

Venice to Istanbul on the Danube Express

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Overview

The Highlights

- Travel through an astounding nine European countries, with six nights on board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*
- Special visit to the Tunnel Museum under Sarajevo Airport with a guide's personal account of the 1992-96 conflict
- See the renowned arch bridge of Mostar and learn about the city's Ottoman history
- Explore the narrow streets of Skopje's Old Town, with tiny shops and mosques with ceramic-tiled interiors
- Extended tour of Istanbul, including the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia
- Plenty of time to explore Venice and Istanbul, with included hotel stays

- Fully inclusive tour: accommodations, touring, transfers, gratuities, and meals

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 nine countries in just 12 days, aboard your comfortable hotel-on-wheels.

Itinerary

Day 1: Venice (Italy)

Arrive in Venice, the "City of Water," where you will be met and transferred to the Hotel Monaco & Grand Canal for a two-night stay. This hotel has an excellent location in the heart of Venice, just a few steps away from St Mark's Square, and with a fantastic view overlooking the Grand Canal.

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)

Venice is a truly captivating city of romance; its unrivaled beauty is breathtaking for first-time visitors and local residents alike. Today we will have the opportunity to 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.

Spend the rest of the day exploring this magnificent city at your leisure. For a truly iconic experience, take a gondola ride (at your own cost) in the Basin of St. Mark's and along the Grand Canal.

Day 3: Trieste (Italy)

Transfer to Santa Lucia station and board our private train, the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*.

Your cabin attendant will be waiting on the platform to welcome and escort you to your cabin. Lunch is served in the dining cars as the train threads its way out of the station and onto the causeway across the lagoon that links Venice to the mainland.

Our first stop is the Italian port city of Trieste, where we enjoy a city tour before returning to the

train for dinner.

Day 4: Ljubljana (Slovenia) & Zagreb (Croatia)

Have an early breakfast on board as the train heads for Lake Bled, one of the most picturesque and photographed lakes in Eastern Europe.

Next, travel down to the capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana, to tour the lovely, compact city by foot and by water with a relaxing cruise on the Ljubljanica River.

Return to the train for lunch as the train follows the scenic River Sava to Croatia's capital, Zagreb, where we spend the afternoon touring the city. Later, enjoy dinner on the train en route to Bosnia.

Day 5: Sarajevo & Mostar (Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Early this morning we arrive in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, which is 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 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 make a special visit to the Tunnel Museum under the Sarajevo Airport. Your guide, who gives a personal account of the 1992-1996 conflict, brings to life in touching fashion the struggles that the citizens of Sarajevo faced during the siege of the city.

Over lunch, you'll travel along a very scenic line to the historic city of Mostar, the crossroads of many civilizations, cultures, and 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 Turkish House and the mosque before walking through the narrow bazaar streets, where you can shop for traditional souvenirs and handicrafts.

Depart Mostar as dinner is served and the train heads towards Serbia.

Day 6: Belgrade (Serbia)

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

Our full-day city tour includes the "House of Flowers," the mausoleum of Josip Tito; the Town Hall; Republic Square; and Knez Mihajlova Street, as well as "Varos" Gate and a visit to the mighty Kalemegdan Fortress.

Lunch today will be in the spectacular Salon 1905. We leave Belgrade late afternoon and head towards North Macedonia and Greece.

Day 7: Skopje (North Macedonia) & Thessaloniki (Greece)

This morning we arrive in the little-visited Skopje and discover a city where the Ottoman influences are still strong. Explore the narrow streets of the Old Town, filled with tiny shops and mosques with ceramic-tiled interiors. Meander through the Old Bazaar area, brimming with things to buy, and cross the 15th-century Stone Bridge that links the bazaar to the modern town.

Return to the train for lunch on board and continue through the afternoon, crossing into Greece for a late afternoon arrival into Thessaloniki. We soak up the evening atmosphere of this vibrant city by heading to Aristotelous Square and the seafront before returning to the train for dinner.

Day 8: Sofia & Plovdiv (Bulgaria)

After breakfast, the train arrives in Sofia, Bulgaria's modern capital at the foot of Mt. Vitosha, which was first occupied by the Thracian tribe of Serdi. On our morning tour, we will visit sections of the Roman wall and admire the ancient Church of St. George, the golden-domed Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, and the Turkish Banya Bashi Mosque.

Enjoy lunch on the train as we travel from Sofia to Plovdiv. Plovdiv is the second-largest city in Bulgaria after Sofia and is called "The City of Seven Hills." It is one of the oldest cities in Europe and contains more than 200 known archaeological sites. We spend the afternoon here exploring the Roman Forum and Amphitheater. We'll also visit the charming Old Town, including its medieval walls and Ottoman baths.

Enjoy the final night's dinner onboard this evening as you head for Turkey.

Day 9: Istanbul (Turkey)

As breakfast is served, the train winds its way along the Sea of Marmara towards Istanbul's historic Sirkeci station. Mid-morning, we bid farewell to our train and transfer to the Pera Palace, a historical luxury hotel in the heart of Istanbul, for a three-night stay.

This fabled city that spans Asia and Europe is the final stop on our tour, and there is plenty of time to explore - see how old meets new and east meets west. The remainder of the day is at your leisure to explore this bustling city.

Day 10: Istanbul (Turkey)

Tour some of Istanbul's fabulous sites today. One of the most famous monuments in both the Turkish and Islamic worlds, the Sultan Ahmet Mosque (the Blue Mosque), is a superb creation in the classic Ottoman style and features six towering minarets and 260 windows illuminating its vast main chamber, which is decorated with more than 20,000 Iznik tiles.

Now a museum, Hagia Sophia was built in the 6th century by the Emperor Justinian and was one of the largest basilicas in the Christian world. After the Ottoman conquest, it was converted to a mosque and is today one of the most magnificent museums in the world. Take a moment to linger here to admire the fine Byzantine mosaics.

Day 11: Istanbul (Turkey)

Continue exploring the city today with a visit to the crown jewel of the Ottoman Empire, Topkapi. This stunning palace is the largest and oldest in the world and was the primary residence of the Ottoman Sultans from 1465 to 1853. With its treasury and exotic buildings overlooking the Golden Horn, our visit to Topkapi promises to be a truly fascinating experience.

Day 12: Istanbul (Turkey)

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

Reverse itinerary

Day 1: Istanbul (Turkey)

Arrive in the magical city of Istanbul, where you will be met and transferred to the Pera Palace, a historical luxury hotel in the heart of Istanbul, for a three-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: Istanbul (Turkey)

The fabled city of Istanbul spans Asia and Europe, where old meets new and east meets west.

Tour some of Istanbul's fabulous sites today. One of the most famous monuments in both the Turkish and Islamic worlds, the Sultan Ahmet Mosque (the Blue Mosque), is a superb creation in the classic Ottoman style and features six towering minarets and 260 windows illuminating its vast main chamber, which is decorated with more than 20,000 Iznik tiles.

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Day 4: Board Golden Eagle Danube Express

Late afternoon we board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* at Istanbul's Sirkeci station. Your cabin attendant will be waiting on the platform to welcome and escort you to your private en-suite cabin.

Enjoy your first dinner onboard as the train heads towards the border with Bulgaria.

Day 5: Plovdiv & Sofia (Bulgaria)

This morning we arrive in Plovdiv, the second-largest city in Bulgaria after Sofia. Called "The City of Seven Hills," it is one of the oldest cities in Europe and contains more than 200 known archaeological sites. We spend time here exploring the Roman Forum and Amphitheater - and also visit the charming Old Town, including its medieval walls and Ottoman baths.

Enjoy lunch on the train as you travel to Sofia, Bulgaria's modern capital at the foot of Mt. Vitosha. On our afternoon tour, we will visit sections of the Roman wall and admire the ancient church of St. George, the golden-domed Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, and the Turkish Banya Bashi Mosque.

Day 6: Thessaloniki (Greece) & Skopje (North Macedonia)

This morning, we cross into Greece and arrive in the vibrant city of Thessaloniki. Soak up the atmosphere of this port city by heading to Aristotelous Square and the seafront before returning to the train for lunch.

In the afternoon, you'll arrive in the little-visited Skopje in North Macedonia and discover a city where the Ottoman influences are still strong. Explore the narrow streets of the Old Town with tiny shops and mosques with ceramic-tiled interiors. Meander through the Old Bazaar area, brimming with things to buy, and cross the 15th-century stone bridge that links the bazaar to the modern town.

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Lunch today will be in the spectacular Salon 1905. We leave Belgrade late afternoon and head towards Bosnia.

Day 8: Mostar & Sarajevo (Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Over breakfast, you'll travel along a very scenic line to the historic city of Mostar, the crossroads of many civilizations, cultures, and 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. Visit the Turkish House and the mosque before walking through the narrow bazaar streets, where you can shop for traditional souvenirs and handicrafts.

Depart Mostar, and after lunch you'll arrive in 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 in the war-torn buildings you'll pass before making a special visit to the Tunnel Museum under Sarajevo Airport. Your guide, who gives a personal account of the 1992-1996 conflict, brings to life in touching fashion the struggles that the citizens of Sarajevo faced during the siege of the city.

Return to the train for dinner onboard as your journey continues on to Croatia and Slovenia.

Day 9: Zagreb (Croatia) & Ljubljana (Slovenia)

Have breakfast on board as the train heads to Croatia's capital, Zagreb, then spend the morning touring the city.

Return to the train for lunch as the train follows the scenic River Sava to the capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana. Tour this lovely, compact city by foot and by a cruise on the Ljubljanica River. Later, you'll head to Lake Bled, one of the most picturesque and photographed lakes in Eastern Europe.

Then, return to the train for a final dinner in the train's dining cars as you travel overnight toward Italy.

Day 10: Trieste & Venice (Italy)

After an early breakfast, we'll stop in the medieval port city of Trieste, once amongst the oldest and largest cities in the Habsburg Empire.

Then return to the train and prepare to disembark at the Venice Santa Lucia Station on the Canal Grande, where you will be transferred to the Hotel Monaco & Grand Canal for a two-night stay. This hotel has an excellent location in the heart of Venice, just a few steps away from St Mark's Square, and with a fantastic view overlooking the Grand Canal. Unpack, relax, and enjoy your first evening in Venice at leisure.

Day 11: Venice (Italy)

Venice is a truly captivating city of romance; its unrivalled beauty takes away the breath of first-time visitors and regulars alike.

Today we will have the opportunity to take a walking tour around the highlights of this spectacular city. Explore the winding lanes beside the Grand Canal to St Mark's Square, which for 1,000 years was the heart of Venetian life.

Dinner tonight will be at your hotel.

Day 12: Venice (Italy)

Following breakfast in the hotel, you will be transferred to the airport for your flight home. Alternately, contact IRT to learn how you can extend your stay in Venice for additional nights to explore more of this fascinating city.

Dates & Prices

More

[Read Angela Walker's first-hand report about the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*.](#)

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