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Košice:

The 'must sees'

- Elizabeth Cathedral (Hlavná)
- Miklus Prison (Pri Miklušovej väznici)
- Jakab Palus/Metsky Park
- Any cafe that sells Kofola. It's a unique surprise.

I almost shed a tear seeing the mountains behind Poprod fade away from the train window. I had just been in the Tatras mountains of Slovakia, recharged from a week at The Ginger Monkey in Ždiar. Maybe I had rested on my laurels too much? I had put in no time researching my new destination, Košice. As I made my way to The Happy Bull Hostel (Vrátna 705/30) I was astounded at how the city had maintained a medieval purity, evidenced by St. Elizabeth's Cathedral standing tall over Hlavná, the old town's central collection of churches, museums and shops.

The Happy Bull is located upstairs from the now closed Club Madrid, that is filled wall to wall with memories of their patrons. Their impression is famous among travelers and locals for stories of summer beach trips, new found romances and a few random accounts of public indecency. The owners are of good stock and the fridge is always stocked with some chilled ones for us backpackers.

Later that evening I got a dose of those well known 'Eastern European random acts of kindness,' at an HC Košice hockey game at STEEL Aréna (Nerudova 12). A steward handed me a stray hockey puck which I immediately cherished. If you think North Americans take ice hockey seriously you're in for a treat, especially if you're a fan of high decibel, ear shattering chanting. Plus, it's only a 5 euro ticket and nothing says souvenir like some 2 euro merch or a close up of your favorite skater's face scrunched up in the glass boards. The home team will spend an extra 10 minutes on the ice post match showing their appreciation for the fans and signing autographs.

If it's the old wilderness you're looking, Košice has stunning surrounding beauty. A bit of advice though, take a good map if you're planning on staying out late. As I wandered mapless from the city centre I found a well marked and signed trail out near Hrešná, which is a national forest. I did a full circle around Jahodna which is a small but inexpensive place to downhill ski and had the best views around Vysoký Vrch (851 meters). On the way back down the 547 road near Cermel a Camino de Santiago route begins which will take you a whole 600km through the

Tatras and to the Austrian border. Good luck to anyone who can complete that. I am one hundred percent behind you... from my warm, comfy bar sofa.

And what a great bar scene there is in Košice. Especially if you're a solo traveler and find yourself at Jekyll and Hyde's dimly lit, book filled attic (Hlavná 75/97), or if your group manages to find the high ceilinged party warehouse known as Collosseum (Vrátna 639/70). Seriously, I've been there 3 times but can't find it without a guide. In Košice, you can enjoy getting into the nitty gritty of European history, human existence or your favorite winner of Eurovision. Slovaks on the whole speak English well, and are always willing to try if they're warmed up with a few drinks.

I would only suggest remembering that due to its central location Košice has been a region full of historical excitement and as such has been pulled into many different countries and empires over the years. They're proud to be from that region and there's a very powerful and traditional identity that is genuine. Sitting on the Hornad as a trading spot for 500 years plus it's no wonder Košice is the perfect place to exchange ideas, culture, laughs and quite possibly someone on your arm for that late night walk back the hostel... if you're lucky. Hope you enjoy Europe's 2013 Capital of Culture.

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* If you're looking for a little side food tourism trip, take the 2 hour bus to Uzhhorod, Ukraine for a day/night. It's the pinnacle of Slavic/Ukrainian food and the most affordable. Plus, you can practice your Ukrainian/sign language because in my experience 1 in 10 understand English.