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Seven Places in Europe We Call Home

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From Madrid to Istanbul, our contributors reveal the hidden delights of their European homes: jewel-box gardens, neighborhood cafes, secret coves.

3. SARAJEVO

A City That Never Forgets

By **ALEX CREVAR**





Laura Boushnak for The New York Times

For nearly two decades, I have lived — on and off — in Sarajevo, an energized tangle of traditions wedged in a valley and fueled by colliding empires and cultures. From one window in my apartment and office (where I work as an editor and writer), I can see the main mosque, built in the 16th century, and Bascarsija, the old Ottoman bazaar. Another window overlooks the Miljacka River and the Latin Bridge, which leads to the green steeple of the Franciscan monastery and the snow-capped mountains beyond.

When people ask how I, an American from Atlanta, ended up in the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a city only now on travelers' maps, I say it was a combination of Sarajevo's under-the-radar subtlety and historic complexity. Here, modernity struggles against Old World traditions. Over the last century, this tenuous balance has been tested time and again.

Below my apartment, for example, Austria's Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated on June 28, 1914. That event sparked World War I and transformed the world. In the 1990s, Sarajevo was under a nearly four-year siege during the war that destroyed Yugoslavia and permanently rejiggered the Balkans.

Today, Bosnia's chief city is still about change — and perspective. The tile-inlaid words "Sarajevo Meeting of Cultures" stretch across the main pedestrian avenue and

pinpoint the spot where Ottoman flagstones (to the East) meet Austro-Hungarian Secessionist facades (to the West). Depending on the observer, this unexpected exactitude either inspires platitudes about diversity or is a reminder of a tumultuous past.

The Sarajevo I have come to love pays homage to every era. Recently, I found myself walking past ateliers, shops selling hand-sewn slippers, kebab stands, the aroma of hookah smoke. Climbing a cobbled alley, I stepped onto the porch of Cajdzinica Dzirlo, a teahouse anchored in Ottoman tradition. Here, patrons lounge on cushions and prayer rugs, and sip salep, a steaming drink made of wild orchid root and mixed with milk and cinnamon. “We have 50 teas,” says the owner, Dijana Dzirlo. “But we are not about tea, we are about our relationship to people.”

Later I might jump centuries ahead to the Yugoslavia-nostalgic tavern Zara iz duvara, which serves Bosnian fare like sarma, minced meat and rice rolled in cabbage. Zara becomes an open-mic venue three nights a week. Lamplight spreads under wood-beam ceilings and across lace curtains as guests lock arms, puff cigarettes, drink beer and rakija (schnapps) and sing acoustic rock and traditional numbers until the wee hours.

A good 21st-century recovery brunch awaits at Delikatesna Radnja. Creative types crowd the intimate riverside bistro. Snag a patio table and order veal steak with rosemary and basil, and red Vranac wine, such as the Vukoje Reserve.

I often escape time altogether with a jaunt into the eternal: a hike above town to the top of the 5,344-foot Trebevic Mountain. The adventure tourism operator Green Visions leads treks from the graffitied shell of the 1984 Winter Olympics bobsled track, through spruce forests with a view of Old Town and a panorama of peaks. From this position I feel small but invigorated by the promise of my adopted home’s next chapter.