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Time of your life ... Serbia's EXIT festival

GETTING THERE: JAT Airways flies to Belgrade daily from Heathrow and BA five days a week. Prices from £180.

STAYING THERE: A ticket to Exit festival 2010, July 8-11, is £85 if booked before May.

Camping is £20. This year's festival headliners are The Chemical Brothers and Mika.

See exitfest.org or lastminute.com.

Hotel rooms average £50 a night with breakfast, and operators include Regent Holidays and Balkan Holidays.

OUT & ABOUT: For information on Serbia and places to stay see serbia.travel.

FOOD AND DRINK: Meal for two with wine approx £12, pint of beer £1.

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ELEVEN years ago three Serbian students set up stages close to one of their university's faculties in the southern town of Novi Sad where they held a festival that ended up lasting 100 days. In a time where their country was recovering from a vicious war, and the political situation was still very fragile, this was an event that preceded the overthrow of the then president Slobodan Milošević. Fast forward to 2010 and the festival has become one of Europe's most popular music events, attracting a wide ranging roster of top musicians and performers. But there's a lot more to Serbia than the EXIT festival, as **MARCUS BARNES** discovered when he paid a visit to the beautiful eastern European nation.

So, I'm in Serbia with the aim of helping Novi Sad celebrate 10 years of the [EXIT festival](#), but while I'm here it's important to take in some of the many other delights the country has to offer - so, first stop Belgrade.



Delights ... of Belgrade

In the late 90s the Serbian capital was bombed by NATO forces. Buildings that appeared to be on the verge of collapse were a rare sight, but a stark reminder of a war that ended just over ten years ago.

Belgrade has recovered from the troubles in the Balkans to become a thoroughly modern city, with plenty of amazing features that set it apart from many European cities - the architecture for one, influenced by a melting pot of cultures.

We visit St Sava church, a spectacular building with a huge cathedral funded exclusively by donations from the public and private investors.

Beautiful

Although it is still yet to be completed the scale and beauty of the structure is already breathtaking, dominating Belgrade's skyline and acting as a beacon for tourists.

Following our tour of the city, which also included a visit to one of the city's fortresses and a panoramic view of the sprawling Danube, we head to one of Belgrade's hidden pleasures - The Federal Association Of Globe-Trotters, an underground bar located in the basement of an apartment block.

The bar is one of many that were set up during Milošević's rule, when political discussions and criticism of the Government was outlawed - in order to be able to indulge in free speech, many residents set up these unlicensed havens in the basements of their blocks, where they would drink and put the world to rights.



Euro pop ... Lily Allen in Serbia

Quite an experience for someone who is not familiar with the city, the bars still exist largely on a need to know basis, meaning it can be difficult to track them down - it was truly an honour to pay a visit to The Federal Association Of Globe-Trotters, where the cocktail menu included the incredibly naughty sounding Liquid Cocaine.

A dinner beside the Danube, followed by a jaunt to one of the city's many riverside clubs finished the night off perfectly.

The following day we depart to Novi Sad, where we stay at the [Aleksander Hotel](#) right in the centre of this quaint, laidback southern town, which has become home to Europe's top music festival (as voted in 2007) attracting more than 50,000 revellers every year.

After getting acquainted with our hotel rooms, we take lunch at the lovely Sokace restaurant, where the main meal consists of the largest boat of meat I think any of us had ever seen, all of it mouthwateringly good.

A tour of the city takes in the main square where we see a statue of the infamous Serbian freedom fighter Svetozar Miletic. The poet, who was also mayor of Novi Sad, was the founder and leader of the Srpska narodna slobodoumna stranka (People's Serb Freethinkers Party) and is a highly regarded historical figure in the province and across the country.



Beauty ... Belgrade's St Sava cathedral

After the walking tour, we get our first vision of the EXIT festival's base - the stunning Petrovaradin Fortress. Perched atop a hill right next to the Danube, the fortress not only holds the huge annual festival, but also offers the kind of virtually priceless views of Novi Sad.

And so, we gear up for our first night at the EXIT festival, with Lily Allen and The Arctic Monkeys on the Main Stage this was guaranteed to be a thoroughly enjoyable opening night and it was no disappointment - particularly as we were fortunate enough to be allowed within 10 metres of the stage for much of the artists' performances.

Cruising

A day of relaxation was followed by a visit to the beautiful city of [Indjija](#), where we're promised a boat trip along the Danube... the boat, which we had snobbishly envisioned to be a huge luxury yacht, was in fact two wooden fishing boats.

Not a problem, in fact probably 100 times better than a yacht - we set off on a tour of some of the hidden treasures around the Danube, areas full of wildlife and ankle high waters, where we set up 'The world's best bar' on one of the fishing boats (after witnessing some of the local farmers catch a rabbit with the aid of their hunting dogs, amazing!).

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At the world's best bar we indulge in some of the Serbia brandy, with which we are already very familiar, and a bitter liquer by the name of Pelinkovac - all of this is a precursor to a dinner put on by the locals, who serve up fish soup and a variety of treats for the group. An excellent evening, all of which led up to our second night at the festival.

On our third day we visit the delightful [Salas 137 farmhouse](#), which is home to an outdoor restaurant - perfect in the early summer warmth. Home to stables, a riding school, rustic farmhouse accomadation and of course the 150 seater restaurant where we have our delicious three-course lunch, Salas was a great place to recouperate and trade stories of the previous night's adventures at the festival.

Before we knew it another night at EXIT was upon us with the promise of Patti Smith, Moby and Grandmaster Flash, this was yet another night of music and partying that none of us will forget.

The final day takes in a visit to Subotica in the north of Serbia - a pretty town with colourful buildings and a town hall with a huge spire standing proud above its population. Here we have lunch by the town's beautiful lake, and have a tour of the town hall ahead of out final night at the festival.

Tales of the town's past ruler still ringing in our ears, we arrive at the festival ready to dance our feet off to the brilliant Madness, the awesome Prodigy and watch the sunrise with techno legend Carl Cox.

Which all goes to show, if you can make the effort to leave your hotel during the day there is an amazing amount of

relaxing and breathtaking delights on offer in Serbia.

Just make sure you don't overdo it on the local brandy, or you may just end up with a goose egg in your pocket!

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