



Eastern Europe



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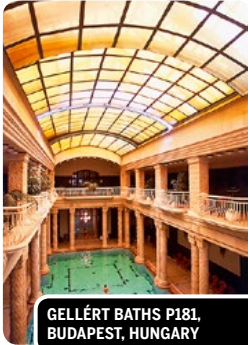
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Itineraries



2
WEEKS

Essential Eastern Europe

Combine highlights of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary for a quintessential introduction to the charms of Eastern Europe. Start in **Prague**, spending several days absorbing the Staré Město (Old Town), Malá Strana (Lesser Quarter) and the magnificent Prague Castle. Don't miss nearby towns such as beer-lovers' mecca **Plzeň** and beautiful **Kutná Hora**.

On day five head by train into Poland and regal **Kraków**, with its gob-smacking Old Town and the vast Rynek Główny (Main Sq). Spending three nights here allows you to get to know the Wawel Castle complex, offbeat Kazimierz and take a day trip to **Oświęcim** (Auschwitz).

On day eight head south to Slovakia, where you'll pass through magnificent scenery in the High Tatras before arriving in **Bratislava**, with its grand castle and wonderful Danube views.

On day 10 take a boat down the Danube to **Budapest**, where you can spend hours in luxurious sulphur baths, explore the famous coffee houses and take in the dazzling art and architecture of the forward-looking Hungarian capital. From here visit the Hungarian countryside – try the baroque city of **Eger**, or **Pécs**, full of relics from the Turkish occupation.



East of East Tour

Pull back the old Iron Curtain to discover the history and beauty of these one-time Soviet satellites and current regional heavyweight Russia. Begin in dynamic **Warsaw**, with its reconstructed Old Town, museums and Royal Parks. Take a train to **Lviv**, Ukraine's most beautiful city, and spend a day enjoying the Old Town's churches without the tour-group crowd. From Lviv, continue by train to fascinating and historic **Kyiv**, the Jerusalem of East Slavonic culture.

After a few days enjoying the sights in the Ukrainian capital, including the awesome Kyivo-Pecherska Lavra (Caves Monastery), take the sleeper train to the megalopolis **Moscow**, Europe's biggest city and a place of striking extremes, dazzling wealth and gridlocked traffic. Drink in the history of the Kremlin, see Lenin's Mausoleum, St Basil's Cathedral and Red Square, and sample the nightlife and fashion for which the city is now rightly famous. On day 10 get out of Moscow and visit picturesque **Veliky Novgorod** en route to the beautiful baroque and neoclassical architecture of mind-blowing **St Petersburg**. You can easily spend three or four days in the city itself, although there are abundant sights outside it as well, such as the tsarist palaces of Petrodvorets or Tsarskoe Selo.

From Russia take the train to Estonia's magical capital, **Tallinn**, where you can soak up the medieval Old Town. Relax on the golden-sand beaches of **Pärnu** before heading south to the Latvian capital **Riga**, which boasts Europe's finest collection of art nouveau architecture and is a delightful place to spend a few days. Latvia has plenty of other highlights to offer though, such as the caves and medieval castles of **Sigulda** and the breathtaking Baltic coastline around **Ventspils**. Cross into Lithuania, where a couple of nights in charming **Vilnius** will reveal the Baltic's most underrated capital as well as Europe's largest collection of baroque architecture. From Vilnius make a trip to the huge sand dunes and fragile ecological environment of the amazing **Curonian Spit**. If you've arranged a double-entry visa for Russia, you can cross over into the exclave of **Kaliningrad** here. Alternatively, if you've sorted a Belarus visa, take the train to this isolated republic with its Stalinist-style, but surprisingly pleasant capital **Minsk** before re-entering Poland and heading back to Warsaw.

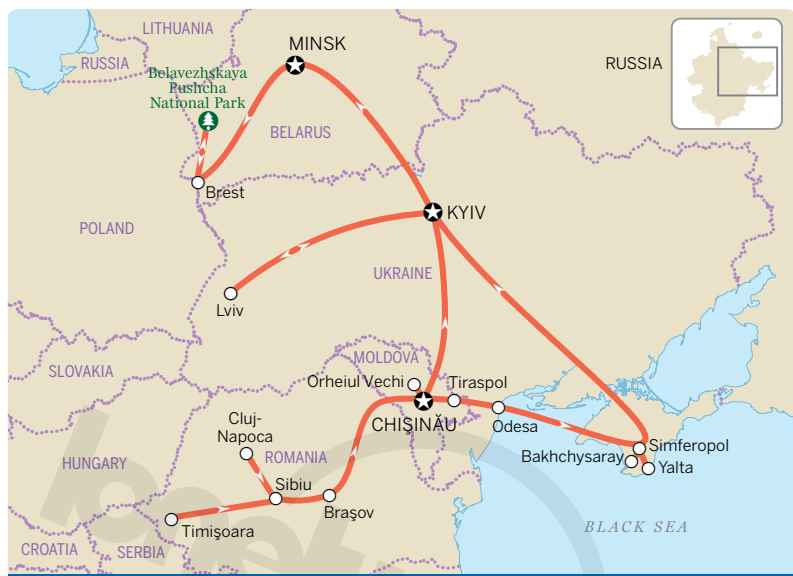


Breezing Through the Balkans

Taking its name from the Balkan Mountains, this is a fascinating, beautiful region of Eastern Europe lapped by several different seas and including spectacular countryside and awesome towns and cities. Begin in lively little Slovenia, where the charming capital **Ljubljana** is a pedestrian delight with a castle, beautiful buildings and bridges, and top-class museums to view. Indulge in superb scenery and adrenaline-rush mountain sports in the **Julian Alps** before heading south to the Croatian coast and working your way through the beaches along the **Dalmatian coast**. Stop in **Dubrovnik** to explore the Old Town, its vast ramparts and the surrounding islands, which shouldn't be missed.

Detour into Bosnia – perhaps a day trip to **Mostar** to see the legendary bridge and the interesting multiethnic community that has enjoyed rejuvenation since the Balkan War, or a night or two in the bustling capital of **Sarajevo**. Continue south into Montenegro, to visit the historic walled city of **Kotor**, see the wonderful coastline, and enjoy some of the country's beautiful beaches around the walled island village of **Sveti Stefan** before heading into Albania. From the northern city of **Shkoder** take a bus straight on to **Tirana**, a mountain-shrouded ramshackle capital on the rise. Make an excursion to the gorgeous Unesco-listed heritage town of **Berat** before taking a bus through the mountains into little-explored Macedonia, ending up in beautiful **Ohrid**. Spend at least two days here, enjoying the wonderful monastery and swimming in the eponymous lake.

Make your way to **Skopje**, Macedonia's fun capital where an abundance of newly minted structures are redefining the city for the 21st century. Take the train to **Pristina**, Kosovo's optimistic capital, from where it's an easy hop to **Prizren**, a charming mosque-filled old town. To reach Serbia's audacious and gritty capital **Belgrade**, you'll need to backtrack to Skopje and board the international train. Don't miss the city's ancient Kalemegdan Citadel and wild clubbing scene. Another cross border train will take you on into Bulgaria where the capital **Sofia** is a little-known gem. Continue east to **Veliko Tarnovo**, the awesome ancient capital and a university town with a dramatic setting over a fast-flowing river. From here it's an easy bus to the beach at **Varna**, complete with marvellous museums, Roman ruins and open-air nightclubs.



4
WEEKS

On the Edge

Covering the eastern edge of the region up to the border with Russia, this itinerary balances the charm of old towns and thrill of Gothic castles with the quirky, time-stood-still qualities of oddballs Transdniestria and Belarus. Start in **Timișoara** or **Cluj-Napoca** in Romania before getting medieval in **Sibiu** and/or **Brașov** from where you can make a day trip to 'Dracula's Castle', properly known as Bran Castle. Cross into Moldova where the real adventure starts. Get into the groove in the entertaining capital, **Chișinău**, where partying is a way of life and the excellent local wine is plentiful and cheap, including that from the must-visit vineyards of Cricova. Make a day trip to the stunning cave monastery at **Orheiul Vechi**. Travel into Transdniestria, a country that doesn't officially exist. In the fascinating 'capital' **Tiraspol** little appears to have changed since the Soviet era of the mid-80s.

Entering Ukraine, make a beeline for **Kyiv**, which demands several days' attention. This eclectic capital city is the ancient seat of Slavic and Orthodox culture as well as a modern and pleasant metropolis that played a starring role in the 2014 Maidan Revolution, which toppled the last of the post-Soviet dictators. Don't miss the Kyievo-Pecherska Lavra (Caves Monastery) and St Sophia's Cathedral, as well as ousted ex-president Viktor Yanukovych's opulent mansion Mezhyhirya. For a complete contrast, detour to the western edge of the country where Unesco World Heritage-listed **Lviv** is a charming central European town of quaint cobbles, aromatic coffee houses and rattling trams, which feels a continent away from the war-torn badlands of Ukraine's east.

The final stops on this tour through the most remote parts of the region take you to Belarus, Europe's so-called 'last dictatorship'. Have a blast in monolithic **Minsk** and find a surprising amount going on in a city dominated by huge Stalinist avenues and Soviet memorials. Heading southwest, stop at **Brest** on the border and use it as a base to visit **Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park**, where you'll be able to see the *zoobr* (European bison), Europe's largest mammal, as well as a host of other wild beauties before crossing back into the EU.

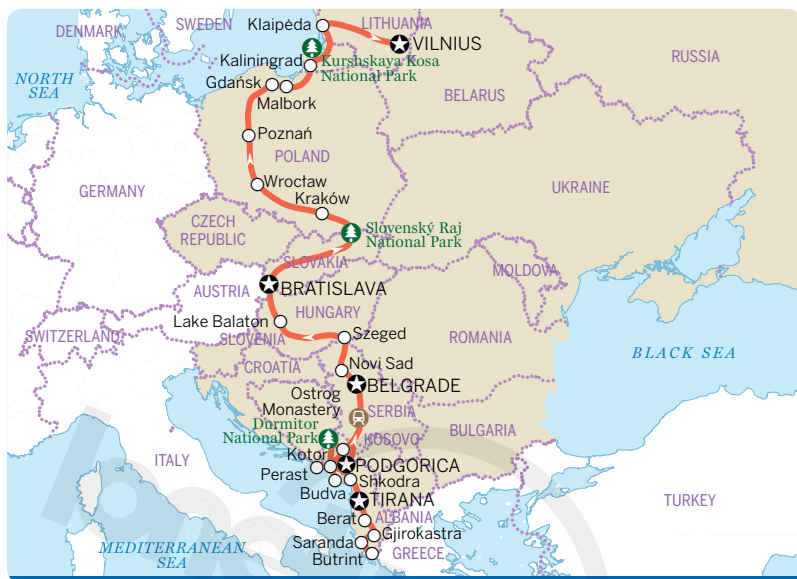


Top: Lviv (p418),
Ukraine

Bottom: Minsk (p59),
Belarus



ВЫСЬ ВІДПОВІДЬ / GETTY IMAGES ©

4
WEEKS

The Ionian to the Baltic

This Ionian to Baltic Sea itinerary, covering eight countries, will enlighten you to a vast variety of things to do and see in the region. Arrive in mountainous Albania by ferry from Corfu at the busy port of **Saranda**, then stay the night and try to see the glorious ruins of **Butrint** right on the Greek border. Continue up through Albania to **Tirana** via either **Gjirokastra** or **Berat** – two of Albania's loveliest old towns. Spend a day or two exploring the Albanian capital before taking the bus to **Shkodra** and journeying on to Montenegro.

Base yourself in lovely **Kotor**, soaking up its spectacular setting and Old Town. Make day trips to Venice lookalike **Perast** and **Budva** with its atmospheric Old Town and lively beach scene. Head north to the extraordinary cliff-face-hugging **Ostrog Monastery**, and on to **Durmitor National Park**, a great place for hiking, rafting and canyoning.

From Montenegro's capital **Podgorica** catch an overnight train to the vibrant Serbian capital **Belgrade** that's definitely worth a couple of days, then continue north to convivial **Novi Sad**. Cross into Hungary at pretty **Szeged** and head for **Lake Balaton** for some sublime swimming. Keep surging north into Slovakia, aiming for plucky traveller favourite **Bratislava**, where it's perfectly acceptable to kick back and enjoy the good food and nightlife for a few days before going on to the incredible scenery of **Slovenský Raj National Park**. Crossing the Tatra Mountains into Poland, travel via **Kraków** to unsung gem **Wrocław**, spending a few days in both before dropping in on beautifully restored **Poznań**. From here, head for the Baltic coast and the bustling Hanseatic city of **Gdańsk** (formerly the German Free City of Danzig), a thriving port city where WWII broke out and the Solidarity social movement was born. From here you can make day trips to nearby beaches as well as **Malbork**, famed for Europe's biggest Gothic castle.

Next up is the intriguing Russian exclave of **Kaliningrad** (remember to sort your visa ahead of your arrival), which combines elements of old Prussia, the USSR and modern Russia. Return to the coast to travel though Kaliningrad's **Kurshskaya Kosa National Park** across into the Lithuanian section of the Curonian Spit, aiming for **Klaipėda**, Lithuania's main port. End your trip in baroque **Vilnius**, Lithuania's beautiful capital.



2 WEEKS Baltic Blast

This trip along the Baltic coast takes you through four very different countries and across a region that few travellers ever get to know beyond the universally loved capital cities of Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. In Russia, set aside three nights for the gloriously beautiful Baltic city of **St Petersburg** to see the Hermitage, vast Nevsky Prospekt's mansions and the amazing Church on the Spilled Blood. Head to the superbly restored out-of-town **Peterhof**, which belonged to Peter the Great and is positioned with glorious views over the Baltic.

Take a bus or train to the Estonian capital **Tallinn** for two days and wander the charmingly chocolate-box streets of the 14th- and 15th-century Old Town before heading to the university town of **Tartu**, which lays claim to being the nation's cultural capital and is packed with interesting museums. On the Baltic coast is the inviting Estonian beach resort of **Pärnu** where you can indulge in Eastern European holidaymaking (think mud baths, Bacchanalian youth and golden-sand beaches) before continuing south into Latvia.

Stop off in cheerful, castle-rich **Sigulda** and spend a day or two walking in the tranquil landscapes and thick forests of the Gauja National Park. Continue on to **Riga**, Latvia's delightful capital, where you can soak up the fantastic architecture, the Old Town and friendly atmosphere over several days. Consider a day trip to the opulent Rundāle Palace. If you'd prefer a day or two's rest, there's the lovely beaches and gracious wooden houses of **Jūrmala**.

Lithuania is next up – and it greets you straight away with its astounding Hill of Crosses in **Šiauliai**, a must-see even if there's no reason to dawdle. Charming university town **Kaunas** is Lithuania's second city and boasts a leafy old centre and friendly locals, as well as being just a short distance away from the chilling Ninth Fort concentration camp. Finally, end your journey in beautiful **Vilnius**, the country's crowning glory, which boasts the biggest Old Town in the Baltic and is still relatively undiscovered by tour groups.



Eastern Europe 101

Time-challenged travellers need not fret – this zippy itinerary gives you the best of five Eastern European gems. Start off by flying to the Polish capital **Warsaw** for one night, seeing the beautifully restored Old Town and eating delicious *pierogi* (dumplings) before taking the train south to **Kraków** for two nights, giving you time to see the Old Town, Wawel Castle and Kazimierz, and to do a day trip to **Oświęcim** (Auschwitz) before taking the overnight train to **Prague** for two days of intensive sightseeing: Prague Castle, Charles Bridge, wandering the Malá Strana (Lesser Quarter) and the Staré Město (Old Town) and tasting genuine Czech beer in a local brewery.

Take another overnight train to **Budapest** for two nights in Hungary. Soak in the city's glorious Gellért Baths, take a cruise on the Danube, see the magnificent Hungarian Parliament building and wander Castle Hill before yet another overnight train to Romania's much underrated capital, **Bucharest**. With a one-night stay you can cover the main sights (including the amazing Palace of Parliament), wander the small historic centre and pick up a sense of the city's energy in its bars and clubs.

Continue by train to wonderful and much-overlooked **Veliko Târnovo** in Northern Bulgaria for one night; it's a stunning and unusually located university town and a far more 'everyday' Eastern European town than most national capitals. While here, find the time to see the ancient Tsarevets Fortress (and stick around for the nightly summer light show). Finish up your two weeks by taking the train to **Sofia** for two final nights that will give you a taste of the plucky Bulgarian capital, including the wonderful golden-domed Aleksander Nevski Church and the subterranean museum housing an ancient necropolis beneath the Sveta Sofia Church.

On your last day take a day trip through the Rila Mountains to the unmissable **Rila Monastery**, the country's holiest site and one of the most important monasteries in Eastern Europe. From here you can fly out of Sofia or continue to bigger air hubs such as nearby Athens or Istanbul to get a flight home.



Simon Richmond

Russia UK-born writer and photographer Simon first ventured into Eastern Europe shortly after the Berlin Wall fell for an eventful rail trip including Prague and Budapest. Many subsequent, always fascinating, journeys across the region have followed, with work assignments in Russia and the Baltic States. Follow him on Twitter, Instagram and at www.simonrichmond.com. Simon also wrote the Plan and Survive chapters.



Tamara Sheward

Bulgaria, Serbia After years of freelance travel writing, rock'n'roll journalism and insalubrious authordom, Tamara joined Lonely Planet's ranks as the presenter of LPTV's *Roads Less Travelled: Cambodia* documentary. Since then she's stuck to covering decidedly less leech-infested destinations including Russia, Serbia and Bulgaria. Tamara is currently living in Australia's far north with her husband (whom she never would have met were it not for some late night 'researching'), and daughter.



Luke Waterson

Slovakia Luke fell in love with Slovakia and these days lives in its quirky capital, Bratislava, beside vineyards that yield some of the country's finest white wines. He's constantly planning hikes into Slovakia's forests and hills – particularly if they go via a ruined castle or a rustic *krčma* (pub). As well as writing a bunch of content about Slovakia for Lonely Planet and the BBC, he also runs the quirky travel/culture blog on all things Slovak: www.englishmaninslovakia.com.



Mark Elliott

Bosnia & Hercegovina British born travel writer Mark Elliott was only 11 when his family first dragged him to Sarajevo and stood him in the now defunct concrete footsteps of Gavrilo Princip. Fortunately no Austro-Hungarian emperors were passing at the time. He has since visited virtually every corner of BiH, supping fine Hercegovinian wines with master vintrners, talking philosophy with Serb monks and Sufi mystics, and drinking more Bosnian coffee than any stomach should be subjected to.



Steve Fallon

Hungary, Slovenia Steve, who has written every edition of Lonely Planet's *Hungary* guidebook, lived in Budapest for three years in the early 1990s. From there he also researched and later wrote LP's first Slovenia guidebook. He maintains close contacts with both countries, returning often to Magyarország for thermal baths, Tokaj wine and *bablèves* (bean soup) and to Slovenija for a glimpse of the Julian Alps in the sunshine, a dribble of *bučno olje* (pumpkinseed oil) and a dose of the dual. Find out more about Steve at www.steveslondon.com.



Tom Masters

Albania, Belarus, Kosovo, Macedonia Tom has been travelling in Eastern Europe since the early '90s when, as a young teenager, he travelled by train across the newly liberated 'Eastern Bloc' with his mother, an experience not unlike a Graham Greene novel. Having studied Russian, lived in St Petersburg and currently residing in the former East Berlin, Tom knows this part of the world like few others, though it constantly manages to surprise him. You can find more of his work at www.tommasters.net.



Anja Mutić

Croatia It's been more than two decades since Anja left her native Croatia. The journey took her to several countries before she made New York City her base 15 years ago. But the roots are a-calling. She's been returning to Croatia frequently for work and play, intent on discovering a new place on every visit, be it a nature park, an offbeat town or a remote island. She's happy that Croatia's beauties are appreciated worldwide but secretly longs for the time when you could head to Hvar and hear the sound of crickets instead of blasting music. Anja is online at www.everthenomad.com.



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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, 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



Mark Baker

Czech Republic, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania Mark Baker is an independent travel writer based in Prague. He's lived in Central Europe for more than 20 years, working as a writer and editor for the *Economist*, Bloomberg and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and is an enthusiastic traveller throughout the region. He's author of several Lonely Planet guides, including *Prague & the Czech Republic*, *Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania*, *Romania & Bulgaria*, *Poland and Slovenia*. Tweet him @markbakerprague.



Marc Di Duca

Ukraine Driven by an urge to discover Eastern Europe's wilder side, Marc first hit Kyiv one dark, snow-flecked night in early 1998. Many prolonged sprints, countless near misses with Kyiv's metro doors and a few too many rides in seatbelt-less Lada taxis later, he still gets excited about exploring this immense but troubled land. A busy travel writer, Marc has penned guides to Moscow, Siberia's Lake Baikal, Russia and the Trans-Siberian Railway, as well as countless other destinations around Europe.



Peter Dragicevich

Estonia, Latvia, Montenegro After a dozen years working for newspapers and magazines in both his native New Zealand and in Australia, Peter ditched the desk and hit the road. He wrote Lonely Planet's first guide to the newly independent Montenegro and has contributed to literally dozens of other Lonely Planet titles, including the *Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania* guidebook and five successive editions of *Eastern Europe*.

OVER MORE
PAGE WRITERS

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