

Via Dinarica Walks in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Mostar and Sarajevo

<https://www.kudutravel.com/tours/bosnia-walking-tour>

6 – 17 September 2020

We continue our exploration of the Balkans in arguably the least developed, but undoubtedly politically most complex, country of the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia Herzegovina. The natural beauty of mountainous Bosnia and Mediterranean Herzegovina combines with a rich cultural heritage built on influences from the Illyrian, Celtic, Slavic, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian periods.

During our 12-day tour, there are seven country walks including three along the White Trail of the Via Dinarica, a long-distance path traversing the Dinaric Alps from Slovenia to Albania. We take a boat trip through the Hutovo Blato Nature Reserve, visit mosques, Orthodox and Catholic churches, mediaeval necropoli, hilltop fortresses and museums and walk through Sarajevo and Mostar on guided city tours.

Itinerary

DAY 1

D included

After meeting at Sarajevo airport in the afternoon, we have a 2-hr drive south-east to Sutjeska National Park, the oldest national park in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Originally established to preserve the site of an important Partisan victory in WW2, it includes the country's highest peak, Mount Maglić (2,386 m), and the Perućica Nature Reserve, a primeval forest of beech, fir and spruce. We stay for 2 nights in a comfortable 3-star hotel.

DAY 2

B, L, D included

We follow a narrow mountain road for 1 hour to reach the start of our walk in the heart of the National Park. We join the Via Dinarica trail at the Prijedor pass (1,667 m) and follow it across the Montenegro border to the glacial Trnovačko Lake (1,500 m), set in a natural amphitheatre formed by the surrounding 2,000-metre peaks. The round trip takes around 3 hours.

DAY 3

B, L, D included

A 2-hour drive takes us to the historic town of Stolac in Herzegovina. As we walk on a hilltop plateau above the town, we discover the cyclopean walls of an ancient fort built by the Daorsi, an Illyrian tribe. Our country walk continues past a charming hidden 16th century Serbian Orthodox church. After lunch in Stolac, below the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian fortress, we stop at the Radimlja necropolis to admire the remarkable 15th and 16th century carved tombstones (stećci). Finally, we walk through Počitelj, a village built on the hill above the Neretva river, noted for its Ottoman era architecture, before heading for our simple hotel in a peaceful location in the Hutovo Blato Nature Reserve, listed as a Birdlife International Important Bird Area consisting primarily of marshlands created by the Krupa River.

DAY 4

B, L, D included

We are well placed to start our 2-hour boat trip early to take advantage of the morning light. As we travel through narrow canals and lakes, we look for birds such as Squacco and Purple Heron,

Pygmy Cormorant, Glossy Ibis, Little Bittern and Ferruginous Duck. By the early afternoon, we are in Mostar (1-hour's drive) and our atmospheric hotel for 2 nights is a listed Ottoman house in a quiet street near the city centre. On our tour of the old town, we pass several 15th and 16th century mosques and may watch craftsmen, such as coppersmiths or carpet makers, work in their traditional shops, before we cross the famous Old Bridge - Stari Most - spanning the Neretva, guarded by the impressive towers on both sides of the river. The bridge, built in 1566, was destroyed in the conflict of 1993 and restored in 2004 with the re-opening televised around the globe.

DAY 5

B, L, D included

Following a 2-hour walk on the windy karst Podvezlje Plateau above Mostar, we drive to Blagaj to climb to the mediaeval fortress of Herceg Stjepan built over an Illyrian and Roman fort and visit the 16th century Dervish *tekke*, a building complex constructed at the base of a 200-metre cliff protecting the source of the River Buna. We return to Mostar in the afternoon for some free time to wander through the ancient cobbled lanes or people watch from a traditional coffee house whilst enjoying a cup of Bosnian coffee accompanied by *rahatlokum* (Turkish delight).

DAY 6

B, L, D included

In the morning, we walk (1.5 hrs) in the quiet valley of a Neretva tributary before joining locals and visitors for a roast lamb lunch in one of the restaurants serving this speciality. In Jablanica, we visit a museum dedicated to the WW2 Battle of Neretva, featuring the collapsed bridge still hanging from the cliff as a reminder of one of the great victories of the Partisans. We continue to the Blidinje Nature Park, where we stay for 2 nights in a 3-star mountain hotel with an excellent restaurant.

DAY 7

B, L, D included

Blidinje Nature Park was set up to preserve an area of the Dinaric Alps and covers a plateau with a large glacial lake and the surrounding mountain ranges of Vran and Čvrsnica. We spend the day walking and exploring the history and culture of this remote area. We will see forests of the endemic Bosnian pine (*pinus leucodermis*) with *stećci* scattered around these ancient meadows, where monks accompanied shepherds to their pastures and established the forerunner of the Church of St. Elias in Masna Luka.

DAY 8

B, L, D included

We spend the day walking in the Blidinje Nature Park along the Via Dinarica, a recent initiative set up to promote sustainable tourism through community involvement. In the afternoon, we drive (2.5 hours) to our modern 4-star hotel for 1 night, located in the Bjelasnica ski resort.

DAY 9

B, L, D included

We drive to the village of Lukomir on the Bjelašnica mountain (2 hrs). At 1,469 meters, it is Bosnia's highest and most isolated permanent settlement, with the traditional lifestyle of the Dinaric highlanders still practised. We start our final and perhaps most spectacular walk (3.5 hrs), along the top of the Rakitnica canyon to another charming upland village, Umoljani. From here, we transfer to the heart of Sarajevo and our historic 5-star hotel for 3 nights.

DAY 10

B, L, D included

Setting off for our city tour on foot, we are soon in Baščaršija, the market area of the Ottoman town. The 16th century Gazi Husrev Beg Mosque is amongst the finest examples of Ottoman

Islamic architecture in the Balkans. The Brusa Bezistan, the 6 domed covered market designed in 1551 by Rustum Pasha, Grand Vizier to Suleiman the Great, houses the informative Museum of Sarajevo. We continue to the spot where Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, thus launching the First World War, and visit the small museum dedicated to Austro-Hungarian rule in Sarajevo (1878-1918).

DAY 11

B, L, D included

A short drive out of town brings us to the moving and memorable Tunnel Museum, which documents the lifeline that saved Sarajevo during the 1,400 day siege in 1992 – 1996. The nearby suburb of Ilidža, a thermal spa since the Roman times, has several landmark buildings from the Austro-Hungarian period, including the hotel Austria, where Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Sofia stayed during their fateful visit.

DAY 12

B included

We visit the small museum dedicated to the history of the Jewish community established in the 15th century by Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain, before a midday transfer to the airport concludes your holiday.

Activity Level

Standard

7 walking days, 1.5 to 4 hours daily. Waterproof walking boots with a Vibram-type sole and good ankle support are recommended, particularly as many paths in the forests and mountains are quite rough. Walking poles are also very useful.

Temperatures

The low-lying area of Herzegovina around Mostar is the warmest part of the country we visit and early September average high temperatures are 26°C – 28°C with average lows of 15°C. The rest of the country is higher and cooler. In Sarajevo, average high temperatures are 23°C – 25°C and the average low is 9°C.

Accommodation

- 2 nights in Tjentiste near the Sutjeska National Park, in a comfortable 3-star hotel
- 1 night in a simple hotel in a peaceful location in the Hutovo Blato Nature Reserve
- 2 nights in Mostar, in an atmospheric hotel in a listed building near the city centre
- 2 nights in the Blidinje Nature Park, in a 3-star mountain hotel with an excellent restaurant
- 1 night in Bjelasnica ski resort, in a modern 4-star hotel
- 3 nights in an historic 5-star hotel in the centre of Sarajevo

Trip Price, per person sharing

£2,673.25 until 5th December 2019

£2,817.75 until 5th June 2020

£2,745.50 until 5th March 2020

£2,890 after 5th June 2020

<https://www.kudutravel.com/faq#discounts>

£400 deposit per person

£260 single room supplement

Please note that the single room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. If you are willing to share but no other suitable guest books on the trip, we regret that the supplement will be payable. We endeavour to obtain double rooms for single occupancy whenever possible, but hotels in some countries do have single rooms that are small and less well positioned. In this case the supplement is simply ensuring your privacy.

Price Includes

- Accommodation for Days 1 through 12, on a twin shared basis
- Meals with wine and beer at restaurant lunches and dinners, as listed in the daily notation
- Land transportation in a private vehicle as described except during free periods
- Entrance, sightseeing and National Park fees as described, except during free periods
- Services of a local guide plus a Kudu tour guide
- Gratuities for restaurant and hotel staff (appreciation for your tour guides is at your discretion)

Price does not Include

- Flights to and from Sarajevo airport
- Trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- Immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- Passport, visa and health documentation
- Personal expenses (laundry, alcohol besides wine and beer with group lunches and dinners, free time activities, etc.)
- Transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Bosnia and Herzegovina departure tax, if any

VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

Visa and Health Requirements

Visitors from the EU, USA, Canada and Australia currently require a valid passport, but not a visa, for entry to Bosnia Herzegovina. If you are a national of any other country, please check visa regulations with your nearest relevant Embassy.

At present, there are no specific and compulsory health requirements for entry to Bosnia Herzegovina. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk/travellers) and the FCO (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

Insurance

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please see the brochure, or ask our office.

Size of Party

This trip will run with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 14 guests.