

24-Day Balkans Rail Adventure

Day 1 – Welcome to Skopje: North Macedonia

Welcome to Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia! You're about to kick off a surreal cultural adventure by rail, snaking your way north through seven countries to explore this little corner of south-east Europe – and if you've not been to the Balkans region, it will be nothing like you would have imagined!

A friendly face will pick you up from the Skopje airport and get you to your hotel. Settle right in, freshen up, then get set to join your tour leader and other Patchies for the very first time over dinner – in typical, Balkan-style hospitality.

💡 Please note! Something we need to clarify upfront – you will not go hungry in the Balkans... it's just how it is!

Accommodation: Solun Hotel (or similar), Skopje, North Macedonia

Included: Dinner

Day 2 – Explore Skopje

This morning, we'll get out of Skopje's metropol and spend time in nature with a trip to the nearby Matka canyon. 'Wow' away at this unexpected beauty as you take a boat ride down the river.

In the afternoon, it is time to get to know Skopje. Enjoy your first lunch of the trip before taking a leisurely stroll around this rather surprising city, where you'll discover a mash-up of ancient civilisations and ethnicities, all fitting in rather harmoniously.

(Did you know, that Skopje happens to be the birthplace of a rather special Albanian woman... a Catholic nun famously known as Saint Mother Teresa?)

Accommodation: Solun Hotel (or similar), Skopje, North Macedonia

Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



Day 3 – Pristina to Peja by train: Kosovo

Bye-bye North Macedonia and hello Kosovo... the world's youngest country! A cheeky private transfer takes you up north to Pristina railway station after breakfast. Here, you'll store your luggage as our local guide shows you the sights that made history around the Kosovar capital city. As Pristina is a melting-pot of ethnicities and cultures, expect a quirky mix of architectures and monuments, including new art installations acknowledging the birth of the small nation. But before you deep dive into Pristina's culture, you will make a special surprise stop.

💡 **Note!** In Albanian, Pristina is written as 'Prishtina'. The Kosovar city is home to the second-largest Albanian population outside of Tirana (Albania's capital).

If you're feeling a tad peckish, now would be a good time to grab some lunch... before your very first train ride of this trip! Woohoo! The afternoon plan is to get yourself on board the 2-hour train ride and head west from Pristina to Peja. You'll arrive at 18:30, get yourself organised and later the group will head out to a much-anticipated Balkan-style dinner.

Accommodation: Seraphine Plaza (or similar), Peja, Kosovo

Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 4 – Offbeat Peja

You won't find Peja on too many travel itineraries. That's what makes it more appealing in our opinion, and we're sure you'll agree. It's a 'green' city of open space and parklands, encircled by mountains, cave-filled gorges, lakes and a little-visited waterfall. It still carries the architectural reminders of its Ottoman rulers – many buildings, artisan workshops and landmarks like the old central bazaar, Bajrakli mosque and hammam (traditional Turkish baths)... plus a couple more secrets to discover!

Your guide will take you exploring to the must-see city sights this morning, leaving you the afternoon free to check out local museums, hunt down more delicious food (ask your guide for tips)... or however you wish to spend it!

Accommodation: Seraphine Plaza (or similar), Peja, Kosovo

Included: Breakfast



Day 5 – Stari Bar: Montenegro

It's day 5 of the trip and things are just starting to warm up. Which means, this morning you're leaving Peja behind and heading off to the Adriatic seaside! That's right, you'll make your way south-west in a private vehicle that will have you in Bar, Montenegro – one of Europe's smallest countries – by the afternoon. Enjoy a leg-stretch as you make a lunch-stop somewhere.

Soak up the green, forested, hilly scenes interspersed with red-topped rural houses along the way... these are the kind of memories that will hit you time and again... long after the trip is over. Once your driver passes through Podgorica, Montenegro's capital, and over Skadar Lake (a national park) you can get excited because it's not long to go now!

When you arrive in Stari Bar (Old Town 'Bar') , get yourself comfortable, as you'll be spending the next two nights here in an 'old-school' guesthouse of very distinct Balkan architecture. Stari Bar is one of the oldest towns in Montenegro, originating as a hill-top fortress over a millennia ago. For dinner, hit the hotel's traditional-styled restaurant with its authentic regional cuisine for the full local dining effect.

Accommodation: Stara Čaršija Hotel & SPA (or similar), Bar, Montenegro

Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 – Beach Day in Novi Bar

Today is basically yours to do as you please... so enjoy a free day before tomorrow's long train ride. Although, after breakfast, the seaside town of Novi Bar (New Town 'Bar') is surely calling out to you. With Stari Bar being 4 km inland, our driver will be at-the-ready to give you a lift in. Use the opportunity to hit the beach and take a swim in the appealing turquoise tones of the Adriatic Sea... It's pretty hard to resist, and at 23 degrees, a delightful temperature. And say 'hi' to the locals – they're super friendly!

Accommodation: Stara Čaršija Hotel & SPA (or similar), Bar, Montenegro

Included: Breakfast

Day 7 – Bar to Uzice by train: Serbia



What a day – get ready for one of the most exciting train trips in Europe! No doubt one of the rail highlights of the entire trip – and one of the ‘famous’ routes shown to rail enthusiasts by Chris Tarrant.

This line runs between Bar and Belgrade, Serbia’s capital, normally taking 11 hours. Today however, you’ll get off 3 hours earlier at Uzice and spend a couple of nights in the mountains of Zlatibor nature park. But more about that later!

We’ve got you on the daytime train for a very good reason – despite being a long ride, it is ridiculously scenic and you’ll pass briefly through Bosnia and Herzegovina along the way. The curvaceous journey will cross more than 435 bridges above steep gorges and pass through 254 tunnels – you will surely marvel at the feat of workmanship that lasted more than 20 years in the making!

You’ll conclude your day with a well-earned traditional dinner, in a local restaurant.

Accommodation: Mona Plaza (or similar), Zlatibor, Serbia

Included: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 – Tara National Park by Steam Train

Rail and nature lovers, get ready for a magical day with a ride on the heritage Sargan 8 railway through the jaw-dropping beauty of Tara National Park in western Serbia. ‘Fairy tale vibes’ is the only way to describe this.

Taking off from the dreamy little village of Mokra Gora, the ingenuity of the railway construction is proudly on show as the train chugs its way around the mountain taking you over five large bridges, gorgeous ravines, rivers and gorges.

The 15-kilometre, narrow-gauge track winds its way around the mountain in a figure-of-eight-like shape – hence the name Sargan 8 – to climb a 300-metre steep incline that would otherwise be a mere 3.5 kilometres as the crow flies. Its 22 tunnels, incredibly, are carved through solid rock.

Accommodation: Mona Plaza (or similar), Zlatibor, Serbia

Included: Breakfast



Day 9 – Uzice to Belgrade by train

A change of scenery today! After breakfast, wave goodbye to Uzice as you board the train to Belgrade, enjoying the last rural landscape views before they fade into the urban cityscape of Serbia's capital. Your local guide will acquaint you with Belgrade this afternoon, as you soak up the local vibe and enjoy what this hospitable and entertaining city does best – looking after its guests.

Tonight, you'll enjoy an unforgettable group dinner tonight in the bohemian Skadarlija district, one of Belgrade's oldest, most charming streets. It may be a bit touristy, but trust us you are going to love this! Once a gathering place for artists, the arts and entertainment scene thrives via antique shops, art galleries, cafes and bars with live music and its renowned, traditional restaurants

Accommodation: Balkan Hotel (or similar), Belgrade, Serbia

Included: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 – Belgrade: free day

Hard to believe, but you've been on the go for nine days already. You've explored four countries, with three more to go! This is your first chance to relax and chill out since your beach day in Bar. Use the day exactly as you wish... perhaps a sleep-in with a late breakfast. Stroll around the city and explore its museums, Kalemegdan and other parks... maybe a fortress. And, more tasty food to discover whether you're a meat lover or vegetarian. Don't forget to hit up your guide for some good tips.

Accommodation: Balkan Hotel (or similar), Belgrade, Serbia

Included: Breakfast

Day 11 – Sremski Karlovci to Novi Sad

Let's get going again.

A morning visit to Tito's train, a step into history, before we catch a commuter train to Sremski Karlovci. This cultural town is also famous for its wine cellars. Let your guide give



you some insights into the local history before you break for lunch nearby.

(Now, on the topic of lunch – we are just dying to leak the details here... it's so special... but we'll very reluctantly leave it as a surprise – you'll appreciate it all the more and thank us for it later!)

Only thing left to do now is hop on a vehicle, bound for the beautiful city of Novi Sad, where you'll be introduced to the Novi Sad hilltop fortress (nicknamed 'Gibraltar of the Danube') by your guide, and then the rest of the evening is yours to explore this absolute stunner of a city.

Accommodation: Hotel Mediteraneo (or similar), Novi Sad, Serbia

Included: Breakfast and Lunch

Day 12 – Novi Sad to Sarajevo: Bosnia & Herzegovina

A train-free day to get from Novi Sad to Sarajevo. It's a bit of a drive (around 6 hours), but you'll stop for lunch in the Bosnian river-town of Zvornik – a busy trades and crafts town back in the Middle Ages.

Continue on your journey... and finally you'll get to hear: "welcome to Sarajevo!"

Ah, Sarajevo! Your home away from home. A true melting pot of cultures and old-world religions, and none are prouder of this than the locals – possibly the most hospitable people you'll ever meet. Being at the crossroads of Continental Europe and the old Ottoman Empire has earned Bosnia's kind and tolerant capital the apt nickname of "Europe's Jerusalem".

Tonight, kill your hunger with a long-awaited dinner at one of our favourite local restaurants.

Accommodation: Courtyard by Marriot (or similar), Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 – Sarajevo

Today is all about Sarajevo, Bosnia. Your guide will show you around the famous Bascarsija, the city's historic centre filled with old architecture and the alluring scents of grilled cevapi, freshly baked burek and Bosnian coffee. Mouth. Watering.



A slightly more sombre visit to the 'Tunnel of Hope', constructed during the period that Sarajevo was under siege for 1,425 days. Now, incredibly, operating as a private museum, you'll learn of the vital role it served during the 1990s war.

This evening, learn how to prepare a traditional Bosnian meal and enjoy a home cooked dinner in a local house in the Sarajevo hills.

Accommodation: Courtyard by Marriot (or similar), Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Included: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 – Sarajevo to Mostar by train

Day 14. Sadly, today you'll be leaving Sarajevo behind as you take a bright and early train ride to Mostar, Herzegovina – one that's very worth it. Winding its way around little hillside villages through the scenic Neretva river canyon, this is considered one of Europe's most beautiful train rides. Once you've done it you'll understand why.

If you're like most, you'll fall totally in love with Mostar Old Town, a UNESCO protected zone with its landmark bridge framing the intense blue waters of the Neretva River below. An eclectic mix of Mediterranean and continental vibes, the banks on either side are a hive of activity with all the coffee houses and ethnic crafts stalls.

With a bit of luck, you'll observe the local tradition of young men diving the 24 metres from the top of the bridge. Get a lesson in making Bosnian coffee in a traditional coffee house and enjoy more delicious Balkan goodies for lunch.

Tonight will be spent in an authentic family hotel in the UNESCO heritage Old Town – just wait until you see it... you're going to fall in love with this one as well! Sweet dreams.

Accommodation: Hotel Almira (or similar), Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Included: Breakfast and Lunch

Day 15 – Split: Croatia

The time has come to get yourself down to the Croatian Adriatic for a 3 night stay in heaven, otherwise known as Split.



Croatia's second-largest city, the unofficial 'capital' of Dalmatia was more famously the retirement home of a Dalmatian-born Ilyrian who went on to become the Roman Emperor Diocletian, back in the 4th century AD. But before we get there, there's a couple of cool stops along the way to enjoy some of nature's stunners before heading out of Hercegovina.

Once you cross the border into Croatia your first stop is the coastal town of Omis. Now, just a heads' up... there's nothing that can prepare you for the beauty you're about to see, from the karst mountain tops, down to where the emerald Cetina river flows into the Adriatic – with the most insane views along the way. Your mouth will constantly be opening along with a 'WOW'.

Accommodation: Heritage Hotel Fermai (or similar), Split, Croatia

Included: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 – Split

Your first night was spent smack-bang in the midst of the ancient UNESCO city of Split, only a stone's throw from the magical, palm-lined riva overlooking the port towards the ferry terminals.

Right after breakfast, your guide will get you an up-close-and-personal view of Diocletian's palace – did you know he was the first-ever Roman Emperor who survived long enough to retire? Ironically, he never actually liked Rome and only ever visited it once.

Enjoy your free afternoon to explore the narrow streets and corners of the Old City, or the riva as you wish, and observe the locals enjoying their hours-long coffee catch-ups or going about their day!

Accommodation: Heritage Hotel Fermai (or similar), Split, Croatia

Included: Breakfast

Day 17 – Day trip to Hvar Island

Of all the days you'll want to finish breakfast in a hurry, this is it.

This morning you'll sail on a catamaran over to the island of Hvar (ancient Pharos).



Your first sighting of the heavenly Dalmatian islands is a real 'pinch me' moment... Seriously, you'll be convinced you're dreaming. Explore the secret nooks and crannies of Hvar old town, and if you're feeling up to it, you can walk up to Spanjola fortress for some killer views across the Adriatic and the Croatian islands. You'll enjoy a leisurely lunch like a true hedonist today on Hvar.

Accommodation: Heritage Hotel Fermai (or similar), Split, Croatia

Included: Breakfast and Lunch

Day 18 – Split to Zagreb by train

It's now Day 18 – less than a week to go – and chances are, you might want to skip the rest of the tour and hang out in Split – but don't! There's so much more in front of you to be experienced. An 8am departure by inter-county commuter rail from Split will have you travelling along the coast, through the rural Dalmatian hinterland and across the mountainous beauty of Lika before arriving in Zagreb, around 3pm.

Nicknamed 'Little Vienna', the Croatian capital may actually surprise you! In fact, Ana – our resident Croatian on the team – insisted that this city had to be on the itinerary.

The modern Old Town has medieval origins, but also many stunning architectural examples from its days in the Austro-Hungarian empire, and hundreds of green parks and gardens. Your local guide will show off the sights to you in the late afternoon.

Accommodation: Le Premier Boutique Hotel (or similar), Zagreb, Croatia

Included: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 – Zagreb

There's time today to go out for a relaxing stroll. You'll pick up on the Zagreb city vibe by now... a city so chill it's got a village feel.

By now, you've well and truly noticed that wherever you go in the Balkans it seems like everyone is on a day-long coffee break, and you might be wondering whether anyone actually works! That's just how they roll



But first, get your wine taste buds ready for a morning in the vineyards of Zagreb's hilly wine region, rounded out with a traditional, local lunch.

Accommodation: Le Premier Boutique Hotel (or similar), Zagreb, Croatia

Included: Breakfast and Lunch

Day 20 – Opatija

Back on a train this morning as you farewell Zagreb and head to Croatia's industrial seaport and third-largest city – Rijeka. A short transfer and you're in Opatija, a seaside town oozing with such charm that it feels like you've time-travelled back to the Habsburg era.

Opatija is the town that kicked off tourism in Croatia, with the first tourist hotel built there in 1844 and Austro-Hungarian royalty declaring it a climatic seaside resort not long after. If you don't feel like resting just yet, you can stroll along the famous Lungomare promenade to enjoy the atmosphere and inhale that fresh sea air.

Opatija is right on Istria's doorstep – sometimes referred to as 'Croatia's Tuscany', and home to several regional gastronomic delicacies, including an abundance of truffles.

Accommodation: Amadria Park Hotel Agava (or similar), Opatija, Croatia

Included: Breakfast

Day 21 – Motovun to Bled: Slovenia

Your stay in Opatija was short and sweet, so after breakfast it's time to move on... with a private transfer to Motovun in the heart of Istria. After a short visit to this idyllic medieval hilltop town, get ready to hunt for underground treasure... the prized local black truffle (you saw that coming, right?) Enjoy a truffle brunch washed down with a local wine.

Next, the group leaves Croatia behind, crossing the border to Slovenia, our final country of the trip. From Nova Gorica you'll catch a scenic train through the jewel of nature that is Soca valley. The terrain is starting to resemble more of an alpine-like appearance, and the colours of the Soca River, Lake Bled and all the surroundings will seem totally surreal. Forget what you've seen in photos, that will pale into insignificance compared to what you are witnessing right now. And with two nights in Bled, you have enough time to soak it up.



Accommodation: Astoria Hotel (or similar), Bled, Slovenia
Included: Breakfast and Brunch

Day 22 – Bled

Feeling a bit contemplative today? You've woken up and still can't believe where you are! It could be because the scenery has taken your breath away... or that you know the trip is drawing to an end.

A morning stroll around the dreamy fairytale of Lake Bled is calling out to you, then take the rest of the day at your leisure. Maybe explore some more... or maybe gather the rest of the crew, who are well and truly like family by now, and try out the local signature sweet 'kremšnita' (similar to our vanilla slice).

Accommodation: Astoria Hotel (or similar), Bled, Slovenia
Included: Breakfast

Day 23 – Ljubljana

Sadly, this is your last full day of the trip. But there's still some more action to be had! Catch the morning train from Bled to Ljubljana, Slovenia's capital. You'll walk the city with your guide while having the feeling you could almost be somewhere in Austria.

For the trip finale, you'll ride the funicular up to Ljubljana castle – of course, we've squeezed in one final rail experience – where the group will enjoy one very special, farewell dinner, reflecting on all that you've seen, done and enjoyed. Final hugs, promises to exchange photos, and in a couple of days' time, you'll all be asking our Patch Adventures team not to delete the chat group.

Accommodation: Exe Lev (or similar), Ljubljana, Slovenia
Included: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 24 – Farewell, Friends



Reluctantly depart Ljubljana today, but think about this! You've seen all the layers of the Balkans in its diversities and various influences, from the Roman and Ottoman Empires, the Venetian Republic and Austro-Hungarian rulers – right through to a blend of modern European culture. Cheers to a memorable trip, a memorable time and a memorable group!

Included: Breakfast

