Plav - Cultural Route

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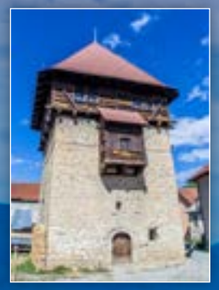
The Towers of Plav



The old stone towers of Plav and Gusinje are a unique phenomenon in the architecture of this area. Narrow and tall, with small openings and narrow rifle holes, the towers represent the most interesting examples of residential-cum-defensive structures in Montenegro. The oldest and most beautiful among them is Redžepagić Tower, built at the end of the 17th century in the centre of Plav, with characteristic "corners" – covered wooden balconies built above the rifle holes. The first two floors were built of stone which in certain places is a metre thick. Later the third floor made of wood was also added and it was used as a residential space, and was decorated with rich carvings, closets, sofas, carpets and exquisitely carved shelves. Also, the exterior of the towers was often decorated with calligraphic inscriptions and geometrical figures.

The Mosques of Plav

In the very centre of Plav, facing each other, there are two unique mosques, the first and the last large mosques which the Ottoman Empire built in this part of Europe. The Emperor's Mosque from the 15th century is the most important and oldest religious structure in Plav. Built on the raised plateau of Dizdar's former fortified town, this mosque fascinates the visitor with its original architecture, a combination of stone and wood construction and rich carving. The Sultaniya's Mosque, with its concrete minaret 41.5 metres tall, is one of the largest mosques in this part of Montenegro. Built at the beginning of the 20th century it was being built for over ten years by the famous masons of Debar. Soon it was turned into a school, and afterwards into the police station and the building of public utility provider, social service and fire department. In 2005 the Sultaniya's Mosque was restored and it regained its original purpose.

Lake Plav

Right beside the town there is the famous Lake Plav, the largest glacial lake in Montenegro, which is also the source of the mighty River Lim. Many people compare it with the sea, and at one point it attracted more tourists than any coastal destination in the vicinity. Surrounded by high mountains reflected on its surface, the nuances of colour of Lake Plav change depending on the position of the sun, the season, the lakeside vegetation and the shadow cast by Mt. Visitor. It is up to 9 metres deep, and in summer you can swim here, in winter often ice skate as well, whereas if you opt for fishing, you might catch a capital huchen, trout or pike. It has been calculated that the water of Lake Plav, very rich in fish, is replenished 82 times a year.

Velemun Botanical Gardens

The best way to learn about rich flora of the Prokletije Mountains, including even those rare high altitude plants reached only by the bravest mountaineers, is to visit *Velemun* Botanical Gardens in the village of Brezojevice. Within the 520 m² grounds you can see over 350 plant species, including numerous endemic and protected species as well as some newly discovered species from the still insufficiently explored Prokletije Mountains. Accompanied by the creator and owner of this unique botanical garden you will learn many interesting details regarding both the plants from this area and life itself in these majestic but cruel mountains. If you decide to head toward Mt. Visitor, at the foot of which Velemun is located, at an elevation of 1,642 metres above sea level, you will come across one of the most beautiful glacial lakes – Lake Visitor, well-known for its one-time floating island which is today connected to the shore.

Holy Trinity Monastery in Brezojevice

Only several kilometres from Plav, at the foot of Gradac Hill and on the left bank of the River Lim the monastery complex of the Holy Trinity in Brezojevice is located. It is thought that this monastery, which for centuries has been the centre of the spiritual and cultural life of the Orthodox population of this region, was built in the 13th century. Although it has been destroyed and rebuilt several times the Monastery of the Holy Trinity has preserved some of the most beautiful works of wall painting from the 16th century in the Polimlje Region. The church, which in appearance resembles old coastal church, was built in the Byzantine style as a single-nave stone structure. The bell tower was built on Gradac Hill, and not by the church as was more common, in order to allow messages and information to reach the people faster.

Gusinje

Hidden amid the steep slopes of the mountains of Prokletije and Visitor, at an elevation of 920 metres above sea level, Gusinje, a little old town which has preserved the spirit of past times until the present day, is situated. Here even today one can see narrow cobbled streets, little shops, old stone towers and houses with small windows and porches richly decorated with carvings. In the 14th century Gusinje was well-known as a caravan station on the road leading from the coast to Peć and Istanbul. Over time the settlement developed into a wealthy commercial, crafts and administrative centre of the Upper Polimlje region. Unlike most places in its surroundings, Gusinje was built in a planned manner. The entire settlement is concentrated around one semicircular street with a central square from where other streets lead radially, and at their ends they are connected with one circular street.

The Mosques and Churches of Gusinje

There are few places in the world which in the same street have a mosque, an Orthodox and a Catholic church. One of them is Gusinje, where on the main road, within a distance of one kilometre, there are the famous Vizier's Mosque and the nearly-a-century-old Church of St George and the Church of St Anthony. In the very centre of the little town the slender wooden minaret of the oldest and best-known mosque of Gusinje – the Vizier's Mosque soars into the sky. It is assumed that it was built by Mahmut-Pasha Bushatlija, the Vizier of Skadar in the mid-18th century, although local tradition says that it is much older. At the entrance to the mosque, in a richly carved soferluk (entrance section), there is a showcase with pebbles which keep the secret of a great drought which struck the entire region in 1917.

Ali-Pasha's Springs of Gusinje

Gusinje is best-known for its springs. Slightly above the town, at the foot of the Prokletije Mountains you will come across an unusual sight, as if the ground itself bubbles with many minor springs emerging directly from the soil and rock. These Gusinje's or Ali-Pasha's Springs, famed for their beauty, at which every summer over 15,000 natives of Plav and Gusinje gather from all over the world at one of the largest homeland gatherings in Montenegro. Another karst spring of outstanding beauty is located in the vicinity. Near the village of Vusanje, at an elevation of 1,010 metres above sea level, Oko Skakavice (the eye of the River Skakavica) or Savino oko (Sava's Eye) is hidden in a dense forest. And if you head forwards you will be drawn by the roar of one of the largest and most beautiful waterfalls in the Prokletije Mountains, a thirty-metre-high waterfall of the River Grlja.

Murino

This tiny town on the River Lim surrounded by giant mountains, since as long ago as the beginning of the last century, has attracted tourists who admired its untouched nature, enjoyed the clean air, the hospitality of the hosts and the famous spring water from Malevka. Mt. Čakor with its eponymous mountain pass, which for centuries has been the most important and shortest route connecting the whole region, towers above Murino. Caravans and travellers as well as many armies have passed over it. Nowhere will you see so many monuments, tombs and memorials witnessing to the difficult and turbulent past of this region as in Čakor. There is also the village of Velika which in order to protect itself from Ottoman attacks became a French protectorate in the mid-19th century. The Church of the Holy Great Martyrs Quiricus and Julietta, built in memory of the numerous victims of World War II, is also situated in the village.

The Tourist Organisation of Plav

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www.restorankrojet.blogspot.com

Getting There - Transportation

Air Transport: The closest airport is located in Podgorica (202 km).
Train: The closest railway station is located in Bijelo Polje (77km); www.zcg-prevoz.me
Bus: It is well connected with all towns in the region by bus lines; Plav Bus Station, phone: +382 (0) 51 251 371
Automobile: Along the main road to Podgorica (192 km), Berane (42km), Bijelo Polje (77 km), Kolasin (115 km) and Belgrade (392km).

Ćevapi

If you want to try one of the best-known Balkan gourmet dishes you have come to the right place! In the *ćevabdžinice* (kebab shops) of Plav and Gusinje *ćevapi* have a special flavour! This famous grilled speciality is made of minced meat with a mixture of garlic, onion and various spices. Most commonly it is served in a flatbread or pitta bread soaked with the frying sauce and here along with them you will get finely chopped onion and sour cream.

Welcome!

Now you are in Plav, at the foot of the highest Montenegrin mountain, in the place where the mighty River Lim has its source. And while you are enjoying the wonderful mountain landscapes and crystal clear lakes, do not forget that you are in a region of rich history which for hundreds of years has been a crossroads of various cultures, religions and nations.

The Cultural Route of Plav leads you to the most interesting places in the area, where you will discover how people lived in old stone towers, where is the street in which one mosque and two churches are located, why Lake Plav is the best place for fishing and how a little village on Mt. Čakor became a French protectorate. You will also learn why houses in Plav used to have a small wooden apple on their roofs and where Dizdar's fortified town was situated.

STEP INTO THE HISTORY OF PLAV!

More information about the Cultural Route and assistance for organising a tour can be obtained in The Tourist Organisation of Plav

Working Hours:
In summer: Monday – Saturday from 8 am to 8 pm.
In winter: Monday – Friday from 8 am to 4 pm.

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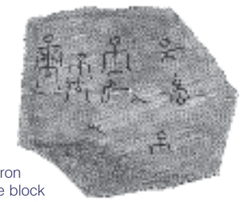
E-mail: toplav@t-com.me
Web page: www.toplav.me

Although there is no marked biking trail the entire route can be done by mountain bike.

Cave Drawings



One out of the three caves where drawings have been found in Montenegro is located on the mountain called Vezirova brada in the vicinity of Gusinje. At an elevation of 1,300 metres above sea level in the extremely inaccessible Grebaja Cave one can see **a scene of deer hunting** drawn in white. This drawing was made in the 8th century BC and it is the oldest drawing found so far from the Iron Age. Somewhat younger is the engraving on a stone block found in Mt. Popadija in the vicinity of the abandoned Volušnica summer pasture. It depicts a scene of fight of a man and a woman against a wolf that attacked a child. It is assumed that this engraving, named ***the Great Mother (Magna mater)***, dates from the Middle Bronze Age, around 600 BC.

The Lake Of Happiness

They say that Lake Hrid in the Prokletije Mountains is one of the most beautiful mountain lakes in Europe. It is so beautiful that it is believed that the gods created it and gave it as a present to forest nymphs to enjoy. When people discovered it the nymphs had to leave, and the gods in their sadness and anger sent lightning and thunder on the surrounding mountains and after they had cursed them they turned their peaks into bare rock. Since that time the mountains have been called Prokletije (The Cursed), whereas this lake with crystal clear, healing water was left behind by the nymphs. It is also called the lake of happiness, because it is believed that bathing in it brings beauty, health and love, and to make a wish come true, after bathing in it one should throw a piece of jewellery in the water. If legend is to be believed, a greedy merchant from Plav also heard stories about this, so he secretly came to the lake at night and started collecting gems and pearls which girls had left after bath. After stepping ashore he started counting the treasure, but with the first glint of silver in the moonlight he went completely blind. Terrified, the merchant started sobbing loudly, and his echo resounded through the entire mountain. Since then the lake has been called *Ridsko or Hridsko* (the Sobbing).

REGIONALNA RAZVOJNA AGENCIJA Bjelasica, Komovi & Prokletije

Austrian Development Cooperation

www.montenegro.travel

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CULTURAL ROUTE Plav