

# welcome to Eastern Europe



## Cultural Explosion

Eastern Europe is a warehouse of art, 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 Prague's 14th-century Charles Bridge at dawn, marvel at Kraków's preserved Rynek Główny (Main Market Sq), see an unrivalled cross-section of art history at the Hermitage in St Petersburg and hear Liszt in his native Hungary. It's not all about high culture though – the people you'll meet are just as much of an attraction. Start a conversation with locals on a train and you'll likely end

up sharing food and drinks with them, listening to folk songs, playing cards or even being invited home for dinner. Along the way you'll discover that myths about Eastern European cuisine are just that – delve into delicacies such as Croatian truffles and Hungarian *gulyás* (goulash) as well as delicious daily staples such as Polish *pierogi* (dumplings) and Russian bliny.

## Spectacular Scenery

The variety of landscapes in Eastern Europe is simply mind-blowing. Take a boat ride on the blue Danube, discover that Eastern Europe means great beaches on the Croatian or Albanian riviera and hike your way through Poland and Slovakia's



*Dramatically diverse, Eastern Europe remains a through-the-looking-glass experience after the certainties of the West. Head here for guaranteed adventure; it's surreal, exciting and surprising.*

(left) Bled Island (p888), Slovenia

(below) Buskers near Charles Bridge (p283) in Prague, Czech Republic



High Tatras, Romania's Bucegi Mountains, Bulgaria's Rodopi Mountains and Albania's simply incredible 'Accursed Mountains'. Even less expected are the vast sand dunes of Curonian Spit in Lithuania, beautiful Lake Ohrid in Macedonia, the Great Masurian Lakes of Poland and the racing river gorges of Slovenia and Bosnia and Hercegovina. Those looking for an easier ride can take Eastern Europe's most impressive train journey from Belgrade to Bar through the spectacular canyons of Montenegro, or the Lake Koman ferry in Albania for astonishing mountain views. Whatever scenery you enjoy, you'll find exciting and unexpected landscapes in a region that is anything but grey and predictable.

## Historic Overload

Eastern Europe's bleak past is present in its preserved palaces, haunting castles, magnificent churches and grandiose plazas. You can still stand in the room in the Livadia Palace where 'the big three' divided up Europe at the 1945 Yalta Conference, or feel the echo of the Romanian Revolution on Bucharest's Revolution Sq. Elsewhere you can see sights from more distant history – soak up the legacy of Ivan the Terrible's terrifying reign at St Basil's Cathedral on Moscow's Red Sq, cross the bridge where Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo and take a stroll through the remains of Diocletian's Palace in Split, Croatia.