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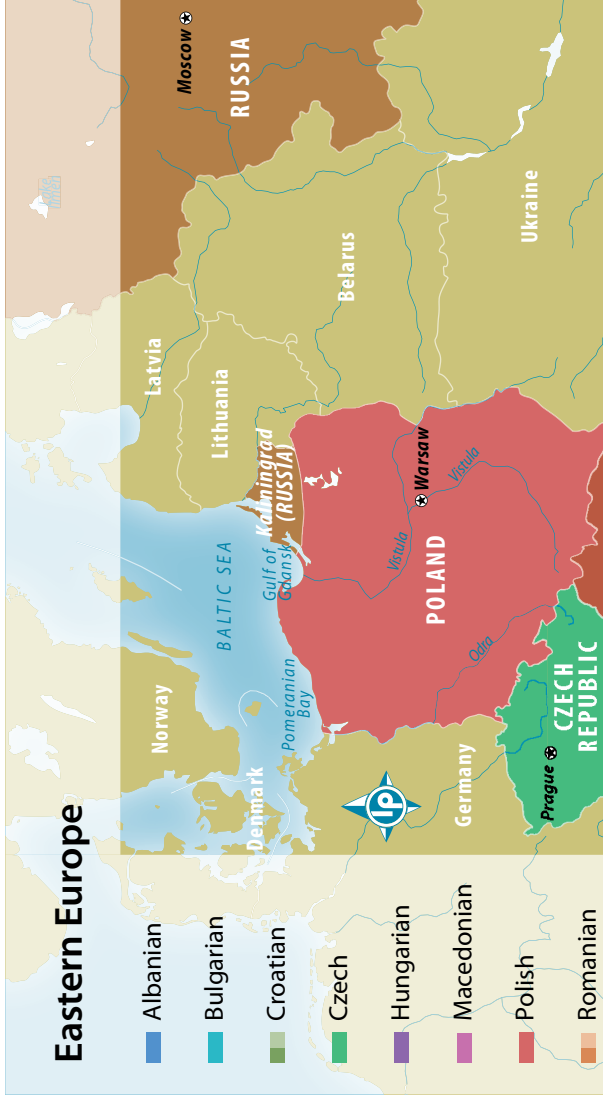
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6 language map





eastern europe – at a glance

One of the most rewarding things about travelling through Eastern Europe is the rich variety of cuisine, customs, architecture and history. The flipside of course is that you'll encounter a number of very different languages. Most languages spoken in Eastern Europe belong to what's known as the Indo-European language family, believed to have originally developed from one language spoken thousands of years ago. Luckily for English speakers, most of these languages also use Roman script.

The Slavic languages are a branch of the Indo-European language family and share a large amount of basic vocabulary. They originated north of the Carpathians and are now divided into Eastern (Russian), Western (Czech, Slovak and Polish) and Southern (Bulgarian, Croatian, Macedonian and Slovene) subgroups. The languages traditionally associated with the Orthodox Church (Russian, Bulgarian and Macedonian) use Cyrillic alphabet, while those influenced by the Catholic Church (Czech, Slovak, Polish, Croatian and Slovene) use Roman alphabet. Romanian, the only representative of the Romance languages in Eastern Europe, is more closely related to French, Italian or Spanish. The freedom with which English has borrowed Latin-based vocabulary means you'll quickly recognise many words from Romanian. Albanian forms a single branch of the Indo-European language family. Finally, Hungarian is part of the Ural-Altai language family, which includes languages spoken from Europe to northeast Asia. Its closest European relative is Finnish.

did you know?

- The European Union (EU) was established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. It developed from the European Economic Community, founded by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Since the 2007 enlargement, it has 28 member states and 24 official languages.
- The EU flag is a circle of 12 gold stars on a blue background – the number 12 representing wholeness.
- The EU anthem is the 'Ode to Joy' from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.
- Europe Day, 9 May, commemorates the 1950 declaration by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman which marked the creation of the European Union.
- The euro has been in circulation since E-Day, 1 January 2002. The euro's symbol (€) was inspired by the Greek letter epsilon (ε) – Greece being the cradle of European civilisation and ε being the first letter of the word 'Europe'.
- The Eurovision Song Contest, held each May, has been running since 1956. For the larger part of the competition's history, the performers were only allowed to sing in their country's national language, but that's no longer the case.

Albanian

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introduction

Albanian (*gjuha shqipe* *dyoo-ha shtyee-pe*) is one of the oldest Indo-European languages, generally considered the only descendant of Illyrian, the language of the ancient inhabitants of the Balkans. With no close relatives and constituting a branch of its own, it's a proud survivor of the Roman, Slavic and Ottoman influxes and a European linguistic oddity on a par with Basque.

Albanian's position on the edge of the turbulent and multilingual Balkans means that it's been influenced by many languages. Some similarities with Romanian, for example, suggest that the two languages were closely related and that their speakers interacted even in pre-Roman times. The Romans, who established control over the present-day Albania by 167 BC and ruled for the next five centuries, left their mark on the vocabulary and structure of the language. After the division of the Roman Empire in AD 395, Albanians fell within the realm of Byzantium and Greek Orthodox culture. The interaction with Bulgarian and Serbian began after the arrival of the Slavs to the Balkans in the 6th century. With the Ottoman conquest in 1479 Turkish and Arabic influences were added to the mix.

There are two main dialects of Albanian – Tosk (with about 3 million speakers in southern Albania, Greece, Italy and Turkey) and Gheg (spoken by about 2.8 million people in northern Albania, Kosovo and the surrounding areas of Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia). Tosk is the official language of Albania and is also the variety used in this phrasebook.

Not surprisingly, Albanian has been written in various alphabets since the earliest written records from the 15th century. A single-sentence baptismal formula dating from 1462 and a Catholic prayer book from 1555 were both written in the Roman alphabet, which was mainly used for the Gheg dialect during the 17th and 18th centuries. The Tosk dialect, on the other hand, was originally written in the Greek alphabet. However, during the Ottoman rule, texts in both varieties were often in Arabic script (also used for Turkish). Even Cyrillic script was occasionally in use. This orthographic confusion was finally settled by the Manastir Congress in 1908, which adopted a modified Roman alphabet as the standard written form of Albanian.

Even though many Albanians speak English, you'll find attempts to communicate in Albanian are welcomed. Discovering some of the mysteries of this intriguing language will be rewarding – try learning a few of the 27 words Albanian has for 'moustache' or the other 27 used for 'eyebrows'!