



Slovakia

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Best Places to Eat

- » Café Verne (p443)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Ginger Monkey Hostel (p462)
- » Grand Hotel Kempinski (p460)
- » Skaritz (p442)
- » Hotel Marrol's (p442)

Why Go?

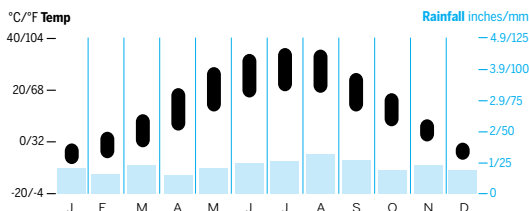
No, it isn't a province of the Czech Republic. Going strong over two decades as an independent state after the breakup of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia out-trumps the Czechs for ancient castles, and boasts nature far wilder than its western neighbours. It savours wine over beer and, in its bashful heartland amid mountains and forests, cradles an entrancing folk culture most European nations have lost.

Slovakia's small size is possibly its biggest attraction. You can hike woodsy waterfall-filled gorges one day and yodel from peaks soaring more than 2500m the next. Dinky capital Bratislava is awash with quirky museums and backed by thick forests. With its rabbit-warren Old Town, it might just win world prize for most cafes per city resident.

Don't leave without heading east, to where fortresses tower over tradition-rich medieval towns such as Levoča or Bardejov and hiking trails lace the hills. Down a *slivovica* (fire-waterlike plum brandy) and drink a toast for us – *nazdravie!*

When to Go

Bratislava



Sep Fewer crowds but clement weather. Wine season means it's time for alcohol-themed festivities.

Jun & Jul Festivals abound across the country, High Tatras hiking trails are all open.

Jan & Feb Peak ski season in the mountains, but many other sights are closed.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Euro (€)
- » **Language** Slovak
- » **Money** ATMs widely available in cities
- » **Visas** Not required for most visitors staying less than 90 days

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 49,035 sq km
- » **Capital** Bratislava
- » **Country code** ☎02
- » **Emergency** ☎112

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.82
Canada	C\$1	€0.77
Japan	¥100	€0.83
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.65
UK	UK£1	€1.18
USA	US\$1	€0.78

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** €30–60
- » **Two-course meal** €15
- » **Museum entrance** €3
- » **Beer** €1.50
- » **City transport ticket** €0.70

Resources

- » **Slovak Tourist Board** (www.slovakia.travel)
- » **Slovakia Document Store** (www.panorama.sk)
- » **What's On Slovakia** (www.whatonslovakia.com)

Connections

Though few airlines fly into Slovakia itself, Bratislava is just 60km from well-connected Vienna International Airport. By train from Bratislava, Budapest (three hours) and Prague (five hours) are easily reachable. Buses connect to Zakopane in Poland (two hours) from Poprad, and to Uzhhorod in Ukraine (2½ hours) via Košice.

ITINERARIES

Three Days

Two nights in Bratislava is enough to wander the Old Town streets and see some museums. The following day is best spent on a castle excursion, either to Devín or Trenčín. Or, better yet, spend all three days hiking in the rocky High Tatra mountains, staying central in the resort town of Starý Smokovec or in more off-beat Ždiar in the Belá Tatras.

One Week

After a day or two in Bratislava, venture east. Spend at least four nights around the Tatras so you have time to hike to a mountain hut as well as take day trips to the must-see Spiš Castle ruins, medieval Levoča, or to Slovenský Raj National Park for its highly rated Suchá Belá Gorge hike. For the last night or two, continue to Bardejov to marvel at its complete Renaissance town square, icon art and nearby wooden churches.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Sheep's cheese** *Bryndza* – sharp, soft and spreadable; *oštiepok* – solid and ball-shaped; *žinčina* – a traditional sheep's-whey drink (like sour milk).
- » **Meaty moments** *Vývar* (chicken/beef broth served with *slížiky*, thin pasta strips, or liver dumplings); *kapustnica* (thick sauerkraut and meat soup, often with chorizo or mushrooms); baked duck/goose served in *lokše* (potato pancakes) and stewed cabbage.
- » **Dumplings** Potato-based goodies in varieties such as *halušky* (mini-dumplings in cabbage or *bryndza* sauce topped with bacon) or *pirohy* (pocket-shaped dumplings stuffed with *bryndza* or smoked meat). For sweets, try *šulance* – walnut- or poppy-seed-topped dumplings.
- » **Fruit firewater** Homemade or store-bought liquor, made from berries and pitted fruits, such as *borovička* (from juniper) and *slivovica* (from plums).