A Journey through Europe—Preserved in Time

This tour explores the ancient and historic areas of Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia. The first stop is Bulgaria— a cultural melting pot with Greek, Slavic, Ottoman, and Persian influences. You will then move on to three Republics that were once part of Yugoslavia—Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia. Along the way, you'll work your way into the heart of mountainous Montenegro by traveling the Belgrade to Bar Railway, one of the least known but most spectacular railroad trips in Europe. Passing through well over 200 tunnels along a 300-mile route, you may think you are part of the cast of Hitchcock's "The Lady Vanishes."

In the heart of the Balkans you will discover the remains of ancient Thracian tribes, as well as medieval monuments and Roman ruins. This tour includes visits to several Unesco World Heritage sites as well as a cultural sampling of the present-day Balkans. History and art lovers alike will find themselves transported back in time to a Europe of monasteries and cobblestone streets.

Opposite: Shipka Memorial Church
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Above: Veliko Trnovo on a stamp
Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1: Arrive in Sofia, rest in the Grand Hotel Sofia
Day 2: Sofia- Rila Monastery, the cave of St. Ivan Rilski, and Boyana Church
Day 3: The Old Town of Plovdiv and remains of the Ancient Roman Empire
Day 4: Asenova Fortress, Bachkovo Monastery, Villa Yustina Winery
Day 5: Shipka Memorial Church, the ancient town of Veliko Trnovo
Day 6: The Byzantine town Nicopolis ad Istrum, Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo
Day 7: Walking tour of Sofia including Alexander Nevski Cathedral
Day 8: Travel day from Sofia to Belgrade
Day 9: Belgrade to Podgorica, Montenegro by Belgrade to Bar Railway
Day 10: Centinje, Sveti Stefan, and Budva on the coast
Day 11: Walking tour of Kotor and cruise on the Kotor Bay
Day 12: Travel to Croatia along the Adriatic coastline, walking tour of Dubrovnik
Day 13: Peljesac Peninsula and the village of Ston
Day 14: Breakfast, depart Dubrovnik
Daily Itinerary

**Day 1:** Arrival. Stay at the Grand Hotel Sofia - right in the heart of Sofia overlooking the City Garden.

**Day 2:** After breakfast you set out for the Rila Monastery, around a two-hour drive. The Rila monastery is the largest and most important orthodox cloister in the country and is, without a doubt, the jewel of Bulgarian cultural and historical heritage as well as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Situated deep in the dense pine forests of the Rila Mountains, it may be considered the most beautiful ancient monastery in all of Europe. Not far away is the cave which was the abode of St. Ivan Rilski, the founder of the monastery and the most honored Bulgaria saint.

On the way back to Sofia, and not far from the city, you will stop at the medieval Boyana Church, another Unesco World Heritage site. The Church has hundreds of amazing frescoes and wall paintings. In the evening it will be time to celebrate a festive welcome dinner at a local Sofia restaurant (included in the price of the trip).

Stay in Sofia overnight.
Day 3: Today you will tour Plovdiv, considered to be one of the oldest cities in Europe. Here you can see the remains of a Thracian fortress (5th century BC) and well-preserved remains from Roman times to the present day. The Old Town of Plovdiv is a marvelous site, with its picturesque churches, the mosque, and many houses with unique architectural characteristics in the spirit of the Bulgarian Revival period. Your guide will show you the fabulous remains of the Ancient Roman Empire – the Roman Stadium, the Roman Forum, and the Amphitheater. The Roman Theater of Plovdiv is one of the world's best preserved ancient theaters- constructed in the 1st century AD, probably under the rule of Emperor Domitian. Stay in Plovdiv overnight.
Day 4: After breakfast you will drive to the **Asenova Fortress** - a medieval fortress in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountains. Sitting high on a rocky ridge on the left bank of the Asenitsa River, the fortress was built during the reign of Byzantine Emperor Justinian the Great in the 6th century and grew to prominence during the Middle Ages. Next will be a visit to the **Bachkovo Monastery**, one of the largest and most important Eastern Orthodox monasteries in Europe. The last stop of the day will be the **Villa Yustina Winery**, situated in the picturesque village of Ustina. There you will be able to taste the wine typical of this region of Bulgaria.

Stay in Plovdiv overnight.
Day 5: You will breakfast in the hotel and then drive to the Shipka Memorial Church. This is a Russian-style church dedicated to the Slavic soldiers who died fighting in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. After a visit to the church you head for Veliko Trnovo, the picturesque capital of the medieval Bulgarian empire. Located here are the imposing palace of the Bulgarian Emperors and the Patriarchal Cathedral, surrounded by thick medieval walls. Along the old streets, are quaint craft and jewelry shops, a good place to pick up gifts or souvenirs. Stay overnight in Veliko Trnovo.

Day 6: After breakfast in the hotel, you will visit Nicopolis ad Istrum - a Roman and Early Byzantine town founded around 101–106 AD. The town reached its apogee during the reign of Hadrian. The Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo - another Unesco World Heritage site you will visit today - are comprised of a group of monolithic religious buildings, carved out of solid rock. They are noted for their beautiful medieval frescoes, dating from the 13th and 14th Centuries. Many inscriptions have also been preserved, including the famous indented inscription of the monk Ivo Gramatik. Stay overnight in Veliko Trnovo.
Day 7: After breakfast in the hotel you will transfer to **Sofia**. After checking back into the Grand Hotel Sofia there will be a walking tour of Sofia’s main sites. Sofia is one of the oldest towns in Europe, founded more than five thousand years ago. The walking tour will include the **St. George rotunda, and the Alexander Nevski Cathedral**. Stay overnight at Sofia Grand Hotel.

Day 8: After breakfast at the hotel you will board a charter bus for the approximately 5-hour drive to **Belgrade**. Early evening arrival in Belgrade and overnight at Centar Hotel.
Day 9: After an early breakfast transfer to the train station in time for the 9 AM departure to Podgorica. The trip will take around 10 hours if the train is more or less on time. Please bear in mind that this is not a luxury train trip, but rather a train used daily by average people. The train compartments are perfectly comfortable, but not luxurious or plush. There are usually 6 in a compartment. But the reason we have included this train trip is the spectacular scenery the train passes through on its route down to the Adriatic coast. This is one of the most scenic train trips in Europe, but, at the same time, one that is relatively unknown by the general public. Since the train is unlikely to have a dining car you will be provided with a box lunch. Upon arrival in Podgorica, transfer to your hotel for a good night's sleep. Overnight at New Star Hotel.
Day 10: After breakfast the tour will continue by road, descending still farther down the mountains towards the beautiful Adriatic coast to the old town of **Cetinje (Montenegro)**. Cetinje was founded in the 15th Century and is the old capital of Montenegro. This is a beautiful historic town and you will enjoy walking around its relatively small area. From Cetinje the tour continues to the Adriatic coast itself. You will have a beautiful view from your vehicle as the coast comes into sight while you are still up in the mountains near Cetinje, winding your way down the slopes. The next stop is a famous place - **Sveti Stefan** (Saint Stephen). This is a small jewel of a town, attached to a small peninsula extending out into the sea. Upon leaving Sveti Stefan, you now make your way farther up the coast to the town of **Budva**. Budva is an ancient town with a small historic center. The town dates back to the 4th Century BC and extends out on a peninsula into the Blue Adriatic. After a walking tour of Budva and a visit to the 15th-Century Citadel the tour continues on to **Kotor**, another 40 minutes along the coast, where you will spend the next two nights. Overnight Kotor at Hotel Cattaro in the historic center.
Day 11: The town of Kotor is classified as a Unesco World Heritage site for its cultural and historical significance. There will be a walking tour of the old city of Kotor and, perhaps, a drink or coffee at one of the many outdoor cafes in the town square. A highlight of the day will be a cruise of Kotor Bay. The cruise will include a stop at Our Lady of the Rocks, a church dating back to the 15th Century. Please note that you will be part of a public cruise with other tourists here. Overnight at Hotel Cattaro in Kotor

Day 12: After breakfast it will be time to head for the last destination of the tour, the famous walled city of Dubrovnik. Although Dubrovnik is only around 55 miles away, the trip will take over 2 hours because of the winding road along the scenic Adriatic coastline. After checking into your hotel, the Hotel Argentina, not far from the walls of the old city, it will be time for a walking tour of Dubrovnik. You can easily walk around the whole system of ramparts and fortresses atop the city walls. Dubrovnik draws tourists from all over the world and is known as the Pearl of the Adriatic. It was once a Venetian city known as Ragusa and into the second half of the 20th Century Italian was still spoken there, as it was elsewhere all along the Dalmatian Coast. Of course, Dubrovnik is a listed Unesco World Heritage site. After seeing as much as possible during your walking tour, head back to your hotel to relax. Overnight Dubrovnik, Hotel Argentina
Day 13: The last full day of the tour will take you a short way up the coast to the Peljesac Peninsula and the medieval small village of Ston. Ston is famous for its narrow streets and ancient houses. It also has the longest stone wall in Europe and you will be able to walk on at least part of it during your visit there. The wall itself is 5.5 km long, but you can decide how far you want to walk. Ston is also famous for its oysters, which you can sample at a local restaurant. Then it will be time to return to Dubrovnik. There will be a farewell dinner at a nice local restaurant to celebrate the end of the tour (included in the price of the trip). Overnight Dubrovnik.

Day 14: This is farewell! After breakfast, transfer to the local airport in Croatia for your flights home.
Trip Cost and Details
Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslavia

Duration
14 days, 13 nights (travel days included)

Dates
April 18 (Arrival in Bulgaria) to May 1 (Departure from Croatia), 2020

Trip Price
US $3,950 per person; double occupancy (includes all taxes, accommodations, guides, transportation services, entrances, and breakfasts) *If you must have a single room by yourself there will be an additional cost

Airfare to Bulgaria and from Croatia
Not Included in Trip Price

Trip Reservations and Deposits
A deposit of $1,185 (30%) of the trip cost is due by February 1, 2020 to secure your spot

Refunds and Cancellations
Refunds and cancellations are accepted, but may be reviewed on an individual basis due to time constraints.
WorldDenver travel programs - to Iran, Madagascar, and Bhutan, so far - have given my husband and myself extraordinary opportunities to connect with fascinating places and people. Through its networks of world-travelled members and advisers, destinations and itineraries are selected to provide experiences we could not have found elsewhere, independently or with another travel company. And traveling with other WorldDenver members, themselves people with amazing world experiences, has created lasting memories and meaningful friendships for us. Looking forward to my next trip - Eastern Europe, in spring 2020!

~Laurie Hirschfeld Zeller