



Bratislava

Discover cafés and culture as one of Europe's youngest capital cities plays catch-up to its thriving neighbours

Nicknamed 'Little Big City', the Slovakian capital has come out fighting in a bid to compete with the established cities that surround it. Prague, Budapest and Vienna may seem a formidable force, but the cosy capital Bratislava is using its intimate size to its advantage.

GETTING THERE

■ Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) flies direct from Bristol, East Midlands and London Stansted.

■ SkyEurope (www.skyeurope.com) flies direct from Birmingham, London Luton and Manchester.

■ AirSlovakia (www.airlovakia.sk) flies direct from Birmingham.

■ Bus No 61 goes from the airport to the city's central train station (Hlavná stanica), where you can catch tram No 13 to the old town – approx 55 minutes. Buy your ticket from the information booth in arrivals.

■ Passengers carrying more than hand luggage may prefer to take a taxi as buses have limited room for luggage. Expect to pay around £12 for a single taxi journey.

GETTING AROUND

Purchased from the city's tourist offices and some hotel receptions, 1, 2, or 3 day Bratislava City Cards provide discounts on a range of tourist attractions, including galleries, museums and restaurants. The card also allows the holder to travel on city buses and trams free of charge. However, with individual tickets for a one hour bus/tram journey costing only 52p (and most sightseeing done on foot), we would not

recommended a card solely for transport purposes. Before handing over any money, our advice is to take a look through the booklet that accompanies the card to see how many of the discounts you may use.

1 Day £8, 2 Days £10, 3 Days £12

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

Bratislava Castle

Perched high above the city's old town, this impressive castle is worth the steep climb to the top. First referenced in 907 AD, the architecture seen today is representative of centuries of disasters, modifications and reconstruction in the castle's colourful history.

Although access to the castle interior is not permitted (due to a five-year restoration project, which began in March 2008), its far-reaching views are worthy of a visit.

St Martin's Cathedral

Rudnayovo namestie

Consecrated in 1452, this gothic cathedral witnessed a total of 19 coronations between 1563 and 1830 and a replica of St Steven's crown tops the 85-metre steeple. Look to the south-east corner of the nave where you will see the statue of St Martin and the beggar, a striking sculpture by Raphael Donner. Open Mon-Sat 10am-11.30am and 1.30pm-4pm, Sun 1.30pm-4.30pm (times may vary).

Admission 50Sk (£1.20)

Primate's Palace

Primacialne namestie 3

Located just off the main square, this beautiful pink palace dates back to the end of the 18th century. Originally built as the Archbishop's winter residence, the striking facade displays his coat of arms, crowned with a cardinal hat.

Further down, a pair of angels hold the letters 'C' and 'I' to represent the Archbishop's motto 'Clementia et Iustitia' (kindness and justice). The interior is just as elegant and it's easy to see why the grand hall of mirrors has hosted many important events.

The palace is also home to a notable display of English tapestries, yet how and when they came to the palace remains a mystery. Open 10am-5pm. Closed Monday.

Admission 40Sk (£1)

Michael's Gate

Michalská street 24

www.muzeum.bratislava.sk

The only remaining tower gateway from Bratislava's medieval fortification and now home to the city's Arms Museum. Some interesting artefacts are on display, although the view from the tower is arguably the best exhibit of all. Open Tues-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat-Sun 11am-6pm. Closed Monday.

Admission 130 SK (£3.10)

TIP The viewing platform at the top is fairly narrow, so avoid peak times to ensure you make the most of the view.

Old Town Hall: The Museum of City History

Primacialne Square 3

www.muzeum.bratislava.sk

Originally dating back to the 14th century, an earthquake and fire has contributed to the building's evolution. Climb the Baroque-styled tower for great views over the main square, and don't miss the former town prison and torture chamber in the basement of the building. Open Tues-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat-Sun 11am-6pm. Closed Monday.

Admission 70Sk (£1.70)

For the magazine report on Bratislava, see p47 of the May 2008 issue of Which? Holiday



The UFO Observation Deck on the New Bridge

Grassalkovich Palace

Hodňovo namestie 1

www.prezident.sk

Home to the president of Slovakia, this 18th-century palace is located to the north of the city, amidst the hustle and bustle that lies outside the pedestrianised old town. Although you can't go inside, the French inspired gardens are open to the public.

UFO Observation Deck

Novy most (on the New Bridge)

www.u-f-o.sk

The Observation Deck is located 95 metres above street level on top of the UFO restaurant. A 45-second lift ride whisks you to the top. Open daily 10am-11pm.

Admission 150Sk (£3.60). Discounts available

TIP The restaurant is comparatively expensive to many in the city (main courses around £21), so why not experience the magnificent evening views from the stylish bar – cocktails from 140Sk (£3.40).

Take a tour

It won't take long before you spot your first tour group patrolling the city. Walking tours are a good way to get an insight into the history of the capital and can help you decide which sights to explore in further detail.

Tip Around two hours is the recommended length for a thorough tour of the old town (three hours including the castle). Alternatively, view the city on board a sightseeing cruise down the River Danube (45-minute round trip in April-September, www.lod.sk). **Adults 105Sk (£2.50)**

Visit Vienna

Vienna is only 40 miles from Bratislava, making it a popular day-trip destination. You can travel there by train or bus, and during the peak season, high-speed catamarans and cruise liners (hydrofoil) depart from the passenger port daily. Catamaran journeys take 75 minutes, and weekend prices start from £25 return

(www.twincityliner.com). Hydrofoil cruise liners are less frequent and take a leisurely one hour and 45mins, £18 return (www.lod.sk).

TIP Don't forget your passport!

Opera, ballet and music

Tickets for the opera, ballet and music performances are a fraction of UK prices. Visit www.bratislavaguide.com for information on what's on.

Devin Castle

Muránska street

www.muzeum.bratislava.sk

A ruin since it was blown up by Napoleon's troops in 1809, Devin castle is located eight miles to the west of the city centre. Far-reaching views of Austria can be seen from its peak, while the confluence of the River Danube and Morava meets below.

The castle can be reached by bus or via the hydrofoil cruise liner (April-September, www.lod.sk). Open April, October, November Tues-Sun 10am-5pm. May-Sept Tues-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat-Sun 10am-7pm.

Admission 130Sk (£3.10). Discounts available

TIPS

■ Those with walking difficulties should be aware that there are a number of stairs to navigate at many sights. These are particularly steep and narrow at Michael's Tower and The Old Town Hall.

■ Many museums are closed on Mondays.

GOOD PLACES TO STAY

Hotel Danube

Rybné námestie 1,

Tel 00421 25934 0000

www.hoteldanube.com

A large hotel with views of the River Danube and Bratislava Castle. Standard rooms are clean and comfortable, but the decor and furnishings are fairly bland. The hotel is undergoing refurbishment to update the restaurant, café and boutiques. Work should be completed by the beginning of June 2008. **Double B&B £139**

Hotel Michalská Brána

Bastova 4,

Tel 00421 25930 7200

www.michalskabrana.com

A fabulous boutique hotel located along a cobbled side street in the heart of Bratislava's old town. Despite its modern interior, this former fort house has a history dating back 600 years. The street itself holds many a historic tale and for centuries was home to the town hangman! Don't expect too many scenic views from your bedroom window, just high-quality, tastefully decorated and extremely comfortable accommodation. **Double B&B £108**

PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK

Au Cafe

Tyrsovo nabrezie (Danube embankment)

Tel 00421 26252 0355

www.au-cafe.sk

Cross the 'New Bridge' from the old town to the charming Au Cafe Italian restaurant. Set on the banks of the Danube, the food is tasty, the staff friendly and the views a delight. Main course around £11.

Kaffee Mayer

Hlavné nám 4

Originally a Vienna-founded bakery and situated in the old town's main square, the café offers a large selection of delicious homemade cakes and sweets. In the warmer months chairs and tables fill the pavement outside the café, ideal for people-watching.

Schokocafé Maximilian

Hlavné nám

A welcoming café and chocolate shop overlooking the main square and Maximilian fountain. A vast array of hot chocolates, coffees, teas, smoothies and juices are available, and the café's special chocolate fondue, served with a choice of chocolates, biscuits and wafers, is just too tempting!

Traditional Slovak Restaurant

Michalská ul. 14-16

Tel 00421 25443 0872

www.staroslovenskakrcma.sk

The name of this restaurant says it all, traditional Slovak cuisine served among authentic furnishings. Expect a hearty meal with some unusual combinations of flavours. Main course around £9.50

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Time difference UK +1 hour

International dialling code 00421

Exchange rate £1 = 41.3 Sk

When to go Travel between April and September, but expect to see plenty of tour groups in the peak summer months. A trip during the week may suit those who want to avoid the busy weekends (including stag groups), but many of the city's museums and sights are closed on Mondays.

GUIDEBOOKS & WEBSITES



■ **Bratislava Pictorial**

Guide by Martin

Sloboda, £5.50

(ISBN 80-89159-02-08)

■ **Visiting Slovakia:**

Bratislava Old Town, £7.95

(ISBN 80-88975-91-3)

■ www.bratislava.sk

■ www.bkis.sk

