

# Bosnia & Hercegovina

Bosnia and Hercegovina (BiH) describes itself as the 'heart-shaped land', which is surprisingly accurate anatomically. Emotionally, too, the deep yet unimposing human warmth of this craggily beautiful country fits the bill. And despite some lingering scars, the heartbreaking societal haemorrhaging of the 1990s has been completely stemmed (if not forgotten). The BiH of today has regained its once-famed religious tolerance. Rebuilt churches, mosques and synagogues huddle closely, rekindling that intriguing East-meets-West atmosphere born of Bosnia's fascinatingly blended Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian histories.

Socialist urban planning and war damage still combine to give certain post-industrial cityscapes all the charm of a Molvanian nightmare. But such scenes are surprisingly rare blots on a beautiful, largely rural landscape. Meanwhile the reincarnated Austro-Ottoman centres of Sarajevo and especially Mostar are unexpected delights. And the majority of Bosnian towns are lovably small, wrapped around medieval castles and surrounded by mountain ridges, verdant hills or merrily cascading river-canyons. Few places in Europe offer better rafting or such accessible and excellent-value skiing.

Fashionable bars and wi-fi-equipped cafes abound, but unemployment concerns remain as the fledgling state comes to terms with post-communist realities that were masked for years by more pressing war worries. Roads remain slow and winding, but they're extremely scenic, mostly well surfaced and relatively quiet, making for delightful random adventures, especially if you're driving. Indeed, however you travel, BiH offers a great sense of discovery, of real personal interaction and of very fair value for money that's all too rare in the heart of 21st-century Europe.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 51,129 sq km
- **Capital** Sarajevo
- **Currency** KM (BAM); US\$1 = 1.48KM; UK£1 = 2.15KM; €1 = 1.96KM; A\$1 = 0.99KM
- **Famous for** the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics, the bridge at Mostar
- **Key phrases** *zdravo* (hello), *hvala* (thanks), *molim* (please)
- **Official languages** Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian
- **Population** four million (estimate)
- **Telephone codes** country code ☎ 387; international access code ☎ 00
- **Visas** not required for most visitors; see p166



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Old Bridge** (Stari Most; p133) Seek ever-new angles from which to photograph young men throwing themselves off this magnificently rebuilt icon, in Mostar's delightful old town.
- **Jajce** (p154) One of BiH's most appealing fortress towns, which hides some compelling historical curiosities and makes an ideal base for visiting the stunning mountain lakes nearby.
- **Sarajevo** (p110) Potter round the timeless Turkish- and Austrian-era pedestrian lanes sampling the city's fashionable cafes and eclectic nightlife or gazing down on the mosque-dotted, red-roofed cityscape from the Park Prinčeva restaurant (p124).
- **Best Activity** (p163) Rafting dramatic canyons down one of BiH's fast-flowing rivers, whether from Foča, Bihać, Banja Luka or Konjic, or even starting with a quad-bike 'safari' through the wild upland villages behind the Bjelašnica ski resort (p129).

## ITINERARIES

- **Six days** Arriving from Dubrovnik in coastal Croatia, roam Mostar's old town (p131) and join a day tour visiting Počitelj (p141), Blagaj (p138) and the Kravice waterfalls (p142). After two days in Sarajevo (p110) head for Jajce (p154), then bus it down to Split in Croatia. Or visit Višegrad (p146) en route to Mokra Gora and Belgrade in Serbia.
- **Two weeks** As above, but add quaint Trebinje (p143) and historic Stolac (p142) between Dubrovnik and Mostar, ski or go quad-biking around Bjelašnica (p129) near Sarajevo, visit the controversial Visoko pyramid (p150) and old-town Travnik (p152) en route to Jajce and consider adding in some high-adrenalin rafting (p163) from Banja Luka, Bihać or Foča.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Bosnia gets cold, snowy winters and baking hot summers. Hercegovina has milder winters and truly scorching summers, though even here the bare mountaintops can stay snow-whitened till mid-April. In spring the days are gently warm (if often wet) and the countryside bursts forth with dazzling blossoms and

## HOW MUCH?

- **Short taxi ride** 5KM
- **Internet access per hour** 1.50-3KM
- **Espresso coffee** 0.50-2KM
- **Shot of šljia (plum brandy)** 1.50KM
- **Movie ticket** 3-5KM

## LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 2.01KM (diesel 2.18KM)
- **Litre of bottled water** 0.90KM (But why not drink from the tap?)
- **Half-litre of beer** 3KM in midrange bar
- **Souvenir Bosnian coffee set** from 25KM
- **Street snack (burek)** 2KM

lush meadow greenery. Bring a sweater for the cool April nights. See p429 for a Mostar climate chart.

In spring and autumn tourists are rare, but in summer the availability of accommodation can be stretched in Sarajevo and Mostar as diaspora Bosnians come 'home'. The peak ski season is mid-December to mid-March, but prices fall considerably in later March if you're prepared to gamble on the snow conditions (often excellent but much less predictable at that time).

Rafting in April and May is high-adrenalin, world-quality stuff best left to the most experienced. Rivers calm down in mid-summer, making rafting conditions much less taxing for novices in July.

## HISTORY

From the faith of medieval kings to the who-did-what of the 1990s conflict, much of BiH's 'history' remains highly controversial and is seen very differently according to one's ethno-religious viewpoint.

## Early History

The region's ancient inhabitants were the Hellenic Illyrian people, whose peaceable existence became steadily tougher around 2500 years ago, leading them to build hefty fortifications like those at Daorson near Stolac (p143). They were nonetheless conquered by the Romans in AD 9. After a period of pacification, the Romans started building fine