

Balkan Odyssey on the Danube Express: Budapest-Venice

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Overview

The Highlights

- Travel through seven European countries, with seven nights on board the *Danube Express*
- Special visit to the Tunnel Museum under Sarajevo Airport with a guide who lived through the 1992-96 conflict
- Excursion to Dracula's Castle (Bran Castle)
- Traditional Puszta Horse Show
- Accommodation in five-star Four Seasons Gresham Palace Budapest (or similar) for 2 nights

- Accommodation in five-star Hotel Danieli in Venice (or similar) for 2 nights

The Tour

Explore Eastern Europe's Balkans on the [Golden Eagle Danube Express](#) Balkan Odyssey luxury rail journey. This is a region synonymous with history and legend, stunning architecture and colorful people, yet also with war and tragedy. In one glorious sweep, you'll travel from Budapest, where you'll spend two nights at the famed Four Seasons Gresham Palace, then through Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia, and on into Venice's Santa Lucia Station. And you'll do so in comfort, aboard the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*.

Itinerary

Day 1: Budapest, Hungary

Arrive in Budapest and be transferred to the Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace (or similar) for a two-night stay. Enjoy a welcome reception dinner in the elegant surroundings of this art nouveau landmark where you can meet your fellow travelers on this highly anticipated journey.

Day 2: Budapest, Hungary

Budapest is actually two cities separated by the Danube: the old city of Buda, with its imposing Royal Palace, and, across the Danube, the commercial heart of Pest.

Your tour today includes the Castle District, St. Mathias Church, and a panoramic view of the city from Gellert Hill. You will also see the Citadel, the Opera House, St Stephen's Cathedral, Heroes' Square, and the City Park.

The rest of the day is at leisure.

Day 3: Lajosmizse & Kecskemet, Hungary

Enjoy a morning drinks reception in the impressive Royal Waiting Room at Budapest Nyugati station before boarding the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*. Settle in to your cabin before enjoying lunch as the train departs for Lajosmizse and a spectacular 'Pushta' horse show.

Later in the afternoon, travel the short distance to explore Kecskemet, a fascinating city at the geographical center of Hungary.

Back onboard, enjoy a pre-dinner drink in the Lounge Car as the train continues across the Great Hungarian Plain. Dinner is served as we head towards Transylvania.

Day 4: Brasov & Sighisoara, Romania

Today, arrive in Sighisoara for a walking tour of the town's highlights. A World Heritage site rumored to be the birthplace of Dracula, it is one of the best-preserved fortified medieval towns in Europe. Burgher houses and ornate churches line its cobbled streets.

Return to the train for lunch and continue on to Brasov for a tour of Bran Castle. Popularly known as Dracula's Castle, this beautiful 14th-century building is situated amongst stunning mountain scenery.

Back onboard later this evening, the train climbs over the Carpathian Mountains and threads its way through a dramatic landscape with crystal clear mountain streams. Dinner is served as the journey continues on to Bulgaria.

Day 5: Veliko Tarnovo & Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Arrive after breakfast in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria's ancient capital. Nestled in a magnificent mountain setting, the stone houses seem perched, one above the other, on the steep banks of the Yantra River.

A tour includes the superbly-preserved medieval Tsarevets Hill and Castle, and there is free time to wander through the streets of the ancient city.

Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria after Sofia. 'The City of Seven Hills' is one of the oldest cities in Europe with more than 200 known archaeological sites. Spend the late afternoon here exploring the many sights in the charming Old Town including its ancient theaters, medieval walls and Ottoman baths.

Day 6: Belgrade, Serbia

Arrive this morning in the Serbian capital of Belgrade. Located at the strategic meeting point of the Danube and Sava Rivers, this truly cosmopolitan city has fortifications dating from Celtic times, medieval tombs and Turkish baths.

A comprehensive day tour includes visits to Town Hall, Republic Square, Knez Mihajlova Street, Tito's memorial, 'Varos' Gate, and the mighty Kalemegdan Fortress.

Day 7: Mostar & Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

This morning, tour the historic city of Mostar, the crossroads of many civilizations, cultures, and three religions. Mostar was one of the most important cities of the Ottoman Empire. The town's renowned stone arch bridge linking the Christian and Muslim areas was re-built in the summer of 2004. We also visit a local mosque before walking through the narrow bazaar streets, where you can shop for traditional souvenirs and handicrafts.

An early afternoon arrival into the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, which has an intriguing blend of Eastern and Western culture; it has mosques and minarets, an ancient bazaar, and an

atmospheric old Turkish quarter. Discover the city's poignant history through a truly absorbing tour detailing the horrors of the Balkan War. Sarajevo suffered from the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare. The scars of war are still evident as we travel past war-torn buildings and we make a special visit to the Tunnel Museum under Sarajevo Airport. Your guide, who lived through the 1992-1996 conflict, brings to life in touching fashion the struggles the citizens of Sarajevo faced during the siege of the city.

Day 8: Ljubljana, Slovenia

Today, enjoy a full day visiting the beautiful Slovenian capital city of Ljubljana, a delightful combination of ancient architecture and youthful culture, and the surrounding region. Our tour includes visits to Preseren Square, Three Bridges, and Dragon Bridge.

Later, travel out of the city to visit Predjama Castle, perched on a cliff high above the beautiful Inner Carniola region. Explore the chambers and stairwells and learn about the castle's most famous resident, Erazem of Predjama. Then, continue to Postojna Cave and ride a mini-train deep underground and tour the ethereal network of stalactites, stalagmites, and caverns.

Day 9: Trieste & Venice, Italy

This morning the train arrives into the Italian port city of Trieste for a short tour. Stop at the vast Piazza Unita d'Italia, the main town square, and climb the hill to the famous Church of San Giusto, built around a medieval complex that dates back to the 13th century. A tour ventures inside the church for a closeup view of the splendid Byzantine-style architecture replete with precious mosaics.

Enjoy a final lunch onboard and leave Trieste to follow the Adriatic coast towards Mestre, where the train curves to the left onto the 3-mile causeway across the Venice Lagoon and into Venice Santa Lucia station, located on the Grand Canal. Say farewell to the train staff and transfer by boat to the five-star Danieli hotel (or similar) for a two-night stay. The hotel enjoys a spectacular location and is only a short stroll from St. Mark's Square, the Doge's Palace, and the Bridge of Sighs.

Day 10: Venice, Italy

Venice is a truly captivating city of romance; its unrivaled beauty takes away the breath of first time visitors and regulars alike. Take a walking tour around the highlights of this spectacular city. Walk through the winding lanes beside the Grand Canal to St. Mark's Square, which for 1,000 years was the heart of Venetian life. See St. Mark's Basilica and stroll through the Rialto Market.

Alternatively, enjoy the city at your own pace. Perhaps take an iconic gondola ride (additional cost) in the Basin of St. Mark's and along the Grand Canal or stroll through the artists' district of Dorsoduro, stopping to take in the city's most breathtaking views from the Accademia Bridge.

In the evening, enjoy a farewell reception dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 11: Venice, Italy

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

Dates & Prices

More

For a detailed report on the 2015 Balkan Odyssey journey, please read [Angela Walker's post on our blog](#), Track 25.

Included in the tour price:

- Arrival and departure transfers.
- A generous drink allowance, including wine, is included 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.