

Why You Shouldn't Miss Sarajevo on Your Next Trip to Europe? by Larissa Olenicoff

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You listed Sarajevo on the number 3 on the Top 5 Eastern Europe places to visit List. Can you say for the Sarajevo Times why particularly you put Sarajevo on that list?

Sarajevo is such a unique city, really unlike anywhere else on the entire continent, not just Eastern Europe. I can't recall meeting anyone who has visited and didn't have wonderful things to say about the time they spent there. It's a treasure for sure and still somewhat of a secret (a great one) as far as European capitals go.

Can you enumerate the things that you saw in Sarajevo and will remember for sure?

It would be easy to just spout off the usual sights – Baščaršija, the Yellow Bastion, Tunnel Museum, abandoned bobsled track, some of its famous bars and cafes – but the experiences I had with each are what makes them all unforgettable. For example, the Tunnel Museum itself is not the most interesting museum you will ever visit, but chatting with one of the employees there about his personal experience during the siege and hearing firsthand what it felt like to have that as the only link to the outside world for a period made it one of the more memorable museum experiences I've ever had. The abandoned bobsled track is also nothing special, just concrete, but getting there and back is an experience in itself as suddenly you find yourself in the mountains with some of the best views of Sarajevo that you probably didn't realize were only 10 minutes from where you were sipping coffee in the center of town.

Sarajevo is a beautiful town with lots of interesting things to see and do for sure, but I think above all else it's the people and the atmosphere that are the most unforgettable, not its sights.

Sarajevo offers travelers something different and something special from most other places in Europe. It's laid back but cosmopolitan, it's not overly packed with tourists just yet, and it's incredibly warm and welcoming. Even if you think you have an idea of what it will be like before you arrive, chances are it will still surprise you. Sarajevo is the kind of place that you feel more than you see and those tend to leave a greater impression on travelers in the end.

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Quite simply put, Sarajevo is one of the coolest cities I have ever been in, definitely one of the best in all of Europe and one you should go see now. It is also by far one of the most affecting places I have traveled to on so many different levels. Even just thinking about it now and going through my photos, I am overwhelmed by a variety of emotions. Happiness, sadness, pride, anger, excitement, worry, affection. They are all there.

For whatever reason, I love comparing cities to people. Sarajevo is that person you know who has been through so much darkness in their life, more than you could ever imagine, yet they don't dwell on it, they don't want you to feel sorry for them. If anything, they want you to enjoy the moment with them and instead tell you about all the wonderful things that have happened in the most humble way possible. You know that behind that big smile and warm welcome there is pain, lots of it, but the fact of the matter is that we are here today so let's make the most out of it. That mentality. Those kinds of people are the epitome of inspiration. Sarajevo is the epitome of inspiration.

It's also freaking GORGEOUS. I didn't expect to feel so close to nature here but it's completely surrounded by rolling hills with the Miljacka River calmly passing through. I was there in mid-March when there was still a bit of snow, but I can imagine in spring and summer this place gets lush.

Sarajevo also rocks multiculturalism like no other place I've been to before. One minute you feel like you are in Istanbul and then Vienna the next. Yet no matter how cosmopolitan and pivotal this city has been throughout history, it has retained this unexplainable coziness. The second you start wandering its streets you feel almost immediately at home, regardless of where you come from.

Of course it's hard not to bring up the war when talking about any place in the Balkans because it's still so obvious, physically and emotionally, but I think what surprised me the most about

Sarajevo is what I mentioned before – they don't dwell on it. They want you to be aware of what happened and not forget, but they are also eager to move forward and not let those awful times overshadow all the greatness it has to offer.

I am convinced Sarajevo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina for that matter, will blow up over the next couple of years as a major tourist destination in Europe. So much natural beauty, so much potential. So whether you are already traveling around Europe or have plans to in the near future, I just wanted to give you a heads up, a warning if you will – do not miss Sarajevo!

Interview by Zejna Smajic Yesilyurt