

# TRAVEL WEEKLY



## EASTERN EUROPE

increasing marketing efforts spur popularity

**E**astern Europe is seeing a boom in U.S. visitors, with Virtuoso noting enormous increases in visitors to Hungary, Croatia, Poland and the Czech Republic. Both Hungary and Croatia were included in Virtuoso's Hot List of countries seeing the largest year-over-year growth.

This is due in part to the increased focus on the U.S. as a key target market by Eastern European countries. This year, for example, five cities in five countries teamed up to create the One Baltic Sea Region (One BSR) partnership, a joint marketing effort supported by the European Regional Development Fund, which fosters economic transnational cooperation. The One BSR was designed to showcase the tourism appeal of Hamburg, Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Riga and Warsaw.

Another joint marketing effort comes from the Visegrad4 Group of countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), which are cooperating with the aim of marketing the "V4" countries jointly as one destination, especially in overseas target markets. Read on to find out the latest new amenities for travelers, along with new developments, attractions and tourist information.

### CROATIA

Croatia has seen a boost in visitors due to the HBO series *Game of Thrones* (GOT), which is filmed in various locations throughout Europe, including Croatia. GOT walking tours of Dubrovnik were especially popular this year because of interest in the television show. Here's what's happening in Croatia:

- › The new Bellevue Hotel is the first five-star property on the Mali Losinj Island. The contemporary 24-story, two-tower hotel offers 732 guest rooms, including 55 suites. Among many other amenities, the hotel boasts a Spa Clinic with holistic treatments.
- › Another new five-star hotel, the Valmar Dubrovnik President hotel, opened in Dubrovnik, with 294 guest rooms that all have balconies.
- › The Istria region recently added the eco-friendly Boutique Hotel Oasi with nine guest rooms, located in Pjescana Uvala near Medulin.
- › The tourist board of Zagreb, the largest city in Croatia, launched the new app called Zagreb Be There, which features five possible routes for various sightseeing tours. It also recommends off-the-beaten-track sites like the Museum of Broken Relationships and the Museum of Street Art, as well as routes that focus on classical and musical themes. Visitors who complete the app's routes can claim discounts on the price of entrance tickets and other awards.
- › The Croatian National Tourism Board is rolling out new user-generated content in its Visit Croatia, Share Croatia marketing campaign. The website includes images and video, showcasing real-time experiences of visitors all over Croatia. Visitors are encouraged to share their vacation memories on social media channels under the



#### MAP LEGEND

Boscolo Budapest, Autograph Collection	1
Boscolo Carlo IV, Autograph Collection	2



- official hashtags #LoveCroatia and #ShareCroatia.
- › Classic Journeys' weeklong Dalmatian Coast family vacation in Croatia was included in the company's product line due to the popularity of the destination. The program offers everything from kayaking and snorkeling to cycling and picnicking on an island populated by peacocks.
- › Cox & Kings introduced trips this year featuring some of Europe's most exotic destinations and designed to appeal to multigenerational families. The 10-night Family Treasures of the Adriatic trip focuses on Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania and provides a mix of beach activities at Budva and exploring Roman ruins in Albania.
- › Huck Finn Adventure introduced a new river rafting experience on the Sava River in Zagreb.
- › Silversea Cruises added Rijeka, Croatia's third largest city and principal sea port, and Rab Island, off the northern coast of Croatia in the Adriatic Sea, as a new ports for 2015.

## HUNGARY

Hungary landed the number-four slot on Virtuoso's Hot List of countries, with an 86 percent increase in visitors. Here's some of the latest news from Hungary.

- › Pocket Guide has issued a series of new audio guides that can be used with an iPhone or Android mobile device for in-depth info on the culture and sights of Hungary. Three tours are already available for Budapest: The City and the Danube, The Great Castle Tour and The Hungarian Champs Elysées. These guides are free until May 31, 2015, after which the tours will be available at a cost of \$ EU each. The Budapest guides are just one part of a larger project in which the Visegrad4 Group of countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) are cooperating with the aim of marketing the "V4" countries jointly as one destination, especially in overseas target markets.
- › In August, Google started mapping views of Hungary from a boat on the Danube River. This data has not been made public yet, but eventually 250 miles of the river and its banks will be included in Google maps Streetview feature.
- › Sziki Porta Guesthouse, a new holiday house with parking facility, opened with 9 rooms. Guests have the opportunity to get acquainted with domestic animals and participate in agricultural activities.
- › The leading hotels in Budapest are running a special "Budapest Winter Invitation" promotion until April 5, 2015. Guests can stay three nights for the price of two, or four nights for the price of three at many of the 3-, 4- and 5-star hotels. They also can enter free of charge any of three historical spas of the city: Gellert, Rudas and the Lukacs baths.

## CZECH REPUBLIC

This year Prague scored the number-five spot among the world's best destinations on 2014 Travelers' Choice Awards, based on the millions of reviews and opinions from TripAdvisor's travelers. Here's what you have to look forward to in the Czech Republic:

- › The National Museum in Prague expanded this year into the modern building that previously served as the headquarters of Radio Free Europe. The new building increased the exhibition capacity of the National Museum by more than 3,000 square meters, adding additional exhibit space along with a restaurant, museum shop and conference hall.
- › The West Bohemian city of Pilsen, well-known throughout the world for its production of beer, was selected to be a European Capital of Culture in 2015. Each month there will be one big weekend event that will take over the city. The opening ceremony of the project, on January 17, 2015, will begin with the ringing of the four church bells that are being replaced in St. Bartholomew's Cathedral more than 70 years after Nazi occupiers confiscated them and melted them down.

## POLAND

Poland's capital attracts some 12 million visitors a year, but this year, World War II memorial events in Europe have brought increased attention to Warsaw as well as Krakow. Here's some of the latest news from Poland:

- › The Core Exhibition opened in Warsaw in November, presenting the thousand-year history of Polish Jews at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, located in what once was the heart of Jewish Warsaw.
- › The Hampton by Hilton Warsaw City Centre has opened in Poland's capital city. At 300 rooms, the hotel is the Hampton brand's largest outside of the U.S.
- › Following the enormous success of the largest skating rink in Poland, the Winter National Stadium in Warsaw will be expanded for the upcoming season. The first edition involved more than 105,000 people over 47 days, while this season there will be as many as three skating rinks open for 100 days.
- › For the first time in Poland (and for the first time with a Polish pilot) World Championship Red Bull Air Race took place in Gdynia in July, where the best race pilots in the world flew around the city at high speed just above the ground.

## ROMANIA

The number of U.S. visitors to Romania was growing at a steady 8.1 percent, year over year, from 1990 until the global recession hit in 2008. After a drop in 2009, visitor growth returned in spades in 2013, with 23.4 percent more U.S. arrivals than in 2010. The Romanian National Tourist Office (RNTO) expects this upward trend to continue in the coming years. See below for updates from this unique country.

- › Over the past 10 years, more than 70,000 hotel rooms have been added across the country, and in Bucharest alone room supply doubled, according to the RNTO. Many major U.S. hotel chains now have a presence in Romania, including Hilton, Radisson, Ramada, Marriott and Starwood.
- › JW Marriott Bucharest Grand Hotel, located in Bucharest's city center, was named as Romania's Leading Hotel for 2013 at the World Travel Awards. The property previously won the title in 2007, 2008 and 2009.
- › Epoque Hotel in Bucharest, a five star boutique hotel with 45 suites, a French gastronomy restaurant, winter garden and spa, ranked 10th on the global 2014 Expedia Insiders' Select winners list—the only property in Europe present in the top 10 for 2014.
- › In 2015, Emerald Waterways will launch a new 10-day Eastern Europe itinerary that includes Bucharest, where voyagers can disembark to tour the magnificent Palace of the Parliament and explore Romania's capital city, often referred to as the Paris of the East.