

Guide for Erasmus in Poprad

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INDEX

- 1 The city, p. 1
- 2 Currency, p. 2
- 3 Transport and insurance, p. 2
- 4 Accommodation, p. 3
- 5 The Jazyková škola Poprad, p. 4
- 6 Use of English among the inhabitants of Poprad, p. 4
- 7 Sightseeing, eating, shopping and drinking in the centre of Poprad, pp. 5-8
- 8 Sightseeing, eating and drinking in Spišská Sobota, p. 9
- 9 The High Tatras, p. 10
- 10 Kežmarok, p. 11
- 11 Levoča, p. 12
- 12 Važec Cave, p. 12
- 13 Food and drink, pp. 13-15
- 14 Gifts, p. 16
- 15 The fujara, p. 17
- 16 Short Slovak glossary, p. 17

1. The city

Poprad is located in the north-east of Slovakia, in the foothills of the High Tatras, the highest part of the Carpathian Mountains. It is the tenth largest city in Slovakia with 50.000 inhabitants, and the largest city in the Spiš region. A tourist centre for hikers and winter sports enthusiasts, it mainly receives visitors from neighbouring countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

While it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, at the end of the 19th century, Poprad became densely populated when it was linked by a private Košice-Bohumín railway to other parts of the country.

Until then it had been a settlement whose first written reference dates back to the 13th century. In the process, it absorbed other medieval sites such as Spišská Sobota, until then dominant in the area. Spišská Sobota, one of the six districts of Poprad today, preserves the town's largest number of old buildings.

With a continental climate, Poprad's winters are cold and summers are warm. When we stayed here at the end of March, we enjoyed pleasant weather, with episodic light snowfall.

In Poprad, as in the rest of Slovakia, you don't need a plug adapter or a voltage converter.

2. Currency

The legal tender in Slovakia is the euro.

3. Transport and insurance



Erasmus students at Poprad-Tatry railway station.

Although Poprad has an international airport, the most practical way to get here from the Canary Islands is from Krakow in neighbouring Poland, which is closer to Poprad than Bratislava, the Slovak capital. Otherwise, to get there by plane from the Archipelago, you would have to make a stopover in London, with the enormous detour and time increase that this entails. The direct flight Gran Canaria-Cracow, with Ryanair, cost us 193.29 euros.

From Krakow we took private transport for 100 euros which, although we paid for it ourselves, was arranged for our safety by the Jazyková škola Poprad, the Poprad Language School, with which our school reached the agreement in the framework of the Learning Intercultural Values at the EOILPGC through Erasmus+ accreditation.

The return to Gran Canaria can be via Budapest, as one of us did (the other one also took the opportunity to visit Vienna). For this, we took a train from Poprad to Budapest, which cost us thirty-four euros. We bought tickets at the station, which is near the Jazyková škola, but you can also buy them online. The direct flight Budapest-Gran Canaria, with Ryanair, cost 165.54 euros.

The price of insurance for three weeks, with the conditions indicated in the agreement with the school —Europ Assistance travel insurance plus with health, liability and accident cover— was 67.32 euros.

We suggest purchasing tickets and insurance through the Carrefour agency. Viajes Costa Canaria, at number 7, Grau Bassas St. (a few metres from our school). The owner, Kunál Bathia, not only has already worked with several Erasmus students from the school, so he takes care of all the necessary paperwork, but he is also an extremely attentive person, looking after his clients 24 hours a day.

4. Accommodation



The High Tatras in the background, seen from the terrace of flat 509 at 20 Francisciho St. in the Poprad City Centre.

One of us stayed in the centre of Poprad, next to the Jazyková škola itself, and the other chose to stay in Spišská Sobota. In Poprad we stayed in a comfortable flat, centrally located flat, number 509 in the apartment building at 20 Francisciho St. With a terrace and a wonderful view of the High Tratas, the owner, Valeria, behaved exquisitely. The cost for thirteen nights, through an Airbnb booking, was 535.07 euros.



Borievka pension.

Accommodation in Spišská Sobota was for fourteen nights in the Borievka pension. The cost was 394 euros for a single room, with its own bathroom and a small shared kitchen. The Slovak concept of a pension corresponds to a cheaper hotel. It is not the same as a European hostel, where there is more of a culture of sharing with other guests.

From Spišská Sobota to the school you can go on foot (about 30 minutes), by bus, taking bus number 3 from the central square, or by taxi (three to four euros for a five-minute ride). You can order a taxi from Aba Taxi (tel. 421 911 334 773).

5. The Jazyková škola Poprad



Entrance to the main branch of the Jazyková škola Poprad.

The Jazyková škola Poprad offers primary and secondary school students, university students and adults the opportunity to obtain or supplement their language education at levels A1 to C1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages / SERR/.

Its main branch is located in the Central Industrial School of Technology and Design Building, but it has two other branches in a joint school building in Poprad and in the town of Kežmarok.

6. Use of English among the inhabitants of Poprad

In addition to the intensive classes we received at the Jazyková škola, we were able to speak English with many people in Poprad. As in Slovakia as a whole, after the fall of communism, English displaced Russian as the second language in official education. Speaking a minority language, Slovak, and because of the Europeanist thirst of the country, which joined the European Union in 2009, there is a special interest in English. Poprad is therefore an ideal place to learn English, not only because of the invaluable cultural immersion, but also because it is an ideal place to learn this language.

7. Sightseeing, eating, shopping and drinking in the centre of Poprad



Kostol Sv. Egidia Church.

Námestie Sv. Egidia Square gives its name to Poprad's main street. From here it is easy to find your way around the city centre. Another landmark is the Forum Shopping Centre. Inside the Forum there are all kinds of shops, a large Tesco supermarket and various dining options. Upstairs there are various inexpensive self-services. In the vicinity of the street is the Dobré Časy brewery, a trendy place in Poprad, where you can eat. Monuments such as the Kostol Sv. Egidia Church, which dates back to the 13th century and is the oldest historical monument in the city centre, and the Church of the Holy Trinity are worth a visit. There is also, of course, the Podtatranské Museum, with its rich collections of history, archaeology, natural history and ethnography, and the Tatranská Gallery, an active art centre housed in a former steam power station. If you want to buy a gift to bring back home, the shop opposite the Poprad City Information Office on Námestie Sv. Egidia Square is a popular place. Another must-visit restaurant is Salaš Veľký Slavkov, where the Jazyková škola invited the Canarian Erasmus students for a wonderful farewell lunch.



Námestie Sv. Egidia Street, in the background the Evangelical Church of the Holy Trinity.



Podtatranské Museum.



Façade of the Tatranská Gallery, during a guided tour for Erasmus students from the Jazyková škola Poprad.



Entrance to the Forum Shopping Centre.



Dobré Časy Brewery. A mural of a tank is painted on the façade, in memory of the Soviet tank that crashed here in 1968, during the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops.



Teachers, administrative staff and Erasmus students in front of the Salaš Velký Slavkov restaurant.

8. Sightseeing, eating and drinking in Spišská Sobota



Main street of Spišská Sobota.

Spišská Sobota means "Saturday market". In the old days, a market was held here on Saturdays in the main square.

With its well-preserved medieval square, typical architecture and the facades of the houses, Spišská Sobota is the most attractive part of Poprad. Historically, it was the most important and wealthiest part of the town.

The Roman-Catholic church of St. George, built before 1273 in the late Romanesque style, was rebuilt in the Gothic style in 1464.

Spišská Sobota is today a favourite stop for tourists, who can enjoy a tasty meal in one of its restaurants or spend the night in its restored guesthouses.

Recommended restaurants include the Benosky, which offers daily and breakfast menus, the Rest Burger, which is the restaurant on the main square that closes the latest, and the Expreso, an ideal bar for breakfast and snacks.

9. The High Tatras



The authors of the guidebook with students from the Jazyková škola in the High Tatras.

The High Tatras (Vysoké Tatry in Slovak) are a mountain range on the border between Slovakia and Poland. They are the highest part of the Carpathian mountain range, with peaks above 2.500 metres. Frequented by hikers and winter sports enthusiasts, they have several mountain resorts where you can have lunch, rest and even buy a gift. To reach them, you have to travel by cable car.

10. Kežmarok



Evangelical Articulated Church.

Founded in the 13th century, Kežmarok is a town which, like Poprad, belongs to the Spiš region. As mentioned above, the Jazyková škola also has a centre here. Worth a visit are its castle, which has been converted into a museum, its beautiful wooden Evangelical Articulated Church, and the library of the Evangelical Lyceum, with first editions of Luther and Melanchthon, old copies of *Don Quixote* in different languages and other bookish delights.

For lunch we highly recommend the restaurant Boss, where we were treated to a succulent dinner by the owner, Iveta, a student of the Jazyková škola.



Dinner with teacher Monika and students of the Jazyková škola in the Boss restaurant.

11. Levoča



Cage of shame in Levoča.

The town, part of the Prešov region, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. Its monuments include the Gothic Church of St. James', the 15th-century town hall, the Thurzo House and the Košice Gate. Also worth seeing is the cage of shame for displaying prisoners, at whom stones and rotten vegetables were thrown.

12. The Važec Cave



Važec Cave, in the background, Professor Tibor with the guide.

Located in the village of Važec, this cave is an impressive 235-metre sightseeing tour (approximately 25 minutes). Filled with stalagmites, stalagmites and stalagnates, it contains the remains of bears and even a Pleistocene rhinoceros.

13. Food and drink

A few things we tried, all of them very tasty.



Hovädzí vývar so rezancami (vegetable and veal soup).



Slivkové gule (sweet dumplings filled with plums).



Bryndzové halusky (gnocchi with sheep's cheese).



Tatársky biftek (steak tartar).



Rezeň so zemiakmi (pork chop with potatoes).



In Poprad there is a great variety of Slovak beers.



Kofola. The local 'Coca-Cola'.

14. Gifts



In the centre and on the right, items with the typical ornamentation of the wooden houses of Čičmany (on the left), a central Slovak village whose geometric shapes have become fashionable in Slovak merchandising.



Bryndza (soft sheep's cheese).



Spišská Borovička (brandy).



Slanina (smoked bacon).

15. The fujara



A man plays a fujara.

The fujara is a long three-holed flute characteristic of Slovakia. It was a delight to drive up to the High Tatras, while Professor Tibor Liptaj was tuned in his car to a radio station playing music played on the fujara.

16. Short Slovak glossary

Thank you: *ďakujem*.

Good morning: *dobré ráno*.

Good afternoon: *dobré popoludnie*.

Good evening: *dobrý večer*.

Please: *prosím*.

Taxi: *taxu*.

Account: *účet*.

How much does it cost?: *koľko to stojí?*

Credit card: *karta*.

Key: *kľúč*.

Water: *voda*.

Beer: *pivo*.

I don't understand: *nerozumiem*.