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NORWAY to NOWHERE

LIVE A BOLD STORY

MAY 10, 2015

Weekend Getaway: A Guide to Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Welcome to our Weekend Getaway series! While it's our preference to discover a country slowly and thoroughly, realistically time often only allows for a long weekend of exploring. Each week we'll focus on a different city and highlight how to get the most out of a 2-4 day stay. Sometimes we write about the city ourselves, while other times we'll have awesome guest bloggers giving us the low-down.

If you're interested in guest blogging on this series, shoot us an email!

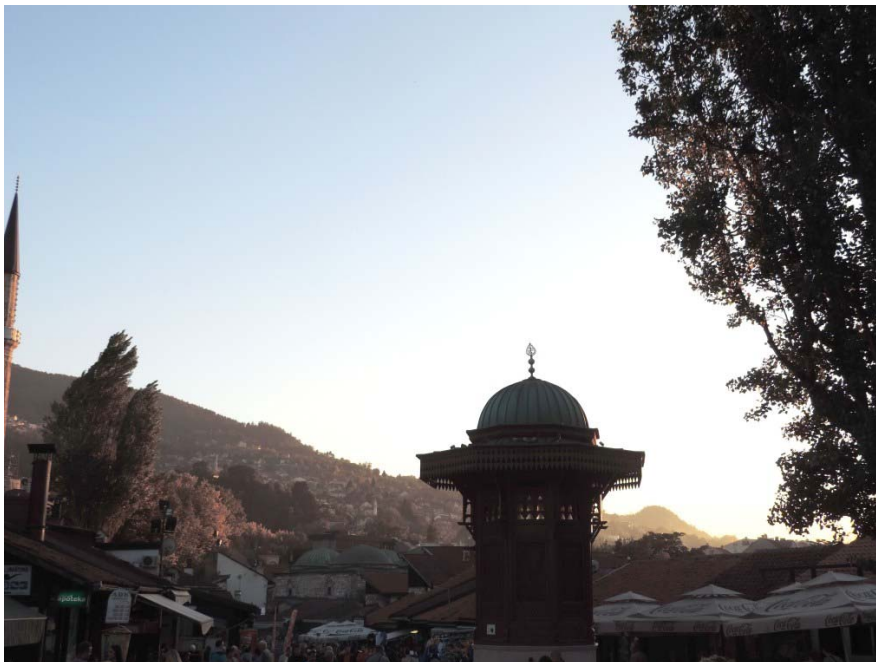


Welcome! Tell us a little bit about yourself (don't be shy), your blog and where you're currently traveling.

Hey. My name is Ariana, I'm 27 and I live in Sydney, Australia. Though Australia is my home, and has been for most of my life, my heart belongs in my birth country Bosnia & Herzegovina. The war started in Bosnia when I was only four, and we had to leave everything behind to escape. My first visit back since the war was only in 2013, twenty years after leaving. This July will be my fourth trip since then. I started my blog as a way of breaking down the barriers of people's views on Bosnia, to show them the beauty the country has to offer and why it should be on everyone's bucket list. This summer, I am packing my bags with a one way ticket to Bosnia, where I will be volunteering in a hostel and tour agency, and doing promotional tours around Bosnia for my blog on the days I have off. I can't wait to learn more about my country and to share it with everyone!

What makes Sarajevo a good place for a weekend getaway?

Sarajevo, sometimes called the "Jerusalem of Europe" and famous for its cultural and religious diversity, has a "east meets west" ambience. One minute you are walking down old Ottoman streets feeling like you are in Istanbul, the next minute you feel like you have been transported to Vienna. Despite having suffered during the war, the city is rebuilding its infrastructure and tourism is booming. Not wanting to spend much for a getaway? Take advantage of fantastic exchange rates, as Bosnia is not yet using the Euro and caters to bargain hunters and high-end shoppers alike.





What's the best way to travel to Sarajevo?

You can fly straight into Sarajevo International Airport. A cheaper but more time consuming way is to catch a bus from major cities into Sarajevo. If coming from Mostar or Dubrovnik, the bus is the best option.

Public transportation: Is it available in this city, and is it easy to navigate?

Taxis, buses and trams are available but most of the sightseeing can be done on foot. Taxis are cheap and my favourite way of going to non-walkable places.

If traveling to other Bosnian towns, head to the Main Bus station, and from there you can get a bus to places like Mostar, Dubrovnik, Konjic, etc. I did notice that timetables online aren't always reliable (almost missed two busses). When at the station, go to the info desk, ask for a timetable or if they don't have one just ask for each place what time the bus will arrive.

What is the typical cost of a taxi to get from one side of town to the other?

Taxis are cheap and are the best way around the center 2.5KM (convertible mark) + 1 KM per kilometer. (Side note: KM refers to the currency, similar to USD for American currency.) Be cautious of taxis in Sarajevo though as there are non-registered ones working who will overcharge you. Check out my [helpful tips post](#) to help you navigate. From airport to city center should cost no more than 10-15 marks (\$5-8 USD).

Do you have any recommendations on a luxury or boutique hotel in the area?

Hotel Central Sarajevo. As the name suggests, the hotel is in a very central location and all the main sights are easy to walk to. I haven't stayed here myself as I normally stay with family, but it's central to everything.

How about those looking for a more budget friendly option?

When I was recently looking for accommodation to book for June, I looked on [Airbnb](#) and found The Doctors Hostel, and immediately had to book. It's a short 5 minute walk from the old town, and there are several rooms to choose from. There is a 10 bedroom, 6 bedrooms with balcony and a 4 bedroom. Each bed comes with curtains for privacy, fresh sheets and a towel. Owned and run by an American woman who fell in love with Sarajevo, she moved there and started her business.

One of our favorite things to do while exploring a new city is to take part in the outdoors scene. What are some adventure and/or outdoors activities (such as hiking, biking, waterfall rappelling, skiing, skydiving, etc.) to enjoy here?



A lot of Sarajevo can be explored on foot. From cafes, to museums, markets and places of worship, Sarajevo is a city full of new adventures and places waiting to be explored. If skiing and hiking is your thing, Sarajevo is your place to be as it's surrounded by mountains. Sarajevo hosted the 1984 Winter Olympic Games, so skiing during the winter and hiking in the summer seasons are great for adventure seekers. If you are looking for a break from the city life, take a taxi to Vrelo Bosne. This gorgeous oasis is the spring of the river Bosna, (by which the country was named after) and is beautiful all year round. Also Skakavac waterfall (Skakavac meaning grasshopper) is located 12 km from Sarajevo. At 98 meters high, the Skakavac waterfall is one of the greatest and most attractive waterfalls in Bosnia & Herzegovina, surrounded by lush green forest and beautiful mountains.

For more, check out my [top 10 things to do in Sarajevo!](#)

Are there any local entertainment events that we should know about when planning a trip to Sarajevo (such as South By South West in Austin, a Football match in England, or running with the bulls in Spain)?

In Sarajevo during summer season? Bascarsija Nights is an annual festival, held throughout the month of July, and includes dance, music, and theatrical performances.

The Sarajevo film festival is held every year in early August, and focuses on regional feature, short, and documentary films. A few years ago Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie (who love visiting Bosnia), attended the festival. I myself went in 2013, lined up with a girl from Canada whom I met during a tour, and even though we missed out on movie tickets, being part of the red carpet event was amazing.

Ramadan & Eid are the religious holidays of Bosnian Muslims. During the month of Ramadan, people fast til sundown. Families and friends gather in the town, eating, and socialising. On Eid everyone is nicely dressed, and it is a time for family and friends. In the summertime, the sun doesn't set til about 8 or 9pm so you will see a lot of restaurants and cafes full of people, waiting for the ezan call for prayer & the canon to go off which marks the end of the fast for the day.

Name one phenomenal museum that shouldn't be skipped.

Sadly due to lack of funding the National Museum is closed as of 2012 but there are several smaller museums worth checking out. Brusa Bezistan is one of the museums part of Muzej Sarajevo. This two story museum shows the story of Sarajevo's past, from the prehistoric settlements at Butmir, the Illyrian and Roman settlements, medieval Bosnia, the Ottoman period, the Austro-Hungarian period and modern times. Another great thing to check out is the Latin Bridge and the museum close by. If you remember from history class this was the place where the assassination of Austrian Archduke took place, which then initiated the start of WW1.



Where should we go if we want to blend in with the locals?

Bascarsija, the old town square (and often called Pigeon Square), is the meeting point for locals. Most taxi drives will drop you off right across the road from here. It's always buzzing with locals and tourists. You can always spot a local; they can sit at a coffee shop for hours, drinking traditional black coffee, enjoying their day and socializing. The tourists drink their coffee and hurry away, which is ok if you don't have a lot of time in town, but doesn't give you that feeling of blending in. Try the hot chocolate at Miris Dunja. Unlike the liquid ones we are used to here in Australia, It's more like chocolate pudding. If you are a coffee person I will recommend you try the traditional black coffee (similar to Turkish coffee). It's strong and bitter with no sugar, but the taste grows on you. Served in traditional coffee pots (dzezva) and cups (filjan) with a square of Turkish delight!



Let's talk about an important aspect of travel: Food. What are your absolute favorite restaurants in the area?

Zjelo, famous for its cevapi & Morica Han, once an Inn, it has been turned into a restaurant with amazing food and is an amazing atmosphere, especially when it's a religious holiday. For cafes I recommend the Baklava shop which has a variety of flavours to choose from including Walnut baklava, Almond Baklava and even Nutella baklava. They start from only 1 KM per piece, and is perfect with a traditional Bosnian coffee. Also as mentioned above, Miris Dunja is a gorgeous café tucked away in a small street just before the Gazi Mosque

What's one local dish you'd recommend someone to try while they're here?

Ćevapi or ćevapčići, they are the national dish of Bosnia. It consists of a grilled dish of minced meat sausages. They are usually served of 5–10 pieces in a flatbread (*lepinje* or *somun*), often served with chopped onions, sour cream or kajmak (sort of like cottage cheese)

We're from the US where waiters and waitresses make a living solely from tips. What is the tipping etiquette in Sarajevo?

Tipping isn't necessary, but is always appreciated. Since food is so cheap, and most people work so hard for very little money, I always tend to tip in Bosnia. How much depends on service, but even 1KM can make their day!

If we're craving a night out on the town, what are some cool local spots we should check out?

Most of the young locals head out to Bascarsija at night. With no shops open there are hardly any tourists, making it a perfect way to explore the town on a hot summer's night. Cafes remain open til late.

Anything we should know about the local culture and customs (so you don't offend people, or get offended by something!)

Even though the country is rebuilding itself from the war, fixing infrastructure and tourism is booming, many people still don't like to talk about the war. Try avoiding this conversation, unless they initiate it. Bosnia is a country with mixed ethnicities and religions, but in Sarajevo, the majority is of Muslim background. Be aware that in religious places such as mosques and their grounds, there is a modest dress code.

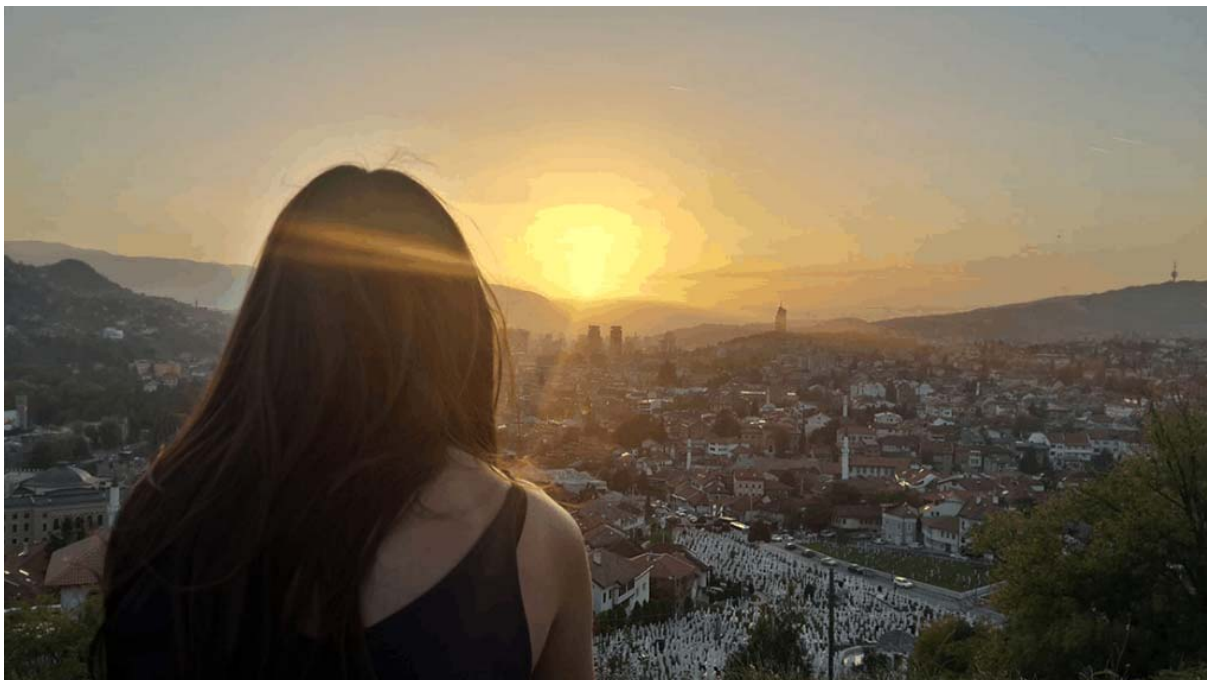
What is the currency here and how much would a typical pint of beer or glass of wine cost?

Currency is the Bosnian Convertible Mark. (KM). At the moment 1KM is \$US 0.55 & \$AUS 0.70.

Beer, like everything else in Sarajevo is cheap. The local beer (Sarajevsko) averages at 3KM, which is a bit cheaper than import beers, but like all beverages in Sarajevo, IT'S CHEAP!

Where should we go for the city's best photo op?

Zuta Tabija, meaning Yellow Fortress. It's the remains of an old fortress, up on a hill that overlooks the whole city and is amazing during sunset. Have a look at my [post](#) to see just how amazing it really is!



Sunset over Sarajevo



Written by Ariana from [The Bosnian Aussie](#)