Balkan Explorer on the Danube Express: Venice to Istanbul

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Overview

The Highlights

- Travel through an astounding seven European countries, with six nights on board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express;*

- Two nights at a five-star hotel in Venice;

- Two nights at a five-star Four Seasons hotel in Istanbul;

- One night at the historic Hotel Bristol in Belgrade;

- See the renowned arch bridge of Mostar and learn about the city's Ottoman history;

- Explore the UNESCO-listed Postojna Caves, one of Slovenia’s most spectacular natural attractions;

- Visit Belgrade’s historic Kalemegdan Fortress and enjoy a Serbian wine tasting;

- Sightseeing tour of Pula & Rijeka, Croatia;

- Tour Istanbul's Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia.

The Tour

Discover the fascinating history, vibrant culture, and medieval relics of this enchanting region as we venture through the lush landscapes of the Balkan states and their neighboring countries on this journey aboard the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*. Meandering through verdant landscapes and along turquoise coastlines, this exclusive rail cruise delivers a captivating exploration of the Balkan nations. Travel through an incredible seven countries in just 12 days, aboard your comfortable hotel-on-wheels.

Add the 'Castles of Transylvania' tour, a 7-day Istanbul-Budapest extension to your Balkan Explorer journey!

Itinerary

Day 1: Venice (Italy)

Arrive in Venice, where you will be met and transferred to a centrally-located hotel for a two-night stay.

Today is at leisure to explore this wonderful city. This evening we will enjoy a welcome reception and dinner, giving you the opportunity to meet your fellow travelers.

Day 2: Venice (Italy)

Today you will have the opportunity to choose a tailored experience of Venice.

You may choose to join a guided walking tour beginning at the iconic Rialto Bridge. Stroll through Venice's winding streets and across its many bridges, uncovering the city's hidden corners and everyday life. The walk is followed by a short gondola ride, before enjoying lunch at an authentic Venetian restaurant. After lunch, the tour continues to the magnificent St Mark's Square, the historic and cultural heart of the city.

Alternatively, embark on an excursion to the famous Venetian islands. Visit Murano for a traditional glassblowing demonstration and time to browse local workshops, before continuing to Burano, a charming group of small islands renowned for their brightly colored houses and centuries-old lacemaking tradition. Enjoy a guided walk through the island and a visit to a celebrated lacemaker, before rejoining the group back in Venice for lunch.

This evening, there is an optional private visit to St Mark's Basilica, offering a rare and unforgettable opportunity to experience one of Venice's most extraordinary landmarks in a more intimate setting.

Day 3: Trieste (Italy) & Postojna (Slovenia)

This morning, transfer from the hotel, by boat, directly to Santa Lucia station on the Grand Canal. Here, board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* and settled into your private en-suite cabin.

After lunch onboard the train, make a brief stop in the Italian port city of Trieste for a short guided tour. Explore the Piazza Unità d'Italia, and enjoy time at leisure to explore the city.

This evening, experience the truly magnificent Postojna Caves. Travel deep underground aboard a cave train before exploring a remarkable network of vast chambers, dramatic stalactite and stalagmite formations, and the mysterious subterranean wildlife that inhabits this extraordinary natural wonder.

Day 4: Pula & Rijeka (Croatia)

Begin the morning with a guided tour of Pula, exploring its historic center and the impressive Roman Arena.

Continue inland to the Kumpariçka Estate for a visit and leisurely lunch, enjoying a tasting of authentic Istrian flavors in a beautiful rural setting.

In the afternoon, travel to Rijeka for a guided walk through the city center, including time along the lively Korzo promenade, before rejoining the train to continue your journey.

Day 5: Sarajevo (Bosnia & Herzegovina)

This morning, arrive into the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. Discover the city through a city tour.

Following lunch at a local restaurant, the afternoon offers two carefully selection options. You may ascend by cable car to Mount Trebevic, once a 1984 Olympic venue, where breathtaking

panoramic views unfold across the city and surrounding mountains.

Alternatively, visit the Tunnel of Hope, a profoundly moving site that tells the story of Sarajevo's endurance and spirit during the siege of the 1990s, offering a powerful and reflective counterpoint to the city's beauty above ground.

Day 6: Mostar (Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Continue to the historic city of Mostar, a true crossroads of civilizations, cultures, and faiths.

Enjoy a guided walking tour through the old town, including a visit to a traditional Turkish House and a local mosque, offering insight into Ottoman life and architecture.

Lunch is enjoyed at a restaurant overlooking the iconic bridge, before following the emerald waters of the Neretva River to the ancient Ottoman fortified town of Pocitelj, dramatically set against the hillside and steeped in history.

Day 7: Belgrade (Serbia)

Today, we arrive in Belgrade where we disembark the train for an overnight stay at the historic Hotel Bristol, an elegant landmark reflecting the city's grand past. Begin with a guided tour of the Old Town and the commanding Kalemegdan Fortress, where sweeping panoramic views unfold at the dramatic confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers.

Following the tour, enjoy a curated wine tasting featuring local Serbian wines, accompanied by regional snacks that showcase the country's emerging wine culture.

In the afternoon, visit the magnificent Church of Saint Sava, one of the largest Orthodox churches in the world, renowned for its vast scale, luminous interiors, and spiritual significance.

Day 8: Belgrade (Serbia)

Today, explore Tito's Belgrade, gaining insight into the life and legacy of one of the most influential figures in Yugoslav history. Visit Tito's museum complex, including his former residence and the museum itself, where you will be welcomed with the traditional Serbian offering of bread and salt.

The visit is complemented by a lively Serbian folk dance performance, bringing local culture and tradition vividly to life and offering a memorable perspective on Belgrade's 20th-century heritage.

Following the visit, rejoin the train and continue your journey southeast towards Sofia, crossing the scenic landscapes of Serbia as you make your way into Bulgaria.

Day 9: Sofia & Plovdiv (Bulgaria)

Today's exploration begins in Sofia, Bulgaria's vibrant capital, set at the foot of Mount Vitosha. This morning, enjoy a guided tour where you will see sections of the Roman city walls, admire the

early Christian Church of St George, marvel at the golden-domed Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, and visit the historic Turkish Bashi Mosque.

Following the morning tour, arrive in Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second-largest city, known as 'The City of Seven Hills'. Discover one of Europe's oldest continuously inhabited settlements, home to over 200 known archaeological sites.

In the evening, enjoy a guided tour of the Roman Forum and Amphitheatre, then wander through the charming Old Town with its cobbled streets, medieval walls, and Ottoman-era baths, soaking in the city's layered history and timeless charm.

Day 10: Istanbul (Turkey)

This morning, you arrive into Istanbul, where you stay two nights at a five-star Four Seasons hotel.

Begin with a walk through the historic streets, before entering the atmospheric Spice Market. Enjoy a guided visit through this centuries-old bazaar, taking in the rich aromas and vivid displays of spices and delicacies, whetting the appetite for a traditional Turkish lunch in a historic building dating back to 1772.

After lunch, embark on a scenic cruise along the legendary Bosphorus, where Istanbul's dramatic skyline unfolds, offering a unique perspective on the meeting point of Europe and Asia.

Later, check in at the hotel and enjoy time at leisure to explore the ancient heart of the city, perhaps visiting the nearby Blue Mosque or strolling through the surrounding historic streets.

This evening, descend into the atmospheric depths of Istanbul's ancient cisterns. Visit one of these remarkable underground structures—the Basilica Cistern being the most famous—before enjoying dinner, concluding the day with a truly memorable and evocative experience.

Day 11: Istanbul (Turkey)

This morning begins with Freedom of Choice options, allowing you to tailor your final explorations of Istanbul.

You may choose to visit the opulent Topkapi Palace, former residence of the Ottoman sultans.

Alternatively, enjoy a guided tour of the Grand Bazaar, including the exhilarating opportunity to follow in James Bond's footsteps with a walk along the rooftop of this vast and historic marketplace.

After lunch, visit one of the city's most iconic landmarks, Hagia Sophia. It stands today as one of the most magnificent Grand Mosques in the world.

This evening, conclude your journey with a Farewell Dinner at the hotel.

Day 12: Istanbul (Turkey)

Following breakfast in the hotel, you will be transferred to the airport for your flight home. Alternately, choose to extend your stay in Istanbul for additional nights to explore more of this fascinating city.

Want to lengthen your journey? Add the 7-day “Castles of Transylvania’ Istanbul-Budapest extension. Click here for details.

Dates & Prices

2027 Dates

May 7 - May 18
September 10 - September 21
October 19 - October 30

Accommodation	Double	Single	Deposit
Deluxe Class	$27,600	$41,400	25%
Superior Deluxe Class	$35,900	$59,900	25%

Prices are shown in USD and are based on a quarterly exchange rate. Prices are subject to change quarterly.
All prices are per person.

2028 Dates

May 12 - May 23
September 22 - October 3
October 10 - October 21

Accommodation	Double	Single	Deposit
Deluxe Class	$28,850	$43,250	25%
Superior Deluxe Class	$37,500	$62,550	25%

Prices are shown in USD and are based on a quarterly exchange rate. Prices are subject to change quarterly.
All prices are per person.

More

For a first-hand report of Angela Walker's journey on the *Golden Eagle Danube Express,* click here

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Included in the tour price:

- Arrival and departure transfers

- A generous drink allowance, including wine, with lunch and dinner

- All gratuities

- All off-train touring, with personal headsets to make it easy to hear your guide

- Complimentary tea, coffee, and bottled drinking water are available in your cabin 24 hours a day

- An on-board doctor, with medical facilities, is available, should the need arise

- 24-hour service attendant

- Porterage of bags; your bags will be stowed for you on the train and transported to your hotel at the end of your trip