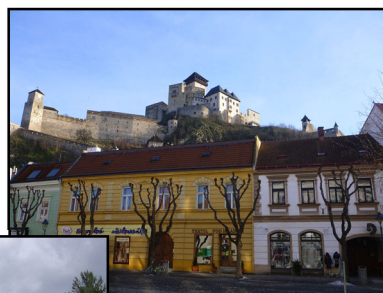


A Visitor's Guide to the Castles of Slovakia

By Angela Crocker



A Visitor's Guide to the Castles of Slovakia provides information on the most visited castles in Slovakia [SLOW-vah-key-ah]. Tourists planning a trip to this central European country will find this guide helpful. Additionally, immigrant Slovaks returning home, either on vacation or as permanent residents, will

The pronunciation of Slovakian words is noted in square brackets next to the first use of the word. Emphasis is on the syllable in all caps.

find this a useful refresher. The guide begins with traveller information and continues with a short overview of Slovakia's geography and political history. By reading this general information, readers gain context for the significance of the featured castles. Although Slovakia is home to more than one hundred castles, this guide focuses on six of the most significant and interesting castles.

Getting to Slovakia

Slovakia, also known as the Slovak Republic, is the geographic centre of Europe. It is referred to as the heart of Europe.

To get to Slovakia, travellers typically use a combination of air and ground transportation. There is a small international airport in the capital city of Bratislava [BRAT-iss-slah-va]. Travellers usually fly into the larger international airport in Vienna or Budapest and then hop on a shuttle bus or rent a car and drive to their destination in Slovakia. Time and money permitting, there is also the option to enjoy a cruise along the Danube River from Vienna to Bratislava. Alternatively, some travellers plan Slovakia as one stop on a more extensive European tour. Any major European city can be an entry point for an itinerary that includes Slovakia. Once in this beautiful and historic state, visitors travel by rental car, tourist coach, train or, if absolutely necessary, bus.

Budget Rentals and Enterprise Rent-a-Car rent vehicles in Slovakia. See www.rentalcars.com for more information.

Visit www.travelslovakia.sk or www.eurolines.com or www.backroadstouring.com/Slovakia for coach tour options.



Traveller Information

As with any trip, comfort is essential. Below are some helpful travel tips for visitors to Slovakia.

- Within Slovakia, the official **language** is Slovakian. Many residents also speak English or German. Slovaks are friendly and approachable. They appreciate visitors' efforts to speak with them. Start with ahoj [ah-HOY] to say hello in Slovakian.
- In general, Slovakia is a **safe** and friendly country for visitors. Be alert to your surroundings and take common sense steps to protect your valuables.
- Your day-to-day living **expenses** while visiting Slovakia range from cheap to affordable. This is not an expensive country. The Euro is the standard currency.
- Slovakia is a country of **weather** extremes. In summer, temperatures soar to 40°C yet in winter temperatures drop as low as -20°C. Travellers are encouraged to check the weather forecast and plan their wardrobe accordingly.
- Physical **fitness** is a consideration. With many historical monuments built on hill tops, visitors will need to walk, or even hike, some distance to get to the buildings. Travellers with mobility challenges, accessibility considerations and limited activity endurance should be alert to the athletic physical requirements needed to visit the castles of Slovakia.

An Overview of Slovakia

Slovakia's history has been shaped by Roman, Celtic, Hungarian, German and Soviet influences as well as the Catholic and Protestant religions. Slovakia broke free from the Soviet Union in 1989 and achieved independent membership in the European Union in 1993.



Beckov Castle. Photo credit: Silvia Mitrengova

Modern Slovakia is divided into 8 administrative regions and 79 districts. Across the country, mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes dominate the landscape with many caves carved by moving water in the soft limestone and sandstone terrain. That same soft stone is ideal for building castles.

Historical monuments across the landscape include castles, chateaux, manor houses and ruins. Buildings were built throughout the last two thousand years with architectural influences including Classic, Gothic, and Romantic, styles. This wide variety of architecture allows visitors to travel through time to visit several eras.

Castles in Slovakia

Slovakia is home to more than one hundred castles, chateaux, manor houses and ruins. This guide focuses on six of the most significant and interesting castles.

Bratislava Castle

Bratislava Castle and its four turrets dominate the landscape in the city of Bratislava. Positioned high on a hill, the castle overlooks historic trading routes known as the Amber Road and the Danube Road. This castle rose to prominence in the 13th century and was reconstructed in the 15th century on the orders of Hungarian King Sigismund. The king and his heirs lived in the castle for centuries. In fact, the Hungarian crown jewels were stored in Bratislava Castle's Crown Tower from the mid 16th century to the late 18th century. The building was reconstructed again in the 18th century by Empress Maria Theresa. She ruled lands ranging from Austria, Hungary, Croatia, and Bohemia all the way to the Austrian Netherlands. Sadly, the castle was destroyed by fire in 1811 and lay in ruins until its restoration in the late 20th century. Today, Bratislava Castle acts as a cultural venue, is the official residence of the Slovak president and plays host to official events and state visits.



Bratislava Castle. Photo credit: Slovak Tourist Board

Spiš Castle

Spiš [SPEE-sh] Castle covers a huge area made up of three distinct parts. These include the castle itself, a cathedral and canonry on the hill across the valley and a little town below the castle. Spiš Castle was a hub of royal power. The cathedral and canonry housed a thriving religious community. The village housed a small community that lived in symbiosis with the castle and the canonry. This site was



Spiš Castle. Photo credit: Slovak Tourist Board

abandoned in the early 18th century when it could no longer support the increasing needs of resident and visiting nobility. Following a destructive fire in 1770, the castle has lain in ruins ever since. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage site, Spiš Castle is the largest castle in central Europe.

Trenčín Castle

Trenčín [TREN-chin] Castle is the oldest castle in central Europe. Built high on a limestone cliff above the town of Trenčín, it is most famous for the Roman inscription found here dated from AD179. The authenticity of the Roman tablet has been verified with other records concerning the movements of the Roman's 2nd Auxiliary Legion under the rule of Emperor Marcus Aurelius from AD161–AD180.



The Roman inscription at Trenčín Castle.
Photo credit: www.behindwalls.sk

Renovated in recent decades, Trenčín Castle stands as a national cultural monument. During the summer months, visitors can view authentic historical costumes and armoury. They also have the opportunity to taste food and drinks made from historic recipes and to observe historical shows recreating fights, music and dance of the old days.



Trenčín Castle above the town of Trenčín. Photo credit Silvia Mitrengova.

Many castles in Slovakia offer historical reenactments for visitors to watch and role playing opportunities to try out swords, archery equipment and helmets.



Historical reenactment at Beckov Castle. Photo credit: Slovak Tourist Board



Nosferatu movie poster (circa 1922).
Photo credit: IMDB

Orava Castle

Orava [OR-ah-vah] Castle dominates the Orava region and is considered one of the most beautiful castles in Slovakia. Built in stages over five centuries, the castle's construction began in the mid 13th century and was completed in the early 17th century. Built high on a hill overlooking the Orava River, the location was never defeated due to its unique architecture on three successive tiers of a rocky hill. The castle draws large numbers of tourists and is popular with film crews as well. Notably, the silent film *Nosferatu*, a classic vampire movie, was filmed here in 1922.

Bojnice Chateau

Bojnice [BOI-neet-say] Chateau is a romantic castle. Originally built with architectural features drawn from both Gothic and Renaissance times, the castle was reconstructed from 1889-1910 changing its appearance to today's fairy tale chateau. The property includes a huge park, a nearby forest and a popular zoological garden. These features and the beauty of the chateau itself make Bojnice a sought after wedding venue. Visitors not attending a wedding can observe regularly scheduled historical reenactments including battles and beheadings.



Bojnice Chateau. Photo credit: Silvia Mitrengova

Čachtice Castle

Čachtice [CHA-kee-say] Castle was built in the second half of the 13th century and stands now in ruins. It reminds us that not all castles have survived the passage of time. Still, the ruins can be explored and give a glimpse into the area's glorious past.

Čachtice Castle is notable in that a woman, Alžbeta_Báthory [ee-LIZ-ah-beth bath-OR-ee], ruled this castle in the 17th century. It was rare for a woman to command such a property. Records suggest that she was extraordinarily smart and her eccentric habits made her notorious. Most disturbingly, she allegedly murdered women to bathe in their blood.



The ruins of Čachtice Castle. Photo credit: Slovak Tourist Board

Conclusion

Visitors seeking castles have many choices when visiting Slovakia. No matter which Slovakian castles are on an itinerary, visitors will be steeped in centuries of European history.

Thank you for reading the *Visitors Guide to the Castles of Slovakia*. Thanks, also, to Silvia Mitrengova for sharing her knowledge of Slovakia and its castles. Further appreciation is extended to the Slovak Tourist Board for their publication *Castles and Chateaux in Slovakia* and also to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic for their publication *Slovakia*.



Bojnice Castles. Photo credit Slovak Tourist Board.



Historical reenactment. Photo credit: Silvia Mitrengova

www.slovakia.travel