

# Discoveries

The Latin Bridge in Sarajevo, scene of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand - an event that triggered the First World War



## *Besieged Bosnia* back in business

Bosnia, embattled in 1914 and again 80 years later, still bears the scars of its brutal conflicts but, as **Clive Nicholls** discovers, the tragedy is tempered by its compelling beauty

PHOTOGRAPHY: CLIVE NICHOLLS

## Discoveries

Main photo: An unremarkable house on the outskirts of Sarajevo with such a remarkable history. Still showing the signs of war damage, this house hid the end of the tunnel that provided the lifeline to the city. Clockwise: coffee comes sweet and strong; Sarajevo shops: individual and interesting; Gazi Husrev-Beg Mosque in Sarajevo



“Sarajevo is my first stop on my Insight Vacations tour of Bosnia and Croatia. It’s just 20 years since it was under siege for the best part of four years in the Bosnian war”



**I**N 1914 a small bridge in Sarajevo was the scene of an event that would change the course of history. The Latin Bridge, older than most, and certainly on the pretty side of plain, was in other ways an unremarkable bridge – that was until June 28 in this fateful year.

It was at this spot that a young Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, shot and killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, triggering a chain of events that would lead to the outbreak of the First

World War and ultimately the deaths of more than 17 million. A team of assassins targeted Ferdinand and, indeed, he had survived an attempt earlier that day when a grenade was lobbed into his car.

Later, a change of route confused his driver and, as fate would have it, he stopped by the bridge to reverse up right in front of Princip who seized his moment. Shooting dead the Archduke, he also killed Sophie in the melee that followed.

Within a month the Austro-Hungarians invaded Serbia. Germany and Russia, with

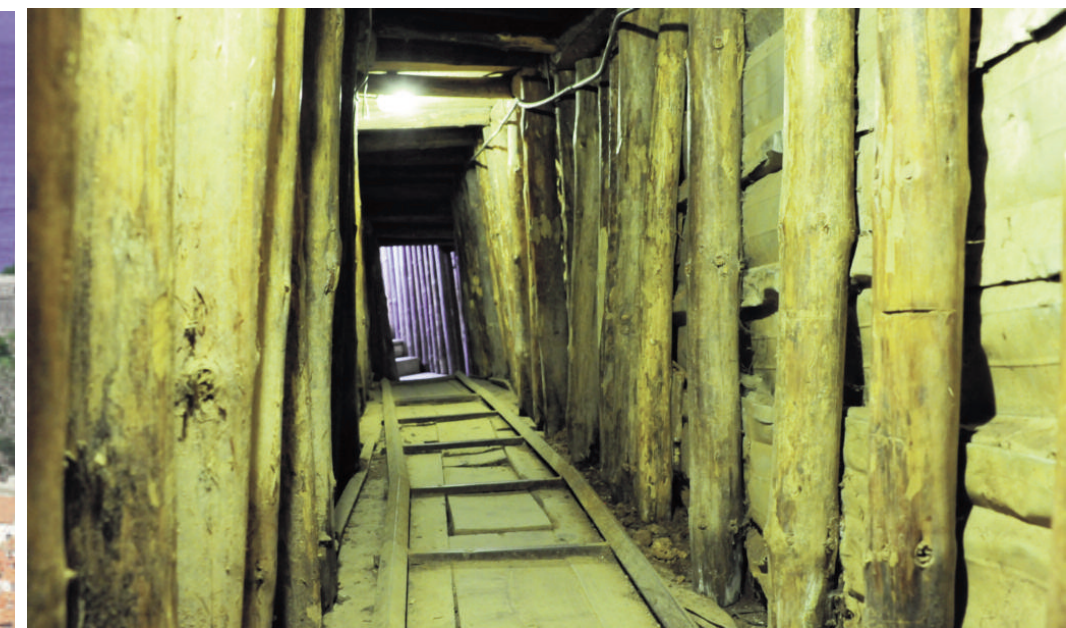
their own agendas, took the opportunity to join in, and soon most of Europe had taken sides and individual actions had spiralled into the First World War.

Sarajevo hit the headlines again in the 20th century, being the city that endured the longest wartime siege in modern history, from 1992-96. More of that later, but for me, on a more positive note, Valentine’s Day 1984 in Sarajevo was simply brilliant. Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean stunned the world with their emotional performance of Ravel’s





Main photo: Croatia's beautiful, beguiling Dubrovnik. Clockwise: Sarajevo's Tunnel of Life; the City Hall and Onofrio's Fountain



◀ *Bolero*. For sure, they were expected to win gold at Sarajevo's Winter Olympics. Back home every television in the UK must have been tuned in. We expected so much but somehow they delivered even more – ice dancing would never be the same again. The sixes rolled up on the scoreboard and the crowd in the Zetra Stadium rose to their feet as they realised they had just witnessed something so special – the finest ice skating performance ever.

Sarajevo is my first stop on my Insight

Vacations tour of Bosnia and Croatia – what a fascinating place it is.

It's just 20 years since it was under siege for the best part of four years in the Bosnian war. This wasn't a war that was played by the rules – civilians, women and children were seen as legitimate targets and Sarajevo still bears the scars of its struggle for survival, 20 years on. Hardly a building remained untouched and even today many buildings look battle-wary with damage from machinegun fire and artillery shells, showing what they endured during this

vicious conflict. The human toll was devastating: in Sarajevo alone 11,500 died, including 1600 children, and more than 56,000 were seriously wounded – what kind of world do we live in where children are seen as legitimate targets for snipers?

I had the privilege of dining with a local family in their eighth-floor flat in a tower block still pockmarked by gunfire. Sanela and husband Kemo, children Nani and Sara and Kemo's mother, Semka, were perfect hosts. Semka was cook, Sanela the interpreter and the children, well, they

were just delightful. Their mother, Sanela, was 14 when the war ended; she had spent days, nights and weeks in the tower block basement during the shelling. Her school was destroyed but with other children, she was taught at home until her teacher was killed by a sniper.

Nowhere was safe and the basement, usually without power, became home. On a quiet day, when there hadn't been any shelling or sniper fire, she begged her mother to let her and her sister play outside with their best friend. Within five

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Far left: City Walls in Dubrovnik; Roman Catholic church in Mostar; Semka, the perfect host for dinner; re-built, the fabulous bridge in Mostar.  
Main pic: Bosnian countryside: dramatic and enchanting; below left: Dubrovnik and below right: Mostar

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minutes they were targeted by a mortar – her best friend died – she was just 11 years old. Sanela tells how there wasn't a mark on her body; it was just the effect of the blast that killed her. So terribly sad.

I got another taste of life under siege. Travelling along 'Sniper Alley' (the main road to the airport) I saw the Television Centre, now rebuilt, but I can still remember the TV images of the burning building and the destruction around it.

I'm visiting the 'Tunnel of Life' built under the airport runway in secret during

the early stages of the siege. This is a half-mile long tunnel, 5ft high and 3ft, wide that, together with another three miles of trenches, linked the city with Bosnian-held territory on the outside.

Previously 800 people had lost their lives to snipers trying to cross the runway to link to the outside world. Built in just four months by troops working around the clock, the tunnel allowed weapons and aid in, and also a way out for those fleeing Sarajevo. It must have been one of the most heavily used tunnels in the

world – in total there were more than three million crossings taking up to two hours to get through.

Today a section is open to the public and is accessed through the secret entrance in what was a family home on the outside of the city. It really does bring home to you the hardship that those in Sarajevo faced – watch your head, it's not very high and you will have to stoop to get through.

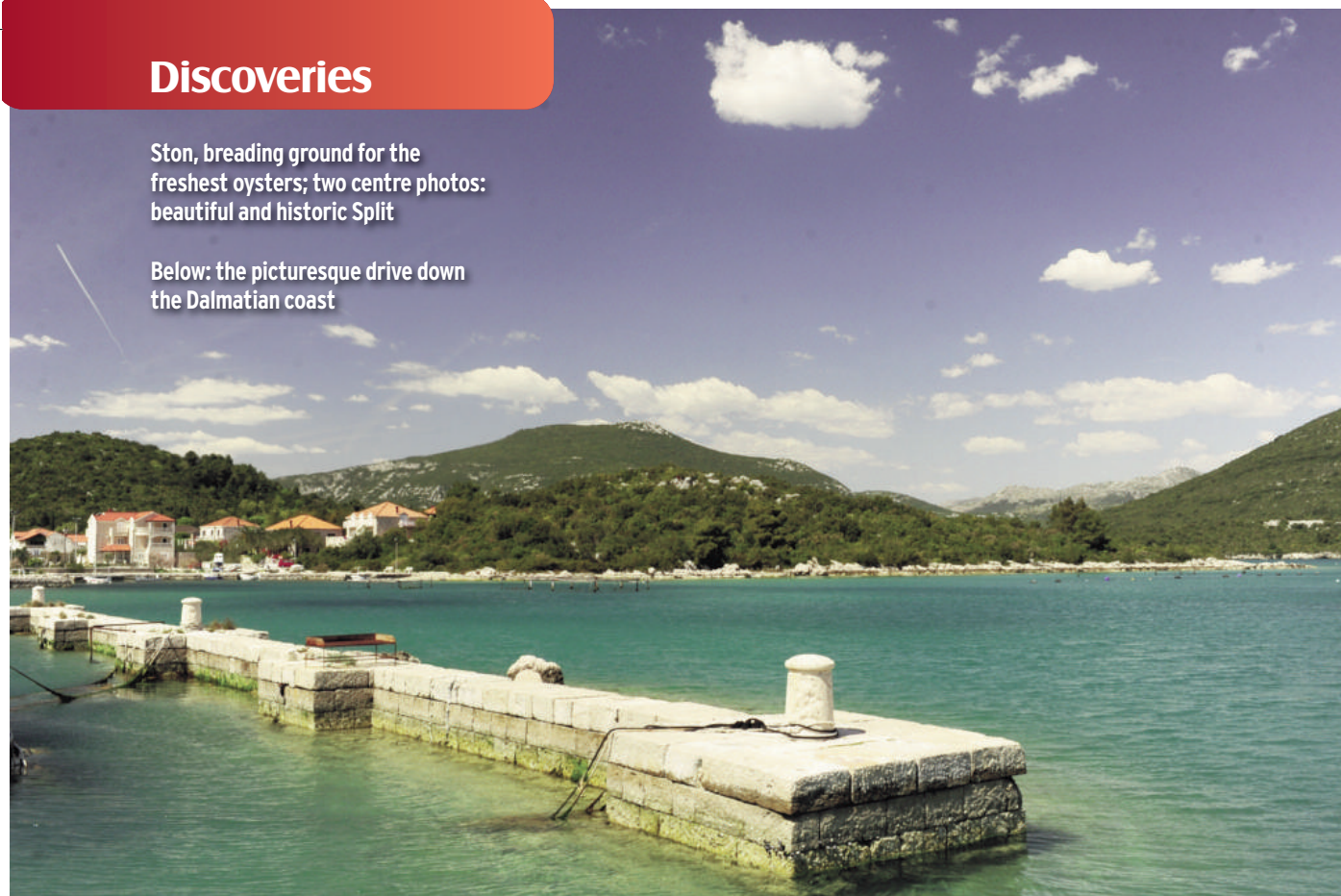
Next stop is Mostar in Herzegovina – another town that had to ensure a siege during the Bosnian war. It's a beautiful



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Ston, breeding ground for the freshest oysters; two centre photos: beautiful and historic Split

Below: the picturesque drive down the Dalmatian coast



town and the Old Bridge is just stunning. It was destroyed by the Croats during the war but was rebuilt in 2003 and is as good as ever. The views from the bridge are brilliant, the views of the bridge are amazing – take your time and soak up the atmosphere. Either side of the bridge, market stalls and cafés tout for business, in a nice way. Then it's back to the motor coach; next stop Split in Croatia and the Dalmatian Riviera.

Travelling by coach is brilliant – the driver always manages to drop us off exactly

where we want to be. In the case of Split it's right on the waterfront, recently remodelled to combine modern café culture with the fabulous Palace of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, built in 305. It's huge, covering almost ten acres, and is a palace crossed with a fort. Massive walls with an escape route directly to the sea gave Diocletian the best of both worlds, luxury and security.

Take in the palace and the old town before enjoying a glass of wine on the waterfront and some serious people-

watching – a great way to end the day. Next day is a fabulous drive south along the Dalmatian coast, past the Island of Brač to the village of Ston and its smaller brother, Mali Ston. There, the huge defensive wall, which once protected the salt pans, snakes across the hillside and with its towers and forts looks like a mini wall of China. It's open to tourists and there's even a run across the top for joggers every year.

Famous for its oysters, the farms at Mali Ston fill the bay. A trip out by boat takes us

to see fresh oysters hauled aboard, split and then offered with a dash of lemon juice – they don't come fresher than this.

I've always been a bit unsure of downing raw oysters; I've only ever eaten one before and that didn't really work for me. So I photographed them, had a think, gave them a squirt of lemon, and thought 'why not?' The texture is a bit slippery but the taste was good, so good I went back for more. I wouldn't say that I'm now an oyster aficionado, but I'm certainly not frightened of them any more – and, after

all, that's what holidays are about, trying something different.

Back on board, we drive down to catch a ferry out to the island of Korčula, 30 miles long and five wide; it's a place to slow down the pace a bit, relax, take in the history of the old town and unwind.

Marco Polo had a house here (it's not in the finest state of repair), though that is disputed by Venetians. You know what it's like when you're famous; everyone wants to claim a bit of you. The story is good but the facts are sketchy and most historians

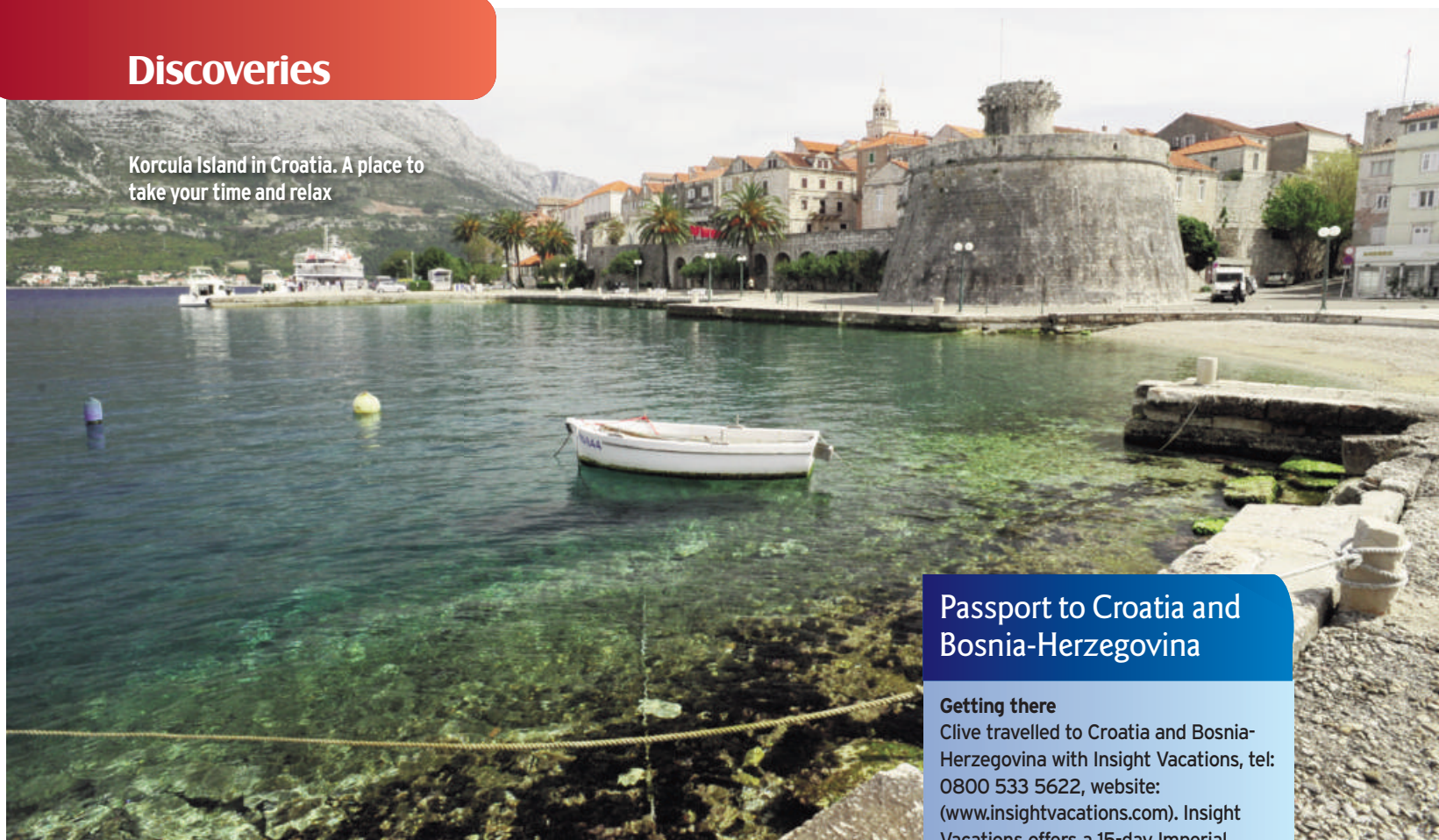
believe he was born in Venice, not Korčula. We hire bikes here, ride out to a local winery and spend the afternoon tasting the reds and whites before a downhill ride back to the harbour – now that's chilling out!

The morning ferry takes us back to the mainland and we drive down to the 'Pearl of the Adriatic' – Dubrovnik.

Once again I'm grateful to our driver as he eases the coach round the narrow roads to drop us off at Pile Gate at the entrance to the Old Town. Dating from the 15th

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Korcula Island in Croatia. A place to take your time and relax



### Passport to Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

#### Getting there

Clive travelled to Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina with Insight Vacations, tel: 0800 533 5622, website: (www.insightvacations.com). Insight Vacations offers a 15-day Imperial Capitals & The Dalmatian Riviera trip from £2550 per person. It includes:

- Return flights
- 14 nights' premium B&B accommodation
- Six evening meals including a Highlight Dinner at a restaurant in Dubrovnik
- A Dine Around evening in Zagreb
- VIP door-to-door private airport transfers
- Sightseeing and the services of a professional tour director throughout.

#### Find out more

- For more information, tel: 0800 533 5622, website: (www.insightvacations.com)
- Insight offers other trips to Croatia and the Balkans. For more information, see the website.

century, the drawbridge at the gate was at one time raised each night to seal off and protect the city. The walls here are huge, up to 20ft thick and in places 80 ft high, so it makes sense to protect the weakest points: the gates.

Considering their age, the walls are in fantastic condition and the walk around the top gives a spectacular overview of Dubrovnik. You can look down on the Big Onofrio's Fountain (always a good meeting point) and the Main Street with its limestone paving that runs through the heart of the Old Town. Onofrio della Cava was the designer of a complicated aqueduct system and the two fountains that delivered water to the city centre.

Built in 1440, the larger fountain is a masterpiece, with 16 sides, ornate carvings and a fabulous stone roof. This is not just a water supply, it's a work of art.

I haven't watched it myself, but the hit series *Game of Thrones* was filmed in Dubrovnik. You can take a tour of the film locations (which starts at the fountain every day at 11am), for 180 Croatian Kuna, about £18. The Pile Gate was used for the scene where King Joffrey faced a citizens' riot and nearby Lovrijenac Fort was where the attack on King's Landing

took place. Having seen some of the locations, I might try to catch up on the series and see what spots I can recognise.

Dubrovnik does get very busy, and it's easy to see why it's so popular, so if you get the chance, an early start will pay dividends. The walls open at 9am and being in the first groups on top you'll get the clearest views and you won't be tripping over others and jostling for the best pictures. Believe me, it's worth it.

My coach tour ends in Dubrovnik. It's been so much more relaxing than driving myself, no more hunting for parking spaces, change for the meter or long walks from a far-off car park, plus of course the driver always knows where he's going – not something I can always claim. A big plus for me is that Insight always takes some rows of seats out of its coaches and spreads out the extra leg-room among the rest – I'm 6ft and being able to stretch out works wonders.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was fascinating; its history is both tragic and compelling. Sarajevo and Mostar have their own stories to tell and the bridge and old cobbled streets in Mostar are particularly special. The Old Towns in Croatia are like something out of a fairy

tale – they've got everything: narrow paved streets, beautiful old buildings, intimate cafés and restaurants, and because we were never far from the sea, beautiful harbours. The Dalmatian Riviera – now that's something special.

I'm flying home with so many memories, new friends – and perhaps even a taste for fresh oysters.