

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/bosnia-and-hercegovina/travel-tips-and-articles/ten-reasons-to-visit-bosnia-hercegovina>

Ten reasons to visit Bosnia & Hercegovina

by [Mark Elliott](#) · Jun 15 2015

One of Europe's less-visited countries, the former-Yugoslavian nation of Bosnia & Hercegovina (BiH) is a treasure-trove of architectural and natural beauty. Even if you have just a couple of days, it's worth nipping in from neighbouring Croatia or Serbia to see Mostar's iconic bridge or to stroll the Ottoman-flavoured alleys of Sarajevo. But if you've got longer, there are many more highlights to discover.

Daredevil bridge-jumping in Mostar



Local man jumping from Mostar's Stari Most. Image by Tim E White / Getty

Forget bungee-jumping. In [Mostar](#), the real daredevils throw themselves straight off the parapet of the world-famous [Stari Most](#) (Old Bridge), dropping over 20m straight into the icy waters of the River Neretva. It's a tradition dating back long before the 1990s war which saw the bridge bombed to rubble. The bridge was painstakingly rebuilt in 2004, recreating the swooping stone arch of the 1567 original.

Each July there's a bridge-diving competition. At other times, professional jumpers will only perform once their touts have collected sufficient photo money from passing tourists. Some visitors even try it for themselves, paying €25 for advice and a practice

jump from a lower platform on the river bank. But that doesn't mean it's safe – travellers have died in the attempt.

War and peace in Sarajevo

Bosnia's capital, [Sarajevo](#), has a delightful Ottoman-era centre ringed by neo-Moorish Austro-Hungarian architecture, all set deep within a mountain valley blushing with red-tiled roofs and dotted with minarets. It's a photogenic, friendly city. Yet most visitors know its name for only two reasons. And both are associated with war.

A century ago, a gun-shot fired on the street corner beside Sarajevo's [Latin Bridge](#) killed Franz Ferdinand. That's the Austro-Hungarian Crown Prince, of course, not the Scottish rockers. His death proved the fuse that ignited WWI. The other conflict, Bosnia's messy 1990s civil war, finished 20 years ago. For nearly four years Sarajevo was besieged by Bosnian Serb forces and the only way in or out of the city for the defenders was through a hand-dug tunnel beneath the airport runway. Today, a section of that tunnel, along with the battle-scarred house in which the entrance was hidden, forms the unmissable [Tunnel Museum](#).

Wine-touring in Hercegovina



Vineyard near Međugorje in Hercegovina. Image by Thomas Stankiewicz / LOOK-foto / Getty

Intense summer sunshine beats down on the arid mountains of Hercegovina around the charming towns of [Trebinje](#) and Mostar. And that sunshine packs BiH's classic yet little-known grape varieties with wine-making potential. For dry, yet fruit-filled whites try a živalka. Meanwhile blatina and vranac produce reds that can be velvety

and complex. If you're driving around Hercegovina, follow the brown Vinska Cesta (wineroute.ba) signs that dot the countryside to locate a whole series of wineries. If you're just wanting to sample a few glasses, note that most restaurants have domaći (house) wine that's sold by the carafe that rarely costs more than €8 per litre. That's far less than by the bottle and ensures that you're drinking a really local drop.

'The World's Biggest Pyramid' in Visoko

Is all of traditionally taught pre-history wrong? That is the controversial message propagated by the archaeologists and new-age dreamers of Visoko's [Pyramid of the Sun](#) Foundation. Their central claim is that the hills surrounding the otherwise forgettable leather-tanning town of Visoko, are in fact, the world's biggest pyramids. The main 'pyramid' is even said to have an energy beam emanating from its apex. And beneath town is a labyrinth of tunnels that they claim to be well over 10,000 years old. Volunteers are busy digging out these tunnels, revealing rune stones, 'energy rocks' and water claimed to have special 'happy' properties. Whatever you might think of the claims, which have been widely discredited by mainstream archaeologists, it's certainly curious to delve into the labyrinth or simply drop by the foundation's Sarajevo [office-shop](#) for some mind-bending conversation.

Rich and distinctive coffee culture



Traditional Bosnian coffee, accompanied by Turkish delight and water. Image by Beatdrifter / Andy Holmes / Getty

'Any time Bosnians want to discuss something, they'll head for the nearest cafe,' says Asem, my local guide. 'Coffee is just the setting for conversation. But I don't ever worry that it might be bad.' Indeed, wherever you go in BiH, it does seem almost impossible to find a bad brew. Many Bosnians now choose an Italian-style espresso, but a proper Bosnian coffee is something unique. It comes in an individual, long neck copper pot called a džezva. Flavour-wise it's similar to Turkish – served mud-thick in thimble-sized cups, often with a cube of lokum (Turkish delight) – but unlike Turkish coffee, the grounds are brought to the boil several times to create a suitable crema. And thanks to the džezva those grounds stay out of your cup... as long as you wait. 'Aha!' adds Asem... 'Coffee also teaches you patience!'

Ottoman architectural treasures

Where it has survived or been painstakingly rebuilt, Bosnia's architectural heritage is a fascinating interplay of medieval Ottoman and later Central European styles. The old city centres of Mostar and Sarajevo are the prime examples, but the town of [Travnik](#) retains a fine sprinkling including two old clock towers, a 'many-coloured mosque', a fortress and array of Ottoman graves. Travnik was the setting for one of the great novels of Nobel Prize-winning Bosnian author Ivo Andrić. Meanwhile in [Višegrad](#), the author is commemorated in a new pseudo-antique town core built as a kind of historic theme-park. Višegrad was the setting for Andrić's masterwork, *Bridge on the Drina*, whose main 'character' is a real-life 1571 stone bridge. The [Mehmet Paša Sokolović Bridge](#) still stands and often appears to 'float' in the misty canyon that fronts the town.



The Mehmet Paša Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad. Image by Bernd Zillich / Getty

The Una Valley's rapids and waterfalls

The adorable Una River goes through a variety of moods. In the lush green gorges northwest of [Bihać](#), some sections are as calm as mirrored opal. Others gush over widely fanned rapids, as happens at [Kostelski Buk](#) where you can enjoy the spectacle while dining at one of BiH's most appealing riverside restaurants. Most dramatic is the glorious [Štrbački Buk](#), a waterfall that forms the centrepiece of the [Una National Park](#). The Una Regatta in late July sees hundreds of kayaks and rafts following a three-day course from Kulen-Vakuf to Bosanska Krupa, a quaint castle town where it's still possible to snap a photo of Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox places of worship all in a single frame.

Easy-access skiing at Bjelašnica



Snowy scenes in Bjelašnica. Image by Andreas Mohaupt / Getty

Out of the plane and onto the piste in an hour? Not many resorts can offer you that. But being under 30km from Sarajevo's compact airport, [Bjelašnica](#) is one place where you just might manage it. The small resort is hardly glitzy, but two of its three hotels are new and fashion-conscious, and the slopes are of international quality. After all, events of the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics were held here. Today there's the added attraction of floodlit night skiing (6pm-9pm). And in summer, the area of mountain villages tucked behind Bjelašnica offers a whole gamut of exploration possibilities on foot, mountain bike or quad.

Hiking through pristine forest in Sutjeska National Park

Perućica is one of Europe's last genuinely primeval native forests with stands of spruce, fir and beech sometimes exceeding 50m high, ranged around a 70m waterfall. As a Strict Reserve it can only be visited with an official guide, but numerous other trails in the surrounding [Sutjeska National Park](#) are open to all. These allow hiking and mountain bike access to some fabulous upland lakes. Start a visit by buying a map from the [Hotel Mladost](#) at Tjentište, where bicycles are also available for rent.

Dozens of atmospheric castles



Jajce's castle and old town, stunningly located above a 21m-high waterfall. Image by junlongyang / Getty

Perched high above the Una Valley, [Ostrožac Fortress](#) is so spookily gothic that it feels like the film set for a horror movie. [Jajce](#), one of Bosnia's finest fortified towns, is made all the more photogenic by a ring of urban waterfalls that cascade in front of the old citadel area. On a crag overlooking a deep cut valley high above Klučaj, the recently restored castle was the last of many Royal Bosnian fortresses to fall to the Ottomans (1463). But there are many, many more... from Sarajevo's hefty [Vratnik Citadel](#) to the pretty fortress village of [Počitelj](#) outside Mostar, and dozens of lesser-known ruins, there's a remarkable wealth of fortifications for castle-addicts to explore.

Read more: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/bosnia-and-hercegovina/travel-tips-and-articles/ten-reasons-to-visit-bosnia-hercegovina#ixzz3ejZE2pX1>