

a special summer place: “The British in India simply packed up during the hottest months and moved business, the colonial government, and all social life up to hill stations, towns in the Himalayan foothills where the air was cooler.”¹⁰ In like fashion, New England families have long found relief from the summer heat by moving away from cities to their cottages in the mountains or along the seacoast. Midwesterners, on the other hand, commonly move to a winter place, a house or condominium in Florida, to escape the worst of the bitter cold.

THE SEPARATE FACES OF BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

Jana Kepplová, a teacher and translator in Bratislava, Slovakia, describes how, each summer, her family moves from their apartment in a city high-rise to their rural dacha within walking distance of Brezova pod Bradlom, a village in the foothills of the western Carpathian Mountains. She explains that they occasionally make the trip for an ordinary weekend but it is the spring visit that “stirs up the most excitement.”

But first I will set up a backdrop for her story. In the bitter cold of January 1993, my wife and I arrived in Bratislava where I began teaching at the Slovak Technical University as a Fulbright recipient. We left in the stifling heat of the following July. Between our arrival and departure, we experienced the joy of an explosive spring. And throughout the 6 months we stayed there, I kept a daily journal from which I have selected a few entries to help explain why so many Slovaks keep a summer cottage.

We arrived when Slovakia, as a separate country, was only 1 month old. For a thousand years the people had been ruled by a series of outside forces, including the Hungarians, Turks, Austrians, Germans, and, finally, the Soviets. When the Soviets pulled out in 1990, there followed a period of adjustment in which Czechoslovakia, as a fabrication of World War I, began to unravel.

There are now two countries: the Czech Republic with its capital in Prague and Slovakia with its capital in Bratislava on the Danube River just 35 miles (56.3 km) downstream from Vienna.

Slovakia is more eastward looking than the Czech Republic. First, it is more agrarian, rural, and even rustic, centering on village life. And second, it is nearly surrounded by three formerly Eastern-bloc countries: Poland, Hungary, and Ukraine. Thus it was more heavily impacted by the 40-year Soviet occupation with its forced industrialization, collectivization of family farms, and mass-housing policies. The consequence is a split landscape of antagonistic parts and qualities.

The climate of Slovakia is continental. There are no maritime influences to moderate thermal extremes. Cold winter winds catch one's coat like a sail on an icy sidewalk. Hot summer afternoons leave people gasping for a breath of air near an open window. But the stunning beauty of spring renews the soul depleted by seasonal excesses.

In the 6 months we lived there, we learned about Bratislava both in parts and in layers of time. Prievoz, an old village now woven into the city's fabric, has a rich ceremonial life. By comparison, Petralka, the most recent product of architecture and urban planning, is indifferent to nature and nearly devoid of ritual. There are other important parts of the city corresponding to different eras of construction. But in my daily journal, I compared only these two places. Their contrasting rhythms and rituals provide a vivid picture of the reasons for a special summer place.

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We are renting a modern apartment overlooking an older settlement. Our own street is lined with other apartment blocks, office buildings, and commercial structures. But in the older place, people live mostly in bungalows with clay tile roofs and stuccoed walls close to the sidewalk. The houses have gardens, now cov-