

Welcome to Sarajevo:

Two Days in the Bosnian Capital

More than a decade after Sarajevo was only heard of in international news as an area of conflict and siege, this 'most easterly point of the west and the most westerly point of the east' is back on its feet and drawing in the visitors. And what a draw it is. Sarajevo is like a kid's pocket after a quick spree at the Woolworth's pick'n'mix counter: it's got bits of everything. Mosques (in abundance), churches (quite a few), an Ottoman bazaar area (only one), wide Austro-Hungarian streets and classy buildings (lots), grey socialist blocks (yep). But most of all, Sarajevo has tons of character and a kicking spirit.

EAST INTO WEST

Begin your tour at the grandiose Austro-Hungarian **National Library** (Zmaja od Bosne 8; www.nub.ba). Deliberately targeted by the Serbs as a 'centre of culture', the library suffered heavy destruction during the Balkan Conflict. From here, the best way to get directly at Sarajevo's soul is by getting lost in the mazy streets of **Baščaršija**, the city's Turkish centre. The bazaar here is an ancient trading place with small shops, coffee-drinking dens and endless souvenir choices (look out for bullets turned into keyrings, among other obscure objects of desire). The streets teem with young Sarajevans with places to go and old men drinking steaming black coffees sweetened by Turkish Delight.

Baščaršija's centre piece, the **Sebilj** fountain, sits in a small square surrounded by a colony of pigeons (hence the nickname Pigeon Square). A little south from the Sebilj is the picturesque 16th-century **Baščaršija mosque**, where worshippers pray silently on the outside terrace.

From the Sebilj, go down **Ferhadija** and immerse yourself in the noisy life of one of Sarajevo's favourite avenues. Off Ferhadija is **Morića Han** (near Saračvi 73), a courtyard filled with cafés and a good spot for a break.

Behind Morića Han is the **Old Orthodox Church** (Mula Mustafe Bašeskije 59), with an excellent museum showcasing Russian, Greek and local icons, tapestries and old manuscripts. But a short hop away you'll stumble across **Gazi-Husrevbey** (Veliki Mudželeti 21), one of Sarajevo's most beautiful mosques. Women with headscarves and men with scraggly beards dart to and fro from the mosque to the **Gazi-Husrevbey madrasa**, a Muslim place of learning since 1537.

A little further up the same street, the religion changes once again, this time to consumerism, at the six-domed **Brusa Bezistan** shopping centre. It's packed with shops selling clothes, fake designer shades, handiwork, souvenirs and other life essentials.

For the best *čevapčići* (minced beef or lamb) in town, go to **Žveljo** (Bravadžviluk bb). This place is about as famous as Baščaršija itself, and many say that you haven't been to Sarajevo till you've eaten here.

Continuing up Ferhadija after lunch, you'll soon start to leave the Ottoman-style architecture behind and enter the remains of the Austro-Hungarian world. On your right you'll see the 19th-century **Catholic Cathedral** with its neo-Gothic belltowers visible from almost any spot in town. Just behind the Cathedral is the **Bosniak Institute** (Mula Mustafe Bašeskije 21), a museum dedicated to the history of Bosnia's Muslim population.

A good place to pause is the **Art Gallery** (Zelenih Beretki 8), opposite the Orthodox Cathedral. The sprawling white building has a comprehensive range of the region's modern and contemporary art and also houses the lovely café **Karabit**.

Back on Ferhadija, the avenue meets Maršala Tito at the **Eternal Flame** (Vječna vatra), a monument

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commemorating the victims of WWII. Down Tito is **Alipašva mosque**, a particularly dangerous sniper spot in the conflict. Look out for the **Sarajevo roses** on the pavements – skeletal hand-like indentations of mortar shells, many symbolically filled in with hard red paint to signify fatalities.

Behind the mosque is **Skenderija bridge**, named after the once grand 1984 Olympic structure Skenderija. Walking east along the river after crossing Skenderija bridge, you'll come upon one of Sarajevo's loveliest buildings, the **Academy of Art**. On the other side of the street is the main **Post Office**, a beautiful Austro-Hungarian structure, with an elegant and peaceful interior renovated after the war. Next to it is the equally scrumptious **National Theatre** building, dating from 1899. It was here, on 28th June 1914, that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie kicked off WWI.

North of Baščaršija is **Svrzo House** (Glodžina 8), a display of the lifestyle of a well-to-do, 18th-century Muslim family. The owners lived in the house until 1952 when it was passed over to the city as a museum.

Walk across the river to check out the **Sarajevo Brewery** (Trg Heroja 35), a large red-and-cream edifice part of which has been converted into a cavernous bar. It serves standard Sarajevo beer plus a pleasant dark beer with a caramel aftertaste.

For dinner, check out **Inat Kuća** (Velika Alifakovac 1), set in a gorgeous wooden Ottoman building with a lovely riverside terrace. This is the ideal spot to try *sarma* (pickled cabbage leaves stuffed with minced meat) and *Begova čvorba* (Bey's soup, a Bosnian aphrodisiac).

After food, observe the Bosnian love of partying as you knock back a few drinks at eclectic **Zlatna Ribica** (Kaptol 5), relaxed **Buddha Bar** (Radičeva bb) and laidback **Bar** (Maršala Tita 7). If you want to see Sarajevo nightlife pre-1992, check out **Sloga** (Mehmeda Spahe 20; www.mcsloga.com), one of the city's favourite clubs.

SIEGE CITY

Start the day at **Mash** (Branilaca Sarajeva), a fashionable bar that serves a great breakfast. Fully recovered from your late night, head to **Zmaja od Bosne**, the stretch between the city and the airport, infamously dubbed 'sniper alley' during the Sarajevo siege. You'll notice

the shelled Holiday Inn building, home to journalists during the conflict. Spend the rest of the morning in the **History Museum** (Zmaja od Bosne 5). The outstanding exhibits are those from the 1990s war; many are personal belongings that bear some imprint of the siege.

Head back into the old town for a lunch of Macedonian polenta at tiny **Dveri** (Prote Baković bb). In the afternoon, catch a cab to the **Airport Tunnel Museum** (Tuneli 1). During the siege, the tunnel became a lifeline to the outside world and is considered to be an inanimate war hero. The museum displays 25m of the original 800m that ran through the ground as well as various bits of Bosnian Army memorabilia and documentary footage of the siege.

As night falls, jump in a taxi to **Park Prinčeva** (Iza Hidra 7; www.parkprinceva.ba). The restaurant overlooks the twinkling lights of Sarajevo way down below, and the superb Bosnian food is a memorable way to cap off your stay.

SLEEPING

Budget:

Pansion Baščaršija (Veliki Ćurčiluk; ☎ 232 185) Small pension run by a father and son team slap bang in the centre of Baščaršija.

Midrange:

Guest House Halvat (www.halvat.com.ba; ☎ 232 714) Family-run and super-friendly guest house complete with adorable Dalmatian dog.

Top End:

Villa Orient (hotel-villa-orient.com; ☎ 232 754) Lovely Ottoman building in the heart of Baščaršija with flashy reception and standard rooms.

By Amanda Canning

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