



Belarus

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hotel Manastyrski (p94)
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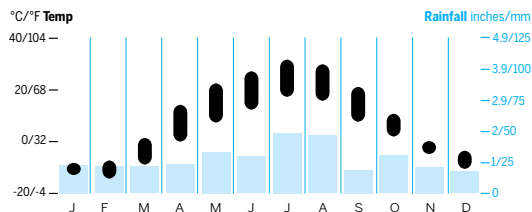
Why Go?

Eastern Europe's outcast, Belarus (Беларусь) lies at the edge of the region and seems determined to avoid integration with the rest of the continent at all costs. Taking its lead from the Soviet Union rather than the European Union, this little-visited dictatorship may seem like a strange choice for travellers, but its isolation lies at the heart of its appeal.

While the rest of Eastern Europe has charged headlong into capitalism, Belarus allows the chance to visit a Europe with minimal advertising and no litter or graffiti. Outside the monumental Stalinist capital of Minsk, Belarus offers a simple yet pleasing landscape of cornflower fields, thick forests and picturesque villages. The country also offers two excellent national parks and is home to Europe's largest mammal, the zoobr (or European bison). While travellers will always be subject to curiosity, they'll also be on the receiving end of warm hospitality and genuine welcome.

When to Go

Minsk



Jun–Aug Come to Belarus to escape the crowds elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Early Jul On 6 July watch locals celebrate *Kupalye*, a fortune-telling festival with pagan roots.

Mid-Jul Join in Vitsebsk's superb Slavyansky Bazaar festival and celebrate all things Slavic.



Belarus Highlights

1 Get under the skin of **Minsk** (p93), the showpiece of Stalinist architecture and a friendly, accessible city.

2 Spot a European bison, a brown bear or a wolf at **Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park** (p99).

3 Stroll through the mellow pedestrian streets of cosmopolitan **Brest** to the epic WWII memorial that is Brest Fortress (p98).

4 Discover the childhood home of painter Marc Chagall (p100) in **Vitebsk**.

5 See the fairy-tale 16th-century castle (p97) that presides over the tranquil town of **Mir**.

6 Explore one of the few historical complexes to have survived WWII at **Nyasvizh**, at the gloriously restored Radziwill Palace Fortress (p97).