

Bratislava



Thankfully, the fabled compact rabbit warren of old-town Bratislava retains its charm despite the times. Narrow pedestrian streets, pastel 18th-century buildings and street cafes galore create a supremely stroll-worthy setting. One chichi restaurant after another vies for the attention of passers-by, and frequent free concerts take place in the main square.

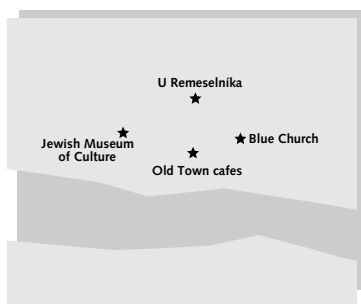
Outside the centre, the contrast created under communism become more pronounced. Ugly modern housing estates sit just across the river from the old town and the age-old castle shares a skyline with the UFO-like New Bridge. Post-EU membership, new investment poured into the city, but subsequent global economic woes stopped a number of projects mid-construction.

On the upside for travellers, the downturn has also meant that lodging prices fell slightly from their all-time highs after the euro was introduced in January 2009. And yes, Bratislava is where the horror hostelling film was set. But the scariest thing about Slovakia's capital these days is the fact that the first international chain stores have appeared on the old-town scene. Bath & Body Works – *gasp!*

Though there are more foreigners and fewer residents on the pedestrianised streets than there used to be (restaurant prices are definitely not aimed at locals), Bratislava is a living city. People work in the old town and on weekdays the streets are bustling. At the weekend you'll see young people enjoying drinks in the historic centre cafes and one of the best things to do is meander the mazelike alleys, stopping regularly for coffee or cocktails. But be warned, it'd be odd if you didn't also come across a couple of gangs of English-speaking, bachelor-party blokes wandering around inebriated...OK, maybe *that's* a little scary.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching passers-by from one of the many old-town **street cafes** (p286)
- Coming upon a wedding as frilly as the **Blue Church** (p282) itself
- Bearing witness to the lives and old-town architecture lost at the **Museum of Jewish Culture** (p280)
- Eating *halušky* with the little old ladies that lunch at **U Remeselníka** (p285)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 02

■ POPULATION: 426,930

