



# Eastern Europe



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STARI GRAD, HVAR ISLAND  
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## ON THE ROAD

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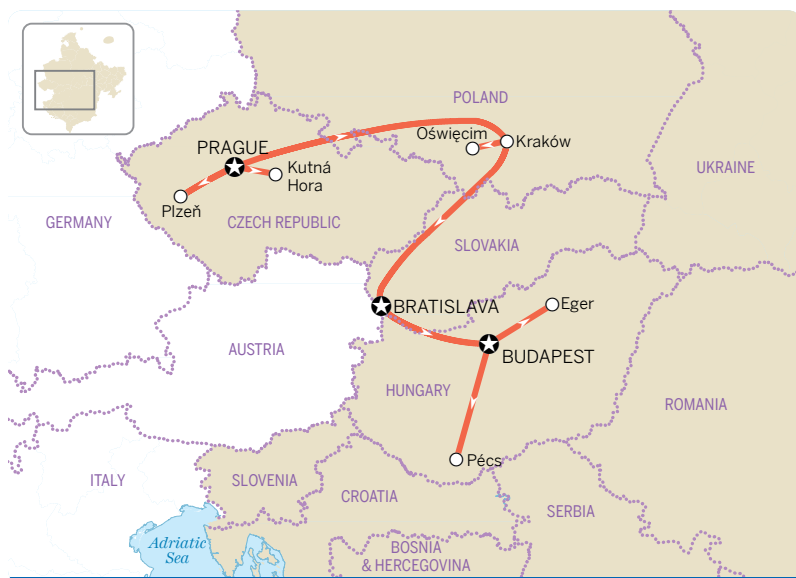
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# Itineraries



## 2 WEEKS Essential Eastern Europe

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

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

On day five head by train into Poland to reach **Kraków**, with its gob-smacking Main Square. Over three days, ramble Wawel Castle and off-beat Kazimierz, and take a trip to harrowing **Oświęcim** (Auschwitz).

On day eight head to Slovakia, passing through the High Tatras before reaching **Bratislava**, with its Danube views. Spend the evening in wine bars and beer halls; the next morning, take a half-day excursion to crumbling Devín Castle.

On day 10 take a boat down the Danube to **Budapest**. Spend a couple days simmering in outdoor baths, exploring coffee houses and ruin bars, and admiring the architecture. From here bolt to the baroque **Eger** and finish with a day trip to **Pécs**, full of relics from the Turkish occupation.



2  
WEEKS

## 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 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 and the Old Town, and tasting Czech beer in a local pub.

At the end of day five, take another overnight train to **Budapest** for two nights in Hungary. Soak in the glorious Gellért Baths, take a cruise on the Danube, see the magnificent 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 Palace of Parliament, wander the historic centre and pick up the city's energy in its bars and clubs.

On day nine, continue by bus or 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 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, in a mountain setting as spine-tingling as its apocalyptic frescoes. From here, fly out of Sofia or continue to bigger regional air hubs, such as Athens or Istanbul, to get a flight home.



## 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 and discover three capitals – Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius – along with timeless St Petersburg and quirky Baltic towns.

Set aside three nights for heart-stoppingly beautiful **St Petersburg** to see the Hermitage, 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 to find the inviting Estonian beach resort of **Pärnu**. Rest here for a day to indulge in the pleasures of summer holiday-making: mud baths, Bacchanalian nightlife and golden-sand beaches.

At the beginning of week two, continue into Latvia, stopping off in cheerful **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 the aristocrats lived. On day 12, day-trip to the beaches of **Jūrmala**.

Lithuania is next, and it greets you with the astounding Hill of Crosses in **Šiauliai**, an icon of Lithuanian identity. Spirited university town **Kaunas** is Lithuania's second city, boasting 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. Finally, end your journey in beautiful **Vilnius**, the country's crowning glory.





## East of East Tour

Pull back the old Iron Curtain to discover the history and beauty of these one-time Soviet satellites of regional heavyweight Russia.

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

After a couple of days enjoying the sights in the Ukrainian capital, and perhaps a guided tour of Chernobyl's exclusion zone, take the sleeper train to the megalopolis **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.

Once you've had your fill, leave Moscow and visit picturesque **Veliky Novgorod** en route to the beautiful baroque and neoclassical architecture of **St Petersburg**. You could easily spend three days here, although there are abundant sights around as well, such as the tsarist palace Tsarskoe Selo.

When you're ready to head off, grab a train to Estonia's magical capital, **Tallinn**, where you can soak up the medieval Old Town. Head south and relax on the golden-sand beaches of **Pärnu** before continuing to the Latvian capital **Riga**, and its fine collection of art-nouveau architecture. Squeeze in trips to the caves and medieval castles of **Sigulda**, and the breathtaking coastline around **Ventspils**.

Cross into Lithuania, where a night or two in **Vilnius** will reveal the Baltic's most underrated capital. From Vilnius travel to the huge sand dunes of the amazing **Curonian Spit**. If you've arranged a double-entry visa for Russia, cross over into the melting-pot exclave of **Kaliningrad**. Alternatively, if you've sorted a Belarus visa, take the train to this isolated republic with its pleasant capital **Minsk** before re-entering Poland and heading back to Warsaw.



Top: Kotor's Old Town  
(p279), Montenegro  
Bottom: Cathedral  
of St Sophia in Veliky  
Novgorod, Russia

MARIYA ZETELINA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©





## Breezing through the Balkans

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

Begin in Slovenia, where the capital **Ljubljana** is a delight with a castle, beautiful buildings and bridges. Indulge in superb scenery and adrenaline-rush sports in the **Julian Alps** before heading south to Croatia and to the beaches along the **Dalmatian Coast**. Stop in **Dubrovnik** to explore the Old Town and the surrounding islands.

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

After exploring **Tiranë**, a mountain-shrouded, ramshackle capital, make an excursion to the Unesco-listed town of **Berat**, before taking a bus into little-explored North 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**, North Macedonia's capital, where an abundance of gleaming, modern Italianate structures are re-defining the city for the 21st century. Take the train to **Pristina**, Kosovo's cosmopolitan capital, from where it's an easy hop to **Prizren**, a 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 scenes. Take a detour to laid-back **Novi Sad** with its neoclassical buildings, outdoor cafes and Danube views.

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



## On the Edge

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

Start in one of Romania's underrated westerly cities: either lively **Timișoara**, with its history of anti-Ceaușescu revolt, or edgy **Cluj-Napoca**, harbouring avant-garde nightlife and coffee spots. On day three, head east to elegant **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 entering lost-in-time Moldova. Spend a day or two exploring gritty but green capital **Chișinău**; excellent local wine is plentiful and cheap. Allow a day to visit the stunning cave monastery at **Orheiul Vechi**, and another to time-travel into Transnistria, a country that doesn't officially exist. Little appears to have changed in the 'capital' **Tiraspol** since the Soviet era.

Entering Ukraine on day 11, make a beeline for **Odesa**, which is only two hours by train or bus from Tiraspol, to enjoy the seaside setting of Ukraine's Black Sea resort. Next, head north and devote around four days to the country's dynamic capital, **Kyiv**. An ancient seat of Slavic and Orthodox culture, it's a modern metropolis that played a starring role in the 2014 Maidan Revolution. Don't miss the Pecherska Lavra complex and St Sophia's Cathedral, as well as ousted ex-president Viktor Yanukovich's opulent mansion Mezhyhirya.

The final stop takes you to Belarus, Europe's so-called 'last dictatorship'. To avoid having to arrange a Belarus visa, fly from Kyiv to monolithic **Minsk**, a city dominated by Stalinist avenues and Soviet memorials. Minsk is generating buzz for its scintillating nightlife, centred around the up-and-coming arts quarter vul Katrychnitskaya. End your journey with a trip to the provinces. Check out the castle in **Mir**, then experience provincial life in **Nyasvizh** with its ancient churches and 16th-century castle.



4  
WEEKS

## The Ionian to the Baltic

This eight-country odyssey extends from the Ionian to Baltic Seas, darting between sea-facing fortresses, mountainous vistas and undiscovered towns.

Arrive in Albania by ferry at the port of **Saranda**, and head to the ruins in **Butrint**. Continue through Albania to Unesco-listed **Gjirokastra**, whose stone-and-slate Old Town is Albania's loveliest. Press on to the capital **Tirana** for a couple of days of colourful cityscapes and inventive museums, before journeying on to Montenegro.

Move first to **Budva** with its atmospheric Old Town and beaches and then discover ancient, walled **Kotor**. Head north to the cliff-face-hugging **Ostrog Monastery** and on to **Durmitor National Park** for hiking, rafting and canyoning.

From Montenegro's capital Podgorica, catch an overnight train to vibrant Serbian capital **Belgrade**. Stroll the citadels and drink by the Danube, then continue north to convivial, Austro-Hungarian-influenced **Novi Sad** and explore the **Fruška Gora** monasteries and vineyards. Cross into Hungary at culture-crammed **Szeged** and head for **Lake Balaton**. Keep surging north into Slovakia, aiming for plucky **Bratislava**, to spend a few days hopping between cafes and castles. Venture onward to chilly gorges and cascades in high-octane **Slovenský Raj National Park**.

Crossing the Tatra Mountains into Poland, travel to cultural hive **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: **Gdansk** is a thriving port where WWII broke out. From here, make day trips to beaches and to **Malbork**, famed for Europe's biggest Gothic castle.

Next up is the Russian exclave of **Kaliningrad**, which combines elements of Prussia, the USSR and modern Russia. Return to the coast to travel through Kaliningrad's **Kurshskaya Kosa National Park** and cross into the Lithuanian section of birch-forested Curonian Spit, aiming for **Klaipeda**, Lithuania's main port. End your trip in many-steeped **Vilnius**.

# Behind the Scenes

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# 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
- Hut/Shelter

## 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
- 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



### Neil Wilson

[Poland](#) Neil was born in Scotland and has lived there most of his life. Based in Perthshire, he has been a full-time writer since 1988, working on more than 80 guidebooks for various publishers, including the Lonely Planet guides to Scotland, England, Ireland and Prague. An outdoors enthusiast since childhood, Neil is an active hill-walker, mountain-biker, sailor, snowboarder, fly-fisher and rock-climber, and has climbed and tramped in four continents, including ascents

of Jebel Toubkal in Morocco, Mount Kinabalu in Borneo, the Old Man of Hoy in Scotland's Orkney Islands and the Northwest Face of Half Dome in California's Yosemite Valley.



### Anthony Ham

[Croatia](#), [Slovenia](#) Anthony is a freelance writer and photographer who specialises in Spain, East and Southern Africa, the Arctic and the Middle East. When he's not writing for Lonely Planet, Anthony writes about and photographs Spain, Africa and the Middle East for newspapers and magazines in Australia, the UK and the US.



### Jessica Lee

[Croatia](#), [Slovenia](#) In 2011 Jessica swapped a career as an adventure-tour leader for travel writing and since then her travels for Lonely Planet have taken her across Africa, the Middle East and Asia. She has lived in the Middle East since 2007 and tweets @jessofarabia. Jess has contributed to Lonely Planet's Egypt, Turkey, Cyprus, Morocco, Marrakesh, Middle East, Europe, Africa, Cambodia, and Vietnam guidebooks and her travel writing has appeared in *Wanderlust* maga-

zine, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent*, BBC Travel and Lonelyplanet.com.



### Kevin Raub

[Serbia](#) Atlanta native Kevin Raub started his career as a music journalist in New York, working for *Men's Journal* and *Rolling Stone* magazines. He ditched the rock 'n' roll lifestyle for travel writing and has written more than 70 Lonely Planet guides, focused mainly on Brazil, Chile, Colombia, USA, India, the Caribbean and Portugal. Raub also contributes to a variety of travel magazines in both the US and UK. Along the way, the self-confessed hophead is in constant search of wildly

high IBUs in local beers. Follow him on Twitter and Instagram (@RaubOnTheRoad).



**Peter Dragicevich**

**Bosnia & Hercegovina, Croatia, Montenegro** After a successful career in niche newspaper and magazine publishing, both in his native New Zealand and in Australia, Peter finally gave in to 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.

**Steve Fallon**

**Hungary** A native of Boston, Massachusetts, Steve graduated from Georgetown University with a Bachelor of Science in modern languages. After working for several years for an American daily newspaper and earning a master's degree in journalism, his fascination with the 'new' Asia led him to Hong Kong, where he lived for over a dozen years, working for a variety of media companies and running his own travel bookshop. Steve lived in Budapest for three years before moving

to London in 1994. He has written or contributed to more than 100 Lonely Planet titles. Steve is a qualified London Blue Badge Tourist Guide. Visit his website on [www.steveslondon.com](http://www.steveslondon.com).

**Anita Isalska**

**Lithuania, Slovakia** Anita Isalska is a travel journalist, editor and copywriter.

After several merry years as a staff writer and editor – a few of them in Lonely Planet's London office – Anita now works freelance between San Francisco, the UK and any Baltic bolthole with good wi-fi. Anita specialises in Eastern and Central Europe, Southeast Asia, France and off-beat travel. Read her stuff on [www.anitaalska.com](http://www.anitaalska.com).

**Vesna Maric**

**North Macedonia** Vesna has been a Lonely Planet author for nearly two decades, covering places as far and wide as Bolivia, Algeria, Sicily, Cyprus, Barcelona, London and Croatia, among others. Her latest work has been updating Florida, Greece and North Macedonia.

**MaSovaida Morgan**

**Estonia, Latvia** MaSovaida is a travel writer and multimedia storyteller whose wanderlust has taken her to more than 40 countries and all seven continents. Previously, she was Lonely Planet's Destination Editor for South America and Antarctica for four years and worked as an editor for newspapers and NGOs in the Middle East and United Kingdom. Follow her on Instagram @MaSovaida.

**Leonid Ragozin**

**Russia, Ukraine** Leonid Ragozin studied beach dynamics at 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 *Newsweek Russia*. 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.

**Brana Vladislavljevic**

**Serbia** Brana grew up in the former Yugoslavia and studied foreign languages and literature in Belgrade. She joined Lonely Planet's Melbourne office in 2004 and has lost count of the phrasebook and guidebook titles she edited over the years. From 2014 to 2019, she was based in the London office as the Destination Editor for Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Brana looked after destinations stretching from the Russian Far East to the Greek islands but has a soft spot for her native Western Balkans region.



## 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. Follow him on Instagram and Twitter (@markbakerprague), and read his blog: [www.markbakerprague.com](http://www.markbakerprague.com). Mark also contributed to the Plan and Survival Guide chapters.



### Greg Bloom

**Belarus, Moldova** Greg is a freelance writer, editor, tour guide and travel planner based out of Manila and Anilao, 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 40 Lonely Planet titles, mostly in Eastern Europe and Asia. In addition to writing, he organises customised adventure tours in north Palawan and north Luzon (Philippines). Greg's travel articles have been published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *South China Morning Post*, BBC.com and the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, among many other publications. Accounts of his Lonely Planet trips over the years are at [www.mytripjournal.com/bloomblogs](http://www.mytripjournal.com/bloomblogs).



### Stuart Butler

**Albania, Kosovo** Stuart has been writing for Lonely Planet for a decade and during this time he's come eye to eye with gorillas in the Congolese jungles, met a man with horns on his head who could lie in fire, huffed and puffed over snow bound Himalayan mountain passes, interviewed a king who could turn into a tree, and had his fortune told by a parrot. Oh, and he's met more than his fair share of self-proclaimed gods. When not on the road for Lonely Planet he lives

on the beautiful beaches of Southwest France with his wife and two young children. He also works as a photographer and was a finalist in both the 2015 and 2016 Travel Photographer of the Year Awards. In 2015 he walked for six weeks with a Maasai friend across part of Kenya's Maasai lands in order to gather material for a book he is writing (see [www.walkingwiththemaasai.com](http://www.walkingwiththemaasai.com)). His website is [www.stuartbutlerjournalist.com](http://www.stuartbutlerjournalist.com).

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