



Western Balkans



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LAKE OHRID (P300),
NORTH MACEDONIA

ON THE ROAD

SPECTRALDESIGN/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



THETH (P81), THE ACCURSED MOUNTAINS, ALBANIA

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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**.



3
WEEKS

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**.



DUBROVNIK/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

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



ZONIMIR/ATL/IC/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



KATILU, JAMA/ROY/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



ALINA, STOKK/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.



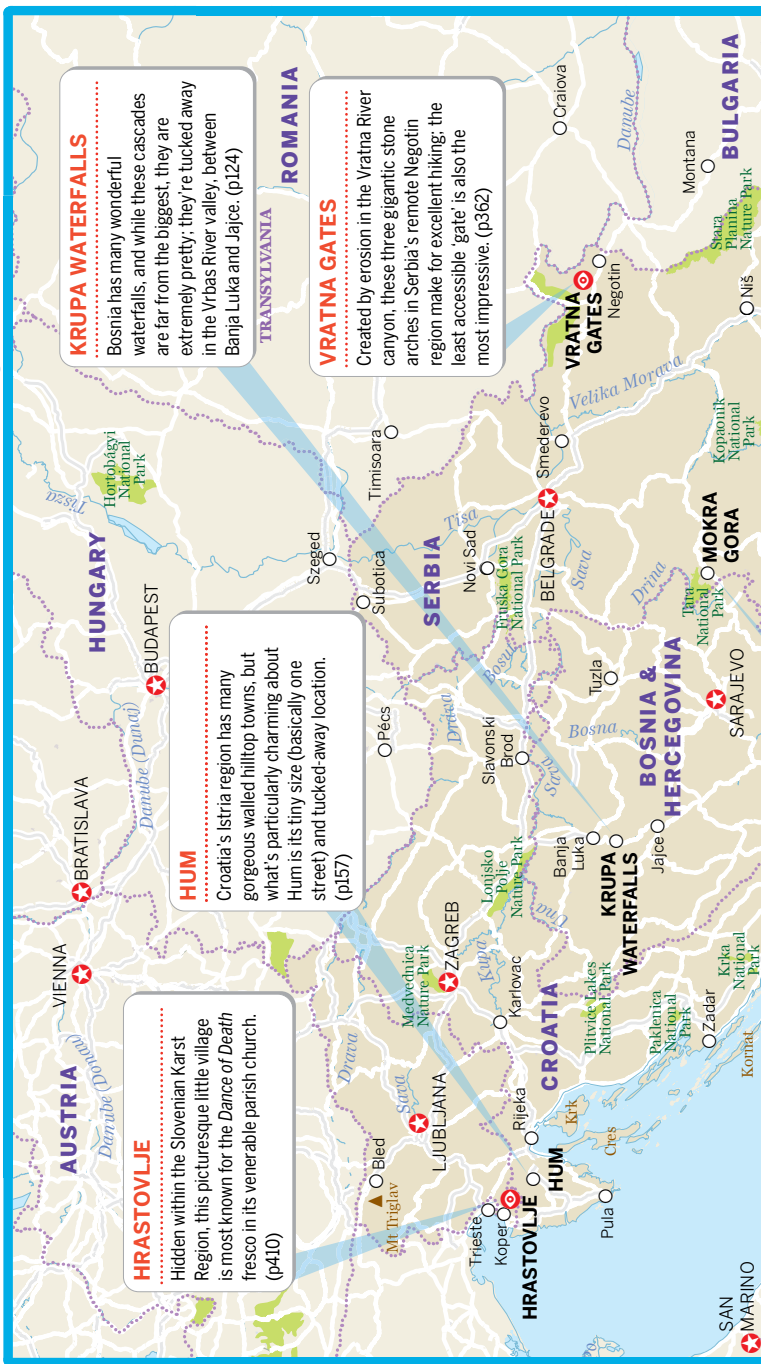
2 WEEKS An Eastern Circuit

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-debated, 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**.

Western Balkans: Off the Beaten Track





BLACA HERMITAGE

This fascinating former monastery, hidden in a remote valley on the Croatian island of Brač, can only be approached by a narrow, rocky track. (p188)

MOKRA GORA & GAZIVODE LAKE

Ongoing ethnic tensions have kept this corner of Kosovo off the tourism radar ever since the war, but with things cooling down, hiking, biking, kayaking and climbing are once again possible. (p229)

ŽABLJAK CRNOJEVIĆA

It takes a bit of finding, but this atmospheric ruined castle, set on a hilltop in Montenegro's Lake Skadar National Park, is well worth the effort. (p265)

KOKINO OBSERVATORY

Dating from the Bronze Age, this prehistoric megalithic observatory sits 1013m up a volcanic hill in North Macedonia, 19km northeast of Kumanovo. (p297)

CRNA REKA MONASTERY

Built into caves and clinging to a cliff hidden within forest-draped mountains, this remote Serbian hermitage can only be accessed by a narrow wooden footbridge. (p360)

SAZAN ISLAND

Once a top-secret Soviet submarine base, this island off Albania's remote Karaburun Peninsula was only opened to visitors for the first time in 2017. (p77)

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Brana Vladislavljovic

Serbia Brana grew up in the former Yugoslavia and studied foreign languages and literature in Belgrade. She joined Lonely Planet's Melbourne office in 2004 and has lost count of the phrasebook and guidebook titles she edited over the years. From 2014 to 2019, she was based in the London office as the Destination Editor for Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Brana looked after destinations stretching from the Russian Far East to the Greek islands

but has a soft spot for her native Western Balkans region.



Anthony Ham

Croatia, Slovenia Anthony is a freelance writer and photographer who specialises in Spain, East and Southern Africa, the Arctic and the Middle East. When he's not writing for Lonely Planet, Anthony writes about and photographs Spain, Africa and the Middle East for newspapers and magazines in Australia, the UK and the US.



Jessica Lee

Croatia, Slovenia In 2011 Jessica swapped a career as an adventure-tour leader for travel writing and since then her travels for Lonely Planet have taken her across Africa, the Middle East and Asia. She has lived in the Middle East since 2007 and tweets @jessofarabia. Jess has contributed to Lonely Planet's *Egypt, Turkey, Cyprus, Morocco, Marrakesh, Middle East, Europe, Africa, Cambodia* and *Vietnam* guidebooks and her travel writing

has appeared in *Wanderlust* magazine, *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent*, BBC Travel and lonelyplanet.com.



Kevin Raub

Serbia Atlanta native Kevin started his career as a music journalist in New York, working for *Men's Journal* and *Rolling Stone* magazines. He ditched the rock 'n' roll lifestyle for travel writing and has written more than 70 Lonely Planet guides, focused mainly on Brazil, Chile, Colombia, USA, India, the Caribbean and Portugal. Raub also contributes to a variety of travel magazines in both the US and UK. Along the way, the self-confessed hophead is

in constant search of wildly high IBUs in local beers. Follow Kevin on Twitter and Instagram (@RaubOnTheRoad).



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



Peter Dragicevich

Bosnia & Herzegovina, 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.



Mark Baker

Slovenia Mark is a freelance travel writer with a penchant for offbeat stories and forgotten places. He's originally from the US, but now makes his home in the Czech capital, Prague. He writes mainly on Eastern and Central Europe for Lonely Planet as well as other leading travel publishers, but finds real satisfaction in digging up stories in places that are too remote or quirky for the guides. Prior to becoming an author, he worked as a journalist for the *Economist*, *Bloomberg*

News and *Radio Free Europe*, among other organisations. Follow him on Instagram and Twitter (@markbakerprague), and read his blog: www.markbakerprague.com.



Stuart Butler

Albania, Kosovo Stuart has been writing for Lonely Planet for more than a decade and during this time he's come eye to eye with gorillas in the Congolese jungles, met a man with horns on his head who could lie in fire, huffed and puffed over snowbound Himalayan mountain passes, interviewed a king who could turn into a tree, and had his fortune told by a parrot. Oh, and he's met more than his fair share of self-proclaimed gods. When not on the road for Lonely Planet he

lives on the beautiful beaches of Southwest France with his wife and two young children. He also works as a photographer and was a finalist in both the 2015 and 2016 Travel Photographer of the Year Awards. In 2015 he walked for six weeks with a Maasai friend across part of Kenya's Maasai lands in order to gather material for a book he is writing (see www.walkingwiththemaasai.com). His website is www.stuartbutlerjournalist.com.



Vesna Maric

North Macedonia Vesna has been a Lonely Planet author for nearly two decades, covering places as far and wide as Bolivia, Algeria, Sicily, Cyprus, Barcelona, London and Croatia, among others. Her latest work has been updating Florida, Greece and North Macedonia.

OVER MORE
PAGE WRITERS

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