

Peace and War

The Balkans have had a long history of war. The most recent chapter has occurred after Yugoslavia broke apart in the 1990s. Croatia had a relatively peaceful independence movement and thus has prospered. Bosnia had a more violent independence period and is just now beginning to make progress.

The most prominent impression of Mostar, Bosnia is the remnants of the 1990s civil war. There are numerous bombed out buildings and others peppered with bullets, with signs on their crumpling walls stating "Attention! Dangerous Ruins". Due to hills on both sides of the city, it was easy to bomb the city for the Serbs who controlled one side and the Croats and Muslims who controlled another. The Croats then turned on their allies the Muslims and more damage of the city ensued. An area near



the old front line illustrates in the most vivid detail the destruction of the war. Nearly all of the buildings on the road were destroyed and still have not been rebuilt.

The sights of Mostar reflect its violent past. A new church is being built as the old one, containing a statue of the Virgin Mary with a bullet hole through her head, was mostly destroyed. The Karadzobegova Mosque is also being refurbished due to the war and has numerous reminders of the war in its cemetery. The Old Bridge is not really old because it too was destroyed but was rebuilt in 2004. The tradition of diving off the 60 feet high bridge has returned.



The Museum of Herzegovina shows a short movie that gives a history of the Old Bridge, in which the bridge seems to take on a human persona. The movie begins with the divers in the 1950s jumping off the bridge to the sound of happy music. Then it shows the shelling of the bridge. The bridge attempts to hold on, to resist death from the constant barrage of bombs before eventually collapsing into the Neretva River. At this point, it feels like a friend has succumbed to death. However, the bridge was rebuilt and the movie culminates with the joyous reopening that includes fireworks and divers again jumping into the river with sparklers in hand.

There are some possibilities to get away from the destruction and enjoy Mostar. There are a couple of Turkish houses with intricate detail related to Islam, such as a stone globe facing in the direction of Mecca. The old town of Kujundziluk has the cobblestone streets, cafes and shops that one would expect from an old town. The hilly countryside is beautiful but trekking is still limited due to landmines and unexploded ordinance.

Sarajevo reflects the destruction but also illustrates the hope for a rebuilding Bosnia. In the central part of the capital are Sarajevo roses, located on city sidewalks. These are exploded mortars that leave the shape of a rose and have now been filled in with red paint as a simple memorial for those who died in the war. Near the outside of the city is the Tunnel Museum, an 800 meter long tunnel built under the airport as a way to connect Croats who were under siege by the Serbs. Our still bitter tour guide, Sunny, used these tunnels as a teenager to deliver 40 pound packages to fellow Croats who were not outside of Sarajevo and our driver, Dark Wolf, the aggressive driver that drove through sniper alley to get people and supplies back and forth to the tunnel.

Sunny and Dark Wolf took us to other places in the city and described the war and there experiences. From an area overlooking the city, one can see the bright yellow Holiday Inn, where international journalists stayed. Sunny told us of the UN Food Program that supplied such goods as two cargo planes of condoms, dehydrated food from the Vietnam War, and large quantities of malaria pills, despite the fact that there is no malaria in Bosnia. There is also a 10 foot high yellow and blue Icar can located by the National Museum sarcastically dedicated to the UN Food Program. This was the most common food that was supplied to the Bosnians and was unfavorably compared to dog food. Sunny's onslaught continued with stories of the UN being called smurfs, because they had blue helmets and were small people. He told us of common jokes, "Why are you digging in the ground so deep? Because if I find oil maybe NATO will start to bomb." The siege lasted four year, NATO eventually bombed the Serbs and five days later the siege was over. 11,000 died in Sarajevo and about a quarter million died in Bosnia.

There are indications of a divided, but tolerant Bosnia. The National Library was bombed in 1992 and thus the Bosnian repository of books was destroyed. At the entrance of the not yet rebuilt library is a sign indicating the "cowardly" Serbs bombed this from the surrounding hills. Nearby is the Latin Bridge where Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was killed which was the catalyst for World War I. However, there are places of worship for four religions within 100 meters (Eastern Orthodox, Judaism, Islam and Roman Catholic), which can be found in only one other city, Jerusalem. During World War II, the Nazis were looking to destroy an important Jewish book and the Jews hid it in



a mosque with the assistance of Muslims. Nearly everyone smokes cigarettes, drinks beer and eats *cevapcici* (sausages with onions) and *burek* (a doughy dish that is not nutritious but is filling). There seems to be a collective Bosnian aversion to vegetables. The numerous new open aired bars and restaurants are a sign of shared optimism that the tenuous peace and rebuilding will continue.

Split and Dubrovnik in Croatia have similar attributes, most notably an old town, with nearby islands and beaches. In Split's case, the palace in the old town belonged to Roman Emperor Diocletian and the basement hall includes a description of that palace. The city of Split originated in the palace and as more people entered the city began to take form. Hiking up Marjan Hill, one can see some small churches and Mestrovic



Gallery, dedicated to a Croat sculptor. Hvar and Korcula Island can be visited and there are rocky and sandy beaches scattered in the area. Dubrovnik's old town can be best visited by walking her city walls, in which one can see the orange-tiled city houses. Also possible to see is the Franciscan monastery that includes a functioning pharmacy that opened in 1391. Lokrum

Island has a national park that includes a botanical garden, several proud peacocks and old monastery ruins. Both Split and Dubrovnik have a maze of cobblestones streets in the old town, heaps of tourists and bars and restaurants to house them. Overall, Dubrovnik seems to cater more to tourists as it has medieval shows and more street vendors, like puppet shows.

Continuing down the Dalmatian Coast is a country that declared independence in 2006, Montenegro. Kotor is the main tourist city on the coast and much like other coastal cities the treat is to just take a stroll. There is a descent maritime museum and a couple nice churches with elaborate chandeliers. More of a hike than a stroll is visiting the old castle overlooking the city. From here one can see the city, its walls and its position along southern Europe's deepest fiord. A lot of candle lit restaurants are located in the city center.

Heading south of Kotor, a series of cities (Bar, Budva and Ulcinj) are known for beaches and their party atmosphere. Bar and Budva stresses beaches and parties, while Ulcinj can be used as a way into Albania. All illustrate the increasing strength as Russians who are buying land in the area. Some Montenegrins say that Russia is wealthier than the US. Although that's not true, it illustrates what locals think of Russian economic strength. There are also many Russians on vacation here and they dominate the

social life. A popular activity at night is to walk the promenade along the beach, which seemingly everyone does.

The differences between countries that engaged in civil war are noticeable when visiting the Balkans. Croatia has a steady stream of tourists and the economic growth continues. Bosnia struggled with civil war longer and is continuing to balance between peace and war.