

discover the balkans

Wednesday 5 May to Tuesday 18 May 2010

Exploration of Eastern Europe continues to fascinate as we build on our experience of the Balkans and visit Serbia and Bulgaria. Amongst superb mountain scenery we've found a couple of remote narrow gauge railways which are real gems for you to enjoy.

DAY 1 • Fly to Ljubljana

Fly from Stansted to Ljubljana and transfer to our city centre hotel in the capital of Slovenia. Ljubljana has been listed as one of the most desirable places in the EU in which to live and you'll soon understand why. It is a beautiful city, small enough to be explored on foot and, at this time of year, the Alps are still covered in late snow.

DAY 2 • Free Day in Ljubljana

There's a lot to see and do here and, certainly in fine weather, the pavement cafés will beckon but, for those intent on wandering further afield, a first class Inter Rail Pass makes excursions an easy matter. The fabulous limestone caves at Postojna are just an hour away.

DAY 3 • Excursion to Lake Bled

We take the train west to Sežana, then along a scenic byway to the lakeside resort of Bled. Here we are met by a coach and, after free time for lunch in the village and an optional visit to the Vintgar Gorge, we return by road to Ljubljana.

DAY 4 • Zagreb, Croatia's Capital

An early afternoon's train journey brings us to Zagreb. The hotel is opposite the station.

DAY 5 • Zagreb to Belgrade

There's time for just a little sightseeing in Zagreb before we continue by lunchtime train and cross the Serbian border to reach Belgrade. Transfer to our hotel which isn't in a central location – this is deliberate because those nearer the station are older properties whilst our hotel is new with modern facilities.

DAY 6 • Free Day in Belgrade

Belgrade is well worth a day's sightseeing and the hotel is but a short tram or bus ride from the centre (transport fares are

ridiculously cheap). The park and fortress overlooking the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers are especially attractive, as is the shopping street with its pavement cafés opposite the park entrance.

DAY 7 • Zlatibor

We take the scenic rail line south towards Montenegro but alight at Uzice where we have a coach transfer to the mountain resort of Zlatibor, our base for 2 nights.

DAY 8 • Mokra Gora and the Šargan Eight

Until the mid twentieth century, a narrow gauge railway linked Belgrade with Dubrovnik – a marathon of a journey across difficult mountainous country. The last section of this line closed in 1974 but the Serbian state railway has now reopened the most scenic part over the Šargan Pass from Mokra Gora, close to the border with Bosnia. Because of its distance from Western Europe, the line is rarely visited by most of us but, rest assured, it is one of the most spectacular pieces of railway engineering we have ever encountered. It climbs over the pass in a series of hairpins, spirals and a figure-of-eight loop which gives the line its name. It is now run entirely as a tourist attraction and the three-hour return trip includes photo stops at vantage points.

DAY 9 • Return to Belgrade

The morning is free to relax in the village of Zlatibor before our transfer to Uzice for the train to Belgrade.

DAY 10 • Belgrade to Sofia

As international main lines go, this one is not what you might expect. Much of it is single track and it certainly isn't high speed but there are some delightful scenic sections, including one through a spectacular limestone gorge east of Niš. Overnight in Sofia, capital of Bulgaria.



DAY 11 • Narrow Gauge to Bansko

We take a main line train to Septemvri to meet up with the second of our narrow gauge lines. It is still operated as a regular scheduled public service and the journey of over four hours to Bansko will take us over the mountains and through remote villages. Once again there are hairpins and even a spiral before we arrive at journey's end in time for evening meal.

DAY 12 • Free day in Bansko

Bansko itself is a ski resort surrounded by snow capped mountains and makes an ideal break in our journey. If you were sufficiently inspired by yesterday's train ride to want more, your Inter Rail Pass gives unlimited travel and you may want to take a train up into the mountains where it make several stops en route – ideal for exploring.

DAY 13 • Return to Sofia

Another chance to savour the mountain scenery as we return to Sofia.

DAY 14 • Heading for Home

Direct flight from Sofia to London Gatwick.

Please note that, as airline schedules stand at the time of going to press, this holiday uses different airports for departure and arrival home. However, times of departure and arrival are both at convenient times of the day for using the rail connecting services.

Trains, particularly in Serbia, are older and often without the refinements you would expect in Western Europe. Traditional low platforms are still the norm and access to them from the rest of the station is often by flights of steps. It is therefore more than ever essential that you travel with luggage which is easily manageable.

Seat reservations are not available on many of the services and we must limit the number of participants to 20 plus the tour leader. Please book early to ensure a place. Although

first class unlimited travel tickets are included, some of the trains used have only second class accommodation.

Hotels are all excellent and we will request non smoking rooms. However, no-smoking policies are neither observed nor enforced on Serbian trains.

price per person

Includes flights in economy class, first class Inter Rail Pass for Slovenia and Bulgaria, other rail travel specified, Mokra Gora excursion, hotels + breakfast and transfers specified.

Escorted holiday: £1,835

Single Room Supplement: £350

Deposit for the holiday: £200

Insurance: please see page 43

