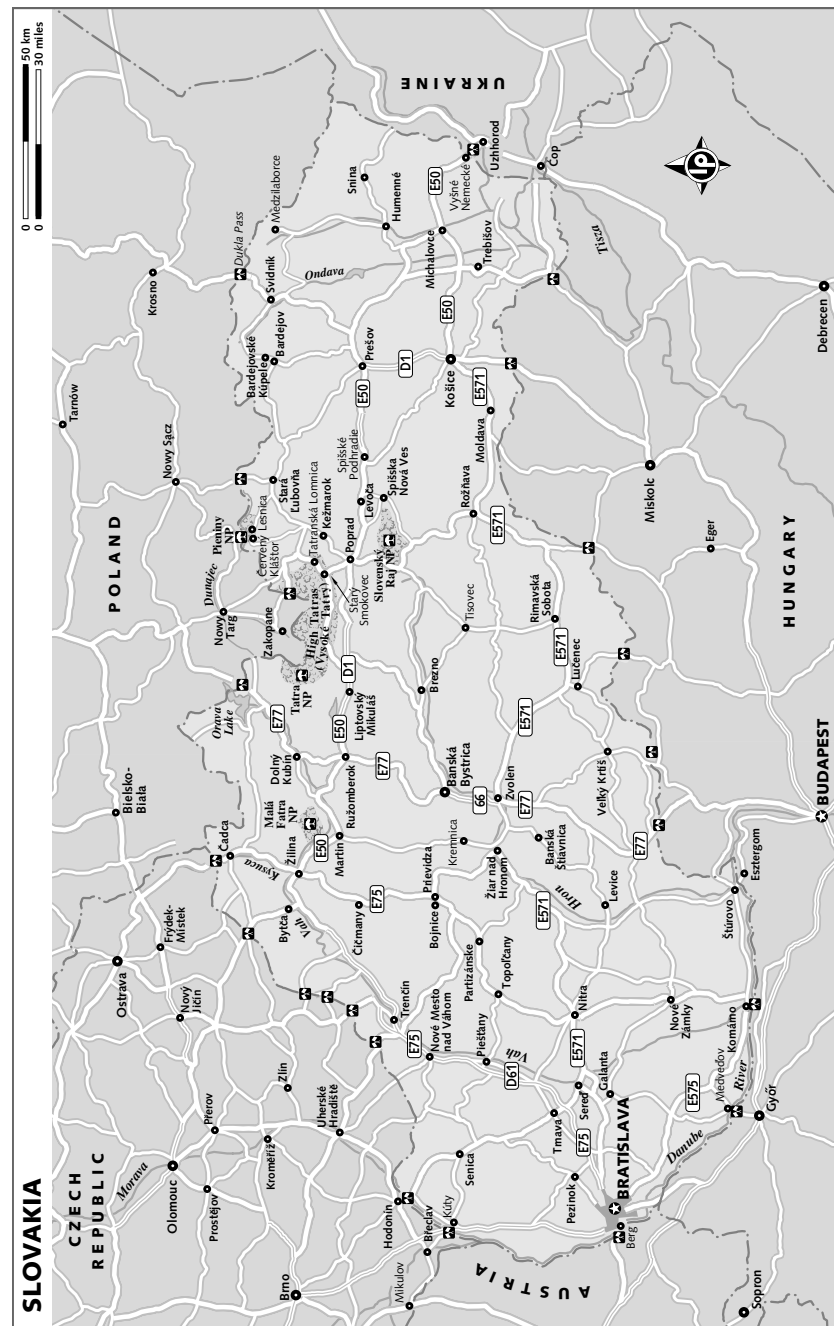
HISTORY

Slavic tribes wandered west into what would become Slovakia sometime round about the 5th century; by the 9th the territory was part of the short-lived Great Moravian Empire. It was about then that the Magyars (Hungarians) set up shop next door and subsequently lay claim to the whole territory. In the early 16th century, the Turks moved into Budapest pushing the Hungarian monarchs into Bratislava (then Pressburg, in German, or Pozsony, in Hungarian). Slovak intellectuals eventually cultivated ties with the Czechs, and after WWI, took their nation into the united Czechoslovakia.

The day before Hitler's troops invaded Czech territory in March 1939, leaders set up Slovakia as a fascist puppet and German ally. It was not, however, a populist move and in August 1944 Slovak partisans instigated the ill-fated Slovak National Uprising (Slovenské Národné Povstanie, or SNP), a source of ongoing national pride (and innumerable street names).

After the communist takeover in 1948, power was again centralised in Prague until 1989, when the Velvet Revolution brought down the curtains on the communists. Elections in 1992 saw the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) come to power and Vladimír Mečiar become prime minister. By that summer the Slovak parliament had voted to declare sovereignty, and the federation dissolved peacefully on 1 January 1993.

Mečiar's reign was characterised by anti-democratic laws and discrimination and the international community quickly turned on him. In part due to this pressure, the elections of 1998 ousted Mečiar and ushered in Mikuláš Dzurinda, leader of the right-leaning Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK). Dzurinda



changed the course of recent Slovakian history by launching a policy of economic and social reforms that got Slovakia into NATO and the EU by 2004.

June 2006 parliamentary elections brought to power parties that have at times been anti-reform. The coalition is headed by Prime Minister Robert Fico of Smer, a left-wing party, but also includes Mečiar's isolationist HZDS. For now, despite contradictory statements early on, Fico is promising to keep Slovakia on track to euro conversion in 2009. Time will tell which direction the government decides to go.

PEOPLE

A deeply religious and familial people, Slovaks have strong family circles and a deep sense of folk traditions. The young are warm and open, but there can be a reserve about older generations. Show interest in their country, or ask for help, and the shell cracks. Generosity and warmth lurks just behind the stoicism. Thankfully, surly service is now the exception rather than the rule in the tourist industry.

With such great scenery, it's not surprising that most Slovaks spend weekends outdoors. *Ist' na prechadsku* (going for a walk) is a national pastime so you will doubtless run into a backpack-toting Slovak walking in nature wherever you go. About a quarter of the population lives in the five largest cities.

Government statistics estimate that Slovakia's population is 86% Slovak, 11% Hungarian, 1.2% Czech and 1.7% Roma. This last figure is in some dispute as some groups estimate the

Roma population as high as 4%. The minority Roma are still viewed with an uncompromising suspicion.

SPORT

Wander into any bar or restaurant during puck-pushing season (September to April) and 12 large men and an ice rink will never be far from the TV screen, even at nice restaurants. Local club rivalries are heated, but the national team showing had flagged by the time of research. Although they brought home the bronze in the 2003 World Championships, Slovakia was knocked out of the Torino 2006 Olympic medal race during the quarter finals by rival Czech Republic. The announcement that Slovakia will host the 2011 World Championships (and Bratislava will get a new multibillion-koruna hockey stadium) surely perked up fans.

Football fills the summer months, and while the Slovaks have yet to attain the rabid fanaticism found elsewhere in Europe, their club game is a reliable source of red-blooded bravado. SK Slovan Bratislava is the nation's most successful team.

RELIGION

Slovakia's first Christian church was founded in Nitra in AD 833 after SS Cyril and Methodius visited the Great Moravian Empire. Despite 50 years of communist suppression, the majority of Slovaks retained their strong beliefs. Today, 84.1% of the population consider themselves religiously affiliated. Roman Catholics form the majority (about 60%), but evangelicals are also numerous; East Slovakia has many Greek Catholics and Orthodox believers.

ARTS

Some city dwellers may have been put off by the clichéd image of the Communist-era 'happy peasant', but get out into the countryside and traditional folk arts, from music to architecture, are celebrated – especially during summer festivals

Architecture

The wooden churches of East Slovakia, easily accessible from Bardejov (p812) are some of the most interesting architectural gems in the country. You can see transplanted versions at a *skansen* (open-air museum), like the one in Martin (p798), where vernacular

village architecture is preserved. Levoča (p808) is known for its nearly complete medieval town walls and for the Gothic Church of St Jacob with a 18m-high altar carved by Master Pavol. Of course you can't miss the brutal socialist-realist architecture of the communist epoch, as evidenced by the New Bridge (Nový most, p792). Yes, it does resemble a UFO on a stick.

Cinema

Slovak cinema first made its mark as part of the Czechoslovak New Wave of the 1960s, with classic films like *Smrt si rika Engelchen* (Death Calls Itself Engelchen, 1963) directed by Ján Kádar, and *Obchod na korze* (The Shop on the Main Street, 1965) by Elmar Klos. Martin Sulík was one of Slovakia's most promising new directors, winning an Oscar nomination for *Všetko, čo mám rád* (Everything I Like, 1992), and international acclaim for *Krajinka* (The Landscape, 2000). Unfortunately, lack of funding and the closing of the Koliba movie studios has meant little serious movie making since 2000.

Music

Traditional Slovak folk instruments include the *fujara* (a 2m-long flute), the *gajdy* (bagpipes) and the *konkovka* (a strident shepherd's flute). Folk songs helped preserve the Slovak language during Hungarian rule, and in East Slovakia musical folk traditions are an integral part of village life.

In classical music, the 19th-century works of Ján L. Bela and the symphonies of Alexander Moyzes receive world recognition. Slovakia's contemporary music scene is small, but vibrant. Modern musicians combine traditional lyrics or rhythms with a modern beat. Zuzana Mojžišová's music seems to have an almost Romany-like vibrancy, but stems from Slovak folk music. Marián Varga riffs on classical themes and the Peter Lipa band is granddaddy of the Bratislava Jazz Days festival.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Slovakia sits in the heart of Europe, straddling the northwestern end of the Carpathian Mountains. This hilly country forms a clear physical barrier between the plains of Poland and Hungary. Almost 80% of Slovakia is more than 750m above sea level, and forests, mainly beech and spruce, cover 40% of the country.

Southwestern Slovakia is a fertile lowland stretching from the foothills of the Carpathians down to the Danube River, which, from Bratislava to Štúrovo, forms the border with Hungary.

Central Slovakia is dominated by the High Tatras (Vysoké Tatry) mountains along the Polish border; Gerlachovský štít (2654m) being the highest peak. The forested ridges of the Low Tatras (Nízke Tatry) and the Malá Fatra are national park playgrounds. South are the gorges and waterfalls of Slovenský raj and the limestone caves of Slovenský kras. The longest river, the Váh, rises in the Tatras and flows 390km west and south to join the Danube at Komárno.

Wildlife & National Parks

Slovakia's national parks contain bears, marmots, wolves, lynxes, chamois, mink and otters, though they're rarely seen. Deer, pheasants, partridges, ducks, wild geese, storks, grouse, eagles and other birds of prey can be seen across the country.

National parks and protected areas make up 20% of Slovakia. The parks in the High Tatras, Slovenský raj and Malá Fatra regions should not be missed.

Environmental Issues

Slovakia is a mixed bag in environmental terms. No doubt due to most Slovaks' penchant for all things outdoors, large swathes of the countryside are protected parkland. On the other hand, the communist legacy left more than its fair share of grimy, industrial factories. Big centres such as Bratislava and Košice do suffer from air pollution.

The Gabčíkovo hydroelectric project, on the Danube west of Komárno, produces enough power to cover the needs of every home in Slovakia. But some believe it exacerbates the damage caused by annual floods. Events like Danube Day (www.danubeday.sk in Slovak) in June aim to raise awareness and money for river restoration.

Responsible Travel

Tens of thousands of hikers pass through Slovakia's parks and protected areas every year – try to do your bit to keep them pristine. Wherever possible, carry out your rubbish, avoid using detergents or toothpaste in or near watercourses, stick to established trails (this helps prevent erosion), cook on a kerosene

VOX POP

Who are you and how old? Martin Latal, age 29

How do you spend your days? I'm working at Accenture as a technology specialist, and studying for a manager's degree. My daily routine is of course work, but I go swimming almost every evening, and weekends I go out to a disco or pub with my friends.

What's the best part of living in Bratislava? The nightlife is really thrilling, and even on weekdays you can find good entertainment.

What do you think about EU membership, possible euro ascension and Slovakia's future? The EU is making Europe even smaller, better. Business, as well as goods trading, is getting easier each year.

stove rather than an open fire and do not engage in or encourage – by purchasing goods made from endangered species – hunting.

After the famous Šöner Náci statue in Bratislava's old town was upturned one weekend, allegedly by a group of probably inebriated English-speaking men, police presence in the old town increased. Drink responsibly.

FOOD & DRINK

Staples & Specialities

Slovak cuisine is basic central European fare: various fried meat schnitzels with fries and hearty stews with potatoes. Soups like *cesnaková polievka* (garlic soup), either creamy or clear with croutons and cheese, and *kapustnica* (cabbage soup), with a paprika and pork base, start most meals. Slovakia's national dish is *bryndzové halušky*, gnochilike dumplings topped with soft sheep's cheese and bits of bacon fat. Don't pass up an opportunity to eat in a *salaš* or a *koliba* (rustic wooden eateries) where these traditional specialities are the mainstay.

For dessert, try *palacinka* (crepes) stuffed with jam or chocolate. *Ovocné knedličky* (fruit dumplings) are round balls filled with fruit and coated with crushed poppy seeds or breadcrumbs, dribbled with melted butter and sometimes accompanied by fruit purée and ice cream – yum.

Drinks

Slovak wine is...what do oenophiles say...highly drinkable (ie good and cheap). The Modra region squeezes dry reds, like Frankovka and Kláštorňé. Slovak Tokaj, a white desert wine from the southeast, is trying to give the Hungarian version a run for its money (though it falls short).

Slovak *pivo* (beer) is as good as the Czech stuff – try full-bodied Zlatý Bažant or dark, sweet Martiner. *Borovička* (a potent berry-based clear liquor) and *slivovice* (plum-based) are consumed as shots and are said to aid in digestion.

Where to Eat & Drink

Self-service cafeterias (called *samoobsluha reštaurácie*, *jedáleň* or *bufet*) cater to office workers and are great places to eat during the day (they close early). Look for food stands near train and bus stations; you can buy fruits and vegetables at the local *tržnica* (market).

All manner of trendy world food has found a foothold in Bratislava, but most Slovak towns at least have a pizzeria or a Chinese takeaway. Cafés (spelled in English) are often as much bar or restaurant as coffee shop; *kaviareň* (cafés) may only serve beverages, but that includes alcohol, a *cukráreň* (pastry or sweet shop) has the best ice cream and cakes to go with coffee.

Vegetarians & Vegans

It isn't easy being green in Slovakia. Some menus have a pasta or vegetable dish, but your only choice may be *vyprášaný syr* (fried cheese) and a *miešaný šalát* (mixed salad). In this meat-lovers' haven even vegetable soups are made with chicken stock and *bezmläsa* (meatless) dishes aren't always meatless (those bacon crumbles on the dumplings apparently don't count). Things are looking up in Bratislava where a few vegetarian restaurants have sprung up. Other than that, pizzerias are always an option.

Habits & Customs

Small tips (five to 10%) are customary, but your friends are likely to say you're spoiling the waiter. At least round up the bill to the next 20Sk (50Sk if the bill is over 500Sk).

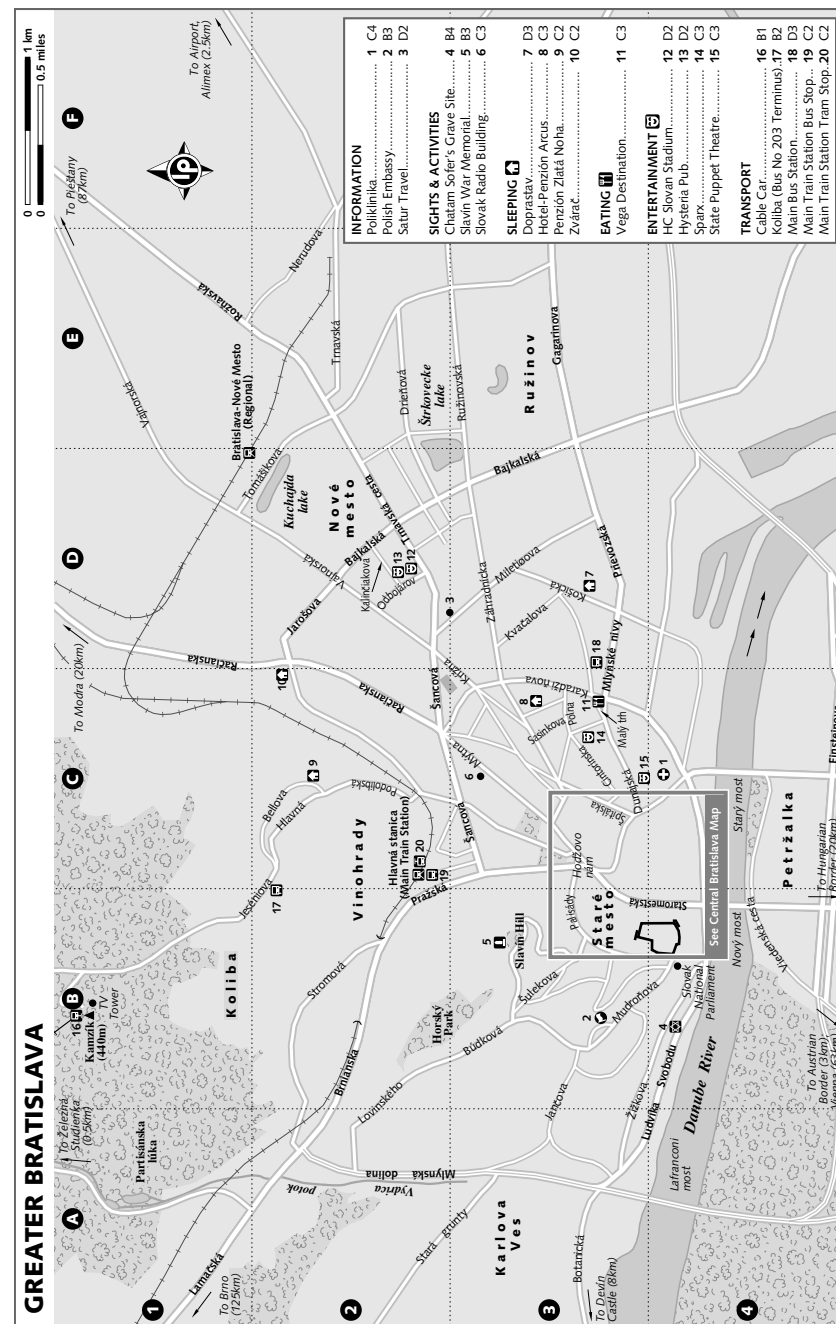
BRATISLAVA

☎ 02 / pop 421,355

Focus in on the compact historic centre and you see cobblestone roads, pedestrian plazas, pastel 18th-century rococo buildings, and sidewalk cafés galore. Expand your gaze and you can't miss the institutional housing blocks and bizarre communist constructions. An age-old castle shares the skyline with the 1970s, UFO-like New Bridge. That's Bratislava, a mixed but manageable city where both old and new merit a look.

Today the city hums as foreign investment helps upgrade roads, and beautiful people wearing black dine at the newest chichi pooh-poo eatery. There's something a bit reckless about the development though. The old town zoning restrictions are taken lightly and weekend nights at least one gang of inebriated English-speaking blokes will likely pass by if you're out and about.

Who knows what the town will be in a few years, but for now the old centre is supremely



strollable. Wander around the mazelike alleys, stopping for a coffee or two along the way. You may want to pop into a museum if it's raining, but otherwise the best thing to do is just take in the different views, even as it all changes before your eyes.

HISTORY

Founded in AD 907, Bratislava was already a large city in the 12th century. In 1467 the Hungarian Renaissance monarch Matthias Corvinus founded a university here, the Academia Istropolitana. Then came the invading Turks and the capital of the Kingdom of Hungary was hurriedly moved to Bratislava in 1536. The city flourished during the reign of Maria Theresa of Austria (1740–80), when many of the imposing baroque palaces you see today were built. Hungarian monarchs were crowned here in St Martin's cathedral until 1830 and parliament met locally until 1848.

In 1918 the city was included in the newly formed Republic of Czechoslovakia, in 1969 it became the state capital of a federal Slovak Republic, and in 1993, the capital of an independent Slovakia.

Today, as the capital of one of the newest EU member states, Bratislava is a city under construction. With EU-inspired money and a proliferation of low-cost carrier flights, prices ain't what they used to be. Don't expect a bargain-basement visit.

ORIENTATION

Bratislava's pedestrian centre starts south of Hodžovo nám. Follow Poštová down and you cross Obchodná (Shopping street) before getting to the Nám SNP and the heart of the old town bounded by the castle in the west and Tesco department store in the east. The large, plazalike Hviezdoslavovo nám is a convenient reference point, with the old town to the north, the Danube to the south, and the Slovak National Theatre on its east end.

The main train station, Hlavná stanica, is located just 1km north of the centre. Tram 13 runs from the station to Nám L Štúra, just south of Hviezdoslavovo nám, and bus 93 stops at Hodžovo nám. The main bus station, called Mlynské Nivy by locals because of the street it's on, is a little over 1km east of the old town. Bus 206 shuttles between the bus station and the main train station, stopping at Hodžovo nám in between.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Interpress Slovakia (Map p790; Sedlárska 2; ☎ 9am–10pm Mon–Sat, 2–10pm Sun) Foreign newspapers and Bratislava periodicals in English.

Next Apache (Map p790; Panenská 28; ☎ 9am–10pm Mon–Fri, 10am–10pm Sat & Sun) Loads of used English books and a comfy café.

Emergency

Main police station (Map p790; ☎ 159; Gunduličova 10)

Internet Access

Getting online will cost from the price of a drink to 100Sk, but 60Sk per hour is average. Small internet outlets are all over the old town.

Internet Centrum (Map p790; ☎ 0903693577; Mikalská 2; ☎ 9am–4am) Four of the six computers have web cam and Skype access.

Wifi Café (Map p790; ground fl, Tatracentrum, Hodžovo nám; ☎ 8am–10pm Mon–Fri, 10am–10pm Sat, 11am–10pm Sun) Flat-screen terminals, smoke-free café with wi-fi.

Left Luggage

Main bus station (Mlynské Nivy; Map p787; per bag per day 35Sk; ☎ 5.30am–10pm Mon–Fri, 6am–6pm Sat & Sun)

Main train station (Hlavná stanica; Map p787; per bag per day 45Sk; ☎ 6.30am–11pm)

Media

Slovak Spectator (www.slovakspectator.sk) English-language weekly, with current affairs and event listings.

Medical Services

24-hour pharmacy (Map p790; ☎ 5443 2952; Nám SNP 20)

Poliklinika (Map p787; ☎ 5296 2461; Bezručova 8) Twenty-four-hour emergency services, including dental.

Money

Bratislava has an excess of banks and ATMs in the old town, with several convenient branches on Poštová and around Kamenné nám. There are also ATMs and exchange booths in the train and bus stations, and at the airport.

Tatra Banka (Map p790; Dunajská 4) Has staff that speak exceptional English and great English signage.

Post

Main Post Office (Map p790; Nám SNP 34–35)

Tourist Information

Bratislava Culture & Information Centre (BKIS; ☎ 5249 5906; www.bkis.sk) Centre (Map p790;

Klobučnícka 2; ☎ 8.30am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–3pm Sat); Main train station (Map p787; Hlavná stanica; ☎ 8am–7.30pm Mon–Fri & 8am–5pm Sat Jun–Sep, 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri & 9am–2pm Sat Oct–May); Airport (MR Štefánik; ☎ 8am–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat) The official central tourist point is a little sterile and the staff can seem uninterested, but keep pressing and they'll help.

Bratislava Tourist Service (BTS; Map p790; ☎ 5464 1271; www.bratislava-info.sk; Ventúrska 9; ☎ 10am–8pm) Tiny place, but it has a younger, more helpful staff and lots of maps and knick-knacks.

Travel Agencies

Satur (Map p787; ☎ 5542 2828; www.satur.sk; Miletičova 1) Bratislava package trips and tours, transport tickets etc.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bratislava Castle (Bratislavský hrad; Map p790; grounds admission free; ☎ 9am–8pm Apr–Sep, to 6pm Oct–Mar) Lords over the west side of the old town on a hill above the Danube. Winding ramparts and grounds provide a great vantage point for comparing ancient and communist Bratislava. The castle looks a bit like a four-poster bed, a shape that was well established by the 15th century. During the Turkish occupation of Budapest, this was the seat of Hungarian royalty. A fire devastated the fortress in 1811 and most of what you see today is a reconstruction from the 1950s (bland white interiors and all). The saving grace of the castle's ho-hum **Historical Museum** (Historické múzeum; Map p790; ☎ 5441 1441; www.snm.sk; adult/student 100/40Sk; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sun) is that you can climb up the *korunná veža* (crown tower). At the time of writing

MAN AT WORK

The castle? The New Bridge? Nope, the most photo-opted sight in Bratislava is a bronze statue called **The Watcher** (Čumil; Map p790). He peeps out of an imaginary manhole at the intersection of Panská and Sedlárska, below a 'men at work' sign. And he's not alone. There are other quirky statues scattered around the old town. See if you can find them: **The Frenchman** leans on a park bench, **The Photographer** stalks his subject paparazzi-style around a corner and the **Schöner Náci** tips his top hat on a square. Look up for other questionable characters, like a timepiece-toting monk and a rather naked imp, decorating building façades.

BRATISLAVA IN TWO DAYS

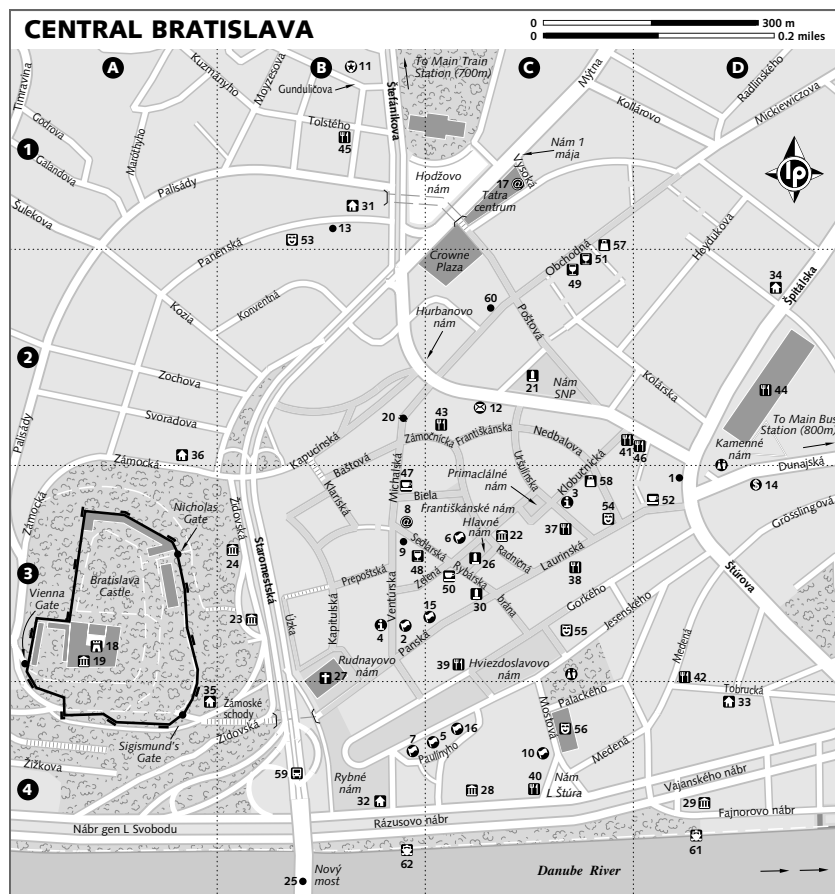
Start the morning by wandering up the ramparts of **Bratislava Castle** (left). Enter through the **Historical Museum** (left) to climb the *veža* (tower) for the highest views of the old town. On your way back down to town, stop at the **Museum of Jewish Culture** (below) before having lunch at **Prašná Bašta** (p793). Spend the afternoon strolling through the old town, stopping to drink at as many café terraces as you dare. If you schedule it right, you could catch an opera at the **Slovak National Theatre** (p794) or a band at the **Café Štúdio Club** (p793). The following day, trip out of town to explore **Devín Castle** (p795).

the tiny **treasury** (*klenotnica*) was closed for reconstruction. When it reopens, the highlight will still be the unbelievable 25,000-year-old fertility statue of a miniature headless naked woman carved from a mammoth tusk, the Venus of Moravany.

To see a more historically complete castle, take the bus beneath the bridge by Bratislava Castle to **Devín** (p795) 9km outside the city.

A series of old homes winds down the castle hill along Židovská in what was once the Jewish quarter. The **Museum of Clocks** (Múzeum hodín; Map p790; ☎ 5441 1940; Židovská 1; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) is housed in the reputedly skinniest house in Slovakia. Further down, the **Museum of Jewish Culture** (Múzeum židovskej kultúry; Map p790; ☎ 5441 8507; www.chatamsofer.com; Židovská 17; adult/student 200/20Sk; ☎ 11am–5pm Sun–Fri) displays moving exhibits about the community lost during WWII. Black-and-white photos show the old ghetto and synagogue ploughed under by the communists to make way for a highway and bridge. The staff can help arrange a visit to **Chatam Sofer's grave site** (Map p787; www.chatamsofer.com; Žižkova at tram tunnel; donations accepted; ☎ by appointment only), the resting place of the much revered 19th-century rabbi.

A relatively modest interior belies the elaborate history of **St Martin's Cathedral** (Dóm sv Martina; Map p790; admission €1.25; ☎ 9–11am & 1–5pm Mon–Sat, 1–5pm Sun). Eleven ruling monarchs (10 kings and one queen, Maria Theresa) were crowned in this 14th century church. The busy motorway almost touching St Martin's follows the moat of the former city walls and is shaking the building to its core.



Further east along the Danube, the 1st-floor exhibits of the **Slovak National Museum** (Slovenské Národné múzeum; Map p790; ☎ 5934 9122; www.snm.sk; Vajanského nábrežie 2; adult/student 60/20Sk; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun) provide a super overview of the folk cultures and customs of Slovakia's regions. Skip the tired natural-history stuff upstairs.

An 18th-century palace and a Stalinist-modernist make interesting cohorts for the **Slovak National Gallery** (Slovenská Národná Galéria; Map p790; ☎ 5443 4587; www.sng.sk; Rázusovo nábrežie 2; adult/student 80/40Sk; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) and the nation's eclectic art collection – from Gothic to graphic design.

The old town's two opulent theatres are off Hviezdoslavovo nám, a broad, tree-lined plaza. The gilt neobaroque 1914 **Reduta Palace**

(see Slovak Philharmonic on p794) hosts the nation's symphony, and the ornate 1886 **Slovak National Theatre** (see p794) is the city's opera house. Neither is open for tours, but tickets are cheap if you want to see a show.

Bustling, narrow **Rybárska brána** runs through the pedestrian zone to Hlavné nám (Main Square), which is filled with café tables in summer, and a craft market at Easter and Christmas times. **Roland's Fountain** (Map p790) at the centre may have been built in 1572 as an old-fashioned fire hydrant. Flanking one side of the square is the 1421 **town hall** (*radnica*) containing the **Municipal Museum** (Mestské múzeum; Map p790; ☎ 5920 5130; Hlavné nám; adult/student 50/20Sk; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Fri, 11am–6pm Sat & Sun). Buzz past the tedious archaeological cases and look for

INFORMATION		Museum of Jewish Culture.....24 B3		U Jakubu.....46 D2	
24-hour Pharmacy.....1	D3	New Bridge.....25	B4	Reduta Palace.....(see 56)	
Austrian Embassy.....2	B3	Roland's Fountain.....26	C3	St Martin's Cathedral.....27	B3
BRATISLAVA CULTURE & INFORMATION					
Centre.....3	C3	Slovak National Gallery.....28	C4	Slovak National Museum.....29	D4
Bratislava Tourist Service.....4	B3	The Watcher.....30	C3	Town Hall.....(see 22)	
Czech Embassy.....5	C4	Internet Centrum.....8	B3	Interpress Slovakia.....9	B3
French Embassy.....6	C3	Irish Embassy.....10	C4	Main Police Station.....11	B1
German Embassy.....7	B4	Main Post Office.....12	C2	Next Apache.....13	B1
Interpress Slovakia.....9	B3	Tatra Banka.....14	D3	UK Embassy.....15	C3
Irish Embassy.....10	C4	US Embassy.....16	C4	Wifi Café.....17	C1
Main Police Station.....11	B1	SLEEPING			
Main Post Office.....12	C2	Downtown Backpackers.....31	B1	ENTERTAINMENT	
Next Apache.....13	B1	Hotel Danube.....32	B4	Apollon Club.....53	B1
Tatra Banka.....14	D3	Hotel Marrol's.....33	D4	Café Stúdio Club.....54	C3
UK Embassy.....15	C3	Patio Hostel.....34	D2	Slovak National Theatre & Booking Office.....55	C3
US Embassy.....16	C4	Pension Castle Club.....35	A4	Slovenská Philharmonic & Ticket Office.....56	C4
Wifi Café.....17	C1	Penzión Chez David.....36	A2	SHOPPING	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES					
Bratislava Castle.....18	A3	Archa.....37	C3	Diveta diétna jedáleň.....38	C3
Historical Museum.....19	A3	Kogo.....39	C3	Malecón.....40	C4
Michael's Gate.....20	B2	Old Market.....41	C2	Pizza Mizza.....42	D3
Monument to the Slovak National Uprising.....21	C2	Prašná Bašta.....43	D2	Tesco Department Store.....44	C2
Municipal Museum.....22	C3	Traja Mušketieri.....45	B1	Vinotéka sv Urbana.....58	C3
Museum of Clocks.....23	B3	TRANSPORT			

the stairs down to the cellar torture chambers, complete with illustrated murals.

The focal point of the **Nám SNP** is the **Monument to the Slovak National Uprising** and the heroes who fought fascism in WWII. On 31 December 2002, hundreds of thousands gathered here to ring in the new year – and a new nation – when separation from the Czech Republic became official.

Hiking

To get out of the city and into the forest, take trolley bus 203 northeast from Hodžovo nám to the end of the line at Koliba, then walk up the road for about 20 minutes to the **TV tower** (Map p787) on Kamzík Hill (440m). Posted maps outline the many hiking possibilities in the forest surrounds and there are a couple of hotels with restaurants in the park. A **cable car** (lanovka; Map 000; ☎ 4425 9188; adult/student round-trip 90/60Sk; ☎ 10am–4pm Oct–May) makes the 15-minute journey downhill to the picnic areas and playgrounds of **Železná studienka**.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bratislava's best events are arts related. From June to September the **Cultural Summer Festival** (Kultúrne leto; ☎ 5441 3063) brings a smorgasbord of operas, plays and performances to the streets and venues around town. Classical music takes centre stage at the **Bratislava Music Festival** (Bratislavské hudobné slávnosti; ☎ 5443 4546;

www.bhsfestival.sk in Slovak), which runs from late September to mid-October. **Bratislava Jazz Days** (Bratislavských jazzových dní; ☎ 5293 1572; www.bjd.sk) swings for three days in September. Twenty-sixth of November is the usual start to the **Christmas market** on Hlavné nám.

SLEEPING

Bratislava's no-longer-dirt-cheap lodging market is still cheaper than London, but don't expect comparable services. Bratislava Culture & Information Service (p788) can help with private rooms (from 1100Sk per person) and student dormitories (July and August, from 300Sk per person). To book an apartment, check out www.bratislavahotels.com.

Budget

Patio Hostel (Map p790; ☎ 5292 5797; www.patio.hostel.com; Špitalska 35; dm 450–550Sk, d per person 860–900Sk; ☎ ☎ ☎) Clean and fresh and dorm-like (100 beds) – that is if you were allowed to paint the concrete block walls with bright colours and stylised graffiti at college. Each floor has a kitchenette and there's a courtyard patio in addition to the computer room and basement rec room (TV, fussball).

Downtown Backpackers (Map p790; ☎ 5464 1191; www.backpackers.sk; Panenská 31; dm 500–600Sk, d per person 1000Sk; ☎ ☎ ☎) If you'd rather have lively conversation and laid-back Bohemian charm (exposed brick, red common-area walls) than

cowboys downing tequila at this fun-loving restaurant-bar-disco. It's multigenerationally popular.

Sparx (Map p787; ☎ 0903403097; Cintorínska 32; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Wed, to 1am Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) This cavernous bar (once a big beer hall) has live music Thursdays and becomes a disco at weekends.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

UAnjelov (Map p790; ☎ 5443 2724; Laurinská 19; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, until 1.30am Fri, 1pm-1.30am Sat, 1pm-midnight Sun) Bratislava's gay café serves creative mixed drinks, sometimes garnished with a candied marshmallow, while Frank Sinatra croons overhead.

Apollon Club (Map p790; ☎ 09-15-48 00 31; www.apollon-gay-club.sk; Panenská 24; ☎ 6pm-3am Mon-Thu & Sun, 6pm-5am Fri & Sat) The main gay dance club in town (not that there are many) with two bars and three stages. Boys only Thursdays.

Sport

You can buy tickets online at www.ticketportal.sk.

HC Slovan (Map p787; ☎ 4445 6500; www.hcslovan.sk in Slovak; Odbojárov 3) Bratislava's hallowed ice-hockey team plays at a stadium northeast of the old town.

SK Slovan (☎ 4437 3083; Junácka 2) The home football team kicks it around nearby.

Theatre & Concerts

Slovak National Theatre (Slovenské Národné Divadlo; Map p790; www.snd.sk; Hviezdoslavovo nám) Opera and ballet are performed at this ornate theatre. Get tickets ahead of time at the booking office (*pokladňa*; Map p790; ☎ 5443 3764) located behind the theatre, at the corner of Jesenského and Komenského. It's open from 8am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday, and from 9am to 1pm on Saturday.

Slovak Philharmonic (Slovenská Filharmónia; Map p790; ☎ 5920 8233; www.filharmonia.sk; cnr Nám L Štúra & Medená; ticket office ☎ 1-7pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 8am-2pm Wed) This state orchestra plays at a theatre in the Reduta Palace.

State Puppet Theatre (Štátne Bábkové Divadlo; Map p787; ☎ 5292 3668; www.babkovedivadlo.sk; Dunajská 36) Puts on puppet shows, usually at 10am and sometimes again at 2pm.

Folk dance and music ensembles, like **Sluk** (☎ 6285 9125; www.sluk.sk) and **Lúčnica** (☎ 5292 0068; www.lucnica.sk), perform at various venues around town.

SHOPPING

There are several crystal, craft and jewellery stores in and around Hlavné nám.

Úľuv (Map p790; ☎ 5273 1351; www.uluv.sk; Obchodná 64) For serious folk art shopping head to Úľuv, where there are two stores and a courtyard filled with artisans' studios. There's even a small restaurant serving folksy specials.

Vinotéka Sv Urbana (Map p790; ☎ 5433 2573; Klobučnícka 4) Has wines for sample and sale.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Bratislava's **MR Štefánika airport** (BTS; ☎ 3303 3353; www.airportbratislava.sk) is 7km northeast of the centre. **Sky Europe** (☎ 4850 4850; www.skyeurope.com) has two to three daily flights to Košice (50 minutes, three daily) for as little as 190Sk (plus 300Sk in taxes) if you book ahead. For more on flying within Eastern Europe, see this chapter's Transport section (p821). For more on getting to Slovakia from further afield, see the Transport chapter (p928).

Vienna International airport (VIE; www.viennairport.com) is only 60km from Bratislava, and is connected by near-hourly buses.

Boat

Floating down the Danube River is a cruisy way to get between Bratislava and Vienna (€21 one way, 1½ hours) or Budapest (€69 one way, four hours). From mid-April to September, **Slovenská plavba a prístavy** (☎ 5293 2226; www.lod.sk) runs at least one hydrofoil to Vienna and one to Budapest daily from the **hydrofoil terminal** (Map p790; Fajnorovo nábrežie 2). From June to October the **Twin City Liner** (☎ 09-03-61 07 16; www.twincityliner.com) operates three boats a day between the Bratislava **propeller terminal** (Map p790; Rázusovo nábrežie), in front of the Hotel Devin, and Vienna.

Bus

The **main bus station** (autobusová stanica, A5; Map p787; reservations ☎ 5556 7349; www.eurolines.sk), is 1.5km east of the old town. Locals call it Mlynské Nivy, after the street it's on. Buses leave from here heading to towns across Slovakia, including Žilina (203Sk, three hours, seven daily), Poprad (345Sk, seven hours, four daily), Košice (441Sk, eight hours, nine daily) and Bardejov (491Sk, nine to 11 hours, three daily).

Eurolines (☎ 5556 7349; www.eurolines.sk) runs international buses from Bratislava to Prague (420Sk, four hours, three daily), Budapest (560Sk, four hours, one daily) and Kraków.

For more on getting to Bratislava by bus from outside Eastern Europe, see (p930).

Train

At least 12 daily trains leave the **main train station** (Hlavná stanica; www.zsrsk), 1km north of the centre, to Košice (518Sk, 5½ to nine hours), most via Žilina (268Sk, 2¾ to four hours) and Poprad (420Sk, 4¾ to eight hours).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Bus 61 links the airport with the main train station (18Sk; 20 minutes). To get to town by taxi shouldn't cost much more than 500Sk – make sure the meter is used.

Bus & Tram

Dopravný Podnik Bratislava (DPB; ☎ 5950 5950; www.dpb.sk) runs an extensive tram, bus and trolleybus network. You can buy tickets (14/18/22Sk for 10/30/60 minutes) at the **DPB office** (Map p790; Obchodná 14; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) and at newsstands. Validate on board. One-/two-/three-/seven-day *turistické cestovné lístky* (tourist travel tickets) cost 90/170/270/310Sk and are sold at the DPB office and train and bus stations. Check routes and schedules at www.imhd.sk.

Bratislava Culture & Information Centres (p788) sell the **Bratislava City Card** (1/2/3 days 200/300/370Sk), which covers city transport and provides discounted museum admissions among other benefits.

Car

Numerous international rental agencies have offices at the airport; **Alimex** (☎ 5564 1641; www.alimex.sk) charges from 699Sk per day. **Avís** (Map p790; ☎ 5341 6111; www.avis.sk; Rybné nám 1) has a desk in the Hotel Danube, but prices are high (from 1200Sk per day).

Taxi

Bratislava's taxis have meters, but they can be set to run at different rates. Cheating is becoming less common; within the old town a trip should cost no more than 300Sk. Call **Transtel Taxi** (☎ 16 301) or **Super Taxi** (☎ 16 616).

AROUND BRATISLAVA

Hardcore castle aficionados should don their daypack and head to **Devin Castle** (☎ 6573 0105; Muránska; adult/student 80/30Sk; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr-Oct), 9km west of Bratislava. Once the military plaything of 9th-century warlord

Prince Ratislav, the castle withstood the Turks but was blown up in 1809 by the French. Peer at the older bits that have been unearthed and tour a reconstructed palace museum. Bus 29 links Devin with Bratislava's New Bridge stop, under the bridge. Austria is just across the river.

WEST SLOVAKIA

Snaking along the Small Carpathians on the main route northeast of Bratislava, watch for hilltop castle ruins high above the Váh River. Trenčín's magnificent, reconstructed castle is one of the most impressive along this once heavily fortified stretch.

TREŇČÍN

☎ 032 / pop 56,850

A mighty castle looms above the 18th- and 19th-century buildings in this lively university town. Roman legionnaires fancied the site, establishing a military post, Laugaricio, in the 2nd century AD. A rock inscription recalls the 2nd legion's victory over the Germanic Kvad tribes. Trenčín Castle was first noted in a Viennese chronicle of 1069, but today's structure dates from around the 15th century. An excellent art museum rounds out the city's offerings.

Orientation & Information

From the adjacent bus and train stations walk west through Park MR Štefánika and beneath the highway past the Hotel Tatra, where a street bears left uphill to Mierové nám, the main square. The whole centre is easily walkable.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 159; Štúrovo nám 10)

INTERNET ACCESS

Mike Studio (Mierové nám 25; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun; per min 15k) Just internet, no café.

MONEY

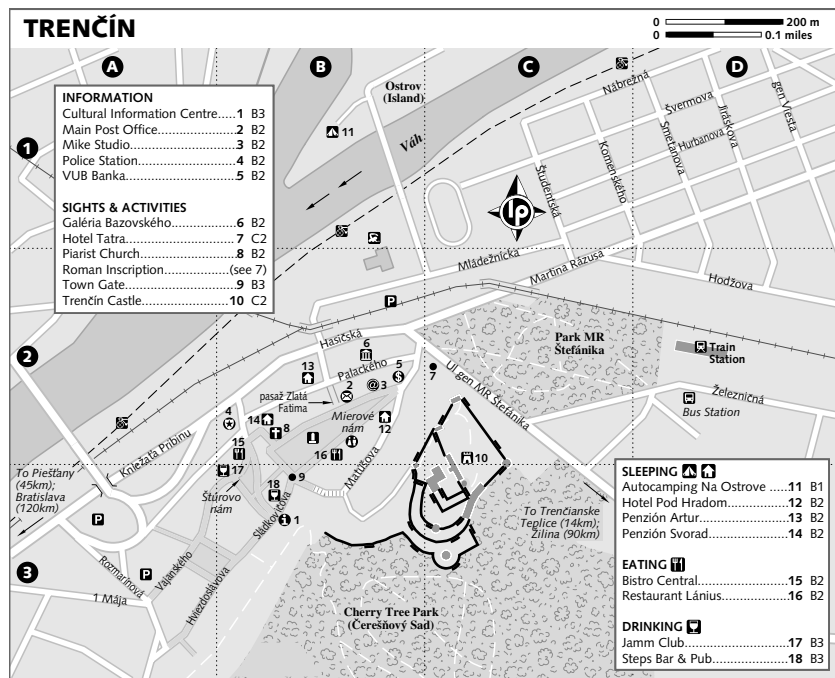
VUB Banka (Mierové nám 37) ATM and exchange.

POST

Main post office (Mierové nám 21)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Cultural Information Centre (☎ 161 86; www.trencin.sk; City Office, Sládkovičova; ☎ 8am-6pm May-Sep, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) The helpful, well-informed staff can recommend one of the many local pensions.



Sights

Sitting astride a rocky crag above the town squares, **Trenčín Castle** (Trenčiansky hrad; ☎ 7435 657; adult/student 80/40Sk; 🕒 9am-5.30pm May-Oct, to 3.30pm Nov-Apr) would be hard to miss. At night, the castle is lit with green and purple lights. From up top you have sweeping views of the Váh River plain. Much of the castle you see is post-1950s reconstruction; a fire in the 1800s left the place in ruins. The Well of Love, purportedly dug by a man trying to win his lover back from servitude in the castle, is 70m deep. To go inside the palace, you have to join one of the frequent tours (in Slovak only, call two days ahead to arrange an English-speaking guide). The best time to visit is on summer evenings when two-hour **medieval night tours** (adult/student 100/50Sk) entertain you with sword fighting, minstrels, fun and staged frolics.

The famous **Roman inscription** of AD 179 is on the cliff behind the **Hotel Tatra** (☎ 6506 111; www.hotel-tatra.sk; Ulica gen MR Štefánika 2) and can only be seen through a viewing window on the hotel's staircase – ask at reception for permission to see it. The translation reads: 'To the victory of the emperor and the army

which, numbering 855 soldiers, resided at Laugaricia. By order of Maximianus, legate of the 2nd auxiliary legion.'

The **Galéria Bazovského** (☎ 7436 858; http://gmab.scot.sk in Slovak; Palackého 27; adult/student 40/10Sk; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), in a restored 19th-century palace, houses a collection of works by local painter Miloš Bazovský (1899–1968). Temporary exhibits represent some of the best of 20th-century Slovak and Czech art.

At the western end of Mierové nám are the baroque **Piarist Church** (Piaristický kostol) and a 16th-century **town gate** (*mestská brána*).

Sleeping

Trenčín has tonnes more pensions than we can list here, ask at the tourist office if the ones below are full.

Autocamping na Ostrove (☎ 7434 013; http://web.viapvt.sk/autocamping.tn; per car/tent 50/70Sk, per person in hut 200Sk; 🕒 May–mid-Sep) On an island in the Váh River, walking distance from the city centre, this decent camping ground also has two five-bed *chaty* (huts).

Penzión Svorad (☎ 7430 322; www.svorad-trencin.sk; Palackého 4; s 450-800Sk, d 700-1200Sk; 🕒) Frayed

curtains, peeling linoleum – but oh, the castle views. It's clear this is in part of a grammar school; the staff is quite rule-oriented.

Penzión Artur (☎ 7481 029; www.arturtn.sk; Palackého 23; s/d/tr 1200/1500/2000Sk) Modular modern furniture in a colourful old town building. The wine restaurant and sidewalk café add to the appeal.

Hotel Pod Hradom (☎ 7442 507; www.podhradom.sk in Slovak; Matúšova 12; r 2300-2950Sk) On a winding wee street en route to the castle, this pretty little lodging has a prime location and patio. All rooms have minibars and broadband, many have sloped ceilings and skylights, some have a *maželska postel* (literally 'marriage bed', with one continuous queen-sized mattress).

Eating & Drinking

Bistro Central (Štúrovo nám 10; mains 42-86Sk; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4am Fri, 7pm-4am Sat) You can nosh kebab meat in *langoš* (fried bread) from this food stand after the clubs let out.

Restaurant Lánius (☎ 7441 978; Mierové nám 20; mains 90-190Sk) Creaking beams, wood fires and wood floors; the rustic set up matches the hearty Slovak fare. Pass the dining room in the front; the one up the stairs at the rear of the courtyard is more fun.

Steps Bar & Pub (☎ 7446 252; Sládkovičova 4-6; 🕒 10.30am-1am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) The ground-floor pub has imports on tap. Upstairs the bar attracts a beautiful, college-age crowd.

Jamm Club (Štúrovo nám 5; 🕒 noon-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri, 2pm-3am Sat, 2pm-1am Sun) Red and black painted walls make this cellar club seem extra dark. Live jazz and blues alternates with '70s and '80s disco nights.

Getting There & Away

Trains are the quickest and most cost-efficient way to get here from Bratislava (180Sk, two hours, seven daily). Most continue on to Košice (420Sk, four hours). Twenty trains a day travel to Žilina (180Sk, 1½ hours) from here.

CENTRAL SLOVAKIA

The rolling hills and forested mountain ranges of Central Slovakia are home to the shepherding tradition that defines Slovak culture. Watch roadside for farmers selling local sheep's cheese. The beautiful Malá Fatra mountain range is where this nation's Robin Hood, Juraj Jánošík, once roamed.

ŽILINA

☎ 041 / pop 85,268

A Slavic tribe in the 6th century was the first to recognize Žilina's advantageous location on the Váh River at the intersection of several important trade routes. Today it makes a convenient base for exploring the Malá Fatra National Park, as well as the area's fortresses, towns and folk villages. There isn't much to see in town besides the old palace-castle on the outskirts.

Orientation

The train station is on the northeastern side of the old town, near the Váh River. A 700m walk along Národná takes you past Nám A Hlinku up to Mariánské nám, the main square. From the south end of the bus station, follow Jána Milca northeast to Národná.

Information

CK Selinan (☎ 5620 789; www.zilina.sk; Burianova medziera 4; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Located in a lane off the western side of Mariánské nám, this travel agency is an official tourist office representative. It can also arrange accommodation in the Malá Fatras.

Internet Caffé (☎ 0903522226; Bottova 12; per min 1.5Sk; 🕒 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 2-10pm Sat & Sun) Also has a full bar.

Main post office (Sládkovičova 1) Three blocks north of Mariánské nám.

Tatra Banka (cnr Mariánské nám & Farská) Has an ATM and change facility.

Sights

North across the Váh River, the **Budatín Castle** (Budatínsky zámok; ☎ 5620 033; Topolová 1; adult/student 50/30Sk; 🕒 9am-5.15pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, to 4pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct) is more mansion than stronghold. Inside, the **Považské Museum** contains exhibits of 18th- and 19th-century decorative arts as well as wire figures made by area tinkers. Other than that, you're left to a stroll through the pleasant old town.

Sleeping

CK Selinan (above) can help with private rooms from 300Sk per person.

Veľký Diel (☎ 5005 249; kadorova@dorm.utc.sk; Žilinská univerzita, Vysokoškolskákov 20; dm 300-500Sk; 🕒) A student dorm open to travellers in July and August only, Veľký Diel is worth contacting year-round just in case it has a vacancy. Take tram 1 from the bus or the train stations to get here.

Penzión Majovej (☎ 5624 152; fax 5625 239; Jána Milca 3; s/d 1000/1750Sk) The deep coral outside is more interesting than the stark white inside but bathrooms are huge and tile floors keep things cool throughout. Breakfast is an extra 100Sk.

Hotel Grand (☎ 5626 809; www.hotelgrand.sk; Sládkovičova 1; s/d 1590/2630Sk; (P)) Floor-to-ceiling windows brighten up the bland rooms in this 90-year-old hotel off the main square. Go deluxe and ask for one with whirlpool tub and air-con (3180Sk).

Eating & Drinking

Voyage Voyage (☎ 5640 230; Mariánske nám 191; mains 100-175Sk) With sleek neon and chrome, this is not your typical Slovak eatery. Dishes are as updated as the scene. Try one of the milk shakes.

Pizzeria Carolina (☎ 5003 030; Národná 5; pizzas 98-137Sk) Tables are filled weekdays to weekend; Carolina's is especially popular with college students. There's a mixed salad bar of sorts.

Boston (☎ 0905481214; Mariánské 24; ☎ 9am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) Live jazz Tuesday at 8pm; bar action nightly.

Getting There & Away

Žilina is on the main railway line from Bratislava to Košice. Trains head to Trenčín (180Sk, one hour, 20 daily), Bratislava (268Sk, 2¼ hours, 12 daily), Poprad (200Sk, two hours, 17 daily) and Košice (316Sk, three hours, 10 daily).

AROUND ŽILINA

A few folk culture sights within an hour of Žilina are well worth exploring. The nearby town of **Martin** (☎ tourist information 4234 776; www.tikmartin.sk; Štefánika 9A) is industrial, but it also has the country's biggest *skansen* (open-air

village museum), complete with working *krčma* (pub). Traditional plaster-and-log buildings from all over the region have been moved to the **Museum of the Slovak Village** (Múzeum Slovenské Dediny; ☎ 043-4239 491; adult/student 50/30Sk; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sun). Take the bus to Martin (40Sk, 40 minutes, half-hourly), 35km south of Žilina. The village museum is 4km southeast of the city. Take bus 10 from the bus station to the last stop, Ladovaň, and walk the remaining 1km up through the forest.

Dark log homes painted with contrasting patterns fill the traditional village of **Čičmany** (www.cicmany.viapvt.sk in Slovak), which is 50 minutes south of Žilina by bus (destination Čičmany, 47Sk, five daily). If you've seen a brochure or postcard of Slovakia, you've probably seen a photograph of a Čičmany house. Most are private residences, but **Radenov House** (No 42; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) is a museum and **Penzión Katka** (☎ 041-5492 132; www.penzionkatka.sk; No 50; r per person 370-430Sk) rents rooms. Return bus times allow lots of hours to wander.

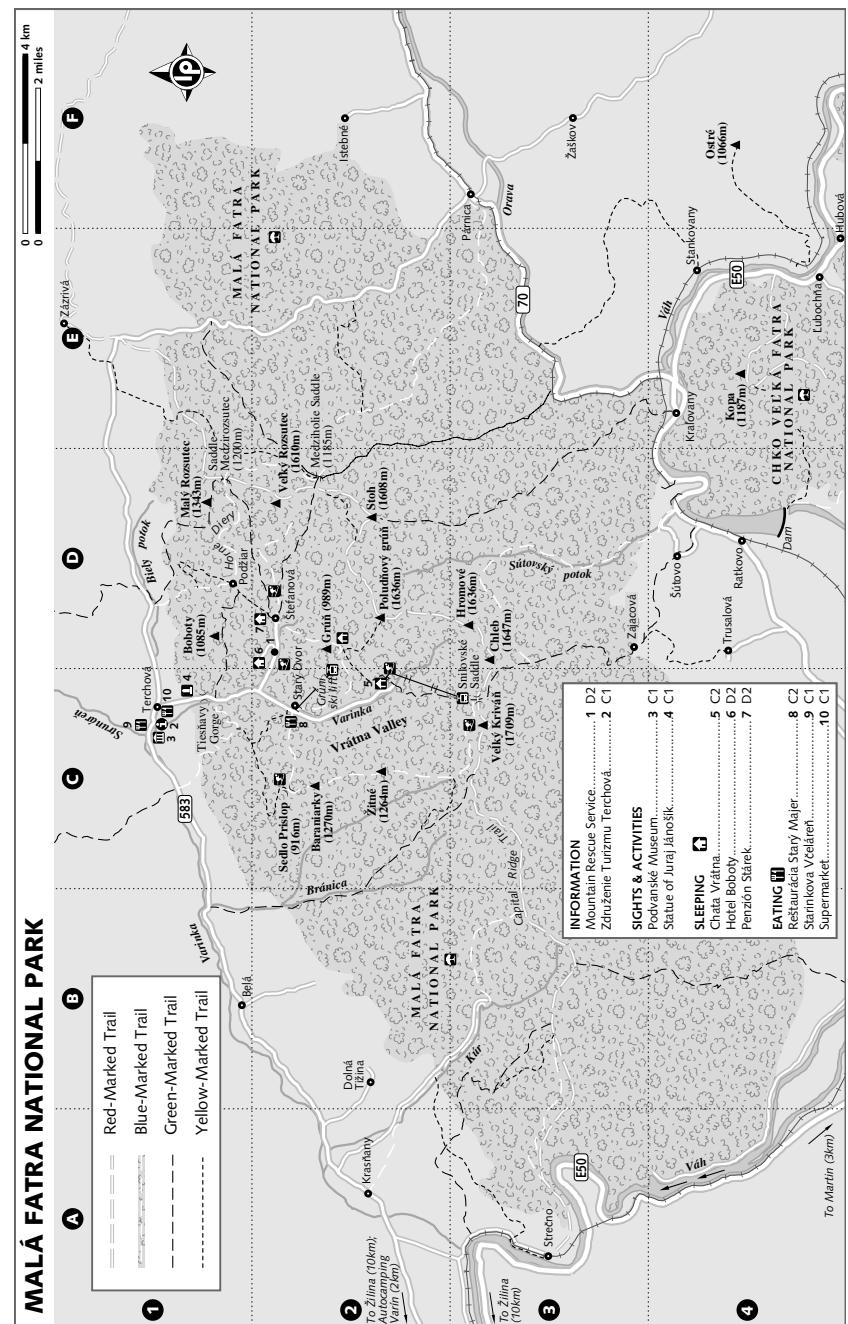
MALÁ FATRA NATIONAL PARK

☎ 041

Sentinel-like formations stand watch at the rocky gorge entrance to the valley and precipitous peaks top the pine-clad slopes above. The Malá Fatra National Park (Národný park Malá Fatra) incorporates a chocolate box—pretty, 200-sq-km swathe of its namesake mountain range. The Vrátna Valley (Vrátna dolina), 25km east of Žilina, lies at the heart of the park. From here you can access the trailheads, ski lifts and a cable car to start your exploration. The long, one-street town of Terchová is at the lower end of the valley, Chata Vrátna is at the top. The village of Štefanová sits to the east, 1km uphill from Terchová.

WORTH A TRIP

Bojnice Castle (Bojnice zámok; ☎ 5430 633; www.bojnicecastle.sk; adult/child 200/70Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May, Jun & Sep, daily Jul & Aug, 10am-3pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) comes straight out of a fairy-tale dream. The original 12th-century fortification got an early 20th-century redo by the Pálffy family, who modelled it on French romantic castles. (Original Gothic and Renaissance parts do survive within.) The time to visit is during one of the many festivals and night-time tours. The biggest is the **International Festival of Ghosts and Ghouls** in May, which attracts thousands daily. Costumed guides re-enact legends and put on shows throughout the castle and grounds. The place also gets decked out for Christmas, Valentine's Day and medieval events, among others; check the website for schedules. A bus from Žilina to Prievidza takes 1½ hours (80Sk, eight daily), from Bratislava it's 3½ hours (198Sk, eight daily). Bojnice is 3km from Prievidza (via local bus 3). It's not on a main train line.



Information

Mountain Rescue Service (Horská služba; ☎ 5695 232; <http://his.hzs.sk/>; Štefanová) Check with this service for trail conditions. If you plan to hike, you should get the VKÚ's 1:50,000 *Malá Fatra – Vrátna* map (sheet No 110). **Združenie Turizmu Terchová** (☎ 5695 307; www.ztt.sk in Slovak; Sv Cyrila a Metoda 96; ☎ 9am–6pm) The tourist office on the main road in Terchová. It has internet access (100Sk per hour), and there's an ATM next door.

Sights & Activities

The road enters the Vrátna Valley just south of Terchová, where it runs through the crags of **Tiesňavy Gorge** (Tiesňavy roklina). A **cable car** (kábinkova lanovka; ☎ 5993 049; Chata Vrátna; adult/student one way 250/170Sk; ☎ 8am–4pm) runs from above the hut at the top of the valley to **Snilov Saddle** (Snilovské sedlo; 1524m) below two peaks, **Chleb** (1647m) and **Velký Kriváň** (1709m). Both are on the red, ridge trail, one of the most popular in the park. A hike northeast from Chleb over **Poludňový grúň** (1636m), **Hromové** (1636m) and **Stoh** (1608m) to **Medzihoľie Saddle** (1185m) takes about 5½ hours. From there you can descend for an hour on the green trail to **Štefanová** village where there's a bus stop, places to stay and eat.

Above the village of Terchová is an immense aluminium **statue of Juraj Jánošík** (see the boxed text below), and west of the village bus stop next to the Obecný úrad (village office) is a little branch of **Podvanské Museum** (adult/student 20/10Sk; ☎ 9am–1pm & 1.30–3pm Mon–Sun) devoted to him.

SKIING

The Vrátna Valley has plenty of tows and lifts are open from December to April. A day pass

costs 680Sk for adults and 480Sk for children. Buy your ticket from **Lyžiarska stredisko Vrátna** (☎ 5695 055; www.vratna.sk). The *kasa* (cashier) is at Starý Dvor, look for the big parking lot on the left side midway up the valley. Next door there's a shack with **ski rental** (per pair 300Sk; ☎ 8am–4pm).

Sleeping

Places to stay book up fast both during summer and ski season. Ask about private rooms (from 300Sk per person) at the Združenie Turizmu Terchová office (left). No wild camping is allowed in the park.

Autocamp Varín (☎ 5621 478; per person/tent/car 75Sk each, 4-person hut 1000Sk; ☎ May–mid-Oct; 🚰) Fifteen kilometres west of the Vrátna Valley, Varín is one of the closest camping grounds to the park.

Chata Vrátna (☎ 5695 739; www.vratna.sk/chata_vratna/; dm 220Sk, d with shared bathroom 760Sk; 🚰) Muddy hikers, giggling children and a fragrant wood-smoke aroma fill this well-worn, chalet-style outfit at the top of Vrátna Valley.

Penzión Stárek (☎ 5695 359; www.penzionstarek.sk; Štefanová 124; d per person 400–540Sk; 🚰) A warm and welcoming eight-room log cabin. You'll often find the owner's family gathered at the restaurant's outdoor picnic tables.

Hotel Boboty (☎ 5695 228; www.hotelboboty.sk in Slovak; Nový Dvor; s 800Sk, d 900–1900Sk; 🚰 🚰 🚰) Skyscraping windows in the dining room create tremendous vistas of the forests and mountains beyond in a clean-line contemporary style. Expect services galore, including sauna, massage, billiards, free ski shuttle and some in-room internet connections. From

the bus stop at Nový Dvor, walk five minutes' uphill in the direction of Štefanová.

Eating

The food situation in the park is pretty bleak; most Slovaks bring their own. There are takeaway stands at Starý Dvor and there's a **supermarket** (*potraviny*) at the valley turnoff in Terchová. Most hotels have restaurants. There's a pizzeria in Penzión Stárek (opposite).

Starinkova Včeláreň (☎ 5993 130; A Hlinku 246; snacks 20–50Sk) A friendly tearoom has scones and homemade honey to go with its brew.

Reštaurácia Starý Majer (☎ 5695 419; mains 1000–200Sk; ☎ 10am–9pm) Farm implements decorate the walls and hearty *halušky* top the menu.

Getting There & Around

At least every two hours, more often on weekdays, buses link Žilina with Terchová (40Sk, 45 minutes) and Chata Vrátna (50Sk, one hour). Or you can change in Terchová for local buses that make multiple stops in the valley.

Ask at the Terchová information centre (opposite) about bicycle rental.

EAST SLOVAKIA

Majestic? Ancient? Sublime? No one adjective well describes East Slovakia with its alpine peaks, old towns and even older castles. In one compact region you can hike the High Tatras, explore a medieval town square in Levoča, conquer the Špis Castle ruins, visit the Renaissance era in Bardejov and get back to city life in Košice. Though it's a distance from Bratislava, once you get here, the area is easy to traverse by bus. And Poland's just the other side of the mountains.

HIGH TATRAS

☎ 052

When you first see the alpine, snow-strewn High Tatras (Vysoké Tatry) jutting out of the valley floor north of Poprad, you may do a double take. This isn't Switzerland after all. But Gerlachovský štít (2654m) is the highest in the Carpathian range, and the Tatras tower over most of Eastern Europe. The massif is only 25km wide, adding to the sense that some alien plopped these huge mountains here. The photo opportunities at higher elevations will get you fantasising about a career with *National Geographic* –

pristine snowfields, ultramarine mountain lakes, crashing waterfalls. Sadly, a massive windstorm in late 2004 uprooted the dense pine forest that surrounded the resort towns of Starý Smokovec and Tatranská Lomnica. Huge swathes will look barren and war-ravaged for years to come. Trunks have been cleared leaving fields full of giant upturned stumps and dirt. This hasn't stopped the crowds from showing up.

Since 1949 most of the Slovak part of this jagged range has been included in the Tatra National Park (Tanap), complementing a similar park in Poland. A 600km network of hiking trails reaches all the alpine valleys and some peaks, with *chaty* (mountain huts) to stop at along the way. Routes are colour coded and easy to follow. Park regulations require you to keep to the marked trails and to refrain from picking flowers.

Climate & When to Go

When planning your trip, keep in mind that the higher trails are closed from November to mid-June to protect the environment, and avalanches may close lower portions as well. There's snow by November that lingers at least until May. Always wear hiking boots and layer clothing. Know that the assistance of the Mountain Rescue Service is not free and beware of sudden thunderstorms on ridges and peaks where there's no protection. June and July are especially rainy. July and August are the warmest (and most crowded) months. Hotel prices and crowds are at their lowest from October to April.

For the latest weather and trail conditions stop by the **Mountain Rescue Service** (Horská Záchraná Služba; ☎ emergency 18 300; <http://his.hzs.sk/>; Starý Smokovec 23).

Orientation

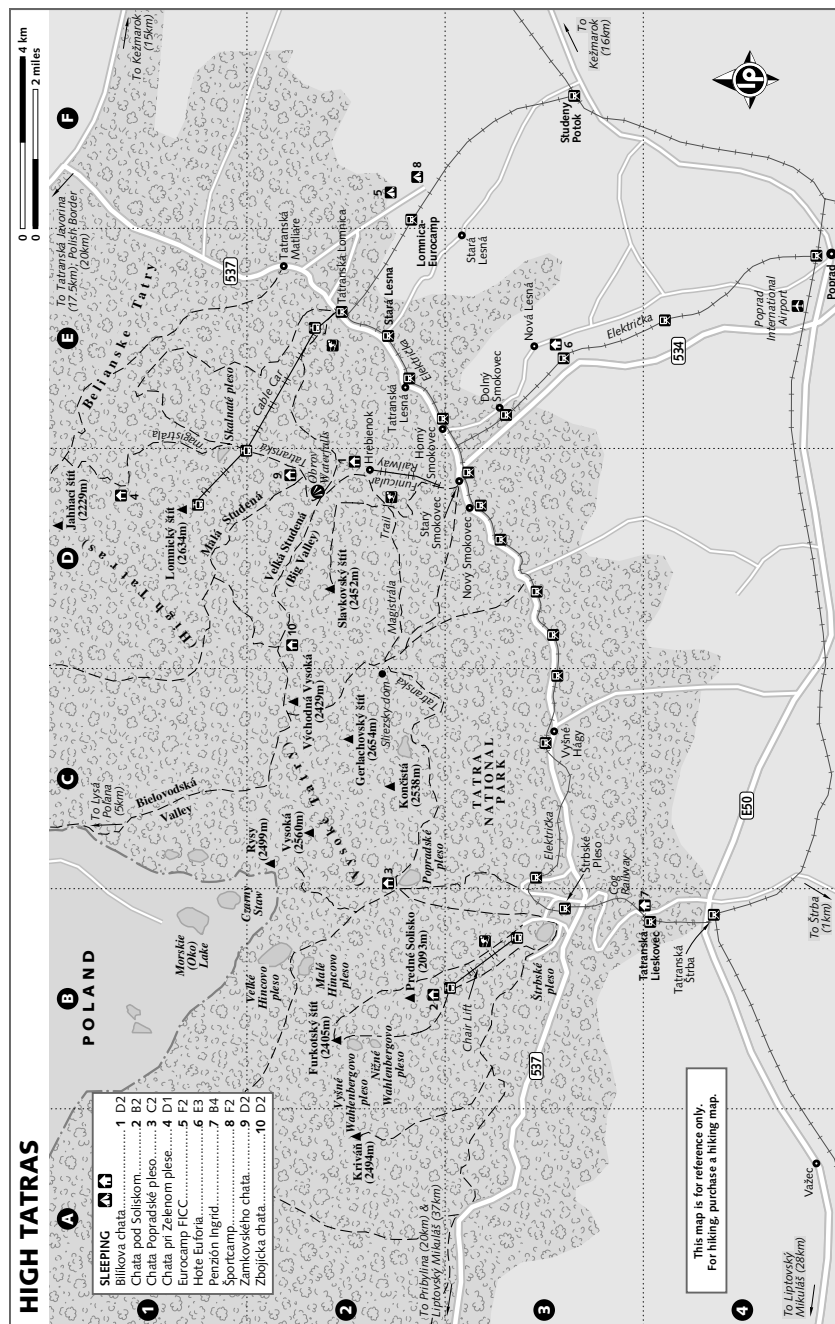
Starý Smokovec, a 20th-century resort town, is roughly central along the High Tatras chain, with Tatranská Lomnica, the smallest and quaintest resort, 5km to the east. Lakeside, development-crazy Štrbské Pleso, 11km to the west, was the only one of the big three resorts villages left with trees after the storm, and in some ways is the prettiest now. A narrow-gauge electric train connects Poprad with Štrbské Pleso via Starý Smokovec, where you have to change to get to Tatranská Lomnica. Roads lead downhill from the resorts to less expensive villages.

SLOVAKIA'S ROBIN HOOD

Juraj Jánošík has been written about, sung about, painted on canvas, etched on glass, carved in wood; he's been made the subject of three movies and a card game, there's even an opera. It's hard to imagine a bigger national character. But like any legend, Jánošík is a mix of fact and fiction. Born into a peasant family in Terchová in 1688, he joined up with Ferenc Rákóczi II in 1703 to fight the Habsburgs. While away his mother died and his father was beaten to death by their landlord for taking time off to bury her. Jánošík took to the hills and spent years robbing from the rich and giving to the poor (although some say he didn't make much of a distinction about who he stole from and didn't give it away).

In 1713 he was captured in a pub; the story goes that an old lady threw down some peas that tripped him up as he tried to escape. He was sentenced and hung on a hook by the ribs (gory huh?) in the town of Liptovský Mikuláš. But where in the town isn't even certain.

Ask a Slovak and you'll likely hear what sensational thing the robber did in their home village. Guess in a country that was dominated by foreigners for most of history, it's not surprising that the local hero was an underdog.



MAPS

Our High Tatras map is intended for orientation only, not as a hiking guide. Buy a proper VKÚ 1:25,000 (sheet No 2) or 1:50,000 *Vysoké Tatry* (sheet No 113) trail map when you arrive – both cost around 120Sk. They're usually available at hotels, shops and newsstands, as well as information offices. Green maps list summer *hiking turistka* (hiking trails) and the blue ones show winter ski routes.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Hotel FIS (☎ 4492 221; Areál FIS, Štrbské Pleso; per hr 100Sk; ☎ 24hr) Two lobby computers are available for general rental.

Townson Travel (☎ 4782 731; Tatranská Lomnica 94; per hr 80Sk; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) This travel agency has one computer with access, but it closes sporadically.

U Michalka Café (Starý Smokovec 4; per hr 80Sk; ☎ 11am–10pm) One terminal in the corner.

MONEY

All three main resorts have ATMs.

Slovenská Sporiteľňa (Cesta Slobody 24, Starý Smokovec) On the main road, has an ATM and exchange.

POST

Post Office (off Cesta Slobody) Above Starý Smokovec train station.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tatra Information Office (TIK) Starý Smokovec (☎ 4423 440; www.tatry.sk; Dom služieb 24; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat); Tatranská Lomnica (☎ 4468 118; Cesta Slobody; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat) Oodles of info.

Tatra National Park Info Centrum (☎ 4492 391; www.tanap.sk; Štrbské Pleso; ☎ 9am–4pm) Next to Tolar department store; staff knows a lot about trails.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

T-Ski Travel (☎ 4423 200; www.sloviatravel.sk; Starý Smokovec 46; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Thu, to 5pm Fri–Sun) Books lodging, including some huts, and arranges ski and sport programmes. It's at the funicular station.

Sights & Activities

STARÝ SMOKOVEC

From Starý Smokovec a **funicular railway** (pozemná lanovka; ☎ 4467 618; www.tldtatry.sk; adult/student return 100/60Sk; ☎ 7.30am–7pm), or a 55-minute hike on the green trail, takes you up to **Hrebienok** (1280m). From here you have a great view of the Velká Studená Valley and a of couple

hiking options. The red trail, past the Bilikova chata to **Obrov Waterfalls** (Obrovsky vodopad), takes about an hour. This is part of the **Tatranská Magistrála Trail** that follows the southern slopes of the High Tatras for 65km. Continuing on from the falls, it's a 35-minute hike to Zamkovského chata, and Skalnaté pleso (see below), with its cable car and trails down to Tatranská Lomnica.

TATRANSKÁ LOMNICA

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

Alternatively, you can yomp it up to Skalnaté (2½ hours), where there is also an ordinary **chairlift** (adult/student return 150/90Sk; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Jul–Aug, 8.30am–4.30pm Sep–Jun) running up to **Lomnické sedlo**, a 2190m saddle below the summit.

Is it a rollercoaster? Is it a summer bobsled? Both, it's **Tatrabob** (☎ 4467 951; Tatranská Lomnica 29; per ride 50Sk; ☎ 9am–10pm Jul & Aug, 9am–7pm Sep–Jun). Individual riders get hauled up on a track and then let go to control their own undulating descent.

ŠTRBSKÉ PLESO

From the modern ski resort of Štrbské Pleso and its glacial lake (1346m), follow the red-marked **Magistrála Trail** (uphill from the train station) for about an hour up to **Popradské pleso**, an even more idyllic pond at 1494m. From Popradské pleso the **Magistrála** zigzags steeply up the mountainside then traverses east towards **Sliezsky dom** and **Hrebienok** (four hours).

There is also a year-round **chairlift** (☎ 4492 343; www.parksnow.sk; adult/student return 200/140Sk; ☎ 8am–3.30pm) to **Solisko**, from where it's a one-hour walk north along the red trail to the 2093m summit of **Predné Solisko**.

There's usually a guy hawking rides on a **snowmobile** (snižky skooter; 10 min 600Sk) in the field on the side of the road to the chairlift and Areál FIS.

MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

You can reach the top of **Slavkovský štít** (2452m) via the blue trail from Starý Smokovec (seven

to eight hours return), but to scale the peaks without marked hiking trails (Gerlachovský štít included) you must hire a mountain guide (members of recognised climbing clubs excluded). Contact the **Mountain Guides Society Office** (☎ 4422 066; www.tatraguide.sk; Starý Smokovec 38; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-May), by the Hotel Smokovec. It runs classes too.

SKIING, SNOWBOARDING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

Štrbské Pleso is probably the most popular ski and snowboard area, but Starý Smokovec and Tatranská Lomnica both have lifts and runs. You can hire skis, snowboards, even mountain bikes, (all about 300Sk a day) from **Crystal Ski** (☎ 4492 834; www.crystalski.sk; Areál FIS; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) in Štrbské Pleso and from **Tatrasport** (☎ 4425 241; www.tatry.net/tatrasport; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-6pm) in Starý Smokovec, above the bus station parking lot.

Sleeping

No wild camping is permitted within the national park, but there are a couple of camping grounds near Tatranská Lomnica. Lodging rates are high in the three main resorts; if you're looking for bargains you have to go downhill to towns like Nová Lesná, Stará Lesná and Tatranská Štrba. It's best to book private rooms ahead of time via the internet (www.tatry.sk and www.tanap.sk/homes.html) as tourist offices up here don't do bookings.

Up on the trails, a *chata* (mountain hut) can be anything from a shack to chalet. A bed goes for 300Sk to 500Sk; all may be full midsummer. Food is usually available, but you may want to bring some of your own supplies. A stay in a *chata* is one of the best mountain experiences the Tatras have to offer. Contact the *chata* directly to book ahead, essential in July and August. Someone usually speaks enough English to communicate.

STARÝ SMOKOVEC & AROUND

Pension Vesna (☎ 4422 774; vesna@stonline.sk; Nový Smokovec 69; r per person 600Sk; Ⓟ) Both family-orientated and friendly. Most of the seven rooms at this guesthouse have three beds and a separate living area. Vesna's below Nový Smokovec train stop, behind the sanatorium.

Hotel Euforia (☎ 4783 061; www.hoteleuforia.sk; Nová Lesná 399; s/d 1150/1550Sk; Ⓟ) With blond wood and cobalt blue rugs, Euforia is fresher and

brighter (and newer) than most of what's up the hill. It's 3km south of Starý Smokovec, near the Nová Lesná train stop. A big terrace closes off with windows for winter.

Grand Hotel (☎ 4870 000; www.grandhotel.sk; Starý Smokovec 38; s/d 2300/3900Sk; Ⓟ ☎) More than 100 years of history are tied up in this full-service property front and centre in Starý Smokovec. It's a biggie.

Some mountain huts above:

Bilikova chata (1220m; ☎ 4422 439; fax 4422 267) Hotel-like chalet with restaurant and one-, two- and three-bed rooms with shared bathrooms.

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

Zamkovského chata (1475m; ☎ 4422 636; www.zamka.sk) Twenty-four beds in four-bed rooms; board available.

TATRANSKÁ LOMNICA & AROUND

Eurocamp FICC (☎ 4467 741; www.eurocamp-ficc.sk; per person/tent/car 110/80/80Sk, 2-/3-/4-bed bungalows 1200/1400/1600Sk; ☎ year-round; Ⓟ ☎) Row upon row of caravans line up at this 1500-capacity ground. On site there are two restaurants, a bar, billiards, a supermarket, a swimming pool and sauna, and ball courts. It's five minutes' northeast of the Lomnica-Eurocamp train station on the line to Studený Potok.

Sportcamp (☎ 4467 288; http://sportcamp.host.sk in Slovak; per person/tent/car 80/80/50Sk) Two kilometres south of Eurocamp FICC is a less hyper, 100-site camping ground with tennis and volleyball courts

Penzión Encian (☎ 4467 520; penzion.encian@sinet.sk; s/d 1000/1500Sk; Ⓟ) You couldn't ask for better hosts than Zdenka and Štefan Unák. They've warmed up the small restaurant with a fire in the hearth and old skiing memorabilia on display. Eave-top room 13 has a great view of Lomnický štít.

Grandhotel Praha (☎ 4467 941; www.grandhotel.praha.sk; s/d 2900/3900Sk; Ⓟ ☎) Remember when train travel was elegant? OK, so we're too young, but the 1899 Grandhotel isn't. Rooms are appropriately classic, if uninspired, and there's a new spa.

Take the cable car up from Tatranská Lomnica to Skalnaté pleso, and hike west to the huts above Starý Smokovec (above), or you can make the strenuous 2½-hour red-trail trek from Skalnaté pleso to **Chata pri Zelenom plese** (1540m; ☎ 4467 420; www.zelenepleso.sk). The lakeside hut has 50 beds.

ŠTRBSKÉ PLESO & AROUND

Penzión Pleso (☎ 4492 160; Nové Štrbské Pleso 11; www.penzion.pleso.sk; r per person 650Sk, ste per person 800Sk; Ⓟ) The inside of this refurbishment-in-progress is well ahead of the outside. Go for contemporary suite 11 because of the views from corner, full-length windows. Breakfast is 90Sk.

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

Mountain huts above Štrbské Pleso:

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

Chata Popradské pleso (1500m; ☎ 4492 177; www.popradskkepleso.sk) Sizeable chalet with restaurant and 132 beds in two eight-bed rooms. The attic floor sleeps 25 in sleeping bags.

Eating & Drinking

The villages are close enough that it's easy to eat in one and sleep in another. All of the hotels, and some of the *penzións* (homy hotels), have restaurants; the grand ones have bars and discos. Look for the local *potraviny* (supermarket) on the main road in each village.

Samoobslužná Reštaurácia (☎ 4781 011; Hotel Toliar, Štrbské Pleso 21; mains 40-70Sk; ☎ 7am-10pm) This self-service cafeteria has one-dish meals (goulash, chicken stir-fry) and some vegetarian options.

Reštaurácia Stará Mama (☎ 4467 216; shopping centre Sintra, Tatranská Lomnica; mains 65-172Sk) Substantial soups and homemade dumplings are the main reason hikers frequent this rustic fave; but the menu is actually quite extensive.

Pizzéria Albas (☎ 4423 460; Albas, Starý Smokovec; pizzas 100-170Sk) Everyone you talk to seems to recommend this big, antiseptic pizzeria. It's the pizza, not the place.

Zbojnícka Koliba (Tatranská Lomnica; mains 150-350Sk) Musicians play gypsy songs on the cimbalon while your chicken roasts over the open fire. Sit back, order some *bryndza* to spread on bread, have some hot spiced wine and wait, it'll take an hour to cook. The Koliba is on the road up to the Grand Hotel Praha.

Tatry Pub (☎ 4422 448; Starý Smokovec; ☎ 1-11pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri-Sun) Refresh yourself at the official watering hole of the Mountain Guide Club. It's on the main road west and up from the car park.

Getting There & Away

To reach the Tatras from most destinations you need to switch in Poprad (p806).

BUS

Buses from Poprad travel to Starý Smokovec (18Sk, 20 minutes, every half hour), Tatranská Lomnica (25Sk, 35 minutes, hourly) and Štrbské Pleso (45Sk, 50 minutes, every 45 minutes). One daily, early-morning bus links Bratislava with Starý Smokovec (346Sk, 6½ hours) directly.

From Tatranská Lomnica buses leave for Kežmarok (22Sk, 30 minutes) at least every 1½ hours.

TRAIN

To reach the High Tatras by train you'll have to change at Poprad (p806). There are frequent narrow-gauge electric trains between Poprad and the High Tatras (see Getting Around). All three main train stations have left-luggage offices.

WALKING INTO POLAND

There's a highway border crossing at Lysá Polana, 2.5km north of Tatranská Javorina, which is accessible by bus from Tatranská Lomnica (30Sk, 45 minutes, at least five daily). From the Polish side there are regular public buses and private minibuses to Zakopane (26km).

Getting Around

Tatra electric train service (Tatranská elektrická železnica, TEZ) links most of the towns and villages in the Tatras at least hourly. One line runs from Poprad via Starý Smokovec (30 minutes) to Štrbské Pleso (one hour), with frequent stops in between. Another line connects Starý Smokovec to Tatranská Lomnica (15 minutes). A third route is from Tatranská Lomnica through Studený Potok (15 minutes) looping round to Poprad (25 minutes). A 20Sk ticket covers a six to 14km ride. It's easier to buy a one-/three-/seven-day pass for 100/200/360Sk. If there's not a ticket window at your stop, buy one from the conductor. Validate it on board.

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

Local buses run between the resorts every 20 minutes and tend to be quicker than the train – they have fewer stops though. Starý

Smokovec to Tatranská Lomnica (10Sk) takes 10 minutes, and to Štrbské Pleso (28Sk) takes 30 minutes.

The main road through the Tatras resorts is Rte 537, or Cesta Slobody (Freedom Way). You can connect to it from the E50 motorway through Tatranská Štrba, Poprad or Veľká Lomnica.

Hire mountain bikes from Tatrasport in Starý Smokovec and Crystal Ski in Štrbské Pleso, which both also rent skis (see p804).

POPRAD

☎ 052 / pop 55,400

Poprad is an important transportation transfer point for the High Tatras and Slovenský raj National Parks, and a possible base for seeing Levoča and surrounding towns if you have a car. Otherwise, skip the modern, industrial city. From the adjacent train and bus stations the central pedestrian square, Nám sv Egidia, is a five-minute walk south on Alžbetina.

Information

City Information Centre (☎ 7721 700; www.poprad.sk; Nám sv Egidia 15; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat Jul-Aug, 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat Sep-Jun) Has information about the Tatras and can help with accommodation.

Sinet (Nám sv Egidia 28; per hr 40Sk; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, from 1pm Sun). Internet and email available.

Sleeping

The old Germanic village of Spišská Sobota, 2km northeast of the centre, is now a Poprad adjunct. There are more than 10 lodging options on or near its medieval square.

Hotel Sobota (☎ 4663 121; www.hotelsobota.sk; Kežmarská 15; s/d 1750/2200Sk; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) One of the newer lodging options; it has great slate and timber construction. It's near the road connecting Kežmarok and Levoča.

Eating

Numerous restaurants and cafés line Nám sv Egidia.

Pizzeria Utopia (☎ 7732 222; Dostojevského 23; pizzas 100-200Sk) For eclectic antiques and pizza head south across the E18 to Utopia. Salami, blue cheese and corn is an interesting combination, don't you think?

Getting There & Away

Bus 12 travels between the Poprad city centre and **Poprad-Tatry International airport** (☎ 7763 875;

www.airport-poprad.sk; Na Letisko 100), 5km west of the centre. The only flights that use this airport are the ones to and from London (see p928).

Intercity (IC) or Eurocity (EC) trains are the quickest way to get in and out of Poprad; four a day run to Bratislava (420Sk, 4¼ hours) and Košice (154Sk, 1¼ hours). For more on the electric trains that traverse the 13km or so to the High Tatras resorts, see p805.

To cities in Western and Central Slovakia, trains are generally better than buses (quicker, comparable cost). For more on transferring to the High Tatras resorts by bus, see p805. To get to Poland, you can take a bus from Poprad to Tatranska Javorina (58Sk, 1¼ hours, four daily), near the border at Lysá Poľana. Walk across to the buses waiting to take you to Zakopane.

KEŽMAROK

☎ 052 / pop 12,740

Snuggled beneath the broody peaks of the High Tatras, Kežmarok may not seem dramatic, but it is a truly pleasant place. The numerous architecturally distinct churches, the pocket-sized old town square with resident castle, all the ice-cream shops...

Ever since it was colonised by Germans back in the 13th century, Kežmarok has been treading a subtly different path from the rest of the country. The residents even declared themselves an independent republic, albeit infinitesimally, in 1918. Though the Germanic settlers moved on, they left behind something of their character on the town buildings. On the second weekend in July, the **European Folk Craft Market** attracts artisans from all across the country to demonstrate and sell their wares. Plenty of food and drink to be had then too.

Orientation & Information

Kežmarok is 14km east of Tatranská Lomnica and 16km northeast of Poprad – easy day-tripping distances. The bus and train stations are side by side, northwest of the old town, just across the Poprad River, via Dr Alexandra, to the main square, Hlavné nám.

The extremely useful **Kežmarok Information Agency** (☎ 4524 047; 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 Tatras too. One of the best bookstore map selections in the country is at **Alter Ego** (☎ 4525 432; Hlavné nám 3).

Sights

The huge red-and-green, 1894 pseudo-Moorish **New Evangelical Church** (nr Toporcerova & Hviezdoslavova; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-4pm May-Sep) dominates the south end of town. Next door, the **Old Wooden Evangelical Church** (☎ 10am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Sat May-Sep) was built in 1717 without a single nail and has an amazing interior of carved and painted wood. A 30Sk ticket covers entry to both.

The wooden altars in the 15th-century Gothic **Basilica of the Holy Cross** (Bazilika sv Kríža; Nám Požárnikov; donation 10Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep) were supposedly carved by students of Master Pavol of Levoča. Small, mansionlike **Kežmarok Castle** (☎ 4522 618; Hradné nám 45; adult/student 60/30Sk; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep) dates back to the 15th century and is now a museum with local history, archaeology and period furniture exhibits. Entry from October to April is with a tour that leaves on the hour from 8am to 3pm, Monday to Friday.

Sleeping & Eating

Penzión U Jakuba (☎ 4526 314; www.penzioujakuba.sk; Starý trh 39; d 880-1190Sk) An authentic, folksy Slovakness pervades this *penzión* and restaurant. Take a seat at a big wooden bench table near the open fire and be waited on by servers in area folk dress. Remember to call a day ahead if you want a whole roast pig. Rooms are simply dressed in pine.

Sidewalk cafés abound in the pedestrian area around Hlavné nám. There are no fewer than six *cukráreň* serving pastries and ice cream, or you could stop at the tables on the square run by **Pizza Classica** (☎ 4523 693; nr Hviezdoslavova & Hlavné nám; pizzas 90-170Sk).

Getting There & Away

Buses are the way to get around locally – they run hourly to/from Poprad (22Sk, 30 minutes) and every 1½ hours to/from Tatranská Lomnica (22Sk, 30 minutes). From Monday to Friday, there are three buses a day to Červený Kláštor (58Sk, 1¼ hours, only one on Saturday and Sunday).

PIENINY NATIONAL PARK

☎ 052

Gently bubbling water flows between impressive 500m-tall sheer cliffs: the 21 sq km **Pieniny National Park** (Pieninský Národný Park) was created to protect the 9km **Dunajec Gorge**. The park combines with a similar one on the

Polish side of the river and extends between the Slovak village of Červený Kláštor and Szczawnica, Poland. River rafting is the main attraction here, but there are also hiking trails and an ancient monastery. Pick up VKÚ's 1:25,000 *Pieninský Národný Park* map (sheet No 7) for detailed exploring.

At the mouth of the gorge is the fortified **Red Monastery** (Červený Kláštor; ☎ 4822 955; 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 collection of statuary and old prints of the area. Two kilometres west of the monastery is a small **information centre** (☎ 4822 122; Rte 543; www.pieniny.sk; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Oct).

There are two departure points along Rte 243 for a **river float trip** (adult/child 250/100Sk; ☎ daylight May-Oct) on a *plň* (shallow, flat-bottom wood rafts): one opposite the monastery, and another 1km upriver west of the village. A raft may wait to set out until it has as many passengers as possible (capacity 12). Don't be expecting white-water thrills – the Dunajec is a rather sedate 1½-hour experience terminating near the Slovak village of Lesnica.

To return to Červený Kláštor you can hike back the way you came, roughly southwest, along the river-side trail through the gorge, in a little over an hour. It's an interesting walk even if you don't do water. Or, walk 500m southeast of the river to Chata Pieniny in Lesnica. The hiker's lodge rents out bicycles (one way 100Sk) and runs a shuttle bus (50Sk) to take you the 22km over-mountain distance by road. Follow the yellow trail north of Lesnica (1.5km) and you reach a pedestrian border crossing into Poland for tourists, open from 9am to 4pm from May to October.

Sleeping & Eating

Cheap and cheerful **Chata Pieniny** (☎ 4397 530; www.chatapieniny.sk; Lesnica; dm 280Sk) is an old log lodge with two- to six-bed rooms at the terminus of the raft trip. There's a restaurant, a minimarket and bike rental available. It's located 500m south of the river landing terminus, at the far north end of Lesnica.

Copious *privaty* and *zimmer frei* ('private', or 'free' room in Slovak and German respectively) and *pension* signs line the one long road in Červený Kláštor. The not-so-youthful **Hotel Pľtník** (☎ 4822 525; www.hotelpltnik.sk; s/d 720/870Sk; ☎) also has camping (per person/tent 60/50Sk) in the big river-front field next door.

Food stalls stand between the monastery and the river launch.

Getting There & Away

Getting here is a challenge unless you have a car. Buses run to Červený Kláštor from Poprad (89Sk, 1l hours) three times a day Monday to Saturday and once on Sunday. From Košice (152Sk, 3" hours) there's one direct afternoon bus, otherwise you have to change in Stará Lubovňa (120Sk, 2" hours, five daily) for the connecting service to Červený Kláštor (40Sk, 35 minutes, six daily).

LEVOČA

☎ 053 / pop 14,604

Medieval walls stand stolid and defensive, protecting the age-old centre from onslaught. Thank goodness no hyper-mart developer is getting in here. Levoča is one of the few Slovak cities to have her 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 Jacob.

In the 13th century the king of Hungary invited Saxon Germans to colonise the eastern frontiers of his kingdom as a protection against Tatar incursions. Levoča was one of the main towns comprising what came to be known as the Spiš region.

Orientation & Information

Levoča is on the main E50 motorway between Poprad (28km) and Košice (94km). The centre is 1km north of the train and bus stations. Both banks and post are on the small main square, Nám Majstra Pavla.

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

Tourist information office (☎ 4513 763; www.levoča.sk; Nám Majstra Pavla 58; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr) Ask staff for the free photocopied map they keep under the counter if you want one.

Sights

The spindles-and-spires **Church of St Jacob** (Chrám sv Jakuba; ☎ 4512 347; www.chramsvojakuba.sk; adult/student 50/30Sk; ☎ 11.30am, 1, 2, 3 & 4pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, 11am-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat Jun-Aug), built in the 14th and 15th centuries, elevates your spirit with its soaring arches, precious art and rare furnishings. Everyone comes to see the splen-

did golden Gothic altar (1517) created by Master Pavol of Levoča. On it he carved and painted representations of the Last Supper and the Madonna and Child. (This Madonna's face appears on the 100Sk banknote.) Buy tickets at the **cashier** (kasa; ☎ 11am-5pm) inside the **Municipal Weights House** across the street from the north door. Once inside, drop a 5Sk coin in the machine at the back for a recorded description in English.

The square is choc-a-bloc with Gothic and Renaissance eye candy. No 20 is the **Master Pavol Museum** (☎ 4513 496; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm) dedicated to the city's most celebrated son. The 15th-century **town hall** (*radnica*) houses a lacklustre **Spiš Museum** (☎ 4512 449; adult/student 50/20Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm). The adjacent 16th-century **cape of shame** is for naughty boys and girls.

From town you can see the **Church of Mariánska hora**, 2km north, where the largest Catholic pilgrimage in Slovakia takes place in early July.

Sleeping

Recreačné Zariadenie (☎ 4512 705; www.rz-levoča.web2001.cz; Levočská Dolina; per person/tent 85/70Sk, 2-bed hut 380Sk; P) A good camping option, Recreačné Zariadenie is 5km northwest of the centre and bikes can be rented. Relax in the sauna after all that pedalling.

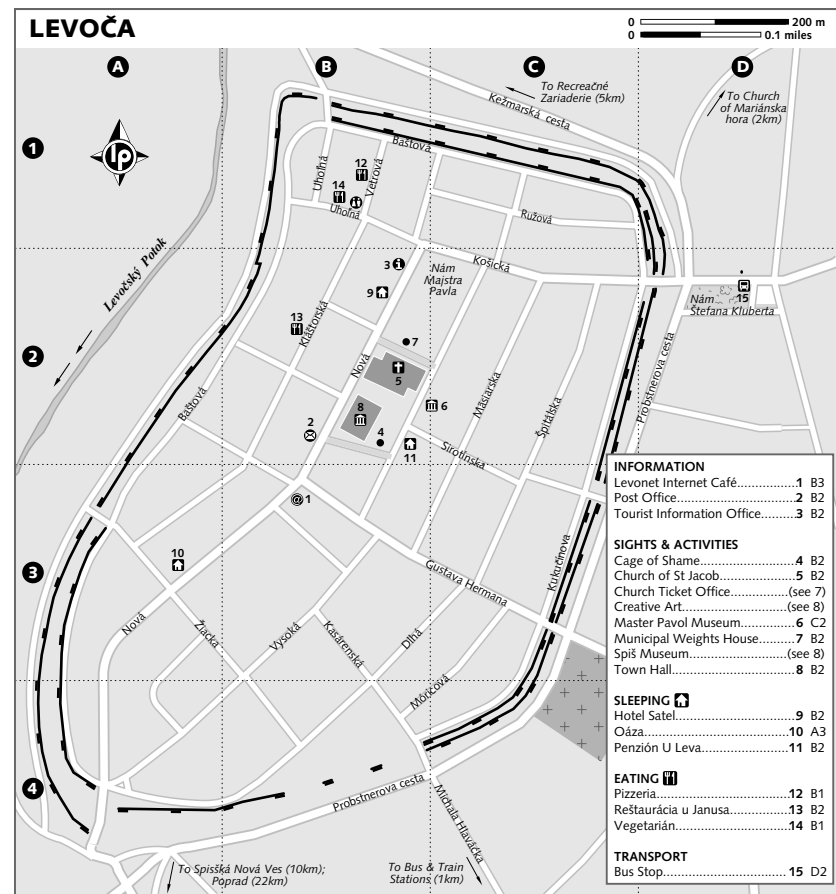
Oáza (☎ 4514 511; www.ubytovanieoaza.sk; Nová 65; per person 300Sk) Two-bed rooms with shared bathroom, and four-bed rooms with bathroom and kitchen, are just what the budget doctor ordered. There's a big garden (with lawn, caged chickens and vegetables) between the two parts of the house.

On the main square, choose between the self-catering friendly apartments (with a new lift) at **Penzión U Leva** (☎ 4502 311; www.uleva.sk; Nám Majstra Pavla 24; s/d 1100/2000Sk; P) or the swishy luxury of **Hotel Satel** (☎ 4512 943; www.hotelsatel.com; Nám Majstra Pavla 55; s/d 1765/2730Sk; P) in a 14th-century building.

Eating

Vegetarián (☎ 4514 576; Uhoľná 137; mains 45-90Sk; ☎ 10am-3.15pm Mon-Fri) Wholesome smells and a no-fuss menu make this basic veggie haunt a hit.

Reštaurácia u Janusa (☎ 4514 592; Kláštorská 22; mains 70-120Sk) Choose from all the fried pork favourites at this, the locals' pick for best Slovak food.



Pizzeria (☎ 0905396528; Vetrová 4; pizzas 100-160Sk) For such a smoky, nameless place, the pizza's really not bad.

Getting There & Away

Bus travel is pretty practical in the area as there are frequent services to Spišské Podhradie (22Sk, 20 minutes, 11 daily) and to Poprad (40Sk, 30 minutes, 21 daily), which has onward train connections. Two to five buses a day wend their way to/from Košice (128Sk, two hours). Buses also run to Spišská Nová Ves (18Sk, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes), where you can switch to the main Bratislava to Košice train line. The local bus stop at Nám Štefana Kluberta is a little closer to town than the station, and most routes stop there.

SPIŠSKÉ PODHRADIE

☎ 053
Slovakia's most grandiose castle sits above a bedraggled little town (big village). Not much reason to come here except for Spiš Castle and the Spiš Chapter ecclesiastical settlement on either side.

Sights

From the motorway you catch glimpses of eerie outlines and stony ruins crowning the ridge on the eastern side of Spišské Podhradie. Can it really be that big? Indeed, **Spiš Castle** (Spišský hrad; ☎ 4541 336; www.spiskyhrad.com in Slovak; adult/student 100/60Sk; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Oct, by appointment Nov-Apr), among the largest in Eastern Europe, spreads over more than

4 hectares. In 1993 it was added to Unesco's World Heritage list. If the ruins are this impressive, imagine what the fortress once was.

Chronicles first mention Spiš Castle in 1209, and the central residential tower, at the highest elevation, is thought to date from that time. From here defenders are said to have repulsed the Tatars in 1241. Rulers and noble families kept adding to it during the 15th and 16th centuries. But by 1780 the site had already lost its military significance and was largely deserted after much of it was destroyed in a fire that year. Few structures remain whole, 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 to see the torture devices the human mind has thought up.

The castle is a good hike up from the train station, 1km south of Spišské Podhradie's bus stop. Cross at the tracks near the station and follow the yellow markers up to the castle. If you're driving or cycling, the access road is off the Prešov highway east of town.

A kilometre west of Spišské Podhradie sits the still active **Spiš Chapter** (Spišská Kapitula), a 13th-century Catholic complex encircled by a 16th-century wall. Charming Gothic houses line the single street running between the two medieval gates. Buy tickets from the **information office** (☎ 0907388411; adult/student 20/10Sk; ☎ 11.15am-2.45pm), where you can also pick up a guide. At the upper end is the magnificent **St Martin's Cathedral**, built in 1273, with twin Romanesque towers and a Gothic sanctuary. Inside are several trifold painted Gothic

altars from the 15th century that are quite impressive. On either side of the cathedral are the **seminary** and the Renaissance **bishop's palace** (1652).

Sleeping & Eating

Penzión Podzámok (☎ 4541 755; www.penzionpodzamok.sk; Podzámková 28, Spišské Podhradie; s/d with shared bathroom 300/650Sk; 📞) A view of the castle in your own backyard. Three family houses have been cobbled together to create a 42-bed guesthouse with meals available. Podzámok is at the end of the street next to the bridge, halfway between the Spiš Chapter and Castle.

Spišsky Salaš (☎ 4541 202; www.spisskysalas.sk; Levočská cesta 11; s/d 420/800Sk; 📞) What rustic fun! Dig into a lamb stew in the restaurant and then settle down for the night in a simple wood-panelled room. The 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 and Spišské Vlachy (12Sk, 10 minutes, eight daily), a station on the main line from Poprad to Košice. Relatively frequent buses run to/from Levoča (22Sk, 20 minutes, 11 daily) and Poprad (55Sk, 50 minutes, eight daily). If you're travelling to Spiš Chapter by bus from Levoča, you can get off one stop before the main town Spišské Podhradie, at Kapitula.

TOP FIVE FORTRESSES

Castles and ruins abound in Slovakia. Pick up a national map, look for the ruin symbols and start hiking. You may find only a hearth, or you may find a room's outlines, but you're sure to have a good work-out and great views once you reach the crest. Here are the top-five formal castle sights to tour:

- This was the big one; the ruins of **Spiš Castle** (p809) spread out for what seems like forever.
- Walt Disney couldn't have invented a dreamier sight than **Bojnice Castle** (p798).
- **Devín Castle** (p795) has stood at the intersection of Slovakia, Austria and Hungary for a millennium.
- Be led by torch light by a medieval guide on a night tour of **Trenčín Castle** (p796)
- Climb up the tower of **Bratislava Castle** (p789) and you're at the highest vantage point in the old town.

SLOVENSKÝ RAJ

☎ 053

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. 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, that's after you've scrambled horizontally across a log ladder to cross the stream down below. Pure exhilaration.

Orientation & Information

The nearest town of any size is the unattractive but almost unavoidable Spišská Nová Ves, 23km southeast of Poprad. The main trailheads on the northern edge of the national park are at Čingov, 5km west of Spišská Nová Ves and Podlesok, 1km southwest of Hrabušice. There are lodgings and eateries near northern trailheads, but for full town services, go into Spišská Nová Ves or Hrabušice. Dedinky, at the south end of the park, is a regular village with pub, supermarket, a lake and houses. Before you go trekking, make sure to buy VKÚ's 1:25,000 *Slovenský raj* hiking map (No 4), available at many tourist offices and bookshops countrywide.

EMERGENCY

Mountain Rescue Service (Horská Služba; emergency ☎ 183 00)

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Klub (☎ 4414 402; Letná 4, Spišská Nová Ves; per hr 50Sk; ☎ 9am-9pm)

Ascona Café (Hlavná 99, Hrabušice; per hr 25Sk; ☎ 1pm-midnight Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat)

MONEY

It's best to procure money before you get to the park unless you're planning to stop in Spišská Nová Ves, where there's an ATM at the train station and at banks on the main square.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Your lodging place is usually your best source of information; orientation maps are posted near trailheads. **Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 4428 292; www.slovenskyraj.sk; Letná 49, Spišská Nová Ves; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat Jun-Sep, 8am-

4.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) Hit-or-miss help with area accommodation and info.

Tourist information (☎ 4299 854; Hlavná, Hrabušice; ☎ 8am-6pm Jul & Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun) Small, summertime office.

Sights & Activities

Trails that include a one-way *roklina* (gorge) take at least a half day; the shortest, **Zejmarska' Gorge** hike on a blue trail, starts at Biele Vody (25 minutes northeast of Dedinky on the red trail). The physically fit can run, clamber and climb up in 50 minutes; others huff and puff up in 90 minutes. To get back, you can follow the green trail down to Dedinky, or there's a **chairlift** (adult/student 30/15Sk; ☎ 9am-5pm) that, if it's working, goes on the hour.

From Čingov a green trail leads up the **Hornád River Gorge** to **Letanovský mlyn** (1½ hours), from there the blue trail continues along the river to the base of the green, one-way, technically aided **Kláštorský Gorge** hike (one hour). At **Kláštorský chata** (☎ 4493 307; cabins per person 250Sk), there's a restaurant and small cabins (book ahead to make sure you have a place). From Kláštorský you can follow another green trail back along the ridge towards Čingov. Allow at least six hours for the circuit, lunch at Kláštorský included.

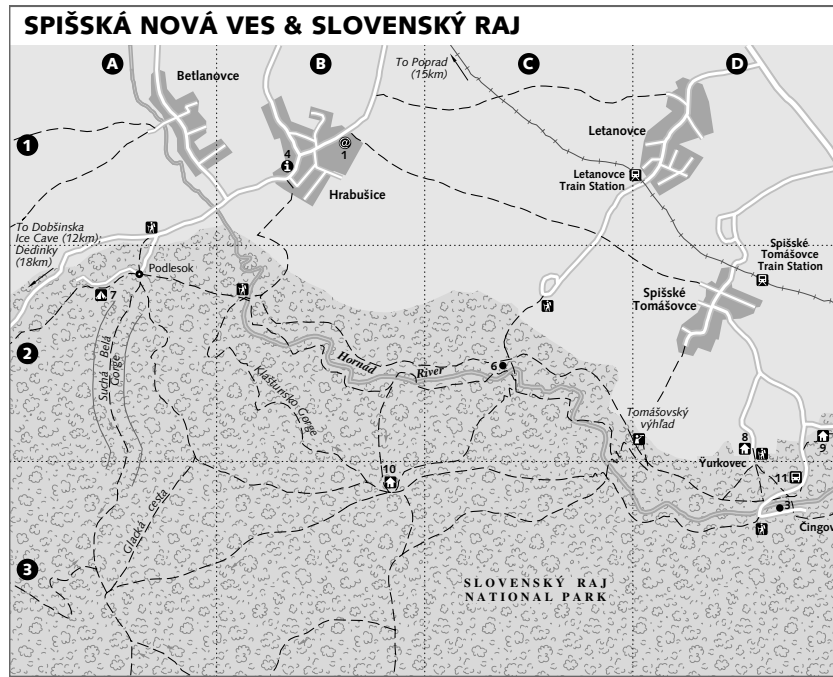
From Podlesok, an excellent day's hike heads up the **Suchá Belá Gorge** (with several steep ladders), then east to Kláštorský on a yellow then red trail. From here, take the blue trail down to the Hornád River, then follow the river gorge upstream to return to Podlesok. Six to seven hours.

Six kilometres west of Dedinky is **Dobšinská Ice Cave** (Dobšinská ľadová Jaskyňa; ☎ 7881 470; adult/student 150/130Sk; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 9.30am-2pm Tue-Sun May & Sep). The frozen formations are most dazzling in May, before they start to melt. Tours leave every hour or so.

Sleeping & Eating

Surrounding towns also have private rooms and pensions (a lot of which are listed at www.slovenskyraj.sk); those below are closer to the trails. All the park's lodgings have restaurants. From May to September there are food stands near the Podlesok trailhead parking lot; a Bila supermarket sits next to the bus station in Spišská Nová Ves.

Autocamp Podlesok (☎ 4299 165; slovajbela@stonline.sk; Podlesok; per person/tent 60/60Sk, huts per person 230Sk; 📞) 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. It's a 2km walk from Hrabušice.

Autocamping Tatran (☎ 4297 105; www.durkovec.sk; per person/tent 80/60Sk, dm 220Sk, 2-person hut with shared bathroom 190Sk; **P**) Tents crowd together in the pasture surrounded by tiny huts, a big dormitory and multiroom rental houses with satellite TV (2500Sk). Tromp 2km west of the Čingov bus stop.

Hotel Flora (☎ 4491 129; www.hotelfloraslovenskyraj.sk; Čingov; s/d 750/1200Sk; **P**) A renovation made the lobby and restaurant of this mountain hotel fabulous: stone fireplace, leather chairs, big windows. Food's good too. Pity the rooms didn't come along for the ride. It's 1km before the village.

Penzión Pastierňa (☎ 058-798 1175; Dedinky 42; per person from 300Sk; **P**) Small wooden guesthouse at the edge of Dedinky, near the forest and green trailhead.

Getting There & Around

You may want to consider springing for a car in Košice; connections aren't great. A few buses run directly from Poprad to Dedinky

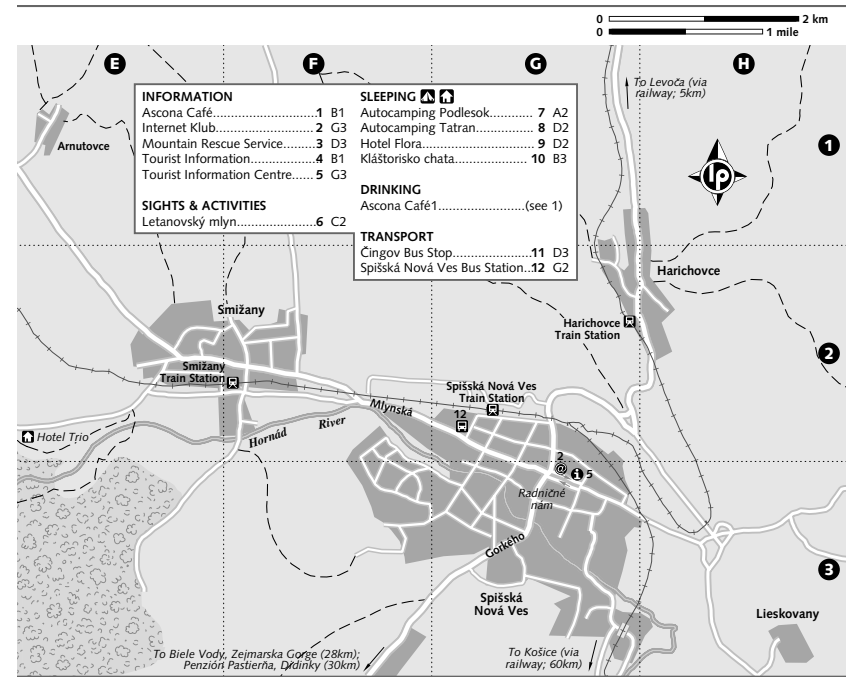
(53Sk, 1¼ hours, three daily) and to Hrabušice (25Sk, 40 minutes, five on weekdays, one on weekends). Other than that, Spišska Nová Ves is the main transfer point for the Slovenský raj region; most buses go in the morning. There's a bus service to/from Poprad (40Sk, 45 minutes, eight daily), Levoča (18Sk, 20 minutes, every half hour) and Košice (117Sk, two to three hours, two daily).

From Spišska Nová Ves, two buses a day run to Hrabušice (22Sk, 35 minutes), two to the trailheads of Čingov (10Sk, 12 minutes) and three to Dedinky (53Sk, one hour).

BARDEJOV

☎ 054 / pop 33,400

All steep roofs and flat fronts, each main-square Gothic-Renaissance burgher's house is set apart by its particular pastel hue and intricate paint-and-plaster details. It may as well be the 15th century, this town has been so enthusiastically well preserved (there's always some scaffolding signalling upkeep somewhere). Unesco thought so too, adding it to the World Heritage list in 2000. Today the quiet square is the tourist draw, but there's



also an excellent icon museum that sheds light on this region's eastern-facing religion. A couple of kilometres north of town in Bardejovské Kúpele there's a hot spring spa inviting you to take a cure, and an open-air village museum waiting to be explored. Wooden churches in the area reflect the Carpatho-Rusyn heritage that the area shares with neighbouring parts of the Ukraine and Poland.

History

Bardejov received its royal charter in 1376, and grew rich on trade between Poland and Russia. After an abortive 17th-century revolt against the Habsburgs, Bardejov's fortunes declined. In late 1944 heavy WWII fighting took place at the Dukla Pass on the Polish border, 54km northeast of Bardejov, near Svidník (preserved WWII Soviet and German tanks still sit on the roadside and there's a military museum).

Orientation

The main square, Radničné nám, is a 600m walk southwest of the bus and train station. Some old town walls still encircle the city, enter through the gate off Slovenská at Baštová.

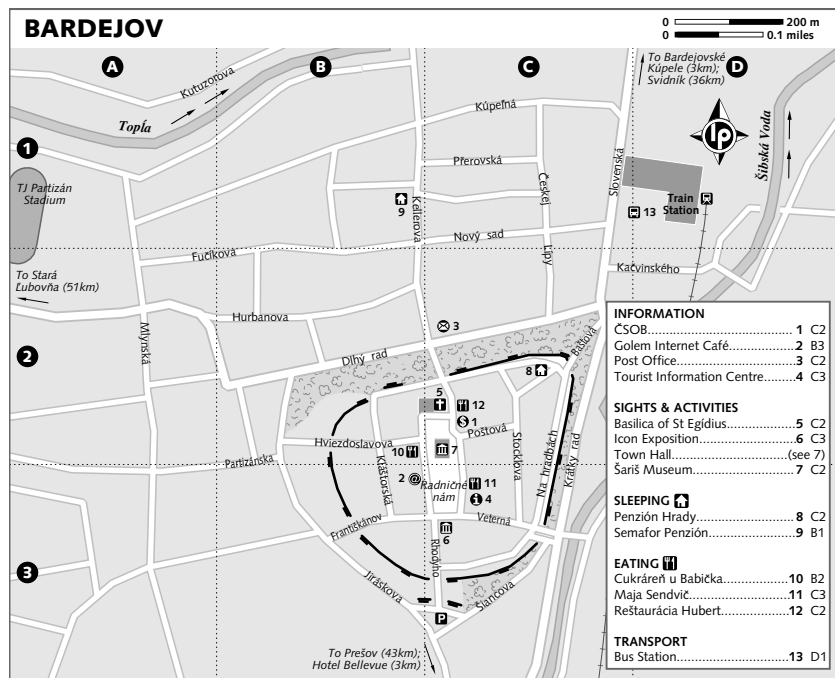
Information

ČSOB (Radničné nám 7) Bank and ATM.
Golem Internet Café (Radničné nám 25; per hr 25Sk; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, 1-11pm Sat & Sun)
Main post office (Dlhý rad 14)
Tourist information centre (☎ 4744 003; www.e-bardejov.sk; Radničné nám 21; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun May-Sep) Info, souvenirs and guide service.

Sights

There are two branches of the **Šariš Museum** (☎ 4724 966; www.muzeumbardejov.sk; adult/student 40/20Sk; ☎ 8am-noon & 12.30-4pm Tue-Sun) Housing altarpieces and a historical collection, the **town hall** (*radnica*) was built in 1509 and was the first Renaissance building in Slovakia. More than 130 dazzling icons from the 16th to 19th century make up the **Icon Exposition** (Expozícia ikony; Radničné nám 27). Originally they decorated Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches east of here.

The interior of 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 Gothic altarpieces, built from 1460 to 1510.



Sleeping & Eating

Ask at the information office about private rooms (from 300Sk a night).

Penzión Hradý (☎ 0903211865; www.penzionivana.sk; Stocklova 8; s/d/tr 495/750/880Sk; 📍) Want your hair cut? There's a salon across the hall in this busy building. Basic rooms, basic prices.

Penzión Semafor (☎ 0905830984; www.penzionsemafor.sk; Kellera 13; s/d 700/900Sk, ste 800/1100Sk; 📍) If the large, bright doubles are good, the 'apartments' (bigger rooms) are even better. All share a communal kitchen in this family-run guesthouse.

Hotel Bellevue (☎ 4728 404; www.bellevuehotel.sk; Mihalov 2503; s/d 2600/1900Sk; 📍) This hotel on a hill is as close as the town comes to swank. From here you have a view from above, cherrywood beds, a pool and a full-service restaurant. It's 3km south of the city; take bus 8 from the train station.

Reštaurácia Hubert (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.

On the main square **Cukráreň u Babička** (Radničné nám 49; cakes 30-100Sk), back in a Renais-

sance arcade, serves pastries and cakes like your Slovak grandma used to make, and **Maja Sendvič** (☎ 091941064; Radničné nám 15; sandwiches 40-50Sk; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri, 3-11pm Sat & Sun) has baguette sandwiches to go.

Getting There & Away

Bus run between Bardejov and Košice (100Sk, 1¼ hours, eight daily) and to/from Poprad (135Sk, 2½ hours, 12 daily).

AROUND BARDEJOV

Three short kilometres to the north, with frequent local bus connections, is the parklike spa town of **Bardejovské Kúpele**. If you want to book a service (mineral bath 200Sk, 15-minute massage 170Sk), you have to go in person to the **Spa House** (Kúpeľny dom; ☎ 4774 225; 🕒 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Sat) at the top of the main pedestrian street. Across the way is the **Museum of Folk Architecture** (Múzeum Ľudovej Architektúry; ☎ 4722 070; adult/student 40/20Sk; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun, to 3pm Oct-Apr). One of the nail-less wooden churches is among the many traditional buildings moved to this *skansen* (open-air village museum). Peer into the simple dwellings and

see how rural folk lived. If you have a car, park in the lot by the bus station at the base of the village and walk up; the whole place is pedestrian-only.

Buy a *Wooden Churches Around Bardejov* booklet at the tourist information centre (p813) in Bardejov if you want to explore more of the area's Eastern vernacular architecture.

KOŠICE

☎ 055 / pop 235,006

Wander among the midday work crowd down the long town square, crane your neck to admire the massive Cathedral of St Elizabeth then head underground to explore the ancient city's archaeology. Come evening, gather with the rest of Košice on the benches near the musical fountain. With so many people out and about, Slovakia's second city has a real sense of cohesion and community that's missing in the capital. You get the feeling if you sat down for a beer at one of the many street festivals, you might actually make friends. Old town buildings range from 12th-century Gothic to 20th-century Art Nouveau. Why not spend a day or two and check it out?

History

Košice received its city coat of arms in 1369 and for many years was the eastern stronghold of the Hungarian Kingdom. Transylvanian prince Ferenc Rákóczi II had his headquarters at Košice during the Hungarian War of Independence against the Habsburgs (1703-11). On 5 April 1945 the Košice Government Program – which made communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia a virtual certainty – was announced here. Today US Steel girders form the backbone of the city; you can't miss the company's influence – from the flare stacks to the brand new ice-hockey stadium it sponsored.

Orientation

The adjacent bus and train stations are just east of the old town. A five-minute walk along Mlynská brings you into Hlavná, which broadens to accommodate the squares of *Nám Slobody* and *Hlavné nám*.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Art Forum (☎ 6232 677; Mlynská 6) Coffee-table pictorials and fiction in English, some even by Slovak authors.

BP Press (Hlavná 102; 🕒 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun) Foreign magazines and newspapers.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 159; Pribinova 6)

INTERNET ACCESS

City Information Centre (☎ 6258 888; Hlavná 59; per hr 30Sk; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Net Club (Hlavná 9; per hr 50Sk; 🕒 9am-10pm) Fast connections.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Fakultná Nemocnica I Pasteura (☎ 6153 111; Rastislavova 45) Hospital.

MONEY

Ľudová Banka (Mlynská 29) ATM and exchange; between the centre and transport stations.

POST

Main post office (Poštová 18)

TOURIST INFORMATION

The train station and airport also have information stands.

Municipal Information Centre (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 and personal, with a vibrant staff and tonnes of knick-knacks for sale.
City Information Centre (☎ 6258 888; www.kosice.sk; Hlavná 59; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Large and busy; books galore. Runs information stands at the airport and train station with the same hours.

Sights

The dark and brooding 14th-century **Cathedral of St Elizabeth** (Dóm sv Alžbety; ☎ 0908667093; adult/student 70/35Sk; 🕒 1-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) wins the prize for sight most likely to grace your Košice postcard home. You can't miss Europe's easternmost Gothic cathedral dominating the square. Below the church a **crypt** contains the tomb of Duke Ferenc Rákóczi, who was exiled to Turkey after the failed 18th-century Hungarian revolt against Austria. Don't forget to climb the church's **tower** for city views. To the south of the cathedral is the 14th-century **St Michael's Chapel** (adult/student 30/15Sk; 🕒 1-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

Get lost in the mazelike passages and tunnels of the **archaeological excavations** (☎ 6228 393; adult/child 25/10Sk; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), discovered

DJs spin house most nights at both at the **Jazz Club** (☎ 6224 237; Kováčska 39; 🕒 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11am-2am Fri, 4pm-2am Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun) and at the **Piano Café** (☎ 0915517339; Hlavná 92; 🕒 10am-midnight Mon-Thu, 10am-1am Fri, 3pm-1am Sat, 3pm-midnight Sun). But each occasionally has live jazz.

Shopping

Wander onto the alleylike Hrnčiarska for some truly unique shopping. Along this 'craftsman' street there's a potter's shop, an iron-works master, a herbalist and a gemstone artist, among others.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Košice International airport (KSC; ☎ 6221 093; www.airportkosice.sk) is about 6km southwest of the centre. **Sky Europe** (☎ reservations 02-4850 4850; www.skyeurope.com) has two or three daily flights to/from Bratislava (one hour) that may set you back as little as 500Sk oneway with tax, if you book ahead. **Czech Airlines** (CSA; ☎ 6782 490; www.czechairlines.com) has three daily flights to and from Prague. For more on getting to Košice from outside Eastern Europe see (p928)

BUS

Buses wend their way to/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 Ukraine (140Sk, 2½ hours) at least once a day (twice from Tuesday to Sunday) and to Nowy Targ in Poland (180Sk, four hours) Thursday and Saturday. A bus goes from Košice to Miskolc (120Sk, two hours), in Hungary, on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

CAR

There are several big international chain car rental representatives at the airport, but **Alimex** (☎ 7290 100; www.alimex.sk; Košice International airport) is cheaper, especially if you're willing to drive around with adverts painted on the car (as little as 699Sk per day, unlimited kilometres).

TRAIN

Express trains run to/from Poprad (154Sk, 1¾ hours, up to 10 daily) and Žilina (316Sk, 2¾ hours, 14 daily). If you're commuting all the way to/from Bratislava, an IC or EC train (518Sk, 5½ hours, four daily) is your

best bet; otherwise you could crawl along for more than seven hours with no dining car. For domestic schedules visit www.zsr.sk.

A sleeper train leaves Košice every morning for Kyiv in Ukraine (913Sk, 22½ hours), stopping at Čop (193Sk, 2½ hours), 14km from Uzhhorod. Two trains (one overnight) a day head for Prague in the Czech Republic (1140Sk, 11 hours), two for Budapest in Hungary (967Sk, four hours) and three to Kraków in Poland (844Sk, 6½ hours).

Getting Around

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

SLOVAKIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

For every season there is a price: May to September is considered tourist season, but prices top out around the Christmas/New Year and Easter holidays. From October to April, rates drop dramatically (10% to 50%). We quote tourist season prices. Reviews in this chapter are ordered according to price. There's a tourist tax of 30Sk.

For more lodging options in Bratislava, see www.lonelyplanet.com. Note that non-smoking rooms are not yet common outside the capital.

Camping

Most camping grounds open from May to September and are often accessible on public transport. Many have a restaurant and assorted cheap cabins. Wild camping is generally prohibited in national parks.

Hostels

Outside Bratislava there are no backpacker-style hostels in Slovakia. Student dormitories throughout the country open to tourists in July and August. If you're looking for cheap sleeps outside those months, *ubytovňa* is the word to know. These are hostels for workers (in cities) or Slovak tourists (near natural attractions) that usually have basic, no-nonsense shared-bathroom singles and doubles or bunks.

Private Rooms, Pensions & Hotels

Tourist towns usually have private rooms for rent; look for signs reading 'privát' or 'zimmer frei' (from 1100Sk in Bratislava, 300Sk elsewhere). Information offices may have lists of renters.

Pensions are family-run B&Bs, or bigger inns, that have fewer services but more character than hotels. Outside the capital, hotels are often still institutional, communist leftovers. At both, breakfast is usually either included in the rate or can be added on for 80Sk to 200Sk.

ACTIVITIES

Slovakia is one of Eastern Europe's best areas for hiking: see the Malá Fatra (p798), High Tatras (p801) and Slovenský raj (p811). There's also excellent rock climbing and mountain biking in the High Tatras. See the Starý Smokovec section (p803).

The country has some of Europe's cheapest ski resorts. The season runs from December to April in the High Tatras and Malá Fatra. Ski hire starts at 299Sk per day.

BUSINESS HOURS

Restaurants nationwide are generally open from 10am to 10pm. Stand-alone shops open around 9am and close at 5pm or 6pm weekdays and at noon on Saturday. The local *potraviny* (supermarket) hours are from 6.30am or 7am until 5pm or 6pm Monday to Friday and from 7am to noon on Saturday. Big-name chain grocery and department stores (Tesco, Billa etc) have longer hours, typically until 9pm for downtown branches and 24 hours for suburban hyper-markets.

Bank hours are open from about 8am to 5pm Monday to Thursday, and until 4pm Friday. Post offices work from about 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday and until 11am Saturday.

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

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime is low compared with the West, but pickpocketing does happen. Just be aware. Never leave anything on the seat of an unattended vehicle, even a locked one; apparently that's just advertising that you don't want it any more.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Slovakia is behind many EU countries in terms of facilities for the disabled. Few hotels and restaurants have ramps or barrier-free rooms.

Slovak Union for the Disabled (Slovenský zväz telesne postihnutých; ☎ 02-6381 4478; www.sztp.sk) is fighting to change the status quo.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Slovak Embassies & Consulates
Australia (☎ 02 6290 1516; www.slovakemb-aust.org; 47 Culgoa Circuit, O'Malley, Canberra, ACT 2606)
Austria (☎ 01-318 905 5200; www.vienna.mfa.sk; Armbrustergasse 24, 1-1190 Wien)
Canada (☎ 613-749 4442; www.ottawa.mfa.sk; 50 Rideau Terrace, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 2A1)
Czech Republic (☎ 233 113 051; www.praha.mfa.sk; Pod Hradbami 1, 160 00 Praha 6)
France (☎ 01-44 14 56 00; www.amb-slovaquie.fr; 125 Rue de Ranelagh, 75016 Paris)
Germany (☎ 030-8892 6 200; www.botschaft-slowakei.de; Fredrichstrasse 60, Berlin 10707)
Hungary (☎ 01-460 9010; www.budapest.mfa.sk; Stefánia út 22-24, H-1143 Budapest XIV)
Ireland (☎ 01-660 0012; www.dublin.mfa.sk; 20 Clyde Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)
UK (☎ 020-7313 6470; www.slovakembassy.co.uk; 25 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QY)
USA (☎ 202-237 1054; www.slovakembassy-us.org; 3523 International Court NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Slovakia

Australia and New Zealand do not have embassies in Slovakia; the nearest are in Vienna and Berlin respectively. The following are all in Bratislava (area code ☎ 02).

Austria (Map p790; ☎ 5443 1443; www.embassy.austria.sk/www.mzv.cz/bratislava/; Ventúrska 10)
Czech Republic (Map p790; ☎ 5920 3303; Hviezdoslavovo nám 8)
France (Map p790; ☎ 5934 7111; www.france.sk; Hlavné nám 7)
Germany (Map p790; ☎ 5920 4400; www.germanembassy.sk; Hviezdoslavovo nám 10)
Ireland (Map p790; ☎ 5930 9611; bratislava@iveagh.irigov.ie; Carlton Savoy Bldg, Mostová 2)
Poland (Map p787; ☎ 5441 3174; Hummelova 4)
UK (Map p790; ☎ 5998 2000; www.polskevelys.lanectvo.sk; Panská 16)
USA (Map p790; ☎ 5443 0861; www.britishembassy.sk; www.usembassy.sk; Hviezdoslavovo nám 4)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

During summer months folk festivals take place all over Slovakia. In late June or early

July folk dancers and musicians from all over Slovakia gather at the biggest, the **Východná Folklore Festival** (www.obec-vychodna.sk in Slovak), 32km west of Poprad. The two-week **Bratislava Music Festival** (Bratislavské hudobné slávnosti; ☎ 02-5443 4546; www.bhsfestival.sk in Slovak) is held in late September to early October, and the **Bratislava Jazz Days** (Bratislavských jazzových dní; ☎ 02-5293 1572; www.bjd.sk) swings one weekend in September. The **Slovak Spectator** (www.slovak spectator.sk) newspaper lists events countrywide.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's & Independence Day 1 January

Three Kings Day 6 January

Good Friday & Easter Monday March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Victory over Fascism Day 8 May

Cyril & Methodius Day 5 July

SNP Day 29 August

Constitution Day 1 September

Our Lady of Sorrows Day 15 September

All Saints' Day 1 November

Christmas 24 to 26 December

INTERNET RESOURCES

The **Slovak Tourism Board's website** (www.slova kiaturism.sk) boasts about the country's attractions. **Slovakia Document Store** (www.panorama.sk) contains links to a wealth of Slovakia-related stuff, including books you can buy from abroad. **What's On Slovakia** (www.whatsonslovakia.com) lists events. You can check on the news from Slovakia at www.slovensko.com, get the low-down on exhibits nationwide at www.muzeum.sk and find yourself at the Slovak map site www.kompas.sk.

MONEY

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

Almost all banks have exchange desks and there are usually branches in or near a town's old town square. ATMs are quite common even in smaller towns, but shouldn't be relied upon in villages. Main banks include the **Všeobecná úverová banka** (VUB; General Credit Bank; www.vub.sk) and the **Slovenská sporiteľňa** (Slovak Savings Bank; www.slsp.sk).

In Bratislava, credit cards are widely accepted. Elsewhere, Visa and MasterCard are

accepted at most hotels, at some shops and at higher category restaurants (if you announce before requesting the bill that you plan to pay with credit).

If you stay in hostels, eat your meals in local pubs and take local transport, and you can expect to spend €25 to €45 a day in Bratislava (€20 to €30 elsewhere). Double this amount if you are looking to bed down in pensions and dine in smarter eateries. Some businesses quote prices in euros; prices in this chapter reflect the quotes of individual businesses.

POST

Poste restante sent to Bratislava (c/o Poste restante, 81000 Bratislava 1), can be picked up at the Main Post Office (p788) and will be kept for one month.

TELEPHONE

Phone Codes

Slovakia's country code is ☎ 421. When dialling from abroad, you need to drop the zero on city area codes and mobile phone numbers. To dial internationally from inside Slovakia, dial ☎ 00, the country code and the number.

Mobile phone numbers are often used for business and generally start with ☎ 09. If you are calling a Slovak mobile phone from abroad, drop the initial zero.

Phonecards

Most payphones require *telefónna karta* (telephone cards), which you can purchase from newsagents, for local calls. International phone cards, like **EZ Phone** (www.ezcard.sk; per min to UK & USA 25k) can also be bought there. Both of these cards are easy to mistake for mobile phone credit, so pay attention to what you're buying.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Association of Information Centres of Slovakia** (AICES; ☎ 16 186; www.aices.sk) is an extensive network of city information centres. There's no Slovakiawide information office; your best bet is to go online to the **Slovak Tourist Board** (www.slovakiatourism.sk).

EMERGENCY NUMBER

■ Ambulance, Fire, Police ☎ 112

VISAS

Slovakia joined the EU in May 2004. Citizens of other EU countries, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan and the US can enter visa-free for up to 90 days. South Africans do need a visa. For a full list, see www.mzv.sk, under Ministry and then Travel. If you do require a visa, it must be bought in advance – they are not issued on arrival.

TRANSPORT IN SLOVAKIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Bratislava's small airport receives flights from more than 20 cities across the Continent. **Czech Airlines** (CSA; ☎ 02-5296 1042; www.czechairlines.com) flies to Prague three times per day. **Slovak Airlines** (☎ 02-4870 4870; www.slovakairlines.sk) flies to Moscow weekly in conjunction with Aeroflot. **SkyEurope Airlines** (☎ 02-4850 4850; www.skyeurope.com) connects Bratislava a couple of times a week to Split, Zadar and Dubrovnik in Croatia, Sofia and Burgas in Bulgaria, and Bucharest in Romania.

For more on getting to Slovakia from outside Eastern Europe, see the Regional Directory chapter (p928).

Vienna's international airport is just 60km from Bratislava, and is served by a vast range of international flights. Buses connect to Bratislava hourly.

Land

BUS

Eurolines (☎ 02-5556 7349; www.eurolines.sk) runs buses between Bratislava and Prague (410Sk, four hours, three daily) and Bratislava and Budapest (570Sk, 3½ hours, one daily). Other international lines heading east do so from Košice (p818).

For more on getting to Bratislava by bus from further afield see the Regional Directory chapter (p930).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

As well as your vehicle's registration papers, you need a 'green card', which shows you are covered by at least third-party liability insurance. Your vehicle must display a nationality sticker and carry a first-aid kit and warning triangle.

TRAIN

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

River

For more on the boats that link Bratislava with Vienna and Budapest from April to September, see p794.

GETTING AROUND

Bicycle

Roads are often narrow and potholed and in towns cobblestones and tram tracks can prove dangerous. Theft's a problem, so a lock is a must. You can hire bikes in popular biking areas like the High Tatras. The cost of transporting a bike by rail is usually 10% of the train ticket.

Bus

National buses run by **Slovenská autobusová doprava** (SAD; www.eurolines.sk) are comparably priced to trains, but less convenient for the bigger cities in this chapter. Buses are quite useful in East Slovakia, however. To search for schedules, go to www.busy.sk; it's in Slovak, but is decipherable if you remember *odkiaľ* means 'from', *kam* means 'to', and *vyhľadať* means 'search' (click it a second time after the error-looking message comes up). When looking at bus schedules in terminals, beware of the footnotes (many fewer buses go on weekends). It's helpful to know that *premáva* means 'it operates' and *nepremáva* means 'it doesn't operate'.

Car & Motorcycle

DRIVING LICENCE

All foreign driving licences with photo ID are valid in Slovakia.

HIRE

Both Bratislava and Košice airports have several international and local car rental agencies.

ROAD RULES

In order to use Slovakia's motorways (denoted by green signs) all vehicles must have a motorway sticker (*nálepka*), which should be displayed in the windscreen. Rental cars

come with them. You can buy stickers at border crossings, petrol stations or Satur offices (100Sk for 15 days, 600Sk for a year, both for vehicles up to 1.5 tonnes).

Parking restrictions are eagerly enforced with bright orange tyre boots. Always buy a ticket, either from a machine, or from the attendant wandering around with a waist pack, and put it on your dashboard.

Local Transport

City buses and trams operate from around 4.30am to 11.30pm daily. Tickets are sold at

public transport offices and at newsstands. In Bratislava, some stops have ticket-vending machines. Validate tickets in the red machines on board or you could face a fine of up to 1400Sk.

Train

Slovak Republic Railways (Železnice Slovenskej Republiky or ŽSR; ☎ 18 188; www.zsr.sk) provides a cheap and efficient rail service. Most of the places covered in this chapter are on or near the main railway line between Bratislava and Košice.