



# Eastern Europe



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LAKE BALATON REGION  
(P193), HUNGARY



PRAGUE (P136), CZECH  
REPUBLIC

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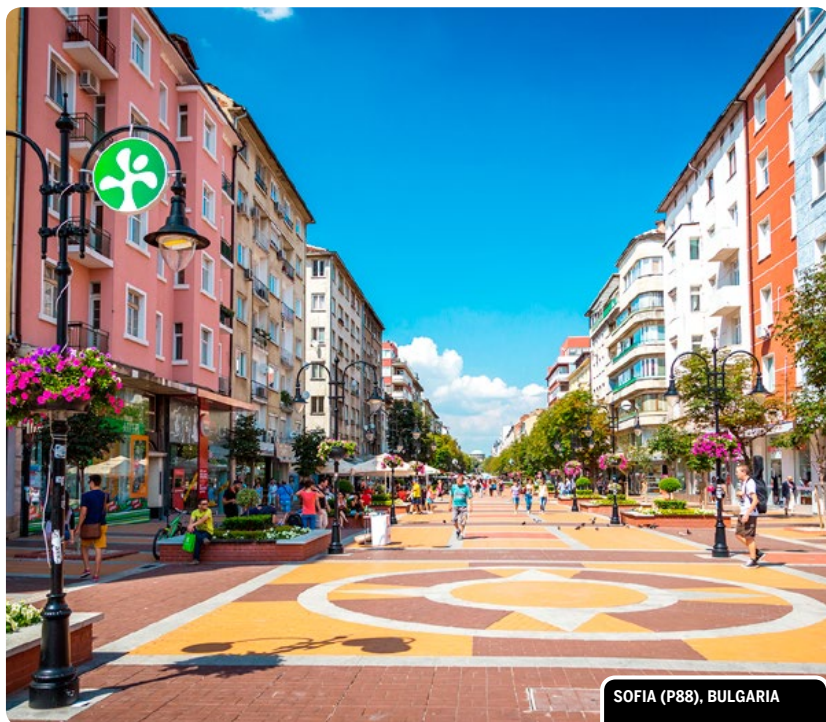
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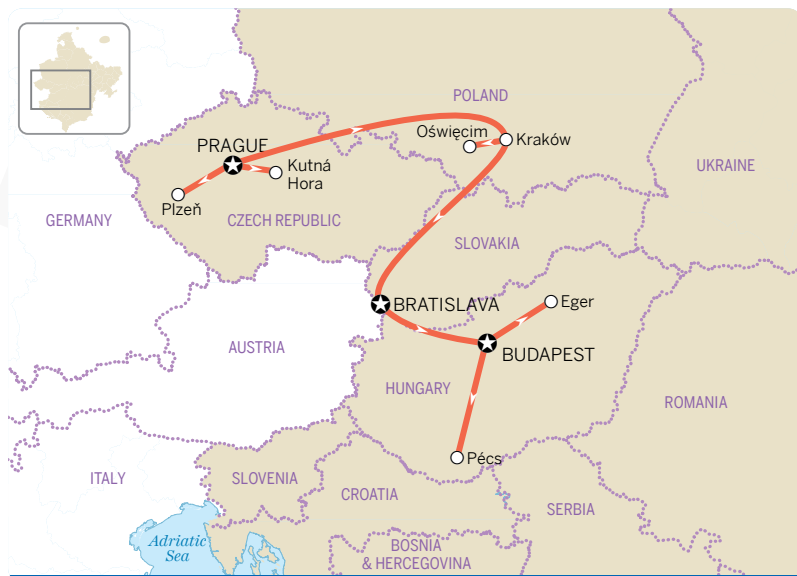
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# Itineraries



**2**  
WEEKS

## Essential Eastern Europe

Combine highlights of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary for a quintessential introduction to Eastern Europe's charms.

Start in **Prague**, spending two days absorbing the Old Town, Malá Strana and Prague Castle. Day-trip to **Kutná Hora**, to peep at its eerie ossuary and medieval silver-mining history, and take a beer pilgrimage to **Plzeň**.

On day five head by train into Poland to reach regal **Kraków**, with its gob-smacking Old Town and vast Rynek Główny (Main Sq). Over three days, ramble Wawel Castle, the off-beat Kazimierz district, and take a trip to harrowing **Oświęcim** (Auschwitz).

On day eight head south to Slovakia, passing through the magnificent High Tatras before reaching **Bratislava**, with its grand castle and Danube views. Spend the evening in wine bars and beer halls; the next morning enjoy a lazy Old Town brunch and take a half day excursion to crumbling Devín Castle.

On day 10 take a boat down the Danube to **Budapest**. Spend a couple of days simmering in outdoor baths, exploring coffee houses and ruin bars, and admiring dazzling architecture. From here bolt to the baroque city of **Eger**, and finish with a day trip to **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 of current regional heavyweight Russia.

Begin with two days in dynamic **Warsaw**, with its revamped Old Town, museums and royal parks. On day three take a train to **Lviv**, Ukraine's most beautiful city, and spend a day enjoying Old Town churches and enchanting Lychakiv Cemetery. From Lviv, continue by train on day four to imposing **Kyiv**, where sacred relics repose beneath gilded domes, and dark history mingles with eclectic street art.

After a couple of days enjoying the sights in the Ukrainian capital, including the labyrinthine Pecherska Lavra complex and perhaps a guided tour of Chornobyl's exclusion zone, on day six take the sleeper train to **Moscow**, 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.

On day nine leave Moscow and visit picturesque **Veliky Novgorod** en route to the beautiful baroque and neoclassical architecture of **St Petersburg**. You can easily spend three days in the city itself, although there are abundant sights outside it as well, such as the tsarist palace Tsarskoe Selo.

On day 13 take the train to Estonia's magical capital, **Tallinn**, where you can soak up the medieval Old Town. Head south on day 15 and relax on the golden-sand beaches of **Pärnu** before continuing to the Latvian capital **Riga** which boasts Europe's finest collection of art-nouveau architecture. Latvia has plenty of other highlights: squeeze in day trips to the caves and medieval castles of **Sigulda**, and the breathtaking Baltic coastline around **Ventspils**.

Cross into Lithuania on day 18, where a night or two in charming **Vilnius** will reveal the Baltic's most underrated capital. From Vilnius make a trip to the huge sand dunes and fragile ecological environment of the **Curonian Spit**. If you've arranged a double-entry visa for Russia, cross over into **Kaliningrad**. 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.

3  
WEEKS

## Breezing through the Balkans

Taking its name from the Balkan Mountains, this is a fascinating region of Eastern Europe lapped by several different seas, with enigmatic fortresses and intriguing towns along the way.

Begin in lively little Slovenia, where the capital **Ljubljana** is a pedestrian delight. Indulge in superb scenery and adrenaline-rush sports in the **Julian Alps** before heading south to Croatia and working your way through the beaches along the **Dalmatian Coast**. Stop in **Dubrovnik** to explore the Old Town and the surrounding islands.

Detour into Bosnia – first visit **Mostar** to see the legendary bridge and the multi-ethnic community that has enjoyed rejuvenation since the Balkan Wars, then a night or two in the bustling capital of **Sarajevo**. Head back south to the coast and east into Montenegro: visit the walled city of **Kotor**, see the impressive coastline and surrounding mountains, and enjoy some of the country's top beaches around the fortified island village of **Sveti Stefan** before pressing south into Albania.

After exploring **Tiranë**, a mountain-shrouded ramshackle capital on the rise, make an excursion to the Unesco-listed town of **Berat**, before taking a bus through the mountains into Macedonia, ending up in sublime **Ohrid**. Spend at least two days here, enjoying the ancient churches and swimming in the eponymous lake. Make your way to **Skopje**, Macedonia's fun capital where an abundance of gleaming modern Italianate structures are redefining the city for the 21st century. Take the train to **Pristina**, Kosovo's dainty though cosmopolitan capital, from where it's an easy hop to **Prizren**, a charming mosque-filled old town.

To reach Serbia's capital **Belgrade**, you'll need to backtrack to Skopje and board the international train. Don't miss the city's ancient Kalemegdan Citadel and the hip restaurant and clubbing scene. Take a detour to laid-back **Novi Sad** with its fine neoclassical buildings, outdoor cafes and Danube fortress views.

Another cross-border train will take you into Bulgaria. Head east to **Veliko Târnovo**, the ancient capital and a university town with a dramatic setting. From here it's an easy bus to **Varna** by the Black Sea, complete with beaches, Roman ruins and open-air nightclubs.





3  
WEEKS

## On The Edge

Covering the easternmost edge of the region (before Russia), this itinerary balances pretty old towns and fortresses with the forbidding architecture of time-trapped Belarus and border anomaly Transdnistr.

Start in one of Romania's underrated westerly cities: either museum-packed **Timișoara**, which broods with its history of anti-Ceaușescu revolt, or edgy **Cluj-Napoca**, harbouring avant-garde nightlife and coffee spots within its Gothic-modern mash-up. On day three, head east to elegant, Saxon-tinged **Sibiu**, before pressing on to **Brașov** on day four. Allow three days to traipse Brașov's forested hills, meander medieval laneways and day-trip to bear country or dramatic **Bran Castle**.

Start week two by bidding goodbye to the beaten track and entering lost-in-time Moldova. Spend a day or two exploring gritty but green capital **Chișinău**: excellent local wine is plentiful and cheap, and stately monuments jostle alongside decaying Soviet relics. Allow one day to visit the stunning cave monastery at **Orheiul Vechi**, and another to time-travel into Transdnistr, 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.

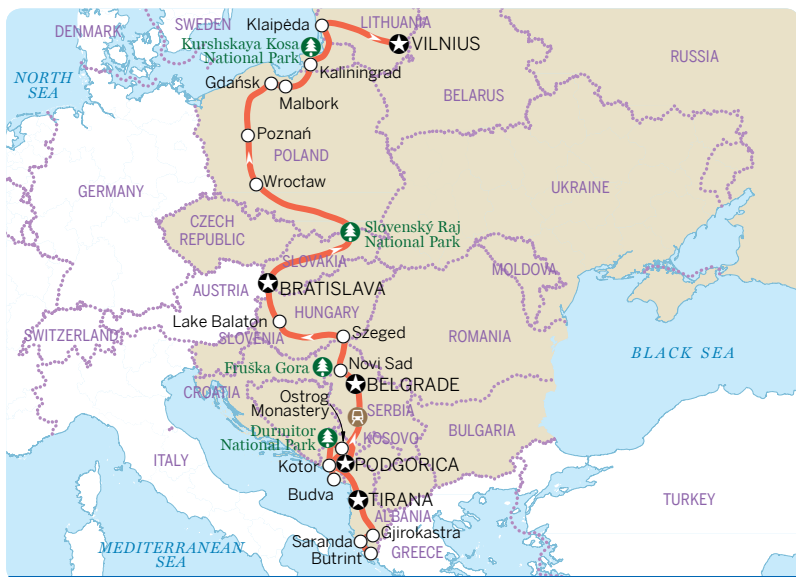
Entering Ukraine on day 11, make a beeline for **Kyiv**, which demands around four days' attention. An ancient seat of Slavic and Orthodox culture, today Kyiv is a modern and pleasant metropolis. Don't miss the Pecherska Lavra complex and St Sophia's Cathedral, as well as ousted ex-president Viktor Yanukovich's opulent mansion Mezhyhirya. For a complete contrast, detour to the western edge of the country where Unesco World Heritage-listed **Lviv** is a town of quaint cobbles, aromatic coffeehouses and rattling trams; its Parisian vibe feels a continent away from the war-torn badlands of Ukraine's east.

The final stops on this tour of the region's lesser discovered highlights take you to Belarus, Europe's so-called 'last dictatorship'. Around day 17, have a blast in monolithic **Minsk**, a city dominated by huge Stalinist avenues and Soviet memorials. Heading southwest, stop at **Brest** on the border and visit the fortress. Use Brest as a base to visit **Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park**, where you'll be able to see Europe's largest mammal, the European bison, as well as a host of other wild beauties before crossing back into the EU.



Top: Bran Castle  
(p322), Romania  
Right: *Courage*,  
sculpture in Brest  
Fortress (p67), Belarus





## The Ionian to the Baltic

This eight-country odyssey extends from the Ionian to Baltic Seas, darting between sea-facing fortresses, mountainous vistas and some of Eastern Europe's undiscovered old towns.

Arrive in Albania by ferry from Corfu at the busy port of **Saranda**, and head to the ancient ruins in **Butrint** near the Greek border. Continue up through Albania to Unesco-listed **Gjirokastra**, whose stone-and-slate old town on a hillside is Albania's loveliest. Press on to Albanian capital **Tirana**, for a couple of days of colourful cityscapes and inventive museums before journeying on to Montenegro.

Base yourself in ancient, walled **Kotor**, soaking up its coastal setting. Move on to **Budva** to dally in the atmospheric Old Town and beaches. Head north to the 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 vibrant Serbian capital **Belgrade**. Spend a couple of days here, then continue north to convivial **Novi Sad** and explore the serene **Fruška Gora** monasteries and vineyards nearby.

Cross into Hungary at verdant, culture-crammed **Szeged** and head for **Lake Balaton** for sublime swimming. Keep surging north into Slovakia, aiming for plucky **Bratislava**, to spend a few days hopping between cute cafes, mighty castles and perhaps a trip out to the inspiring Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum. Venture onward to chilly gorges and cascades in high-octane **Slovenský Raj National Park**.

Crossing the Tatra Mountains into Poland, travel to **Wroclaw**, spending a few days admiring street art and edgy galleries before dropping in on pastel-coloured **Poznań**. From here, head for the Baltic coast: **Gdańsk** is a thriving port city. From here, make day trips to beaches and to **Malbork**, famed for Europe's biggest Gothic castle.

Next up is the intriguing Russian exclave of **Kaliningrad** which combines elements of old Prussia, the USSR and modern Russia. Return to the coast to travel through **Kurshskaya Kosa National Park** and cross into the Lithuanian section of birch tree-forested Curonian Spit, aiming for **Klaipėda**, Lithuania's main port with a merry, beer-loving nightlife. End your trip in baroque **Vilnius**, Lithuania's many-steepled capital.



## Baltic Blast

This trip weaves through four very different countries: skirting the Baltic coast, plunging through thick forests, and taking in treasured art. In the space of a fortnight you'll see rolling countryside, discover three capital cities – Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius – along with timeless St Petersburg and quirky Baltic towns.

Set aside three nights for the heart-stoppingly beautiful city of **St Petersburg** to see the Hermitage, vast Nevsky Prospekt's mansions, and the amazing Church on the Spilled Blood. Head out of town to the reconstructed palaces and manicured gardens of **Peterhof**, which belonged to Peter the Great.

Take a bus or train to the Estonian capital **Tallinn** for two days. Wander the chocolate-box streets and stone towers of the 14th- and 15th-century Old Town before heading to the university town of **Tartu**, packed with interesting museums, parks and handsome wooden buildings. Duck west to the Baltic coast where you'll find the inviting Estonian beach resort of **Pärnu**. Rest here for a day to indulge in all the pleasures of Eastern European summer holiday-making: mud baths, Bacchanalian nightlife and golden-sand beaches.

At the beginning of week two, continue south into Latvia, stopping off in cheerful, castle-rich **Sigulda**. Spend a day walking in the tranquil landscapes and dense forests of **Gauja National Park**. On day 10, continue on to **Riga**, Latvia's delightful capital, where you can soak up fantastic art-nouveau architecture, plus bleak history and a contrastingly friendly Old Town, over two days. On one of the days, take an excursion to the opulent **Rundāle Palace** to see how 18th-century aristocrats lived. On day 12, day-trip to the lovely beaches and wooden villas of **Jūrmala**.

Lithuania is next, and it greets you with the astounding Hill of Crosses in **Šiauliai**, an icon of Lithuanian identity (even if there's no reason to dawdle in the town). Spirited university town **Kaunas** boasts a leafy old centre and bookish cafes, as well as being just a short distance away from the chilling history of war and deportation at Ninth Fort. End your journey in beautiful **Vilnius**, the country's crowning glory, which clasps an artistic quarter, weathered watchtowers and an alluring Old Town within its bounds.



## Eastern Europe 101

Looking to cram history, culture and nightlife into a zippy fortnight-long trip? This itinerary knits together highlights from five Eastern European countries.

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**. Staying for two nights gives you time to see the Old Town, Wawel Castle and Kazimierz, and do a day trip to **Oświęcim** (Auschwitz) before taking the overnight train to **Prague**. Spend another two days on intensive sightseeing – Prague Castle, Charles Bridge, wandering the Malá Strana and the Old Town and tasting genuine Czech beer in a local brewery.

At the end of day five, 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 (at the end of day seven) to Romania's 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.

On day nine, continue by train to **Plovdiv** in Bulgaria, equally rich in Roman ruins, creaky Bulgarian Revival-era mansions, inventive galleries and bars. Stay two nights here, allowing time to amble through the Old Town, pose in the Roman Amphitheatre, and take a half-day trip to vertiginous Asen's Fortress. On day 11, take the train to **Sofia** for two nights exploring the grit and glamour of the Bulgarian capital, in particular the golden-domed Aleksander Nevski Cathedral and the Ancient Serdica Complex.

On your last day, take a day trip from Sofia through the Rila Mountains to the country's spiritual nucleus. Thousand-year-old **Rila Monastery** is Bulgaria's holiest site and one of the most important monasteries in Eastern Europe, in a mountain setting as spine-tingling as its apocalyptic frescoes. 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.



# Map Legend

## Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

## Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

## Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

## Eating

- Eating

## Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

## Entertainment

- Entertainment

## Shopping

- Shopping

## Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

## Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

## Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

## Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Tube station
- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

## Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

## Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

## Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

## Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

*Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book*



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**Poland** Tim is a travel writer whose work has appeared in a variety of newspapers, magazines and websites. He also researches and writes guidebooks for Lonely Planet. Tim lived in Egypt for two years, and Poland for a year, while teaching English as a foreign language in the mid-1990s. Nowadays he lives in the city centre of Melbourne, Australia, with his wife, Narrelle Harris.

**Simon Richmond**

Journalist and photographer Simon Richmond has specialised as a travel writer since the early 1990s and first worked for Lonely Planet in 1999 on their Central Asia guide. He's long since stopped counting the number of guidebooks he's researched and written for the company, but countries covered including Australia, China, India, Iran, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), Russia, Singapore, South Africa and Turkey. For Lonely

Planet's website he's penned features on topics from the world's best swimming pools to the joys of Urban Sketching - follow him on Instagram to see some of his photos and sketches. Simon contributed to the Plan and Survival Guide chapters

**Tamara Sheward**

**Montenegro & Serbia** After years of freelance travel writing, rock'n'roll journalism and insalubrious authorship, Tamara leapt at the chance to join the Lonely Planet ranks in 2009. Since then, she's worked on guides to an incongruous jumble of countries including Montenegro, Australia, Serbia, Russia, the Samoas, Bulgaria and Fiji. She's written a miscellany of travel

articles for the BBC, *The Independent*, *Sydney Morning Herald* et al; she's also fronted the camera as a documentary presenter for Lonely Planet TV, Nat Geo and Al-Jazeera. Tamara's based in far northern Australia, but you're more likely to find her roaming elsewhere, tattered notebook in one hand, the world's best-travelled toddler in the other.

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### Mark Elliott

**Bosnia & Hercegovina** Having already lived and worked on five continents, Mark started writing travel guides in the pre-Internet dark ages. His first work, *Asia Overland*, was a ludicrously over-ambitious opus covering a whole continent and designed to aid impecunious English teachers make the trip home to Europe from Japan with a minimal budget. It was one of the first guides to help backpackers across the then-new states of the former USSR.

Elliott has since written, or co-written, around 60 other travel books, while acting as a travel consultant, occasional tour leader, video presenter, interviewer and blues harmonicist.



### Anita Isalska

**Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania & Slovakia** Anita is a travel journalist, editor and copywriter whose work for Lonely Planet has taken her from Greek beach towns to Malaysian jungles, and plenty of places in between. After several merry years as an in-house editor and writer – with a few of them in Lonely Planet's London office – Anita now works freelance between the UK, Australia and any Balkan guesthouse with a good wi-fi connection. Anita writes about

travel, food and culture for a host of websites and magazines. Read her stuff on [www.anita-isalska.com](http://www.anita-isalska.com).



### Tom Masters

**Albania & Kosovo** Dreaming since he could walk of going to the most obscure places on earth, Tom has always had a taste for the unknown. This has led to a writing career that has taken him all over the world, including North Korea, the Arctic, Congo and Siberia. Despite a brief spell living in the English countryside, Tom has always called London, Paris and Berlin home. He currently lives in Berlin and can be found online at [www.tommasters.net](http://www.tommasters.net).



### Hugh McNaughtan

**Lithuania** A former English lecturer, Hugh swapped grant applications for visa applications, and turned his love of travel into a full-time thing. A long-time castle tragic with an abiding love of Britain's Celtic extremities, he jumped at the chance to explore Wales, from the Cambrian Mountains to the tip of Anglesey. He's never happier than when on the road with his two daughters. Except perhaps on the cricket field....



### Lorna Parkes

**Macedonia** Londoner by birth, Melburnian by palate and ex-Lonely Planet staffer in both cities, Lorna has spent more than 10 years exploring the globe in search of the perfect meal, the friendliest B&B, the best-value travel experience, and the most spectacular lookout point – both for her own pleasure and other people's. She's discovered she writes best on planes, and has contributed to numerous Lonely Planet books and magazines. Wineries and the

tropics (not at the same time!) are her go-to happy places. Follow her @Lorna\_Explorer.



### Leonid Ragozin

**Latvia, Russia & Ukraine** Leonid studied beach dynamics at the Moscow State University, but for want of decent beaches in Russia, he switched to journalism and spent 12 years voyaging through different parts of the BBC, with a break for a four-year stint as a foreign correspondent for the Russian *Newsweek*. Leonid is currently a freelance journalist focusing largely on the

conflict between Russia and Ukraine (both his Lonely Planet destinations), which prompted him to leave Moscow and find a new home in Riga.



## 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, Dublin, 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

**Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania & Slovenia** Mark is a freelance travel writer with a penchant for offbeat stories and forgotten places. He's originally from the United States, but now makes his home in the Czech capital, Prague. He writes mainly on Eastern and Central Europe for Lonely Planet as well as other leading travel publishers, but finds real satisfaction in digging up stories in places that are too remote or quirky for the guides. Prior to becoming an author, he worked as a

journalist for *The Economist*, Bloomberg News and Radio Free Europe, among other organisations. Instagram: @markbakerprague Twitter: @markbakerprague



### Greg Bloom

**Belarus & Moldova** Greg is a freelance writer, tour operator and travel planner based out of Siem Reap, Cambodia, and Manila, Philippines. Greg began his writing career in the late '90s in Ukraine, working as a journalist and later editor-in-chief of the *Kyiv Post*, an English-language weekly. As a freelance travel writer, he has contributed to some 35 Lonely Planet titles, mostly in Eastern

Europe and Asia. In addition to writing, he now organises adventure trips in Cambodia and Palawan (Philippines) through his tour company, Bearcat Travel.



### Marc Di Duca

**Croatia, Poland & Ukraine** A travel author for the last decade, Marc has worked for Lonely Planet in Siberia, Slovakia, Bavaria, England, Ukraine, Austria, Poland, Croatia, Portugal, Madeira and on the Trans-Siberian Railway, as well as writing and updating tens of other guides for other publishers. When not on the road, Marc lives between Sandwich, Kent and Mariánské Lázně in the Czech Republic with his wife and two sons.



### Peter Dragicevich

**Croatia & Estonia** After a successful career in niche newspaper and magazine publishing, both in his native New Zealand and in Australia, Peter finally gave into Kiwi wanderlust, giving up staff jobs to chase his diverse roots around much of Europe. Over the last decade he's written literally dozens of guidebooks for Lonely Planet on an oddly disparate collection of countries, all of which he's come to love. He once again calls Auckland, New Zealand his home – although his current nomadic existence means he's often elsewhere.

### Published by Lonely Planet Global Limited

CRN 554153

14th edition – October 2017

ISBN 978 1 78657 145 8

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

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