

PEOPLE . PLACES

BALKAN BOOM TOWNS

5 x 52' (ENG, GER, SPA), 5 x 45' (GER, FRE)

They are European cities on the rise, major cultural centres but hardly anybody outside of the region really know of them: the cities of the Balkan.

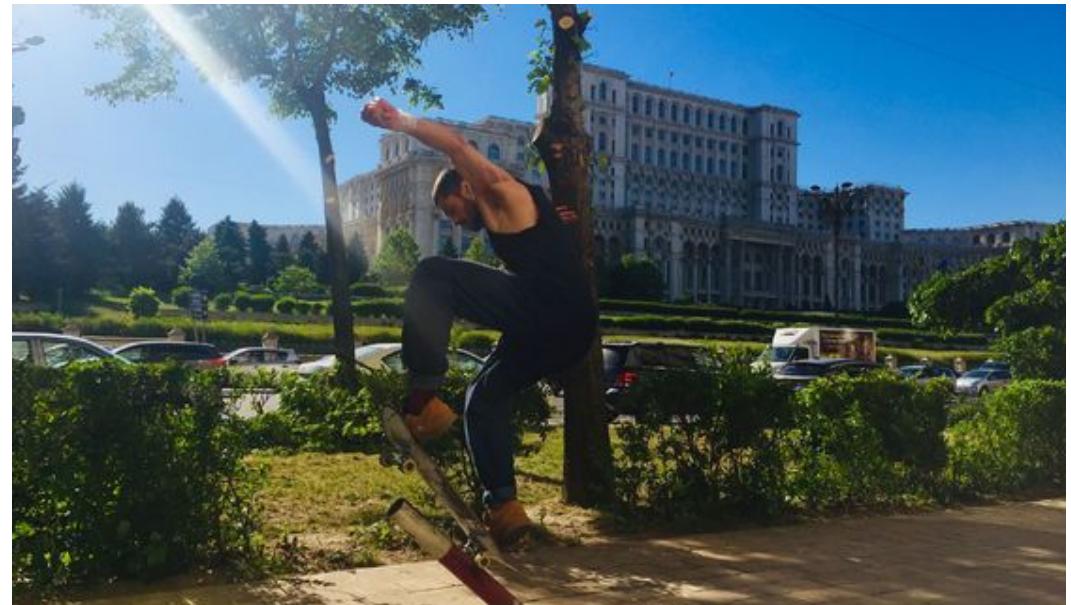
Many Europeans still associate cities such as Bucharest, Belgrade, Ljubljana, Sofia and Sarajevo with socialist dictatorship and prefabricated dreariness. For most, they are sites for the bloody wars of the 90s. But for young creative minds, these places belong among the coveted lists of "places to be". The cities have endured long difficult pasts, and now they offer an exciting and inspiring present with lots of potential for the future. Reasons enough for a trip to the old and new cities of the Balkan.

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1. Ljubljana

The Slovenian capital is also called Little Venice because of its many bridges that elegantly swing across the Ljubljanica River and its decorative baroque facades. Ljubljana's city centre is characterised by Art Nouveau and Italian Baroque buildings. However, the Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik has provided the urban highlights. He rebuilt the city, designed bridges and buildings in which he combined antique and modern form elements in his own way.

2. Sarajevo

Sarajevo is the capital and the largest city of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For centuries it has been characterized by cultural diversity and multi-ethnic coexistence. Sarajevo is an interface between the Islamic Orient and the Christian Occident. In no other European city have different religions and cultures existed so long and mostly peacefully side by side and together. Mosques, synagogues and churches belong equally to the identity of this Balkan metropolis.

3. Belgrade

Serbia and its capital Belgrade still do not have the best reputation with many Europeans. Too close is the memory of the Balkan wars, too nationalistic is the sound of the rulers until today. But the city at the confluence of the Sava and the Danube has awakened from its lethargy of decades and is now liberating itself more and more from its stigma. Young people from all over the world have been drawn to the Balkan metropolis for a number of years, and many have decided to stay.

4. Sofia

Sofia is the poorest, but supposedly the oldest metropolis in Europe. It is the political, economic and cultural center of Bulgaria. The fact that 14 percent of all Bulgarians live in the capital alone makes this clear. The place was already known for its mineral water springs in ancient times. In the course of the centuries they attracted many peoples: Thracians, Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans settled here and left their traces. The coming and going of cultures was most clearly reflected in the churches.

5. Bucharest

Bucharest is not a classic beauty, but a city you fall in love with at second glance. During the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu, the capital of Romania underwent a brutal transformation: historical quarters were demolished, show-off buildings erected, and entire churches moved. Today, Bucharest is in search of a new identity: lively, diverse, creative. It is shaped by its inhabitants, who are full of ideas about the heritage of the past and are looking for ways to transform their city into an attractive European metropolis.