

Chapter 7

CENTRAL EUROPE

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WELCOME TO CENTRAL EUROPE

TOP REASONS TO GO

★ Stunning Cities:

Discover everywhere from fairy-tale Prague to fast-changing Berlin, lakeside Zürich to thermal bath–filled Budapest.

★ Churches:

Take your pick among stand-outs in splendid styles from Renaissance to Rococo to Baroque.

★ Outdoor Activities:

In winter, skiers take to the slopes of Switzerland and Austria. In summer, swimmers hit the shores of northern Poland or of Hungary's Lake Balaton.

★ Wine Tasting:

Whether it's German Riesling, Austrian Grüner Veltliner, or Hungarian Tokaji, wine has quenched the thirst of visitors to Central Europe for centuries.

★ Music:

This region means classical music. From grand opera houses to Baroque churches, the music of Mozart, Chopin, Dvořák, Liszt, and Beethoven fills the air.

★ Sport:

Germany is a mecca for soccer, but winter sports rule here. Visit the toboggan runs of Switzerland or the ice hockey rinks of Slovakia.

1 Austria. Come for great landscapes and even greater culture, from skiing in the Tyrolean Alps to nights at the Vienna opera.

2 Germany. From Berlin's cutting-edge art to Hamburg's historic harbor to Munich's famous Oktoberfest, Germany offers diverse experiences.

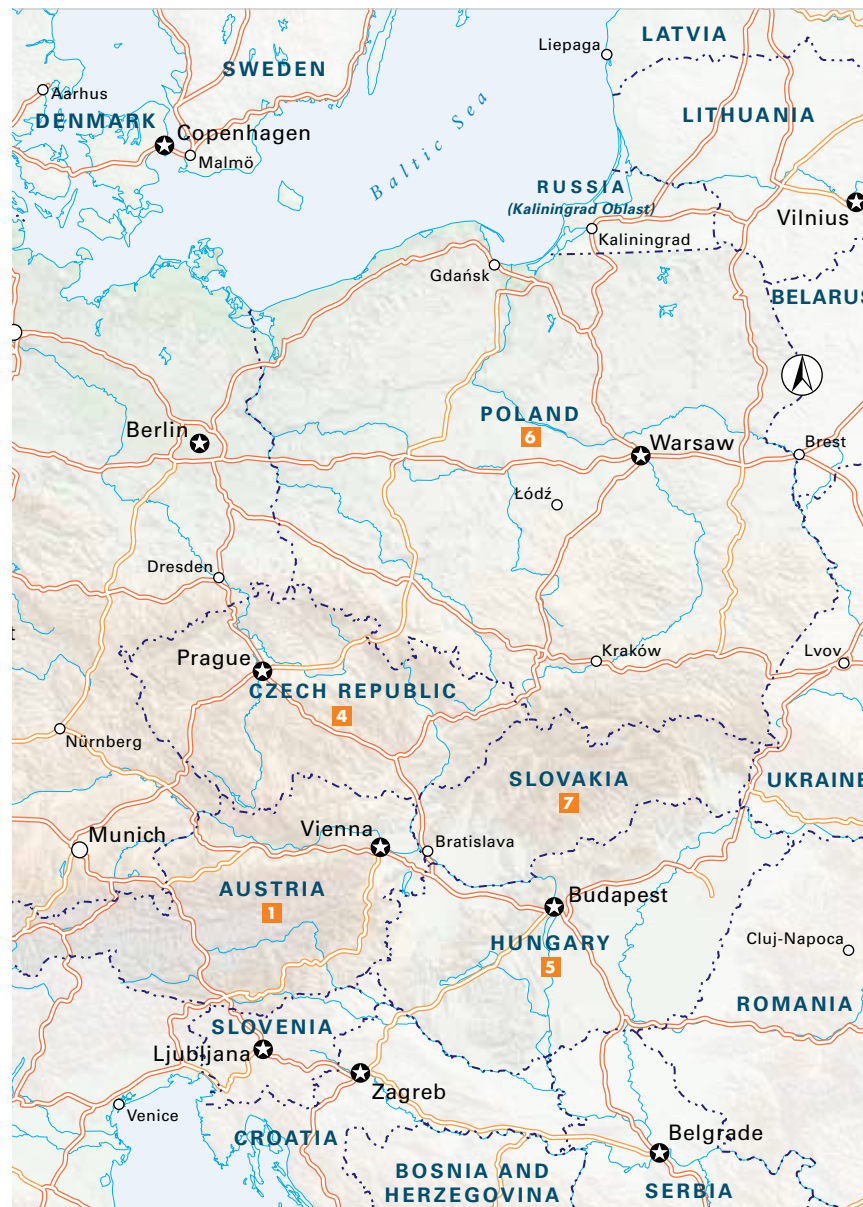
3 Switzerland. Zürich mixes old-world charm with a youthful vibe. But it is in Switzerland's lakes, valleys, and peaks where you'll find its soul.

4 Czech Republic. Prague offers Gothic splendors, while the castle-dotted countryside showcases dazzling relics of Europe's past.

5 Hungary. Once ruled by the Turks and Habsburgs, modern Hungary has a confident cultural capital, spectacular lakes, and flourishing vineyards.

6 Poland. Whether you're into sleeping in an old palace or camping by the lake, folk crafts, or fine dining, Poland has it all.

7 Slovakia. From the cobbled streets of Bratislava to the hiking trails of the High Tatras, Slovakia is made to explore on foot.



WHAT TO EAT IN CENTRAL EUROPE



Sachertorte

FONDUE

Whether a mix of Gruyère and Vacherin (known as *moitié-moitié*) or a less pungent mix of hard cheeses, fondue is a Swiss staple. Too rich for you? Try *raclette*, a heated half wheel of full-bodied cheese, melted onto potatoes or bread.

GOULASH

meaning “herdsman,” is one of Hungary’s national dishes. The classic recipe is created using beef, potatoes, vegetables, pinched egg noodles, paprika, and various other Hungarian spices. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have their own variations on “*guláš*.”

KÄSESPÄTZLE

This Austrian take on macaroni and cheese, also popular in parts of Germany, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein, has strips of egg pasta called *Spätzle*

layered with onions and grated cheese, then panfried to a golden brown and topped with fried onions.

PICKLED CHEESE

A staple of Czech pubs, *nakládaný hermelín* is a Camembert-like cheese that’s marinated in oil and spices. Is it a little like Prague’s Astronomical Clock: overhyped? Perhaps. But you’re going to remember it. Best enjoyed spread on dark Czech bread.

PIEROGI

In Poland, pierogi is the fast food of choice. These boiled dumplings come in two main versions: *pierogi ruskie* (the Russian pierogi), with potatoes, cottage cheese, onion, salt, and pepper, and the *pierogi z kapustą i grzybami*, with cabbage and mushrooms.

SACHERTORTE

The famous chocolate cake with a layer of apricot jam and dark chocolate icing is synonymous with Vienna. Developed in the 19th century, the Hotel Sacher lays claim to the “original” recipe, which is allegedly kept under lock and key.

BIRCHERMÜESLI

Created by raw food pioneer Dr. Bircher-Benner at the turn of the 20th century, *Birchermüesli* is a Swiss breakfast dish made with soaked, rolled oats, grated apples, nuts, and cream. It comes in several varieties but often contains fresh berries.

LÁNGOS

This is a traditional Hungarian fried bread, sold everywhere by street carts and vendors. The usual toppings for this deep-fried delight are a dollop of sour cream and shredded cheese, but other options include bacon, sausage, red onion, garlic, and paprika.

WHITE WINE

From Germany’s Mosel Valley and the Czech Republic’s Moravian wine region to the hilly terraces overlooking Vienna and the shores of Lake Balaton, white wine is big business in Central Europe. Look out for varieties including Riesling, Grüner Veltliner, and Pinot Blanc.

Goulash



Fondue

BEER AND PLUM BRANDY

All Central European countries have their favorite pilsner (pale lager), but the original can be found at the Pilsner Urquell brewery, 40 miles south of Prague. Need something stronger? Try *aslivovitz* (plum brandy), popular in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary.

BRATWURST

In a country that loves sausages, the bratwurst is, by far, the German favorite. Perhaps the most beloved of all Bratwürste (sausages) is the small, thin sausage from the city of Nuremberg. Thuringian bratwurst is larger and is made from lean pork shoulder flavored with garlic and marjoram.

RÖSTI

Basically glorified hash browns, these are grated, fried potatoes covered in toppings like bacon. They’ve become known as Switzerland’s national dish.

Central Europe Snapshot

Know Before You Go

CURRENCY MATTERS.

Not every country in Central Europe is part of the Euro zone, so don't assume you won't need to change currencies. While the euro is used in Austria, Germany, and Slovakia, you'll need francs for Switzerland, crowns for the Czech Republic, forints for Hungary, and zloty for Poland. Many hotels and bars in the major regional capitals will take euros anyway, but prepare for a poor exchange rate.

HOW DO YOU SAY...?

There are several different languages spoken throughout this region, with four in Switzerland alone. You can get by in English, but learning a few key phrases will always be appreciated.

DITCH THE WHEELS.

All the big cities of Central Europe are conveniently connected by public transport, including by cross-border trains and buses. Even smaller towns and villages are usually accessible by local buses, so there's no need to have your own car. There are also quick and cheap flight connections across the region, though obviously on-the-ground transport is a greener option.

Planning Your Time

While Central Europe is a relatively compact area, it's close to 1,000 miles from one extreme (southwestern Switzerland) to the other (northeastern Poland). Plan around four weeks for a "big city" itinerary that starts in Zürich, visits Munich, Salzburg, Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, Kraków, and Prague, and ends in Berlin. Only a week to spare? Limit yourself to two or three cities.

Great Trips

4 days. Zürich to St Gallen to Bregenz to Munich.

5 days. Prague to Kraków.

5 days. Budapest to Bratislava to Vienna.

Big Events

Febiofest. Film lovers will want to catch Febiofest, the largest film festival in Central Europe, held in April or May in Prague.

Montreux Jazz Festival. This legendary lakeside event—the world's second-largest annual jazz festival—offers three weeks of exemplary jazz throughout July.

Budapest Wine Festival. Taste the best of Hungarian and international wines every September at this popular Buda Castle festival.

What To...

READ

Sherlock Holmes: The Final Problem, Arthur Conan Doyle. A classic set at Switzerland's Reichenbach Falls.

The Trial, Franz Kafka. A dystopian novel by Prague's famous author, who wrote in German.

Géza Gárdonyi. A journey into medieval Hungary.

The Third Man, Graham Greene. The novel (and film) is set in Vienna just after World War II.

WATCH

Amadeus. The tale of Austrian composer Wolfgang Mozart told by Czech director Miloš Forman.

The Witness. Péter Bacsó's satire about the communist regime in Hungary is a cult classic.

Schindler's List. Set in Kraków, Steven Spielberg's harrowing historical drama won seven Oscars.

The Swissmakers. This comedy by Rolf Lyssy is Switzerland's most successful movie.

LISTEN TO

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*

Kraftwerk, *The Model*

Frédéric Chopin, *The Polonaise*

Karel Gott, *Lady Karneval*

BUY

Nobody does lager better than the Czechs and the Germans.

Take your pick of crystal from Swarovski (Austria), Moser (Czech), or Ajka (Hungary).

Popular in Slovakia, bryndza sheep-milk cheese is deliciously pungent.

Fürst Mozartkugel marzipan and nougat-filled chocolates are an Austrian essential.

Contacts

AIR

MAJOR AIRPORTS

Austria. Vienna (VIE)

Germany. Frankfurt (FRA), Munich (MUC), Berlin Brandenburg (BER)

Switzerland. Zürich (ZRH), Geneva (GVA)

Czech Republic. Prague (PRG)

Hungary. Budapest (BUD)

Poland. Warsaw (WAW), Krakow (KRK)

Slovakia. Bratislava (BTS)

BUS

Flixbus. www.flixbus.com

Austria. Blaguss Reisen www.blaguss.at

Germany. Eurolines www.eurolines.de

Switzerland. PostBus www.postauto.ch

Czech Republic. Regiojet www.regiojet.cz

Hungary. Volán www.volanbusz.hu

TRAIN

Austria. ÖBB (Österreichische Bundesbahnen) www.oebb.at

Germany. Deutsche Bahn www.deutschebahn.com

Switzerland. Swiss Federal Railways www.sbb.ch

Czech Republic. Czech Railways www.cd.cz

Slovakia. Slovak Rail www.zssk.sk

Hungary. MAV www.mavcsopot.hu

Poland. PKP www.pkp.pl

VISITOR INFORMATION

Austria. www.austria.info

Germany. www.germany.travel

Switzerland. www.myswitzerland.com

Czech Republic. www.visitczechrepublic.com

Slovakia. www.slovakia.travel

Hungary. www.visithungary.com

Poland. www.poland.travel