



Classic Montenegro and Serbia

7 - 14 October

The Balkan country of Montenegro is a varied country of rugged mountains, thick forests, fortified towns, medieval villages and narrow beaches, which became a sovereign state as recently as 2006. It is connected to the rest of the European passenger railway network only by a long and very scenic line from Serbia.

Highlights

- Possibly the most scenic train ride in Europe
- Ostrog Monastery pilgrimage site
- Guided tours of Bar and Nikšić
- Boat ride on beautiful Lake Skadar
- Amazing Sargan Eight train ride
- Uvac Special Nature reserve with boat ride and (maybe) vultures
- Includes 6 dinners and 4 lunches

We base ourselves in Podgorica for four nights which should allow plenty of time for exploration of this interesting capital city, located at the edge of the Zeta plain at the confluence of the Ribnica and Morača rivers. About a quarter of the country's total population reside here.

Opened in 1976, the country's main rail artery links the port of Bar with Serbia and its capital Beograd and ranks as one of the most spectacular railways in Europe. As we head northwards the line twists and climbs up the Morača valley and we are treated to magnificent mountain scenery, heavily forested in places, with numerous tunnels and bridges to negotiate. After passing through Bioče station we cross the Mala Rijeka viaduct, which at 198 metres is the highest in Europe. The splendid scenery continues as we reach the line's summit at Kolašin, having climbed from 40 to 1032 metres above sea level.

Day 1 Saturday 5 October, 2024

Direct flights from London Stansted (11:50). You can also fly from Heathrow, via Vienna, to Podgorica. Road transfer to our city centre hotel. Time to check in before we meet back in reception for dinner.

Day 2 Sunday 6 October (B,D)

After breakfast we transfer to the railway station from where we take a train ride to the city of Bar, on the Adriatic coast. On arrival we have a sightseeing tour of the Old Town which covers an area of 4.5 hectares, and contains the remains of around 600 public and private edifices from different periods of Mediterranean history. It is in references from the 10th century that the Old Town of Bar is mentioned for the first time; however, it is assumed that it had existed even in the 6th century in the form of the rehabilitated Roman 'castrum'. The residential architecture of the town is characterised by late gothic, renaissance, baroque and oriental elements. We take lunch in a national-style restaurant with Oriental-Balkan cuisine.

After lunch we travel by rail to Skadar and have a boat trip on beautiful Lake Skadar which is in a National

Park. A snack and local wine are included. The lake is located in the Zeta – Skadar valley and is surrounded by mountains, just 7 kilometres from the Adriatic Sea. Two thirds of the lake is in Montenegro and the rest in Albania. It is the largest lake on the Balkan Peninsula, one of the last fresh water spaces and the largest national park in Montenegro, famous for its diversity of flora and fauna and home to over 270 bird species. After our boat ride and snack (with local wine) on the boat, We transfer back to Podgorica. Overnight and welcome dinner at the same hotel.

Day 3 Monday 7 October (B,D)

After breakfast we have a city tour of old Podgorica. After time for lunch, we transfer to the railway station and take a train to Nikšić. We have a walking tour of Nikšić visiting the Roman bridge, King Nicolas Palace and Church of St. Vasilie. Afterwards we transfer by bus to the Ostrog Monastery. This is the most visited pilgrimage site in Montenegro with its cave-like chapel and the Monastery complex that preserves the sanctity of Saint Basil, the Orthodox Christian Saint of Miracles. We return to Podgorica and have dinner with regional music in the nearby restaurant Lanterna.

Day 4 Tuesday 8 October (B,D)

Morning is free and in the late afternoon we transfer to the railway station for the fast train to Kolašin which travels along the most exciting part of the Bar to Belgrade railway, rising into the mountains with many tunnels and bridges. Just open the train window and enjoy the scenery, especially as we cross the highest railway bridge in Europe – the Mala Rijeka Most. We alight in Kolašin, a small town at the foot of the Bjelasica mountain. We should arrive before dusk but don't worry as we travel along this section of line again in daylight. Dinner at hotel.

After time to check in to our hotel, we go by coach to Biograd lake in a nearby National Park where there is the opportunity to walk around the lake and enjoy the surrounding primeval forest. Lunch in the restaurant by the lake. Optional: jeep safari over the Bjelasica mountain to visit the "Vranjak" summer pasture cottage.



Day 5 Wednesday 9 October (B,L)

After breakfast we head north by road to Užice in neighbouring Serbia. We are welcomed by a professional tourist guide and coach and transferred to the nearby luxury rural complex of Lazarevi konaci for a welcome drink of homemade plum brandy or raspberry juice and slatko (a thin fruit jelly) followed by a brass orchestra performance and homemade lunch.

In the afternoon we transfer to the famous Smoke House in the tiny nearby village with a presentation on meat processing and smoking along with tasting of delicacies including smoked ham, sausage, rakija and wine. Our coach transfers us to Zlatibor, the most famous mountain tourist centre of Serbia and hotel accommodation in a spa hotel. Optional walk along the beautiful lakeside while enjoying fresh mountain air and scenery.

Day 6 Thursday 10 October (B,L,D)

After breakfast we transfer to Mokra Gora and the Šargan Eight train ride (at 10.20) we have a return ride on this astonishing railway, and the incredibly convoluted route up the mountain describes a figure of eight at one point, hence the name. There are many tunnels, but also many bridges from which the beautiful scenery of south west Serbia can be appreciated. After our ride we visit the nearby Küstendorf (Mečavnik) Wooden Town established by famous Film Director Emir Kusturica and now home of a film academy and a tourist sight in its own right. We drive on to the Staro Selo Sirogojno open air museum and have a big traditional lunch followed by sightseeing in the open-air complex which presents the lifestyle of the Dinaric population of the 19th century. A visit now to the Knitters Museum in Sirogojno and a short show of woollen handwork with tasting of dried raspberries and strawberries traditionally prepared by the Sirogojno Company. Return to Zlatibor hotel for dinner and our overnight stay.

Day 7 Friday 11 October (B,L,D)

After breakfast we depart back to Montenegro, taking a break for a boat ride through the Uvac Special Nature reserve – the largest natural habitat of Griffin vultures in the Balkans. We hope to be able to view some of the nests and maybe the adults if we're lucky. There will also be a visit to a small dairy producing the famous Zlatar cheese which we will be able to taste. Big homemade lunch in a rural household which provides tourist services. Expect buckwheat pie, cheese, beef cooked in milk and baklava (a sweet dessert pastry).

Onward by coach to the Gostun – Brodarevo border crossing where we stay for a night near Bijelo Polje.

Day 8 Saturday 12 October (B)

This morning we take the 09:07 train from Bijelo Polje back to Podgorica (arriving 11:24) giving us a chance to see the whole line in daylight (it is only possible when heading south).

Road transfers to the airport for return flights to London Stansted at 16:00. For Heathrow you depart at 15:20 and change places in Belgrade. Luggage can be left safely at the hotel until your departure.

These are really the only flight options from the UK. This stunning country is still quite difficult to get to and therefore adds to its charm. It is certainly not, yet, overrun by tourists.

Holiday Prices (per person)

- Full 8 day holiday including flight from London Stansted: £1,695
- Full 9 day holiday including flight from London Heathrow: £1,775
- Own flight arrangements: £1,475

Options

- Single room supplement: £190

Deposit

- Travelling by air: £600
- Own travel: £300

