

# welcome to Eastern Europe



## Cultural Explosion

Eastern Europe is a warehouse of art, music, history and architecture, and its world-class museums, festivals and galleries will overwhelm even the most eager connoisseur. Star attractions Prague, Moscow, Kraków, St Petersburg and Budapest groan under the weight of their heritage: cross the 14th-century Charles Bridge at dawn (p285), marvel at Kraków's preserved Rynek Główny (p627), see an unrivalled cross-section of art history at the Hermitage (p792) and hear Liszt in his native Hungary (p401). It's not all about high culture though – people will welcome you with their long and insistent traditions of hospitality. Start a conversation with some locals on a train and you'll

likely end up sharing food and perhaps even their firewater, listening to renditions of folk songs, playing cards with them or even invited home for dinner. You'll discover that myths about Eastern European cuisine are just that – delve into delicacies such as Croatian truffles, Moldovan wines and Hungarian *gulyás* (goulash) as well as delicious daily staples such as Polish *pierogi* (dumplings) and Russian bliny.

## Spectacular Scenery

The variety and range of landscapes in Eastern Europe is quite mind-blowing. Take a boat ride on the blue Danube (p391), discover that Eastern Europe means great beaches on Albania's still undeveloped riviera (p59)

*Dramatically diverse, Europe's flip side remains a through-the-looking-glass experience after the certainties of the West. Head to Eastern Europe for an adventure; it's surreal, exciting and dramatic.*

(left) Pedestrians walking on Széchenyi Chain Bridge, Budapest, Hungary  
(bottom) Decorated eggs for sale outside Humor Monastery (p749), Romania



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and hike your way through the High Tatras (p880), the Bucegi (boxed text p713) or the Rodopi Mountains (p163). Even less expected are the vast sand dunes of the Curonian Spit (p517) in Lithuania and the racing river gorges of Slovenia (p907) and Bosnia and Hercegovina (p103), beautiful Lake Ohrid in Macedonia (p538) and the Great Masurian Lakes of Poland (p679). Whatever scenery you enjoy, you'll find exciting and unexpected landscapes in a region that is anything but grey and predictable.

## Historic Overload

A trip through this region can be like plunging into a history book: Eastern Europe's bleak past is tangibly present in its amaz-

ingly preserved palaces, haunting castles, magnificent churches and grandiose plazas. You can still stand in the courtyard where 'the big three' divided up postwar Europe at the 1945 Yalta Conference (p982) or feel the echo of the Romanian Revolution on Bucharest's Revolution Sq (p699). Elsewhere you can see sights from more distant history – soak up the legacy of Ivan the Terrible's terrifying reign in Moscow at St Basil's Cathedral (p773), cross the bridge where Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, kicking off WWI (p109), and take a stroll through the remains of Diocletian's Palace in Split, Croatia (p242). For anyone who enjoys history, there's no better destination than Eastern Europe.