



Western Balkans



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LAKE OHRID (P300).
NORTH MACEDONIA

ON THE ROAD

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Itineraries



2
WEEKS

Breezing through the Balkans

Consider this a 'greatest hits' of the Western Balkans, taking in a slice of each of the eight countries featured. It can easily be tackled on public transport, although a car will give you more flexibility for exploring the extraordinary countryside along the way.

Start by city-hopping through four of the capitals: **Ljubljana** in Slovenia, **Zagreb** in Croatia, **Belgrade** in Serbia and **Sarajevo** in Bosnia. While the first two are cute, mid-sized, Central European cities, Sarajevo's fascinating cultural fusion lets you know that you're on the east side, while Belgrade is a hub of history, culture and late-night hedonism.

Stop to take a look at the famous bridge in **Mostar** on your way to the ancient walled city of **Dubrovnik**, then hop across the Croatia–Montenegro border to its 'mini me' **Kotor**. From here you can take an extraordinary drive via Budva, Podgorica, the breathtaking Morača Canyon and through the mountains to historic **Prizren** in Kosovo.

Continue on to North Macedonia, and spend a night amid the old-world architecture of **Ohrid** on the shores of the eponymous lake. Cross into Albania to experience the wild colours of the vibrant capital, **Tirana**.



Cruising the Coast

This itinerary traces a leisurely path along arguably the Mediterranean's most spectacular coastline, from the Adriatic Sea all the way to the Ionian. An extensive network of ferries and buses makes car-free travel a breeze.

Spend your first week exploring the Istrian peninsula, starting in pretty **Piran**, the main attraction of Slovenia's tiny slice of coast. Cross the border into Croatia and head to **Poreč**, where an extraordinary Byzantine basilica awaits. Continue on to the gorgeous old town of **Rovinj** and the ancient city of **Pula**, replete with Roman ruins. Be sure to take day trips into the interior to visit Istria's historic hill towns and to experience its exemplary cuisine. The best beach is in **Rabac**, on Istria's east coast; stop for a swim before heading up to the shabby but interesting city of **Rijeka**.

Set aside your second week for exploring Dalmatia but, before you do, detour to **Plitvice Lakes National Park** to witness its famed waterfalls. Plunge down to **Zadar** and wander through the slippery marble streets of the old town. Keep cruising the coast to the sun-kissed city of **Split**, home to Diocletian's Palace and gateway to the Dalmatian islands. After a couple of days on party- and beach-loving **Hvar Island**, hop over to **Korčula Town** on the island of the same name. This picturesque little fortified town is a taster for the main course, the famous walled city of **Dubrovnik**.

Start your third week by crossing into Montenegro and driving around the extraordinarily beautiful Bay of Kotor. Take a look at palazzo-packed **Perast** and then press on to the fortified old town of **Kotor** for a couple of days. As you continue down the coast, stop for a quick look at the still-charming walled town of otherwise-overdeveloped **Budva** and pause along the highway for the obligatory photo of the fortified island village of **Sveti Stefan**. Stop for the night in buzzy **Ulcinj** before crossing the border into Albania and following the coast as the sea switches from the Adriatic to the Ionian. Spend your last two nights on the **Albanian Riviera**, making sure to visit Gjipe Beach and the ancient ruins of **Butrint**.



Top: Old Town city walls (p197), Dubrovnik, Croatia,
Bottom: Mosaic, National History Museum (p53), Tirana, Albania



ZVONIMIR/ALTEC/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



Remote Ramblings

If you've got a few months to spare, excellent fitness and a local crew handling the logistics, you could tackle the extraordinary 1261km cross-border Via Dinarica hiking trail. If not, this car-based itinerary roughly traces the route. Start in the Slovenian capital, **Ljubljana**. Stop for a look around **Postojna Cave** before heading to **Cerknica** to check out the disappearing lake and Notranjska Regional Park. Book in a bear-spotting tour in the **Lož Valley** the following day, then continue across the Croatian border to **Risnjak National Park**. Look out for the park's elusive namesake, lynx (*ris*), as you hike through the forested mountains, then continue on to busy but beautiful **Plitvice Lakes National Park**. Cut through the Velebit range to the coast and base yourself in Starigrad-Paklenica for a day hike in rugged **Paklenica National Park**. The next day, briefly leave the mountains to explore the waterfalls and lakes of **Krka National Park**.

Cross the border into the Hercegovina region of Bosnia and drive through **Konjic** to the ski resort of **Bjelašnica**. Spend the next day hiking to the lost-in-time villages of Umoljani and Lukomir and sampling traditional Bosnian cuisine. Continue on to **Sarajevo** for a taste of the Bosnian capital and then take a detour up to **Tara National Park**, the most scenic part of western Serbia. Back in Bosnia, pause to view the famous bridge on the Drina River in **Višegrad** before pushing on to **Sutjeska National Park**, where excellent mountain hiking awaits.

Enter Montenegro and allow a couple of days to explore the mountains and famous river canyon in **Durmitor National Park** and then another day for lakeside **Biogradska Gora National Park**. Cross into Kosovo and base yourself in **Peja (Peć)** to visit its famous Orthodox monastery and to tackle the walking tracks in the nearby Rugova Valley. Continue down into Albania and head to **Valbona** in the Accursed Mountains, the official end of the Via Dinarica. From here you can take day hikes into the mountains or organise a cross-border trek through a local agency, venturing into Montenegro's Prokletije National Park. Press on to North Macedonia and spend a couple of days in **Mavrovo National Park** before finishing up in the capital, **Skopje**.

3
WEEKS

The Middle Road

A trio of capital cities, five national parks and a medley of historic towns punctuate this route through the heart of the Balkans, traversing Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro.

Start your journey with a few days in Serbia's rambunctious capital, **Belgrade**. Once you've explored its museums, fortress, cafes and bars, take a detour northwest to **Novi Sad**, the principal city of the nation's multi-ethnic Vojvodina region. From here it's only a half-hour drive to **Fruška Gora National Park**; set aside a day for hiking, wine tasting and expeditions to historic Serbian Orthodox monasteries. Head south to **Tara National Park** and linger to explore the forested mountains and dramatic Drina River canyon.

Cross the border into Bosnia and visit **Višegrad**, the town immortalised in Ivo Andrić's acclaimed novel *The Bridge on the Drina*. From here, **Sarajevo** is due west and worthy of a multiday stay. Soak up the sights, sounds and tastes of its historic Baščaršija quarter, feasting on *burek* (filled pastry twists), baklava and Bosnian coffee in the shadow of historic mosques, churches and synagogues.

Continue on to sun-scorched Hercegovina, where the highway hugs the emerald-hued Neretva River. Stop in **Konjic** to see the old stone bridge and secret nuclear bunker, before continuing on to gaze upon the exquisite architectural ensemble that is the Ottoman-era core of **Mostar**. Pause in **Blagaj** to visit the peaceful *tekke* (dervish house) before continuing east to **Sutjeska National Park**, distinguished by its mountain scenery and extraordinary Partisan memorial.

Hop across the Montenegrin border and spend a couple of days hiking and rafting in mountainous **Durmitor National Park**. One night is enough to get the gist of the modern capital, **Podgorica**, and allow another to explore the museums and galleries of Old Montenegro's historic capital, **Cetinje**. From here take the spectacular route through **Lovćen National Park** and down the precipitous, serpentine road to **Kotor** – a walled gem positioned within the innermost fold of the fjord-like Bay of Kotor. With Kotor as a base, it's easy to explore the entire bay by boat, bus or car and then pop over to neighbouring Budva on the Adriatic coast.



KAMIL MAKAROV/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



ALINA STOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Top: Trg Republike, Belgrade (p325), Serbia

Bottom: Partisan Memorial (by sculptors Miodrag Živković and Ranko Radović; p108), Sutjeska National Park, Bosnia & Herzegovina



2 WEEKS

West Side Glory

Wend your way around the western edge of the Balkans through Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Along the way you'll take in spectacular mountains, coast, rivers and waterfalls, plus ancient Roman, Venetian, Austrian and Ottoman towns.

Start at glorious **Lake Bled** before delving into the art nouveau delights of **Ljubljana**. Visit the **Škocjan Caves** and then hit the coast at picturesque **Piran**. Journey across the Croatian border to the glamorous seaside town of **Rovinj**. On the next leg you'll edge past interesting Pazin, Opatija and Rijeka en route to the extraordinary **Plitvice Lakes National Park**. From here, it's a breeze to duck across the Bosnian border to Bihać, gateway to the waterfalls of **Una National Park**.

Cross back into Croatia and continue on to **Zadar**, a walled coastal city with a profusion of Roman remains. There's more of ancient Rome to be spotted in **Split**. From here, venture back into the heart of Bosnia to visit the charming Ottoman town of **Jajce**. More Ottoman architecture can be seen in **Mostar**, including its signature bridge. Press on to **Trebinje**, a pleasant little place with a walled riverside old town.



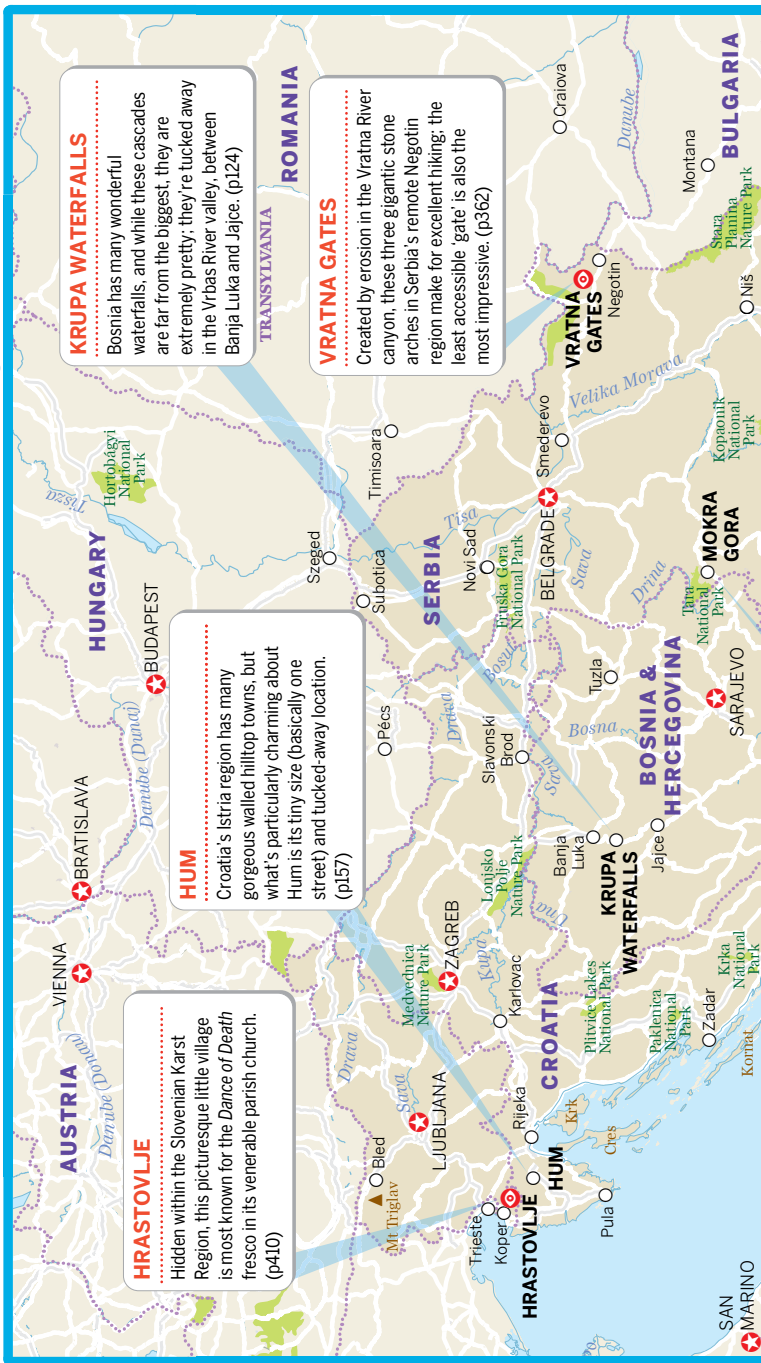
2 WEEKS

An Eastern Circuit

This itinerary traces a ring through Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia and can be commenced from any of the three capital cities and tackled in either direction.

Allocate a couple of days to **Tirana**, the kooky Albanian capital. Take the picturesque journey north to remote **Theth National Park**. Double back to the historic city of **Shkoder** and then cut east to Kosovo. Just across the border, **Prizren** has a historic core and is a good base for hikes in the nearby **Shar National Park**. The capital, **Pristina**, is not as pretty but it has an enticing atmosphere all of its own.

Continue south and cross into North Macedonia. The capital **Skopje** contrasts wonderful socialist modernist architecture with a recent, much-derided, neoclassical makeover. From here, beat a path to mountainous **Mavrovo National Park**. Continue on to **Ohrid**, a highlight not just of North Macedonia, but of this eastern edge of the region. Follow the eastern shore of Lake Ohrid to the Albanian border, pausing to visit the imposing **Sveti Naum Monastery** along the way. Back in Albania, head to the Ottoman-era town of **Berat** and the coastal resort of **Durrës**.





Behind the Scenes

SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

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OUR READERS

Many thanks to the travellers who used the last edition and wrote to us with helpful hints, useful advice and interesting anecdotes: Alma Arifhodzic, Ann Kennard, Brian Hortle, Christopher Feierabend, David Kolecki, David Wood, Frank Nowicki, Greg Mason, Ivan Serdarusic, Luca Lietti, Maria Tğanoplai, Mark Hebden, Melitta Jalkanen, Mónica Plana Culubret, Moritz Hofmann, Wolfgang Crasemann

WRITER THANKS

Peter Dragicevich

First and foremost, I'd like to say a huge *hvala* to Vojko, Marija, Ivan, Mario and Ivana Dragičević in Split, for the kindness and patience you've shown your distant cousin over the years. Thanks also to Hayley Wright, Slavenko Sucur, and Emma and Ben Hayward for the tips and chats. Special thanks to my destination editors, Anna Tyler and Brana Vladislavjevic, and all of the writers, editors and Lonely Planet staff who contributed to this book.

Mark Baker

Thanks first to folks on the ground in Slovenia, including Najda Dördevič, Yuri Barron, John Bills, Jana Kuhar, Domen Kalajzic and family, Aleksandra Jezeršek Matjašič and Ana Vugrin. My Slovenian friends in Prague: Tjaša Čebulj, Zeljka Sok and Anjuša Belehar for their helpful suggestions. Finally, fellow writers Anthony Ham and Jess Lee, and my destination editor in London, Anna Tyler.

Stuart Butler

The first people I must thank are my wife, Heather, and children, Jake and Grace, for their unending patience while I worked on this project and for being the best travel companions a person could want in Albania. In Kosovo huge thanks to Nol and Virtyt for their help and hiking knowledge. In Albania huge thanks to Amar in Tirana and Altin in Ksamil. Back in Lonely Planet's London office thanks to Brana for all her tips, suggestions and endless Balkan knowledge.

Vesna Maric

I would like to thank Maja Trajkovska, Metodi Chilianov, Magdalena Lazarevska and Slobodan Đudurović for making my time in Macedonia more special than I could imagine. Big thank yous go to Brana Vladislavjevic for commissioning me and always being such a great and kind editor. Thanks also to Tom Masters for his help.

Brana Vladislavjevic

Hvala puno to James Smart and Jennifer Carey for the support, Kate Morgan for her guidebook authoring advice, co-writer Kevin Raub for excellent work on Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš updates, Dragiša Mijačić for all his tips on Stara Planina and Kragujevac, and my sister Sandra for keeping me company on the road for a few days.

Anthony Ham

In Croatia, thanks to Luca, Miriam, Lidija, Marija and all the staff at tourist offices across the country.

In Slovenia, many thanks to Romana Nared, Ana Petrič and Franc Mlakar in the Lož Valley, and to Saša and Jure in Idrija, as well as to all the staff at the tourist offices. At Lonely Planet, I am grateful to my editor Anna Tyler for sending me to such wonderful places, and to my fellow writers Peter, Mark and Jess for their wisdom. To my family – Marina, Jan, Carlota and Valentina: *con todo mi amor*.

Jessica Lee

Big thanks to staff at the tourist information centres for tips, advice and local knowledge across Croatia and Slovenia respectively. In particular the chirpy, friendly folk who went out of their way to help with answering my endless questions at the Slovenian offices (in Celje, Dolenjske Toplice, Murska Sobata and Ptuj). Thank you to the enthusiastic staff at the offices in Croatia (Varaždin, Osijek and Zagreb County) for being founts of knowledge and helpful information. A big thank you to Skanka and Igor, Petra, Daniel and Lea in Slovenia. And in

Croatia, to Anton, Irena, Mila, Tea, Tom and Zvonimir for tips and chats.

Kevin Raub

Thanks to Brana Vladislavljevic and all my fellow partners in crime at Lonely Planet. On the road, Jelena Stanković, Maja Živković, Suna Kažić, Marija Mitrović, Dejan Majić, Tijana Vujašinović, Goran Magdić, Djole Jovanović, Filip Mičić, Luka Pejović and Mihailo Subotić.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Climate map data adapted from Peel MC, Finlayson BL & McMahon TA (2007) 'Updated World Map of the Köppen-Geiger Climate Classification', *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences*, 11, 1633–44.

Cover photograph: Sveti Naum Monastery (p300), Lake Ohrid, North Macedonia, Lucie Debelkova/4Corners ©

THIS BOOK

This 3rd edition of Lonely Planet's *Western Balkans* guidebook was researched and written by Peter Dragicevich, Mark Baker, Stuart Butler, Vesna Maric, Brana Vladislavljevic, Anthony Ham, Jessica Lee and Kevin Raub. The previous edition was written by Marika McAdam, Jayne D'Arcy, Chris Deliso, Peter Dragicevich, Mark Elliott, Vesna Maric and Anja Mutić.

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Cover Researcher Brendan Dempsey-Spencer

Thanks to Hannah Cartmel, Vesna Čelebić, Grace Dobell, Shona Gray, Mark Griffiths, Kate Kiely, Kathryn Rowan, Wibowo Rusli

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Map Legend

Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Body surfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping
- Hut/Shelter

Eating

- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment

- Entertainment

Shopping

- Shopping

Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



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OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



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Bosnia & Hercegovina, Croatia, Montenegro After a successful career in niche newspaper and magazine publishing, both in his native New Zealand and in Australia, Peter finally gave in to Kiwi wanderlust, giving up staff jobs to chase his diverse roots around much of Europe. Over the last decade he's written literally dozens of guidebooks for Lonely Planet on an oddly disparate collection of countries, all of which he's come to love. He once again calls Auckland, New Zealand, his home – although his current nomadic existence means he's often elsewhere. Peter also curated the Plan, Understand and Survival Guide sections.



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Published by Lonely Planet Global Limited

CRN 554153

3rd edition – Oct 2019

ISBN 978 1 78868 277 0

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

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