



# CASTLES AND CHATEAUX IN SLOVAKIA



# Little Big Country



Although the wheel of history turns incessantly round, history never leaves us. Slovakia's historical monuments are there to remind us of our ancestors, opening up the path to the distant past. They give the modern people knowledge, relaxation and happy times. Though a country of modest size, Slovakia is full of chateaux and old castles, some in ruins, others in excellent condition.



Most of them were built centuries ago. To the nobility, castles provided fine family seats and, perhaps more importantly, protection against the raids of enemies. Some of the castles stood against siege for decades, others fell victim to humiliation and destruction.

The numerous ruins of once majestic castles remind us of the worse side of the medieval times. Those castles that survived destructive attacks and have remained in good condition to this day, or have been partly renovated, give their visitors a taste of the country's history. Old arts and crafts, authentic utility and decorative objects together with shows of medieval fights help these places appeal to masses of tourists.



# Castles



Bratislava Castle

## Bratislava Castle

Dominating the landscape of the capital Bratislava, the stately castle sits atop an 85 metre high hill and is well known for its four turrets.

The Bratislava Castle was built at a strategic point overlooking the crossing of the important trade routes: the Amber Road and the Danube Road. The most important times for the castle started in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. But it was the reconstruction in the 15<sup>th</sup> century – initiated by the Hungarian king Sigismund who went to live in the castle – that gave it the shape we know today. The Crown Tower was home to the Hungarian coronation

jewels from the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

It was not until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that the castle became a representative seat of the ruling dynasty when the Empress Maria Theresia initiated another reconstruction. In 1811 the castle fell victim to a destructive fire, caused by the neglect of the troops that were using it at the time, and for another century and a half it lay in ruins. The complete renovation came as late as the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

These days, the Bratislava Castle is used as a cultural venue and hosts official events and state visits.



1. Bratislava Castle
2. Spiš Castle
3. Nitra Castle
4. Trenčín Castle
5. Lubovňa Castle
6. Orava Castle

7. Krásna Hôrka Castle
8. Kremnica Castle
9. Devín Castle



## Spiš Castle

The Spiš Castle covers a huge area, and apart from the castle itself, it consists of the Spiš Canonry (Spišská Kapitula) and the village of Spišské Podhradie. In the past, the three parts formed a single area of settlement but each had their own distinctive features: the large castle as a symbol of royal power; a little town directly below; and on the hill across the valley is a religious community with a cathedral and canonry as the

centre of religious life of the Spiš region. The Spiš Castle was one of the few not to give in to the Tartar raids in 1241. The artists from Italy, involved in the 13<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction, went on to build the cathedral. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the castle was abandoned as it was no longer able to cater for the increasing needs of the nobility. As a result of a huge destructive fire in 1780, the castle was abandoned for good. Still, its partly reconstructed ruins testify to the grandeur of the largest castle in Central Europe.



There are many castles in Slovakia that try to remind their visitors of the life and unique martial arts of the medieval times. It is especially in summer that these places hold numerous shows and events. This way, visitors are invited to see authentic historical costumes and armoury, and taste some of the foods and drinks based on ancient recipes.



## Nitra Castle

Sitting on the top of a cliff, the Nitra castle has always had a strategic role as a natural fortress overlooking the river Nitra. Its history reaches as far back as 871 when the castle was one of the official seats of the Great Moravian Empire, which makes it the most valuable place of the town. It was among the walls of this castle that the first Christian church in Slovakia and Central Europe was opened in 828. Each of the buildings inside the castle went through numerous reconstructions, and the shape we know today dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when it was fortified after the wars against Turkey. The castle consists of four parts: cathedral, the bishop's palace, the supporting buildings



Nitra Castle

Devín Castle

and a well-preserved external fortification with a single gateway. Deep inside the castle, the remnants of the original fortification from the times of Great Moravia 1,200 years ago are accessible to the visitors. These days the castle is home to the Bishopric. The castle also boasts a diocese museum with some rare written documents showing the earliest history and the beginnings of Christianity in Slovakia, and a cathedral jewel treasury.

## Trenčín Castle

Towering on a steep limestone cliff directly above the town, the Trenčín Castle is a fairly large construction that was renovated several decades ago. The castle is an outstanding feature not only of the town of Trenčín but of the entire region along the middle flow of the river Váh. It is a national cultural monument and its history dates back to the Roman Empire: an inscription in the

## Lubovňa Castle

The Castle was built on the top of a high rock above the town of Stará Ľubovňa in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, intended as a checkpoint on the border between Hungary and Poland. Like the castles of Plaveč and Nedeca east to the High Tatras and the Orava Castle to the west, the Ľubovňa Castle was part of a system of checkpoints guarding the northern borderline of what was then Hungary. It was used to monitor the East-West trade route going to the Czech lands, Austria and Italy, and its branch leading northwards to Poland. This route was used to export Slovakia's



Ľubovňa Castle

rock below the castle announces the victory of the 2nd legion over German tribes at Laugaricio in 179 A.D. The castle appears to have been built on the site of a fortified settlement. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, the castle was owned by the mighty Hungarian nobleman Matúš Čák who controlled large areas of West and Central Slovakia. The castle square boasts "The Love Well" which a young Turkish boy named Omar is said to have dug out with his own hands in order to buy out his beloved girl called Fatima. Intriguing as the story of neverending love may sound, the well was made in a much more ordinary way in reality.

copper and silver ores, and import Poland's salt. Another key export product bound for Poland was Hungarian wine. Since the castle was in Poland's possession between 1412-1772, it acted as a political and cultural bridge between the two countries.

Trenčín Castle



Kremnica Castle





Orava Castle





## Orava Castle

The Orava Castle is one of the most beautiful castles in Slovakia. The castle clearly dominates the Orava region and has a very important place among Slovakia's castles. Its highest part rises 112 meters above the nearby river Orava. Built at a strategic point on the trade route from Poland to Hungary, in close vicinity to the Tvrdošín customs station, the castle was appointed as county centre in 1370. The construction spanned from the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the castle was built in several stages, each of the three parts erected on a separate level of the rocky hill. The defensive system was so good that the castle was never defeated. Its unparalleled silhouette and internal design draw huge numbers of tourists as well as film crews who like to make historical movies around and in the castle.



Kežmarok

Krásna hôrka



## Krásna Hôrka

Krásna Hôrka is one of Slovakia's few castles to have survived in fairly good condition. The first written records date back to 1333. Over the following decades, the castle was owned by three important noble families. The castle was intended to provide protection to a medieval route going through the mining areas of the Slovak mountains. The top of a cone-shaped hill is dominated by a palace with a defensive tower. More palaces with fortification, a chapel and residential and farmers' houses are situated below, testifying to the way the castle developed over the centuries. The premises were surrounded with fortification and there was one gateway to it.



# Chateaux



Banská Štiavnica – New Chateau

Chateaux tend to be associated in people’s minds with royal families, and their splendid decoration often called for immense wealth. Even these days people never fail to admire the mastery of the craftsmen and artists who helped create these impressive constructions over centuries past.

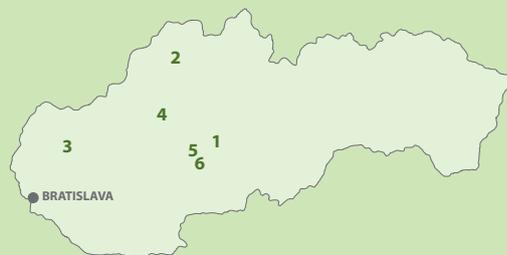
## Zvolen

Situated on a hill not far from the town centre, the Zvolen Chateau is the town’s main castle. The nobility first used what is now called the Deserted Castle, dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and sitting above the confluence of the rivers Slatina and Hron. Its less favourable position and poor access made King Ľudovít I decide for a new castle, which was constructed in 1360-1382 based on Italian town chateaux. The place has come down to

our times in its original shape. The central building is a square palace, surrounded with fortification comprising several constructions. Each year, the castle hosts the Zvolen Castle Festival, bringing together drama and opera companies from across Slovakia and abroad.



1. Zvolen Chateau
2. Budatín Chateau
3. Smolenice Chateau
4. Bojnice Chateau
5. Banská Štiavnica
6. Svätý Anton



Svätý Anton



## Budatín

Hills above the confluence of two rivers have always been considered naturally safe places. And it is in a place like this that the Budatín Chateau is situated, surrounded with a small park. The round tower is a distinguishing feature of the chateau which was built on the site of a former water castle protected from two sides by the rivers Váh and Kysuca. Water from the rivers was used to fill in the ditches, which was a very effective way of protecting the castle. The 17<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction added a couple of Renaissance features to the place. Following a fire in the revolutionary years of 1848-1849, the castle was rebuilt again in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and given the shape we know today. The chateau hosts a gallery and a regional ethnological museum with a huge collection of tinkers' works from the area surrounding the town of Žilina which the castle is part of.



Smolenice Chateau



Topoľčianky



Budatín

## Smolenice Chateau

Built originally as a castle, the place was later turned into a romantic chateau. The Smolenice Chateau was one of the jewels of the mountainous area known as the Little Carpathians, and it was intended as one of the checkpoints along the Czech Route established in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It often changed hands, and as early as 1777 – when its indebted owner had to hand it over to the Pálffy family – the place began to run

down. Following years of property disputes, Móric Pálffy and his son Jozef finally built a romantic chateau into the original fortification, designed by the Budapest-based architect Jozef Hubert. These days the place hosts regular congress events of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, in summer it is open to the general public.



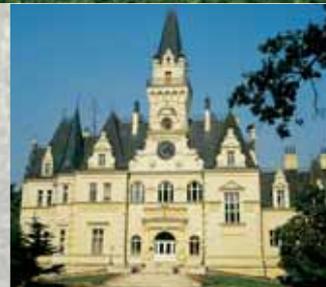
## Bojnice Chateau

The Bojnice Chateau is a romantic castle with features dating back to the Gothic and Renaissance times. Situated on the western outskirts of the town of Bojnice, the castle is visible from a large part of the northern region along the river Nitra. In the Middle Ages, the former fortified settlement was made into a wooden castle. The second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century saw

Baroque features added to the construction. Most recently, the Neo-Gothic reconstruction of 1889-1910 changed the castle into a fairy-tale chateau. The place is currently home to some of the collections of the Slovak National Museum. The chateau boasts a huge park and a nearby forest park with a popular zoological garden.



# Manor Houses



Budmerice

## Betliar

The manor house in Betliar is part of the large estate of Krásna Hôrka and is associated with the Andráši family. The design we know today dates from the latest reconstruction of 1881-1886. In the renovation, the house – built in Classicistic style – was expanded with an extra floor, and a monumental tower of staircase in Neo-Gothic style was added to the northern section. The eastern section was given a turret, its design

drawing inspiration from the tower of the famous Vajdahunyad Castle located in Transylvania in what is today Romania. The museum situated in the manor house boasts huge collections of paintings, pottery and a large authentic library with more than 15 thousand books. Surrounding the manor house, the English garden park is decorated with charming pieces of garden architecture. The adjacent forest park of 70 hectares has plenty of exotic trees and plants from all over the world.



Topolčianky

## Topolčianky

Situated on the site of a stone settlement from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Classicistic manor house designed by the Vienna-based architect Alojz Pichl sits in the middle of a large English park. This place is considered to be the finest and purest example of Classicism in Slovakia's architecture. When Czechoslovakia was established in 1918, the manor house was used by the country's presidents in summer, and it was the nation's first president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk who had

a special liking for the place. Part of it now hosts a museum of furniture and home design: all the paintings, clocks, pottery, carpets, embroidered curtains and weaponry are authentic, left behind by the last noble family to own the place.

1. Betliar
2. Topolčianky
3. Budmerice
4. Markušovce





# Ruins



Unfortunately, many of the beautiful medieval castles did not survive the passage of time. Still, the ruins invite their visitors to use what has been left to dream of the once glorious past and stunning features.

## Čachtice Castle

Built in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the castle was one of the first places intended as checkpoints along the western borderline of Hungary. First, a palace was built on the top of the cliff, and this upper square was later expanded with more and more buildings. The lower square, used primarily for defense purposes, was accessible from a limestone mountain ridge. The 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the castle in the hands of the famous Alžbeta Bábthory whose life and horror-like pastimes are the subject of legend.



1. Čachtice Castle
2. Beckov
3. Strečno
4. Plavecký hrad
5. Lietavský hrad





## Strečno

Situated not far from the town of Žilina on a 103 meter high cliff above the river Váh, the Strečno Castle dates back to the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the place provided perfect protection to the anti-Habsburg rebels led by the Transylvanian prince Imre Tököly. Therefore, the imperial troops tore down the external walls and damaged part of the interior, too. This left the castle in ruins. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the walls were renovated, and following a costly reconstruction of the 1990s, the castle was opened to the general public.



Beckov



Lietava Castle



Plavec Castle

## Beckov

The Beckov Castle has come down to these days in the form of reconstructed ruins sitting on a 70 meter high cliff. Its silhouette is visible from far away. Originally, the castle was intended as a checkpoint overlooking a large part of the region along the middle flow of the river Váh. The lavish reconstruction of the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries pushed up the towers and added a Gothic-style palace with a knight's hall and a chapel. The threat of Turkish troops called for extensive fortification in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: the lower courtyard had a cannon tower added to it and the external walls were heightened. The fire of 1727 destroyed most of the buildings, and the place has remained empty ever since. The ruins of the upper and lower parts show the remnants of the palaces, defensive features and fortification.

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