

Central Europe



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

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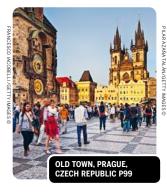
Mark Baker, Kerry Christiani, Steve Fallon, Tim Richards, Andrea Schulte-Peevers, Luke Waterson

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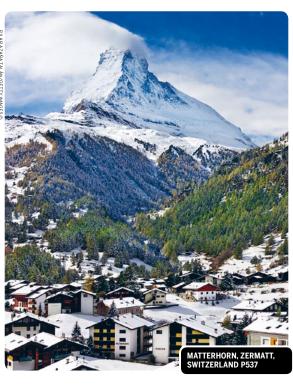
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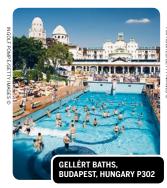
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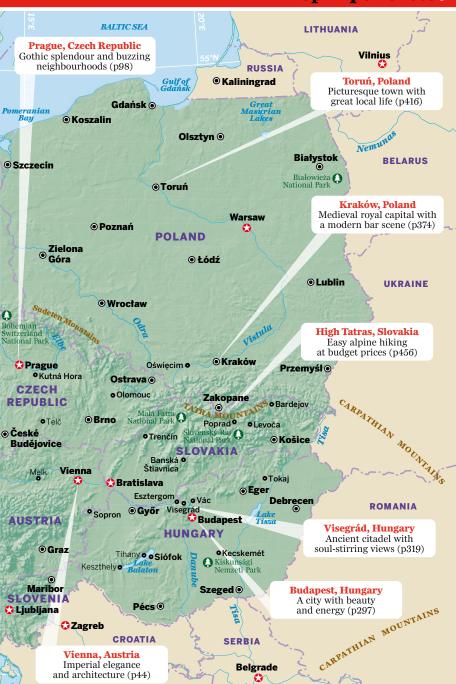
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> Central Europe



Top Experiences)





OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime - across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end - broke but inspired - they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born. Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and

Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Ryan Ver Berkmoes

Coordinating Author, Switzerland Ryan Ver Berkmoes first visited Switzerland in 1984 when he used it as his mail drop during a year-long backpacking trip. He next tried to visit Czechoslovakia but was denied access by a pudgy bureaucrat out of central casting. Since then he has delighted in numerous, hassle-free trips across Central Europe. These days he divides his time between Europe and the US. Follow him at ryanverberkmoes.com. He tweets at @ryanvb.



Mark Baker

Czech Republic, Slovenia Based permanently in Prague, Mark has lived and worked in Eastern Europe for more than 20 years, first as a journalist for The Economist Group and then for Bloomberg News and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. He travels frequently throughout the region and counts Bulgaria, Slovenia and Romania among his favourite countries in Europe. In addition to this book, Mark is co-author of the Lonely Planet guides to Prague, Slovenia, and Romania and Bulgaria.



Kerry Christiani

Austria Ever since her first post-grad trip to Austria, Kerry has seized every available chance to travel to the country of Mozart, Maria and co. Picking the cream of Vienna's coffee houses, glimpsing September snow in the Alps above Innsbruck and finding out the truth about the von Trapps in Salzburg kept her busy for this edition. Kerry has worked on some 20 guidebooks, including Lonely Planet's Austria, Germany and Switzerland. She tweets @kerrychristiani and lists her latest work at www.kerrychristiani.com.



Steve Fallon

Hungary Steve, who has written every edition of Lonely Planet's Hungary, first visited Magyarország in the early 1980s by chance. It was a brief visit but he immediately fell in love with thermal baths, Tokaj wine and bableves (bean soup). Not able to survive on the occasional fleeting fix, he moved to Budapest in 1992, where he could enjoy all three in abundance. Now based in London, Steve returns to Hungary regularly for all these things and more: pálinka (fruit-flavoured brandy), art nouveau and the haunting voice of Marta Sebestyén.

OVER MORE

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Tim Richards

Poland Tim taught English in Kraków in the 1990s, and was fascinated by Poland's post-communist transition. He's returned repeatedly for Lonely Planet, deepening his relationship with this beautiful, complex country. In 2011 Tim released a Kindle ebook collecting his media articles about Poland, We Have Here the Homicide. When he's not on the road for Lonely Planet, Tim is a freelance journalist in Melbourne, Australia, writing about travel and the arts. You can find his blog and social media contacts at www.iwriter.com.au.



Andrea Schulte-Peevers

Germany Born and raised in Germany and educated in London and at UCLA, Andrea has travelled the distance to the moon and back in her visits to some 65 countries. She's written about her native country for two decades and authored or contributed to some 60 Lonely Planet titles, including all editions of Germany, Berlin and Pocket Berlin. After years of living in LA, Andrea now makes her home in Berlin.



Luke Waterson

Slovakia Dividing his love affair with Slovakia between the castles, the mountains, pirohy (potato dumplings) and (more unexplainably) Soviet architecture, Luke has, besides contributions to 15 Lonely Planet titles, written for BBC Travel, the Guardian, Avalon Travel Publishing and a clutch of in-flight magazines (thus keeping you entertained even in mid-air). He lives on the very edge of Bratislava, conveniently located for slurping Small Carpathian wine, and his favourite weekend activity is hiking into the hills to a quirky krčma (rural pub).

Read more about Luke at: lonelyplanet.com/members/lukewaterson

itineraries



Two Weeks **Top Capital Tour**

Spending two to three days per capital will give you a great overview of the region. Start your trip in the dynamic, delightfully idiosyncratic **Berlin**; the history-filled capital of reunited Germany is also something of a party place. Then ride the rails to sprawling **Warsaw**, with a reconstructed Old Town that became the capital of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania back in the mid-16th century. After a few days, continue south to mystical **Prague**. The Czech seat of power is famous for its fantasyland of Gothic architecture – and for great beer. Next? Slovakia's **Bratislava** is a fascinating mix of Old Town charm and new development, while the imperial opulence of the long-reigning Habsburg empire is still evident in Austria's capital, **Vienna**. Just don't satiate yourself on coffee-house culture there; you have more cafes to visit in one-time cocapital **Budapest**. Today Hungary's main city is abuzz with a mix of the modern and the historic. If you have time, detour to **Ljubljana** in Slovenia and tiny **Vaduz** in Liechtenstein; otherwise World Heritage–listed **Bern**, the Swiss capital fought over by the Holy Roman and Habsburg Empires alike, is your final stop. It's so beautiful, it's no wonder everyone wanted a piece of it.



Two Months Central Europe In-Depth

With two months, you can cover the entire region, but it will still be a bit of a 'Best of' trip. Skyscraper-filled **Frankfurt-am-Main** is most useful as an air hub, but you may want to spend a night. From there, shake off jet lag at the chi-chi spa centre **Baden-Baden** before exploring the bucolic towns of the **Black Forest**. Just across the Swiss border, the cobblestone streets and cafes of **Basel** await. Move on to the modern art and ancient architecture of the capital, **Bern**.

Soon the Alps beckon: **Interlaken** and the Jungfrau region have some of the most extreme mountain scenery around. Check out the cafe scene of **Zürich** before crossing the spine of the Alps and getting ready to imbibe in the beer halls of **Munich**. Spend a few days, so you can bus it along the Romantic Road and see the fantasyland-like Schloss Neuschwanstein in **Füssen**. Next stop is the baroque, music-filled city of **Salzburg**. Then it's south into the Julian Alps and picture-postcard, lakeside **Bled**, in Slovenia.

The lovely Slovenian capital of **Ljubljana** is also worth a stop before you ride the rails on to impressively imperial **Vienna** for a couple of nights. A riverboat ride along the vineyard-laden **Danube Valley** is a worthy detour before travelling downstream to the bathhouses and bars of **Budapest**. To the south, the architecture in **Pécs** retains some remarkable Turkish relics.

Heading north again, myriad Old Town cafes in **Bratislava** make a good pit stop en route to the **Tatra Mountains**. On the Slovak side, the most atmospheric midmountain village is Ždiar; in Poland, it's Zakopane. Hike rugged area trails before you continue to **Kraków**, one of Europe's prettiest Old Towns, near the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp. A local favourite and another lively Old Town, **Wrocław** is next, then **Dresden**, a restored German city that exhibits some impressive art.

The whole of Czech captial **Prague** is like a museum, so you'll want to take several days wandering its neighbourhoods, or side trip to spend a night in even more medieval **Český Krumlov**. From Prague exciting and edgy **Berlin** is only three hours north by fast train, or you can return west to catch a flight in Frankfurt-am-Main (7½ hours by train).



Three Weeks **Northern Route**

Mild weather makes summer the best time for seeing the northernmost reaches of Germany and Poland. Start by spending a few nights in multicultural **Cologne**. Pass two days touring the country's largest cathedral and several small museums. By evening heft a glass of locally brewed Kölsch beer in one of the town's lively beer halls and bars. From there day-trip over to character-filled **Aachen**, where you can float in bubbling thermal baths before wandering the quirky cobblestone streets. Moving on to charming **Bremen** for a night or two, you'll explore art nouveau alleyways and an ornate market hall before winding up at a cafe on the waterfront promenade.

Next, Germany's most energetic port town, **Hamburg**, will keep you entertained for at least three days. You'll enjoy the maritime history, the old brick warehouse district and the new glass-encased philharmonic hall. Take the ferry out to the windswept beaches and seafood restaurants of Germany's northernmost point, the **North Frisian Islands**.

Back on the mainland, **Lübeck** is a 12th-century, Unesco-recognised townscape of medieval merchants' houses and towers that is well worth a stopover. Save at least three days – and nights – for the rich history, museums, bars and clubs of **Berlin**. The Brandenburg Gate, Holocaust Memorial and East Side Gallery at the Berlin Wall are must-sees. In the evening you have your choice of subdued-but-happening nightlife in Prenzlauer Berg, the hipster havens in Friedrichshain or alternative clubs in slightly grungy Kreuzberg.

Entering Poland, make the Old Town of **Poznań**, where the lively university population keeps the ancient centre buzzing, your first overnight stop. Two days in the impressively Gothic, church-filled **Toruń** has a much slower pace. To the north, **Gdańsk** is Poland's largest Baltic Sea port town. You can easily spend a few days wandering the waterfront, taking boat excursions and exploring resorts like Sopot.

Five hours or so south, **Warsaw** may not be the prettiest city, but it has loads of history hidden among the big-city sprawl. Take two days exploring the Old Town and war monuments. End your tour with an outing to **Białowieża National Park**, a biosphere reserve where the once nearly extinct European bison roams. The small village has plenty of places to stay overnight before your journey onward.

Three Weeks **Alpine Adventure**

Getting up close and personal with the Alps takes time; connections are almost never direct. Allow at least three to four days per region.

Starting out in **Geneva**, take a day and night to enjoy the city's cosmopolitan lakefront, cafes and fountains. If you want to gain altitude immediately, transfer on to quainter, also-lakeside **Lausanne** – part former fishing village with a summer beach-resort feel, part upscale, elegant shopping and dining town.

Next, explore Valais and Switzerland's 10 tallest peaks. Don your stylish togs and base yourself beneath the Matterhorn in the ritzy 19th-century resort town of **Zermatt**. Nearby, cogwheel trains and cable cars provide access to amazing hiking, skiing and mountain views.

From Zermatt take the 7½-hour Glacier Express train ride over high mountain passes to **St Moritz**. This region has 11,000km of hiking trails and incredible black diamond ski runs – and the town has fab nightlife to boot.

To the north, the **Swiss National Park** area is a quieter, more peaceful stop with rugged dolomite peaks, sprawling larch woodlands and untouched, topaz lakes. Stay in the village of Zernez or in the park itself.

Continuing on to the Liechtenstein Alps, you'll have to connect through **Vaduz** to get to the famous alpine hike, the thrilling Fürstensteig Trail. Don't forget to snap a shot of the town's famous hilltop castle.

Neighbouring Austria's wild and beautiful Arlberg region is home to **St Anton am Arlberg**, a huge draw for skiers and boarders, with an active party scene.

The Tyrolean Zillertal Valley is as much a summer playground as a winter one. Set off from the town of **Mayrhofen** to go cycling, hiking, rock climbing or rafting.

One of the best drives in the Alps awaits you in **Hohe Tauern National Park**, a nearly 1800-sq-km wilderness with 3000m peaks. You'll undoubtedly pass over Grossglockner Road, a 1930s engineering marvel with 36 switchbacks.

South in Slovenia, Triglav National Park encompasses almost all of the Julian Alps. A postcard-perfect mountain setting and cute village make **Bled** the most popular base. But you should also check out the larger, less-crowded lake at **Bohinj** or adventure-sports-oriented **Bovec** before connecting on from the capital, **Ljubljana**.



One Week **Seven-Day Sprint**

Only have a week to spend in Central Europe? You don't actually have to run far. The picture-perfect towns close to the borders of Switzerland, Austria and Germany are tailor-placed for a quick highlights tour. Fly into **Zürich**, and spend a night in the lively urban centre that retains an Old World heart; don't miss hip Züri-West. From there, head to the mountains and the ever-idyllic lakeside city of **Lucerne**, where iconic half-timbered bridges cross glacier-cold waters.

Leave Switzerland for its immediate neighbour to the east, Austria. **Innsbruck** has hosted the Winter Olympics twice and is a great mountain base; from there you can ski or hike, taking sustenance in mountain huts. The beer halls of **Munich** are now only a short hop away. This atmospheric Bavarian town with good museums is worth a couple of days; when it's clear, you can see the Alps. A short final jaunt brings you to the perfect combination of hills and music: **Salzburg**. Mozart's one-time home has an abundance of old architecture, including an impressive castle, surrounded by mountains and Alpine lakes.

10 Days **Blue Danube**

Build on Johann Strauss' classical attempt to capture the mood of Central Europe by exploring the region around the 'Blue Danube' river. Start with a water-view meal in Germany's **Regensburg**, a city replete with historical constructions. Then visit **Linz** and its stunning riverside art gallery before boarding a tour boat. Cruises stop in pretty **Melk**, dominated by an intimidating Benedictine monastery. After that, head to the **Danube Valley**, crowded with castles and vineyards, and best seen by water. On the northern bank of the Danube, **Krems an der Donau** has a pretty cobblestone centre.

Meander on by train to **Vienna**. Take a couple of days to tour the city before going by boat, train or bus to spend a night in the Slovakian capital, **Bratislava**, with its interesting mix of ancient Old Town and communist concrete. From there you can cruise along, following the Danube east into Hungary. Look up at **Esztergom** to see the awesome walled basilica high above. Finish with a few days in **Budapest**, where renting a bike and tootling around midriver Margaret Island caps off your Danube adventure.





- » (above) Stift Melk (p60), Austria » (left) Kapellbrücke (p543), Lucerne



Two Weeks Coast to Coast

From the Adriatic to the Baltic, going coast to coast takes you right up the centre of Central Europe. Connect to Slovenia through capital **Ljubljana**, and make your way to the water. Divide several days between the modern-day port of **Koper** and the old Venetian gem **Piran**. Backtracking north, a side trip to the colossal **Škocjan Caves** is in order before you head into Austria.

From Ljubljana, you go through Salzburg (and may want to stop) en route to boating, bobbing and nature-walking in the Lake District, Salzkammergut. Next, it's avant-garde and arty Linz. North in Germany, medieval Regensburg lies on the Danube riverfront. From there head north to Würzburg to taste the wines of the valley (or to oh-so-cute Bamberg for smoked beer). Spend a couple of days of cultural pursuit in Weimar - like Goethe, Liszt and Nietzsche before vou. You might detour to see Erfurt and the nearby castle, or Buchenwald concentration camp. Transferring on to happening Hamburg, you've reached the coast and a lively last port of call.

One Month Far East

Taking an eastern tack you'll be travelling through former communist countries, but you'd hardly know it today. Start in **Berlin**, where, instead of a wall dividing the city, you'll find an art gallery and walking path. Then travel to the dynamic East German city of Leipzig, where Bach and Wagner once lived. Make a stop in reconstructed baroque Dresden before staying a few days in tourist-filled Prague. You'll have a more authentic Czech experience in a smaller, Unesco-recognised town like Telč. Then, see modern Moravian life in upbeat **Brno**, and head east for another astronomical clock in laid-back Olomouc. If you like medieval construction, you'll love Kraków, in Poland. To get to Slovakia, you pass through the Tatra **Mountains**, so you may as well stop, Below the mountains, the walled city of Levoča is close to the impressive Spiš Castle ruins. A musical fountain and Gothic cathedral highlight Košice. Thirsty? Because little Tokaj, in Hungary, has been producing great dessert wines for ages. Vineyards also cover the hills surrounding the old town of Eger and its walkable wine-tasting valley. From there **Budapest** - and your onward journey - are not far west.

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