

TOP 10 ATTRACTIONS IN THE EASTERN EUROPE



Central and Eastern Europe although praised by many travelers still remains one of the least visited regions. Several landmarks have been already discovered though and every year they enjoy streams of tourists going through the gates. What were the most popular attractions in the Eastern Europe last year? Euromonitor International announces its ranking. Brought to you by Tourism-

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1/ Sanctuary on Jasna Gora in Czestochowa

Poland

4,980,000 visitors

The large baroque monastery of Jasna Góra dominates a hilltop in Częstochowa and is always bustling with pilgrims and worshippers. As pilgrims approach the monastery, the most striking sight is the 106-meter belltower, reconstructed in 1906. The focus of pilgrims to Jasna Góra is not the monastery, but the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa, which is displayed in a altar in the Chapel of the Black Madonna. The Monastery is the third-largest Catholic pilgrimage site in the world as well as the national shrine of Poland and the center of Polish Catholicism. Every day, from early in the morning to late in the evening, a steady stream of pilgrims approaches the shrine via tree-lined main avenue.

2/ Peterhof (St Petersburg)

Russia

4,915,000 visitors

Peterhof, sometimes called the "Russian Versailles" is a unique series of palaces and gardens, laid out on the orders of Peter the Great. The palace-ensemble along with the city center is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and since 2007 it also boasts the title of one of the seven Russian wonders. Located 29 km away from St Petersburg Petergof is a country-house of tsar Peter the Great. Today it is famous for its numerous fountains as well as Grand Palace.

3/ Peter and Paul Fortress

Russia

3,789,000 visitors

The Fortress is the original citadel of St. Petersburg, founded by Peter the Great in 1703 and built to Domenico Trezzini's designs from 1706 to 1740. The fortress contains several notable buildings clustered around the Peter and Paul Cathedral, which has a 123.2-metre bell-tower (the tallest in the downtown) and a gilded angel-topped cupola. Other structures inside the fortress include the still functioning mint building, Grand Ducal Mausoleum, the Trubetskoy and Alekseyevsky bastions with their grim prison cells, and the city museum. According to a centuries-old tradition, a cannon is fired each noon from the Naryshkin Bastion. Annual celebrations of the city day (May 27) are normally

centered on the island where the city was born.

4/ Krkonose National Park

Czech Republic

3,370,000 visitors

Krkonose National Park lies in the Krkonose Mountains which is the highest range of the country. The park has also been listed as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve site. Despite the small area, the Mountains are endowed with a rich flora. More than 1,250 species of vascular plants have been identified in the region. This amounts to almost half of the total original flora of the Czech Republic. The Mountains do not belong among the biggest European mountain ranges but in spite of that their natural scientific repute is in many aspects similar to that of the Alps or High Tatra. Visitors are surprised to see striking contrasts going up to one of the peaks of the mountain range. Over two hours hikers are able to walk through broadleaved forests in the foothills, over mountain spruce forests and dwarf pine stands up to tundra. Scandinavian tourists can be surprised by the similarity of the countryside of peatbogs on the ridges with distant Scandinavia.

5/ Isaakievskiy Sobor (St Peterburg)

Russia

3,301,000 visitors

Saint Isaac's Cathedral or Isaakievskiy Sobor in Saint Petersburg is the largest cathedral (sobor) in the city and was the largest church in Russia when it was built (101.5 meters high). It is dedicated to Saint Isaac of Dalmatia, a patron saint of Peter the Great who had been born on the feast day of that saint. Ostentatious, extravagant and excessive are words that could and probably should be used in describing features of this massive construction. Prior to the Revolution in 1917 it was noted that inside the Cathedral there were approximately 200 unsecured icons and paintings, plus hundreds of other decorative objects and items of religious paraphernalia, comprising several tons of silver or gold embellishment. But the Soviets emptied the building of all valuables and confiscated everything, before opening the building again as a Museum of Atheism. Today the Cathedral is still a museum, but since 1992 it has been holding religious services on special occasions.

6/ Varna Sea Garden

Bulgaria

3,150,000 visitors

The Sea Garden is the Bulgarian port city of Varna's largest, oldest and best known public park, also said to be the largest landscaped park in the Balkans. Located along the city's coast on the Black Sea, it is an important tourist attraction and a national monument of landscape architecture. An Alley of Cosmonauts was arranged here in the 1960s, with the first cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin planting the first plant. An Observatory and Planetarium were opened in 1968 on the site of an old open-air theatre and the Varna Zoo was inaugurated in 1961. A swan-shaped sundial was installed in front of the main entrance. The present open-air theatre, flanked by the Alpineum and the children's amusement park, is the venue of the Varna International Ballet Competition. Recently, the Exotic Zoo terrarium was added, and plans for expansion of the Natural History Museum and the Aquarium were announced.

7/ The Tretyakov's Gallery (Moscow)

Russia

3,110,000 visitors

The State Tretyakov Gallery is an art gallery in Moscow, the foremost depository of Russian fine art in the world. The gallery's history starts in 1856 when the Moscow merchant Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov acquired works by Russian artists of his day with the aim of creating a collection, which might later grow into a museum of national art. In 1892, Tretyakov presented his already famous collection to the Russian nation. The façade of the gallery building was designed by the painter Viktor Vasnetsov in a peculiar Russian fairy-tale style. It was built in 1902-04 to the south from the Moscow Kremlin. The collection contains more than 130,000 exhibits, ranging from Theotokos of Vladimir and Andrei Rublev's Trinity to the monumental Composition VII by Wassily Kandinsky and the Black Square by Kazimir Malevich.

8/ Golden Ring of Russia

Russia

2,996,000 visitors

The Golden Ring is a ring of cities northeast of Moscow that formerly comprised the region known as Zalesye. These ancient towns, which also played a significant role in the formation of the Russian Orthodox Church, preserve the memory of the most important and significant events in Russian history. The towns have been called "open air museums" and feature unique monuments of Russian architecture of the 12th-18th centuries, including kremlins, monasteries, cathedrals, and churches. These towns are among the most picturesque in Russia and prominently feature Russia's famous onion domes.

9/ The Old Town of Sozopol

Bulgaria

2,690,000 visitors

Sozopol is one of the oldest towns on Bulgarian Thrace's Black Sea coast. The first settlement on the site dates back to the Bronze Age. Undersea explorations in the region of the port reveal relics of dwellings, ceramic pottery, stone and bone tools from that era. Many anchors from the second and first millennium BC have been discovered in the town's bay, a proof of active shipping since ancient times. Today the busiest times of the year are the summer months, ranging from May to September as tourists from around the world come to enjoy the weather, sandy beaches, history and culture, fusion cuisine (Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish), and atmosphere of the colourful resort. The increasing popularity of the town has led to it being dubbed the Bulgarian St. Tropez.

10/ Vitosha Natural Park

Bulgaria

2,675,000 visitors

Vitosha is a mountain massif, on the outskirts of Sofia and it is one of the tourists symbols of the capital and the closest site for hiking, alpinism and skiing. Convenient bus lines and rope ways render the mountain and the national park easily accessible. The territory of the mountain includes Vitosha national park, the oldest national park in the Balkans, that encompasses the best known and

most frequently visited parts. Due to a great variability in elevation, a rich diversity of climates, flora and fauna can be found within the park. Research has revealed that on the comparatively small area of the mountain there are 1,500 species of higher plants, 500 species of fungi, 500 species of algae, 326 species of mosses, and 200 species of lichens. Among them 31 species are Balkan endemics and 52 species are included in the Red Book of Bulgaria.

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Date: 2009-11-23

Article link: <https://www.tourism-review.com/top-east-european-tourism-attractions-news1938>