

# Welcome to Eastern Europe

*From soaring mountains to golden sands, Eastern Europe reveals a tapestry of quaint and contemporary cultures – always with enough rough edges to keep you intrigued.*

## Cultural Explosion

Eastern Europe is a warehouse of culture, whether your preference is fine arts or folk singing. Cities such as Prague, St Petersburg and Budapest are effortlessly elegant, housing remarkable art collections in palatial surrounds. Some locations are akin to open-air museums, like Moscow's vast Red Square and the art nouveau architecture across Riga. For every age-old powerhouse of classical music and opera, you'll also discover a plucky up-and-comer, building a reputation for avant-garde nightlife (Belgrade) or gritty galleries (Cluj-Napoca).

## Spectacular Scenery

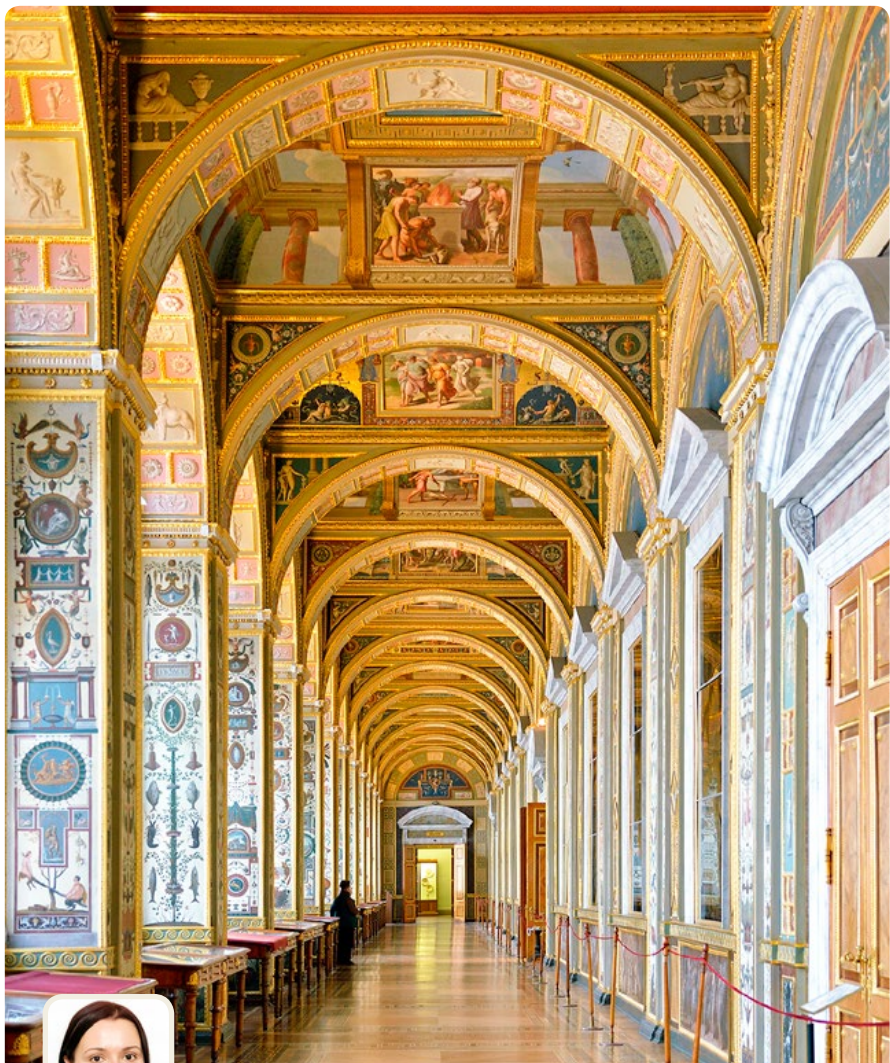
Sandy beaches, windswept plains, rugged mountain ranges – Eastern Europe has it all. Glide down the Danube River, bob across Macedonia's Lake Ohrid or splash around in Hungary's Lake Balaton. Gulp down fresh air and solitude in Albania's Accursed Mountains, Transylvania's crisscrossing ranges, or the High Tatras, which rumble along the Poland–Slovakia border. Test the white-water in Slovenia's Triglav National Park, or explore canyons and caverns in Montenegro or Bosnia and Herzegovina. You can be exhilarated or lulled into contentment exploring Eastern Europe's great outdoors.

## Historic Overload

History surrounds you in Eastern Europe. Gaze at St Basil's Cathedral on Moscow's Red Square, a legacy of Ivan the Terrible's brutal reign; cross the bridge where Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo; feel the echo of the Romanian Revolution on Bucharest's Revolution Square or more recent tragic events on Kyiv's Maydan Nezalezhnosti. Stroll even further back in time through the remains of Diocletian's Palace in Split, Croatia; or through Sofia and Plovdiv in Bulgaria, where ancient ruins continue to be unearthed.

## Folklore & Festivals

Eastern Europe is the heartland of Orthodox Christianity: the religion's rites permeate many aspects of cultural life, particularly in Russia and Ukraine. Roman Catholic, Muslim and Jewish communities add their own influences, while whiffs of pagan tradition can be felt in the Baltics. Baltica International Folklore Festivals, Slovakia's Východná and Bulgaria's Rose Festival are captivating events, full of insight into age-old Europe. Traditional woodcarvers still hunch over workbenches in Slovakia, while glass icons continue to be painted in Romania, allowing travellers to take home a piece of Eastern European craft.



## Why I Love Eastern Europe

By Anita Isalska, Writer

Eastern Europe is peppered with the unexpected. Gothic spires and Lego-block buildings share the same streets. Eerie communist-era wrecks glower over beaches and walking trails. I'm fascinated by how this region incorporates a bloody, border-shifting past into the spirited present – often with dry humour. Soviet-themed cafes from Moscow to Chişinău balance irony with nostalgia, and Budapest's crumbling buildings have morphed into ruin bars. Eastern Europe revives not only dilapidated neighbourhoods, but raises entire cities from rubble. When proud, irrepressible Eastern Europe gets under your skin, it's impossible to resist exploring.

**For more about our writers, see p480**