

Bratislava Essentials

Getting there

It's best to fly to Vienna Airport, which is bigger and has more frequent flights than Bratislava's airport. The Slovak capital is just a 40-kilometre trip away by car, taxi, airport shuttle or train. Austrian

Airlines operates four non-stop flights a week from Dorval Airport. If you want to fly from here to Bratislava and don't mind connecting in Europe, try Air Canada and SkyEurope

Airlines (the Slovak carrier) via London, Swiss International via Zurich, or Czech Airlines via Prague. Unlike the Czech

Republic, Canadian tourists don't need a visa to enter Slovakia.

Where to stay

Downtown Bratislava still has a shortage of hotels, but there are at least a few reliable choices in the Old Town.

For the well-heeled business traveller, there's the refurbished Carlton Hotel (address: Hviezdoslavovo namestie 3; \$400 for a double room), a five-star establishment operated by the Radisson chain. For something more intimate, try the four-star Perugia Hotel (address: Zelena ulica 5; \$190

for a double room), which has a terrific restaurant. For something cheaper and different, stay at the three-star Gracia Botel (address: Razusovo nabrezie; \$105 for a double room), a floating ship hotel on the Danube.

Eating out

Thick soups and sauces, lots of cabbage and pork, potato dumplings, goulash, sheep- cheese pasties - if you want to sample the best cuisine of Bratislava, stick to its standard central European fare; there are any number of good restaurants catering to it. But you can also eat Mexican, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, Italian, French and even - unusual but cheap - vegetarian at the Divesta lunch hall (address: Lurinska ul. 8). For dessert, try a sweet Bratislava bajgle (bagel) washed down with your favourite brew at one of the city's many coffee houses, such as the historic Kaffee Mayer (address: Hlanve namestie 4).

Drinking

To really appreciate Slovakia's fine white table wines, especially the

sweet Tokaj, try a glass in the cozy atmosphere of one of Bratislava's vaulted wine cellars. For something hardier and original, there are spirits like borovicka (juniper brandy) and Demanovka, a green herbal cordial. Though its producers are increasingly foreign-owned (just like the major Czech breweries) and their quality varies, Slovak beer is usually crisp and good, especially SABMiller's Saris brand. For a soft drink with a twist, try Kofola, a Slovak (originally, Czech) cola that tastes a bit like Italian Brio, less sweet than Coke or Pepsi.

What to bring home

Folk art is a good buy: painted easter eggs, lace, ceramics, leather baskets and wooden noisemakers are easy finds. Check out the antique stores, too, though service can be rather disinterested, a legacy of the communist years. And if you like used books, old maps and postcards, don't miss dropping in to the atmospheric Steiner's bookshop (address: Venturska ulica 20, in the heart of the old city).

What you're spending

The local currency is the Slovak crown (koruna). There are about 25 crowns to the Canadian dollar. So, for example, if you pay 200 crowns for a seat at the opera, it's the equivalent of \$8. (That's the state-subsidized rate

for locals and VIPs; foreigners pay four times more, just like they did in the communist era. Either way, it's a bargain.)

More on the web, in English

www.slovensko.com

general site, with lots of links

www.old.bratislava.sk/anglicky/index.htm

the city of Bratislava site

www.slovakia.org

pro-Slavic site, based in Vancouver

www.spectator.sk

Bratislava's weekly English newspaper

www.government.gov.sk/english

official Slovak government site

www.slovakembassy.com/english/index.htm

Slovak embassy in Ottawa

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