

KOSOVO

PREFACE

Kosovo is one of the newest countries in Europe, having declared its independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008. The Republic of Kosovo has de facto control over most of the territory, while North Kosovo, the largest Kosovo Serb enclave, is under the control of institutions of the Republic of Serbia. Serbia does not recognize the unilateral secession of Kosovo and considers it a UN-governed entity within its sovereign territory. The United States recognized the independence of Kosovo on April 8, 2008.

AREA, GEOGRAPHY, AND CLIMATE

The Republic of Kosovo, a landlocked nation located in the center of the Balkan Peninsula, has a surface area of 10,887 square kilometers (4,203 square miles - slightly smaller than Connecticut) and is bordered by Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro. It has a varied terrain, with high plains at around 500 meters (1640 feet) above sea level, along with rolling hills and mountains, some of which reach an altitude of over 2000 meters (6560 feet).

Kosovo's climate is mainly continental with some Mediterranean and alpine influences. Summers are quite warm and winters are cold. The temperature extremes range from 35°C (95°F) in summer, to -20°C (-4°F) in winter.

The location, topography, climate and other factors are conducive to an abundance of water creating an extensive network of rivers, with rapids, cascades, whirlpools, waterfalls and very narrow deep gorges found in the western areas. None of the waterways, however, are considered navigable.

The capital and largest city in Kosovo is Pristina. Other large urban areas include Prizren, Peja/Pec, Mitrovice/Mitrovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Ferizaj/Urosevac, and Gjakove/Djakovica (note: place names, where applicable, are given in both Albanian and Serbian, the two official languages of Kosovo).

POPULATION

Though a reliable census of the population has not been conducted for decades, most estimates put Kosovo's population at about 2.1 million (2000 est.). It is comprised of approximately 90% ethnic Albanians, 6% ethnic Serbs, with the remaining four percent from the Bosniak, Gorani, Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian, and Turkish communities. The majority of the ethnic Albanian, Bosniak, Gorani, and Turkish communities, and some of the Roma/Ashkalia/Egyptian communities are adherents of Islam. The ethnic Serb population is largely Orthodox Christian, and approximately 3% of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo are Roman Catholic. A census of the population, to coincide with decennial censuses throughout Europe, is planned for 2011.

Recent population trends have been characterized by a high birthrate, a growing proportion of males in the total population, a lower average age, a high rate of unemployment, and multi-generational extended households. The average household has 6.8 members.

ARTS, SCIENCE, AND EDUCATION

Galleries and Exhibition Halls with regular exhibits include:

- * Kosovo Art Gallery
- * Gallery of the Ministry of Culture
- * Hall of the Institute for Albanology
- * Hall in the National and University Library in Pristina
- * American Corner in National and University Library
- * American Corners in Prizren and Mitrovica
- * Gallery Vision 2000+
- * Cultural Center in Gjakova/Gjakovica
- * Gallery in the "Hamam of Prizren"
- * Hall in Peja/Pec Theatre
- * Cultural Center in Gjilan/Gnjilane

Libraries

There are 395 libraries (Regional, Municipal, University, primary and secondary school libraries) in Kosovo. The largest library is the National and University Library located in Pristina on the University of Pristina campus. The Library is scheduled to divide into two separate institutions (a National Library and a University Library) in 2010.

Festivals

Kosovo holds several annual international arts festivals, most of which include U.S. performers and productions.

March: DAM festival features classical music and international performers.

June: PRI International Film Festival is held annually and features productions from all over the world.

August: Docufest (a documentary film festival) is held annually in Prizren.

September: The 9/11 Memorial Film Festival is held each year and runs over a period of one week. This festival is dedicated to the victims of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the U.S. Additionally, there is an annual 9/11 Memorial concert organized by the Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra.

October: The Theater Festival for performing arts is held in Pristina.

November: 1) SKENA UP, a student-run film and theater international festival; 2) Pristina Jazz Festival. U.S. performers are often featured.

Institutions of Cultural Heritage

Monuments and Archives in Kosovo include:

- * The Museum of Kosovo

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- * The Prizren League historic site
- * Ethnographic Museum of Gjakove/Djakovica
- * Ethnographic Museum of Peja/Pec
- * Decani/Deqan Monastery [must submit visitor request]
- * Pec/Peja Patriarchate [must submit visitor request]
- * Kullas of Junik; Peja/Pec; Isniq/Isnic; etc.

The Shota National Ensemble of Songs and Dance presents programs on traditional Albanian song, dance and national folklore. Shota dancers have performed in more than 50 countries around the world and have received international prizes and critical acclaim. They perform regularly at the National Theater in Pristina.

Philharmonic Orchestra and the Chamber Orchestra

The Philharmonic Orchestra performs classical works from every period and including a wide range of composers. The Chamber Orchestra performs one concert in Pristina and three concerts elsewhere in Kosovo every month for a season of 10 months. In addition, they occasionally invite outside instrumentalists to join them for performances as a complete symphony orchestra. Advance notice on performances is unusual, and finding out about cultural performances is difficult. There are occasional recitals given by talented students, usually at the "Red Hall" in the Youth Center.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Kosovo's economic performance has been mixed. Recent revisions to national income accounts point both to both a higher gross domestic product (GDP) than previously estimated, and to higher growth rates. The economy expanded at 3.5% in 2009 on strong domestic demand supported by large flows of remittances and foreign direct investment, a sustained donor presence, and higher deposit-financed credit growth. Despite the expansion, inflation remained fairly low, at roughly 2-3%.

According to IMF estimates, GDP in 2009 was estimated at € 3.8 million (USD 5.3 million), or € 1,800 (USD 2,500) per capita, which is the lowest in the region. National income is markedly higher than GDP due to remittances from abroad, estimated at € 438 million (\$610 million) per year from a 300,000-350,000 strong diaspora.

The unemployment rate, though difficult to estimate, is widely thought to be approximately 40%. The biggest increase in employment since 1999 has been in the public sector.

The official Kosovo currency is the Euro. Because the government of Kosovo does not directly control the supply of Euros, the introduction of the euro has enabled a rapid macroeconomic stabilization after many years of struggle with very high inflation in the former Yugoslavia.

TRANSPORTATION

Most of the transportation in Kosovo is by motor vehicle. The main road network overall is in moderately good condition (particularly after the rehabilitation following the 1999 conflict). The railway system is working, with limited service, mainly in the transport of freight. Passenger rail service exists, but it is unreliable, uncomfortable, and slow.

Kosovo has an international airport located 20 kilometers from Pristina. It has been in operation since 2000. There are daily flights to Vienna, Tirana, Ljubljana, Istanbul and Budapest; there are direct flights to other European cities (London, Tirana) but not on a daily basis and also many regional flights (especially during the summer months to Switzerland and Germany). There are also flights three days in a week from Pristina to Zagreb, Croatia; and from Pristina to Podgorica, Montenegro every day except Tuesday.

Local Transportation

City buses are lucrative hunting grounds for pickpockets, as the numbers of passengers, coupled with the close proximity and jostling of passengers, makes their actions easier. Long-haul buses, by contrast, lack the risk of crime, but most also lack any form of climate control, which can result in an extremely uncomfortable trip during very hot or very cold weather. Taxis are always available in the city. The average taxi fare is around 2-3 €; most taxis work on a meter system.

Regional Transportation

The majority of cities in Kosovo can be reached from Pristina by private auto within two hours. Most roads outside the city are narrow, winding and need repair. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is not essential but winter conditions present difficult driving conditions for conventional vehicles. For those who want to get out and really explore Kosovo, a four-wheel-drive is necessary, as many of the secondary roads are not paved and become deeply rutted or washed out following heavy rains. Under normal conditions, it takes about 5 hours to reach Sofia, Bulgaria or Thessaloniki, Greece. Skopje is 90 minutes away by car. Northern Greece, the Montenegrin coast, Croatia, and Budapest can be reached in a day by car.

COMMUNICATIONS

Mail

Letters and packages may be sent to the U.S. via DHL, FedEx, or UPS, but such services are very expensive.

Radio and TV

Multi-system televisions and radios can receive local broadcasting. Cable TV is available with approximately 50 channels, broadcasting in English, German, Albanian, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.

Newspapers, Magazines, and Journals

A wide variety of Albanian-language newspapers are published in Kosovo. The International Herald Tribune and Financial Times are available in stores the afternoon of publication. English-

language magazines can be obtained at some stores (Djukagjini Bookstore on Mother Teresa Boulevard has a selection of English language books and magazines) and books and magazines in the PX at Camp Bondsteel (access subject to change).

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Medical Facilities

Pristina has a University Clinical Center and private clinics providing health care in almost all medical specialties. These facilities do not meet U.S. standards.

Routine dental care, such as cleanings and simple fillings, can be done locally.

Some commonly prescribed medications are available in Pristina at low prices. Private and state-owned pharmacies are scattered throughout the city and are well-stocked with medications, mostly imported from Slovenia, Serbia, Macedonia, Germany, England, and Bulgaria. However, the quality and handling of medications is variable, and many U.S. products are unavailable. In general, the use of prescription medications obtained locally is discouraged because of concern for the lack of quality control.

Community Health

Air pollution and smog are problems and at times reach bothersome levels for allergy sufferers. Those who are sensitive may find the air a problem year-round, particularly children with asthma or anyone with chronic respiratory illness. Pollutants from the nearby electricity plant, burning coal, burning wood, use of lead-based fuel and high pollen counts are all contributing factors to the pollution and may increase susceptibility to respiratory ailments.

There is a high rate of motor vehicle accidents and pedestrian injuries in Kosovo. Local driving habits often ignore traffic and safety regulations. Narrow streets and a lack of parking often lead to sidewalks blocked by cars, forcing pedestrians into the street.

Sanitary conditions are poor in Pristina. The sewage system is old, sewer smells are apparent in many areas, and you may see water floating in the streets after heavy rains. Water outages are frequent, particularly after 10 pm.

Municipal tap water is not considered potable. Bottled water is recommended for drinking, cooking and tooth brushing.

The food is safe in most of the local restaurants in Pristina and there is an ever-growing variety offered. Locally available fruits and vegetables are good and fresh in season. Precautions related to the washing of raw fresh fruits and vegetables are similar to those which would normally be practiced in the U.S. Meat should be bought only from a clean, reputable butcher. Long-life pasteurized milk is widely available.

Preventive Measures

There are no immunizations required for entry into Kosovo, according to the Center for Disease Control information for travelers to Eastern Europe. However, immunization against Hepatitis A and B, Tetanus-Diphtheria-Pertussis, measles, polio, and rabies (if you have extensive outdoor

exposure, as rabies has been identified in wild foxes) may be recommended by your health care provider.

CCHF (Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever) and Tularemia (transmitted by ticks) are endemic in Kosovo, generally in rural areas. Visitors can avoid most of these diseases by observing good health practices and measures.

PRISTINA

Pristina is the capital and the largest city in Kosovo, with an estimated population of over 400,000. This area has a long history; archaeological discoveries have been found in its vicinity which date back to the early Neolithic ages.

During World War II, Pristina (with around 16,000 inhabitants) was included in the zone occupied by the Italians and was the center of the prefecture with the same name. Pristina became the capital of Kosovo after World War II. Up to this point, Pristina had retained its appearance as an oriental town, but the intensive modernization of Pristina in socialist Yugoslavia completely changed the structure and look of the city. The old narrow cobblestone streets and low, mostly mud-walled houses were replaced by new modern public buildings, such as the Assembly Building, Radio Station, the Television of Pristina, Press and Publishing Hall, the University Library, several banking centers, etc. and wider streets.

The most popular sections of Pristina are Kurrizi (The Spine) in the Dardania quarter and Qafa (The Neck) near the center of the city, which feature many shops, cafés and hangouts in arcades built within residential buildings. A rendering of the House of Emin Gjika (18th century), located next to the Museum of Natural History, is another example of the traditional architecture of Pristina. The city's main thoroughfare, once named in honor of Marshal Tito, is now a pedestrian zone which was dedicated in honor of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, an ethnic Albanian from the territory of present-day Macedonia.

UTILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Single-phase, 220v-220v, 50-cycle, AC electricity is standard throughout Kosovo. Outlets take two-prong round plugs. The wiring in many houses cannot take heavy loads.

FOOD

The availability of food continues to improve. Market areas are usually complete with a grocer, butcher, greengrocer, florist, and there are several large supermarkets. Markets and shops generally are open every day. On Sundays, most stores are closed but the large supermarkets remain open all day and several smaller markets will be open. Most food items can be found (though reading labels of imported products can be a challenge). Low-fat products and diabetic foods are available in very limited quantities and variety.

Meat, Poultry, and Fish

Meat and poultry, both local and imported, are available. Beef, lamb and veal are good. Pork can also be purchased in ethnic Serb areas. There are local butchers where one can buy fresh (unfrozen) meat (generally beef, some lamb/mutton). Fresh poultry is available intermittently in some large supermarkets. Imported frozen chicken can be found though not always high quality. There can be a problem with thawing and refreezing of frozen meat. Fresh fish (imported and from local trout ponds) can be purchased, as well as frozen.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

There are plenty of fruits and vegetables year-round which are both locally produced and imported. Citrus fruits, such as oranges, lemons, and grapefruits, are imported on a regular basis. One can usually find pineapples as well. There is always a variety of sweet peppers, both green and red. There are plenty of tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, eggplant, zucchini, and other types of squash, with more to be found from early spring to late autumn. Cherries, strawberries, peaches, apricots, apples, melons, watermelons and grapes are locally produced and available all summer and autumn. There are also hot peppers and some more exotic fruits, berries and vegetables in the market. Types of lettuce are limited, but more varieties are appearing. Several types of beans can be found. Produce is imported fairly regularly from Greece and Turkey.

Miscellaneous

Canned fruits and vegetables are common found. Grains (several varieties of rice, cornmeal, white wheat flour), and pasta (macaroni, spaghetti, lasagna, and many other forms) can be found easily. It is difficult to buy whole wheat, rye or other flours. Spices are limited but common spices can be found. Spices available locally would include: bay leaf, cinnamon, coriander, pepper, chili powder, garlic powder, nutmeg, sesame seeds. Many kinds of nuts, especially walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds and cashews are available here. Brown sugar, varieties of cooking and salad oils, cookies, jams, honey, vinegar, beer, wine (imported from different places like Montenegro, Macedonia, Greece, Italy, and France), mineral water, different carbonated drinks, imported spirits and many western brands of chocolates and other sweets are available. The sugar is not the same as in the US, it is more granular. A variety of local cheeses and a growing selection of imported cheese are available. The bakery selection has grown – so in addition to the commonly found white bread, other breads can be found, as well as muffins and pastries.

CLOTHING

Summer months and even late spring and early fall can be hot, much like the mid-Atlantic or New England sections of the United States. Spring and autumn are pleasant but seasons rapidly change. Winters are cold and wet with a lot of snow. Windy conditions, especially in winter and early spring can make it bitterly cold.

Mud is present during much of the year, except the middle of summer, which may be dry. It's particularly prevalent in the fall and spring. Boots and shoes that wipe off easily will come in handy.

During hot sunny days, protective clothing is a must, along with moisturizers and sun block. Evenings are often cool, so a light sweater or jacket is advisable. It rains often so a raincoat and umbrella are useful. Weather conditions can change suddenly.

There are many clothing stores, but not with the size and style selection found in the U.S. Much of the clothing is imported from Turkey.

SUPPLIES AND SERVICES

Dry cleaning service is available locally. There are several satisfactory and inexpensive beauty salons and barbershops in the city. Many hair and beauty products are available locally.

Religious Activities

Catholic Mass is offered in English every Saturday evening at the Catholic Church in Ulpiana (a Pristina neighborhood). A Protestant church called the Fellowship of the Lord's People is active in Pristina and offers activities organized by the church. There is no Jewish community or synagogue in Kosovo. Numerous mosques are located in the city, usually opened only for services.

RECREATION AND SOCIAL LIFE

Nightlife in Pristina is a bar-café scene. Good nighttime bars, including establishments with live music, can be found in the center of the city. Many bars, however, are smoke-filled and have only one entry/exit so it is wise to be vigilant.

There is an abundance of restaurants, cafes and 'kebab' stands for food. Restaurants vary from moderately expensive to cheap, with local cuisine, Italian, Indian, Thai, Mexican, Chinese and continental food available. A new Japanese restaurant has opened recently and offers very good sushi, though the selection is limited due to the inconsistent availability of fresh fish. Patrons should be aware that ethnic cuisines are sometimes limited by the ingredients available locally and may be more of an "interpretation" of the cuisine than Americans are accustomed.

There are two large parks in the Pristina area, Germia and Municipal City Park. Germia has hiking and biking trails, a large swimming pool and a few restaurants. There is an entry fee of 1 euro to drive into the park, though many park outside the gate and walk in for free. The Municipal Park is clean and has picnic areas and a playground area for children.

Places recommended for visiting:

- Rugova Gorge
- Mirusha waterfalls near Kline/a
- Drini I Bardhë spring
- Marble cave in Gadime

- Brezovica ski center
- Decani monastery and stone kullas in nearby Isniq
- Novoberde/Novo Brdo fortress
- Old city quarter of Prizren

Touring and Outdoor Activities

Kosovo's mountainous geography offers many good hiking trails. Brezovica ski area and Rugova Gorge are two popular hiking destinations in Kosovo. Winter activities include downhill skiing. The following is a partial list of hills/resorts: Brezovica (1½ hrs. away); Mavrovo, Macedonia (3 hrs. away); Bansko, Bulgaria (5-6 hrs. away) and Borovec, Bulgaria (6 hrs. away). It should be noted that facilities and infrastructure at these resorts vary greatly. While rental equipment is available, it would be advisable to use your own skis or snowboard, and emergency medical care is generally not available on site.

There are 4 lakes in Kosovo that can be used for swimming and some swimming pools. Batllava Lake, not far from Pristina, is the one that is preferred.

Lake Ohrid in Macedonia is a pleasant weekend getaway and about 4 hours drive from Pristina. The closest coast in Montenegro is an 8 hour drive, and the Croatian coast (starting with Dubrovnik) is around 10 hours from Pristina. It takes less than 6 hours to reach the Greek beaches (Halkidiki) just east of Thesaloniki.

Entertainment

Pristina has two theaters and one cinema. Most theater productions are in Albanian. The movie theater shows films that are beyond first release. Films may be in English, French, German or Italian.

The National Theater generally prepares one or two plays per month. The plays are usually in Albanian. Occasionally, there are visiting theater company's presenting plays, often in the original language.

CURRENCY, BANKING, AND WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Banking is still in development. Changes are happening constantly, but the banking environment is generally improving.

Two banks, Raiffeisen and Procredit, provide ATM services. ATMs are available at frequented points (like Post-Telecom Company, Grand Hotel, Youth Trade Center, etc.) VISA and MasterCard can be used at some ATM machines and major stores, such as supermarkets.

Charges for electronic fund transfers range from 0.3% to 0.4%. Charges for cash withdrawal from ATM machines are in the range 2-4% of the amount withdrawn. ATMs are more readily available; however, there remains concerns regarding security and reliability of the machines.

RECOMMENDED READING

Andric, Ivo, "The Travnik Chronicles"

Clark, Wesley, "Waging Modern War"

Glenny, Misha, "The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999"

Huntley, Paula, "The Hemingway Book Club of Kosovo"

Hupchick, Dennis P. "The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism"

Judah, Tim, "Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know," Oxford University Press (2008)

Kaplan, Robert, "Balkan Ghosts"

Malcolm, Noel, "Kosovo: A Short History", New York University Press, 1998

Mertus, Julie, "Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War," Univ. of California Press, Sept. 1999

Vickers, Miranda, "Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo", Columbia Univ. Press, 1998

West, Rebecca, "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon"