



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

EUROPE

ON A BUDGET



INSIDE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION What to see, when to go, author picks, ideas and more

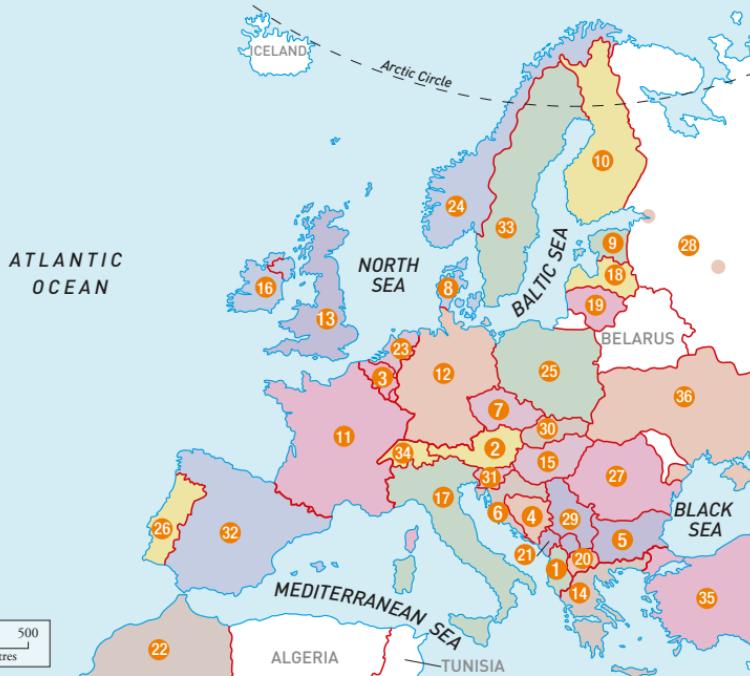
ITINERARIES Plan your route around the continent

BASICS Pre-departure tips and practical information

THE GUIDE Comprehensive, in-depth guide to 36 countries, with highlights, expert reviews, language tips and full-colour maps throughout

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide with the ★ symbol

Europe on a Budget chapters



- | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1 Albania | 10 Finland | 19 Lithuania | 28 Russia |
| 2 Austria | 11 France | 20 Macedonia | 29 Serbia |
| 3 Belgium & Luxembourg | 12 Germany | 21 Montenegro | 30 Slovakia |
| 4 Bosnia-Herzegovina | 13 Great Britain | 22 Morocco | 31 Slovenia |
| 5 Bulgaria | 14 Greece | 23 The Netherlands | 32 Spain |
| 6 Croatia | 15 Hungary | 24 Norway | 33 Sweden |
| 7 Czech Republic | 16 Ireland | 25 Poland | 34 Switzerland |
| 8 Denmark | 17 Italy | 26 Portugal | 35 Turkey |
| 9 Estonia | 18 Latvia | 27 Romania | 36 Ukraine |

Make the Most of Your Time on Earth at roughguides.com

This fifth edition published March 2017



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO **EUROPE** ON A BUDGET

written and researched by

Jonathan Bousfield, Tim Burford, Kiki Deere, Marc Di Duca,
Darragh Geraghty, Emma Gibbs, Lottie Gross, Matthew Hancock,
Eva Hibbs, Daniel Jacobs, Anna Kaminski, Gabriella Le Breton,
Phil Lee, Norm Longley, John Malathronas, Olivia Rawes, Terry
Richardson, Emma Thomson, Kate Turner, Jeroen van Marle,
Steve Vickers, Neville Walker, Luke Waterson and Matt Willis



roughguides.com



Contents

INTRODUCTION	4		
Where to go	8	Ideas	14
When to go	12	Itineraries	22
Author picks	13		
BASICS	28		
Getting there	29	Festivals and annual events	37
Getting around	31	Work and study	38
Accommodation	36	Travel essentials	40
THE GUIDE	47		
1 Albania	47	19 Lithuania	697
2 Austria	61	20 Macedonia	715
3 Belgium & Luxembourg	87	21 Montenegro	727
4 Bosnia-Herzegovina	113	22 Morocco	741
5 Bulgaria	127	23 The Netherlands	773
6 Croatia	153	24 Norway	801
7 Czech Republic	183	25 Poland	831
8 Denmark	207	26 Portugal	859
9 Estonia	237	27 Romania	895
10 Finland	255	28 Russia	915
11 France	275	29 Serbia	939
12 Germany	351	30 Slovakia	957
13 Great Britain	415	31 Slovenia	977
14 Greece	495	32 Spain	997
15 Hungary	545	33 Sweden	1083
16 Ireland	569	34 Switzerland	1113
17 Italy	603	35 Turkey	1139
18 Latvia	681	36 Ukraine	1177
SMALL PRINT & INDEX	1193		



Introduction to Europe

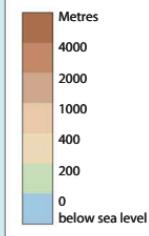
Europe presents an irresistible challenge to the budget traveller. A potent mix of culture, landscape and history on the one hand and a cash-gobbling monster on the other, sticking to your daily allowance can prove tricky. But learn to zone out the “Spend! Spend! Spend!” siren song of its myriad restaurants, bars and shops and you’ll find that this compact little continent is simply the world’s greatest labyrinth. From London’s Royal Parks and Amsterdam’s canals to Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar and Germany’s Berlin Wall, just getting tangled up in its sights is a huge draw – you can do the Algarve, the Alps and the Arctic, all in one trip. There’s time travel here too: with Stonehenge and Ephesus, cathedrals and castles, châteaux and palaces (not to mention statement-making modern architecture), Europe’s man-made structures zoom you through millennia of civilization, a tumultuous history that scars and bejewels the continent by turns.

With its cultural kaleidoscope shifting not just from one country to the next but between towns and villages, relatively short distances can mean profound changes – bang for your backpacking buck, in other words, especially with the average gap-year trip getting shorter. And you needn’t miss out even in some of the world’s most **sophisticated cities**, with many iconic European experiences mercifully light on the pocket: think of *aperitivo* time in Rome, *blini* in Moscow, the freebie wonders at London’s British Museum and bargain lunchtime concerts in Paris or Dublin. You will have to spend a few bob, of course. **Accommodation** and travel are bound to devour a fair chunk of your funds; the glass-half-full response is, “What do I spend the rest on?”. Start by giving your **taste buds** the ride of their lives, be it in a Lyon *bouchon*, a smoky Turkish *ocakbaşı*, at a market or on the hoof (see Ideas, p.19). Don’t be tempted to skip breakfast, either – an oven-fresh croissant or calorie-jammed “full English” are not to be missed, and all the more important in a morning-after-the-night-before context, especially since Europe lives for the wee hours. Whether it’s Berlin and

London's hipster dives, flamenco in Seville, Budapest's ruin bars or craft beer and organic wines in Bologna, there are countless reasons to stay up till sunrise. For fun en masse, check out the continent's **festivals** (see Ideas, p.16) – both traditional and modern – and the outdoor activities that animate its wide-open spaces (see Ideas, p.21), from horseriding in Bulgaria's Rila Mountains to surfing on Portugal's gnarled Alentejo coast. One advantage of **budget travel** is that it makes splurging all the sweeter – for a little flashpacking guidance, keep an eye out for our Treat Yourself tips throughout the Guide.

With just a few exceptions (see p.41), red tape won't be an issue thanks to Europe's unique "open borders" policy – you can travel **hassle-free** between countries that were once fierce enemies. To bolster your funds, consider working (see p.39), which can be a great way to meet people, immerse yourself in a country's day-to-day life and improve your language skills. But a word of caution – while you'll come across sleepy corners where things seem unchanged since some distant "Once upon a time" era, there's an atmosphere of unrest in others. The Eurozone financial crisis is rippling across the continent, having already destabilized governments from Ireland and Greece to Portugal and Slovenia, while 2016 saw Britain opt out of EU membership in the groundbreaking Brexit referendum. Recent terrorist attacks in France and Germany may make you wary, but remember that they're infrequent occurrences. When planning your trip and before you set off, keep an eye on the news and scour Twitter, which is also invaluable for up-to-the-minute reviews of new openings and off-the-beaten-track recommendations. The disaffected mood does have one upside: with its citizens so **politically engaged**, this is one of the most interesting times to travel in Europe for decades, and you're bound to have conversations and encounters that define your memories, whichever road you take.







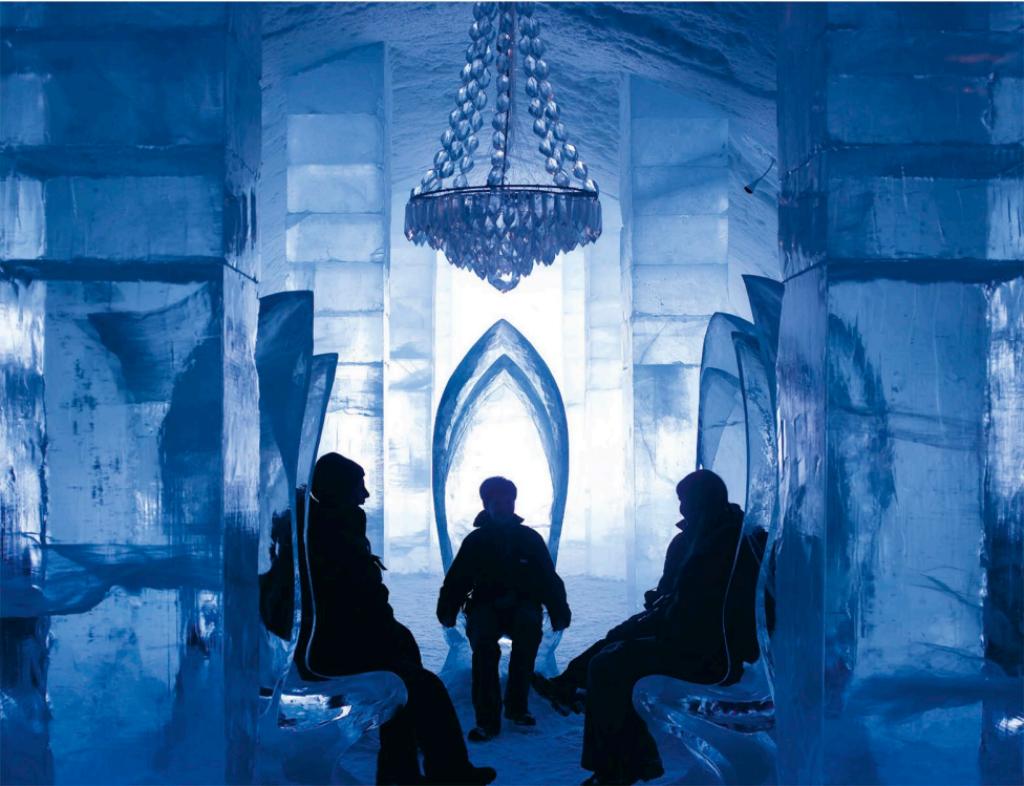
Where to go

Europe has it all: sprawling cities and quaint villages; boulevards, promenades and railways; mountains, beaches and lakes. Some places will be exactly how you imagined: **Venice** is everything it's cracked up to be; springtime in **Paris** has even hardened cynics melting with the romance of it all; and **Oxford**'s colleges really are like Harry Potter film sets. But others will surprise, whether for their under-the-radar nature (see Author picks, p.13) or because they're stuck with an old-established, out-of-date reputation – but then, isn't tweaking your mental map all part of the fun?

Budget travellers are best off combining practicality with stick-a-pin-in-the-map impulsiveness. If you're flying out, look for where the cheap fares will take you and start from there – try our Itineraries section (see pp.22–27) for inspiration. Those getting around by train – still the best option – should note which countries are accessible with an InterRail Global pass and the equivalent Eurail pass (see p.34). Depending on your time and budget, choose one corner of the continent then consider a budget flight for that unmissable experience elsewhere, be it a foodie pilgrimage to **San Sebastián**, a cultural splurge at the **Edinburgh Festival**, or **St Petersburg**'s White Nights.

Great Britain maintains a certain psychological distance from its neighbours (as the Brexit referendum dramatically evidenced), and yet for many it's a European must-do, with iconic sights ranging from Big Ben and the Tower of London to Bath's Royal Crescent. North of the border, Scotland may opt for another independence referendum, given the population's dissatisfaction with Britain's decision to leave the EU. **London** has been feeling rather pleased with itself ever since the 2012 Olympics, and their legacy endures in the shape of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. A reuse of the Games site, it's close to the hip, budget-friendly buzz of the city's East End. A quick flight away, **Ireland**'s west coast is an altogether more dramatic slice of the great outdoors, while a wander through **Galway**'s cobbled streets is the perfect way to explore 2020's European Capital of Culture. With steep fares in Great Britain especially, this is one region to really milk an InterRail card. Those without one should book tickets far in advance, or get ready for some very cosy long-distance bus rides.

The English-Scottish rivalry runs deep, but it's not a patch on the Catalan-Spanish equivalent, and Catalan capital **Barcelona** fairly pulsates with dynamism. From there, Spanish capital **Madrid** is within easy reach while, to the south, **Granada** and Andalucía's great city of **Seville** provide an undiluted shot of Spanishness. To the north and east, **France** and **Italy** could exhaust your rail pass in one fell swoop, with some of the world's finest cuisine, architecture, landscapes and museums. **Marseille** in the south of France recently had a spectacular shake-up, and the Vieux-Port is now studded with gleaming modern architecture. Out west, **Portugal** is relatively easy on the purse strings; its beautiful Douro Rail Route will make a veritable golden ticket of your rail pass, and even the **Algarve** has a thriving hostel scene these days. Further south again, voyage to **Morocco** the romantic way – by boat – and splash out on a stay at a traditional riad, where "Europe" can feel very far away indeed.



Europe's best beaches

Mogren (Montenegro) Part of the so-called "Budva Riviera" that stretches either side of Montenegro's party town *par excellence* (p.735).

Olympos-Çıralı (Turkey) The 3km-long beach between the contrasting resorts of Olympos and Çıralı is among the most chilled in the Med (p.1168).

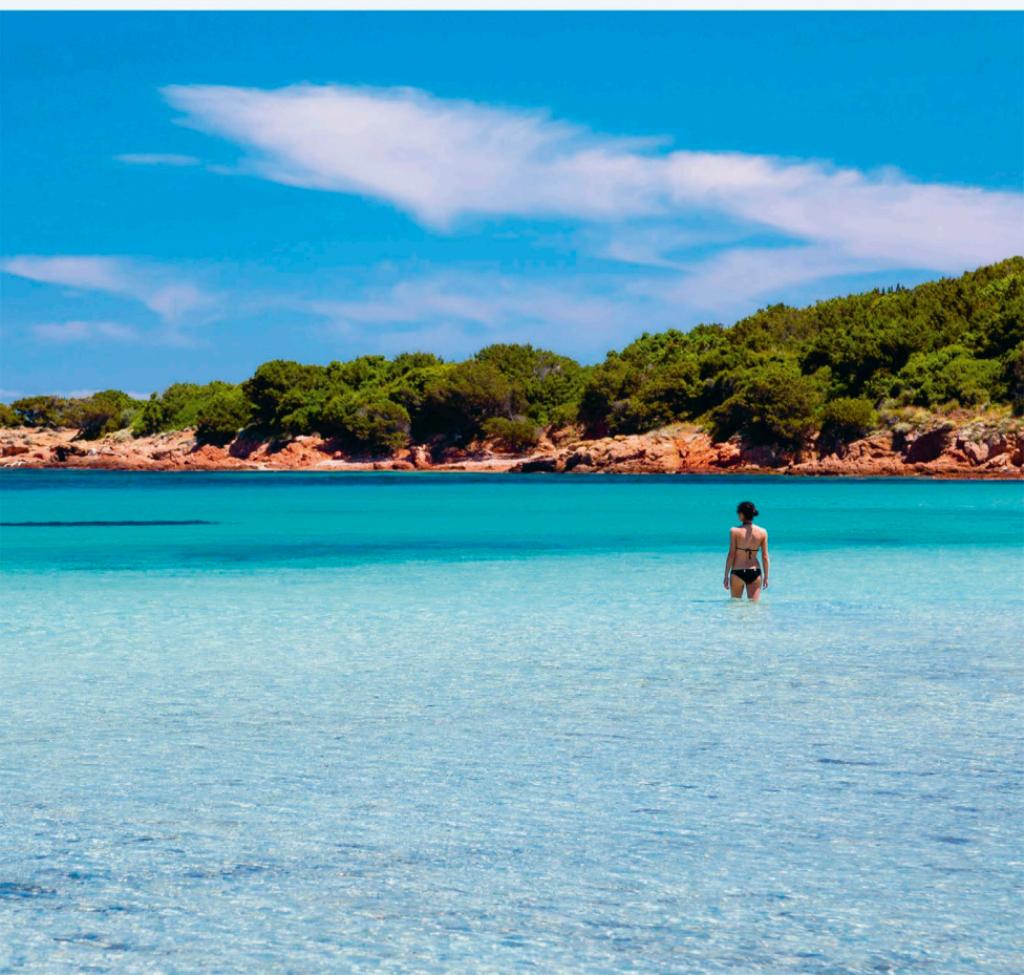
Ilha de Tavira (Portugal) Off the southern coast near the pretty town of Tavira (p.894) and backed by tufted dunes, this is one of the Algarve's finest, peaceful stretches.

Plage de la Rondinara (France) Shaped like a scallop shell, this vies with the turquoise waters of Santa Giulia and Palombaggia for title of "best Corsican beach" (p.350).

Chia (Italy) A sequence of shapely little bays lying just southwest of a quiet Sardinian village (p.679) – nearby lagoons are specked with flamingos, which come here to breed.

Hvar (Croatia) Hvar enjoys a growing reputation as the party capital of the Adriatic and there's a wealth of do-nothing-at-all beaches just a short bus or boat ride away (p.173).

Ksamil (Albania) This is still (just about) one of the Mediterranean's unspoiled corners – and with wonderful Butrint nearby, the beaches at the village of Ksamil (p.60) are an irresistible detour.



In spite of its famous Europe-Asia split, **Turkey** was supposedly closer to EU accession than Morocco. However, the terrorist attacks in Istanbul and Ankara in 2015 and 2016, the failed coup of July 2016 and the government's subsequent crackdowns have set back that schedule indefinitely, while nearby **Athens** experienced unrest in 2015 over Grexit fears. Still, both Athens and **Istanbul** remain excellent budget options. And with these countries' unforgettable ancient sites – not to mention **Greek island-hopping** or ballooning above the “fairy chimneys” of Turkey's **Cappadocia** – it's quite possible to feel blissfully removed from current affairs (should you so wish).

The “melting pot” cliché is often applied to Istanbul, but it's a fit for the **Balkans** too. Their rich diversity extends beyond the ethnic and cultural to landscape and urban make-up: the gorgeous coastlines of **Montenegro** and **Albania**; **Croatia**'s islands; **Romania**'s Saxon villages; the monasteries of **Serbia** and bridges of **Bosnia**; the architectural strangeness of Tirana and Skopje, capitals of **Albania** and **Macedonia**. Indeed, with evocative old quarters and (in some cases) relatively recent political turmoil, the Balkans' towns and cities are some of Europe's most fascinating – and affordable.

Into central Europe and the similarities between **Slovenia** and **Slovakia** don't begin and end with phonetics, these near-neighbours rivalling each other for mountain scenery and outdoorsy pursuits. Slovenian capital **Ljubljana** is an elegant charmer, while landlocked Slovakia boasts pretty **Bratislava** and **Košice**. Industrial **Plzeň** in the **Czech Republic** is regenerating around its own Capital of Culture 2015 award, while **Prague** is a treat just the way it is. Given their vast size, you'll be glad that **Poland** and **Ukraine** are enjoying improved infrastructure, a legacy of their stint as co-hosts of the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship – come for big city thrills with the likes of **Warsaw** and **Kyiv**, and a sense of discovery in less-touristed **Wrocław** and **L'viv**.

Once you hit **Germany** and its neighbours, you'll be glad of any money saved further east. That said, as nightlife hubs go, **Berlin** is pretty affordable; visit **Munich** for Oktoberfest if you like partying of a more traditional sort. Exploring the compact **Netherlands** by bike is both budget-friendly and oh-so-Dutch, while **Amsterdam** has some exciting new neighbourhoods to explore, especially around the former NDSM shipyard. Like the Netherlands, cultural heavyweight **Austria** does a whole lot with its modest size; yet with patches of mountainous terrain, this is one for the skis and snowboard rather than two wheels.

Finally, don't write off **Scandinavia** as unaffordable. Tourist cards, wild camping and university cafeterias – there are ways and means. And even if you can't quite stretch to the latest hot purveyor of “New Danish Cuisine”, plenty of **Copenhagen**'s other famous pleasures can be enjoyed on the cheap – bakeries, *bodega* bars and cycling for starters. And the Northern Lights, visible from **Sweden**, **Norway** and **Finland**, might just be the greatest free show on earth. Finland serves up everything from the traditional culture of the reindeer-herding Sámi people to 2012 World Design Capital **Helsinki**. From there it's easy to reach the **Baltic** states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. **Tallinn** and **Riga** are two recent beneficiaries of the European Capital of Culture award, and a little more vibrant for it – or head boldly into **Russia**, where Moscow and St Petersburg have some truly blockbuster sights. From Marrakesh to Moscow – only in Europe.

When to go

Europe is, for the most part, a year-round destination. In terms of budget, it makes sense to travel in the off season (October through to May) – cheaper menus appear on restaurant tables, hotels drop their rates, and haggling over prices becomes a realistic option. This is especially true of tourist hotspots like Paris, Barcelona and Rome, which attract far bigger crowds in July and August.

If you do decide to travel during the peak **summer** season, try heading east – the Balkan coastline, the Slovenian mountains and Baltic cities are all fantastic places for making the most of your money. When tourist traffic dies down as **autumn** approaches, head to the Med. The famous coastlines and islands of southern Europe are quieter at this time of year, and the cities of Spain and Italy begin to look their best. **Wintertime** brings world-class skiing and snowboarding to European mountainsides (though not guaranteed), and countless festive markets pop up in the towns and cities below. There are epic New Year parties everywhere from Moscow to Lisbon and, despite the cold weather elsewhere at this time of year, there's still the possibility of sunshine in Turkey and Morocco. Come **spring** it's worth heading north to the Netherlands, Scandinavia, France and the British Isles, where you'll find beautifully long days and relatively affordable prices before the summer season kicks in around July.

While **weather** extremes are not the issue they are in, say, Asia or Africa, you should still bear them in mind when planning your trip. The Arctic winter in Scandinavia and Russia can bring temperatures as low as -35°C, with the sun barely rising above the horizon for months at a time. Conversely, summer days in central, southern and eastern parts of continental Europe can be sweltering – temperatures of around 40°C are not unheard of.



Author picks

From lungfuls of mountain air to gulps of super-strong beer, via floating taxis and hostels, cycle rides and kayaking, our authors share their top European tips.

Freewheeling Explore the Loire Valley's Renaissance châteaux, sampling delectable local wines (p.301); check out the street art in Málaga's SOHO district (p.1033); or glide around wonderful Copenhagen's famous cycle network (p.219).

Delicious dishes Relish the world's favourite cuisine at an Italian trattoria such as Florence's *Sostanza* (p.649); graze at the new gastromarkets in Córdoba (p.1036); and discover Britain's network of gastropubs and food markets (p.419).

Watery cities Spend the night in a floating hostel in Stockholm (p.1094); go wild swimming in Zürich (p.1130); board a boat to one of Helsinki's nearby islands (p.263); cruise along the canals of St Petersburg for a unique perspective on its historic sights (p.930); and absorb Venice's perennially stunning beauty from the seat of an affordable *traghetto* (p.638).

Under-the-radar towns Olomouc, Czech Republic (p.205), is a pint-sized Prague with fewer people and more charm (and cobblestones), while Berat (p.57) is a gorgeous Albanian town where row after row of Ottoman buildings loom down at you from the sides of a steep valley.

Drinking dens Order a knee-buckling Duvel beer at Brussels' historic *La Fleur en Papier Doré* (p.99) – a time-worn café once the favourite haunt of Surrealist painter Magritte and Tintin creator Hergé – or down a hefty home-brewed Columbus ale at Amsterdam's Brouwerij 't IJ (p.787), housed in an old public baths.

Saddle up Head for Bulgaria's Rila Mountains (p.131) on horseback (or by foot) to enjoy the spectacular scenery spread out beneath Mount Musala (2925m), the Balkan Peninsula's highest peak, or go galloping among the wild ponies on Great Britain's rugged Dartmoor (p.447).

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.

LEFT ISLE OF SKYE, SCOTLAND FROM TOP VENICE, ITALY;
OLOMOUC, CZECH REPUBLIC; COPENHAGEN, DENMARK



Arts and culture

1 BERLIN WALL MEMORIAL, GERMANY

Page 364

An open-air exhibition of the Wall's most impressive remaining sections.

2 AYA SOFYA, TURKEY

Page 1146

Christianity and Islam meet in one magnificent Istanbul building.

3 BALLET, RUSSIA

Pages 929 & 937

Watch world-class performances at the Bolshoi or Mariinskiy theatres.

4 SISTINE CHAPEL, ITALY

Page 615

Michelangelo's jaw-dropping High Renaissance ceiling still inspires awe.

5 THE PARTHENON, GREECE

Page 503

The iconic image of Western civilization and template for buildings the world over.

6 SAGRADA FAMÍLIA, SPAIN

Page 1059

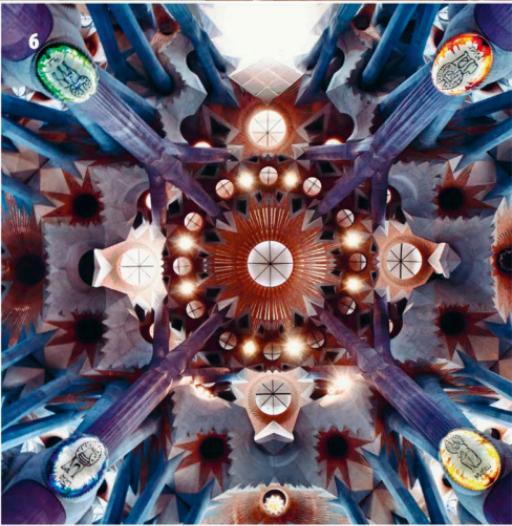
Gaudí's masterpieces are inseparable from the Barcelona experience.

7 TATE LIVERPOOL, UK

Page 462

Contemporary art displayed inside a beautifully converted warehouse.





Festivals

1 ST PATRICK'S DAY, IRELAND

Page 575

Dublin is the epicentre of March 17 shamrock-strewn, Guinness-fuelled fun.

2 SZIGET FESTIVAL, HUNGARY

Page 557

A week-long music and culture fest on Óbudai island, Budapest, which draws half a million revellers.

3 ROSKILDE, DENMARK

Page 226

Glastonbury's Scandinavian rival, with a mass naked run thrown in for good measure.

4 GENTSE FEESTEN, GHENT

Page 105

A two-week canal party so bacchanalian the entire city takes two weeks off work afterwards to recover.

5 FIESTAS DE SAN FERMÍN, SPAIN

Page 1071

Witness the hair-raising running of the bulls in Pamplona.

6 GLASTONBURY, GREAT BRITAIN

Page 447

You might end up caked in mud, but this legendary music festival is worth it.

7 EXIT FESTIVAL, SERBIA

Page 952

A beautiful fortress setting and top-name acts – what's not to like?









Eat like a local

1 FOOD MARKETS, GREAT BRITAIN

Page 429

Local, seasonal produce and a fantastic range of global influences.

2 CURRYWURST, GERMANY

Page 367

After a few steins, nothing else quite hits the spot like this curried street snack, a Berlin speciality.

3 SIMIT, TURKEY

Page 1143

Try one of these fresh bread rings with a little glass of sweet Turkish tea.

4 SMØRREBRØD, DENMARK

Page 211

Open sandwich as art form – and surprisingly filling.

5 PIZZA, ITALY

Page 607

Forget stuffed crust, the Neapolitan pizza is a thing of simple, unadorned beauty.

6 SNAILS, MOROCCO

Page 770

Tease out the flavoursome flesh with a toothpick, then slurp up the broth.

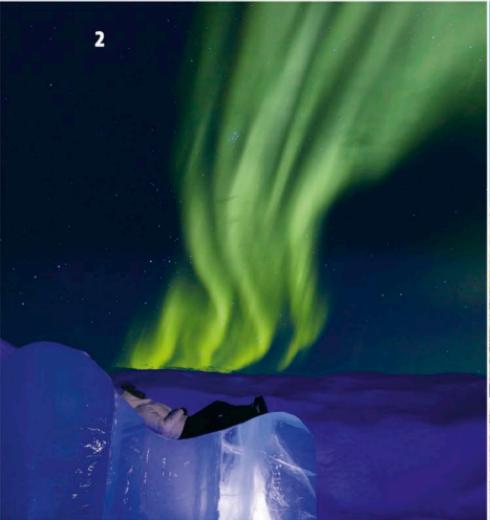
7 TAPAS, SPAIN

Page 1000

Small portions, big flavours – Spain's greatest gift to the world's taste buds.



2



3



4

The great outdoors



1 WINTER WONDERLAND

Pages 344 & 805

From Chamonix snowboarding to cross-country skiing in Norway.

2 THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Pages 827 & 1110

Watch Mother Nature's greatest show in Tromsø or Swedish Lapland.

3 GET YOUR BOOTS ON

Pages 349 & 57

Tackle the GR20 in Corsica or go trekking in Valbona, Albania.

4 TAKE TO THE WATER

Pages 864 & 993

Try your hand at surfing in Portugal or rafting on the Soča, Slovenia.

5 GIDDY UP

Pages 109 & 573

Belgium's Ardennes region and Ireland's Connemara coast are perfect horseriding territory.

6 UNDER CANVAS

Page 37

Camping can help make Europe affordable – and even more beautiful.

7 TWO WHEELS

Pages 219, 1070 & 249

From freewheeling in Copenhagen and exploring Pamplona's medieval street maze, to wheeled marathons in Estonia's national parks.



Itineraries

You can't expect to fit everything Europe has to offer into one trip and we don't suggest you try. On the following pages is a selection of itineraries that guide you through the different regions of the continent, taking you from the misty Scottish Highlands to the souks of Morocco. Each of these itineraries could be done in two to three weeks if followed to the letter, but don't push it too hard – with so much to see and do you're bound to get waylaid somewhere you love or stray off the suggested route.

GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Home to four proud nations, these two small islands pack in a huge amount – from stately homes and weather-beaten moors to theatre, Premier League football and Europe's best music festivals. Don't forget your brolly, drinking hat and sense of humour.

① London As the saying goes, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life. One of the

world's greatest cities is also one of the most expensive, but follow our tips to emerge with your wallet intact. [See p.421](#)

② Oxford The famous university town offers the chance to punt along the river, admire the college architecture or down a few pints in a medieval pub. [See p.450](#)

③ Snowdonia Despite the notoriously unpredictable weather, the Welsh mountains provide excellent hiking and some of Britain's best hostels. [See p.477](#)

④ York From a Viking museum and medieval streets to the soaring Gothic Minster, if you want to soak up some British history, York is the place to do it. [See p.467](#)

⑤ Edinburgh With its stunning cityscape, lively bars and – if you time it right – international festival, the Scottish capital has something for everyone. [See p.479](#)

⑥ The Highlands Find your inner Braveheart, knock back some whisky and hike, climb or ski surrounded by Britain's most stunning scenery. [See p.491](#)

⑦ Belfast A fascinating if troubled history, friendly locals and access point to one of Europe's natural wonders, the Giant's Causeway. [See p.596](#)



ABOVE COSTA DE LA LUZ, SPAIN

❸ Dublin Yep, Guinness really does taste better here, though there's a lot more to see and do in Ireland's sophisticated capital. See p.575

❹ Wild Atlantic Way Explore the rugged cliffs, ancient monuments, windswept beaches, hidden villages and lively towns along Ireland's west coast. See p.588

FRANCE AND SWITZERLAND

Still the world's number one tourist destination, France can smugly claim to have it all, from mountains and sun-kissed beaches to unrivalled food and fashion. Pricey it may be, but nearby Switzerland is worth the expense for its attractive, appealingly relaxed cities and the jaw-dropping mountain views.

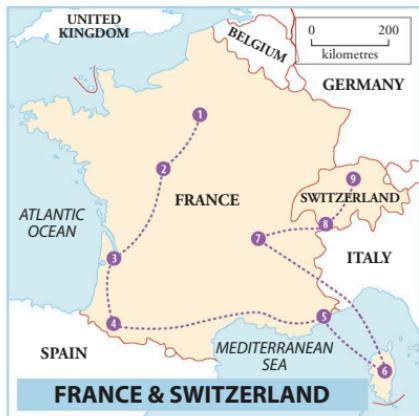
❶ Paris Laze over a coffee in a Left Bank café, arrange a romantic rendezvous or tick off the many museums in Europe's most elegant capital. See p.281

❷ The Loire Valley Some of the most impressive châteaux you'll see in the country grace this bucolic valley, which is also prime vineyard territory. See p.299

❸ Bordeaux An elegant, bustling city and world-famous wine-growing region, with some of Europe's top surf beaches just a short drive away. See p.309

❹ The Pyrenees Clear your head after all that wine with the fresh air and fine walks of this mountain range bordering Spain. See p.316

❺ The Côte d'Azur Nice, Cannes, Monaco – the names alone ooze glamour. Time to dress up and hit one of this chichi region's famed casinos. See p.323



❻ Corsica France's adventure playground, Corsica is home to one of Europe's toughest and most rewarding treks, the GR20. See p.345

❼ Lyon The country's gastronomic capital – eat at *Daniel et Denise*, a classic *bouchon*, to see how good traditional French cooking can be. See p.339

❽ The Alps Try your luck scaling Europe's highest mountains, or spend a season as a ski instructor or chalet monkey. See p.343 & p.344

❾ Zürich Laidback Zürich is still one of Europe's clubbing hotspots and has a wonderful riverside setting. See p.1128

BENELUX, GERMANY AND AUSTRIA

From fine chocolates and champion beers to fairytale castles, forests and clinking cowbells, this region has something for just about everyone. The cities can pass in a blur of late nights, but make time for the scenery too.

❶ Amsterdam Whatever you're looking for – cannabis, clubs, high culture or cuisine – the Netherlands' capital can provide it. See p.779

❷ Bruges It may be brazenly touristy but this gem of Flemish architecture is still worth a visit for its atmospheric canals and beautiful buildings. See p.106

❸ Cologne Linked to Brussels and beyond by super-fast trains, Cologne makes a perfect first stop in Germany with its spectacular cathedral and lively festivals. See p.386



④ Hamburg Germany's northern gateway boasts a vast port, magnificent red-brick warehouses and a riotous bar and live music scene. See p.379

⑤ Berlin Some thirty years since the fall of the Wall, Berlin still has a raw, youthful energy that belies its history of division and destruction. See p.358

⑥ Dresden Bombed to bits in World War II, Dresden is the classic phoenix-from-the-ashes story and now one of Europe's favourite backpacker hangouts. See p.370

⑦ Munich From beer-fuelled thigh-slapping to modern art and mountain scenery, you'll find it all in Bavaria's capital. See p.405

⑧ Salzburg Hit the Mozart trail, pose Julie Andrews-style in homage to *The Sound of Music* or pull on some skis and head for the mountains. See p.77

⑨ Vienna Austria's capital is chock-full of palaces, museums and boulevards – with coffee and cake in a grand café never too far away. See p.65

SPAIN, PORTUGAL AND MOROCCO

Penélope Cruz, Cristiano Ronaldo, tapas, port and Rioja – it's hard not to warm to the Iberian peninsula. To the south, Morocco is just a short hop across the sea but seems a different planet in many respects.

① Bilbao Capital of the Basque country, Bilbao is Spain's friendliest city and home to one of Europe's most spectacular buildings: the Guggenheim. See p.1074



② Barcelona Innovative architecture, city beaches, late-night bars and an enchanting old town – you'll find it hard to leave the Catalan capital. See p.1053

③ Ibiza Amnesia, Pacha, Ushuaia – its nightclubs are famous the world over, but even on Europe's party island there are pockets of idyllic peace and quiet. See p.1048

④ Madrid Take your cue from the locals in the Spanish capital – if you're dining before 10pm, dancing before midnight and asleep before dawn, you haven't experienced a truly Madrileño night out. See p.1003

⑤ Porto Wander the winding cobbled streets of Portugal's second city – and sample a drop at one (or more) of the countless port lodges. See p.881

⑥ Lisbon Portugal's immediately likeable capital has a great setting, delicious food and a huge amount of historic interest. See p.865

⑦ Andalucía Spain in a nutshell – flamenco, fine wines, bullfighting and heat. If you're pushed for time, stick to the unmissable cities of Seville and Granada. See p.1023

⑧ Fez Once across the Strait of Gibraltar from Tarifa or Algeciras, dive head first into Morocco with a stay in this medieval labyrinth of alleys, souks and mosques. See p.755

⑨ Marrakesh Stunning, atmospheric city with the Atlas Mountains as a backdrop and the live circus that is the Jemaa el Fna square at its heart. See p.768

ITALY

If there's one country that deserves its own itinerary, it's Italy. Almost everyone who visits falls in love, whether with the designer-clad locals, the incomparable cuisine or the world's finest collection of art.

① Milan Prada, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana... Milan is prime window-shopping territory, while the city's cathedral and da Vinci's *The Last Supper* are priceless experiences. See p.622

② Venice Despite seemingly sinking under the weight of its tourists, the most beautiful city in the world is frankly unmissable – and with some careful planning still possible to do on a budget. See p.633

③ Bologna Capital of the foodie nirvana Emilia-Romagna (think Parma ham, Parmesan, balsamic vinegar), Bologna is a must-do for anyone with a digestive system. See p.640



④ Tuscany Birthplace of the Renaissance, Florence rightly pulls in the masses; nearby Siena is just as beautiful, full of fun-loving students and an excellent base to explore the region's hill towns. See p.644 & p.651

⑤ Rome You can hardly "do" Europe and not "do" Rome. Whether you're stuck queuing for St Peter's, the Sistine Chapel or the Colosseum, you can at least rest assured that you're about to be wowed. See p.610

⑥ Naples The home of pizza – and the best place to eat it – Naples is also a frenetic, crumblingly attractive city with an intriguing dark side. See p.659

⑦ Pompeii From the ancient graffiti to plaster body casts, seeing a Roman town frozen in time is an experience you won't forget. See p.664

⑧ Matera Try sleeping in a cave in this hand-carved stone city – the perfect introduction to Italy's captivating far south. See p.668

⑨ Sicily Beaches, volcanoes and, in Palermo, one of Italy's most in-your-face cities – Sicilians simply do it better. See p.670

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Having long shrugged off the Iron Curtain, the region we used to regard as bleak and distant is now firmly at the beating heart of the continent. With elegant cities and vast tracts of unspoiled countryside, these countries provide a remarkable set of riches.

① Prague The Czech capital would probably win a pan-European beauty contest for its architecture. As for the beer...well, let's just say you won't be disappointed. See p.188

② Warsaw Beyond the Polish capital's immaculately reconstructed Old Town there are beautiful palaces and parks, not to mention restaurant, club and vodka-soaked bar scenes to explore. See p.837

③ Kraków Art and atmospheric, picture-postcard-pretty Kraków should not be missed, though neither should a sobering trip to nearby Auschwitz. See p.848

④ L'viv This Central European gem has good backpacker hostels and a café-jammed, charming Old Town. See p.1189

⑤ Tatra Mountains Stretching between Poland and Slovakia, the Tatras are that rare thing – majestic wilderness without hordes of Gore-Tex-clad tourists. See p.854 & p.970

⑥ Budapest Two cities for the price of one: stately, museum-packed Buda and, across the not-so-blue Danube, nightlife and restaurant hotspot Pest. See p.551

⑦ Ljubljana Repeat after me: "Lyoo-bly-AH-nah". The Slovenian capital is a small, perfectly formed pit stop between central Europe and the Adriatic. See p.982



SCANDINAVIA

While it can hit your finances, Scandinavia is worth stretching the budget for. Apart from resembling Europe's answer to Middle Earth, it's also full of stylish cities, ingenious design and friendly locals.

① Copenhagen Picturesque and user-friendly, the Danish capital is a lively, welcoming introduction to the region. **See p.213**

② Gothenburg Sweden's second city boasts elegant architecture, fantastic nightlife and a fully functioning rainforest among its standout attractions. **See p.1098**

③ Oslo Paying €8 for a beer can put people off the Norwegian capital, but if you can get over the prices, you'll understand why it frequently tops "best places to live" lists. **See p.807**

④ The fjords No trip to Norway would be complete without a visit to the country's magnificent fjords. **See p.816**

⑤ Lofoten Islands A mild climate, wild scenery and cute, laidback fishing villages pull in the crowds to this remote archipelago in Norway's far north. **See p.825**

⑥ Lapland Synonymous with Santa, Lapland (whether Swedish or Finnish) fits the winter fantasy perfectly with reindeer, yapping huskies and the staggering Northern Lights. **See p.272 & p.1110**

⑦ Stockholm Scandinavia's best-looking capital offers up an unspoilt medieval core, über-hip nightlife and, incongruously enough, some fine beaches. **See p.1089**



⑧ Gotland Sweden's party island buzzes in summer when DJs hit the decks in Visby and the beaches fill with bronzed bodies. **See p.1106**

RUSSIA AND THE BALTIC COAST

Big scary bear it may be, but ever-changing Russia should not be missed, even if it's just to dip into its most "European" city, St Petersburg. Russia's compact Baltic neighbours, meanwhile, provide some of the most beautiful – and most fun – cityscapes in Eastern Europe.

① Moscow Big, brash, expensive, surreal and exciting, twenty-first-century Moscow is almost a nation in itself and well worth the effort to get to. **See p.922**

② St Petersburg With jaw-dropping architecture and priceless art collections, Russia's second city is at its best during the midsummer White Nights festival. **See p.930**

③ Helsinki The love child of the Russian and Swedish empires, yet brought up to be proudly Finnish, Helsinki is a fascinatingly schizophrenic capital. **See p.261**

④ Tallinn Having survived its tenure as a cheap stag- and hen-party hub, the beautifully preserved Estonian capital still retains a huge amount of charm. **See p.241**

⑤ Riga Larger and more cosmopolitan than its neighbours, Latvia's atmospheric capital is full of architectural treasures and is the gateway to some wonderful coastal scenery. **See p.686**

⑥ Curonian Spit This narrow strip of lofty sand dunes and dense pine forest is perfect cycling and hiking territory. **See p.713**

⑦ Vilnius The friendliest and perhaps prettiest of the Baltic capitals, Vilnius's largely undiscovered status means you can enjoy a break from the crowds. **See p.702**





THE BALKANS

A fascinating cultural meeting point, the Balkans today are exciting, safe and mercifully cheap. While Croatia and Bulgaria have been on the scene for a while, a trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia or Albania still scores high in the intrepid stakes.

① Dalmatian coast Croatia's dramatic Dalmatian coast and islands are the perfect place to drop out for the summer, with unlimited watersports, cheap wine and vitamin D on offer. [See p.167](#)

② Sarajevo War-scarred it may be, but this mini-Istanbul might just be Europe's most welcoming capital – you're unlikely to leave without making a friend or two. [See p.118](#)

③ Dubrovnik Rivaling Venice in its day, the "pearl of the Adriatic" has survived centuries of conquest and intrigue, not to mention being on an easyJet flight route. [See p.178](#)

④ Budva Montenegro's star resort boasts the requisite pretty Old Town, but it's the unspoilt beaches and throbbing open-air bars that pull in the party set. [See p.734](#)

⑤ Berat Whitewashed Ottoman houses huddle against the hillside in this gorgeous Albanian town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. [See p.57](#)

⑥ Ohrid Impossibly picturesque, set on the shimmering shores of the eponymous mountain-backed lake, Ohrid is the jewel in Macedonia's crown. [See p.725](#)

⑦ Plovdiv Pay a visit to Bulgaria's buzzing second city to understand why the locals look down on Sofia, the country's capital. [See p.142](#)

⑧ Belgrade Hectic and hedonistic, the Serbian capital is fast attracting the hip crowd thanks to its adrenaline-charged nightlife. [See p.944](#)

⑨ Transylvania No, you probably won't see any vampires, but this history-steeped region holds myriad other attractions, from fairytale villages and colourful festivals to wolf tracking in the spectacular Carpathians. [See p.907](#)

GREECE AND TURKEY

Whether you're interested in classical antiquity and the founding of Western civilization or just sparkling blue seas and sandy beaches, Greece and Turkey are essential destinations.

① Kefalloniá Beautiful Kefalloniá is the best place to hop on a moped and discover that perfect beach. [See p.539](#)

② Athens Crowded, noisy and polluted the Greek capital may be, but once you've seen the sun set over the Parthenon you'll be hooked. [See p.502](#)

③ Ios A favourite among hard-partying backpackers, Ios retains a bohemian, hippie-era charm and is the best stop on the Cyclades island-hopping trail. [See p.530](#)

④ Crete Home to the Minotaur and a fair few trashy resorts, Crete also boasts the dramatic Samarian Gorge, Europe's answer to the Grand Canyon. [See p.540](#)

⑤ Ephesus Turkey's best-preserved archeological site is a treasure-trove of ruined temples, mosaics, baths and some spectacular public conveniences. [See p.1162](#)

⑥ Kaş Fill your days mountain biking, paragliding or diving, then relive it all in some of the Med's liveliest bars. [See p.1167](#)

⑦ Cappadocia It's a long trip east but Cappadocia's unique volcanic landscape has an irresistible allure – stay in a cave hotel and visit a subterranean city. [See p.1173](#)

⑧ Istanbul Squeeze every kuruş out of your Turkish lira shopping in the bazaars, having a rub down in a hammam and enjoying the surprisingly hectic nightlife. [See p.1146](#)





BERLIN

Basics

- 29** Getting there
- 31** Getting around
- 36** Accommodation
- 37** Festivals and annual events
- 38** Work and study
- 40** Travel essentials

Getting there

Europe can be easily reached by air from just about anywhere in the world, with flights to all major European cities. It's also possible to arrive by ferry from across the Mediterranean or Black Sea, or on the Trans-Siberian railway from East Asia.

Air fares will always depend on the **season**; they're usually highest in the summer and over the Christmas period, as well as over public holidays. Note also that flying at weekends or requiring a nonstop journey sometimes adds quite a bit to the round-trip fare. Barring special offers, the cheapest published **fares** usually require advance purchase of two to three weeks, and impose certain restrictions, such as heavy penalties if you change your schedule. Most cheap fares will only give a partial refund, if any, should you cancel or alter your journey, so check the restrictions carefully before buying. You can often cut costs by going through a youth or student travel specialist (see "Agents"; p.31), which may offer low-cost or special youth or student fares, as well as travel-related services such as travel insurance, rail passes and tours.

If Europe is only one stop on a longer journey, and especially if you are based in Australia or New Zealand, you might consider a **Round-the-World** (RTW) air ticket. Prices increase with the number of stops – figure on around £1550–2500/US\$2000–3300/Aus\$2660–3850/NZ\$2820–4660 for a RTW ticket including one or two European stopovers.

From Britain and Ireland

Heading from Britain and Ireland to destinations in northwestern Europe, it's not just greener to go by train, long-distance bus or ferry – it can be quicker and cheaper too. However, it's normally cheaper to fly than take the train to most parts of southern Europe.

By plane

London is predictably **Britain's** main hub for air travel, offering the highest frequency of flights and

widest choice of destinations from its five airports (Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton and City). Manchester also has flights to most parts of Europe, and there are regular services to the Continent from Birmingham, Southampton, Bournemouth, East Midlands, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds/Bradford, Liverpool and Newcastle. From the **Republic of Ireland**, you can fly direct to most major cities in mainland Europe from Dublin, Shannon and Cork. From **Belfast**, there are direct flights with easyJet to a handful of destinations; otherwise, you'll need to change in London or Manchester.

Budget airlines such as easyJet and Ryanair offer low-cost tickets to destinations around Europe (though not always the most convenient airports), though post-Brexit, prices may well go up as no-frills airlines have to negotiate their services in and out of the UK. There are also agents specializing in offers to a specific country or country group on both charters and regular scheduled departures.

EUROPEAN BUDGET AIRLINES

At the time of writing there were 39 budget airlines serving countries in or near Europe. We've listed the more established operators below, but for full details of routes visit flycheapo.com, while skyscanner.net is an invaluable price comparison resource.

Air Berlin airberlin.com

Blue Air blueairweb.com

Darwin ethiadregional.com

easyJet easyjet.com

Flybe flybe.com

Fly Niki flyniki.com

Eurowings eurowings.com

Jet2 jet2.com

Norwegian Air Shuttle norwegian.no

Ryanair ryanair.com

Smart Wings smartwings.com

Transavia transavia.com

TUIfly tuifly.com

Vueling vueling.com

Wizz Air wizzair.com

A BETTER KIND OF TRAVEL

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We believe it helps us understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – and of course tourism is vital to many developing economies. But the scale of modern tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and climate change is accelerated by most forms of transport, especially flying. All Rough Guides' flights are carbon-offset, and every year we donate money to a variety of environmental charities.

By train

Direct trains through the **Channel Tunnel** from London to Paris (17 daily; 2hr 30min) and Brussels (10 daily; 2hr) are run by Eurostar. Tickets to Paris for under-26s start at £27 one-way, £55 return. For over-26s, the cheapest and least flexible tickets cost £29 one-way or £58 return; the further in advance you book, the cheaper the deals. Through-ticket combinations with onward connections from Lille, Brussels and Paris can be booked through International Rail and Rail Europe (see p.35).

Other rail journeys from Britain involve a sea crossing by ferry or, sometimes, catamaran. **Tickets** can be bought from International Rail, and from most major rail stations or from Dutchflyer ([W](#)stena-line.co.uk/ferry/rail-and-sail/holland) if routed via the Hook of Holland. For some destinations, there are cheaper SuperApex fares requiring advance booking and subject to greater restrictions. Otherwise, international tickets are valid for two months and allow for stopovers on the way, providing you stick to the prescribed route (there may be a choice, with different fares applicable). One-way fares are generally around two-thirds the price of a return fare. If you're under 26 you're entitled to special deals.

From **Ireland**, direct rail tickets to Europe via Britain generally include both boat connections, and are available from Irish Railways offices in the Republic ([T](#)1850 366 222, [W](#)irishrail.ie), or Northern Ireland Railways in the North ([T](#)028 9066 6630, [W](#)translink.co.uk).

For rail passes, contacts and other types of discounted rail travel, see p.34.

By bus

A **long-distance bus** is often the cheapest option, although much less comfortable than the train. The main operator is Eurolines ([W](#)eurolines.co.uk, [W](#)eurolines.ie), with a network of routes spanning the Continent. Prices can be up to a third cheaper than by train, and there are marginally lower fares on most services for those under 26. There's usually a discount if you buy your ticket in advance, and bigger discounts for journeys booked a week in advance. Connecting services from elsewhere in Great Britain add £15 each way to the price of the ticket from London. Eurolines sell fifteen- and thirty-day passes; alternatively, consider one of the various passes offered by Busabout for their services around Europe (see p.35).

By ferry

There are numerous **ferry services** between Britain and Ireland, and between the British Isles and the

European mainland. Ferries from the southeast of Ireland and the south coast of England connect with northern France and Spain; those from Kent in southeast England reach northern France and Belgium; those from Scotland and the east coast and northeast of England cross the North Sea to Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia.

FERRY OPERATORS

Brittany Ferries UK [T](#)0330 159 7000, [W](#)brittany-ferries.co.uk; Ireland [T](#)021 427 7801, [W](#)brittanyferries.ie. Cork to Roscoff (April–Nov); Portsmouth to Caen, Cherbourg, Le Havre, St Malo, Bilbao and Santander; Poole to Cherbourg; Plymouth to Roscoff, St Malo and Santander.

Condor Ferries UK [T](#)01202 207216, [W](#)condorferries.co.uk. Portsmouth to Cherbourg; Portsmouth, Poole and Weymouth to St Malo via Jersey and Guernsey.

DFDS Seaways UK [T](#)0871 522 9955, [W](#)dfdsseaways.co.uk. Newcastle to Amsterdam; Dover to Calais and Dunkerque; Newhaven to Dieppe.

Irish Ferries UK [T](#)0871 730 0400, Ireland [T](#)0818 300 400; [W](#)irishferries.com. Dublin to Holyhead and Cherbourg; Rosslare to Pembroke, Cherbourg (March–Dec) and Roscoff (May–Sept).

P&O Ferries UK [T](#)0800 130 0030, Ireland [T](#)01 868 9467; [W](#)poferrries.com. Hull to Zeebrugge and Rotterdam; Dover to Calais; Larne to Cairnryan; Dublin to Liverpool.

Stena Line UK [T](#)0844 770 7070, [W](#)stenaline.co.uk; Ireland [T](#)01 907 5555, [W](#)stenaline.ie. Harwich to Hook of Holland; Rosslare to Fishguard; Dublin to Holyhead; Belfast to Cairnryan and Liverpool.

From the US

From the US the best deals are generally from the main hubs such as **New York**, **Washington DC** and **Chicago** to London. Fixed-date, nonstop advance-purchase tickets for midweek travel to London cost around US\$420 in low season (roughly speaking, winter), US\$710 in high season (summer, Christmas and Easter) from New York and Washington DC, US\$775/890 from Chicago. For more flexible tickets, add at least a third to the price. Fixed-date advance-purchase alternatives include New York to Paris for US\$645/815, US\$650/800 to Frankfurt, US\$730/830 to Madrid, or US\$915/1115 to Rome; flying from Chicago, discounted tickets can be had for US\$915/1380 to Paris and US\$975/1140 to Frankfurt. There are promotional offers from time to time, especially off-peak, so check with individual airlines, or compare all available flights on [W](#)sky-scanner.net and look at the whole month option to see which days are cheapest; allowing at least one stop can significantly reduce the price of a ticket.

From the **west coast** the major airlines fly at least three times a week and up to twice daily from Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle to the main

European cities. With fixed-price tickets, you can get from Los Angeles to London for US\$770/815 (low/high season), to Paris for US\$940/1245 and to Frankfurt for US\$1000/1140.

From Canada

Most of the big airlines fly to the major European hubs from **Montreal** and **Toronto** at least once daily. From Toronto, London is your cheapest option, with the lowest direct round-trip fare around Can\$470/700. Fares from Montreal to Paris start at Can\$475/1000. **Vancouver** and **Calgary** have daily flights to several European cities, with round-trip fares to London from around Can\$630/1280, depending on the season.

From Australia and New Zealand

There are flights from **Melbourne**, **Sydney**, **Adelaide**, **Brisbane** and **Perth** to most European capitals, with not a great deal of difference in the fares to the busiest destinations: a return from Sydney to London, Paris, Rome, Madrid, Athens or Frankfurt should be available through travel agents for around Aus\$980 in low season (Australia's summer, Europe's winter) and slightly higher in high season (though you can sometimes get great deals). A one-way ticket costs slightly more than half that, while a return flight from **Auckland** to Europe is approximately NZ\$1175 in low season and from around NZ\$1735 in high season. Asian airlines often work out cheapest, and may throw in a stopover.

Some agents offer “**open jaw**” tickets, flying you into one city and out from another, which needn’t even be in the same country. For **round-the-world** deals and other low-price tickets, the most reliable operator is STA Travel (see below), which also supplies packages with companies such as Contiki and Busabout, can issue rail passes, and advise on visa regulations – they’ll also do all the paperwork for a fee.

From South Africa

Many major airlines fly from **Johannesburg** and **Cape Town** to a number of European hubs. Flights from Johannesburg cost about ZAR11,000/10,700 to London, ZAR9150/11,720 to Frankfurt in low season/high season, around ZAR11,620/10,370 to Paris, and slightly more from Cape Town. Many of the cheapest deals involve flying via the Middle East with companies such as Turkish Airlines or Emirates.

AGENTS

North South Travel UK **01245 608 291**, northsouthtravel.co.uk. Friendly, competitive travel agency, offering discounted fares worldwide. Profits are used to support projects in the developing world, especially the promotion of sustainable tourism.

STA Travel UK **01333 321 0099**, statravel.co.uk; **US** **1 800 781 4040**, statravel.com; **Australia** **1 134 782**, statravel.com.au; **New Zealand** **0800 474400**, statravel.co.nz; **South Africa** **0861 781 781**, statravel.co.za. Independent and student travel, air tickets, student IDs, travel insurance, car rental and rail passes.

Trailfinders England & Wales **020 7368 1200**, trailfinders.com; **Scotland** **0131 243 2800**, trailfinders.scot; **Ireland** **01 677 7888**, trailfinders.ie. One of the best-informed and most efficient agents for independent travellers.

Travel CUTS **1 800 667 2887**, travelcuts.com. Canadian youth and student travel firm.

USIT Ireland (Republic) **01 602 1906**, **USA** **1 866 647 3697**, **Australia** **1 800 092 499**; usit.ie. Ireland's main student and youth travel specialists.

Getting around

It's easy to travel in Europe, and a number of special deals and passes can make it fairly economical too, especially for students and those under 26. Air links are extensive and, thanks to the growing number of budget airlines, flying is often cheaper than taking the train, but you'll appreciate the diversity of Europe best at ground level, by way of its enormous and generally efficient web of rail, road and ferry connections.

By train

Trains are generally the best way to tour Europe. The **rail network** in most countries is comprehensive and the region boasts some of the world's most scenic rail journeys. Costs are relatively low, too – apart from Britain, where prices can be absurdly steep – as trains are heavily subsidized, and prices are brought down further by passes and discount cards. We've covered the various passes here, as well as the most important international routes and most useful addresses; frequencies and journey times are given throughout the Guide.

During the summer, especially if you're travelling at night or a long distance, it's best to make **reservations** whenever you can; on some trains (TGV services, for example) it's compulsory. See our “Extra rail charges” box for more on supplements.





For timetables, [@bahn.de](#) is the best **online resource**, with comprehensive domestic and international rail listings across Europe, while [@seat61.com](#) is another excellent source of information.

Finally, whenever you board an international train in Europe, check the route of the car you are in, since trains frequently split, with different carriages going to different destinations.

Europe-wide rail passes

InterRail

InterRail passes have long been synonymous with young European backpackers travelling across the Continent on the cheap. There are two types of pass available: the **Global Pass** and **One Country Pass**. Both can be bought direct from [@interrail.com](#) and from main stations and international rail agents in all thirty countries covered by the scheme. To qualify, you need to have been resident in one of the participating countries for six months or more. The only countries in this book not covered by the scheme are Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Morocco and Russia.

InterRail Global Pass The daddy of all rail passes, offering access to almost the entire European rail network. You can choose between five different time periods – continuous blocks of 15 or 22 days or one month – or set amounts of travel – either five days within ten days or ten days within 22 days. Youth (under-26) passes valid for second-class travel start from €264/£221 for five days up to €626/£525 for a month's continuous travel. Note that you cannot use the pass in the country in which you bought it, although discounts of up to fifty percent are usually available.

InterRail One Country Pass Same principle as the Global Pass but valid for just one country (or the Benelux zone of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg). Time periods and prices vary depending on the country. A three-day second-class youth pass will set you back €57/£48 in Bulgaria, €131/£110 in Spain and €154/£129 in France.

EXTRA RAIL CHARGES

Note that even if you've bought an InterRail or Eurail pass, you will still need to pay **extra charges or supplements** to travel on many high-speed trains (such as Eurostar, TGV and AVE), night trains and those on special scenic routes. Even where there is in theory no supplement, there's often a compulsory **reservation fee**, which may cost you double if you only find out about it once you're on the train. For details of charges check the InterRail website under "special trains" or "supplements". You can often avoid these charges if you plan your journey within domestic networks.

Eurail

Non-European residents aren't eligible for InterRail passes, but can buy a range of Eurail passes ([@eurailgroup.org/eurail](#)) giving unlimited travel in 27 European countries. The different types of pass – **Global Pass**, **Select Pass** and **One Country Pass** – all need to be bought outside Europe. Apart from some One Country passes, all are available at discounted youth (25 or younger) rates for second-class travel and saver rates for adults travelling in groups.

Eurail Global Pass A single pass valid for travel in 28 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. There are seven different time periods available, from five days' travel within a month, up to three months' continuous travel. Prices start at €358/US\$394 for a youth pass valid for five days.

Eurail Select Pass Allows you to select two, three or four bordering countries out of the countries above; the Benelux zone of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg counts as one country. Prices start at €130/US\$143 for a two-country youth pass valid for five days' travel within two months. Prices depend on the country combination; for example, a Hungary–Romania youth pass valid for five days' travel in two months will cost you €130/US\$143, whereas the same period for France–Italy costs €218/US\$239.

Eurail One Country Pass Offers travel within one of the following countries or zones: Austria, Benelux, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Greek Islands, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scandinavia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Prices vary depending on the size of the country/zone: for example, a youth pass in Scandinavia valid for three days' travel costs €175/US\$192 and covers four countries; the same time period costs €151/US\$166 in Spain.

Regional rail passes

In addition to the InterRail and Eurail schemes there are a few **regional rail passes** which can be good value if you're doing a lot of travelling within one area; we've listed some of the main ones below. National rail passes (apart from InterRail and Eurail) are covered in the relevant chapter of the Guide.

Balkan Flexipass [@raileurope.com](#). Offers unlimited first- and second-class travel through Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania and Turkey. Prices start at US\$163 (youth US\$97) for five days' travel in one month.

Brit Rail Pass [@britrail.com](#). A variety of passes available for travel in Britain, including country passes for England and Scotland. Prices start from US\$325 (youth US\$260) for a flexipass covering three days' standard-class travel within one month.

European East Pass [@raileurope.com](#). Gives five days' travel in a month in Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia for US\$276, plus up to five additional days at US\$30 each.

RAIL CONTACTS

UK

eTrains4u **T** 020 7619 1083, **W** etrains4u.com. Independent specialists for Continental rail travel.

Eurostar **T** 03432 186186, outside the UK **T** +44 1233 617 575, **W** eurostar.com. UK to Europe via the Channel Tunnel.

International Rail **T** 0871 231 0790, **W** internationalrail.com. Global rail specialist.

InterRail **W** interrail.eu. Main website for buying InterRail passes.

The Man in Seat 61 **T** [seat61.com](tel:seat61.com). Comprehensive informational site set up by a rail enthusiast.

Voyages-snfc.com **T** 0844 848 5848, **W** uk.voyages-snfc.com. British representative of SNCF French railways, sells rail tickets Europe-wide.

STA Travel **T** 0333 321 0099, **W** statravel.co.uk.

US AND CANADA

ACP Rail International **T** 1 866 938 7245, **W** acprail.com. Eurail agent.

BritRail Travel **T** 1 866 938 7245, **W** britrail.com. British passes.

Eurail **W** eurail.com.

Rail Europe US **T** 1 800 622 8600, **Canada** **T** 1 800 361 7245; **W** raileurope.com. Official Eurail agent, with wide range of regional and one-country passes.

STA Travel US **T** 1 800 781 4040, **W** statravel.com.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

CIT Holidays Australia **T** 1300 380 992, **W** cit.com.au. Eurail and Italian rail passes.

Rail Europe Australia **W** raileurope-world.com.au, New Zealand **W** raileurope.co.nz.

Rail Plus Australia **T** 1300 555 003, **W** railplus.com.au; NZ **T** 09 377 5415, **W** railplus.co.nz. Eurail and BritRail passes.

STA Travel Australia **T** 134 782, **W** statravel.com.au; **New Zealand** **T** 0800 474400, **W** statravel.co.nz.

SOUTH AFRICA

Rail Europe **T** 011 628 2319, **W** raileurope.co.za. Official distributor for European rail in South Africa.

STA Travel South Africa **T** 0861 781 781, **W** statravel.co.za.

By bus

Long-distance journeys by bus between major European cities are generally slower and less comfortable than by train and – if you have a rail pass – not necessarily cheaper. If you're only travelling to a few places, however, a **bus pass** or **circular bus ticket** can undercut a rail pass, especially for over-26s. There's also the option of a **bus tour** if you're on a tight schedule or simply want everything planned for you.

Eurolines **W** eurolines-pass.com. Offers the Eurolines pass, valid for travel between 51 cities in twenty countries. It costs £227/€270 (£269/€320 for over-26s) for fifteen days in high season (late June to

mid-Sept as well as Christmas/New Year) and £294/€350 (£357/€425) for 30 days. Prices are around a third lower in low season.

Busabout **W** busabout.com. Runs a hop-on, hop-off service throughout Western Europe operating May–Oct. There are four "loops" as well as a Flexitrip Pass where you design your own route. Prices start from £655/£758 for a one-loop pass or £417/€496 for a two-week Flexitrip Pass. You can also buy one-way passes for example, starting in Rome and heading to Paris via Spain.

Contiki **W** contiki.com. Long-established operator running bus tours throughout Europe for 18- to 35-year-olds from three to 46 days. A thirteen-day "European Discovery" tour taking in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland and France starts at £1284/€1528 including hotel accommodation and meals.

By car

Driving can be an inexpensive way of getting around Europe, particularly if you're travelling with several other people and splitting the costs. Even **renting a car** can work out as cheap as either bussing or taking the train, since car rental in many European countries starts from around €25 a day for a compact vehicle. A number of European countries have **car-sharing** schemes that allow travellers to get a cheap ride by linking up with drivers heading to their desired destination and sharing petrol costs. These include BlaBla Car (**W** blablacar.co.uk) in the UK, GoMore (**W** gomore.com) in Denmark and Drivy (**W** drivy.de) in Germany.

By ferry

Travelling by **ferry** is sometimes the most practical way to get around, the obvious routes being from the mainland to the Mediterranean islands, and between the countries bordering the Baltic and Adriatic seas. There are countless routes serving a huge range of destinations, too numerous to outline here; we've given the details of the most useful routes within each chapter.

By plane

Most European countries now have at least one **budget airline** selling low-cost flights online, and invariably undercutting train and bus fares on longer international routes. Apart from its environmental impact, travelling by air means you miss the scenery and "feel" for a country that ground-level transport can provide; there's also the inconvenience of getting between airports and the cities they serve, often quite a haul in itself. But, if you're pressed for time, and especially if you want to get from one end of Europe to another, flying can be the cheapest option. See p.29 for a selective list of budget airlines.

Accommodation

Although accommodation is one of the key costs to consider when planning your trip, it needn't be a stumbling block to a budget-conscious tour of Europe. Indeed, even in Europe's pricier destinations the hostel system means there is always an affordable place to stay. If you're prepared to camp, you can get by on very little while staying at some excellently equipped sites. Come summer, university accommodation (see [@university.com](#)) can be a cheap option in some countries.

The one rule of thumb is that in the most popular cities and resorts – Venice, Amsterdam, Paris, Barcelona, the Algarve and so on – things can get very busy during the peak summer months. Be sure to book in advance.

Hostels

The cheapest places to stay around Europe are the innumerable **hostels** that cover the Continent. There are plenty of good-quality independent hostels in most major cities, including an increasing number of stylish designer hostels that can easily compete with lower-priced hotels on comfort, style and facilities. Many establishments are members of Hostelling International (HI), which incorporates the national youth hostel associations of every country in the world. Most are clean, well-run places, always offering dormitory accommodation, and often a range of private single and double rooms, or rooms with four to six beds. Many hostels also either have self-catering facilities or provide low-cost meals, and the larger ones have a range of other facilities – a swimming pool and a games room, for example. There is usually no age limit, but where there is limited space priority is sometimes given to those under 26. The best rates are usually available on the hostel website or through booking engines such as Hostelworld

ACCOMMODATION PRICES

All **accommodation prices** listed are for high season. The prices we list for hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs, *pensions* and private rooms are for the cheapest double room. For hostels, it is the price of the cheapest dorm bed, and for campsites the cost of a night's stay per person, except where otherwise stated.

([@hostelworld.com](#)) or Hostelbookers ([@hostelbookers.com](#)). Strictly speaking, to use a HI hostel you have to have membership, although if there's room you can stay at most hostels by simply paying a bit extra. If you do plan to stay in hostels, however, it's certainly worth joining, which you can do through your home country's hostelling association. HI hostels can usually be booked through their country's hostelling association website, almost always over the counter at other hostels in the same country, and often through the international HI website [@hihostels.com](#).

Some countries also offer their own **discount cards** or schemes. In the Netherlands, for example, 27 hostels belong to the StayOkay scheme ([@stayokay.com](#)) and purchasing a €17.50 card entitles travellers to a €2.50 discount a night. Students with ID get discounts in hostels across Germany, while in the Balkans many hostels belong to the Balkan Backpacker scheme ([@thebalkanbackpacker.com](#)), which offers discounts to travellers who stay in more than one of their network of hostels.

YOUTH HOSTEL ASSOCIATIONS

USA [1 301 495 1240](#), [@hiusa.org](#).

Canada [1 613 237 7884](#), [@hihostels.ca](#).

England and Wales [0800 019 1700](#) or [1 01629 592 700](#), [@yha.org.uk](#).

Scotland [0845 293 7373](#), [@syha.org.uk](#).

Ireland (Republic) [01 830 4555](#), [@anoige.ie](#).

Northern Ireland [028 9032 4733](#), [@hini.org.uk](#).

Australia [02 9218 9090](#), [@yha.com.au](#).

New Zealand [0800 278 299](#), [@yha.co.nz](#).

South Africa [@hihostels.com](#).

Hotels and pensions

Most **hotels** in Europe are graded on some kind of star system. One- and two-star hotels are plain and simple on the whole, usually family-run, and rooms often lack private facilities; sometimes breakfast won't be included. In three-star hotels rooms will nearly always be en suite and prices will normally include breakfast. In the really top-level places breakfast isn't always included.

Obviously prices vary greatly, but you'll rarely pay less than €30 for a basic double room even in southern Europe, while between the Netherlands, Scandinavia and the British Isles the average price is around €85. In some countries a *pension* or **B&B** (also variously known as a guesthouse, *pensão*, *Gasthaus* or numerous other names) is a cheaper alternative, offering just a few rooms of simple

COUCHSURFING, AIRBNB AND WIMDU

Couchsurfing ([couchsurfing.com](#)) gives travellers the chance to stay with local people **free of charge**, with hosts verified through references and a vouching system. **Airbnb** ([airbnb.com](#)) and **Wimdu** ([wimdu.com](#)) are other good options for budget short-term stays with rooms, apartments and other (sometimes unusual) lodgings listed by private individuals.

accommodation. In some countries these advertise with a sign in the window; in others they can be booked through the tourist office for a small fee. There are various other kinds of accommodation – apartments, farmhouses, cottages, *gîtes* in France, and more – but most are geared to longer-term stays and we have detailed them only where relevant.

Camping

The cheapest form of accommodation is a **campsite**. Most sites charge per person, with additional charges per tent and/or per vehicle. Facilities can be excellent, especially in countries such as France where camping is very popular. If you don't have a vehicle you should add in the cost and inconvenience of getting to the site, since most are on the outskirts of towns. Some sites also have cabins, which you can stay in for a little extra, although these are usually fairly basic affairs, only really worth considering in regions like Scandinavia where budget options are thin on the ground. Tourist offices can often recommend well-equipped and conveniently located sites.

As for **camping rough**, it's a fine idea if you can get away with it. In some countries it's easy – in parts of Scandinavia it's a legal right, and in Greece and other southern European countries you can usually find a bit of beach to pitch down on – but in others it can get you into trouble with the law.

Camping Card International

If you're planning to do a lot of camping, a **Camping Card International** (CCI or "carnet"; [campingcardinternational.com](#)), gives discounts on member sites. Check the website for details of all the relevant organizations in various countries that issue the card.

Festivals and annual events

There's always some event or other happening in Europe, and the bigger shindigs can be reason enough for visiting a place. Be warned, though, that if you're intending to visit a place during its annual festival you need to plan well in advance; accommodation can be booked up months beforehand, especially for the most famous events.

Festival calendar

Many of the festivals and annual events you'll come across in Europe have their origin in – and in many cases still represent – religious celebrations, commemorating a local miracle or saint's day. Others are decidedly more secular – from film and music festivals to street carnivals.

JANUARY

Twelfth Night (Jan 6) Rather than Christmas Day, in Spain this is the time for present-giving, while in Orthodox Eastern Europe, Jan 6 is Christmas Day.

La Tamborrada, San Sebastián, Spain (Jan 20) Probably the loudest festival you will encounter as scores of drummers take to the streets of San Sebastián.

FEBRUARY

Berlin Film Festival, Germany (early to mid-Feb) Home of the Golden Bear award, this film bash is geared towards the general public.

Carnival/Mardi Gras (mid-Feb) Celebrated most famously in Venice, but there are smaller events across Europe, notably in Viareggio (Italy), Lucern and Basel (Switzerland), Cologne (Germany), Maastricht (Netherlands) and tiny Binche (Belgium).

MARCH

Las Fallas, Valencia, Spain (March 15–19) The passing of winter is celebrated in explosive fashion with enormous bonfires, burning effigies and plenty of all-night partying.

St Patrick's Day (March 17) Celebrated wherever there's an Irish community, in Dublin it's a five-day festival with music, parades and a lot of drinking.

APRIL

Easter Celebrated with most verve and ceremony in Catholic and Orthodox Europe, where Easter Sunday or Monday is usually marked with some sort of procession; note that the Orthodox Church's Easter can fall a week or two either side of the Western festival.

Feria de Abril, Seville, Spain (mid-April) A week of flamenco music and dancing, parades and bullfights, in a frenzied and enthusiastic atmosphere.

King's Day, Amsterdam, Netherlands (April 27) King

Willem-Alexander's birthday is the excuse for this anarchic 24-hour drinking and dressing-up binge – remember your orange attire.

MAY

Cannes Film Festival, France (mid-late May) The world's most famous cinema festival is really more of an industry affair than anything else.

PinkPop Festival, Landgraaf, Netherlands (late May/early June) The Netherlands' biggest pop music festival.

JUNE

Festa do São João, Porto, Portugal (June 23–24) Portugal's second city puts on the mother of all street parties, culminating in revellers hitting each other with plastic hammers.

Glastonbury Festival, England (mid-late June) Despite being one of Europe's largest (and most expensive) music festivals, Glastonbury is a surprisingly intimate affair, thanks to its beautiful setting and hippie vibe.

Roskilde Festival, Denmark (late June/early July) An eclectic range of music (rock, dance, folk) and performance arts, with profits going to worthy causes.

JULY

The Palio, Siena, Italy (July 2 & Aug 16) Italy's most spectacular summer event: a bareback horse race between representatives of the different quarters of the city around the main square.

Montreux Jazz Festival, Switzerland (early July) These days only loosely committed to jazz, this festival takes in everything from folk to breakbeats.

Fiesta de San Fermín, Pamplona, Spain (July 6–14) Anarchic fun, centred on the running of the bulls through the streets of the city, plus music, dancing and of course a lot of drinking.

Exit Festival, Novi Sad, Serbia (early/mid-July) Europe's hippest music festival, held in a beautiful fortress and attracting top DJs and artists from around the world.

Avgnon Festival, France (early/mid-July) Slanted towards drama but hosts plenty of other events too.

Dubrovnik Summer Festival, Croatia (July & Aug) A host of musical events and theatre performances against the backdrop of the town's beautiful Renaissance centre.

Gentse Feesten, Belgium (mid-July) A ten-day canalside party of music and theatre so bacchanalian that the whole city takes two weeks off work afterwards to recover.

The Proms, London (July–Sept) World-famous concert series that maintains high standards of classical music at egalitarian prices.

Ramadan (May–June in 2017, 2018 & 2019) Commemorating the revelation of the Koran to the Prophet Mohammed, the month of fasting from sunrise until sunset ends with a huge celebration called Eid el-Fitr. Morocco, Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, plus Muslim areas of Bulgaria and Greece.

AUGUST

Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland (early/mid-Aug) Movies from around the world compete on the banks of Lake Maggiore.

Sziget Festival, Hungary (mid-Aug) Week-long music and culture fest on Óbuda island, Budapest, drawing almost half a million revellers.

La Tomatina, Buñol, Spain The last Wednesday in August sees the streets of Buñol packed for a one-hour food fight disposing of 130,000 kilos of tomatoes.

Edinburgh Festival, Scotland (last three weeks of Aug) A mass of top-notch and fringe events in every performing medium, from rock to cabaret to modern experimental music, dance and drama.

Notting Hill Carnival, London (last weekend of Aug)

Predominantly Black British and Caribbean celebration that's become the world's second-biggest street carnival after Rio.

Venice Film Festival, Italy (late Aug/early Sept) First held in 1932, this is the world's oldest film festival.

SEPTEMBER

Ibiza closing parties, Spain (mostly in Sept) The summer dance music Mecca goes out with a bang in September, with all the main clubs holding closing parties.

Regata Storica, Venice, Italy (early Sept) A trial of skill for the city's gondoliers.

Oktoberfest, Munich, Germany (late Sept/early Oct) A huge beer festival and fair, attracting vast numbers of people to consume glutinous quantities of beer and food.

Galway International Oyster Festival, Ireland (last weekend in Sept) The arrival of the oyster season is celebrated with a three-day seafood, Guinness and dancing shindig.

OCTOBER

Combat des Reines, Switzerland (early Oct) Quirky cow-fighting contest held to decide the queen of the herd in the Valais region of Switzerland. The main event is the copious drinking and betting on the sidelines (and no, the cows don't get hurt).

NOVEMBER

Bonfire Night, Lewes, England (Nov 5) Huge processions and tremendous fireworks light up this sleepy town every year.

Madonna della Salute Festival, Venice, Italy (Nov 21) Annual candlelit procession across the Grand Canal to the church of Santa Maria della Salute.

DECEMBER

Christmas Festive markets sprout up across the Continent in the run-up to Christmas. One of the best is found in Cologne, Germany.

New Year's Eve Celebrated with parties across Europe, it's best experienced in Edinburgh where over a hundred thousand people cram the streets for Hogmanay, or in Moscow, with incredible fireworks over Red Square.

Work and study

The best way of getting to know a country properly is to work there and learn the language. Study opportunities are also a good way of absorbing yourself

in the local culture, though they invariably need to be organized in advance; look online and check newspapers for ads or contact one of the organizations listed below.

Working in Europe

There are any number of jobs you can pick up on the road to supplement your spending money. It's normally not hard to find bar or restaurant work, especially in large resort areas during the summer, and your chances will be greater if you speak the local language – although being able to speak English may be your greatest asset in more touristy areas. **Cleaning jobs, nannying and au pair** work are also common, if not spectacularly well paid, often just providing room and board plus pocket money. Some of them can be organized on the spot, while others need to be arranged before you leave home.

The other big casual earner is farm work, particularly **grape-picking**, an option from August to October when the vines are being harvested. The best country for this is France, but there's sometimes work in Germany too, and you're unlikely to be asked for documentation. Also in France, along the Côte d'Azur, and in other yacht-havens such as Greece and parts of southern Spain, there is sometimes crewing work available, though you'll need the appropriate experience.

Rather better paid, and equally widespread, if only from September to June, is **teaching** English as a foreign language (TEFL), though it's sometimes hard to find English-teaching jobs without a TEFL qualification. You'll normally be paid a liveable local salary, sometimes with somewhere to live included, and you can often supplement your income with more lucrative private lessons. The TEFL teaching season is reversed in Britain and to a lesser extent Ireland, with plenty of work available during the summer in London and on the English south coast (though again, some kind of TEFL qualification is usually required).

For further **information** on working abroad, check out the books published in the UK by Vacation Work; visit [www.crimsonpublishing.co.uk](http://crimsonpublishing.co.uk) for their catalogue. Also try [www.studyabroad.com](http://studyabroad.com), a useful website with listings and links to study and work programmes worldwide.

Studying in Europe

Studying abroad invariably means **learning a language**, in an intensive course that lasts between

two weeks and three months, and staying with a local family. There are plenty of places you can do this and you should reckon on paying around £230/US\$300 a week, including room and board. If you know a language well, you could also apply to do a short course in another subject at a local university; check websites such as [www.eurolingua.com](http://eurolingua.com), [www.languagesabroad.com](http://languagesabroad.com) and [www.europa-pages.com](http://europa-pages.com), and keep an eye out when you're on the spot. The EU **Erasmus** programme provides grants for university students from Britain and Ireland to study in one of 32 European countries for between three months and a full academic year if their university participates in the programme. Post-Brexit, British students may no longer be eligible for this scheme: check with your university's international relations office, or see [www.britishcouncil.org/erasmus](http://britishcouncil.org/erasmus).

WORK AND STUDY CONTACTS

AFS Intercultural Programs US [1 800 AFS INFO](tel:1800AFSINFO), Canada

[1 800 361 7248](tel:18003617248), Australia [1 300 131 736](tel:1300131736), NZ [0800 600 300](tel:0800600300), SA [27114310113](tel:27114310113); afs.org. Intercultural exchange organization.

American Institute for Foreign Study US [1 866 906 2437](tel:18669062437), UK [020 7581 7300](tel:02075817300), Australia [02 8235 7000](tel:0282357000); aifs.com.

Language study and cultural immersion for the summer or school year.

ASSE US [1 800 333 3802](tel:18003333802), Canada [1 855 886 8381](tel:18558868381); asse.com. International student exchanges and summer language programmes in various European countries.

British Council UK [0161 957 7751](tel:01619577751); britishcouncil.org.

The Council's Recruitment Group recruits TEFL teachers with degrees and TEFL qualifications for posts, while its Education and Training Group runs teacher exchange programmes for those who already work as educators to find out about teacher development programmes abroad.

Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) US

[1 207 553 4000](tel:12075534000); ciee.org. Leading NGO offering study programmes and volunteer projects.

Cultural Vistas US [1 212 497 3500](tel:12124973500); culturalvistas.org.

Summer internships in various European countries for students who have completed at least two years of college in science, agriculture, engineering or architecture.

International House UK [020 7611 2400](tel:02076112400); ihlondon.com.

Reputable English-teaching organization that offers TEFL training leading to a Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA), and recruits for teaching positions in Britain and abroad.

World Learning US [1 800 257 7751](tel:18002577751) or [1 802 257 7751](tel:18022577751); worldlearning.org.

The Experiment in International Living ([www.experiment.org](http://experiment.org)) has summer programmes for high-school students, while the School for International Training ([www.sit.edu/studyabroad](http://sit.edu/studyabroad)) offers accredited college semesters abroad, with language and cultural studies, homestay and other academic work.

WWOOF Europe [www.woofeurope.net](http://wwoofeurope.net).

Volunteering on organic farms and with sustainable projects in various European countries.

Travel essentials

Costs

It's hard to generalize about what you're likely to spend travelling around Europe, but it's by and large **not cheap**. Some countries – Norway, Switzerland, the UK – are among the most expensive in the world, while in others (Turkey, for example) you can live quite well on a fairly modest budget. Remember, however, that all of Europe is modern and well touristed, which means higher prices than in the developing world. In general, countries in the north and west of Europe are more expensive than those in the south and east, though keep an eye on exchange rates.

Accommodation will be your largest single expense, and can really determine where you decide to travel. **Food and drink** costs also vary wildly, although again in most parts of Europe you can assume that a cheap restaurant meal will cost €12–20 a head, with prices nearer the top end of the scale in Scandinavia, at the bottom end in eastern Europe, and below that in Turkey and Morocco. **Transport** costs are something you can pin down more exactly if you have a rail pass. Nowhere, though, are transport costs a major burden, except perhaps in Britain where public transport is less heavily subsidized than elsewhere.

The bottom line for an average **daily budget** touring the Continent – camping, self-catering, hitching, etc – might be around €37 a day per person. Adding on a rail pass, staying in hostels and eating out occasionally would bring this up to

PRICES

At the beginning of each chapter you'll find a **guide to rough costs** including food, accommodation and travel. Prices are quoted in euros for ease of comparison. Within the chapter itself prices are quoted in local currency.

perhaps €60 a day, while staying in private rooms or hotels and eating out once a day would mean a personal daily budget of at least €110. See box below, for tips on keeping your costs down.

Crime and personal safety

Travelling around Europe should be relatively trouble-free, but, as in any part of the world, there is always the chance of **petty theft**. Conditions vary greatly depending on the country: in Scandinavia, for example, you're unlikely to encounter much trouble of any kind, whereas in certain areas of large cities such as London, Paris or Barcelona, the **crime** rate is significantly higher. Also take care in poorer regions such as Morocco, Turkey and southern Italy. France, Belgium, Germany and Turkey have been rocked by a number of terrorist attacks recently, and potential **terrorist activity** remains a concern throughout Europe. Be vigilant when you're in crowded public spaces.

Safety tips

In order to minimize the risks, you should take some basic precautions. First and perhaps most

GETTING BY ON A BUDGET

Buy a rail pass Whether you're planning to take in all of Europe or just a few countries, a rail pass will save you money (see p.34).

Find a roommate Accommodation in hotels, *pensions* and private rooms is cheaper if you share, so buddy up.

Student/youth discounts If you're a student or under 26, make sure you bring your student or youth card (see p.44), and always ask about discounts.

Head for the countryside Don't spend more time than you need to in cities – prices are always higher there.

Shun tourist traps Eat and drink with the locals and try regional food as it'll usually be cheaper – and frequently tastier.

Self-cater Markets are full of fresh, seasonal picnic fare, which makes self-catering a treat.

Drink at home Have a few drinks before you go out – you can usually pick up booze from local shops at a fraction of the bar price.

Be flexible Transport is often cheaper in off-peak hours.

Sleep on the train Make your longest journeys overnight – you'll forego accommodation costs for the night.

Bargain, bargain, bargain Don't be afraid to haggle (especially in places like Morocco where it's expected), but know when to stop.

important, try not to look too much like a tourist. Appearing lost, even if you are, should be avoided, and it's not a good idea – especially in southern Europe – to walk around flashing an obviously expensive camera or smartphone: the professional bag-snatchers who tour train stations can have your valuables off you in seconds.

If you're waiting for a train, keep your eyes (and hands if necessary) on your bags at all times; if you want to sleep, put everything valuable under whatever you use as a pillow. Exercise caution when choosing a train compartment and avoid any situation that makes you feel uncomfortable. **Padlocking** your bags to the luggage rack if you're on an overnight train increases the likelihood that they'll still be there in the morning. It's also a good idea to wear a **money belt**.

If you're staying in a hostel, take your valuables out with you unless there's a very secure store for them on the premises. It's a good idea to **photocopy your passport** and send it to your email account, and leave a copy of your address book with friends or family.

If the worst happens and you do have something stolen, inform the **police** immediately (we've included details of the main city police stations or tourist police throughout); the priority is to get a statement from them detailing exactly what has been lost, which you'll need for your insurance claim back home.

Customs

Customs and **duty-free restrictions** vary throughout Europe. Non-EU citizens arriving in the EU can bring in one litre of spirits, four litres of table wine, plus 200 cigarettes (or 250g tobacco, or fifty cigars). There is no duty-free allowance for travel within the EU: in principle you can carry as much in the way of duty-paid goods as you want, so long as it is for personal use. Note that Andorra, Gibraltar, the Canary Islands, Ceuta and the Channel Islands are outside the EU for customs purposes, and the UK may join them, depending on post-Brexit negotiations. If you are carrying prescribed drugs of any kind, it's a good idea to have a copy of the prescription to show to suspicious customs officers. Note also that all EU members restrict the importation from outside Europe of meat, fish, eggs and honey.

Drugs

Drugs such as amphetamines, cocaine, heroin, LSD and ecstasy are **illegal** all over Europe, and

although use of cannabis is widespread in most countries, and legally tolerated in some (famously in the Netherlands, for example), you are never allowed to possess more than a tiny amount for personal use, and unlicensed sale remains illegal. Penalties can be severe (in certain countries, such as Turkey, even possession of cannabis can result in a hefty prison sentence) and your consulate is unlikely to be sympathetic.

Electricity

The supply in Europe is 220v (240v in the British Isles), which means that anything on North American voltage (110v) normally needs a transformer – or at least a plug adapter if the power cord has a built-in transformer. Some countries (notably Spain and Morocco) still have a few places on 110v or 120v, so check before plugging in or you could fry your electronics. British and Irish sockets take three rectangular pins; elsewhere they take two round pins. A travel plug which adapts to these systems is useful to carry.

Entry requirements

Citizens of the UK (but not other British passport holders), Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US do not need a **visa** to enter most European countries, and can usually stay for between one and three months, depending on nationality. EU countries never require visas from Irish citizens, and currently British citizens don't need them either, though the situation may change post-Brexit. Always check visa requirements before travelling with the embassy of the country you are visiting, as they can and do change; this especially applies to Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African citizens intending to visit Eastern European countries.

VISA ALERT!

Everyone needs a **visa to visit Russia**, which must be obtained in advance, and if you're passing through Belarus to get there, you'll need a transit visa for that country as well. Citizens of most countries also need a visa for **Turkey**, which is available at the border (see p.1141). South Africans need a visa for most European countries, so be sure to check with the appropriate embassy before travelling.

Twenty-six countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), known as the **Schengen group**, have joint visas which are valid for travel in all of them; in theory, there are no immigration controls between these countries, though there may be spot-checks of ID within their borders.

Gay and lesbian travellers

Gay men and lesbians will find most of Europe a **tolerant** place in which to travel, the west rather more so than the east, where there can still be considerable hostility. Gay sex is no longer a criminal offence in any country covered by this book except Morocco, but some still have measures that discriminate against gay men (a higher age of consent, for example), and Russia has recently introduced a law against "gay propaganda", amid a new wave of **homophobia**. Lesbianism sometimes escapes such laws on the basis that its existence is not officially recognized, although that is not the case in Russia. For further information, check the International Lesbian and Gay Association's European region website at ilga-europe.org.

Health

You don't need **inoculations** for any of the countries covered in this book, although for Morocco and Turkey typhoid jabs are advised, and in southeastern Turkey malaria pills are a good idea for much of the year – check www.cdc.gov/travel for full details. Remember to keep your polio and tetanus boosters up to date.

EU citizens are covered by reciprocal health agreements for free or reduced-cost emergency treatment in many of the countries in this book (the main exceptions are Albania, Morocco, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine). To claim this, you will be asked for your proof of residence or **European Health Insurance Card** (EHIC). British citizens are currently eligible for an EHIC, and can apply for one at ehic.org.uk, though post-Brexit this may change: check gov.uk/european-health-insurance-card for the latest situation. Irish citizens can apply for a card at ehic.ie. Without an EHIC, you won't be turned away from hospitals but you will almost certainly have to pay for any treatment or medicines. Also, in practice, some doctors and hospitals charge

anyway and it's up to you to claim reimbursement when you return home. Make sure you are insured for potential medical expenses, and keep copies of receipts and prescriptions.

Doctors, hospitals and pharmacies

For minor health problems it's easiest to go to a **pharmacy**, found pretty much everywhere. In major cities there should be at least one pharmacy open 24 hours – check any pharmacy window for a rota indicating the branch currently open all night. In cases of serious injury or illness contact your nearest consulate, which will have a list of English-speaking **doctors**, as will the local tourist office. In the accounts of larger cities we've listed the most convenient **hospital** casualty units/emergency rooms.

Contraceptives

Condoms are available everywhere, and are normally reliable international brands such as Durex, at least in western Europe; the condoms in eastern European countries, Morocco and Turkey are of uncertain quality, however, so it's best to bring your own. **AIDS** is as much of a problem in Europe as in the rest of the world, and members of both sexes should carry condoms. The **pill** is available everywhere, too, though often only on prescription; again, bring a sufficient supply with you. In case of emergency, the **morning-after pill** is available from pharmacies without a prescription in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Morocco, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK.

Drinking water

Tap water in most countries is **drinkable**, and only needs to be avoided in Morocco and parts of Turkey. Unfamiliar food may well give you a small case of the runs, normally over in a day or two.

Insurance

Wherever you're travelling from, it's a very good idea to have some kind of **travel insurance**. Before buying a policy, however, check whether you're already covered: students will often find that their student health coverage extends into the vacations and for one term beyond the date of last enrolment; and some credit cards include travel insurance.

Otherwise you should contact a specialist travel insurance company. A **typical policy** usually provides cover for the loss of baggage, tickets and –

ROUGH GUIDES TRAVEL INSURANCE

Rough Guides has teamed up with WorldNomads.com to offer great travel insurance deals. Policies are available to residents of over 150 countries, with cover for a wide range of adventure sports, 24hr emergency assistance, high levels of medical and evacuation cover and a stream of travel safety information. Roughguides.com users can take advantage of their policies online 24/7, from anywhere in the world – even if you're already travelling. And since plans often change when you're on the road, you can extend your policy and even claim online. Roughguides.com users who buy travel insurance with WorldNomads.com can also leave a positive footprint and donate to a community development project. For more information, go to roughguides.com/travel-insurance.

up to a certain limit – cash, as well as cancellation or curtailment of your journey. Make sure that the per-article limit covers your most valuable possession. Most policies exclude so-called **dangerous sports** unless an extra premium is paid: in Europe this can mean anything from scuba diving to mountaineering, skiing and even bungee-jumping. With **medical cover**, you should ascertain whether benefits will be paid as treatment proceeds or only after you return home, and whether there is a 24-hour medical emergency number.

Internet and email

In most European countries internet cafés are rare, since public **wi-fi** – often free – has taken over and data roaming has become significantly cheaper. Most hotels and many cafés and restaurants also offer free wi-fi.

Left luggage (baggage deposit)

Almost every train station of any size has facilities for depositing luggage – either lockers or a desk that's open long hours every day. We've given details in the accounts of the major cities.

Mail

We've listed the central **post offices** in major cities and given an idea of opening hours. Bear in mind, though, that in most countries you can avoid long waits in post offices by buying stamps from newsagents, tobacconists and street kiosks.

Maps

Though you can often buy **maps** on the spot, you may want to get them in advance to plan your trip: firms such as Stanfords in the UK (stanfords.co.uk) and Rand McNally in the US (randmcnally.com) sell maps online or by mail order. For extensive

motoring, it's better to get a large-page road **atlas** such as Michelin's *Tourist and Motoring Atlas*. If you have a smartphone, the **Citymapper app** (citymapper.com) is invaluable when navigating public transport in big cities; it currently covers London, Rome, Paris, Hamburg, Brussels, Berlin, Lyon, Lisbon, Milan, Madrid and Barcelona.

Money

The easiest way to carry your money is in the form of plastic. Hotels, shops and restaurants across the Continent accept major **credit and debit cards**, although cheaper places may not. More importantly, you can use them to get cash out of **ATMs** throughout the region, including Morocco and Turkey, as long as they are affiliated to an international network (such as Visa, MasterCard or Cirrus). Using a **cash card** pre-loaded with multiple currencies, such as Travelex (travelex.com), is a good way to avoid paying bank withdrawal fees. In some countries **banks** are the only places where you can legally change money, and they often offer the best exchange rates and lowest commission. Local banking hours are given throughout this book. Outside normal hours you can use **bureaux**

THE EURO (€)

The **euro** is the currency of 19 EU countries (and a couple of others use the euro unilaterally). **Coins** come as 1c, 2c, 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c, €1 and €2, with one side of the coin stating the denomination while the other side has a design unique to the issuing country. Euro **notes** come as €5, €10, €20, €50, €100, €200 and €500. At the time of writing, £1 was worth €1.19, US\$1 got you €0.90, Can\$1 was €0.69, Aus\$1 was €0.68, NZ\$1 was €0.64 and ZAR10 was €0.63. Check xe.com for the latest exchange rates.

de change, often located at train stations and airports, though their rates and/or commissions may well be less favourable.

Phones

Since most people have mobile phones, **public call boxes** have become practically obsolete across Europe. It's easiest to call home via Skype or similar, though in some places it's still possible to go to a post office, or a special phone bureau, where you can call from a private booth and pay afterwards. Phoning from hotels tends to be very expensive.

To call **any country** in this book from Britain, Ireland, South Africa or New Zealand, dial **00**, then the country code, then the city/area code (if there is one) without the initial zero – except for the following: Russia and Lithuania (where there is no initial zero); Italy, where the initial zero (or 3 for a cellphone) must be dialled; and Denmark, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Portugal, Spain, Andorra and Gibraltar, where there are no area codes, and the whole number must be dialled. From the US and most of Canada, the international access code is **011**, from Australia it's **0011**; otherwise the procedure is the same.

To **call home** from almost all European countries, including Morocco and Turkey, dial **00**, then the country code, then the city/area code (without the initial zero if there is one), then the local number. The exception is Russia, where you dial **8**, wait for a continuous dialling tone and then dial **10**, followed by the country code, area code and number.

For **collect calls**, use the "Home Country Direct" service. In the UK and some other countries, international calling cards available from newsagents enable you to call North America, Australia and New Zealand very cheaply. Most North American, British, Irish and Australasian phone companies either allow you to call home on a credit card, or billed to your home number, though with mobile phone access becoming cheaper and easier worldwide, this would be a last resort.

Mobile/cellphones

Some North American **cellphones** may not work in Europe, though if your smartphone is unlocked, you can use it with a local SIM card in most European countries; in Australia and New Zealand, you can pre-order a SIM card from various countries from Travelgear.com.au. Mobiles from the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa can be

used in most parts of Europe, and a lot of countries – certainly in Western Europe – have nearly universal coverage. There's a cap on **mobile phone charges** within Europe, so EU residents can use their own phones within all EU countries for the same price as at home – post-Brexit, this may or may not apply to British citizens: check with your mobile company first. Many service providers, including those in the United States, offer call and data packages that can be used abroad at little or no extra charge.

Student and youth discounts

It's worth flashing whichever discount card you've got at every opportunity. For students, an **International Student Identity Card** (ISIC for short) is well worth the investment. It offers reduced (usually half-price, sometimes free) entry to museums and other sights, as well as qualifying you for other discounts in certain cities. It can also save you money on some transport costs, notably ferries. The card costs £12 in the UK, €15 in Ireland, US\$25 in the US, Can\$20 in Canada, Aus\$25 in Australia, NZ\$25 in New Zealand and ZAR100 in South Africa. If you're not a student but under 26, get an **International Youth Travel Card**, which costs the same and can in some countries give much the same sort of reductions. Both cards are available direct from WIsic.org or from youth travel specialists such as STA. You can download the ISIC app that allows you to search for discounts in the country you're travelling in.

As well as the above options, the **European Youth Card** (Weyca.org) entitles anyone under 26 (or under 30 in some countries) to a wide range of discounts on transport services, tourist attractions, activities and accommodation for up to a year. It is available online for people living outside Europe and at designated outlets in 38 European countries. Although the card is valid across the region, prices vary across individual countries (from around €5 to €19), as do the relevant discounts.

NEWSPAPERS

British and American newspapers and magazines are widely available in Europe, sometimes on the day of publication, more often the day after. They do, however, cost around three times as much as they do at home. Look too for locally produced English-language papers and websites.

CLOTHING AND SHOE SIZES

WOMEN'S DRESSES AND SKIRTS

American	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18
British	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22
Continental	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	52

WOMEN'S BLOUSES AND SWEATERS

American	6	8	10	12	14	16	18
British	30	32	34	36	38	40	42
Continental	40	42	44	46	48	50	52

WOMEN'S SHOES

American	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
British	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Continental	36	37	38	39	40	41	42

MEN'S SUITS

American	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48
British	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48
Continental	44	46	48	50	52	54	56	58

MEN'S SHIRTS

American	14	15	15.5	16	16.5	17	17.5	18
British	14	15	15.5	16	16.5	17	17.5	18
Continental	36	38	39	41	42	43	44	45

MEN'S SHOES

American	7	7.5	8	8.5	9.5	10	10.5	11	11.5
British	6	7	7.5	8	9	9.5	10	11	12
Continental	39	40	41	42	43	44	44	45	46

Time

This book covers four **time zones** (see map, p.46). GMT (Greenwich Mean Time), aka UTC, or Universal Time, is five hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, eight hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time, eight hours behind Western Australia, ten hours behind eastern Australia, twelve hours behind New Zealand and two hours behind South Africa. Note that all countries in this book (except Morocco and Russia) have daylight saving time from March to October. This change, along with daylight saving in North America, Australia and New Zealand, can affect the time difference by an hour either way.

Tourist information

Before you leave, it's worth checking the websites of the **tourist offices** of the countries you're intending to visit. For parts of central and eastern Europe, where up-to-date maps can be hard to find within the country, it may be worth contacting the tourist office in advance and asking them to send you any free maps and brochures they may have:

note that a few countries do not have any official tourist offices abroad, and you may have to contact their embassy instead.

Once in Europe, most countries have a network of tourist offices that answer queries, dole out a range of (mostly free) maps and brochures, and can often book accommodation, or at least advise you on it. They're better organized in the UK, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland and Spain – with branches in all but the smallest village, and mounds of information; in Greece, Turkey and eastern Europe you'll find fewer tourist offices and they'll be less helpful on the whole, sometimes offering no more than a couple of dog-eared brochures and a photocopied map. We've given further details, including a broad idea of opening hours, in the introduction for each country.

Travellers with disabilities

Prosperous northern Europe is easier for **disabled travellers** than the south and east, but the gradual enforcement of EU accessibility regulations is making life easier throughout the European Union



at least. Wheelchair access to public buildings nonetheless remains far from common in many countries, as is wheelchair accessibility to public transport. Most buses are still inaccessible to wheelchair users, but airport facilities are improving, as are those on cross-Channel ferries. As for rail services, these vary greatly: France, for example, provides well for disabled passengers, as do Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland and Austria, but many other countries make little if any provision. For comprehensive info on disabled travel, check out disabledtravelers.com.

Women travellers

One of the major irritants for women travelling through Europe is sexual harassment, which, in Italy,

Greece, Turkey, Spain and Morocco especially, can be almost constant for women travelling alone. By far the most common kind of harassment you'll come across simply consists of street whistles and catcalls; occasionally it's more sinister, and very occasionally it can be dangerous. Indifference is often the best policy, avoiding eye contact with men and at the same time appearing as confident and purposeful as possible. If this doesn't make you feel any more comfortable, shouting a few choice phrases in the local language is a good idea; don't, however, shout in English, which often seems to encourage them. You may also come across gropers on crowded buses and trains, in which case you should complain as loudly as possible in any language – the ensuing scene should be enough to deter your assailant.



VALBONA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

Albania

HIGHLIGHTS

- ① **Tirana** Delve into Albania's past in a giant, underground Communist bunker. [See p.52](#)
- ② **Valbona** Rural life surrounded by stunning alpine mountains. [See p.57](#)
- ③ **Berat** Explore a hilltop maze of Ottoman houses. [See p.57](#)
- ④ **Gjirokastra** Beautiful valley views and a charming old town. [See p.58](#)
- ⑤ **Ksamil's beaches** Relax on some of the Med's least-developed beaches. [See p.60](#)

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.49

ROUGH COSTS

Daily budget Basic €25, occasional treat €40

Drink Bottle of red wine €6

Food Qofte (minced meat rissoles) €2

Hostel/budget hotel €10/€30

Travel Bus: Tirana–Saranda €8 Train: Tirana–Shkodra €1.50

FACT FILE

Population 3 million

Language Albanian (*Shqip*)

Currency Lekë (L)

Capital Tirana

International phone code +355

Time zone GMT +1hr

Introduction

Beyond vague recollections of its Communist past, few travellers know much about Albania. Its rippling mountains and pristine beaches, lands littered with historical Roman ruins and pretty Ottoman towns remain largely undiscovered. Most never see the alluring azure lakes or the picturesque valleys occupied by immensely hospitable locals, and instead bypass the country for its far more popular neighbours.

Following decades of isolationist rule, this rugged land still doesn't seem to fit into the grand continental jigsaw, with distinctly exotic notes emanating from its language, customs and cuisine. But it's those idiosyncrasies that make it such an intriguing and rewarding corner of Europe, begging to be explored.

Most travellers make a beeline for the capital, **Tirana**, a buzzing city with a mishmash of garishly painted buildings, traditional restaurants and trendy bars. However, those seeking to take Albania's true pulse should head to the mountainous hinterlands, particularly the sleepy hillside towns of **Berat** and **Gjirokastra** – both essentially open-air museums of life in Ottoman times. Keen hikers will want to explore the valley of Valbona, where karst limestone mountains harbour astonishing biodiversity, and as the snowcapped peaks of the interior drop down to the ocean, the immaculate beaches along the **Ionian coastline** are among the Mediterranean's least developed sands.

CHRONOLOGY

- 168 BC** The Romans defeat the Illyrian tribe and establish rule over present-day Albania.
- 395 AD** Division of Roman Empire; Albania falls under the rule of Constantinople.
- 300s–500s** Invasions by Visigoths, Ostrogoths and Huns.
- 1343** Serbian invasions.
- 1443–79** Resistance against Ottoman rule, most of it led by national hero Skanderbeg.
- 1614** Founding of Tirana.
- 1912** Albania gains independence.
- 1922** Ahmet Zogu becomes prime minister and president before finally crowning himself King Zog in 1928.

1939 Mussolini annexes Albania; King Zog retreats to the *Ritz* in London.

1946 Proclamation of People's Republic of Albania, led by Enver Hoxha.

1967 "Cultural Revolution" sees agriculture collectivized, religious buildings destroyed and cadres purged.

1979 Mother Teresa, an ethnic Albanian, wins the Nobel Peace Prize.

1990 Thousands scramble into Tirana's Western embassies in an attempt to flee Albania.

1992 The Democratic Party wins elections, ending Communist rule.

1997 Collapse of financial pyramid schemes results in mass bankruptcies.

2000 Artist Edi Rama elected mayor of Tirana.

2009 Albania joins NATO and applies for EU membership.

2013 Edi Rama elected prime minister.

2015 Erion Veliaj elected mayor of Tirana.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

It's getting ever easier to **fly** into Albania, with a growing number of international connections. Low-cost carriers provide connections from all over Europe and direct British Airways flights from London can be quite reasonable. You can also fly cheaply to Corfu then get a ferry to Saranda (see p.59). Visas are not required for citizens of most nations; South Africa is a notable exception.

Greece offers by far the simplest international **bus** connections – there are daily services to Tirana from Athens and Thessaloniki (from €25), and it's also possible to get direct buses to a number of other Albanian cities. From Macedonia there are direct services from Skopje to Tirana, via Struga and Elbasan. It is still not straightforward to get here from

Montenegro – there are no services from the capital Podgorica, though there is a twice-weekly bus from Budva to Tirana and some unofficial minivans linking Shkodra and Ulcinj.

The most interesting form of arrival is by **ferry**. Several operators make overnight sailings to Durrës from Bari in Italy, including Ventouris Ferries (from €40; ventouris.gr); there are hourly bus connections between Durrës and the capital. It's also possible to get to Saranda by ferry from Corfu (from €19; finikas-lines.com), with at least two ferries per day making the forty-minute hop.

GETTING AROUND

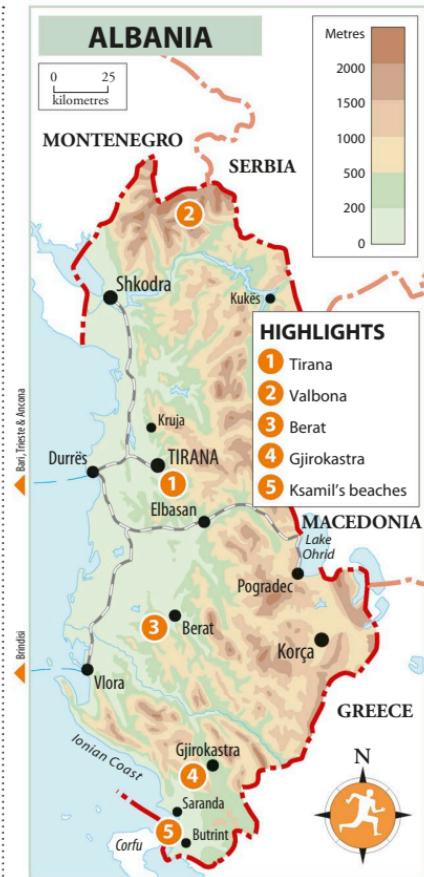
Getting from A to B can be a little tricky in Albania – it's best to be flexible, exercise patience, and to treat travel information as a guideline rather than gospel.

Most travel is conducted by **bus**; the vehicles are usually Italian dinosaurs but fares are cheap, and the roads are being improved. However, the authorities have so far steadfastly refused to build any official bus stations – fine in smaller towns, but a nightmare in a city as large as Tirana where matters are utterly confusing. Buses are sometimes supplemented by minibuses known as **furgons**, which are technically illegal, especially in the big cities, though still run undeterred; they tend not to depart until full and will often roam around town until they have enough passengers.

There are no international **train** connections to Albania, but the country has a small rail network. As part of ongoing construction projects in the north of the city, Tirana's main train station has been demolished and relocated to the small town of Kashar near the airport. From here a limited service runs to a few destinations across the country.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is surprisingly plentiful for a country with such low tourist numbers, and while state-owned



monstrosities were once the norm, there's now a decent selection of clean, good-value **hotels**. You should be able to find a double room for under €35 (prices are almost always quoted in euros), and breakfast is usually included. There don't tend to be any set rates for single rooms, but you can expect a small discount. During summer, it's advised to book ahead for private rooms on the coast. There are now **hostels** in Tirana, Saranda, Berat and Gjirokastra, charging €10–14 for dorm beds; all have free wi-fi. There are very few dedicated **campsites**, though the secluded beaches of the Ionian coast are great for those who can manage without facilities. Wild camping is fine in theory, but leaves you at the mercy of the (occasionally corrupt) local police.

ALBANIAN ADDRESSES

Postal addresses are a relatively new invention in Albania – outside Tirana, few streets have official names. This can make it tricky to track down a particular hotel or restaurant, but locals are always willing to help. Use landmarks for a point of reference when asking for directions.

FOOD AND DRINK

Albania's largely meat-based cuisine brings together elements of Slavic, Turkish and Italian cuisines. Spit-roasted lamb is the traditional dish of choice, though today it's *qebab* (kebabs) and *qoftë* (grilled lamb rissoles) that dominate menus, often served with a bowl of *kos* (yogurt). Another interesting dish is *fergësë*, a mix of cheese, egg, onions and tomatoes (and meat in some regions) cooked in a clay pot.

Vegetarians will find that filling, generous salads are ubiquitous, and seafood is also plentiful around the coast. But for all this choice the modern Albanian youth – and many a tourist – subsists almost entirely on snack food, particularly *burek* (a pastry filled with cheese, meat or spinach) and *sufllaqë* (sliced kebab meat and French fries stuffed in a roll of flatbread). There are some excellent **desserts** on offer, including spongy *shendetlige*, cream-saturated *trilece*, and the usual Turkish pastries.

DRINK

Coffee is king in Albania. Consumed throughout the day, espresso now trumps the old traditional Turkish style, with grounds at the bottom (*kafë turke*). There are cafés on every corner, and it's worth noting that cafés and bars generally melt into the same grey area – what's one by day will usually morph into the other by night.

The alcoholic drink of choice is **rakia** – like coffee, this spirit is something of a way of life in Albania, and usually consumed with meals. The country also produces some **wine**, mostly red, though most locals will admit to a preference for Macedonian varieties; Rilindja is a good, widely sold local label. **Beer** is easy to find, and it's also worth sampling Skënderbeg **cognac**, which is cheap, available in shops everywhere and not too bad at all.

CULTURE AND ETIQUETTE

Albanians tend to go out of their way to welcome foreign guests – partly because of the low number of visitors – and generally do a fine job of eroding popular misconceptions.

Religious practice was largely stamped out following the 1967 Cultural Revolution, meaning that although seventy percent of the population is Muslim, the majority are non-practising; the same can be said of the Christian remainder.

One cultural nicety is that the **body language** used to imply “yes” and “no” is the diametric opposite of what you may be used to – a shake of the head (actually more of a wobble) means “yes”, and a nod (actually more of a tilt) means “no”. Younger folk and those used to foreigners may well follow international norms, which adds to the confusion.

Tipping at restaurants is generally an exercise in rounding up to the nearest lekë note, but with bigger bills ten percent is the norm. **Smoking** has been officially prohibited in public places since 2007, though the police are too busy smoking to fine anybody, and you'll still see ashtrays on every restaurant table.

SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

In a mountainous country with a long coastline, the main attractions are pretty obvious – there are some delightful places to **swim** along the Ionian coast, while the most accessible **hiking** is in the national park area of Mount Dajti. More adventurous activities are thin on the ground, with a monopoly of sorts held by Outdoor Albania (04 222 7121, outdooralbania.com), an adventurous young team that can organize treks and **ski-shoeing** trips, or more high-octane fun such as **rafting** and **paragliding**.

COMMUNICATIONS

Post offices are generally open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. While their quality of distribution is improving – from a pretty low base – it's still prudent to hang onto any valuable parcels until you're out of the country. Public **phones**

ALBANIAN

Note that the dual nature of Albanian nouns – all have definite and indefinite forms – can cause some confusion with place names. Tirana is alternately referred to as Tiranë, Durrës as Durrësi, Berat as Berati, Saranda as Sarandë and Gjirokastra as Gjirokaster.

	ALBANIAN	PRONUNCIATION
Yes	<i>Po</i>	Paw
No	<i>Jo</i>	Yaw
Please	<i>Ju lutem</i>	Yoo lootem
Thank you	<i>Faleminderit</i>	Falemin-derit
Hello/Good day	<i>Tungjatjeta</i>	Toongya-tyeta
Goodbye	<i>Mirupafshim</i>	Meeropafshim
Excuse me	<i>Më falni</i>	Muh falni
Where?	<i>Ku?</i>	Koo?
Good	<i>Mirë</i>	Mir
Bad	<i>Keq</i>	Kek
Near	<i>Afer</i>	Afur
Far	<i>Larg</i>	Larg
Cheap	<i>I lirë</i>	Ee lir
Expensive	<i>I shtronjtë</i>	Ee shtronjtë
Open	<i>I hapur</i>	Ee hapoor
Closed	<i>Mbyllur</i>	Mbeeloor
Today	<i>Sot</i>	Sawt
Yesterday	<i>Dje</i>	Dye
Tomorrow	<i>Nesër</i>	Nesur
How much is...?	<i>Sa kushton...?</i>	Sa kushton...?
What time is it?	<i>Sa eshtë ora?</i>	Sa ushtu awra?
I don't understand	<i>Unë nuk kuptoj</i>	Oonuh nook koop-toy
Do you speak English?	<i>A flisni anglist?</i>	Ah fleesnee anglisht?
One	<i>Një</i>	Nyuuh
Two	<i>Dy</i>	Deeh
Three	<i>Tre</i>	Treh
Four	<i>Katër</i>	Katur
Five	<i>Pesë</i>	Pes
Six	<i>Gjashtë</i>	Gyasht
Seven	<i>Shtatë</i>	Shtat
Eight	<i>Tetë</i>	Tet
Nine	<i>Nëntë</i>	Nuhnt
Ten	<i>Dhjetë</i>	Dyet

are hard to track down, and almost all use cards; you may be offered these on the street but it's safer – and cheaper – to buy from a post office. Alternatively, a **SIM card** with unlimited data, messaging and up to an hour of international calls can cost as little as €10 for a month. **Wi-fi** is widespread, with most hostels, hotels, bars and cafés offering it for free.

EMERGENCIES

Despite its bad rap, the **crime rate** in Albania is actually very low by European

standards, and you're extremely unlikely to find yourself stumbling into one of the famed blood feuds, some of which still bubble away up north. It is, however, worth being aware of a high **road accident** rate made vividly clear by the alarming number of memorial stones by the roadside.

Albania's **hospitals** are in very poor shape – most locals go abroad for

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Police 129; Ambulance 127; Fire 128.

ALBANIA ONLINE

- **albania.al** Official site of the tourist board.
- **albania-hotel.com** Good for booking rooms online.
- **albanianhistory.net** Collection of historical articles.
- **journeytavalbona.com** Comprehensive information on reaching the northern mountains.

treatment if they can afford it, and you should do likewise if possible. There are very few ambulances, so should you or a friend come across an accident it's usually best to hunt down a cab. **Pharmacies** exist in all urban areas, and are usually open 9am to 7pm.

INFORMATION

There are a few **tourist information offices** dotted around, though hours can be irregular to say the least – they can supply maps and book accommodation, but you're better off asking for information at your hotel or hostel.

MONEY AND BANKS

Albania uses the **lekë** (L), which is also often used in its singular form, lek. Coins of 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 lekë are in circulation, as are notes of 200, 500, 1000, 2000 and 5000 lekë. Exchange **rates** are currently around €1 = 138L, £1 = 175L, and US\$ = 122L.

Accommodation prices are quoted in euros at all but the cheapest places, and some of the more upmarket restaurants do likewise; in these you can pay with either currency, although it often works out more expensive to pay in lekë.

Exchanges are the best places to change money, and can be found in most cities.

ATMs are everywhere in Tirana and all towns, while **credit cards** are increasingly accepted in hotels.

OPENING HOURS AND HOLIDAYS

Few **shops** and restaurants in Albania have set **working hours**, though you can

expect restaurants to be open from breakfast to supper, and shops daily from 9am to 5pm. **Museums** are usually closed on Mondays.

Most shops and all banks and post offices are closed on **public holidays**: January 1 and 2, January 6, March 14, March 22, May 1, October 19, November 28 and 29, and December 25, as well as at Easter, both Catholic and Orthodox.

Tirana

Its buildings are painted in lurid colours, a gigantic, useless pyramid rises smack in the centre, the main square is a mess, the roads are potholed, and still there's no official bus station for this city of almost one million people, and yet for all these idiosyncrasies **TIRANA** is undeniably a charmer. The clash of architectural styles (from Italian to Communist to post-modern) is most evident in the central Blloku area, which was off-limits to all but Party members during Communist times. A generation or so down the line, espresso-sipping, fun-loving locals and trendy bar openings are vivid proof that the city is well on its way to becoming a "regular" European capital.

Tirana's Ottoman legacy was largely eroded by former dictator Enver Hoxha's failed regime, an era still evidenced by enormous boulevards and Brutalist architecture. In 2000, the Edi Rama period began with the city's charismatic mayor attempting to paint Tirana into the modern day; the resulting streetscape kaleidoscope performs a continuous palette shift from lemon to lime, saffron to cinnamon and burgundy to baby blue. Some locals grumble that their city looks to have fallen victim to a made-for-TV makeover.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Tirana is better for strolling than sightseeing, but there's plenty to keep you occupied in the southbound stretch from **Skanderbeg Square** to the **Grand Park**, which narrowly bypasses the trendy **Blloku** district on the way.

Skanderbeg Square

All roads in Tirana lead to **Skanderbeg Square**, centrepiece of the city and, therefore, the nation as a whole, marked at its southern end by an equestrian statue of national hero Skanderbeg, who led the ultimately unsuccessful resistance to fifteenth-century Ottoman invasions. The imposing **National History Museum** (Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 10am–2pm; 200L) sits at the north side of the square and is worth a quick visit, particularly for its coverage of Hoxha's concentration camps.

Heading clockwise around the square you'll find the **Palace of Culture**, which houses the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet. Then comes the pretty **Et'hem**

Bey Mosque (daily 8am–11pm except during prayer times), which was closed off during Communist rule; one sunny day in 1991, thousands flocked here to make use of their new-found religious freedom.

Boulevard Dëshmorët e Kombit and Blloku

Heading south from Skanderbeg Square is the “Boulevard of National Martyrs”. The first major sight is the **National Art Gallery** (Wed–Sun 10am–6pm; 100L), which is well worth visiting for its renowned icons by Onufri, and a collection of Socialist Realist paintings. On the parallel road, Ibrahim Rugova, there's the space-age **Resurrection of**

Hospital, Dajti & Bunk'Art

0 metres

TIRANA

Airport, Kruja, Buses to north & south

Durrës



SHOPPING

- Adrion 1
- Albania by Nature 2
- Koralia 4
- Koralia 2 3

ACCOMMODATION

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| B&B Tirana Smile 3 | Propaganda Hostel 7 |
| Freddy's Hotel 1 | Tirana Backpackers 4 |
| Green House 6 | Era 2 |
| Hotel Millennium 5 | Era 2 |

EATING

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Cen Artizani 1 | Fatosi 2 |
| Embelaza Franceze 5 | Oda 3 |
| Era 6 | Zgara Tironës 4 |
| Era 2 7 | Nouvelle Vague 4 |

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

- | |
|------------------|
| Bar Iliria 2 |
| Duff 3 |
| Nouvelle Vague 4 |
| Sky Club 1 |

ALBANIA'S BUNKERS

Cross into Albania by land or sea, and you'll soon notice clutches of grey, dome-like structures dotting the countryside. Under Hoxha's rule, these **bunkers** were scattered around the country in tremendous numbers – estimates run as high as 750,000. These were no family shelters, but strategic positions to which every able-bodied man was expected to head, weapon in hand, at the onset of war. Though Western spies did indeed make attempts to infiltrate the country, the bunkers were never really put to the test. Huge underground government bunkers can also be found, most notably in Tirana where one 106-room shelter known as **Bunk'Art** (Tues–Sun: summer 9am–5pm; winter 9am–3.30pm; 300L, audioguide 600L; bunkart.al) has been converted into an historical museum and art space, located near the Mount Dajti cable car station (see p.56).

Christ Orthodox Cathedral, which is particularly striking at night. South of here, the pleasant green verges of the **Lana** are a good place to get a handle on some of Tirana's famed **colourful buildings**. South of the river, any road to the west will take you to the **Blluku** district, while on the opposite side is the distinctive **Pyramid**. Apparently designed by Hoxha's daughter (a disputed assertion), it first functioned as a museum dedicated to the leader, and then as a conference centre; it's now dilapidated and defunct, though locals are fond of scaling its walls with a beer in hand. Continuing south, opposite the imposing former Communist Party HQ (now the Prime Minister's residence), the 2013 **PostBlluku monument** provides an overdue memorial to the years of Cold War brutality: a restored concrete bunker (see box above) stands alongside a segment of the Berlin Wall and supports from a mine at Albania's notorious Spac forced labour camp. Walking south again, grandiose buildings rise up on either side of you until you emerge in Mother Teresa Square, home to a passable **Archeological Museum** (Mon–Fri 10.30am–2.30pm; 100L).

Grand Park

South of the Archeological Museum, though you'll need to curl west around the hill for access, is the **Grand Park**, whose main feature is an artificial lake to which the Tiranese come for a spot of relaxation. Its population of tiny fish will munch the dead skin from your feet – a treatment you'd pay good money for elsewhere – but avoid swimming, since

villages on the far side of the lake empty their sewage into the waters. Note, too, that although the surrounding forest is full of beautiful fireflies come dusk, it also has snakes.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By plane Mother Teresa International Airport (also known as Rinas Airport) is located 20km northwest of Tirana. Taxis usually charge around 2000L for the 30min trip into town – haggle in euros and you'll likely pay more – though it's far cheaper to take the hourly Rinas Express bus (6am–6pm; 45min; 250L), which drops off near the north end of Skanderbeg Square.

By train Tirana no longer has its own train station so those arriving from the north or the coast will alight at Kashar and take the shuttle bus for the remaining 15km into the city (shuttles go to and from Boulevard Zogu I). Destinations Durres (3 daily; 40min).

By bus Travelling to or from Tirana by bus is gradually getting easier, though the city does not yet have a central bus station, so you may be dropped at any one of a few places depending upon your point of embarkation, and whether you're travelling by bus or *furgon* – the tourist office can advise. The vast majority of buses depart from near the Doganës roundabout northwest of the centre on Dritan Hoxha.

Destinations Athens (8 daily; 15hr); Berat (hourly; 3hr); Gjirokastra (6 hourly; 4hr); Koman (3 daily; 4hr); Saranda (5 daily; 6hr); Skopje (4 daily; 6–7hr).

INFORMATION

Tourist office There's an office behind the National History Museum on Ded Gjo Luli (004 222 3313), but better advice can be found at most hostels. The irregular *Tirana In Your Pocket* guide (inyourpocket.com) is also a good source of information; you'll find print versions for free in hostels and some hotels.

City tours An excellent introduction to Tirana is the free walking tour (tiranafreetour.com) that meets on the steps of the National History Museum daily at

10am. Lasting around two hours, it takes in all the main sights and offers the chance to talk to a local who remembers the tail end of Communist rule. Tips are gladly received.

Activities Outdoor Albania ([www.outdooralbania.com](http://outdooralbania.com)) and Balkan Secrets ([www.balkansecrets.com](http://balkansecrets.com)) both organize fascinating out-of-Tirana excursions, such as mountain snowshoeing in the winter, kayaking in the summer, and jeep safaris.

GETTING AROUND

By bus Buses run every 5–10min (6am–10pm) on a few main routes and cost 30L for a one-way ticket.

By taxi Taxis should cost 400–500L for a trip within the city centre, though central Tirana is just about small enough to cover on foot. Speed Taxi and City Taxi have the best rates; not all have meters.

ACCOMMODATION

HOSTELS

Propaganda Hostel 75 Pjetër Bogdani [068 203 5261](tel:0682035261), [www.propagandahostel.com](http://propagandahostel.com). This place is in a prime location for stumbling into bed after a night out in Blloku's best bars. There's a rooftop space where you can bring your own beers for a sundowner, and a variety of mixed and single-sex dorms. Dorms €9, doubles €27.

Tirana Backpackers 3 Bogdanëve [068 468 2353](tel:0684682353), [www.tiranahostel.com](http://tiranahostel.com). This centrally located hostel, with its retro and sometimes downright bizarre decor – see the preserved fish in jars from the old science museum – has good basic rooms and breakfast is included. The outdoor bar is beautiful on a summer afternoon. Dorms €10, doubles €30.

★ Trip'n'Hostel 1 Musa Maci [068 304 8905](tel:0683048905), [www.tripnhostel.com](http://tripnhostel.com). A welcoming hostel with stylish communal areas, and dorm beds each with a curtain for privacy, a power socket and a handmade lamp. The breakfast is cooked fresh to order and the bar brews its own beer. Dorms €10, doubles €30.

HOTELS

★ B&B Tirana Smile Bogdanëve [04 224 3460](tel:042243460), [www.bbtiranasmile.com](http://bbtiranasmile.com). Spotless and charming, this place has huge, colourful rooms and a very friendly welcome. There's a comfortable communal room and breakfast is a mighty feast. Doubles €40.

Freddy's Hotel 75 Bardhok Biba [068 203 5261](tel:0682035261), [www.freddyshotel.com](http://freddyshotel.com). Formerly *Freddy's Hostel*, this family-run hotel has recently been renovated. Rooms are fresh and modern, and Freddy himself will often go out of his way to make you comfortable. Doubles €40.

Hotel Millennium 25 Murat Toptani [04 225 1935](tel:042251935). This colourful hotel is in a prime location, just 300m from the main square and on a quiet, leafy pedestrianized

★ TREAT YOURSELF

Green House 6 Jul Varibova [04 225 1015](tel:042251015), [www.greenhouse.al](http://greenhouse.al). Artistically designed boutique hotel whose rooms are perhaps the trendiest in the city. With doubles from €80, staying here is a bit of a splurge, but do come for the superb on-site restaurant: at 1400L, the veal fillet with truffle sauce is a delectable bargain.

street. Rooms are spacious and some have balconies. Doubles €40.

EATING

Cen Artizani Mihal Duri. An incredibly cheap Italian restaurant where nine different types of pasta are freshly made in the adjoining glass-fronted kitchen. A huge plate with ham, calamari or shrimp costs just 300L. Daily 11am–11pm.

Embelaza Franceze 1 Dëshmorët e 4 Shkurtit. Come to enjoy cake and coffee served up in a lavish interior. Savoury dishes are available but most are overpriced (sandwiches from 350L, mains 1000L and up). Daily 7am–10pm.

Era 33 Ismail Qemali. A hugely popular restaurant with locals and visitors alike. There's Albanian grill and pasta, but the main event is the thin and crispy pizza (from 360L). They have a sister restaurant on Papa Gjon Pali II. Meal with wine under 1000L. Daily 11am–midnight.

Fatosi Luigj Gurakuqi. This is one of a handful of *qoftë* snack-shacks bunched together near the roundabout. All are extremely popular with locals and well priced. A decent-sized meal will set you back just 300L. Daily 8am–midnight.

★ Oda Luigj Gurakuqi. Small place offering Ottoman-style meals on Ottoman-style sofas. The roasted peppers with cottage cheese (360L) are fresh and tangy, and the offal dishes (460L) far nicer than they sound; all is best washed down – if you're brave – with a shot of flavoured *rakia*. Daily 11am–11pm.

★ Zgara Tironës Kavajës. An always-bustling restaurant split over two floors, this grill serves enormous meat platters and a variety of fresh, tasty salads. Meal with wine from 700L. Daily 8am–midnight.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

Tirana's nightlife scene gets better with each passing year. Almost everything of note is concentrated in the fashionable Blloku area, where most venues function as cafés by day and as bars come evening.

Bar Iliria Rruga Brigada VIII. A Tirana institution, this big but simple bar is run by just one man. Service can be slow but beers are cheap from 150L. Daily though hours vary; usually busy 8pm–midnight.

Duff Rruga Brigada VIII. A trendy bar/restaurant with comfy sofas outside and bar stools inside. There's a good selection of beer on tap and locals say the burgers are the best in the city. Daily 7am–late.

Nouvelle Vague Pjetë Bogdani. A retro, music-themed bar with cosy indoor and outdoor seating. Cocktails cost around 300L and there's a selection of Albanian and Italian beers from 200L. Daily 10am–late.

Sky Club 5 Dëshmorët e 4 Shkurtit. This surprisingly cheap top-floor revolving bar is somewhat outdated but has superb city views. Cocktails go for just 400L and shots of Skenderbeg cognac for 150L. It can get busy around sunset, so come a little earlier to ensure you get the best seats. Daily 8am–midnight.

ENTERTAINMENT

Academy of Film and Multimedia 78 Aleksandër Moisiu ☎ 04 236 5188, afmm.edu.al. Occasional free screenings of foreign movies, all subtitled in English.

Millennium Cinema Murat Toptani. New Hollywood releases shown in a wonderful old theatre whose outdoor café is a delight on sunny days. Tickets from 400L.

SHOPPING

Tirana has a fascinating daily market (6am–10pm), which sprawls north of the Sheshi Avni Rustemi roundabout. Shops are generally open daily 9am–6pm.

Adrion Skanderbeg Square. Has English-language books, newspapers and magazines.

Albania by Nature Luigj Gurakuqi. The place to buy artisanal products, from olive-wood chopping boards to fruit juice, all handmade in Albania.

Koralia Abdyl Frashëri. Jewellery shop selling semi-precious stones and silver jewellery at reasonable prices. Sister shop on Myslym Shyri.

DIRECTORY

Embassies and consulates UK, Skanderbeg ☎ 04 223 4973; US, Elbasanit ☎ 04 224 7285.

Exchange Tirana is full of ATMs, and there's an exchange on almost every road in the centre, which tend to give better rates than the banks.

Hospital Civilian Hospital, Dibrës, northeast of the city centre.

Post office The office on Çameria is open Mon–Fri 8am–4pm.

Day-trips from Tirana

Local landmarks from which you can peer down on Tirana include the slopes of **Mount Dajti** and the hilltop town of **Kruja**, both of which can be visited on a day-trip from the capital.

MOUNT DAJTI

The dark, looming shape of **Mount Dajti** is easily visible from Tirana, a temptation that can prove too much for city dwellers, who head to the forested slopes in droves on sunny weekends. The mountain's network of paths feels surprisingly remote even though you're only 25km from the capital. There's no public transport to the mountain, but by taxi it should be no more than 700L to the base of the cable-car system (Mon & Wed–Sun: summer 10am–10pm; winter 10am–7pm; 800L return; dajtiekspres.com) that whisks passengers to within a slog of the summit. There are a number of restaurants in the area, useful if you fancy refuelling before heading back down. It's worth combining this with an afternoon visit to Bunk'Art (see box, p.54), which is located near the cable-car station in Tirana.

KRUJA

Lofty **KRUJA**, 35km from Tirana, was the focal point of national hero Skanderbeg's resistance to the Ottoman invasions of the fifteenth century, and you'll see his likeness all over town. Most people make a beeline for the **castle**, which houses a number of restaurants and an excellent **History Museum** (Tues–Sun 9am–2pm & 4–7pm; 200L), whose diverting collection of weaponry, icons and the like is augmented by an impressive modern interior. Also within the castle walls is the **Ethnographic Museum** (Tues–Sun 9am–4pm; 300L), housed in a gorgeous building with a serene outdoor courtyard. Souvenir sellers have taken over the town, and the best place to buy your

Albania-flag T-shirt, Skanderbeg statuette or Mother Teresa lighter is the restored **Ottoman bazaar**, just below the castle access road. *Furgons* from Tirana (1hr; 200L) leave regularly from the Zogu i Zi roundabout northwest of the city centre.

The northern mountains

These remote mountains make up the southernmost part of the Dinaric Alps that stretch from Albania, through Serbia and as far north as Slovenia. The range is best explored by trekking around the valley of **Valbona**; it's a long but enjoyable journey from the capital, taking in a ferry crossing on the emerald waters of **Lake Koman**, but entirely worth it for this magnificent mountain scenery.

VALBONA

The picture-perfect valley of **VALBONA**, which follows a river of the same name, is nestled among a collection of towering karst limestone peaks that reach heights of up to 2690m. Home to some of the country's most picturesque homesteads, it offers a true taste of Albanian country living. There are well-marked trails to suit all abilities – maps are available from *Rilindja* restaurant, which doubles as an unofficial information and trekking hub.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus The best way to reach Valbona is on the Sam bus to Koman from Tirana (1000L), which arrives in time for the 9am departure across Lake Koman (3hr; 800–1000L/person). On the other side of the lake, the ferry will be met by a bus connecting the arrival point (Fierze) and Valbona (700L). Ask the ferry staff to help you with connections to Valbona when you board. More detailed information at [@journeytovalbona.com](http://journeytovalbona.com).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

There are a number of good budget options along the valley's main road offering dorms from €10, all of which can organize guides and picnics for day hikes and have adjoining restaurants.

Rilindja ☎ 067 301 4637. Run by Alfred and his American wife, Catherine, this guesthouse has five basic but comfortable rooms, and is the best place to get information and maps on the local area. It also has the valley's finest restaurant serving ultra-fresh trout from the river (600L) and huge salads (350L). Doubles €35

Stani I Arif Kadris ☎ 067 301 4643. One of the highlights of a visit to Valbona is a traditional lunch in a shepherd's stone house. This one can be reached by foot or 4WD from the main road near the Çeremi trailhead (maps available from *Rilindja*).

Southern Albania

With its jumble of rugged mountains fringed by pristine curls of beach, Albania's south is the most appealing part of the country. The interior route boasts the rewarding towns of **Berat** and **Gjirokastra**, each home to whole swathes of Ottoman buildings. Heading on down the **Ionian Coast** instead, you'll find one of Europe's few unspoilt sections of Mediterranean shore, a near-permanently sunny spot where the twin blues of sea and sky are ripped asunder by a ribbon of grey mountains – on a clear day you'll be able to see Italy from the 1027m-high **Llogaraja Pass**. Both routes converge at the beach town of **Saranda**, while further south are the fantastic ruins of **Butrint**.

BERAT

There are few better places to be in Albania than standing on the footbridge in the charming, easy-going town of **BERAT**. From this vantage point, you'll be surrounded by huddles of **Ottoman houses**, their dark, rectangular windows staring from whitewashed walls like a thousand eyes. On the south bank is the sleepy **Gorica** district, kept in shadow for much of the day by a muscular backdrop of rock; to the north is the relatively sun-drenched **Mangalemë** district, from which steep, cobblestoned paths lead up to the hill-top **Kalasa**, an old citadel whose wonderful interior is up there with the best old towns in the Balkans.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

You'll have great views of Berat from the fourteenth-century **Kalasa**, a splendidly restored citadel (daily: April–Sept 8am–8pm; Oct–March 8am–5pm; 100L or free out of hours) towering above town, which is accessed via a steep, cobbled road. This is still a functioning part of town and home to hundreds, yet almost nothing dilutes its centuries-old vibe; visit at night and you're in for a wonderfully eerie treat. There were once over thirty **churches** here, but just a handful remain; oldest and most beautiful is the thirteenth-century **Church of the Holy Trinity**, sitting on the slope below the inner fortifications. Churches remain locked for most of the year, but the key-keepers are usually hanging around nearby. Also within the grounds is the **Onufri Museum** (Tues–Sun 9am–4pm; 200L), dedicated to the country's foremost icon painter, famed for his use of a particularly vivid red. Heading back down the access road, you'll come across the diverting **Ethnographic Museum** (daily: May–Sept 9am–1pm & 4–7pm, Sun 9am–2pm; Oct–April 9am–4pm, Sun 9am–2pm; 200L) and the first of the centre's three main **mosques**.

ARRIVAL AND ACTIVITIES

By bus The bus terminal is around 3km north of the town on Rruga Antipatreia. From there, it's a 30L bus ride on a local service to the centre of town.

Destinations Gjirokastra (2 daily; 4hr); Saranda (2 daily; 6hr); Tirana (every 30min; 3hr).

Tours Rafting excursions (around €50/person) and trips around nearby Mount Tomori can be organized through Outdoor Albania (outdooralbania.com). *Berat Backpackers* also lay on occasional tours.

ACCOMMODATION

Berat Backpackers 069 306 4429, beratbackpackers.com. Located over the river in Gorica and run by Scotty, an affable Geordie, this hostel remains the number one budget choice – the building is a bona fide Ottoman antique, the dorms are cosy, and the garden patio is a delightful place for evening drinks. Dorms €12, doubles €30.

Klea 032 234 970. Family-run guesthouse located just inside the citadel entrance. The tough climb to the top means it's not for all, but to stroll around the eerily quiet

old town by night is an utterly bewitching experience.

Doubles €30

★Mangalemí 068 232 3238, mangalemihotel.com. Near the centre of town, on the road to the citadel, this traditional guesthouse has splendidly decorated rooms that offer excellent value; all are en suite with comfy beds and powerful showers. There's a superb on-site restaurant, and the friendly staff are excellent sources of local information. Doubles €40

EATING AND DRINKING

Ajka On the Gorica side of the footbridge, this smart place is one of the few local bars that receives female customers. It's also good for coffee; head on up to the roof terrace to enjoy the evening sun with a drink. Daily 9am–11pm.

Mangalemí Inside the guesthouse of the same name. Professional service, large portions and reasonable prices – 500L can get you nicely full – and the salads are great. Head up to the terrace if the weather's nice. Reservations advised. Daily 10am–10pm.

Onufri Simple place inside the citadel walls, serving strong coffee and Albanian staples such as *pilaf* and stuffed peppers. Usually open 8am–6pm.

Spetimi 2 032 238 707. Studenty snack-style joint on the river road, selling good pizzas (300L) and mouthwatering crêpes (150L). Daily 7am–11pm.

White House 032 234 570. Riverside restaurant serving the best pizzas in town (from 300L; delivery service available), as well as seafood dishes and traditional Albanian grub. Daily 9am–11pm.

GJIROKASTRA

Sitting proudly above the sparsely inhabited Drinos valley, **GJIROKASTRA** is one of Albania's most attractive towns, and home to some of its friendliest people. It was once an important Ottoman trading hub and today a sprinkling of nineteenth-century **Ottoman-style houses** lines the maze of steep, cobbled streets. Gjiro is also etched into the nation's conscience as the birthplace of former dictator **Enver Hoxha**, and more recently the world-renowned author **Ismail Kadare**.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

The Old Town's centrepiece is its imposing **citadel** (daily 9am–7pm; 200L), which is clearly visible from any point in town. Built in the sixth century and enlarged in 1811 by Ali Pasha Tepelna, it was used as a **prison** by King Zog, the

Nazis and Hoxha's cadres; the interior remains suitably spooky. There are tanks and weaponry to peruse, but most curious is the shell of an **American jet** that was (apparently) forced down in 1957 after being suspected of espionage by the Communist regime. Other than the castle, Gjiro's most appealing sight is its collection of Ottoman-style houses; a prime example is the eighteenth-century **Skenduli House** (daily 9am–7pm; 200L), where the owner's daughter gives English-language tours of its wonderfully preserved rooms throughout the day.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus Buses and *furgons* stop on the highway intersection below the New Town. From here there's a local bus (30L) to take you up the steep climb to the Old Town main square; alternatively, it's a half-hour walk or a 300L taxi ride. Destinations Berat (2 daily; 4hr); Korça (1 daily; Shr); Saranda (hourly; 1hr 30min); Tirana (hourly; 4hr 30min).

ACCOMMODATION

None of these establishments has an address, but they're easy to find.

Gjirokastra Above the mosque on the road running under the castle wall ☎ 084 265 982. Modern guesthouse with an excellent location and pleasant patio for beers in the sun. Rooms are light and beautifully furnished. The traditional breakfast is superb. Doubles €30.

Kotoni Signed from the road under the castle ☎ 084 263 526, eda.goldemi@gmail.com. Cosy nineteenth-century building decorated in true Albanian style. Home-from-home touches include excellent breakfasts and handmade trimmings in the bedrooms. The adjoining restaurant is a welcoming family affair. Doubles €25.

★ Stone City Hostel Rruga Alqi Kondi (ask locals for directions to "Walter's hostel") ☎ 069 348 4271, stonecityhostel.com. Dutch-owned, modern hostel with original exposed brick walls and stylish communal area. Organizes fun day-trips in the surrounding hills. Dorms €12, doubles €30.

EATING AND DRINKING

Kujtimi Qafa e Pazarit. Fantastic Albanian meals dished out under the dappled shade of a maple tree. A salad and small main will set you back 500L. The house speciality is juicy fried frogs' legs. Daily 9am–midnight.

Kuka Astrit Karagozzi. Run by two brothers, this modern restaurant serves excellent traditional Albanian and contemporary dishes. The leafy garden is huge and the inside very sophisticated. Traditional dishes from 200L; pasta 300L. Mon–Sat 8am–10pm.

SARANDA

Staring straight at Corfu, and even within day-trip territory of the Greek island, sunny **SARANDA** is perhaps Albania's most appealing entry point. A recent building boom has eroded some of the town's original genteel atmosphere, but it's still a great place to kick back, stroll along the promenade and watch the sunset over cocktails. There are beaches in town, but better are those in nearby **Ksamil**, some 20km to the south.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By bus There's no station as such, but buses pick up and drop off just north of the centre on Vangjel Pandi, with the harbour a 5min walk away downhill.

Destinations Athens (1 daily; 10hr); Berat (2 daily; 6hr); Gjirokastra (hourly; 1hr 20min); Tirana (5 daily; 6hr).

By boat The small terminal on the west side of town has services to Corfu which run at least twice daily year-round, increasing to three per day June–Aug. Tickets (from €19) can be bought from the Finikas Lines (finikas-lines.com) office on the access road.

ACCOMMODATION

As elsewhere around the Med, prices are at their highest in July and August and many hotels get fully booked far in advance. Discounts are negotiable at other times – even the hostels cut their dorm prices by €2 outside the summer months.

HOSTELS

★ Hairy Lemon Koder 8f ☎ 069 355 9317, hairylemonhostel.com. Irish-owned hostel a 10min walk west of the centre, past the ferries. Clean and friendly, with very comfy beds and a great chill-out area for meeting new travel buddies. Dorms €12.

Saranda (SR) Backpackers Mitat Hoxha 10 ☎ 069 434 5426, backpackerssr.hostel.com. This simple hostel is

THE BLUE EYE

On the way between Gjirokastra and Saranda is the wonderful **Blue Eye**, an underwater spring forming a pool of deepest blue (50L). Its setting in a cool, remote grove is quite spectacular, but the water is bracing to say the least. Hop on any bus or minivan plying the Saranda–Gjirokastra route, and ask to be let off at the Syri i Kaltër; the pool is 20min from the road on a clear path. There's a decent restaurant and hotel on site, with doubles from €30.

inconspicuously located in an apartment building next to an internet café near the ferry ticket office. Its dorms boast sea views and owner Tomi is always eager to help. Dorms €12

HOTELS

Hotel Real Off Ismail Tatzati ☎ 085 226 361. This is a simple place with spotless rooms – most of which have balconies. It's just a short walk from the seafront, the bus and ferry terminals, and dozens of bars and restaurants. Doubles €50
Kaonia Jonianet 2 ☎ 085 222 600. The best value of the hotels around the harbour, perhaps because of the unfinished building it's attached to. All rooms have balconies, but not all offer sea views so look before you pay. Doubles €50

Titania Jonianet 15 ☎ 085 222 869. Another excellent-value hotel considering its location right in the centre of the promenade. Sparklingly clean sea-view rooms with good low-season discounts. Doubles €60

EATING AND DRINKING

The town centre is filled with cheap joints selling *sufflaje*, *burek* and the like, while there's also the well-stocked Alfa supermarket near the *Saranda (SR) Backpackers* hostel.

Bequa Telat Noga. Off the east side of Friendship Park. A small joint serving hearty Albanian food. Meat dishes from 200L; real penny-pinchers will appreciate the 70L *pilaf*. Daily 9am–11pm.

★ **Limani** Jonianet. Jutting out into the harbour, this sprawling restaurant is by far the most popular in town. Staff are attentive, pizzas are cooked in a proper fired oven and the seafood (from 500L) is excellent: the raw marinated prawns are worth the 1500L splurge. Daily 7am–midnight.
Plazhi i Ri Jonianet. A low-key affair behind a row of palms on the promenade, which serves quality traditional dishes at pleasing prices. The seafood soup (500L) is a favourite. Pasta from 300L. Daily 7am–midnight.

NIGHTLIFE

Delight Bar Mitat Hoxha. Big, contemporary bar near the ferry terminal serving milkshakes (250L) by day and cocktails (500L) by night. Plays loud, cheesy chart music; open all day but is most fun 8pm–midnight.

Orange Bar Butrinti. Perhaps the most stylish bar in all of Saranda, this outdoor establishment is open 24 hours a day in summer. Come for cocktails in the evening and nurse your headache with a coffee the morning after.

Paparazzi Bar Mitat Hoxha. Near the top of the hill past the ferry terminal, this fun bar has a great atmosphere in the evenings. There are brilliant views of sparkling Saranda from the balcony. Daily 7am–late.

AROUND SARANDA

The main activity around Saranda is a visit to **Butrint** and the fantastic beaches of **Ksamil**, which can both be visited in a single day-trip from the town.

Ksamil beaches

The small coastal village of **KSAMIL** within **Butrint National Park** has a smattering of lovely public beaches lapped by spectacularly clear waters. Each cove is overlooked by a restaurant serving reasonably priced seafood (*Guvat* is the best of the bunch). The beaches are beautiful but busy in summer, and there are a few small islands close enough to swim to if you want a little extra space.

Butrint

Splendidly sited on an exposed nub of land, the isolated ruins of **BUTRINT** (daily 7am–7pm; 700L) offer a peek into over 2500 years of history, and are a delight to explore on its eucalyptus-lined trails. The area was first developed by the Greeks in the fourth century BC, and the expansive **theatre** and nearby **public baths** were built soon after. Butrint then reached its zenith during Roman times – Julius Caesar stopped by in 44 BC – though most of the statues unearthed from this period are now in the museums of Tirana. You can see most of Butrint's sights on a looped footpath, though do head up to the **Acropolis** for wonderful views and an excellent museum full of unearthed artefacts.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

You can pick up *furgons* to Butrint and Ksamil (hourly, on the same route; 30min; 100L) opposite the synagogue on Skënderbeu in Saranda (the road above the prom), but if you're a group you could opt for a taxi (around €30 including a few hours' waiting time at one or the other).

ACCOMMODATION

Livia ☎ 067 3477 077, hotel-livia.com. Just 100m from the entrance to Butrint, this isolated hotel is fantastic value, with immaculate rooms and an excellent on-site restaurant. Doubles €55



HALLSTATT

Austria

HIGHLIGHTS

- ① **Viennese art** Feast your eyes on stunning paintings by Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele. See p.65
- ② **Coffee and cake, Vienna** Indulge in mouthwatering treats in one of Vienna's ornate coffeehouses. See p.71
- ③ **Salzburg** A fine Baroque city, home to Mozart and, of course, the sound of music. See p.77
- ④ **Hallstatt** Visit this picture-postcard village in the lovely Salzkammergut region. See p.82
- ⑤ **Adventure sports, Innsbruck** Hiking, mountain-biking and skiing in the stunning Austrian Alps. See p.86

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.63

ROUGH COSTS

- Daily budget** Basic €60, occasional treat €80
- Drink** Beer (0.5l) €4, wine or coffee €3
- Food** Schnitzel €10
- Hostel/budget hotel** €22/€65
- Travel** Train: Graz–Vienna €37.30; Vienna–Salzburg €25.50

FACT FILE

- Population** 8.7 million
- Language** German
- Currency** Euro (€)
- Capital** Vienna
- International phone code** +43
- Time zone** GMT +1hr

Introduction

2

Glorious Alpine scenery, monumental Habsburg architecture and the world's favourite musical – Austria's tourist industry certainly plays up to the clichés. However, it's not all bewigged Mozart ensembles and schnitzel; modern Austria boasts some of Europe's most varied museums and contemporary architecture, not to mention attractive and sophisticated cities whose bars, cafés and clubs combine contemporary cool with elegant tradition.

Long the powerhouse of the Habsburg Empire, **Austria** underwent decades of change and uncertainty in the early twentieth century. Shorn of her empire and racked by economic difficulties, the state fell prey to the promises of Nazi Germany. Only with the end of the Cold War did Austria return to the heart of Europe, joining the EU in 1995.

Politics aside, Austria is primarily known for two contrasting attractions – the fading imperial glories of the capital, and the stunning beauty of its Alpine hinterland. **Vienna** is the gateway to much of central Europe and a good place to soak up the culture of *Mitteleuropa*. Less renowned provincial capitals such as **Graz** and **Linz** are surprising pockets of culture, innovation and vitality. **Salzburg**, between **Innsbruck** and Vienna, represents urban Austria at its most picturesque, an intoxicating Baroque city within easy striking distance of the mountains and lakes of the **Salzkammergut**, while the most dramatic of Austria's Alpine scenery is west of here, in and around **Tyrol**, whose capital, **Innsbruck**, provides the best base for exploration.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1st century BC** Romans take over Celtic settlements in present-day Austria.
- 788 AD** Charlemagne conquers Austrian land.
- 1156** The "Privilegium Minus" gives Austria the status of Duchy.
- 1278** The Habsburgs seize control of much of modern Austria (except Salzburg), and retain it until World War I.
- 1683** The Siege of Vienna – the Habsburgs under Leopold I defeat the Ottoman Turks outside Vienna.
- 1773** Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart becomes Court Musician in Salzburg.

1797 Napoleon defeats Austrian forces, taking Austrian land.

1814 An Austrian coalition force defeats Napoleon. In the Congress of Vienna the Salzburg lands are given to Austria, ending centuries of independence under prince-archbishops.

1866 Austrian territory is lost as a result of the Austro-Prussian war.

1899 Sigmund Freud publishes *The Interpretation of Dreams*, introducing the concept of the ego.

1914 The assassination of the Austrian Archduke, Franz Ferdinand, begins the events that lead to World War I.

1920 A new constitution creates the Republic of Austria.

1938 Hitler incorporates Austria into Germany through "Anschluss".

1945 Austria is occupied by Allied forces as World War II ends.

1965 *The Sound of Music* draws attention to Austria on the big screen.

1980s Protests at election of President Kurt Waldheim, due to rumours implicating him in Nazi war crimes.

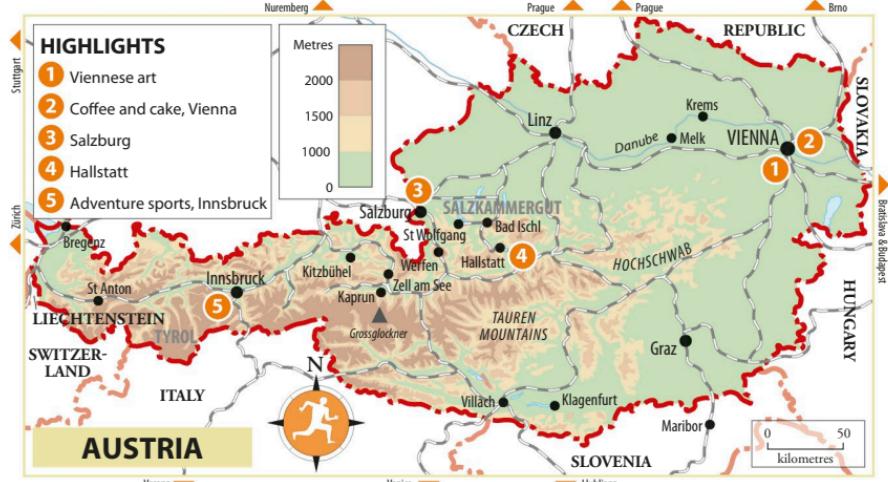
1995 Austria joins the EU.

2008 The world is shocked by the case of Josef Fritzl – who imprisoned his daughter in a cellar for 24 years, fathering seven children with her.

2016 In a photo-finish presidential election, left/liberal candidate Alexander van der Bellen triumphs over the far-right Norbert Hofer, though the results are later disputed, leading to a re-run of the election.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Austria lies at the heart of Europe, bordered by seven countries. Excellent transport connections make it an easy stop-off on either a north-south or east-west route through Europe. Vienna has a major international airport, and you can also fly to Salzburg, Innsbruck, Graz and Linz or to the Slovak capital Bratislava, only a 75-minute bus journey



from Vienna. Vienna is also one of central Europe's major rail hubs, with **connections** including Budapest, Bratislava and Prague. Trains from Croatia and Slovenia stop in Graz, before also terminating here. Arriving in Vienna from northern Italy, it's likely you'll route via Venice and Klagenfurt. Innsbruck has good rail connections with both Italy and Munich, as does Salzburg.

GETTING AROUND

Austria's **public transport** is fast, efficient and comprehensive. ÖBB (oebb.at) runs a punctual **train** network, which includes most towns of any size. All stations in cities and larger towns have left-luggage lockers. An Austria one-country pass with Eurail starts at €130 (3 days' validity in 1 month; under-25s), though individual train prices may be cheaper. From Vienna to Linz or Salzburg, it can be cheaper to travel on the privately operated Westbahn (westbahn.at) out of the Westbahnhof rather than on ÖBB trains from the Hauptbahnhof.

Even cheaper connections between major cities are offered by German budget **bus** company Flixbus (flixbus.at), with Vienna–Graz from €9 and Vienna–Munich from €19.90. Remoter areas including the Alpine valleys are served by the ÖBB-owned **Postbus** (postbus.at). Daily and weekly regional travelcards

(*Netzkarte*), covering both trains and buses, are available in many regions.

Austria is bike-friendly, with **cycle lanes** in all major towns, and sometimes between towns. Many train stations rent **bikes** for around €12 per day; Vienna and Innsbruck also have public bike rental networks.

ACCOMMODATION

Outside popular tourist spots such as Vienna and Salzburg, **accommodation** need not be too expensive. Good-value **B&B** is usually available in the many small family-run hotels known as *Gasthöfe* and *Gasthäuser*, with prices from €60 per double. In the larger towns and cities a **pension** or *Frühstückspension* will offer similar prices. Most places also have a stock of **private rooms** or *Privatzimmer*, although in well-travelled rural areas, roadside signs offering *Zimmer Frei* (vacancies) are common (double rooms from around €50). Local tourist offices have lists of these and will often ring around and book for you.

There are around a hundred **HI hostels** (*Jugendherberge* or *Jugendgästehaus*), run by or affiliated to ÖJHV (oejhv.at) or ÖJHW (oejhw.or.at). Rates are €20–27, normally including breakfast; non-members pay around €3.50 a night extra. There are also some excellent **independent hostels** in Salzburg and Vienna, plus affiliated youth hotel chains.

AUSTRIA ONLINE

austria.info Austrian Tourist Board website.

tiscover.com Detailed information on all regions of the country.

thelocal.at Austrian news, jobs and community pages in English.

2

Austria's numerous **campsites** often have laundry facilities, shops and snack bars. Most open April to September, although some open year-round.

FOOD AND DRINK

Austrian food is hearty and traditional; often of good quality, it makes use of local and seasonal ingredients. For ready-made snacks, try a bakery (*Bäckerei*), confectioner's (*Konditorei*) or local market. **Fast food** centres on the *Würstelstand*, which sells hot dogs, *Bratwurst* (grilled sausage), *Käsekrainer* (spicy sausage with cheese), *Bosna* (spicy, thin Balkan sausage) and *Currywurst*. In *Kaffeehäuser* or cafés and bars you can get light meals and **snacks** starting at about €7; daily specials (under €10) and lunchtime set menus (*Tages- oder Mittagsmenü*) are usually good value. Pizza and burgers are cheaper than main dishes (*Hauptspeisen*; €10–18) such as **schnitzel** (tenderized veal or pork). *Wienerschnitzel* is fried in breadcrumbs, *Jägerschnitzel* is served with a sauce (usually mushroom or tomato). There is usually something available for vegetarians – often *Käsespätzle*, similar to macaroni cheese. Two seasonal ingredients worth trying in spring and early summer are *Bärlauch* (wild garlic), delicious in soups and pasta sauces, and *Spargel* (asparagus), typically the white variety and served with hollandaise.

DRINK

For Austrians, daytime drinking traditionally centres on the **Kaffeehaus**, a relaxed place serving alcoholic and soft drinks, snacks and cakes, plus a wide range of coffees: a *Schwarzer* is small and black; a *Brauner* comes with a little milk;

a *Melange* is half coffee, half milk; a *Verlängerter* is an espresso diluted with hot water; an *Einspänner* is a glass of black coffee topped with whipped cream (*schlag*). Coffee is pricey in a *kaffeehaus* (€3–5 a cup), though for this you can linger for hours. Most cafés also offer a tempting array of cakes and pastries, as do *Café-Konditorei* (café-patisseries), where the cakes take centre stage.

Night-time drinking centres on **bars** and **cafés**, although traditional *Bierstuben* and *Weinstuben* are still thick on the ground. Austrian **beers** are good quality: most places serve the local brew on tap, either by the *Krügerl* (half-litre, €3.50–5), *Seidel* (third-litre, €2–4) or *Pfiff* (fifth-litre, €1–3). The local **wine**, drunk by the *Viertel* (25cl mug) or the *Achterl* (12.5cl glass), is often excellent. The *Weinkeller* is the place to go for this, or, in the wine-producing areas, a *Heuriger* or *Buschenschank* – a traditional tavern, usually serving cold food as well.

CULTURE AND ETIQUETTE

Austrian etiquette is much like the rest of Western Europe, with the leisurely café culture a central fixture. In restaurants, bars and cafés modest **tipping** – around ten percent or rounding up to the nearest euro – is expected (pay the waiter or waitress directly).

SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

With stunning mountain scenery and beautiful lakes, Austria is an ideal destination for all sorts of outdoor sports. **Skiing** and snowboarding are major national pastimes (see box, p.86), and **hiking** and biking trails are clearly marked and graded. Tourist offices usually have a surfeit of details on local routes and activities.

STUDENT DISCOUNTS

It's worth carrying an **ISIC card** (@isic.org) in Austria. Entry to museums and art galleries is costly, particularly in Vienna, and showing your student card will reap savings of 25 percent or more.

LANGUAGE

A high proportion of Austrians speak English, though any attempt at **German** (see box, p.357) will be appreciated. Austrian accents and dialects can be tricky, however – the standard greeting throughout Austria is *Grüss Gott*.

COMMUNICATIONS

Most **post offices** are open Monday to Friday 8am to noon and 2 to 6pm; in larger cities they stay open through lunch and also open Saturday morning. **Stamps** can also be bought at tobacconists (*Tabak-Trafik*). Telekom Austria (A1) is the main **mobile phone** network and also operates call boxes; other mobile networks are T-Mobile and 3. You can search the phone book free online (@herold.at). Most hostels and hotels have **wi-fi**, and some cities, including Vienna, Salzburg and Linz, have free public wi-fi hotspots.

EMERGENCIES

Austria is law-abiding and reasonably safe. Dial 059133 for the nearest police station (*Polizei*). **Pharmacies** (*Apotheke*) follow shopping hours; a rota covers night-time and weekend opening, with details posted in pharmacy windows.

INFORMATION

Tourist offices (usually *Information*, *Tourismusverband*, *Verkehrsamt* or *Fremdenverkehrsverein*) are plentiful, often hand out free maps and almost always book accommodation.

MONEY AND BANKS

Austria's currency is the **euro** (€). Banking hours tend to be Monday to Friday 8am to 12.30pm and 1.30 to 3pm; Thursday until 5.30pm. Banks charge less commission than exchange bureaux.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Police 133; Ambulance 144; Fire 122.

OPENING HOURS AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Most shops are open all day Monday to Saturday, though in the provinces they can close at lunch and on Saturday afternoons. Many **cafés**, **restaurants** and bars also have a weekly *Ruhetag* (closing day). Shops and **banks** close, and most museums have reduced hours, on **public holidays**: January 1, January 6, Easter Monday, May 1, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Corpus Christi, August 15, October 26, November 1, December 8, December 24–26.

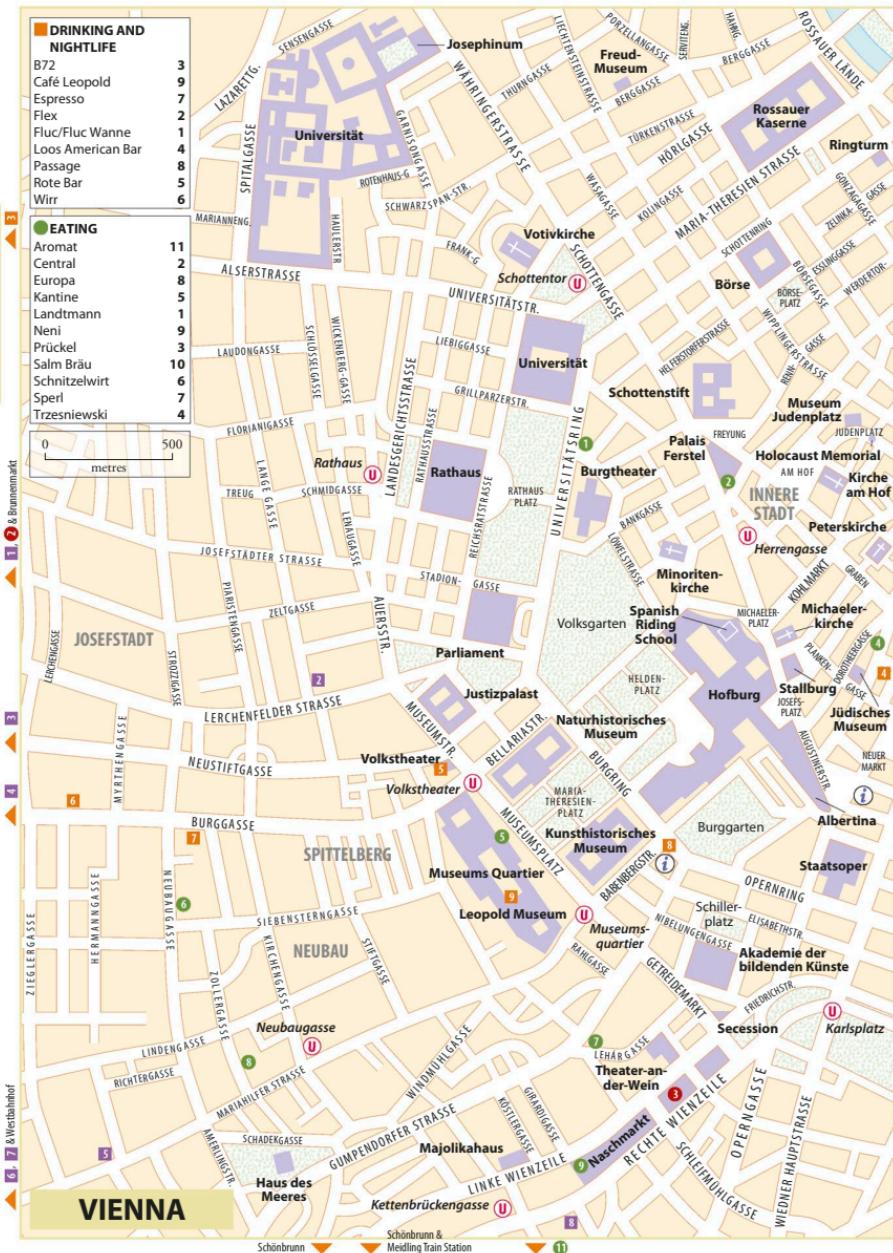
Vienna

Most people visit **VIENNA** (Wien) with a vivid image in their minds: a romantic place, full of imperial nostalgia, opera houses and exquisite cakes. Even so, the city can overwhelm with its eclectic feast of architectural styles, from High Baroque through the monumental imperial projects of the late nineteenth century, to the decorative Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) style of the early twentieth, used to great effect on several of the city's splendid U-Bahn stations.

Vienna became an important centre in the tenth century, then in 1278 the city fell to **Rudolf of Habsburg**, but didn't become the imperial residence until 1683. The great aristocratic families flooded in to build palaces in a frenzy of construction that gave Vienna its **Baroque character**. By the end of the Habsburg era the city had become a breeding ground for the ideological passions of the age, and the ghosts of Freud, Klimt and Schiele are now some of the city's biggest tourist draws.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Central Vienna is surprisingly compact, with the historical centre, or **Innere Stadt**, just 1km wide. The most important sights are concentrated here and along the Ringstrasse – the series of traffic- and tram-clogged boulevards that form a ring road around the centre. Efficient public transport allows you to



cross the city in less than thirty minutes, making even peripheral sights, such as the monumental imperial palace at Schönbrunn, easily accessible. However, for all the grand palaces and museums, a trip to Vienna would not

be complete without spending a leisurely afternoon over a creamy coffee and a piece of cake in one of the grand, shabby-glamorous coffeehouses for which the city is famous.



Stephansdom

The obvious place to begin exploration is **Stephansplatz**, the pedestrianized central square dominated by the hoary Gothic **Stephansdom** (Mon–Sat 6am–10pm, Sun 7am–10pm, except during services;

free, but entry fees to most sections, combined ticket €17.90). It's worth paying to explore the interior more fully, with the highlights of the main section (English tours Mon–Sat 10.30am; €5.50) the Wiener Neustädter Altar, a late

Gothic masterpiece, and the tomb of the Holy Roman Emperor Friedrich III. The **catacombs** (tours every 15–30min, Mon–Sat 10–11.30am & 1.30–4.30pm, Sun 1.30–4.30pm; €5.50) contain the entrails of illustrious Habsburgs housed in bronze caskets. Stellar views reward those climbing the 137m-high (343 steps) south spire (daily 9am–5.30pm; €4.50). Lower, but with a lift, is the north tower (same hours; €5.50). The warren of alleyways north and east of **Stephansdom** preserves something of the medieval character of the city, although the architecture reflects centuries of continuous rebuilding.

Judenplatz

Though one of Vienna's prettiest little squares, **Judenplatz**, northwest of Stephansdom, is dominated by a deliberately bleak concrete **Holocaust Memorial** by British sculptor Rachel Whiteread. The square marks the site of the medieval Jewish ghetto and you can view the foundations of a fourteenth-century synagogue at the excellent **Museum Judenplatz** at no. 8 (Mon–Thurs & Sun 10am–6pm, Fri 10am–5pm; €10), which brings something of medieval Jewish Vienna to life. The ticket includes entrance to the intriguing **Jüdisches Museum** of Jewish tradition and culture, at Dorotheergasse 11 to the south of Stephansplatz (Mon–Fri & Sun 10am–6pm; jmw.at).

Kärntnerstrasse and Graben

From Stephansplatz, pedestrianized Kärntnerstrasse runs south past street entertainers and shops to the illustrious **Staatsoper** (wiener-staatsoper.at), opened in 1869 during the first phase of the Ringstrasse's development. A more unusual tribute to the city's musical genius is the state-of-the-art **Haus der Musik**, Seilerstätte 30 (daily 10am–10pm; €13; hausdermusik.com), a hugely enjoyable museum of sound.

Running west of Stephansplatz is the more upscale Graben, featuring an extremely ornate plague column (*Pestsäule*), built to commemorate the 1679 plague.

VIENNA'S HEURIGEN

To sample Austrian wines on a scenic excursion, visit one of the wine-producing villages on Vienna's outskirts. To the north of the Danube, **Stammersdorf** (tram #31 from Schottenring; 36min) is surrounded by vineyards and filled with traditional, family-run **Heurigen** (wine taverns).

Wienhof Wieninger 21 Stammersdorferstr. 78

(heuriger-wieninger.at) A great place to start, with a pleasant garden, good-value meals (from around €8) and an excellent selection of whites available by the glass (from €1.55). Mid-March to April Fri 3pm–midnight, Sat & Sun noon–midnight, May to mid-Dec Thurs & Fri 3pm–midnight, Sat & Sun noon–midnight.

The Hofburg

A block southeast of Graben is the immense, highly ornate **Hofburg** palace (hofburg-wien.at), housing many of Vienna's key imperial sights. Skip the rather dull **Kaiserappartements** in favour of the more impressive **Schatzkammer** (Mon & Wed–Sun 9am–5.30pm; €12), where you'll see some of the finest medieval craftsmanship and jewellery in Europe, including relics of the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg crown jewels. The Hofburg is also home to two of Vienna's most enduring tourist images: singing boys and prancing horses. Steps beside the Schatzkammer lead up to the **Hofmusik Kapelle** (Mon & Tues 10am–2pm, Fri 11am–1pm; free), where the **Vienna Boys' Choir** sings Mass (mid-Sept to June Sun 9.15am; [01 533 99 27](tel:015339927), hofmusikkapelle.gv.at): you can obtain free, standing tickets from 8.30am (otherwise €10–36; book in advance).

On the north side of the Hofburg, the imperial stables are home to the white horses of the **Spanish Riding School**, known for their extraordinary, intricate performances. There are three main ways to see them: book a performance well in advance (mid-Feb to mid-June & mid-Aug to Dec, usually Sat & Sun at 11am, occasionally Fri & eves; standing from €25, seats from €50; srs.at); attend a morning exercise session

(10am–noon: April–June, Sept & Oct Tues–Fri; Nov–March & Aug Tues–Sat; tickets for exercise session and tours from Michaelerplatz visitor centre Tues–Sun 9am–4pm; €15); or join a guided tour of the school and stables (March to mid-June & Aug to mid-Dec daily, otherwise 5–6 days per week; tours 2pm, 3pm & 4pm; tour €18; combined tour and training session €31). Alternatively, if you just want to take a peek at the horses, look into the stables (*Stallburg*) from the glass windows on Reitschulgasse.

Finally, at the Hofburg's southeastern tip, the **Albertina** (daily 10am–6pm, Wed till 9pm; €12.90; albertina.at) houses one of the world's largest graphic art collections, with works by Raphael, Rembrandt, Dürer and Michelangelo.

The Ring and Rathausplatz

The Ring, the large boulevard that encircles the Innere Stadt, along with its attendant monumental civic buildings, was created to replace the town's fortifications, demolished in 1857; many of these buildings now house museums. On the western section is the showpiece **Rathausplatz**, a square framed by four monumental public buildings: the Rathaus (City Hall), the Burgtheater, Parliament and the Universität – all completed in the 1880s.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum

Of all Vienna's museums, the **Kunsthistorisches Museum** on Burgring still outshines them all (June–Aug daily 10am–6pm, Thurs till 9pm; Sept–May Tues–Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs till 9pm; €15; khm.at). It's one of the world's greatest collections of Old Masters – comparable with the Hermitage or Louvre. Highlight is an unrivalled collection of sixteenth-century paintings by Brueghel the Elder, while the Peter Paul Rubens collection is also very strong and works by Vermeer and Caravaggio are worth seeking out. A number of Greek and Roman antiquities add breadth and variety. Set aside several hours at least: there is also an excellent café.

The MuseumsQuartier

Southwest of the Ring is Vienna's **MuseumsQuartier** (MQ; mqw.at), a collection of museums and galleries in the old imperial stables, where the original buildings are enhanced by a couple of striking contemporary additions. Stylish outdoor seating, plenty of good cafés and an interesting calendar of events make the area a focus for Vienna's cultural life. The best museum here is the **Leopold Museum** (Mon, Wed & Fri–Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–9pm; €13), with fine work by Klimt and the largest collection in the world of works by Egon Schiele.

2

The Secession

The eccentric, eye-catching building crowned with a “golden cabbage” by Karlsplatz is the **Secession building** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €9.50; secession.at), built in 1898 as the headquarters of the Secessionist movement, whose aim was to break with the Viennese establishment and champion new ideas of art and aesthetics. Designed by Joseph Maria Olbrech, the gallery was decorated by several luminaries of the group, including their first president Gustav Klimt. It still puts on contemporary exhibits today, with Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze* downstairs the only permanent artwork.

MAK

On the Ring's eastern section, beyond Stubenring, is the enjoyable **MAK** (Tues 10am–10pm, Wed–Sun 10am–6pm; €9.90, free Tues 6–10pm; mak.at), an applied arts museum whose eclectic collection spans the Romanesque period to the twentieth century and includes an unrivalled Wiener Werkstätte collection.

The Belvedere

South of the Ringstrasse, the **Belvedere** (daily 10am–6pm; Oberes €14, combined ticket €20; belvedere.at; tram #D from the opera house) is one of Vienna's finest palace complexes. Two magnificent Baroque mansions face each other across a sloping formal garden. The loftier of the two, the **Oberes Belvedere**, has the best concentration of paintings by

Klimt in the city, including *The Kiss*, while the Unteres Belvedere and Orangerie show temporary exhibitions.

Schönbrunn

2 The biggest attraction in the city suburbs is the imperial summer palace of **Schönbrunn** (www.schoenbrunn.at; €4 to Schönbrunn), designed by Fischer von Erlach on the model of residences like Versailles. To visit the palace rooms or **Prunkräume** (daily: April–June, Sept & Oct 8.30am–5pm; July & Aug 8.30am–6pm; Nov–March 8.30am–4.30pm) there's a choice of two tours: the “Imperial Tour” (€13.30), which takes in 22 state rooms, and the “Grand Tour” (€16.40 with audioguide, €19.40 with tour guide), which includes forty rooms. The shorter tour misses out the best rooms – such as the Millions Room, a rosewood-panelled chamber covered from floor to ceiling with wildly irregular Rococo cartouches, each holding a Persian miniature watercolour. The palace gets unbearably overcrowded at the height of summer, with lengthy queues, so buy tickets in advance online. The splendid **Schlosspark** (daily 6.30am–dusk; free) is dotted with attractions, including the Gloriette – a hilltop colonnaded monument, now a café and terrace with splendid views (terrace daily: mid-March to June, Sept & Oct 9am–6pm; July & Aug 9am–7pm; late Oct to early Nov 9am–4pm; €3.60), fountains, a maze and labyrinth (same hours as Gloriette; €5.20) and Vienna's excellent **Tiergarten** or zoo (daily: Jan, Nov & Dec 9am–4.30pm; Feb 9am–5pm; March & Oct 9am–5.30pm; April–Sept 9am–6.30pm; €18.50; www.zooienna.at).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By plane Vienna Airport (www.viennaairport.com) is around 16km southeast of the city. The cheapest way to Wien-Mitte station in the centre is to take S-Bahn line S7 (every 30min; 25min; €3.90 one-way), though the City Airport Train (CAT; every 30min; 16min; €11 one-way) is faster. Buses (every 30min; €8 one-way) run to Schwesternplatz (20min) in the centre and Westbahnhof (45min).

By train South of the centre, Vienna's ultra-modern Hauptbahnhof is Austria's most important international

rail hub; all ÖBB's principal long-distance routes stop here, including trains from Prague, Budapest, Bratislava, Graz, Innsbruck and Munich, as well as those from Italy, Poland and Slovenia. Trains from Salzburg and Linz terminate either at the Hauptbahnhof or at the Westbahnhof (S3, five stops from the centre). Many long-distance services also stop at Vienna-Meidling station (S6, four stops south of Westbahnhof).

Destinations Bratislava (every 30min; 1hr); Budapest (every 1–2hr; 2hr 40min); Graz (hourly; 2hr 35min); Innsbruck (hourly; 4hr 25min); Linz (up to 5 hourly; 1hr 15min–1hr 35min); Melk (hourly; 1hr); Prague (every 2hr; 4hr); Salzburg (3 hourly; 2hr 20min–2hr 50min).

By bus Vienna international bus terminal is at Erdbergstr. (S Erdberg, southeast of the centre, six stops from Stephansplatz on line S3).

INFORMATION

Tourist information The main tourist office is on Albertinaplatz, behind the opera house (daily 9am–7pm; 01 245 55, www.wien.info).

GETTING AROUND

So many attractions are in or around the Innere Stadt and can be visited on foot.

By public transport The network (www.wienerlinien.at) consists of trams (Strassenbahn or Bim), buses, the U-Bahn (metro) and the S-Bahn (fast commuter trains). U-Bahns run from around 5am to 12.30am or so, with a reduced frequency of roughly four per hour between midnight & 5am on Fridays and Saturdays; trams run till around midnight. A network of nightbuses centres on Schottentor and Kärntner Ring/Oper.

Tickets Buy your ticket from booths or machines at stations, tobacconists or on board trams and buses (more expensive), then validate it at the start of your journey. One-way tickets are €2.20 (€2.30 on board buses and trams) and allow unlimited changes in one direction; day passes are better value (24hr/48hr/72hr for €7.60/€13.30/€16.50). The Vienna Card (48hr/72hr for €21.90/€24.90) provides unlimited travel plus discounts at attractions, though if you have an ISIC card, a simple travel pass will probably work out cheaper.

By boat DDSG (www.ddsg-blue-danube.at) sightseeing boats dock at the Handelskai on the Danube northeast of the centre (S Vorgartenstrasse, four stops from Stephansplatz); Twin City Liners catamarans (www.twincityliner.com) from Bratislava (April–Oct: up to 5 daily; 1hr 15min) dock at Schwedenplatz.

By bike Vienna has a very cheap city-wide bike scheme, CityBikes (www.citybikewien.at), with 120 stations all over the city, including behind Stephansdom on Stephansplatz. The first hour is free, second is €1, third is €2. Bikes can be rented with a credit card or with a Citybike “tourist card”

VIENNESE ADDRESSES

Vienna is divided into numbered districts (*Bezirke*). District 1 is the Innere Stadt; districts 2–9 are arranged clockwise around it; districts 10–23 are a fair way out.

Addresses begin with the number of the district, followed by the street name, then the house number and apartment number.

(€2 from the Radstation at the Hauptbahnhof; Mon–Fri 5.30am–8.30pm, Sat & Sun 6am–8pm).

ACCOMMODATION

For cheaper accommodation booking ahead is essential in summer. Several hostels are near the Westbahnhof, which is an easy few stops into the centre.

HOSTELS

★ Hostel Ruthensteiner 15, Robert Hamerlinggasse 24 ☎ 01 893 42 02, hostelruthensteiner.com; Ⓛ Westbahnhof. Excellent, friendly and relaxed hostel an easy walk from the Westbahnhof. There's a spacious leafy courtyard, plus bar, musical instruments, kitchen, iPads, barbecue, laundry and free wi-fi. Dorms €20, doubles €66

Mojo Vie 7, Kaiserstr. 77/8 ☎ 0676 551 11 55, mymojovie.at; Ⓛ Burggasse-Stadthalle or tram #5 to Burggasse from Westbahnhof. Charming, stylish alternative to the standard hostel, with a network of local apartments housing dorms and private rooms. Excellent communal areas and personal, welcoming vibe. Reception 8am–1pm. Minimum two nights. Dorms €24, doubles €60

Palace Hostel 16, Savoyenstrasse 2 ☎ 01 481 00 30, hostel.at/en/palace-hostel-vienna; Ⓛ Ottakring then bus #46a or #46b. Located amid leafy grounds up in the Vienna hills, with a view of the city. All rooms come with showers and some have direct access to the garden with its volleyball net and minigolf. Free sheets, parking and wi-fi. Dorms have a maximum of 4 beds. Dorms €22, doubles €60

Wombat's Naschmarkt 4, Rechte Wienzeile 35 ☎ 01 897 23 36, wombats-hostels.com; Ⓛ Kettenbrückengasse. It's all about location at this branch of *Wombat's*, right by the Naschmarkt and within walking distance of the Innere Stadt. It's slick and well equipped, with en-suite dorms, a good bar, laundry and free wi-fi. Dorms €20, doubles €78

Wombat's "The Lounge" 15, Mariahilferstr. 137 ☎ 01 897 23 36, wombats-hostels.com. Smaller of Vienna's two party-oriented *Wombat's* hostels, close to the Westbahnhof. With kitchen, laundry, 24hr reception and free wi-fi. Dorms €21, doubles €68

HOTELS AND PENSIONS

Pension Hargita 7, Andreagasse 1/8 ☎ 01 526 19 28, hargita.at; Ⓛ Zieglergasse. Homely, Hungarian-owned

pension in a great location just off Mariahilferstr. The interior is decorated with blue country pottery, while the cabin-like common areas are lined with wood. All rooms contain washbasins, though en-suite costs extra. Breakfast €5. Doubles €54

Pension Wild 8, Lange Gasse 10 ☎ 01 406 51 74, pension-wild.com; Ⓛ Volkstheater. Friendly, laidback pension, a short walk from the Ring in a student district behind the university. En-suite costs extra. Especially popular with gay travellers; booking essential. Doubles €59

CAMP SITE

Wien West 14, Hüttelbergstr. 80 ☎ 01 914 23 14, wiencamping.at; bus #52 A or B from Ⓛ Hüttdorf. In the plush far-western suburbs of Vienna, with two- and four-bed bungalows to rent. Closed Feb. Camping/person €7.50, plus per tent €7.50/8.50, bungalows/person €40

EATING

CAFÉS, CHEAP EATS AND SNACKS

With stalls selling giant savoury borek pastries from €2.50 or falafel sandwiches from €3.80, the Naschmarkt is the best place for cheap street food.

Central 1, Herrengasse 14; Ⓛ Herrengasse. Traditional meeting place of Vienna's intelligentsia, and Trotsky's favourite *Kaffeehaus* – of all Vienna's cafés, perhaps the most ornate. Breakfast (from €6.30) served until 11.30am weekdays, 1pm at weekends; main courses from €14.50 and a tempting cake display. Mon–Sat 7.30am–10pm, Sun 10am–10pm.

Europa 7, Zollergasse 8; Ⓛ Neubaugasse. Lively, modern café hosting a young, trendy crowd. The short menu includes breakfast from €5.90 and soups or salads from €3.20. Food is served into the small hours, but it's more bar than café by night; cocktails €7.80. Daily 9am–5am.

Kantine 7, Museumsplatz 1; Ⓛ MuseumsQuartier. One of the MuseumsQuartier's nicer cafés, serving breakfast until 3pm (€2.90), veggie-friendly stuffed pittas (from €6.90) and organic Schladminger beer. The vibe is relaxed and there's free wi-fi. Daily 9am–2am.

Landtmann 1, Universitätsring 4; Ⓛ Schottentor. One of Freud's haunts, this elegant Art Deco favourite feels fit for royals and has always attracted big-name celebrities and politicians, though also welcomes people from all walks of life. Breakfasts from €8.50, two-course Mittagsmenü €12.50. Daily 7.30am–midnight.

★ Neni 6, Naschmarkt 510; Ⓛ Karlsplatz. Trendy Israeli café in the thick of the Naschmarkt's foodie scene, with delicious Mediterranean breakfasts served until noon (from €6.50), inexpensive mezze (from €3.50) and a two-course lunch menu for €11.50. Mon–Sat 8am–11pm.

★ Prückel 1 Stubenring 24; Ⓛ Stubentor. You could lose hours of your life to coffee, cake and the newspapers in this, one of the best and most relaxed of the classic

Viennese coffeehouses, with stylish 1950s decor and hot food from around €7. Live piano music Mon, Wed & Fri 7–10pm. Daily 8.30am–10pm.

★Sperl 6, Gumpendorferstr. 11; **①Museumsquartier**. With a slightly faded, *fin-de-siècle* interior this is among the finest of the city's coffeehouses, with reasonably priced daily specials (€9.80) and schnitzel (€11.40). Mon–Sat 7am–11pm, Sun 11am–8pm, July & Aug closed Sun.

Trzesniewski 1, Dorotheergasse 1. Just off Graben, this is a great place for a pit stop – grab a couple of small open sandwiches, with pâté toppings such as herring, egg or spicy pepper for €1.20 each, washed down with a *pifff* (0.2l; €1.20) of beer. Mon–Fri 8.30am–7.30pm, Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

RESTAURANTS

Aromat 4, Margaretenstr. 52 **①01 913 24 53**; **①Kettenbrückengasse**. Tiny 1950s canteen-style place, with a short, daily changing evening menu of Mediterranean-influenced dishes (antipasti or Lebanese platters €7.90), plus sweet and savoury crêpes (from €5.90). Daily 5–10pm.

Salm Bräu 3, Rennweg 8; tram #71. With long outdoor tables in summer, this brew pub dishes up Viennese staples and huge salads (lunch menu €6.90, daily specials €15) as well as a fine selection of brewed-on-the-premises beers and spirits. Daily 11am–midnight.

Schnitzelwirt 7, Neubaugasse 52; tram #49. A convivial local favourite set in a wood-panelled space, perfect for getting cosy on cold nights. Great place for *wiener schnitzel* – a bargain at €7. Mon–Sat 11am–9.30pm.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

For a bar crawl or live music the string of clubs under the railway arches around **①Thaliastr.**, **Josefstadtstr.** and **Alserstr.** are a good bet, while in summer beach bars line the Donaukanal.

BARS

Café Leopold 7, Museumsplatz 1 **①cafe-leopold.at**; **①MuseumsQuartier**. Coolest of the MuseumsQuartier's cafés, in a stylish glass-walled space attached to the museum, with a roof terrace. Chic café during the day; DJs and cocktails (€8.80) at night. Mon–Wed & Sun 10am–midnight, Thurs 10am–4am, Fri & Sat 10am–6am.

★Espresso 7, Burggasse 57; **①Volkstheater**. Stylish, friendly café/bar with street terrace and 1950s furniture; wines by the glass from €2.80. Mon–Fri 7.30pm–1am, Sat & Sun 10am–1am.

Rote Bar 7, Neustiftgasse 1; **①Volkstheater**. Inside the Volkstheater, this sumptuous spot is decked out in red velvet and feels a bit like going back in time. Welcomes all ages, but be sure to wear your best threads. Admission price varies for DJ and tango nights. Mon–Fri 10pm–2am, Sat 10pm–4am, Sun 10pm–1am.

★TREAT YOURSELF

Loos American Bar 1, Kärntnerdurchgang 10; **①Stephansplatz**. Designed in the proto-modernist style of architect Adolf Loos, and with an old-school feel, this classy joint attracts people of all ages who appreciate an expertly made cocktail (from €9.50). Come early if you want a seat. Daily noon–4am.

Wirr 7, Burggasse 70 **①wirr.at**; **①Volkstheater**. Hip, arty day-into-evening café-bar and basement club, with a terrace in summer and an eclectic weekend breakfast menu until 4pm (from €4.80). Mon–Wed & Sun 8am–2am, Fri & Sat 8am–4am.

CLUBS AND LIVE MUSIC

B72 8, Hernalser Gürtel 72, under the arches **①b72.at**; **①Alserstr. or Josefstadtstr.** Dark designer club featuring a mixture of DJs and often good live indie bands. Sun–Thurs 8pm–4am, Fri & Sat 8pm–6am.

Flex 1, Am Donaukanal **①flex.at**; **①Schottenring**. A stalwart in Vienna's club scene, this serious dance-music club by the canal attracts some of the city's best DJs. Entry price varies, but expect to pay around €8. Live gigs 7pm; club Thurs–Sat 11pm–6am.

Fluc/Fluc Wanne 2, Praterstern 5 **①fluc.at**; **①Praterstern**. This upstairs bar (*Fluc*) and underground club (*Fluc Wanne*) inside a former pedestrian tunnel could be mistaken for industrial containers. Come evening they transform into one of the best venues in the city, with interesting electro, house and hip-hop club nights. Entry €5–10. Mon–Sat 8pm–3am or later.

Passage 1, Babenberger Passage, Burgring 3 **①club-passage.at**; **①MuseumsQuartier/Volkstheater**. Dressy, futuristic club in a converted pedestrian underpass, attracting a mixed crowd. Entry price varies depending on night. Tues–Thurs 10pm–5am, Fri & Sat 11pm–6am.

SHOPPING

Mariahilferstr. is best for high-street clothes shops and the big chains, though Neubaugasse, nearby, is more eclectic.

Brunnenmarkt Brunnengasse; **①Josefstädter Strasse**. With a distinctively local feel, Brunnenmarkt sells everything from homewares to Turkish breads and pastries. At Yppenplatz, its northern end, there's a farmers' market on Sat mornings, where you can pick up local produce or stop for brunch at one of the many cafés. Mon–Fri 6am–7.30pm, Sat 6am–5pm.

Naschmarkt **①Karlsplatz**. Large famous market with Turkish deli stalls, hip cafés and a plethora of stalls and snack joints, serving everything from falafel to sushi. On Sat mornings a flea market extends south from here near

① Kettenbrückengasse. Mon–Fri 6am–7pm, Sat 6am–6pm.

Shakespeare & Co 1, Sterngasse 2 shakespeare.co.at; ① Schwedenplatz. Friendly English-language bookshop; also sells translations of Austrian authors. Mon–Sat 9am–9pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

The local listings magazine *Falter* (falter.at) has comprehensive details of the week's cultural programme. The tourist office also publishes the free monthly *Programm*.

Konzerthaus 3, Lothringerstr. 20 [01 24 20 02](tel:01242002), konzerthaus.at. A major classical venue which also hosts occasional jazz and world music performances.

Musikverein 1, Musikvereinsplatz 1 [01 505 81 90](tel:015058190), musikverein.at. Ornate concert hall, bastion of classical music, acclaimed for its acoustics and home to the Vienna Philharmonic.

Staatsoper 1, Opernring 2 [01 513 15 13](tel:015131513), wiener-staatsoper.at. One of Europe's most prestigious opera houses. The season runs Sept–June and tickets range from €6 to well over €250. They often sell out, but the office also sells hundreds of standing-place tickets (*Stehplätze*) each night 1hr 20min before a performance (from €2–4).

DIRECTORY

Embassies Australia, 4, Mattiellistr. 2 [01 50 67 40](tel:01506740); Canada, 1, Laurenzerberg 2 [01 531 38 30 00](tel:01531383000); Ireland, 1, Rotenturmstr. 16–18 [01 715 42 46](tel:017154246); UK, 3, Jauresgasse 12 [01 71 61 30](tel:01716130); US, 9, Boltzmannsgasse 16 [01 31 33 90](tel:01313390).

Hospital Allgemeines Krankenhaus, 9, Währinger Gürtel 18–20; [Michelbeuern-AKH](http://Michelbeuern-AKH.at).

Post office Westbahnhof (Mon–Fri 8am–7pm, Sat 9am–6pm), Hauptbahnhof (Mon–Fri 8am–7pm, Sat 9am–3pm).

Central Austria

West of Vienna, the Danube snakes through the Wachau, one of its most scenic stretches, where castles and vineyards cling to steep slopes above quaint villages. The western end of this 40km stretch is marked by a stunning Baroque monastery in **Melk**. Further west the river steadily loses charm, though it's still a focus for several towns and cities, including **Linz**, whose high-tech Ars Electronica museum is particularly enjoyable. South of the Danube region, the land slowly climbs and rolls into the

hills of Styria, with its attractive and bustling capital **Graz**. Northwest of here, the land rises again up to the Salzkammergut, a region of fine Alpine scenery and pretty lakes within easy reach of **Salzburg**. Southwest of the Salzkammergut the peaks really start to soar, and resorts like **Zell am See** take full advantage of the landscape to offer great skiing and first-rate outdoor activities.

MELK

For real High Baroque excess, head for the early eighteenth-century **Benedictine monastery** at **MELK** – a pilgrimage centre associated with the Irish missionary St Koloman. The monumental coffee-cake monastery, perched on a bluff over the river, dominates the town. Highlights of the interior (daily: April–Oct 9am–5pm; tours in English 10.55am & 2.55pm; Nov–March guided tours only 11am & 2pm; €11, €13 with guided tour; stiftmelk.at) are the exquisite library, with a cherub-flecked ceiling by Troger, and the rather lavish monastery church, with similarly impressive work by Rottmayr.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By train The station is at the head of Bahnhofstrasse, which leads directly into the old quarter.

Tourist information Kremser Strasse 5 (March Mon, Wed, Fri 9.30am–3.30pm; April & Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 10am–2pm; May–Sept Mon–Sat 9.30am–6pm, Sun 9.30am–4pm; [02 75 25 11 60](tel:0275251160), melk.gv.at). Has a stock of private rooms; not all are central, but since Melk is small it's not a major issue.

ACCOMMODATION

Junges Hotel Melk Abt Karl-Str. 42 [02 75 25 26 81](tel:0275252681), melk.noejhw.at. HI hostel a 10min walk from the station, with wi-fi, bike parking and table tennis; reception 4–9pm. Breakfast included. Dorms **€22.50**, doubles **€57**

LINZ

Away from its industrial suburbs, **LINZ** is a pleasant Baroque city straddling the Danube, and steadily reinventing itself as a city of technology and innovation, most evident in a couple of show-stopping new museums.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Linz's two most striking contemporary attractions, Lentos Museum and Ars Electronica Center, face each other on either side of the Danube River – both are illuminated at night, their neon facades glowing dramatically opposite each other. To the south of the river is the city's compact Old Town, the hub of which is **Hauptplatz**, with its pastel-coloured facades and central Trinity Column, crowned by a gilded sunburst. Many of the city's liveliest bars are clustered just west of here, around the triangle formed by Hoffgasse, Altstadt and Hahnengasse. Heading south from the Hauptplatz, the busy shopping street Landstrasse leads south towards the train station.

Lentos

A modern addition to the city's cultural scene nestles beside the Danube: the shimmering, hangar-like steel-and-glass **Lentos** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs till 9pm; €8; lentos.at), which houses contemporary and modern art, including Klimt and Schiele.

Ars Electronica Center

An unusual, tardis-like temple to science and technology, **Ars Electronica Center**, Ars Electronica Strasse 1 (Tues, Wed & Fri 9am–5pm, Thurs 9am–7pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; €9.50; aec.at) makes a trip to Linz worthwhile alone. Inside the glowing box of an exterior is an impressive series of interactive high-tech exhibits. One highlight is the Deep Space virtual-reality room with 3D projections on the walls and floor. Basement areas explore future developments in biology, materials, the brain and robots – set aside several hours and get stuck into the hands-on experiments.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By train 2km south of the centre, at the end of Landstr; all trams (lines #1, #2, #3 and #4) from the underground platform at the station (direction "Zentrum") run up Landstr. to Hauptplatz.

Destinations Salzburg (every 30min; 1hr 5min–1hr 15min); Vienna (3 hourly; 1hr 15min–1hr 35min).

Tourist information Altes Rathaus, Hauptplatz 1 (May–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–7pm, Sun 10am–7pm; Oct–April Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–5pm; ☎ 07 32 70 70 20 09, linz.at); sells the Linz Card (1-day €18, students €15; 3-day €30, students €25), which includes entry to museums and travel.

GETTING AROUND

By public transport Useful network of trams and buses: "mini" 4-stop ticket €1.10; single journey ("midi", transferable) €2.20; 24hr "maxi" ticket €4.40, under-21s €2.20. The Pöstlingbergbahn from Hauptplatz is a tourist tram (every 30min; 20min one-way; €6.10 return), up to the Pöstlingberg on the north side, a hill with good views over the city and a beer garden.

ACCOMMODATION

Campingplatz Linz-Pichlingersee Wienerstr. 937 ☎ 07 32 30 53 14, camping-linz.at. Well-equipped campsite on a lake on the outskirts of Linz, with a restaurant, bar and laundry facilities. Tram #2 to Bahnhof Ebelsberg, then bus #11 or #19, direction Pichlinger See. Open mid-March to mid-Oct. Per person €5.50, plus per tent €6

Jugendherberge Stanglhofweg 3 ☎ 07 32 66 44 34, jugendherbergsverband.at; bus #17, #19, #27 to "Ziegeleistr". Friendly youth hostel 2km from Hauptbahnhof. All bedrooms are en suite and breakfast is included. Reception Mon–Fri 7.30am–8.30pm, Sat & Sun 4–8.30pm. Dorms €24.50, doubles €55

Wilder Mann Goethestr. 14 ☎ 07 32 65 60 78, wildermann.cc; tram one stop from the station to Goethestr. Simple, friendly and convenient hotel, between the train station and the centre; rooms with shared facilities or with en-suite showers. Doubles €62

EATING, DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

Alte Welt Hauptplatz 4. Unpretentious bar and wine cellar with tables on a cosy courtyard just off the Hauptplatz and on the main square itself. Hearty, Austrian/Italian-influenced mains €8–15. Occasional live music and cabaret. Mon–Fri 11.30am–2.30pm & 6–11pm, Sat noon–2.30pm & 6–11pm, Sun 6–10pm.

p'a Altstadt 28. Contemporary vegetarian restaurant, with an imaginative, global menu including curries, Greek, Turkish and Italian-inspired dishes, salads and tasty juices. Lunch mains €9.50–15.50; evening €12.50–18.50. Opening hours vary, but usually Mon & Tues 11.30am–2.30pm, Wed–Fri 11.30am–2.30pm & 6–10pm.

★Traxlmayr Promenade 16. The traditional coffeehouse in Linz serves excellent coffees and hot main courses (from €8) – treat yourself to a slice of *Linzer Torte*, the town's ubiquitous almond-and-jam cake (€3.80). Mon–Sat 7.30am–10pm, Sun 9am–7pm.

GRAZ

Austria's second-largest city, **GRAZ**, owes its importance to the defence of central Europe against the Turks. From the fifteenth century, it was constantly under arms, rendering it more secure than Vienna and leading to a modest seventeenth-century flowering of the arts. Today Graz celebrates its reputation as a city of design, thanks to a clutch of modern architectural adventures and a large student population, and it's a fun place to spend a few days without the tourists of Innsbruck or Salzburg.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Graz is compact and easy to explore, with most sights within easy walking distance of its central **Hauptplatz**, with its fantastically decorated Baroque facades.

2

The Altstadt

From Hauptplatz, it's a few steps to the River Mur and two examples of Graz's architectural renaissance: the **Murinsel** is an ultramodern floating bridge-cum-meeting-place with a café linking the two banks, inspired by an open mussel, while the giant bulbous **Kunsthaus Graz** (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €9, or Joanneum



ACCOMMODATION

A&O Graz Hauptbahnhof	1
Hotel Strasser	2
Jufa Graz	3

EATING

Brot und Spiele	2
Café Promenade	3
Glöckl Bräu	5

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

MI	2
Parkhouse	1
Postgarage	3

LANDESMUSEUM JOANNEUM TICKET

A combined ticket giving entrance to all **Landesmuseum Joanneum** museums comes in two versions: €13 for 24hr, €19 for 48hr.

2

ticket; [@kunsthausgraz.at](http://kunsthausgraz.at)) is a museum of contemporary art, video installation and photography. Pick of the rest of the Joanneum museums is the **Landeszeughaus** city armoury on Herrengasse (Tues–Sun: April–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–March guided tours only at 11am & 2pm in German; English tour at 1pm; €9, or Joanneum ticket), which bristles with sixteenth-century weapons used to keep the Turks at bay.

Schlossberg

For views over the city, head up the wooded hill that overlooks the town: either walk up the zigzagging stone stairs from Schlossbergplatz or take the lift (daily 8am–12.30am; €1.30 single) or funicular from Sackstrasse (April–Sept Mon–Thurs 9am–midnight, Fri & Sat 9am–2am, Sun 9am–11pm; Oct–March Mon–Thurs 10am–midnight, Fri & Sat 10am–2am, Sun 10am–10pm; €2.20). The **Schloss**, or fortress, was destroyed by Napoleon in 1809; only a few prominent features survive – noticeably the huge sixteenth-century **Uhrturm** (clock tower), and more distant **Glockenturm** (bell tower).

Schloss Eggenberg

Some 4km west of the city centre (tram #1 from the train station), the Baroque **Schloss Eggenberg** was designed in imitation of the Escorial for Hans Ulrich von Eggenberg (1568–1634), chief minister to Ferdinand II. It houses on one floor the **Alte Galerie** (April–Oct Wed–Sun 10am–5pm; Nov to early Jan by guided tour only; €9, or Joanneum ticket), whose intelligently curated collection includes thirteenth-century devotional works, and a macabre *Triumph of Death* by Jan Brueghel. The palace rooms, **Prunkräume** (hourly guided tours Tues–Sun 10am–4pm, except 1pm;

€11.50, or Joanneum ticket), were designed as an allegory of the universe (24 rooms, 365 windows on the outside, four towers and so on); the highlight is the “Room of the Planets”, a great hall with an elaborate ceiling and wall paintings depicting the zodiac, and also the three Asian rooms, in particular the one decorated with rare Japanese panels from Osaka.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By train Graz's train station is on the western edge of town, a 15min walk or short tram ride (#1, #3, #6 or #7) from Hauptplatz.

Destinations Innsbruck (3 daily; 5hr 50min–6hr 25min); Hallstatt via Stainach-Irdning (5 daily; 2hr 45min); Salzburg (5 daily; 4hr); Vienna (hourly; 2hr 35min).

Tourist information Herrengasse 16 (daily: Jan–March & Nov 10am–5pm; April–Oct & Dec 10am–6pm; **0316 807 50**, [@gratztourismus.at](http://gratztourismus.at)).

GETTING AROUND

By public transport Graz has a good bus and tram network; the 24hr Tageskarte (€5) is valid on all city transport; 1hr ticket €2.20, available from bus drivers, machines on trams and at the main station, Jakominiplatz and Hauptplatz.

ACCOMMODATION

A&O Graz Hauptbahnhof Eggenbergerstr. 7 **03 16 57 01 62 37 00**, [@aohostels.com](http://aohostels.com); Modern, functional hostel in a convenient location, around the corner from the train station. Accommodation is in singles, doubles and 4–8-bed dorms; there are also women-only dorms, rooftop bar and wi-fi. Dorms **€15**, doubles **€57**

Hotel Strasser Eggenburger Gäßl 11 **03 16 71 39 77**, [@hotelstrasser.at](http://hotelstrasser.at). Good-value three-star hotel close to the station, with comfortable, if plain, singles, doubles and triple rooms with TV and massage showers. Doubles **€63**

Jufa Graz Idlhofgasse 74 **05 708 32 10**, [@jufa.eu](http://jufa.eu); bus #50 from Hauptbahnhof. Friendly, modern youth and family-oriented hotel a 15min walk from the train station and centre. Accommodation is in singles, doubles and 3/4 bed en-suite family rooms, all with free wi-fi. Breakfast included. Doubles **€76**

EATING

Brot und Spiele Mariahilferstr 17. Central, unpretentious bar and restaurant attached to a pool hall, which serves food until midnight. Good burgers (from €6.30) and a good selection of international beers. Mon–Fri 10am–2am, Sat & Sun 1pm–2am.

GRAZ FARMERS' MARKET

Known for its wine-growing and farming, the region of Styria (Steiermark) produces local specialities, in particular **Kürbiskernöl** (pumpkin seed oil), which has a delicious, nutty flavour and is used in salad dressings and other dishes on many Graz menus. The excellent Graz's **farmers' market**, Kaiser-Josef-Platz (Mon–Sat 6am–1pm), is a good place to buy bottles of Kürbiskernöl, local cheeses, breads, meat and other produce. There are also snack stands, coffee joints and fresh juice bars.

★Café Promenade Erzherzog-Johann-Allee 1. Attractive, Neoclassical pavilion, with stylish modern decor and a terrace beneath chestnut trees on the edge of the Stadtpark. Serves snacks (from €3), tapas (from €2.40), tortillas, sandwiches plus more substantial fare (€7–15). Mon–Thurs 9am–1am, Fri & Sat 9am–2am, Sun 9am–midnight.

Glöckl Bräu Glockenspielplatz 2–3. Traditional place, with busy beer terrace serving hearty Austrian dishes like *schnitzel* or *backhendl* for under €11; lunch specials €7. Daily 10.30am–midnight.

La enoteca dei Ciclopi Sackstr. 14 (in courtyard). This delightful Sicilian wine shop and restaurant, with a small cosy interior and a few courtyard tables, serves a short menu of delicious pasta dishes and antipasti. Lunchtime soup and pasta menu €6. Mon 5–10pm, Tues–Fri noon–11pm, Sat 11am–11pm.

Mangolds Griesgasse 11. Popular self-service place and excellent veggie option, with fresh juices and a large salad bar (pay by weight: €1.43/100g). Mon–Fri 11am–7pm, Sat 11am–4pm.

Propeller Zinzendorfgasse 17. Convivial student pub with a beer garden and a good menu that ranges from hearty Austrian classics to burgers. The generous portions cost €8.50–10 and there's also an all-you-can-eat student lunch buffet (Mon–Fri 11am–2pm; €7.90). Mon–Fri 10am–1am, Sat & Sun noon–1am.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

M1 Färberplatz 1. Stylish, split-level third-floor café-bar (take the glass lift up), with a designer interior and an attractive roof terrace. Cocktails around €6.50. Mon–Fri 4pm–2am, Sat 9am–2am, Sun 4–11pm.

Parkhouse Stadtpark 2. Buzzing bar in a pavilion, tucked away in the park, with regular DJ nights and a young crowd spilling out onto the grass. Beers from €3.60; free entry. March–Oct daily 10am–late; Nov–Feb Fri & Sat from 9pm.

Postgarage Dreihackengasse 42 Ⓜ postgarage.at. An interesting and varied programme of gigs and club nights

in the four spaces here – free gigs, gay nights, techno and more. Generally open Wed–Sat: club nights 11pm–late, gigs start 7–8pm.

SALZBURG

For many visitors, **SALZBURG** represents the quintessential Austria, offering ornate architecture, mountain air and the musical heritage of the city's most famous son, Wolfgang Amadeus **Mozart**. The city and surrounding area were for centuries ruled by a series of independent prince-archbishops, and it is the pomp and wealth of their court that is evident everywhere in the fine Baroque Altstadt.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Salzburg's compact centre straddles the River Salzach, squeezed between two dramatic mountains – Mönchsberg on the west and Kapuzinerberg on the east. The **west bank** forms a tight-knit network of alleys and squares – Alter Markt, Residenzplatz, Mozartplatz (with obligatory statue of the composer) and Domplatz – overlooked by the medieval **Hohensalzburg fortress** high above.

Residenzplatz

The complex of Baroque buildings at the centre of Salzburg exudes the ecclesiastical and temporal power of Salzburg's archbishops, whose erstwhile living quarters, the **Residenz** (Mon & Wed–Sun 10am–4pm; €12, including access to the cathedral museums and organ gallery), dominates the west side of Residenzplatz. Take a self-guided audio-tour of the lavish **state rooms**, then head one floor up to the **Residenzgalerie**, whose collection includes a few interesting paintings, most notably Rembrandt's small, almost sketch-like *Old Woman Praying*.

On the east side of Residenzplatz, accessed from Mozartplatz, is the Neue Residenz, built by Archbishop Wolf Dietrich von Raitenau, and topped by the **Glockenspiel**, a seventeenth-century musical clock which chimes at 7am, 11am and 6pm. It now houses the



excellent **Salzburg Museum** (Tues–Sun 9am–5pm; €8.50; salzburgmuseum.at), which, as well as showing some of the archbishop's lavish rooms, explores Salzburg's history, its rediscovery by Romantic painters and the city's tourist industry.

Domplatz and Franziskanerkirche
The pale marble facade of the **Dom** dominates **Domplatz**, while inside, the impressively cavernous Renaissance structure dazzles with its ceiling frescoes. Across Domplatz, an archway leads through to the Gothic **Franziskanerkirche**,

which houses a fine Baroque altar around an earlier *Madonna and Child*. The altar is enclosed by an arc of nine chapels and a frenzy of stucco. Look out for the twelfth-century marble lion that guards the stairway to the pulpit.

Mozarts Geburtshaus and Mozarts Wohnhaus

Getreidegasse, the main street in Salzburg's Old Town, is lined with opulent boutiques, painted facades and wrought-iron shop signs. At no. 9 is the canary-yellow **Mozarts Geburtshaus** (daily: July & Aug 8.30am–6.30pm; Sept–June 9am–5pm; €10, joint ticket with **Wohnhaus** €17; mozaeum.at), where the musical prodigy was born in 1756 and lived until the age of 17. Between the waves of tour parties it can be an evocative place, housing some fascinating period instruments, including one of his baby-sized violins. Over the Salzach River on Makartplatz, **Mozarts Wohnhaus** was the family home from 1773 till 1787 (same hours; €10), and now contains an engrossing multimedia history of the composer.

Hohensalzburg

Overlooking the city from the rocky mountain, the fortified **Hohensalzburg** (daily: May–Sept 9am–6.30pm; Oct–April 9.30am–4.30pm; €12, or €15.20 including funicular; salzburg-burgen.at) is Salzburg's key landmark. You can get up here on Austria's oldest funicular (daily every 10min: April–June, Sept, Oct & Dec 9am–8pm; July & Aug 9am–10pm; Nov & Jan–March 9am–5pm; €8.40 return) from Festungsgasse behind the Dom, although the walk up isn't as hard as it looks.

Begun around 1070, the fortress gradually became a more salubrious courtly seat. Included in the price is an audioguide tour of the observation tower – with spectacular views – and battlements, access to the impressive state rooms and various exhibitions.

Mönchsberg

For some of the best views across to the Hohensalzburg, take the Mönchsberg

lift up to the **Mönchsberg** from Anton-Neumayr-Platz (July & Aug daily 8am–11pm; Sept–June Mon 8am–7pm, Tues–Sun 8am–9pm; €2.30 single, €3.60 return). At the summit, the sleekly concrete-and-glass **Museum der Moderne** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm, Wed till 8pm; €8) is a stylish contrast to all the Baroque that puts on big-name art exhibitions.

Schloss Mirabell

Across the river from the Altstadt, **Schloss Mirabell** on Mirabellplatz stands on the site of a palace built by Archbishop Wolf Dietrich for his mistress Salome, with whom the energetic prelate was rumoured to have sired a dozen children. Familiar from *The Sound of Music*, the palace's ornate gardens offer a popular view back across the city.

Schloss Hellbrunn and the Untersberg

The Italianate palace **Schloss Hellbrunn** (daily: April & Oct 9am–4.30pm; May, June & Sept 9am–5.30pm; July & Aug 9am–9pm, Wasserspiele only after 6pm; €12.50; schlosshellbrunn.at) on Salzburg's southern fringe – 5km from the city centre – was built in the early seventeenth century by Salzburg's decadent archbishop Marcus Sitticus as a place for entertaining. The main attraction is the gardens' impressive array of fountains and watery gimmicks, or *wasserspiele*; guided tours take forty minutes, with the tour guide showing off all the tricks and hidden fountains, including an elaborate, water-powered mechanical theatre (prepare to be

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Salzburg wastes no time cashing in on its connection with the legendary singing Von Trapp family, immortalized in the movie *The Sound of Music*. From its kiosk on Mirabellplatz, Panorama Tours (0628 83 21 10, panoramatours.com) runs **The Original Sound of Music Tour** (daily 9.15am & 2pm; 4hr; €42) to the key film locations, such as Hellbrunn Palace and Mondsee Cathedral – they play the soundtrack and you're encouraged to sing along.

splashed). The palace itself features paintings of Sitticus's unusual animal collection, and a lavishly frescoed festival hall and music room.

To get to Schloss Hellbrunn take bus #25 from the train station or Mirabellplatz (every 20–30min). This bus continues to the village of St Leonhard, 7km further south, where a cable car (March–June & Oct–Nov 8.30am–4.30pm; July–Sept 8.30am–5pm; Dec–Feb 9am–3.30pm; return €23) climbs the 1853m **Untersberg** for impressive views of Salzburg to the north and the Alps to the south.

2

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train The station is 2km north of Mozartplatz; numerous buses run to Mirabellplatz and Altstadt. Destinations Graz (5 daily; 4hr); Hallstatt via Attnang-Puchheim (hourly 2hr 10min–2hr 35min); Innsbruck (hourly; 1hr 50min); Linz (up to 4 hourly; 1hr 15min); Munich (1–2 hourly; 1hr 30min); Werfen (1–2 hourly; 40–55min), Zell am See (every 2hr; 1hr 35min).

By bus If you're travelling on to Germany, note that Berchtesgaden, in Bavaria, is most easily accessed by bus from Salzburg.

Destinations Berchtesgaden, Bavaria (hourly; 45min); Strobl (for St Wolfgang; hourly; 1hr 10min).

INFORMATION

Tourist information Mozartplatz 5 (April–June & mid-Sept to mid-Oct daily 9am–6pm; July & first half Sept daily 9am–6.30pm, Aug daily 9am–7pm; mid-Oct to March Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; 06 62 88 98 73 30, salzburg.info); also at the train station (daily: May & Sept 9am–7pm; June 8.30am–7pm; July & Aug 8.30am–7.30pm; Oct–April 9am–6pm).

Salzburg Card Both tourist offices sell this card (Nov–April €24/24hr, €32/48hr, €37/72hr; May–Oct €27/24hr, €36/48hr, €42/72hr), which includes public transport and admission to all the city's sights – if you go on the Unterbergs cable car it almost pays for itself.

GETTING AROUND

By public transport The bus network centres on the train station and Mirabellplatz. Single tickets available in blocks of five from tobacconists and transport offices at €1.80 per ticket (€2.60 on board).

ACCOMMODATION

Camping Nord-Sam Samstr. 22a 06 62 66 04 94, camping-nord-sam.com; bus #23 from the train station to stop Mauermannstr. The most central campsite, well

equipped with a heated outdoor pool. Per person €12, plus per tent €6.50

Jufa Salzburg Josef Preis Allee 18 05 708 36 13, jufa.eu; bus #25 from the train station. Large, very central, well-equipped hostel with accommodation in singles, doubles, 3-, 4- and 5-bed family rooms and 6–8-bed dorms. Breakfast included. Dorms €27.55, doubles €97

Meininger Fürbergstr. 18–20 07 20 88 34 14, meininger-hotels.com; Obus #2 from Hauptbahnhof to Sternckstr. Large modern, well-equipped hostel/hotel located on a busy junction out of the centre. Some rooms and the fifth-floor terrace have views over Kapuzinerberg. Dorms €16, doubles €64

Schwarzes Rössl Priesterhausgasse 6 06 62 87 44 26, academiahotels.at. Wonderful, creaky old place – in term time a hall of residence – that's central and great value. Rooms have shared or private facilities. Open July–Sept. Doubles €88

Yoho Paracelsusstr. 9 06 62 87 96 49, www.yoho.at. Very popular and often fully booked hostel near the train station, with sociable bar, internet café, free wi-fi and laundry facilities. Dorms €22, doubles €132

EATING

★ Bazar Schwarzstr. 3. Elegant coffeehouse with a pleasant river-view terrace, a fantastic place to unwind and nibble with a view. Snacks and soups from around €5, mains €14–16. Mon–Sat 7.30am–7.30pm, Sun 9am–6pm.

Fingerlos Franz-Josef-Str. 9. Stylish and relaxed *Café-Konditorei*, serving cakes as fine as you'll find in Salzburg, and excellent breakfasts. Breakfasts from €4.70, cakes from €2.60. Tues–Sun 7.30am–7.30pm.

Fischkrieg Hanuschplatz 4. Unpretentious riverside place serving fish and seafood in every form. Try the fishburgers (€2.50), paella (€8.70) or calamari (€7.70). Mon–Fri 8.30am–6.30pm, Sat 8.30am–1pm.

★ Pommes Boutique Rudolfsplatz 1a. Some of the best burgers in Salzburg – including a decent veggie option – served from a tiny pavilion near the river. Portions are generous. From €4. Mon–Fri 11am–8pm, Sun noon–8pm.

Resch & Lieblich Toscaninihof 1a. Tucked away near the Festspielhaus, offering good-value Austrian cuisine in dining rooms carved out of the Hohensalzburg cliffs. Daily specials from €8.20. Mon–Sat noon–11pm; kitchen closes earlier.

Stieglkeller Festungsgasse 10. Enormous brewery-owned restaurant and beer garden with excellent views over the old town. Solid traditional food from €12. Daily 11am–10pm, closed Feb plus Mon in Jan & March.

DRINKING, NIGHTLIFE AND ENTERTAINMENT

The city hosts dozens of concerts of all musical persuasions year-round; check with Salzburg Ticket Service (salzburg.ticket.com), in the tourist office on Mozartplatz. The

Salzburg Festival (late July to late Aug; [06 628 04 50](tel:066280450), salzburgerfestspiele.at) is one of Europe's premier festivals of classical music, opera and theatre, with some outdoor concerts.

★ **Augustiner Bräu** Lindhofstr.7 (pedestrian entrance in Augustinergasse). A 15min stroll from the Old Town, this vast beer hall has a beautiful tree-shaded garden and own-brew beer, served in earthenware steins – €6.20 for 1l, €3.10 for 0.5l. It's good for inexpensive snacks and meals too. Mon–Fri 3–11pm, Sat & Sun 2.30–11pm.

Die Weisse 10 Rupertgasse. Lively microbrewery, well off the tourist track, with pleasant beer garden and great pub food. Goulash and dumplings €12. Mon–Sat 10am–midnight.

Rockhouse Schallmooser Hauptstr 46. Vibrant blend of bar, live rock venue and club, set in historic vaults in the flanks of the Kapuzinerberg. Gigs generally start at 8pm. Mon–Thurs 6pm–1am, Fri & Sat 6pm–2am.

DIRECTORY

Consulate UK, Alter Markt 4 [06 62 84 81 33](tel:0662848133).

Post office Residenzplatz 9, Mon–Fri 8am–6pm.

WERFEN

With its impressive fortification and spectacular ice caves, **WERFEN**, 40km south of Salzburg, offers a great day of sightseeing, but arrive early to comfortably see both. The moody castle **Festung Hohenwerfen** (April Tues–Sun 9.30am–4pm; May–Sept daily 9am–5pm; mid-July to mid-Aug daily 9am–6pm; Oct daily 9.30am–4pm; €12, €15.50 with lift), on an outcrop above town, lies a thirty-minute signed walk from Werfen's train station. Though much modified over the years, it has eleventh-century origins, with all the usual components – ornate chapel and torture chamber included – neatly gathered around a courtyard. There are daily falconry displays (April to mid-July & mid-Aug to Oct 11.15am & 3.15pm, mid-July to mid-Aug 11.15am, 2.15pm & 4.30pm) too.

Up the road from Werfen's castle, you can explore the first kilometre of a 40km underground network at the **Eisriesenwelt ice caves**. The caves are more than two hours' walk from the entrance building, so most visitors take a cable car. Tours run every 30min (daily: May–June, Sept & Oct 8am–3.45pm; July & Aug 8am–4.45pm; ticket office closes 45min before last tour; €12, €24 with cable car) and last around 75 minutes. It's cold, so take a jumper.

Trains from Salzburg frequently arrive at Werfen's station, from where **buses** (€7 return) to the caves depart daily at 8.18am, 10.18am, 12.18pm & 2.18pm; more buses leave (around every 20min) from the official Gries car park departure point across the river – it's signposted from the station and not far.

2

THE SALZKAMMERMUGUT

The **Salzkammergut**, Austria's lake district, features a spectacular series of lakes and mountains. You can get a feel for the area on a day-trip from Salzburg to St Wolfgang, or on a "Sound of Music tour", but if you want to hike, mountain bike or just chill out, head to a lakeside campsite or B&B for a few days' relaxation – picture-perfect Hallstatt is a good choice.

St Wolfgang

The pretty little village of **ST WOLFGANG**, on the north shore of Wolfgangsee, is undeniably picturesque, though it can get crowded in summer, and provides a good taster of the region, particularly if you take the vintage train to the top of the **Schafberg** peak (May–Oct 9.20am–3.30pm; last descent 5.05pm; €34 return; to avoid queuing, reserve a seat on [06 13 82 23 20](tel:0613822320),

GETTING AROUND THE SALZKAMMERMUGUT

A single **train** line runs north–south from Attnang-Puchheim via **Bad Ischl** (one of the region's main towns) and **Hallstatt** to Stainach Irdning (every two hours; 2hr 5min), with connections **from Salzburg** and Linz at Attnang-Puchheim and **from Graz** at Stainach Irdning. But **buses** are generally quicker, with Bad Ischl a useful hub for connections. Hourly bus #150 between Salzburg and Bad Ischl (1hr 35min) runs east along the southern shore of the Wolfgangsee; for St Wolfgang change at **Strobl** for connecting bus #546 (approx hourly; 15min).

schafbergbahn.at) from a station on the western edge of town.

In town, the **Pfarrkirche**, above the lakeshore, houses a high altar, an extravagantly pinnacled structure 12m in height, completed between 1471 and 1481. It features brightly gilded scenes of the *Coronation of the Virgin* flanked by scenes from the life of St Wolfgang.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By bus Buses from Strobl (see box, p.81) drop off at both ends of town, before and after the road tunnel that bypasses the centre.

By boat From April to October, Wolfgangsee Schifffahrt lake steamers run from St Gilgen (bus #150 from Salzburg) to the Schafberg station's jetty in St Wolfgang (April to mid-June, Sept & Oct 10.20am–6pm; mid-June to Aug 9am–6.50pm; €7.40; 40min; schafbergbahn.at).

Tourist office The tourist office (mid-May to June & first half Sept Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–3pm, Sun 9am–noon/1pm; July & Aug Mon–Fri 9am–7pm, Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–5pm; mid-Sept to mid-May Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 9am–noon; [06 138 80 03](tel:061388003), wolfgangsee.at) is at the eastern entrance to the road tunnel.

Hallstatt

The jewel of the Salzkammergut is **HALLSTATT**, which clings to the base of precipitous cliffs on the shores of the Hallstättersee, 20km south of Bad Ischl. With towering peaks and a pristine lake, this is a stunning setting in which to hike, swim or rent a boat. Arriving **by train** is an atmospheric and evocative experience; the station is on the opposite side of the lake from the village, and the ferry, which meets all incoming trains, gives truly dramatic views.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Hallstatt gave its name to a distinct period of Iron Age culture after Celtic remains were discovered in the salt mines above the town. Many of the finds date back to the ninth century BC, and can be seen in the **Museum Hallstatt** (April & Oct daily 10am–4pm; May–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Nov–March Wed–Sun 11am–3pm; €8; museum-hallstatt.at).

The **Pfarrkirche** has a south portal adorned with sixteenth-century Calvary scenes. In the graveyard outside is a small stone structure known as the **Beinhaus**.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IN HALLSTATT

Boats can be rented on the lakeshore between the tourist office and the village centre (1hr; €15). The tourist office can advise on **hiking routes** and sells local hiking guides. At the southern end of town in the suburb of Lahn is a "Badinsel", an artificial island for sunbathing and swimming (changing facilities nearby).

(May–Oct daily 10am–6pm, €1.50), traditionally the repository for the skulls of villagers. The skulls, some quite recent, are inscribed with the names of the deceased and dates of their death, and are often decorated.

Steep paths zigzag up from the village centre and behind the graveyard to the **Salzachtal** (at least 1hr of hard hiking), the highland valley where **salt mines** (guided tours daily: April–Sept 9.30am–4.30pm; Oct 9.30am–3pm; Nov 9.30am–2.30pm; €22) once ensured the area's prosperity. Alternatively, take the **funicular** (daily: April to late Sept 9am–6pm; Oct 9am–4.30pm; Nov 9am–4pm; €16 return, combined ticket with tour €30) up from the suburb of Lahn.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By train The station is across the lake; ferries (€2.50) are timed to coincide with trains. Return ferry times are posted up at the ferry station and around town; the last train to Hallstatt arrives around 6.50pm.

By bus Buses stop in the suburb of Lahn, a 10min lakeside walk south of the centre.

Tourist information Tourist office at Seestr. 99 (Jan–April Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm, Sat 9am–1pm; May–June Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 9am–2.30pm; July–Oct Mon–Fri 8.30am–6pm, Sat & Sun 9am–4pm; Nov & Dec Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm; [06 134 82 08](tel:061348208), hallstatt.net).

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Camping Klaussner-Höll Lahn 201 [06 134 83 22](tel:061348322), camping.hallstatt.net. A short way south from the tourist office at Lahn, on the outskirts of the village. Quiet and cyclist-friendly, with shop, bar, laundry service and wi-fi. Open mid-April to mid-Oct. Per person **€9.50**, plus per tent **€5.70**.

Gasthaus zur Mühle Kirchenweg 36 [06 134 83 18](tel:061348318), hallstatturlaub.at. Small, welcoming bar, restaurant and hostel uphill from the landing stage, with a good line

in pizzas (from €7.10). Upstairs are some basic dorm rooms. Dorms first night €27, subsequent nights €23.

★ Gasthof Simony Wolfengasse 105 ☎ 06 13 42 06 37, gasthof-simony.at. On the lakefront just off the main square, this relaxed guesthouse has a good range of rooms, some en-suite, with traditional wooden furniture and some with balconies overlooking the lake. The garden restaurant serves fresh lake fish from around €15. Good breakfast included. Doubles €80.

ZELL AM SEE-KAPRUN

Some 80km south of Salzburg, **ZELL AM SEE** is a pretty old town wedged between a perfect alpine lake and an impressive mountainous hinterland. The quintessential Austrian resort, it's busy with skiers in winter and hikers in summer. Zell's twin village of **Kaprun** lures visitors for all-year glacier skiing on the 3203m Kitzsteinhorn.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

The narrow streets of Zell's **Old Town** have charm, but they're mainly of interest for their bars, cafés and restaurants. The real attraction here is the scenery, whether enjoyed for its own sake or as a backdrop for summer hiking and cycling or winter sport. Zell's closest **skiing** fans out across the slopes of the 2000m **Schmittenhöhe** (schmitten.at), with plenty of pistes for every standard. The most convenient ascent is via the CityXpress **cable car** (daily: summer 9am–5pm; winter 8.30am–4.30pm; ascent €19.50, descent €17; Schmittenhöhe day-passes include the CityXpress, €45) from the centre of Zell. In summer, the cable cars serve a web of **hiking trails**, stretching as far as the 2074m Maurerkogel, with a 360-degree panorama of 3000m-high peaks.

Towering above nearby **Kaprun**, the mighty **Kitzsteinhorn** is capped with snow and ice year-round. Just below the summit, the 3029m-high **Gipfelwelt** is the highest viewing platform in the region; in July and August there's a snow beach and ice bar on the glacier just below it. Making the ascent involves four cable cars from the base of the mountain near Kaprun (daily 8.15am–4.30pm; summer €40; winter ski pass €50;

kitzsteinhorn.at); bus #660 runs from Zell to the base of the cable car.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By train Zell am See's station is on the lakeside, a few minutes' walk from the tourist office.

Tourist information Brucker Bundesstr. 1a (Mon–Fri 8am–6pm, Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 9am–1pm; 06542770.at, zellamsee-kaprun.com). Has a list of private rooms in Zell and Kaprun (from €22 per person).

Zell am See Kaprun Summer Card Free from your hotel or hostel, it offers free entry or discounts on some transport, services and many attractions. Valid mid-May to mid-Oct.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Junges Hotel Zell am See Seespitzstrasse Seespitzstr. 13 ☎ 06 54 25 71 85, seespitz.hostel-zellamsee.at. Hi-affiliated hostel on the lakeside 1200m south of Zell's centre, with bathing and sports facilities and accommodation in singles, doubles and 4–6-bed dorms. All rooms en-suite; breakfast included. Dorms €27, doubles €64.

★ Pinzgauer Diele Anton Wallner Str. 6. Lively bar in Zell's Old Town with a fun, après-ski atmosphere and a wide choice of filling international fare from pizza (€7.50) and pasta (€8.90) to chilli and tortillas. Daily 4pm–4am.

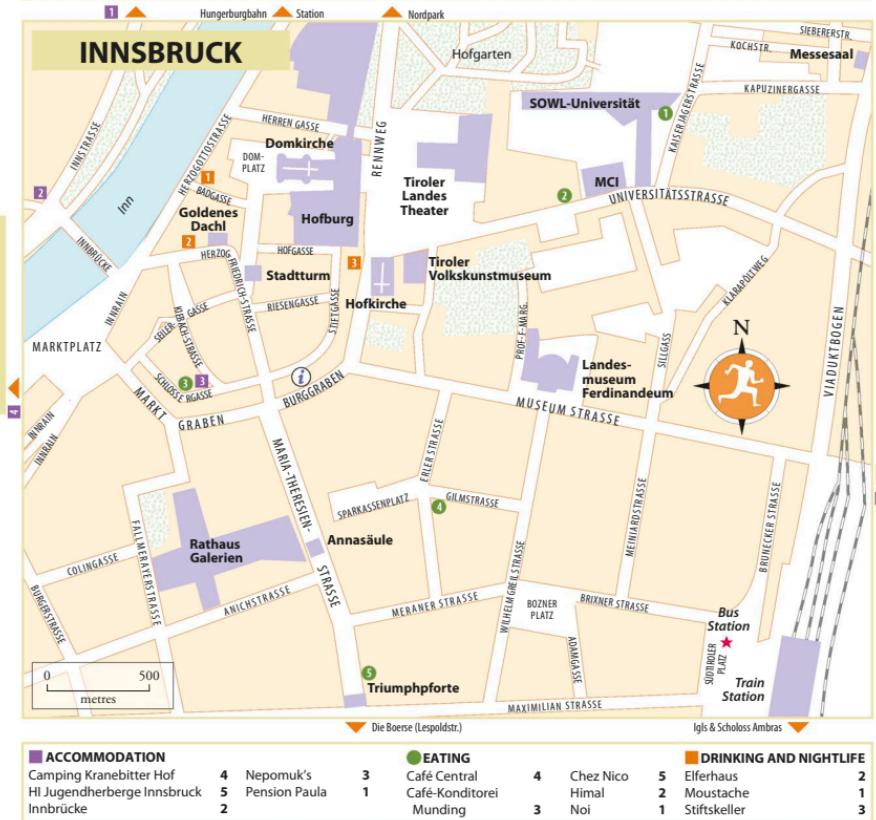
Seecamp Thumersbacherstr. 33–34 ☎ 06 54 27 21 15, seecamp.at. Modest-sized campsite on the lakeside 1.6km north of Zell's old town, with restaurant, wi-fi, laundry and shop. Open year-round. Bus #70 from Zell. Per person €9.70, plus per tent €6.20.

Western Austria

West towards the mountain province of **Tyrol**, Austria's grandiose Alpine scenery begins to emerge. Most trains from Salzburg travel through a corner of Bavaria in Germany before joining the Inn valley and climbing back into Austria towards **Innsbruck**, Tyrol's main town. A less direct but more scenic route (more likely if you're coming from Graz or Zell) cuts by the majestic **Hoher Tauern** – site of Austria's highest peak, the Grossglockner.

INNSBRUCK

Nestled in the Alps and encircled by ski resorts, **INNSBRUCK** is a compact city cradled by towering mountains. It has a rich history: Maximilian I based his imperial court here in the 1490s, placing



the city at the heart of European politics for a century and a half. This combination of historical pedigree and proximity to the mountains has put Innsbruck firmly on the tourist trail.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Most attractions are confined to the central **Altstadt**, bounded by the river and the Graben (Marktgraben and Burggraben), a road that follows the course of the medieval town's moat.

Maria-Theresien-Strasse

Innsbruck's main artery is **Maria-Theresien-Strasse**, famed for the view north towards the great Nordkette, the mountain range that dominates the city. At its southern end the triumphal arch, **Triumphpforte**, was built for the marriage of Maria Theresa's son Leopold in 1756. Halfway along, the **Annasäule**, a column supporting a statue of the Virgin,

commemorates the retreat of the Bavarians, who had been menacing Tyrol in 1703. Herzog-Friedrich-Strasse leads on into the centre, opening out into a plaza lined with arcaded medieval buildings. At the plaza's southern end is the **Goldenes Dachl**, or "Golden Roof" (though the tiles are really copper), built in the 1490s to cover an oriel window from which the court of Emperor Maximilian could observe the square below. The **Goldenes Dachl Museum** (May–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct & Dec–April Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €4.80) has engrossing displays on the city's history, though it offers only a brief glimpse of the balcony.

Domplatz and the Hofburg

Standing on Domplatz, the ostentatious **Domkirche St Jakob** (Mon–Sat 10.15am–6.30/7.30pm, Sun 12.30–6.30/7.30pm) is home to a valuable *Madonna and Child* by German master

Lucas Cranach the Elder, although it's buried in the fussy Baroque detail of the altar.

The adjacent **Hofburg**, entered around the corner, has late medieval roots but was remodelled in the eighteenth century. Its Rococo state apartments are crammed with opulent furniture (daily 9am–5pm; €9).

The Hofkirche and Volkskunstmuseum

At the head of Rennweg is the **Hofkirche** (Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 12.30–5pm; €7), which contains the imposing (but empty) **mausoleum of Emperor Maximilian**.

This extraordinary project was originally envisaged as a series of 40 larger-than-life statues, 100 statuettes and 32 busts of Roman emperors, but in the end only 28 of the statues were completed.

Housed in the same complex, the **Tiroler Volkskunstmuseum** (daily 9am–5pm; €11 including entry to Hofkirche and Landesmuseum), features a huge collection of folk art and objects including re-creations of traditional wood-panelled Tyrolean interiors.

Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum

A short walk south, the **Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum**, Museumstr. 15 (Tues–Sun 9am–5pm; €11, including Hofkirche and Volkskunstmuseum), contains one of the best collections of Gothic paintings in Austria; most originate from the churches of the South Tyrol (now in Italy).

Schloss Ambras

Set in attractive grounds 2km southeast of the centre, **Schloss Ambras** (daily 10am–5pm, closed Nov; €10; tram #6 or bus #C from the train station) was the home of Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol. It features the impressive Spanish Hall, built from 1569–71, and exhibitions of armour and curios amassed from around the globe. Don't miss the inner courtyard covered in sixteenth-century frescoes, including depictions of the triumph of Bacchus.

Hungerburg plateau

A good starting point for hikes is the **Nordpark**, on the slopes of the Nordkette

range, accessible from the swish Hungerburgbahn cable railway. Looking like a funky spaceship, the Zaha Hadid-designed Congress station is opposite the Hofgarten; take it to Hungerburg, then continue on a two-stage sequence of cable cars to just below the summit (daily 8.30am–5pm, Fri also 6–11.30pm; €27.20 return; nordkette.com). The rewards are stupendous views of the high Alps and access to all sorts of hikes.

ARRIVAL AND INFORMATION

By train Innsbruck station is on Südtirolerplatz, east of the Old Town, an easy walk from the centre.

Destinations Munich (every 2hr; 1hr 50min); Salzburg (18 daily; 1hr 45min–2hr); Venice (1 daily; 4hr 45min); Vienna (approx hourly; 4hr 15min); Zürich (9 daily; 3hr 40min).

By bus The bus station is immediately south of the train station; local buses stop in front of the train station.

Tourist information The tourist office at Burggraben 3 (daily 9am–6pm; [0512 598 50](tel:051259850), innsbruck.info) sells the Innsbruck Card (24hr/48hr/72hr for €39/€48/€55), which includes public transport, cable cars (some only in summer) and admission to all the sights.

GETTING AROUND

By public transport Buses and trams; single tickets €2.30 (€2.70 if bought on board), 24hr ticket €5.10. There's also a public bike rental scheme, Stadtrad (stadtrad.ivb.at; first 30min €2, second 30min €2, each extra hour €3; register with credit card).

ACCOMMODATION

Camping Kranebitter Hof Kranebittner Allee 216 [0512 28 19 58](tel:0512281958), kranebitterhof.at; bus #LK from Boznerplatz, a block west of the station, to Klammstr. Well-equipped campsite in the west of the city, close to the airport. Open year-round. Cash only, no cards. Per tent €36

HI Jugendherberge Innsbruck Reichenauerstr. 147 [0512 34 61 79](tel:0512346179), jugendherberge-innsbruck.at; bus #0 from Landesmuseum. Large, functional HI hostel on the outskirts of the city. Dorms €21, doubles €58

Innbrücke Innstr. 1 [0512 28 19 34](tel:0512281934), gasthof-innbruecke.at. Plain but comfortable *Gasthof* on the west bank of the Inn, just over the bridge from the Altstadt. More expensive rooms have en-suite facilities, although most are without. Doubles €74

Nepomuk's Kiebachgasse 16 [0512 58 41 18](tel:0512584118), nepomuks.at. Slightly ramshackle one-dorm hostel above *Café Mundung*, whose owners also run the hostel and serve its good breakfasts. Also has a couple of doubles, though one is windowless and noisy. Dorm €24, doubles €58

SKIING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Innsbruck is great for outdoor activities; the tourist office has a wide range of brochures. Of Innsbruck's **ski areas** the closest to the city is **Nordpark** (see p.85), accessible via the Hungerburgbahn, with its fabulous panoramas, snow park for skiers and snowboarders and taxing expert-level runs. The other ski areas – including the Patscherkofel, Axamer Lizum, Glungezer, Muttereralm, Schlick 2000, Kühtai and Rangger Köpfl. – are all on the opposite, southern, side of the valley and offer mellower terrain ideal for relaxed, wide-turn skiing. At **Stubai Gletscher** (www.stubaier-gletscher.com) glacier skiing is possible from October to June.

In winter, **lift passes** cover all these ski regions: the Stubai Gletscher, for example, has day-passes for €46 (less for part of the day), while the Olympia SkiWorld pass covers the whole Innsbruck area, including ski buses from the town centre, and costs €132 for three days. Passes are available from all lift stations or the Innsbruck tourist office.

Many **cycling** and **mountain-bike** routes are accessible from central Innsbruck, though some of the trails are for experts only: for bike rental try Die Börse, Leopoldstr 4 (Mon–Sat 9am–6/6.30pm; www.dieboerse.at). Innsbruck's tourist office runs an extensive programme of free **guided walks** – including sunrise and night-time hikes – from late May to late October.

Pension Paula Weiherburggasse 15 (0512 29 22 62, www.pensionpaula.at); bus #W from the **Marktplatz**. Friendly, good-value **pension** in a chalet on a hillside north of the river – some rooms have balconies and mountain views. Doubles €62

EATING AND DRINKING

★Café Central Gilmstr. 5. Venerable coffeehouse serving up excellent cakes and decent breakfasts (from €4). Good spot to linger over a coffee and slice of cake (from €2.80). Daily 6.30am–9pm.

★Café-Konditorei Munding Kiebachgasse 16. Superb cakes (€3.80) and pastries, in a bustling traditional café in a quiet corner of the Altstadt, with a terrace primed for people-watching. Good breakfasts (from €3.90) too. Daily 8am–8pm.

Chez Nico Maria Theresienstr 49. While this vegetarian and vegan spot is fancier than some other recommendations, the portions are substantial and the modern-European creative twist is superb. Dinner is pricey (€34 for 4 courses), so go for the fabulous €14.50 two-course lunch special. Mon & Sat 6.30–10pm, Tues–Fri noon–2pm & 6.30–10pm.

Himal Universitätsstr. 13. Stylish Nepalese place serving fresh tasty curries; meat dishes from €11.50, with good veggie options plus lunch menus from €7.10. Mon–Sat 11.30am–2.30pm & 6–10.30pm, Sun 6–10pm.

Noi Kaserjägerstr. 1. Excellent, cheap Thai restaurant around the corner from the Hofkirche with tasty lunch menus from €7.90; main courses from €9.60. Mon–Fri 11.30am–2.30pm & 6–11pm, Sat 6–11pm.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

Ellerhaus Herzog-Friedrich-Str. 11. Popular Old Town beer bar, with a lively atmosphere and a big selection of bottled and draught beers. Also serves good basic Austrian food. Hot mains from €8.40. Daily 10am–2am.

Moustache Herzog-Otto-Str. 8. A relaxed, studenty bar playing a good soundtrack of mainly British and American alternative tunes. Bottled beers €3.10, shots €2.50. On Sundays there's an all-you-can-eat brunch buffet from 11am (€12). Tues–Sun 11am–2am.

★Stiftskeller Stiftsgasse 1–7. Cavernous traditional beer hall and restaurant close to the Hofkirche, and Hofburg, with Augustiner beers (from €2.70), Tyrolean snacks from around €5, baked potatoes from €6.30 and hearty meaty mains from around €10. Daily 10am–midnight.

DIRECTORY

Consulate UK, Kaiserjägerstr. 1/Top B9 (05 12 58 83 20).

Hospital Universitätsklinik, Anichstr. 35 (05 050 40).

Laundry Bubble Point, Andreas-Hoferstr. 37 & Brixnerstr. 1 (Mon–Fri 8am–10/9pm, Sat & Sun 8am–8pm).

Post office Südtiroler Platz 10–12 (Mon–Fri 8am–6pm).



MARKT SQUARE, BRUGES

Belgium & Luxembourg

HIGHLIGHTS

- ➊ **Brussels** See the gold-fringed Grand-Place, Europe's prettiest square. [See p.96](#)
- ➋ **Antwerp** Discover the up-and-coming docks of Belgium's hip northern port. [See p.100](#)
- ➌ **Ghent** Sip local beers in lively bars and join the Gentse Feesten carnival. [See p.103](#)
- ➍ **Bruges** Explore this perfectly preserved medieval town's cobbled streets. [See p.106](#)
- ➎ **The Ardennes** Cycle, kayak or hike through gently rolling woods. [See p.109](#)
- ➏ **Luxembourg City** Discover the UNESCO-listed old town of this cliff-top capital. [See p.110](#)

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.89

ROUGH COSTS

Daily budget Basic €45, occasional treat €65

Drink Jupiler beer €1.60

Food Mussels with chips €15–20

Hostel/budget hotel €20/€60–90

Travel Train: Brussels–Antwerp €7.40

FACT FILE

Population Belgium: 11.4 million; Lux: 570,252

Language Flemish (Belgium), Letzebuergesch (Lux), French, German

Currency Euro (€)

Capital Brussels; Luxembourg City

International phone code Belgium: 032; Lux: 0352

Time zone GMT +1hr

Introduction

A federal country with three official languages and an ongoing rivalry between its two main groups – Dutch-speaking Flemish and French-speaking Walloons – Belgium's dull reputation is definitely misleading. Lively, cultured cities in the predominantly urban north give way to beautiful forests and rugged hills in the south, while regular, affordable trains and an impressive range of good-value accommodation mean the country is a pleasure to explore. Factor in the Belgians' enthusiasm for beer and fine cuisine, and all the ingredients for a truly memorable trip are in place. With Europe's finest cliff-top city, little Luxembourg certainly does its bit too.

3

Roughly in the middle of Belgium lies the capital, **Brussels**, the heart of the EU and a genuinely vibrant and multicultural city. North of here stretch the flat landscapes of Flemish Belgium, whose main city, **Antwerp**, is a bustling old port with doses of fine art, cutting-edge fashion, and twice as many bars as Amsterdam. Further west, also in the Flemish zone, are the charismatic cities of **Bruges** and **Ghent**, each with a stunning concentration of medieval architecture. To the south of Brussels, Belgium's most scenic region, the Ardennes in Wallonia, has deep, wooded valleys, high elevations and dark caverns, with the town of **Namur** the obvious gateway.

The Ardennes reach across the border into the northern part of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, a dramatic landscape of rushing rivers and high hills topped with crumbling castles. The best base for rural expeditions is **Luxembourg City**, an exceptionally picturesque place straddling a steep valley.

CHRONOLOGY

BELGIUM

- 54 BC** Julius Caesar defeats the Belgae tribes.
- 496 AD** The King of the Franks, Clovis, founds a kingdom which includes Belgium.
- 1400–1500** The Belgian cities of Bruges, Brussels and Antwerp become the European centres of commerce and industry.
- 1477** Following the marriage of Austrian King Maximilian I and Mary of Burgundy, Belgium becomes part of Austria.

1713 Treaty of Utrecht transfers Belgian territory from French to Austrian rule.

1790 The Belgians form an independent state from Austria, though it does not last long. They are subsequently invaded by Austria, France and the Netherlands in quick succession.

1830 Belgium gains independence from the Netherlands.

1885 King Leopold II establishes a personal colony in the African Congo.

1908 The Belgian government takes over the Congo Free State after reports of Leopold's brutal regime are circulated.

1914–18 Belgium is invaded by Germany and sees heavy fighting before it is liberated.

1940–44 Nazi invasion, and ultimately liberation by Allied forces.

1957 Belgium is a founder member of the European Economic Community (EEC).

1960 Independence granted to the Congo.

1992 Belgium ratifies the Maastricht Treaty on the European Union.

2007 Following the resignation of Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, Belgium is without a government.

2011 In December, French-speaking Socialist leader Elio di Rupo is appointed prime minister of a six-party coalition, ending 541 days without a government. This is the longest period a country has ever been without an official government, exceeding Iraq's record of 289 days.

2012 Belgium holds municipal elections. Results show widespread gains for the New Flemish Alliance party seeking autonomy for Dutch-speaking Flanders.

2013 Crown Prince Philippe crowned new Belgian king after the abdication of his father Albert II.

2016 On March 22 Zaventem Airport and Maelbeek metro station suffer the worst terrorist attack in Belgian history – an IS atrocity that leaves 32 dead and 300 casualties.



LUXEMBOURG

963 AD Count Siegfried of Ardenne founds the capital of Luxembourg.

1354 Luxembourg's status is raised from fief to duchy by Emperor Charles IV.

1477 The Habsburgs take control of Luxembourg.

1715 Luxembourg is integrated into the Austrian Netherlands.

1867 Second Treaty of London ensures Luxembourg's independence and neutrality.

1890 Luxembourg announces its own ruling monarchy, relinquishing its ties to the Netherlands.

1914–1918 German occupation.

1920 Joins the League of Nations.

1939–1945 German occupation.

1957 Luxembourg is a founder member of the EEC.

2000 Grand Duke Jean abdicates, handing responsibility over to his son Henri.

2008 Constitutional crisis is provoked by Grand Duke Henri threatening to block a bill legalizing euthanasia. As a result, Parliament approves a reform which restricts the monarch to a purely ceremonial role.

2009 Luxembourg is commended for improving the transparency of its banking systems after being added to a "grey list" of countries with questionable banking arrangements by the G20.

2012 Crown Prince Guillaume weds Belgian Countess Stéphanie de Lannoy at the Notre-Dame Cathedral.

2014 Luxembourg's parliament votes to legalize same-sex marriage.

2015 A referendum proposal to allow foreigners to vote in national elections is rejected by a large margin.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

BY PLANE

The majority of airborne travel is into Brussels, which has two airports: the most conveniently located is Zaventem (also known as Brussels National), while Charleroi (which serves most budget airlines including Ryanair) lies about 55km from the centre.

BY TRAIN

There are frequent rail connections from London, Paris, Amsterdam and Luxembourg, with almost all international trains arriving at Bruxelles-Midi (Brussel-Zuid), and frequently also stopping in Ghent or Antwerp. Eurostar "Any Belgian Station" tickets are valid to all onward Belgian stations.

BY BUS

Eurolines **buses** from Paris, Amsterdam, London and other destinations stop at Brussels-Nord, as well as Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges.

BY FERRY

Numerous **ferry** services ply between the UK and Belgian ports. Belgium's main international ferry port is **Zeebrugge**, just outside Bruges, with ferries from Hull (15hr) and Rosyth (20hr). Ferry companies provide bus connections from the port to the train station. Transeuropa ferries run from Ramsgate to the resort town of **Ostend** (4hr), from where trains to Bruges take fifteen minutes.

3

GETTING AROUND

Travelling around Flanders is easy. Distances are short, and an efficient train network links all the major and many minor towns and villages. The Ardennes and Luxembourg, on the other hand, can be more problematic: the train network is not extensive and bus timetables can demand careful study for longer journeys.

BY TRAIN

Belgium's railway system ([www.belgianrail.be](http://belgianrail.be)) – SNCB in French, NMBS in Flemish – is comprehensive and efficient, and fares are comparatively low. If you are under 26, don't have an InterRail or Eurail pass, and are spending some time in Belgium, ask for the **Go-Pass 10**, which buys you ten journeys between any Belgian stations for €51. (If you are planning on travelling from Belgium to Luxembourg and have a Go-Pass 10, use the pass to get to the Belgian border town of Arlon and buy an extension from there.) SNCB/NMBS also publishes information on offers and services in their comprehensive timetable book, which has an English-language section and is available at major train stations.

Luxembourg's railways (www.cfl.lu) comprise one main north–south route down the middle of the country, with a handful of branch lines fanning out from the capital. There are a number of passes

available, giving unlimited train (and bus) travel.

BY BUS

In Belgium **buses** are only really used for travelling short distances, or in parts of the Ardennes where rail lines fizz out. They're used more in Luxembourg, due to the limited rail network. RGTR (mobiliteit.lu) has routes across the country. Fares are comparable to those in Belgium.

BY BIKE

The modest distances and flat terrain make **cycling** in Belgium an attractive proposition, though only in the countryside is there a decent network of signposted cycle routes. You can take your own bike on a train for a small fee, or rent one from any of around thirty train stations during the summer at about €10 per day. In Luxembourg you can rent bikes for around €10 a day, and take your own bike on trains (not buses) for a minimal fee per journey. The Luxembourg Tourist Office has leaflets showing cycle routes and also sells cycling guides.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is one of the major expenses on a trip to Belgium or Luxembourg but there are some **budget alternatives**, principally no-frills hotels, private rooms (effectively B&Bs) and plenty of good hostels. Whichever accommodation you choose, it's best to book ahead, especially in peak season.

In both countries, prices begin at around €60 for a double room in the cheapest one-star **hotel**; breakfast is normally included. Reservations can be made online or (for free) through most tourist offices on the day itself; the deposit they require is subtracted from your final hotel bill. **Private rooms** can be booked through local tourist offices too. Expect to pay €60–90 a night for a double, but note that they're often inconveniently situated on the outskirts of cities and towns. An exception is in Bruges, where private rooms – many of them in the centre – can be booked direct.

Belgium has around thirty HI hostels, run by two separate organizations: *Vlaamse Jeugdherbergcentrale* in Flanders (032 32 72 18, jeugdherbergen.be), and *Jeunesse de Wallonie* in Wallonia (022 19 56 76, lesaubergesdejeunesse.be). Most charge a flat rate per person of €19–25 for a bed in a dormitory or €60 for a double room, most with breakfast included. Some also offer lunch and dinner for €7–12. If you buy a yearly HI e-membership card (€11.52) you get a ten percent discount on your accommodation. Some of the more touristy cities such as Bruges, Antwerp and Brussels also have **privately run hostels**, which normally charge about €22 for a dorm bed. There are ten HI hostels in Luxembourg, all of which are members of the *Centrale des Auberges de Jeunesse Luxembourgeoises* (026 27 66 200, youthhostels.lu). Dorm bed rates for HI members are around €20, with non-members paying an extra €3. Breakfast is always included; lunch or dinner is €6–10.

In Belgium, there are hundreds of **campsites**, anything from a field with a few tent pitches through to extensive complexes. The vast majority are simpler one- and two-star establishments, for which two adults with a tent can expect to pay €20–30 per night; surprisingly, most four-star sites don't cost much more – add about €5. All Luxembourg's campsites are detailed in the Duchy's free tourist office booklet. Prices vary considerably, but are usually €5–7 per person, plus €5–7 for a pitch. In both countries, campsite phone numbers are listed in free camping booklets, and in Luxembourg the national tourist board (042 82 82 10, visitluxembourg.com) will make a reservation on your behalf.

STUDENT AND YOUTH DISCOUNTS

Most museums and galleries offer substantial discounts to those under 26, even if you don't have an ISIC card. Train travel is also cheaper for travellers aged under 26 if you buy a **Go-Pass 10** (see opposite).

FOOD AND DRINK

One of the great pleasures of a trip to **Belgium** is the cuisine, and if you stay away from tourist spots, it's hard to go wrong. Southern Belgian (or Wallonian) cuisine is similar to traditional French, with a fondness for rich sauces and ingredients. The Ardennes region is renowned for its smoked ham and pâté. **Luxembourg's food** is less varied and more Germanic, but you can still eat out extremely well.

In Flanders the food is more akin to that of the Netherlands, with steak and French fries the most common dish. Throughout Belgium, pork, beef, game, fish and seafood (mussels) are staple items, often cooked with butter, cream and herbs, or sometimes in beer; hearty soups are also common. *Hesprolletjes* (chicory and ham baked in a cheese sauce) and *stoemp* (puréed meat and vegetables) are two traditional dishes worth seeking out. Traditional Flemish dishes such as *waterzooi*, or “watery mess” (fish or chicken stew), and *carbonnade* (beef casserole) are also widely available. There are plenty of good **vegetarian** options too, such as quiche and salad, and you can find vegetarian restaurants in all of the larger cities.

In both countries, **bars** and **cafés** are a good source of inexpensive meals, especially at lunchtime when simple dishes – omelettes, steak, mussels – are offered as a dish of the day (*plat du jour/dagschotel*) for around €12. **Restaurants** are usually pricier, but the food is generally excellent. **Frituurs** (stands serving chips) are ubiquitous, cheap, and usually offer a variety of hot sauces, such as *stoofvlees* (beer-soaked beef).

Belgium is also renowned for its **chocolate**. The big *chocolatiers*, Godiva and Leonidas, have shops in all the main towns and cities, but high-quality chocolate is also available in supermarkets at a much lower price – try the Jacques or Côte d'Or brands.

Beer in Belgium is a real treat. Beyond the common lager brands – Stella Artois, Jupiler and Maes – there are about seven hundred speciality beers, from dark stouts to fruit beers, wheat beers and brown ales. The most famous are the strong ales brewed by the country's six **Trappist**

LANGUAGE

There are three official languages in **Belgium**: Dutch, French and German. Speaking French in the Flemish north is not appreciated, and vice versa. Most Belgians speak English. Natives of **Luxembourg** speak *Letzebuergesch*, a dialect of German, but most people also speak French and German and many speak English too. See p.280, p.357 and p.778 for some basic French, German and Dutch language tips.

3

monasteries; Chimay is the most widely available. Luxembourg doesn't really compete, but its three most popular brews – Diekirch, Mousel and Bofferding – complement the food wonderfully.

French **wines** are universally sold, but Luxembourg's wines, especially the *crémant* (sparkling wine), produced along the north bank of the Moselle, are light and refreshing. You'll also find Dutch-style **jenever** (similar to gin) in most bars in the north of Belgium, and in Luxembourg home-produced **eau-de-vie**, distilled from various fruits.

CULTURE AND ETIQUETTE

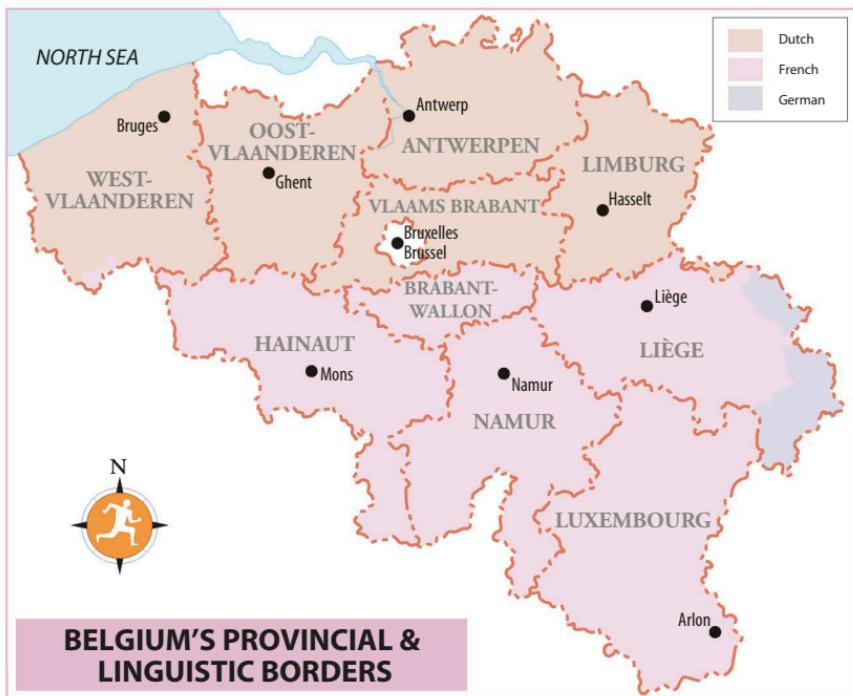
It's nearly impossible to make a faux pas among the Belgians – they're a relaxed bunch who take life at a leisurely pace (so don't be offended if a barman finishes polishing the glasses before serving you). Leave a ten percent tip in restaurants, and greet acquaintances with three kisses, not two.

SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

The Ardennes is ideal for hiking, kayaking, cycling and horseriding (see p.110 for operators); cross-country skiing is also an option. La Roche-en-Ardenne and Bouillon make excellent bases in Belgium, while in Luxembourg the towns of Vianden and Echternach – each about an hour from Luxembourg City – are popular destinations for hikers and cyclists.

COMMUNICATIONS

Post offices are usually open Monday to Friday 9am–noon and 2–5pm. Some



EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Belgium Police 101; fire and ambulance 100.

Luxembourg Police 113; fire and ambulance 112.

urban post offices also open on Saturday mornings. Many **public phones** take only phonecards, which are available from newsagents and post offices. **Internet** access is widespread, with more and more hostels, hotels and cafés offering free **wi-fi**.

EMERGENCIES

Both countries are safe. However, if you're unlucky enough to have something **stolen**, report it immediately to the nearest police station and get a report number – or better still a copy of the statement itself – for your insurance claim when you get home. With regard to **medical emergencies**, if you're reliant on free treatment within the EU health scheme, try to remember to make this clear to the ambulance staff and any medics you subsequently encounter. Outside working hours, all **pharmacies** should display a list of open alternatives in their window. Weekend rotas are also listed in local newspapers.

INFORMATION

In both Belgium and Luxembourg, there are **tourist offices** even in the smallest of villages. They usually provide free local maps, and the larger towns offer a free accommodation booking service too.

BELGIUM AND LUXEMBOURG ONLINE

visitflanders.co.uk Information on Brussels and the Flanders region.

belgiumtheplace.to.be Information on Brussels and southern Belgium.

visitluxembourg.com The Luxembourg tourist board's official site.

use-it.be Excellent online guide for young travellers on Brussels and the Flanders region.

MONEY AND BANKS

Belgium and Luxembourg both use the **euro** (€). **Banks** are the best places to change money and are generally open Monday to Friday 9am–4/4.30pm in both countries, though some have a one-hour lunch break between noon and 2pm, and some close after lunch on Friday. **ATMs** are commonplace.

OPENING HOURS AND HOLIDAYS

In both countries, most shops close on Sunday (except in tourist towns), with some only reopening on Monday afternoon, even in major cities.

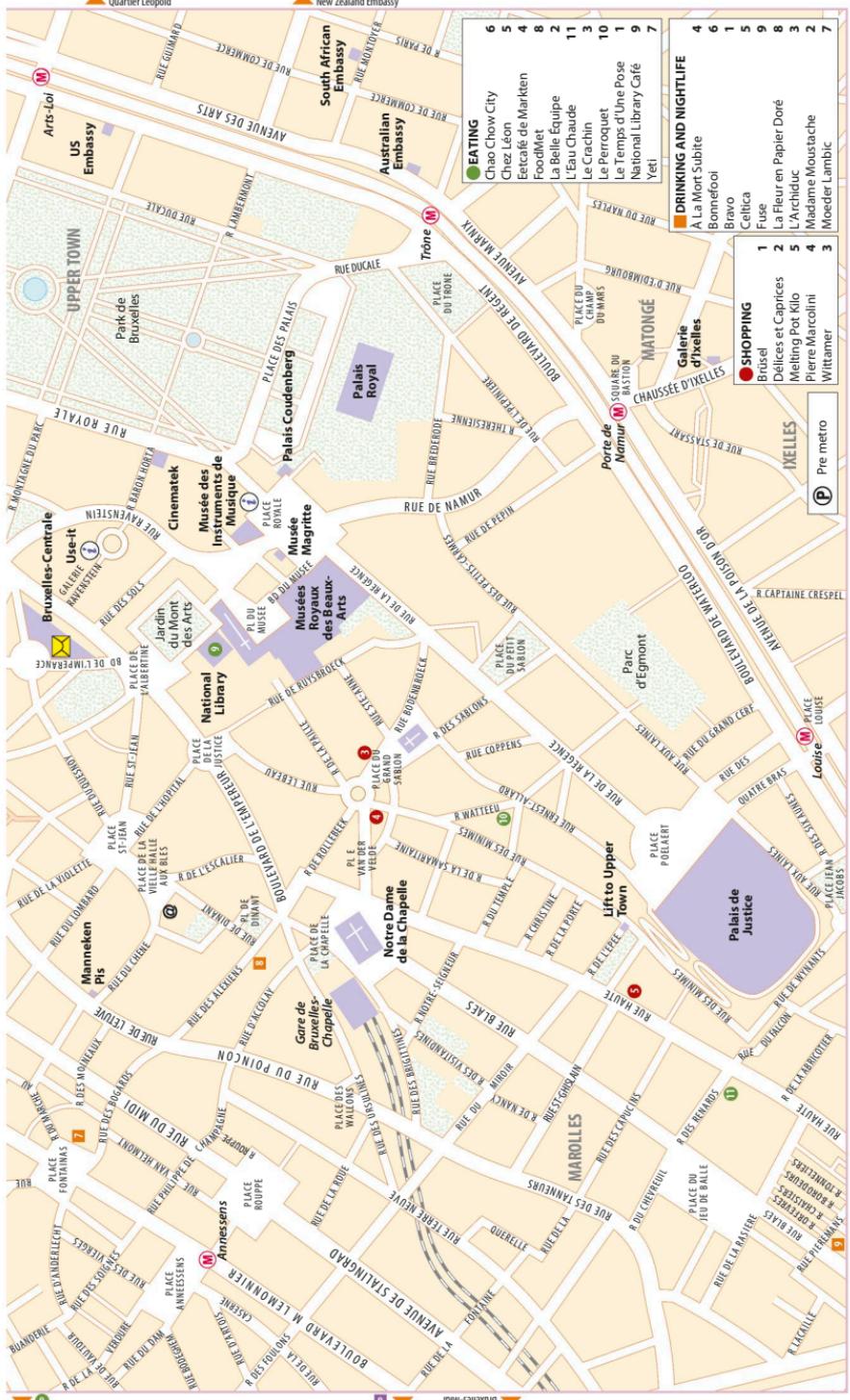
Nonetheless, normal **shopping hours** are Monday to Saturday 9 or 10am to 6 or 7pm, with many urban supermarkets staying open until 8 or 9pm on Fridays. In the big cities, a smattering of convenience stores (*magasins de nuit/nachtwinkels*) stay open either all night or until around 1 or 2am daily, and some souvenir shops open late and on Sundays too. Most **museums** are closed on Mondays, though look out for occasional late-night openings, especially in Brussels. Restaurants also often close on Mondays. Many **bars** have relaxed closing times, claiming to stay open until the last customer leaves. Less usefully, many restaurants and bars close for at least a couple of weeks in July or August.

Shops, banks and many museums are closed on the following **public holidays**: New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, May 1, Ascension Day (forty days after Easter), Whit Sunday, Whit Monday, June 23 (Luxembourg only), July 21 (Belgium only), Assumption (mid-Aug), November 1, November 11 (Belgium only), Christmas Day.

3

Brussels

Belgium's capital **BRUSSELS** (Bruxelles, Brussel) boasts an exciting mish-mash of modern museums, a well-preserved medieval centre and an energetic nightlife. Since World War II, the city's appointment as headquarters of both



NATO and the EU has made it very much an international city – though one that has little interest in being “branché” (trendy). The city's appeal certainly isn't as immediate as that of its neighbours Ghent and Bruges – and yet a day or two of wandering around reveals rooftop gardens, summer beach parties and vintage markets that make it so much more than the “poor man's Paris”.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Central Brussels is enclosed within a pentagon of boulevards – the **petit ring** – which follows the course of the medieval city walls. The centre is also divided between the Upper Town and Lower Town, the former being the traditional home of the city's upper classes who kept a beady eye on the workers down below.

3

The Grand-Place

The obvious point to begin any tour of the **Lower Town** is the **Grand-Place**, the commercial hub of the city since the Middle Ages. With its stupendous spired tower, the **Hôtel de Ville** dominates the square; inside you can view various official rooms (tours in English: Wed 2pm, Sun 11am, 3pm & 4pm; €5). But the real glory of the Grand-Place lies in its **guildhouses**, mostly built in the early eighteenth century, their slender facades swirling with exuberant carving and sculpture.

The Manneken Pis

Rue de l'Etuve leads south from the Grand-Place down to the **Manneken Pis**, a statue of a little boy pissing that's supposed to embody the city's irreverent spirit, and is today one of Brussels' biggest tourist draws. The original statue was cast in the 1600s, but was stolen several times – the current one is a copy.

Notre Dame de la Chapelle and the Quartier Marolles

Across boulevard de l'Empereur, a busy carriageway that scars this part of the centre, you'll spy the crumbling brickwork of **La Tour Anneessens**, a remnant of the medieval city wall, while

to the south gleams the immaculately restored **Notre Dame de la Chapelle** (Mon–Fri 9am–6.30pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6.30pm; free), a sprawling Romanesque-Gothic structure founded in 1134 and the city's oldest church. Running south from the church, rue Haute and parallel rue Blaes form the spine of the now gentrified **Quartier Marolles**, traditionally a working-class neighbourhood overlooked by the enormous, scaffold-clad **Palais de Justice**. **Place du Jeu de Balle**, the heart of Marolles, has retained its earthy character and is the site of the city's best **flea market** (daily 7am–2pm; busiest on Sun). Return to the Upper Town using the free glass-walled lift at the junction of rue des Minimes and rue de l'Epee, which drops you off in place Poelaert and offers a panorama of the city.

The Cathédrale

The **Cathédrale** (Mon–Fri 7.30am–6pm, Sat 7.30am–3.30pm, Sun 2–6pm; €1) lies a couple of minutes' walk to the east of the Grand-Place, at the east end of rue d'Arenberg. It's a splendid Brabantine-Gothic building begun in 1220. Look out also for the gorgeous sixteenth-century **stained-glass windows** in the transepts and above the main doors.

Place Royale

Climb the Mont des Arts – a wide stairway ascending towards **place Royale** – and on the left is the **Old England Building**, one of the finest examples of Art Nouveau in the city. Once a department store, it now holds the **Musée des Instruments de Musique**, at rue Montagne de la Cour 2 (MIM; Tues–Fri 9.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; €8, 19–25s €6; mim.be), which contains an impressive collection of musical instruments and a rooftop café with great views of the city. Back on place Royale, at rue de la Régence 3, the **Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts** (Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 11am–6pm; €13, free first Wed of month from 1pm; fine-arts-museum.be) comprises three interconnecting museums: the **Musée d'Art Ancien** displays art from the

Renaissance to the early nineteenth century, including works by Brueghel and Rubens; the **Musée Fin-de-Siècle** covers art from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century; while the **Musée Magritte** is devoted solely to the work of the Belgian Surrealist.

Northeast of the place Royale, on place des Palais, the haunting remains of the twelfth-century **Palais Coudenberg** (July & Aug Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; Sept–June Tues–Fri 9.30am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; €6; www.coudenberg.com), once home to Emperor Charles V, can be found beneath the BELvue museum.

Outside the petit ring

Brussels by no means ends with the petit ring. To the east of the ring road are the glass high-rises of the EU, notably the winged **Berlaymont** building beside métro Schuman and, nearby, on rue Wiertz 60, the lavish **European Union Parliament** building, which houses the **Parlementarium** (Mon 1–6pm, Tues–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; free), an interactive multimedia visitors' centre explaining the complex workings of parliament.

Just south of the petit ring is the fashionable Ixelles district, filled with excellent examples of Art Nouveau and Art Deco architecture, as well as chic bars and restaurants. Its northern boundary is home to a large African community known as **Matongé**, named after a district

COMICS IN BRUSSELS

Brussels is a city made for comic book fans. The **Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée** at 20 rue des Sables (Comic Strip Museum; daily 10am–6pm; €10, ISIC and IYHF card holders €7; www.cbdb.be) focuses on Belgian comics such as Tintin, Smurfs and so on. For shopping, head to **boulevard Lemonnier** which boasts ten comic book shops, or Multi BD at boulevard Anspach 122 (Mon–Sat 10.30am–7pm, Sun 12.30–6.30pm). Various walls around the city have been decorated with building-sized scenes from comic strips, and tourist information can supply you with a trail following the major ones.

of Kinshasa in the Congo. Here you can explore the shops of **Galerie d'Ixelles** and sample fried plantain from one of the cafés on rue Longue Vie. To the southwest is the Saint-Gilles suburb where, at 25 rue Américaine, the **Musée Victor Horta** (Tues–Sun 2–5.30pm; €10, students €5; hortamuseum.be) occupies the innovative Art Nouveau architect's former home.

In the northern municipality of Schaerbeek, the new **Train World** museum, at place Princesse Elisabeth 5 (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €10, student €7.50; trainworld.be) is a must for train geeks: it's far from dull, however, with unique film footage, props galore and a chance to sleep in a train (see p.98).

To the west of the city centre, at 39–41 Quai du Hainaut, is the new **Mima** (Wed–Sun 10am–6pm; €9.50; mimamuseum.eu), Brussels' version of the Tate Modern, showcasing thought-provoking contemporary art inside a former brewery.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By plane The main airport is in Zaventem (www.brusselsairport.be), 13km northeast of the centre. Trains to the city centre depart every 15min from Level -1 (20min; €8.50). No-frills airlines – principally Ryanair – fly into Charleroi (charleroi-airport.com), 55km south of Brussels; shuttle buses leave every 30min for Bruxelles-Midi (1hr; €14 one-way).

By train Brussels has three main train stations – Bruxelles-Nord, Bruxelles-Central and Bruxelles-Midi, each a few minutes apart. Most international trains, including express trains from London, Amsterdam, Paris and Cologne, stop only at Bruxelles-Midi (Brussel-Zuid), roughly 2km southwest of the city centre. Bruxelles-Central is a 5min walk from Grand-Place; Bruxelles-Nord lies in the business area just north of the main ring-road. To transfer from one of the three main stations to another, simply jump on the next available main-line train. Travellers with Eurostar "Any Belgian Station" tickets can do so for free, otherwise you'll have to buy a new ticket.

Destinations Amsterdam CS (hourly; 2hr 30min); Antwerp (every 20–30min; 40min); Bruges (every 30min; 1hr); Ghent (every 30min; 30min); London (every 2hr; 1hr 50min); Luxembourg City (hourly; 3hr); Namur (hourly; 1hr); Ostend (every 30min; 1hr 10min); Paris (hourly; 1hr 30min).

By bus Eurolines (eurolines.co.uk) buses from London-Victoria arrive and depart at the Bruxelles-Nord station complex.

BRUSSELS ONLINE

Spottedbylocals.com/brussels

Recommendations for places to eat and visit from local residents.

Bruxelleslabelle.com Brussels local shares her favourite haunts from clothes shops to the best burger bars.

Mysecretbrussels.com Insider's guide to the city by longtime Brussels resident and journalist Derek Blyth.

3

INFORMATION

Tourist office VisitBrussels provides information and runs a free same-night hotel booking service. It has offices at rue Royale 2 (daily 9am–6pm; **02 513 89 40**, visit.brussels), in the Hôtel de Ville on the Grand-Place (daily 9am–6pm) and in the European Parliament (Mon 2–6pm, Tues–Thurs 9am–2pm), with smaller offices on the main concourse of the Bruxelles-Midi train station (daily 10am–6pm) and in the arrivals hall at Zaventem airport (daily 6am–9pm). There's also a Visit Flanders information centre near the Grand-Place at rue du Marché aux Herbes 61 (daily: April–Sept 10am–6pm; Oct–March 10am–5pm; Sat & Sun closes 1–2pm). Pick up an Art Nouveau or comic strip trail map for free at any of these offices. Use-It has an info desk at Galerie Ravenstein 25 (Mon–Sat 10am–6.30pm; brussels.use-it.travel) with free wi-fi and maps tailored for younger travellers (best bars, etc).

Discount cards All the tourist offices and some museums sell the Brussels Card, which grants free entry to over 30 museums, free use of public transport, and discounts in selected bars and shops. It costs €22/30/38 for 1/2/3 days.

Listings Buzz, published weekly in English and stocked in tourist offices, has concert, film and exhibition listings. Agenda is a useful English-language listings magazine, available free in many hostels, hotels and shops. Use-It annotated maps, free in hostels and tourist information offices, are also extremely helpful.

GETTING AROUND

Central Brussels is easily walkable, but to reach some of the outlying attractions you'll need public transport. The system, called STIB (stib-mivb.be), includes bus, tram, métro and pré métro (underground trams) lines. Services run from 6am until midnight, after which night buses take over. A single flat-rate ticket costs €2.10 if bought before you travel from kiosks or ticket machines, or €2.50 from the driver (bus, pré métro or tram only). Alternatively, buy a MOBIB card (€5), and add a JUMP ticket to it, available for 24/48/72hr and costing €7.50/14/18.

By taxi Hire a taxi from ranks around the city – notably outside the train stations, on Bourse and place de

Brouckère; to book, phone Taxis Verts (**02 349 49 49**). After 10pm, you pay an initial €4.40 and then €1.66/km.

By bike Villo! the city bike rental scheme, allows you to pick up a bike at 180 locations around the city centre and drop it off elsewhere at a very cheap rate. Full details are on villo.be and in the *Train & Vélo* leaflet (available at stations).

ACCOMMODATION

HOSTELS

2go4 bd Emile Jacmainlaan 99 **02 219 30 19**, 2go4.be; [Rogier/De Brouckère](http://rogier.de). Excellent hostel with helpful staff. TV snug and kitchen are bright and trendily decorated with vintage finds, though the communal rooms and reception are closed 1–4pm. Breakfast not included, but you can help yourself to free hot drinks. Large groups (of over six) not admitted. Dorms **€18**

Brxxl 5 Woeringenstraat 5 **02 02 37 100**, brxxl5.com. New hotel/hostel ten minutes' walk from Midi-Zuid station. All en-suite rooms have a/c, free wi-fi and flatscreen TVs. No breakfast, vending machines. Dorms **€18**, doubles **€55**

Grand Place Hostel Haringstraat 6–8 **02 219 30 19**, 2go4.be; [Bourse/Gare Centrale](http://bourse/garecentrale). Situated on a side street just off the Grand-Place, this is the best-located hostel in the city. Dorms are finished to a high standard and the en-suite bathrooms are positively luxurious. Kitchen available. Bedding is included, but no breakfast. Dorms **€18**

Hello Hostel rue de l'Armistice 1 **0471 93 59 27**, hello-hostel.eu; [Simonis](http://simonis). Snug, homely option in the northwest of town, just outside the petit ring. Breakfast area doubles as a common room and there are games, books and a huge DVD collection. No laundry and doesn't accept groups of more than six, but bedding and breakfast are included. Dorms **€21**, doubles **€55**

Jacques Brel rue de la Sablonnière 30 **02 218 01 87**, lesaubergesdejeunesse.be; [Botanique](http://botanique). Comfortable HI hostel with a mix of en-suite dorm rooms. The free organic breakfast is served in a fresh, bright communal area. Laundry, games and *Babel Bar* (daily 7am–1am) serving snacks and good beers. Bedding included. Rates cheaper for under-26s. Dorms **€24**, doubles **€56**

Meininger quai du Hainaut 33 **02 025 88 14 74**, meininger-hotels.com. Brilliant new hotel/hostel inside a former red-brick brewery. Carbon neutral and with loft-style rooms, there's lots of art, exposed brick walls and a trendy bar. Family rooms too. Pets allowed. Dorms **€16**, doubles **€134**

Train Hostel ave Georges Rodenbach 6 **02 808 61 76**, trainhostel.be; tram #92 to Gare de Schaerbeek. A hostel inside a train! Attached to the new Train World museum (see p.97) at Schaerbeek, 30min north of the centre, this quirky hostel has dorms kitted out with authentic railway fittings including old dial-up telephones.

It's worth upgrading to a cabin or suite to sleep in an authentic railway carriage. Dorms €25, doubles €99.

HOTELS

Theater Hotel rue van Gaver 23 ☎ 02 350 90 00, theaterhotelbrussels.com; Ⓜ Yser. It might be in the red-light district, but the excellent rooms at this hip boutique hotel mean you soon forget the seedy setting. Doubles €60.

EATING

Brussels has an international reputation for its food, and even at the dowdiest snack bar you'll find well-prepared *Bruxellois* dishes featuring fusions of Walloon and Flemish cuisine. FoodMet at rue Ropsy Chaudron 24, to the left of Anderlecht Abattoir (Fri–Sun 7am–2pm; foodmet.brussels), is a new food market, ideal for picnic supplies.

CAFÉS

Etcafé de Markten place du Vieux Marché aux Grains 5; Ⓜ Ste-Catherine. Vibrant café offering good-quality hearty salads, sandwiches and soups at very reasonable prices. Mon–Sat 8.30am–midnight, Sun 10am–6pm.

L'Eau Chaude rue de Renards 25 leauchaude.be. Fill up at this cooperative vegetarian canteen where a plat du jour costs €9 during the week and €11 on Sundays. Breakfast available too. Thurs–Sun 10am–6pm.

National Library Café bd de l'Empereur 2 ☎ 02 51 95 311. A secret spot that's calm not chic. The food is simple and cheap, but the views of the Hotel de Ville and an organic rooftop garden selling its produce (Mon, Wed & Fri 1–2pm) make it a real gem. Mon–Fri 9am–4pm.

Yeti rue de Bon Secours 4–6 iloveyeti.be; Ⓜ Bourse. Eco-conscious café which uses only organic, local and/or Fairtrade products. Good breakfasts, sandwiches (€6), teas and popular for Sunday brunch. Thurs–Sat 9am–10pm, Sun 10am–5pm.

RESTAURANTS

Chao Chow City bd Anspach 89; Ⓜ Bourse. Chinese food never came so cheap! Offers two dishes for either €4 at lunchtime or €6 in the evening. Options are typed up and posted on a piece of paper in the window. Daily noon–midnight.

Chez Léon rue des Bouchers 18 nl.chezleon.be; Ⓜ Bruxelles-Central. Touristy, but worth a visit for their reliably tasty mussels. Ask for the Formule Leon which includes 500g of mussels, chips and a beer for a bargain €16. Daily 11.30am–11pm.

La Belle Équipe rue Antoine Dansaert 202 ☎ 02 502 11 02; Ⓜ Porte de Flandre. Authentic pizzeria which specializes in gourmet toppings (pizzas around €12). Everyone dines on one long bar top. Delivery service available. Daily 9am–10pm.

Le Crachin rue de Flandre 12 lecrachin.net; Ⓜ Ste-Catherine. Breton crêperie serving home-made sweet and savoury buckwheat pancakes and mugs of cider. Mains €12. Mon–Fri noon–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm, Sat & Sun noon–10.30pm.

Le Perroquet rue Watteeu 31; Ⓜ Louise. Come to this lively Art Nouveau café where they serve up good-value pittas and salads (€7–14). Tues–Sat noon–11.30pm, Mon & Sun noon–10.30pm.

Le Temps d'Une Pose rue de Laeken 116 letempsdunepose.be. Cracking local restaurant run by Sandrine who dishes up Belgian classics such as *stoemp* for €9, or the dish of the day for €8. Mon–Fri 7am–6pm.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

Brussels' bars are a joy. St-Géry, just to the west of Bourse, is the place to drink, especially during summer when bars spill out into the square. Rue du Marché au Charbon is the hub of gay nightlife.

BARS

À La Mort Subite rue Montagne aux Herbes Potagères 7 alamortsuite.com; Ⓜ Gare Centrale. Atmospheric 1920s bar, famous for its Gueuze and Kriek beers. Mon–Sat 11am–1am, Sun noon–midnight.

Bonnefooi rue des Pierres 8 bonnefooi.be; Prémétro Bourse. Live music every night at this hip bar and a great atmosphere in summer when the crowds mingle on the street. Mon–Thurs & Sun 4pm–4am, Fri & Sat 4pm–8am.

★ Bravo rue d'Alost 7 bravobxl.com. Industrial-style café that hides a banging basement jazz club where concerts are held almost daily: it also serves tapas (€4–9). Mon–Fri 9am–late, Sat & Sun 10.30am–late.

Celtica rue du Marché aux Poulets 55 celticpubs.com; Prémétro Bourse. Football on big screens, DJs playing nightly from 11pm and the cheapest happy-hour prices in town – Trappist monastery beers just €3, beer on tap €1 1pm–midnight. Daily 1pm–late.

★ La Fleur en Papier Doré rue des Alexiens 55 lafleurenpapierdore.be; Ⓜ Gare Centrale. Traditional Belgian "brown" bar that was a favourite haunt of Hergé and Magritte. Serves Lambic beer the traditional way, in ceramic mugs. Tues–Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 11am–7pm.

L'Archiduc rue Antoine Dansaert 6 archiduc.net; Prémétro Bourse. A pioneer of jazz in Belgium, this legendary Art Deco bar really gets going around midnight, earlier at weekends (5–7pm) – ring the doorbell to get in. Check out the beautiful purple Cointreau Teese cocktail created by burlesque artist Dita Von Teese. Daily 4pm–5am.

Moeder Lambic place Fontainas 8 moederlambic.com; Prémétro Anneessens. Excellent place to try Belgium's many brews, with 46 beers on tap, including Brussels-brewed Cantillon – all served to you in snug wooden booths. Mon–Thurs & Sun 11am–1am, Fri & Sat 11am–2am.

CLUBS

Fuse rue Blaes 208 [fuse.be](#); [Gare du Midi](#). Get out your glow sticks at Belgium's finest techno club, which hosts some of the world's top DJs. Entry €58 before midnight, €12 after. Sat 11pm–7am.

Madame Moustache quai aux Brûler 5–7, [madamemoustache.be](#). Hosts live bands from indie to garage and is very fond of a themed dance evening. Entry €5, €7 after midnight. Tues–Sat 8pm–4am.

SHOPPING

Aside from the Marolles flea market (see p.96), rue Blaes and rue Haute are lined with a mix of affordable and expensive antiques shops. High-street labels can be found on and around rue Neuve.

3

Brüsel blvd Anspach 100 [brusel.com](#). Comic shop that stocks more than 8,000 new comic issues and specializes in French underground editions. Mon–Sat 10.30am–6.30pm, Sun noon–6.30pm.

Délices et Caprices rue des Bouchers 68, [the-belgian-beer-tasting-shop.be](#). Central shop selling speciality beers. The owner, Pierre, can help you navigate through the hundreds of different brews on offer. Thurs–Mon 2–8pm.

Melting Pot Kilo rue Haute 154. Ladies roll up your sleeves – here you can rummage through piles of vintage clothes and pay just €15 per kilo. Daily 10am–6pm.

Pierre Marcolini rue des Minimes 1 (pl du Grand Sablon). Multi award-winning *chocolatier* renowned for his very posh, pretty and pricey "haute" creations and inventive flavour combinations. Mon–Thurs & Sun 10am–7pm, Fri & Sat 10am–8pm.

Wittamer pl du Grand Sablon 12. Esteemed *pâtissier* and *chocolatier* that's been around since 1910 and boasts the royal stamp of approval. Mon 9am–6pm, Tues–Sat 7am–7pm, Sun 7am–6.30pm.

DIRECTORY

Embassies Australia, av des Arts 56 [02 286 05 00](#)
[Trone](#); Canada, av de Tervuren 2 [02 741 06 11](#)
[Merode](#); Ireland, chaussée d'Etterbeek 180 [02 282 34 00](#) [Schuman](#); New Zealand, 7th Floor, av des Nerviens 9–31 [02 512 10 40](#) [Schuman](#); South Africa, rue Montoyer 17–19 [02 285 44 00](#) [Trone](#); UK, av d'Auderghem 10 [02 287 62 11](#) [Schuman](#); USA, bd du Régent 27 [02 811 40 00](#) [Arts-Loi/Kunst-Wet](#).

Left luggage Self-service lockers at all three main train stations.

Pharmacy Multipharma, rue du Marché aux Poulets 37 ([02 511 35 90](#); Mon–Fri 9.30am–6.30pm, Sat 10am–6pm).

Post office Gare du Midi, exit rue Fonsy (Mon–Fri 8am–7.30pm, Sat 10.30am–4.30pm).

Northern Belgium

Almost entirely **Flemish-speaking**, the region to the north of Brussels has a distinctive and vibrant cultural identity, its pancake-flat landscapes punctuated by a string of fine historic cities. These begin with **Antwerp**, a large old port that flourished during the sixteenth century and is now Flanders' most forward-thinking city, followed by **Ghent** and **Bruges**, which became prosperous during the Middle Ages on the back of the cloth trade. All three cities have great restaurants and a lively bar scene.

ANTWERP

ANTWERP, Belgium's second city, and the de facto capital of Flemish Belgium, fans out from the east bank of the Scheldt River about 50km north of Brussels. Many people prefer it to the capital; it is an immediately attractive place, famous for Rubens, fashion, diamonds and the best nightlife in Belgium.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

At the centre of Antwerp is the spacious **Grote Markt**, where the conspicuous **Brabo fountain** features a bronze of Silvius Brabo, the city's first hero, depicted flinging the hand of the giant Antigonus – who terrorized passing ships – into the Scheldt. The north side of Grote Markt is lined with daintily restored sixteenth-century **guildhouses**, while the west is hogged by the handsome **Stadhuis (Town Hall)**.

Onze Lieve Vrouwe Kathedraal

Southeast of Grote Markt, the **Onze Lieve Vrouwe Kathedraal** (Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 10am–3pm, Sun 1–4pm; €6; [dekathedraal.be](#)) is one of the finest Gothic churches in Europe, dating from the middle of the fifteenth century. Four paintings by Rubens, including his masterpieces *Elevation of the Cross* and *Descent from the Cross*, are displayed here.



ANTWERP

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (closed until 2018) &

Plantin-Moretus Museum

The newly refurbished UNESCO-listed **Plantin-Moretus Museum** at Vrijdagmarkt 22–23 (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €8; museumplantinmoretus.be) occupies the grand old mansion of Rubens' father-in-law, the printer Christopher Plantin. It provides a beautiful, richly decorated setting for two of the oldest printing presses in the world.

MoMu and Museum voor Schone Kunsten

In the heart of the city's fashion quarter along Nationalestraat, **MoMu** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €8; momu.be) showcases some of the avant-garde fashion for which the city is famous, with displays ranging from sixteenth-century lace dresses to pieces by Dries van Noten.

About fifteen minutes' walk further south at Leopold de Waelplaats, the **Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten** (Royal Museum of Fine Arts; kmska.be) has one of the country's best fine-art collections: it's currently closed for renovation (check website for the latest reopening date).

North of the Grote Markt

The impressively gabled **Vleeshuis** (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €5) is a short walk north of the Grote Markt. Built for the guild of butchers in 1503 and distinguished by its striped brickwork, it now holds a permanent exhibition covering 600 years of music and dance. Just north of here, along Vleeshouwersstraat, the elegant nave at the sixteenth-century **St Pauluskerk** (April–Oct Mon–Sat 2–5pm, Nov–Mar Sat–Sun 2–5pm; free) is decorated by a series of paintings depicting the Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary, including Rubens' exquisite *Scourging at the Pillar* of 1617.

Rubenshuis and St Jacobskerk

Ten minutes' walk east of the Grote Markt is the **Rubenshuis**, at Wapper 9 (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €8; rubenshuis.be); the former home and studio of Rubens, it's now restored as a very popular museum. On his death in 1640, Rubens was buried in the chapel behind the high altar at **St Jacobskerk**, just to the north at Lange Nieuwstraat 73.

(April–Oct daily 2–5pm; €3). The church features one of his last works, *Our Lady Surrounded by Saints*, featuring himself as St George, his two wives as Martha and Mary, and his father as St Jerome.

Het Eilandje

The docks north of the city centre are home to **MAS** (Museum aan de Stroom; Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm, last entry 1hr before closing time; permanent collection €5, temporary exhibitions €10, free entry last Wed of every month; mas.be), which brings together the collections of the former Ethnographic, National Shipping and Folklore museums in a dynamic display spread over floors four to eight. The top floor offers superb panoramic views of the city. Nearby at Montevideostraat 3, the **Red Star Line Museum** (Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; €8; redstarline.org) explores the lives and journeys taken by families sailing on the Red Star Line ocean liners which departed from Antwerp's docks for the USA between 1873 and 1934.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Antwerp has two main-line train stations: Berchem and Centraal. The latter, located about 2km east of the Grote Markt, is the one you want for the city centre.

Destinations Bruges (hourly; 1hr 30min); Brussels (every 20min; 45min); Ghent (every 30min; 1hr).

INFORMATION

Tourist information Grote Markt 13 (Mon–Sat 9am–5.45pm, Sun 9am–4.45pm; [03 232 01 03](tel:03230103), visitantwerpen.be). Centraal Station also has a kiosk.

Discount cards Tourist offices sell the Antwerp City Card: it costs €27/35/40 for 24/48/72hr, and grants free access to all city museums and churches, free public transport use and discounts on attractions and bike rental.

GETTING AROUND

A flat-rate one-way ticket on any part of the city's transport system costs €3; a 24hr pass (*dagpas*) is €6 (€8 on board).

By tram/metro Antwerp is easily traversed on foot, but there are very good metro and tram services covering the city. Trams #9 and #15 (direction Linkeroever) run from the tram station beside Centraal Station to the centre; get off at Groenplaats.

ACCOMMODATION

Many mid-priced and budget establishments are around Centraal Station, where you should exercise caution at night.

★Abhostel Kattenberg 110 [0473 57 01 66](tel:0473570166), abhostel.com. Chic, family-run hostel a 15min walk from the centre. Each room has cool artwork on the walls. Rooftop terrace, kitchen and lounge with DVDs. Breakfast (with eggs) included. Dorms **€20**, doubles **€50**

Alias Provinciestraat 256 [03 230 05 22](tel:032300522), aliasyouthhostel.com. Modernized hostel 2km from the centre. There's a homely TV room with adjoining breakfast room. Breakfast and bedding are included. Cash only. Dorms **€21.50**, doubles **€50**

Pulcinella Bogaardeplein 1 [03 234 03 14](tel:032340314), jeugdherbergen.be. Sleek black-and-white minimalist hostel. Four- and six-bed en-suite dorms have individual reading lights and lockers. Stylish bar downstairs but no kitchen. Breakfast and sheets included; towels €6. Dorms **€28**, doubles **€61**

Zero Star Pension Minkelersstraat [078 05 40 50](tel:078054050), hostelworld.com. Only open mid-June to Aug, this converted gas factory, 3km from the centre, offers the cheapest beds in town and includes an organic breakfast too: sheets €4 extra. Dorms **€20**

EATING

Antwerp is full of informal café-restaurants. Several of the best are clustered on Suikerrui and Grote Pieter Potstraat near the Grote Markt, and there's another concentration around Hendrik Conscienceplein. For fast food, try the kebab and falafel places on Oude Koornmarkt, or, of course, any of the *frituurs*.

CAFÉS AND SNACK BARS

★Caravan Damplein 17. The new owners here have spruced up the decor and revamped the menu to offer home-made breakfasts and lunch plus dinners with ingredients from New York to Japan. Mains €5–12. Wed–Fri 11am–11pm, Sat & Sun 10am–11pm.

Comme Soupe Hendrik Conscienceplein 11. Recommended by locals, this cute-as-a-button rustic bar serves sandwiches plus 3 different soups daily (€5), all cooked by the patron, Charlotte. Mon–Fri 11.30am–5pm, Sat 11.30am–6pm.

★TREAT YOURSELF

Wake-Up Sandwich Hoogstraat 68 [03 225 16 06](tel:032251606), wakeupsandwich.be.

Bright, well-located hotel, with breakfast in the lovely café downstairs included. The rooms sleeping four are a good deal. Book in advance in summer. Singles **€53**, doubles **€87**, quads **€120**

Fabiola Sint-Antoniussstraat 4. A rustic café with a fantastic range of croque monsieurs (€4–7). Sweet and savoury, traditional and gourmet – they're all here. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 10am–7.30pm.

Fritkot Max Groenplaats 12. It doesn't look like much but this place might just serve the best chips in town (cornets cost €3) – ideal for a quick refuel between sightseeing. Daily noon–midnight.

RESTAURANTS

De Taloorkes Lange Koepoortstraat 61. Five minutes' walk from Grote Markt but a world away from its touristy offerings, this locals' restaurant serves mouth-watering stews and mussels for €15. Sun–Wed 11am–10pm, Thurs–Sat 11am–11pm.

Kapitein Zeppos Vleminckveld 78. Named after a famous 1960s cartoon hero, this restaurant has exposed brick walls, chunky wooden tables and excellent food – the €12 *dagschotel* is great value for money. Cash only. Mon–Fri 10am–10pm, Sat–Sun 11am–11pm.

★ Native Munstraat 8. Fancy a treat? Currently the place to go, this rustic café/restaurant serves inventive organic, seasonal food for around €16 a main. Great ambience. Tues & Wed 11am–6pm, Thurs–Sat 11am–9pm.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

BARS

De Duifkens Graanmarkt 5. A great place to try local beer Bolleke Koninck. Rumour has it the former owner's ashes are stored in the urn that sits on top of the fireplace! Daily 11am–midnight.

Hopper Leopold de Waelstraat 2 ☎cafehopper.be. Best jazz bar in town, with live sessions on Mon at 9pm, Sun at 4pm and Oct–April Tues 9pm. Mon–Wed & Sun 10am–2am, Thurs–Sat 10am–3am.

Kathedraalcafé Torfbrug 10. Hard by the cathedral, this old bar is touristy but still worth visiting for the kitsch, nineteenth-century statues of the Virgin Mary that cram the interior. Daily 10am–late.

Quinten Matsijs Moriaanstraat 17. Established in 1545, this is Antwerp's oldest bar. The regal dark-wood interior is ideal for a quiet, relaxed drink of the local brew Triple d'Anvers, while the *hapjes* (appetizers) are hearty and delicious too. Wed–Sun noon–11pm.

CLUBS

Ampere Simonsstraat 21 ☎ampere-antwerp.com. Creative space beneath the railway tracks, just south of Centraal Station, that transforms into a club at weekends. They aim to mimic Berlin's underground music scene – and even have a piece of the wall to prove it. Good international DJs. Fri–Sat 11pm–7am.

Café d'Anvers Verversruij 15 ☎www.cafe-d-anvers.com. Club housed in a sixteenth-century church in the red-light

district. Mainly house music. Tickets can be bought online and range from €7–15. Thurs 11pm–6am, Fri & Sat 11pm–7.30am.

Jazzcafé De Muze Melkmarkt 15 ☎jazzcafedemuze.be. Renowned jazz bar that puts on free live performances. Mon–Sat at 10pm and Sun at 3pm. Mon–Fri 11am–1am, Sat & Sun 11am–3am.

SHOPPING

Antwerp offers superb fashion shopping. High-street labels can be found along Meir and Huidenvettersstraat, while Kammenstraat is good for vintage clothes shops. The haute-couture boutiques congregate around Nationaalstraat, Kammenstraat and Steenhoudersves. Pricy antiques and cavernous junk shops can be found along Kloosterstraat.

DIRECTORY

Left luggage Self-service lockers in the Centraal train station under the stairs.

Post office Groenplaats 43 (Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–3pm).

3

GHENT

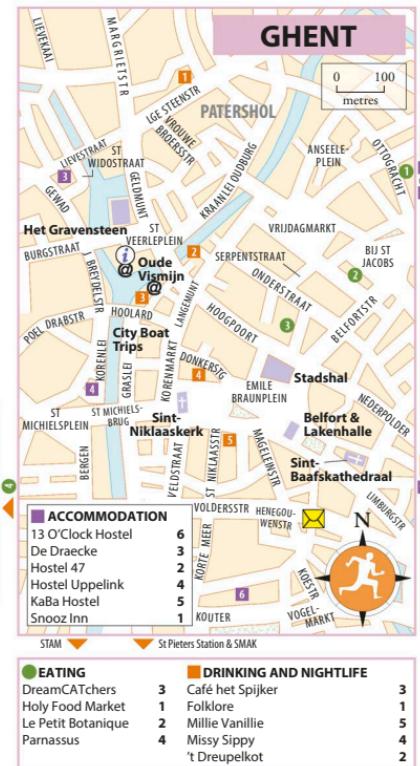
The largest town in Western Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, **GHENT** (Gent) was once at the heart of the medieval Flemish cloth trade. It's now the third-largest city in Belgium, and rivals Bruges thanks to its beautiful canals and well-preserved medieval architecture – without the stifling tourism.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

A captivating university town with a spirited nightlife and its own **castle**, Ghent's main appeal lies in wandering the cobbled streets which line the canalside and sampling the city's bars.

Sint-Baafspllein

Ghent is famous for its three towers in a row. The first of these – and the best place to start exploring – is the mainly Gothic **Sint-Baafskathedraal**, squeezed into the corner of St Baafspllein (April–Oct Mon–Sat 8.30am–6pm, Sun 1–6pm; Nov–March Mon–Sat 8.30am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm; ☎sintbaafskathedraal.be). Inside, a small chapel holds Ghent's greatest treasure, the altarpiece of the **Adoration of the Mystic Lamb** (April–Oct Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm;



Nov–March Mon–Sat 10.30am–4pm, Sun 1–4pm; €4 includes audioguide), a wonderful, early fifteenth-century painting by brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck. It's undergoing a five-year restoration, so a panel may be missing.

On the west side of St Baafsplein lurks the medieval **Lakenhalle** (Cloth Hall), a gloomy hunk of a building. One of its entrances leads to the adjoining **Belfort** (Belfry; daily 10am–6pm; €8; belfortgent.be), a much-amended edifice dating from the fourteenth century. A lift climbs up to the roof for excellent views over the city centre. St Niklaaskerk, at the western end of Emile Braunplein, completes the trio.

The Graslei and Patershol

The **Graslei** forms the eastern side of the old city harbour and is home to a splendid series of medieval guildhouses. On warm days it's packed with students sunning themselves, and is the departure point for

fifty-minute boat tours (€7 in cash) along the canals. Nearby just to the north are the narrow cobbled lanes and alleys of the **Patershol**, a pocket-sized district that was formerly home to the city's weavers, but is now Ghent's main restaurant quarter. To the west, on Sint-Veerleplein, stands **Het Gravensteen** (Castle of the Counts; April–Oct daily 10am–6pm; Nov–March 9am–5pm; €10 includes movieguide), a spectacular twelfth-century castle, now a chilling torture museum.

SMAK and STAM

Strolling south from the centre along Ghent's main shopping street, Veldstraat, it takes about twenty minutes to reach the former casino, now home to **SMAK**, Jan Hoetplein 1 (Mon–Fri 9.30am–5.30pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; €8; osmaki.be), a contemporary art museum known for its adventurous exhibitions.

Just north, across the canal at Godshuizenlaan 2, **STAM** (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–6pm; €8; stamgent.be) details the city's history via an array of artefacts, weapons, costumes and coins.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Of Ghent's two train stations, Gent-Sint-Pieters, about 2km south of the city centre, is the handiest for town. Destinations Antwerp (every 30min; 50min); Bruges (every 20min; 20min); Brussels (every 30min; 40min); Ostend (every 30min; 40min).

By bus The Flibco (flibco.com) shuttle bus from Charleroi airport takes 1hr 20min; tickets €5–15.

INFORMATION

Tourist information Oude Vismijn, Sint-Veerleplein 5 (daily: mid-March to mid-Oct 9.30am–6.30pm; mid-Oct to mid-March 9.30am–4.30pm; [09 266 56 60](tel:092665660); visitgent.be).

Discount cards The CityCard Gent grants free entry to all of the city's main museums and monuments, free use of public transport and a complimentary canal cruise. It costs €30 for 48 hours, or €35 for 72 hours, and can be bought from the tourist office, hotels, participating museums and offices of the public transport company De Lijn.

GETTING AROUND

By tram Trams depart from outside the train station. Tram #1 (direction Evergem or Wondelgem) runs up to the Korenmarkt, in the centre of town, every few minutes. The

single journey flat-rate fare is €3; validate the ticket at the machine once you get on.

ACCOMMODATION

The tourist office publishes a comprehensive brochure detailing local accommodation, and operates a free hotel booking service. You can also ask them about camping options out to the west of town.

★ 13 O'Clock Hostel Universiteitsstraat 13 **0471 13 313**, 13oclock.be. Converted university building that offers slick rooms with kitchenettes (no breakfast) right in the centre of town. Towel and linen included. Dorms **€29**, doubles **€60**

De Draecke St Widostraat 11 **09 233 70 50**, jeugdherbergen.be. Bang in the historic centre, this newly renovated hostel sports lots of beachy wood panelling, a bar and lounge. There's no kitchen, but bedding (not towels) and breakfast included. Three-course dinner €12. Dorms **€26**, doubles **€60**

Hostel 47 Blekerijstraat 47 **0478 71 28 27**, hostel47.com. Trendy hostel in the north of town. Dorm rooms are finished to a high standard, and their communal showers and sinks are very swanky. No laundry, but breakfast and sheets are included. Cash only. Dorms **€30**, doubles **€69**

Hostel Uppelink Sint-Michielsplein 21 **09 279 44 77**, hosteluppelink.com. Excellent eleven-room hostel overlooking the central Korenlei canal. Some dorms (sleeping 2–4) have exposed brick, and one is for women only. Homely lounge and bar too. Fairtrade breakfast and sheets included. Dorms **€22**

KaBa Hostel Filips van Arteveld 35 **09 233 53 33**, kabahostel.be; bus #70/72 from train station to Gent Zuid then walk 400m. Fresh, bright and homely nine-room hostel run by couple Bart and Katrijn. Sunny garden and shared kitchen, with work by local artists adorning every wall. Towels €1. Dorms **€24**, doubles **€70**

EATING

Fancier restaurants are concentrated in Patersholt, while less expensive options cluster around the Korenmarkt. Check out the new Holy Food Market, at Ottogracht 2 (hollyfoodmarket.be), a permanent food market inside a sixteenth-century abbey. Thursday is vegetarian day citywide.

★ TREAT YOURSELF

Snooz Inn Ham 89 **0496 24 14 26**, snoozinn.be. Ultra-modern boutique B&B inside a converted printing house on the edge of the historic centre. Its three stylish rooms have posh showers or steam baths, projection TVs and polished concrete or parquet floors. Breakfast €12.20 extra. Doubles **€118**

DreamCATchers Schepenhuisstraat 17 wearedreamcatchers.be. The Japanese craze for felines and food has reached Ghent. Run by young cat lovers Lana and Evelyne, this café offers coffee with a slice of cake and a cat to cuddle. Check website for opening times.

★ Le Petit Botanique Kammerstraat 19 **09 391 92 09**. Part of an urban farming project that grows all its own organic vegetables. There is just one dish of the day, but it's wholesome, delicious and only €11. Reservations recommended. Mon–Fri 11am–9pm, Sat 10am–6pm.

Parnassus Oude Houtlei 122. Unique chance to dine inside a former Franciscan church and rub shoulders with locals at this lunchtime buffet frequented by students, professors and travellers on a budget. Fill up for around €8. Mon–Fri noon–2pm.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

Ghent boasts an energetic drinking scene thanks to its student population.

BARS

Café het Spijker Pensmarkt 3. Cosy candelit bar housed in a former thirteenth-century leprosy shelter. The terrace at the back has lovely views of the canal. Daily 10am–late.

Folklore Lange Steenstraat. One of Ghent's last true brown cafés. Hard-boiled eggs are served free with the drinks, chamber pots hang from the ceiling, and the clock is turned back one minute every year, so at "last call" at 1am it's actually only 12.30am! Thurs 8am–8pm, Fri 8am–1am, Sat 11am–1am, Sun 10.30am–8pm.

't Dreupelkot Groentenmarkt 12. Cigar-smoking owner Pol has been in charge for more than 40 years at the city's last traditional jenever bar. It stocks over 215 flavours, including home-made vanilla, all kept at icy temperatures. Mon–Sat 4pm–late.

CLUBS AND LIVE MUSIC

★ Millie Vanillie Sint-Niklaasstraat 2 millievannillie.be. Oh-so-hip basement bar/club the owners wanted to

GHENT FESTIVAL

For ten days during the second half of July, Ghent transforms into a 24-hour party city as it pulsates with the **Gentse Feesten** (gentsefeesten.stad.gent). Stages are set up in all the main squares and blast out every kind of music.

Accommodation gets booked up months before the festival, so reserve in advance, and try to avoid visiting immediately afterwards – everything is shut for the next week or so as the city recovers.

name "Matt Damon", but their lawyers wouldn't let them. Dress up and get down to pop and dance music. Fri & Sat 10pm–5am.

Missy Sippy Klein Turkije ☎ missy-sippy.be. New bar that's quickly gained a huge fan base thanks to its blues jams, poetry evenings and boogie nights. Tickets for some events €12. Tues–Sun 5pm–5am.

DIRECTORY

Pharmacy Apotheek Kouter, Kortedagsteeg 1 (09 225 18 49; Mon–Fri 8.30am–7pm, Sat 9.30am–6.30pm).

Post office Lange Kruisstraat 55 (Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–3pm).

3

BRUGES

The reputation of **BRUGES** (Brugge) as one of the most perfectly preserved medieval cities in Europe has made it Belgium's tourist honeypot. Inevitably, the crowds tend to overwhelm the city's charms, but you would be mad to come to Belgium and skip it. Bruges boomed throughout the Middle Ages, its weavers turning English wool into clothing that was exported worldwide. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, the city fell into decline and its unique beauty went unnoticed until it was rediscovered some 400 years later, thanks to the popularity of Georges Rodenbach's novel *Bruges-la-Morte*.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

The older sections of Bruges fan out from two central squares, Markt and Burg.

Markt

Markt, edged on three sides by nineteenth-century gabled buildings, is the larger of the two squares, an impressive open space flanked to the south by the mighty **Belfort** (Belfry; daily 9.30am–6pm; €10), built in the thirteenth century when the town was at its richest. Its tapering staircase leads up to the roof from where there are spectacular views over the city. Also on the square is the **Historium** (daily 10am–6pm, last tickets 5pm; €13.50, combination ticket with Groeningemuseum €17.50; ☎ historium.be), which shows what life was like in Bruges during the fifteenth century

through its seven interactive rooms and a new "smart-glasses" tour.

The Burg and the Heilig Bloedbasiliek

From the Markt, Breidelstraat leads through to the **Burg**, whose finest building is the **Heilig Bloedbasiliek** (Basilica of the Holy Blood; April to mid-Nov daily 9.30am–noon & 2–5pm; mid-Nov to Dec Mon, Tues & Thurs–Sun 9.30am–noon & 2–5pm, Wed 9.30am–noon, Sun 9.30–11am & 2–5pm; €2.50; ☎ holyblood.com). Its Upper Chapel holds a phial of the blood of Christ brought back from Jerusalem by the Crusaders. Stored in a grandiose silver tabernacle, the Holy Blood is still venerated on Ascension Day, when it is carried through the town in a colourful but solemn procession.

The Stadhuis

The **Stadhuis** has a beautiful, turreted sandstone facade, behind which is a magnificent **Gothic Hall** (daily 9.30am–5pm; €4). Nearby, at Burg 11, the former Court of Justice houses an impressive Renaissance ceremonial meeting room **'t Brugse Vrije** (daily 9.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm; €4). Dating from the sixteenth century, it features an enormous oak chimneypiece carved in honour of the ruling Habsburgs.

The Groeningemuseum

The **Groeningemuseum**, at Dijver 12 (Tues–Sun 9.30am–5pm; €8, combination ticket with Historium €17.50), houses a superb collection of Flemish paintings, including several canvases by Jan van Eyck. From 2017, some rooms may be closed, so reduced entrance fees are on offer.

Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk

The **Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk** (Mon–Sat 9.30am–5pm, Sun 1.30–5pm; €6), on Mariastraat, features a delicate marble statue of *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo and, in the chancel, the exquisite Renaissance mausoleums of Charles the Bold and his daughter Mary of Burgundy.

Sint-Janshospitaal and Begijnhof

Sint-Janshospitaal (Tues–Sun 9.30am–5pm; €8) has been turned into a lavish museum celebrating the city's history in general and the hospital in particular. In addition, the old chapel displays a small but distinguished collection of paintings by **Hans Memling**.

From Sint-Janshospitaal, it's a quick stroll down to the **Begijnhof** (Mon–Sat 10am–6.30pm, Sun 2.30–6.30pm; free), a circle of whitewashed houses around a tidy green that was established in the thirteenth century for pious women who had been widowed by the Crusades. Inside is the **Begijnhuisje** (€2), a small museum detailing daily seventeenth-century life. Nearby is the romantic **Minnewater**, often known as the "Lake of Love".

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Bruges's train station is situated 2km southwest of the centre.

Destinations Antwerp (hourly; 1hr 20min); Brussels (every 30min; 1hr); Ghent (every 20min; 20min); Ostend (every 30min; 15min); Zeebrugge (hourly; 15min).

INFORMATION

Tourist information The main office is in the city concert hall at 't Zand 34 (Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 10am–2pm; 05 044 86 86, bezoekers.brugge.be), with smaller branches (both daily 10am–5pm) inside the Historium and inside the train station.

Discount card The Brugge City Card (bruggecitycard.be) grants free access to the main museums and attractions, includes a free canal boat ride and 25 percent discount on bicycle rental and public transport. It costs €47/53 for 48/72hr, and is cheaper for under-26s.

GETTING AROUND

By bus Local buses leave from outside the train station for the main square, the Markt; tickets cost €2 from the driver.

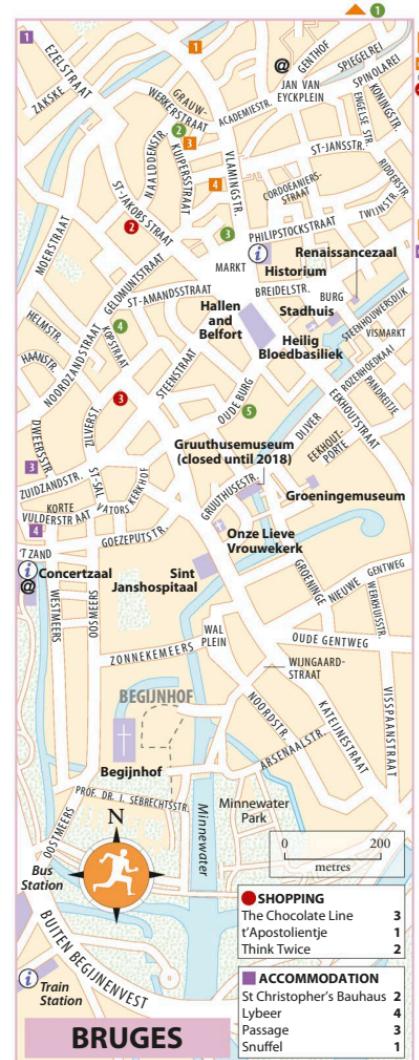
ACCOMMODATION

★ Lybeer Korte Vuldersstraat 31 050 33 43 55, hostellybeer.com. Modern, recently renovated hostel a 10min walk from the train station. Rooms are clean, and the common room cosy. Offers free walking tours themed on the film *In Bruges*, beer tastings and quiz nights. Dorms €30, doubles €110.

Passage Dweersstraat 26 05 034 02 32, passagebruges.com. This hostel has very comfortable,

tasteful rooms sleeping two, three or four people. Breakfast is served in its excellent Art Deco restaurant. Dorms €32, doubles €64.

Snuffel Ezelstraat 42 050 33 31 33, www.snuffel.be. Life at this hostel revolves around its laidback, late-opening bar. Perks include free walking tours, beer tastings every Wed at 7pm, and free concerts in summer. Bedding and breakfast included. Dorms €23, doubles €60.



St Christopher's Bauhaus Langestraat 133–137; reception located at no. 145 ☎ 05 034 10 93, st-christophers.co.uk/bruges-hostels. Cheerful hostel with its own nightclub and excellent bar-restaurant. Ask for a “pod” bunk with curtains around it for privacy, power points and locker drawers. Free walking tours. Bedding and breakfast included. Dorms €20, doubles €68

EATING

#FOOD Oude Burg 30 ☎ hashtagfood.be. Everything about this place is hip: from the hashtag in the name to the insect burger (€19.50) and healthy juices it serves up. Reservations recommended. Mon, Thurs–Sat noon–3pm & 5–8pm.

Friterie 1900 Markt 35. This simple shop-front counter has been serving up cornets of traditional Belgian *frites* for just €2 to the après-dancing crowd for donkey's years. Daily 10.30am–midnight.

Oyya Noordzandstraat 1. Need a sugar fix? This place serves the best ice cream, waffles (€2) and frozen yogurt with toppings galore. The salted caramel is a must. Daily 10am–11pm.

Pas Partout Jeruzalemstraat 1 ☎ sobo.be. A cash- and lunchtime-only place, 350m from the centre, that serves the cheapest *steak frites* (€10) in town. Dishes are prepared by once-unemployed individuals who are now learning a new trade. Mon–Sat 11.45am–2pm.

Vino Vino Grauwerkersstraat 15. Tattooed owner Achim serves delicious wines accompanied by superb tapas, such as *patatas bravas* and squid cooked in wine (€6–9). Great blues music in the background. Mon–Tues & Thurs–Sun 6pm–midnight.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

Café Vlissinghe Blekersstraat 2 ☎ cafevlissinghe.be. Open since 1515, this peaceful, tucked-away café is packed with historic relics. Has board games and a large terrace out the back. Cash only. Wed–Sat 11am–10pm, Sun 11am–7pm.

De Coulissen Jakob Van Oostraat 4. Bruges' largest nightclub (it's still small) has guest DJs on Thursdays, party tunes on Fridays and dance and R&B on Saturdays. Thurs–Sat 10pm–6am.

Groot Vlaenderen Vlamingstraat 94. Drag out your smartest pair of travelling trousers/dress for a gin cocktail at this “pre- & after-dinner” bar, which serves more than 70 different type of cocktails. Wed–Sat 5pm–2am, Sun 5pm–midnight.

Le Trappiste Kuipersstraat 33 ☎ letrappistebrugge.be. Choose from more than 100 specialist beers beneath the vaulted exposed-brick arches of this thirteenth-century cellar. It also hosts tasting evenings: check website for upcoming dates. Tues–Sun 5pm–midnight.

SHOPPING

Lace and chocolate are the best gifts to buy in Bruges.

't Apostolientje Balstraat 11. A trusted source for antique lace. Tues 1–5pm, Wed–Sat 9.30am–12.25pm & 1.15–5pm, Sun 9.30am–1pm.

The Chocolate Line Simon Stevinklein 19. Unusual option selling tobacco- and wasabi-flavoured chocolate. Tues–Sat 9.30am–6.30pm, Sun–Mon 10.30am–6.30pm.

Think Twice Sint Jakobsstraat 21. Quaint secondhand vintage shop that has a good turnover of stock. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 1–5pm.

DIRECTORY

Internet The city has free wi-fi zones (“ZapFi”) in the 't Zand, Markt and Burg squares.

Left luggage Self-service lockers located just inside the train station's main entrance.

Post office Markt 5 (Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–3pm).

Southern Belgium

South of Brussels lies **Wallonia**, French-speaking Belgium, where a belt of heavy industry interrupts the rolling farmland that precedes the high wooded hills of the **Ardennes**. The latter spreads over three provinces – **Namur** in the west, **Luxembourg** in the south and Liège in the east – and is a great place for hiking and canoeing.

NAMUR

Capital of Namur province, the city of **NAMUR** is a charming place, with an antique centre that boasts a number of first-rate restaurants and bars full of university students. It is also the ideal base from which to explore the Ardennes forest.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Straddling the confluence of the rivers Sambre and Meuse, Namur's important strategic location is evidenced by the massive, rambling **citadel** that overlooks the town. One of the largest in Europe, explore it on foot or take the La Citad'n **tourist train** (April–June & mid-Sept to mid-Nov Sat & Sun; July to mid-Sept

daily; €2), which departs every twenty minutes from place de l'Ange and rue du Grognon.

At rue de Fer 24 is the **Musée Provincial des Art Anciens**, also known as Trem.A (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; €3, free first Sun of month), which now houses the Trésor du Prieuré d'Oignies, a spellbinding collection of reliquaries.

In the heart of the old town, at rue Fumal 12, is the **Musée Provincial Félicien Rops** (Tues–Sun 10am–6pm, open Mon July & Aug only; €3, audioguide €2; www.museerosps.be). Sexually liberated for his generation, Rops pushed the boundaries in his sketches and paintings – look for his saucy *Les Sataniques* series on the second floor.

A general **market** is held every Saturday on rue de Fer and a flea market every Sunday on quai de la Meuse (both 7am–1pm).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train Namur's train station is 500m north of the centre on place de la Station.

Destinations Brussels (every 30min; 1hr); Luxembourg City (hourly; 1hr 40min); Marloie for La Roche-en-Ardenne (hourly; 35min); Melreux for La Roche-en-Ardenne (hourly; 1hr).

INFORMATION

Tourist information Place de la Station (daily 9.30am–6pm; [081 24 64 49](tel:081246449), namurtourisme.be). There's also an info centre inside the Citadelle (daily: April–Sept 10am–6pm; Oct–March 10am–5pm) and inside the Halle Al'Chair at rue du Pont 21 (Jan–March & Oct–Dec Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; April–Sept daily 9.30am–6pm).

GETTING AROUND

By bike Li Bia Velo (www.libiavelo.be) has blue bike rental areas around the city. A one-day ticket costs €1; the first 30min is free.

By boat Les Namourettes (July & Aug daily; June & Sept Sat & Sun; €1 one-way; [081 24 65 96](tel:081246596)) are river taxis that ferry passengers across the Meuse and Sambre rivers and to the town of Jambes.

ACCOMMODATION

Auberge de Jeunesse av Félicien Rops 8 [081 22 36 88](tel:081223688), lesaubergedejeunesse.be. On the southern edge of town, this hostel has doubles and dorms (sleeping 3–5), a bar with a terrace overlooking the river, a communal kitchen, TV room and laundry: it also serves breakfast and

evening meals (mains €5). It's 3km from the train station: walk along the river or take bus #3 or #4 from the centre (€1.75). Sheets and breakfast included. Dorms [€25](#), doubles [€62](#)

Gîtes du Vieux Namur rue du Président 32 [081 475 45 76 00](tel:0814754576), lesgitesduvieuxnamur.be. Stylish self-catering apartments for stays of two nights or more, located in the centre of old Namur. [€85](#) per night

EATING AND DRINKING

Local specialities include caramels called *bietrumé*, Wépion strawberries, and a sausage roll-like snack called *avisance*.

★A Table! rue des Brasseurs 21. Lively café serving organic light bites and veggie options (mains around €13). Tables at the back have views of the Sambre and the citadel. Tues–Wed 11.30am–2.30pm, Thurs–Sat 11.30am–2.30pm & 6.30–9pm.

La Mère Gourmandin rue du Président 13. Try the savoury crêpes (from €12) accompanied by tumblers of home-made cider at this romantic candelit restaurant. Mon–Sat noon–5pm, Sun noon–4pm.

Piano Bar place Marché-aux-Légumes 10. One of Namur's most popular bars, with live jazz on Fri and Sat from 10pm. Mon–Thurs & Sun noon–2am, Fri & Sat noon–4am.

Ursule & Pétula rue de Bruxelles 50. Reassuringly popular with locals, this café specializes in gourmet filled baguettes (€6), tasty soups such as carrot and coconut, and salads. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm.

LA ROCHE-EN-ARDENNE

If you've had enough of Belgian cities or flat landscape, head to the **Ardennes** for a change of scene. While its principal town, **La Roche-en-Ardenne**, is packed in the summer (mostly with young families), it remains one of the area's best bases for outdoor activities, and it's easy to escape into the gorgeous surrounding woods. The only downside is that, aside from the town's fairly impressive **castle ruins** (July & Aug daily 10am–6pm; April–June, Sept & Oct daily 11am–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Thurs 1–4pm; €5.50), there's not a whole lot to distract you if the weather's bad.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train The nearest stations to La Roche are Marloie and Melreux, both around 30min away by bus.

By bus Catch bus #13 from Melreux or #15 from Marloie (both: every 2hr; 35min). Passengers are dropped off in the centre of town.

INFORMATION AND TOURS

Tourist information place du Marché 15 (daily 9.30am–5pm, until 6pm July & Aug; ☎ 084 36 77 36, vla-roche-tourisme.com).

Ardenne Aventures rue de l'Eglise 35 ☎ 084 41 19 00, ardenne-aventures.be. Long (€21; 5hr) and short (€16; 1hr 30min) kayak trips year-round, leaving hourly in high season; mountain biking (€25; 4hr); horseriding (€45; 2hr); rafting (Nov–April; €19; 1hr 30min). You can get good rates if you combine two activities on one day.

Brandsport Auberge La Laiterie, Mierchamps 15 ☎ 084 41 10 84, brandsport.be. Orienteering (€12.50/half-day); kayaking (€20/half-day); caving (€55/half-day); archery (€25/half-day). Horseriding, abseiling and rock climbing can also be organized.

3

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

Camping Le Vieux Moulin Petite Strument 62, about 800m to the south of the town centre along the Val du Bronze ☎ 084 41 13 80, strument.com. Huge campsite with a picturesque setting beside a stream. Open March–Oct 31. Per person €3.50, plus per tent €10.

La Stradella place du Marché 2. Garish decor, but the wood-fired Italian pizza is worth it. Very central. Daily 11.30am–2.15pm & 5.45–9.45pm.

Villa Le Monde rue du Nulay 9 ☎ 0496 67 62 19, www.villalemonde.com. This family-run B&B in a villa is a short walk from the village centre, with four en-suite rooms, a homely lounge and leafy terrace. Doubles €88

Luxembourg

Famous as a tax haven, financial centre and headquarters for various European institutions, the **Grand Duchy of Luxembourg**, one of Europe's smallest sovereign states, unsurprisingly gets written off by many travellers. However, this is a mistake: **Luxembourg City** is incredibly charming and well worth visiting for a night or two.

LUXEMBOURG CITY

LUXEMBOURG CITY is one of the most spectacularly situated capitals in Europe. The valleys of the rivers Alzette and Pétrusse, which meet here, cut a green swathe through the city, their deep canyons formerly key to the city's defences.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Luxembourg City divides into four distinct sections: the old town (northern side of the Pétrusse valley), which holds most of the city's sights and is the most appealing quarter; the modern city, where the train station is located; the atmospheric valleys of the **Grund** area (east); and the **Kirchberg** section (northeast), home to sleek European Union buildings.

The old town

The UNESCO-listed old town focuses on two squares: the **place d'Armes**, fringed with cafés and restaurants, and the larger **place Guillaume II**, the venue for Luxembourg's main general market (Wed & Sat from 7am). Nearby, on rue du St-Esprit, the **Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg** (Tues, Wed & Fri–Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–8pm; €5; mhvl.lu) houses a permanent exhibition explaining Luxembourg's history. Further history is on offer at the **Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art** (MNHA), on Marché-aux-Poissons (Tues, Wed & Fri–Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–8pm; €7; mnha.lu), which displays a mish-mash of archaeological finds, paintings and sculptures.

A few minutes' walk east of the museum on the montée de Clausen lies the entrance to 17km of underground tunnels known as the **Casemates du Bock** (daily: March & Oct to early Nov 10am–5.30pm; April–Sept 10am–8.30pm; €4), the earliest of which were excavated in 1644 under Spanish control.

The Grund

The dramatic **chemin de la Corniche** runs along the top of the cliff with great views of the slate-roofed houses of the quaint and leafy **Grund** down below. It leads to the gigantic **Citadelle du St-Esprit**, whose top has been levelled off and partly turned into a verdant park. The Grund is especially worth visiting on Wednesday (when students have a half-day) and Friday nights when its bars kick into action.

Kirchberg

Spread over a large area, the east of the city is largely dominated by European Union buildings; among them, at Park Dräi Eechelen 3, is the **Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean** (MUDAM; Wed–Fri 11am–8pm, Sat–Mon 11am–6pm; €7; mudam.lu). Down the hill from Mudam, at Park Dräi Eechelen 5, is the **Musée Dräi Eechelen** (Mon & Thurs–Sun 10am–6pm, Wed 10am–8pm; €5; m3e.public.lu), a restored fort detailing the Duchy's history.

A good way to see the city is to take the hour-long tours offered by the hop-on, hop-off **sightseeing bus** which leaves from place de la Constitution (April–Oct daily 9.40am–5.20pm; every 20min; €14, valid for 24hr).

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

By train The train station, a 15min walk south of the old town, is the hub of all the city's bus lines. Buses departing from the depot on rue Aldringen will take you back to the train station.

Destinations Brussels (hourly; 3hr); Cologne (hourly; 5hr); Namur (hourly; 2hr); Nancy (hourly; 2hr); Strasbourg (hourly; 2hr).

INFORMATION

Tourist office place Guillaume II 30 (April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–7pm, Sun 10am–6pm; Oct–March Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 10am–6pm; lcto.lu).

Discount card The Luxembourg Card grants free entry to 70 museums and tourist attractions nationwide and includes free cross-country travel. It is available for 1/2/3 days and costs €13/20/28.

GETTING AROUND

By bike Vélo! veloh.lu. City rental scheme with 72 stations dotted across town. There's a long-term card or a 7-day ticket. Book the latter and you only pay for what you use. Payment with bank card. First 30min free, then €5/24hr.

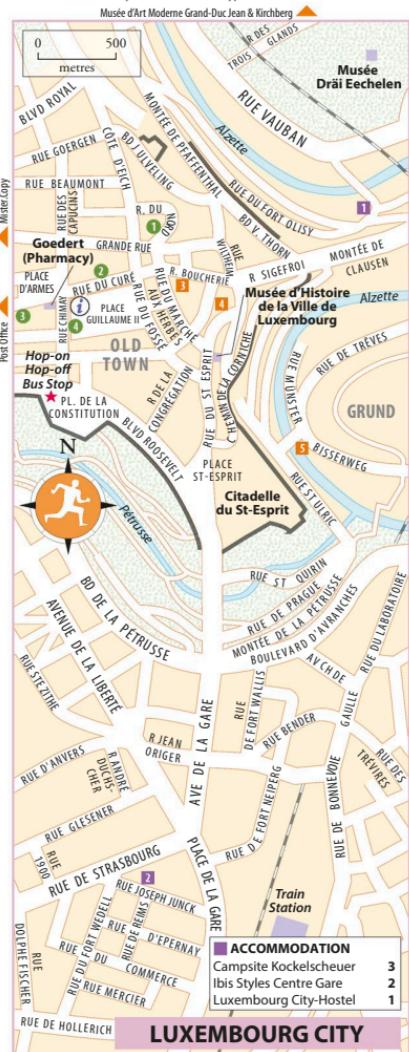
ACCOMMODATION

There are plenty of cheap hotels around the train station; you'll pay a little more to stay in the appealing Old Town – see the tourist information website for listings.

Campsite Kockelscheuer route de Bettembourg 22 (047 18 15; cccv.lu; bus #5). A well-equipped campsite 4km/20min bus ride from the city centre, with wi-fi, tennis courts, bowling, golf and two restaurants. Open March–Oct. Two nights minimum. Per person **€4.50**, plus per tent **€6**

Ibis Styles Centre Gare rue Jospeh Junck 30 (04 92 496; ibis.com). It may be a chain, but you can't fault its good access to the city centre, and fresh modern interior. Doubles **€80**

Luxembourg City-Hostel rue du Fort Olisy 2 (026 27 66 650; youthhostels.lu; bus #9, stop "Plateau Altmünster". Beneath imposing viaduct arches in the Pfaffenthal district, this big, bright HI hostel has four- and six-bed dorms (half en suite), a bar-a Restaurant with



EATING	DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE
A La Soupe Centre	4 Ikkii
Banana's Bar	3 Les Rives de Clausen
Bodega	2 Scott's Pub
Chiggeri	1 The Tube
D'Artagnan	5 Urban Bar

terrace, plus a pool table, book exchange and laundry. Dorms €25, doubles €60

EATING

French cuisine is popular here, but traditional Luxembourghish dishes, such as neck of pork with broad beans (*judd mat gaardebounen*), are found on many menus too.

A La Soupe Centre rue Chimay 9. Trendy soup bar just off place Guillaume II. A bowl of tasty soup plus bread costs €5–8. Mon–Fri 10am–7pm, Sat 10am–6pm.

Banana's Bar av Monterey 9. Lively American bar-restaurant whose walls are plastered with old advertising posters. Serves burgers, pastas and salads, all for around €12, and a plat du jour for €10.50. No credit cards. Mon 9am–11pm, Tues–Sat 9am–1am, Sun noon–7pm.

Chiggeri rue du Nord 15. Head upstairs to this bohemian bar-restaurant with funky decor that is famous for its *tartiflette* (€19) and 2200-strong wine list that features in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Mon–Fri noon–3pm & 7pm–1am, Sat & Sun noon–3am.

D'Artagnan bd du Général Patton 92. Simple restaurant with one winning card: it serves the best horse steak in town (€20.50). Mon 6.30pm–midnight, Tues–Fri 11.30am–3pm & 6.30pm–midnight, Sat 6.30pm–midnight: kitchen closes at 2pm & 10pm.

★TREAT YOURSELF

Bodega rue du Curé 5a. Adored by locals, this homely Iberian restaurant has personable service and excellent tapas and steaks. The huge helpings of paella are particularly good, as are the fish and lamb chops. Mains around €9.50–22. Mon–Sat 11.30am–2.30pm & 6.30–10.30pm.

DRINKING AND NIGHTLIFE

There's a lively bar scene in the old town and Grund, as well as Les Rives de Clausen, rue Emile Mousel 2 (10min walk from the HI hostel), a cluster of pubs and clubs that gets especially busy on Fri evenings.

Ikki Les Rives de Clausen ikki.lu. Locals love this sleek and lively bar in the basement below a smart sushi restaurant. Mon–Thurs 5pm–1am, Fri & Sat 5pm–3am, Sun 3.30pm–1am.

★ Scott's Pub rue Bisscherweg 4. Located in the Grund, this Irish bar is the most backpacker-friendly hangout in Luxembourg, with a lovely terrace that attracts a young, expat crowd. Mon–Sat 11am–1am, Sun 11am–midnight.

The Tube rue Sigfroi 8, Old Town. Youthful bar/club named after the London Underground. Most nights live DJs play everything from soul to techno. Mon–Fri 5pm–1am, Sat & Sun 5pm–3am.

Urban Bar rue de la Boucherie 2. One of the coolest bars in town, albeit in an understated way. There are good burgers and a filling dish of the day, and DJs play Wed–Sat. Mon–Thurs 11am–1am, Fri & Sat 11am–2am, Sun 11am–midnight.

DIRECTORY

Embassies UK, bd Joseph II 5 ☎ 02 298 64; US, bd Emmanuel Servais 22 ☎ 04 601 23.

Internet The entire city has a free wi-fi network called "CityLuxFree".

Luggage storage Located on platform 3CD of the train station.

Pharmacies Goedert, place d'Armes 5 (Mon–Sat 9am–5.30pm).

Post office rue Aldringen 25 (Mon–Fri 7am–7pm, Sat 7am–5pm).



MOSTAR AND THE NERETVA RIVER

Bosnia- Herzegovina

HIGHLIGHTS

- ➊ **Sarajevo** One of the friendliest capitals in Europe. See p.118
- ➋ **Jajce** Adorable Bosnian town with a resident waterfall. See p.122
- ➌ **Bihać** Rafting centre focused on the River Una. See p.123
- ➍ **Mostar** Much more than just a bridge. See p.123
- ➎ **Trebinje** Herzegovina's most appealing town, and another superb bridge. See p.126

HIGHLIGHTS ARE MARKED ON THE MAP ON P.115

ROUGH COSTS

- Daily budget** Basic €25, occasional treat €40
- Drink** Bosnian coffee €0.50–1
- Food** Ćevapčići (meat risssoles) €2–4
- Hostel/budget hotel** €12/€25
- Travel** Bus: Sarajevo–Bihać €25; train: Sarajevo–Mostar €5

FACT FILE

- Population** 3.9 million
- Languages** Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian
- Currency** Convertible Mark (BAM or KM)
- Capital** Sarajevo
- International phone code** ① 387
- Time zone** GMT +1hr

Introduction

A land where turquoise rivers run swift and sheep huddle on steep hillsides, Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of Europe's most visually stunning corners. With muezzins calling the faithful to prayer under a backdrop of church bells, it also provides a delightful fusion of East and West in the heart of the Balkans. Appropriately, the country is now marketing itself as the "heart-shaped land", unintentionally revealing more perhaps than just the shape of its borders: this remains a country cleaved into two distinct entities, the result of a bloody war in the mid-1990s. However, while Bosnia-Herzegovina was not too long ago making headlines for all the wrong reasons, it's now busily, and deservedly, re-etching itself on the world travel map as a bona fide backpacker magnet of some repute.

Most travellers spend their time in the country's two major draws: Sarajevo and Mostar. **Sarajevo** has shrugged off its years under siege to become one of Europe's most likeable capitals, while the delightful city of **Mostar** is focused on an Old Bridge that, meticulously rebuilt after destruction during the war, must be the most photographed object in the Balkans. There are also some beguiling smaller towns to choose from, such as Bosnia's **Jajce**, or Herzegovina's **Blagaj**, while outdoor enthusiasts will be in their element in **Bihać**, one of Europe's foremost rafting destinations. **Trebinje** is easily the pick of the towns in the Republika Srpska.

CHRONOLOGY

- 9 AD** Annexed by Rome.
- 395** Division of Roman Empire; the area that comprises today's Bosnia-Herzegovina stays under the rule of Rome.
- 553** Emperor Justinian I conquers the area for the Byzantine Empire.
- 1463** Bosnia falls to the Ottoman Empire.
- 1482** Herzegovina falls to the Ottoman Empire.
- 1878** Russian defeat of Turkey sees Bosnia-Herzegovina transferred to Austria-Hungary.
- 1914** Franz Ferdinand shot in Sarajevo by a Bosnian Serb, eventually leading to World War I.
- 1918** Bosnia-Herzegovina becomes part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.
- 1961** Ivo Andrić, born near Travnik, wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1984** Sarajevo hosts the Winter Olympics.

1985 Emir Kusturica's film, *When Father Was Away on Business*, set in Bosnia, wins the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

1991 Following the fall of Yugoslavia, Croat-Muslim alliance declares independence and makes Sarajevo its capital; Serbs set up their own government just to the east.

1992 Led by Radovan Karadžić, Bosnian Serbs start campaign of "ethnic cleansing".

1993 Fighting breaks out between Croats and Muslims.

1995 NATO shelling ends siege of Sarajevo; peace terms set out by Dayton Agreement.

2001 *No Man's Land* becomes the first Bosnian movie to win an Academy Award.

2008 Radovan Karadžić arrested on charges of war crimes.

2011 Bosnia's Croat, Serb and Muslim political leaders agree to form new central government.

2011 Ratko Mladić arrested and transferred to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

2016 Radovan Karadžić found guilty of genocide and war crimes in The Hague.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

As close to landlocked as it's possible to get, Bosnia-Herzegovina is fairly easy to enter from all sides. There is one daily train service from Zagreb, in Croatia to Sarajevo. There are currently no trains from Belgrade or Budapest into Bosnia.

Bus connections are more numerous and points of origin include Belgrade and Novi Sad in Serbia, and Split, Dubrovnik and Zagreb in Croatia. There are currently no direct flights from the UK to Bosnia, but a number of budget carriers fly to Zagreb (see p.159), Zadar



(see p.167) and Dubrovnik (see p.178), from where you can get an onward bus.

GETTING AROUND

Bosnia-Herzegovina isn't the easiest country to get around, since much of its transport infrastructure – particularly the rail network – was damaged during the war. Things are improving, however, and decent **bus** services will almost always be able to get you where you want; it'll just take a little longer than you might expect. Connections between the Federation and the Republika Srpska aren't regular.

There are also a few **railway** lines across the country, though severe underfunding means that most trains are too slow or irregular to be worth considering; the one exception is the twice-daily route linking

Sarajevo and Mostar, which is fabulously scenic.

ACCOMMODATION

There are plenty of **hostels** in Sarajevo and Mostar (dorm beds cost around €12), as well as **private rooms** in these cities, though they're pretty rare elsewhere. Otherwise, **hotel** accommodation is pretty cheap – you should always be able to find a room in the €25–35 range. **Guesthouses** (*pansiona*) are available in some towns, though are nowhere near as numerous as in neighbouring countries. Free **wi-fi** is now almost standard in accommodation. There are a few **campsites** dotted around, most with reasonable facilities (www.camping.info/bosnia-herzegovina/campsites). The possible presence of

A TALE OF TWO ENTITIES

Travellers should be aware that, in many ways, Bosnia-Herzegovina functions as two separate countries. These are not Bosnia and Herzegovina, as one might infer from the name, since these are geographical regions (Bosnia makes up around 80 percent of the country, with Herzegovina a small triangle south of Sarajevo). Rather, the country is split along ethnic lines. To the west, and including Sarajevo, is the **Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**, a Muslim-Croat alliance; while to the east and north is the **Republika Srpska**, an ethnic-Serb territory of almost equal size, centred on its capital Banja Luka. To add to the confusion, there are three official languages – all essentially the same – and three presidents. “Most countries just have one idiot in charge,” says a local, “but we’ve got three.”

unexploded mines from the war means that wild camping is not a good idea.

FOOD AND DRINK

Centuries of Ottoman rule have left Turkish fingerprints on the nation’s **cuisine**. You’ll find *čevapčići* joints everywhere, selling grilled meat rissoles that are usually served up with *somun* (spongy bread) and chopped onion. Similarly hard to avoid are stands selling *burek*, greasy pastries filled with meat, spinach, cheese and sometimes pumpkin or potato; Sarajevo is often rated as the best *burek* city in the Balkans. Soups (*čorba*) and vegetables pop up all over the place on the country’s menus, though more often than not the latter are stuffed with mincemeat; **vegetarians** will often have to satisfy themselves with salads, or something from the ubiquitous pizzerias. Sweets also have a Turkish ring to them, with syrupy *baklava* pastries available everywhere; added to this is an artery-clogging range of creamy **desserts**, most notable of which is *tufahije*, a marinaded apple topped with walnut and cream.

4

DRINK

The consumption of **coffee** (*kafa*) has been elevated to something approaching an art form (see box below). For alcohol, there are a few good domestic **beers** (*pivo*), and Herzegovina produces a lot of **wine** – try Blatina, a local variety of red. There’s also *rakia*, a potent spirit as popular by night as coffee is by day. Locals are also fond of telling guests that Bosnian tap water is safe to drink – evidently a major source of pride.

CULTURE AND ETIQUETTE

It’s imperative to note that there are three distinct **ethnicities** in Bosnia-Herzegovina – **Bosnian Serb**, mostly Orthodox; **Bosnian Croat**, mostly Catholic; and Muslims known as **Bosniaks**. Of course, all were constituent parts of the bloody war of the mid-1990s, and reverberations can still be felt today – it’s never too far away from people’s minds. Some locals are more than willing to talk about their experiences, particularly in Sarajevo, but of course it’s best to let them make the first move.

Also worth noting is the **geographical split** evident in the country’s name –

BOSNIAN COFFEE

Don’t dare use the dreaded T-word – although Bosnian coffee is served **Turkish-style**, with hot water poured over unfiltered grounds, locals insist that their variety is unique. It’s markedly weaker than Turkish coffee, mainly because of its function as a social lubricant – it’s consumed fervidly throughout the day, with different coffee sittings ascribed different terms: *razgalica* in the morning, *razgovoruša* a little later on, and *sikteruša* following a meal. Coffee is **served** on a metal tray from a *džezva*, a cute metal pot, and poured into little tumblers (*feldžan*). Also on the tray will be a *šećerluk*, containing a few cubes of sugar – it’s traditional to dip the corner of a sugar cube into your coffee for a flash, nibble it, then let the coffee wash it down. And, most importantly, do as the locals do and take your time.

you'll find yourself using "Bosnian" as an adjective most of the time, and this is accepted, though in Herzegovina it's a tiny bit of a faux pas to tell locals how much you're "enjoying Bosnia".

As for the more regular facets of travel etiquette, you should **dress** conservatively around religious buildings, leave small change or a little more as **tips** in a restaurant, and be aware that for all the ethnic rivalry, **smoking** is perhaps the country's dominant religion. Note, too, that some hostels will require you to remove your shoes before entering.

SPORTS AND OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Bosnia-Herzegovina is pretty good for outdoor pursuits. Beefy mountains mean that **hiking** is popular, though the continued presence of **landmines** means that you should seek local confirmation that an area is safe before setting off. During winter, a few **ski** slopes around Sarajevo come to life, while there's year-round **rafting** on several of the country's rivers – the best is the Una, near Bihać.

COMMUNICATIONS

Most **post offices** (*pošta*) are open weekdays from 9am to 5pm, and often on Saturday mornings too. Public **phones** use cards, which can be bought at post offices and kiosks. Better still, buy a **SIM card** from one of the main Bosnian mobile operators, which are BH Telecom, m:tel and Eronet; these typically cost around 5KM, including some starting credit. **Wi-fi** is common in Sarajevo and Mostar; where you do find an internet café, expect to pay 1–2KM/hr.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA ONLINE

- ➲ bhtourism.ba Official tourist board site.
- ➲ www.bhmac.org Contains some useful information about landmine dangers.
- ➲ sonar.ba Excellent site on all things to see and do in Sarajevo.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Police 122; Ambulance 124; Fire 123.

EMERGENCIES

With the war still fresh in many minds, travellers often arrive expecting Bosnia-Herzegovina to be a dangerous place; it will quickly become clear that this is not the case, and that the **crime rate** is very low by European standards. The country's two **police** forces are usually easy to deal with, but keep your passport or a copy handy in case of a spot check. One very important danger to note is the presence of **landmines**. Strewn liberally during the war, the vast majority have now been cleared, and there's no danger in any urban area. In the countryside, however, it's advisable to stick to clear paths.

Pharmacies usually follow shop hours, though in larger cities you'll find that some stay open until late, and are sometimes open 24 hours.

INFORMATION

Larger cities have **tourist information offices** with plenty of good English materials; some can make accommodation bookings. Free city **maps** are handed out at most hotels and all tourist offices.

MONEY AND BANKS

The currency of Bosnia-Herzegovina is the **convertible mark**, usually abbreviated to KM, though internationally it is BAM. Notes of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200KM are in circulation, as are coins of 10, 20 and 50 fenninga (100 fenninga = 1KM), and 1, 2 and 5KM. Exchange **rates** are currently around €1=1.95KM, £1=2.50KM and US\$1=1.75KM. Accommodation prices are sometimes quoted in euros, as are meals at some upmarket restaurants. In urban areas you won't have to look too far for an **ATM**, and **exchange offices** (*menjačnica*) are plentiful in places used to tourists. **Banks** are usually open weekdays from 9am to 4pm, and often on Saturday mornings too. Credit/debit cards are accepted in most hotels, restaurants and shops.

BOSNIAN

The Bosnian language is essentially the same as Serbian, which in turn is essentially the same as Croatian (see p.158), and all three are listed as official languages in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Note that the Republika Srpska uses the **Cyrillic alphabet**, which may cause some problems with street signs, menus and timetables.

OPENING HOURS AND HOLIDAYS

Times are less rigid here than in most countries – **shops** usually open when they want to open, which in most cases is from 10am to 7pm, and in larger cities there's little difference at weekends. All banks and post offices will be closed on **public holidays**: January 1, March 1, May 1 and November 25 – though these dates are far from the end of the story as the Catholic and Orthodox churches celebrate Easter and Christmas at different times, and Muslims celebrate a biannual holiday known as *Bajram*.

4

Sarajevo

With their imaginations and travel memories fired by spiky minarets, grilled kebabs and the all-pervasive aroma of ground coffee, many travellers see in **SARAJEVO** a Slavic mini-Istanbul. The Ottoman notes are most prominent in Baščaršija, the city's delightful Old Town, which is home to umpteen mosques, bazaars, kebab restaurants and cafés. Further afield, burnt-out buildings evoke the catastrophic war of the mid-1990s, though the fun-loving, easy-going Sarajevans do a great job of painting over the scars of those tumultuous years – it's hard to walk around without being offered coffee, and it's hard to be invited for coffee without making friends.

Sarajevo gained importance during **Roman** times, and after a short slumber was reinvigorated as a trading hub during the **Ottoman** period, but sadly its recent history is far more pertinent. The international spotlight fell on the city

as the host of the **1984 Winter Olympics**, but less than a decade later the world's eyes were retrained on it during a **siege** that lasted for almost four years – by some estimates, the longest in military history. Bosnian Serb forces made a near-unbroken ring around the city, shelling major buildings and shooting civilians dead on their way to work, while years of litter lay rotting in the streets. By the time the ceasefire was announced in 1996, around ten thousand people had been killed; on the ground you may notice some of the many **Sarajevo Roses** – flower-like scars of mortar shell explosions, poignantly filled in with red resin, though now badly fading.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

The central district of **Baščaršija** is Sarajevo's prettiest and contains most of its sights. Heading west from here, the city's history unravels like a tapestry – Ottoman-era mosques slowly give way to the churches and elaborate buildings of the Austro-Hungarian period, before communist behemoths herald your arrival into "Sniper Alley" and its shells of war.

Baščaršija

The powerful waft of grilled *ćevapi* is a sure sign that you're about to enter **Baščaršija**, whose pedestrianized streets are a delight to wander around. It's most logical to approach here from the east, where you'll find the stunning **National Library**. In 1992, a single day's shelling destroyed over three million books, but reconstruction of this pink-and-yellow cream cake of faded beauty is now complete. A little way along is the central square, home to **Sebilj**, a small kiosk-like fountain, and **Baščaršija Mosque**. Far more beautiful is the **Gazi Husrev Beg Mosque** just down the way, which is worth a peep inside. Further west, you'll come across the **Bezistan**, an Ottoman-era bazaar now sadly filled with all manner of fake goods unsuited to such an elegant structure.

Baščaršija is also home to the six buildings that make up the **Museum of Sarajevo** – the largest is located inside the old Brusa Bezistan bazaar (Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat 10am–3pm; 3KM; muzejsarajeva.ba), just off the main



Bosnian Cultural Centre & National Theatre

square, which features a whole host of historical relics, all beautifully presented.

The Latin Bridge and 1878–1918 Museum

Modest in appearance, the **Latin Bridge** has some weighty history – this was the scene of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and, by extension, the start of World War I; a plaque on the wall indicates the exact spot where Ferdinand met his fate. Off its northern end, the small, one-room **1878–1918 Museum** (Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat 10am–3pm; 3KM) commemorates the incident, its most significant exhibits being the pistol used by the assassin, Gavrilo Princip, and the subsequent indictment against the perpetrators. Across the Miljacka River you'll see the fascinating **Papagajka**, a decaying yellow-and-green residential block apparently designed with hovercars in mind – this is how the Jetsons may have lived under Communism.

Ferhadija and around

Along and just off **Ferhadija**, the main pedestrianized thoroughfare, are several points of interest. Dominating the skyline just west of the Bezistan bazaar is the

twin-turreted Catholic **cathedral** dating from the 1880s, while, just behind here, along Mula Mustafa Baseskije, stands the **central market place**. It was here, on February 5, 1994, that 68 people were killed following a mortar attack in what became the war's single most infamous incident; a blood red wall is inscribed with the names of all those who died. Adjacent to the cathedral, the superb **Galerija 11/7/95** (daily 10am–6pm; 10KM) is dedicated to the memory of the victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.

"Sniper Alley" museums

Well worth the fifteen-minute walk west of Baščaršija is the **History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina** (Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, Sat & Sun 10am–2pm; 5KM). Don't be put off by the somewhat brutal exterior and shabby entrance, as the permanent exhibition detailing how Sarajevo functioned during the siege is sobering and superbly presented. The exhibits and photos are frequently harrowing, though the most striking aspect is the remarkable resourcefulness Sarajevans displayed, manifest in some ingeniously improvised implements for cooking, lighting, heating and the like.