

# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

## 2020-21 →



MOSTAR  
TUZLA  
VELEŽ  
RADNIK  
KRUPA  
BIJELJINA  
SARAJEVO  
BANJA LUKA  
ŠIROKI BRIJEG  
MLADOST  
KAKANJ  
BORAC  
OLIMPIK  
ZRINJSKI  
SLOBODA

ŽELJEZNIČAR



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21

*www.liberoguide.com*

The **Premijer liga of Bosnia-Herzegovina** is more than just the top division in one of Europe's youngest nations. Comprising 12 teams, the so-called Liga 12, unified in 2002 and still in place two decades later, allows the top clubs from Bosnia, Herzegovina and Republika Srpska to compete with each other over the course of a season. While so much of Bosnia's creaking post-war infrastructure is divided along ethnic lines, this one body remains intact.

Exclusion from Europe encouraged opposing football authorities to open up the top tier 20 years ago. Competing in the Europa League in 2020-21, **Željezničar**, **Zrinjski Mostar** and **Borac Banja Luka** have very different followings but fulfil domestic fixtures with each other, something that would have been unthinkable in the 1990s. Foreign-backed champions **FK Sarajevo** now attract the highest league gates to the country's national stadium of **Koševo**. These four clubs have claimed all but two titles since that watershed year of 2002. Below the top flight, the lower divisions break down according to regional, and therefore ethnic, lines.

Bosnia-Herzegovina consists of two entities, the ten-canton Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (FBiH), and the mainly Serb Republika Srpska (RS). Bosniaks are in the majority in the inland cantons around Sarajevo and **Tuzla**, Croats in areas of Herzegovina. RS has no national team as such – the best players usually opt to play for Serbia.

## Welcome to liberoguide.com!

The digital travel guide for football fans, **liberoguide.com** is the most up-to-date resource, city-by-city, club-by-club, to the game across Europe and North America. Using only original photos and first-hand research, taken and undertaken over seven seasons, **liberoguide.com** has been put together to enhance every football weekend and Euro night experience. From airport to arena, downtown sports bar to hotel, **liberoguide.com** helps you get the best out of your visit to football's furthest corners and showcase stadiums.

Sarajevo is the national capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Banja Luka the de facto capital of Republika Srpska. The largest city in Herzegovina, **Mostar**, is roughly divided 50/50 between Bosniaks and Croats, **Velež** the main club on one side of the Neretva river, **Zrinjski** on the other. The old bridge



between the two sides symbolised the unity of Yugoslavia, its destruction the collapse of the country into separate parts. It was rebuilt and reopened in 2004. Given this complex scenario, therefore, the fact that the Premijer liga exists at all is not insignificant.

Then there's the national side, Zmajevi, the Dragons. Only 20 years after a fledgling Bosnia team were playing humanitarian friendlies in borrowed

## BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21

### CONTENTS

1-3 **INTRO**  
4-6 **Sarajevo**  
7 **FK Sarajevo**  
8 **Olimpik**  
9 **Željezničar**  
10 **Banja Luka**  
11 **Borac Banja Luka**  
12 **Bijeljina**

13 **Radnik Bijeljina**  
14 **Doboj/Kakanj**  
15 **FK Mladost**  
16 **Krupa na Vrbasu**  
17 **FK Krupa**  
18-19 **Mostar**  
20 **Velež Mostar**  
21 **Zrinjski Mostar**

22 **Široki Brijeg**  
23 **NK Široki Brijeg**  
24 **Tuzla**  
25 **Tušanjski Gradski Stadion**  
26 **Sloboda Tuzla**  
27 **Tuzla City**



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21

*www.liberoguide.com*

INTRO

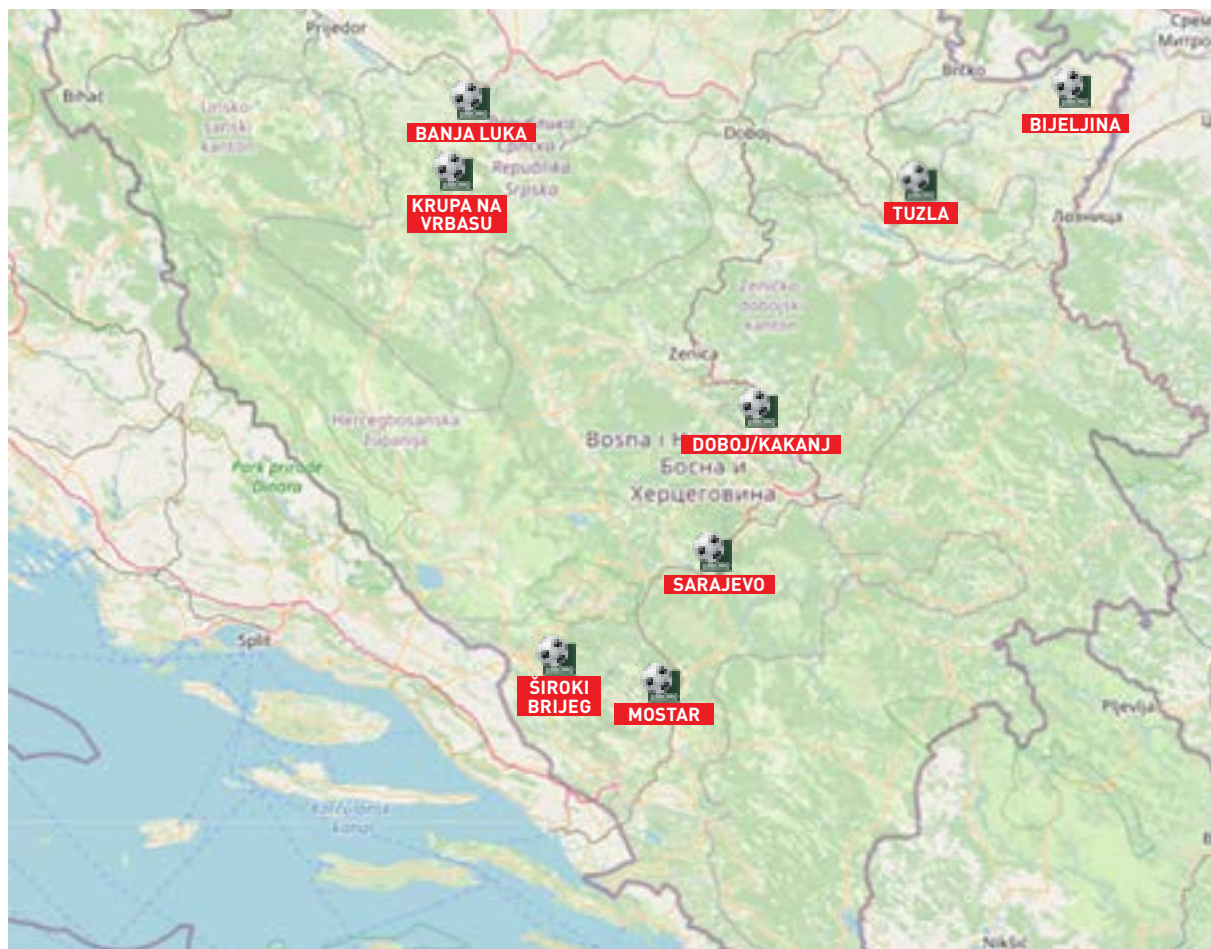


shirts, supporters' buses trundled a thousand-plus kilometres to Kaunas, Lithuania, to witness Bosnia's emotional qualification for the 2014 World Cup. The following summer at the Maracanã, Bosnia were 1-0 down to Messi's Argentina after only two minutes thanks to an own goal. With TV millions willing them on, the underdogs roared back, almost reversing the scoreline in a heroic performance that transcended history and ethnicity. Sometimes, 90 minutes of football can do that.

## Station to stadium

Bosnia-Herzegovina is non-EU but its citizens may enter visa-free for up to 90 days. The currency is the convertible mark (KM), its rate set at 2KM/€1.

Bosnia currently has no national airline. Hungarian budget carrier **Wizz Air** ([wizzair.com](http://wizzair.com)) offers the most flights to Sarajevo, with **Austrian Airlines** ([austrian.com](http://austrian.com)), **Croatia Airlines** ([croatiaairlines.com](http://croatiaairlines.com)) and **Air Serbia**



([airserbia.com](http://airserbia.com)) providing direct links with Vienna, Zagreb and Belgrade. Wizz Air also flies to **Tuzla**, **Ryanair** ([ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com)) to **Banja Luka**. The major air hub of **Split** in Croatia has regular bus services to **Mostar** (3hrs 30mins).

Public transport in bigger cities is generally cheap and reliable, taxis or walking the best option in smaller town centres. Note that it will still be a few years before all land mines scattered around the countryside are cleared

– look out for warning signs and stick to marked trails.

**Buses** connect Bosnia. Major companies such as Mostar-based **Autoprevoz** ([autoprevoz.ba](http://autoprevoz.ba)) and

Sarajevo-based **Centrotrans** ([centrotrans.com](http://centrotrans.com)) link most towns. Sarajevo to Mostar takes 2hrs 30mins and costs 20KM/€10. Tuzla (23KM/€11.50) is just over 3hrs. Buying a return with the same company knocks at least 30% off the price and you pay around 2KM/€1 to store luggage in the hold. Vehicles are often pretty old and few have toilets. **Bus stations** are usually located in city centres. There are also regular services from Zagreb and Belgrade – see **Autobusni Kolodvor** ([autobusni-kolodvor.com/en/sarajevo\\_16\\_173.aspx](http://autobusni-kolodvor.com/en/sarajevo_16_173.aspx)) for details. The one main **train line** ([zfbh.ba/en](http://zfbh.ba/en)), between Sarajevo and Mostar, is infrequent and underused.

Bosnia's **only motorway**, the **A1**, currently runs from Sarajevo as far north as Zenica, and south to Ovčari. For details of **tolls**, see **JP Autoceste** ([jpautoceste.ba/en/electronic-access-road-acc/](http://jpautoceste.ba/en/electronic-access-road-acc/)). All other roads are **single-lane** and arduous. Most petrol stations accept credit cards but always take a spare can. Do not park up and wander off into the countryside in case of mines.

## Tables & trophies

The 12 clubs of the Premijer liga play each other home and away, then once more at either ground, for a total of 33 games. The title-winners enter the Champions League First Qualifying Round, runners-up and third-placed finishers the same stage of the





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21

[www.liberoguide.com](http://www.liberoguide.com)

Europa Conference League. The bottom two clubs drop down to the second-tier **Prva liga**, which has two separate divisions of 16 teams each, one for the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, one for the Republika Srpska. After a season of 30 games, home and away, the champions of each are promoted to the Premijer. Usually four teams go down, but adjustments may be needed according to who has been relegated from the Premijer.

The third-tier **Druga liga** for FBiH is divided into four regional divisions, Centre, North, South and West, usually of 16 teams, with the champions promoted. The number of clubs relegated depends on the **cantonal divisions** below, Sarajevo, Tuzla, West Herzegovina, and so on. Some have two lower tiers. The RS Druga liga comprises four regional divisions, broken down into seven smaller regions below, Banja Luka, Prijedor etc, then Intermunicipal leagues below that.

Each football authority, FBiH and RS, has its own cup, that feeds into the national Kup Bosne i Hercegovine, the **Bosnia-Herzegovina Football Cup**. This starts with the 1/16 finals in September, involving 12 Premijer teams, plus 12 from B-H and eight from RS. Ties are settled on one match, home advantage granted to the lower club. The 1/8 finals come in October – with no home advantage – then the quarter-finals in March. The



semi-finals and final are played over two legs, in April and May. The winners enter the First Qualifying Round of the Europa Conference League.

## Season's dealings

The Premijer liga starts on the third week of July, runs until the first week of December, starts up again the third week of February and, with no play-offs, goes on until late May. Six games are scheduled each round, usually four on a Saturday, two on a Sunday, with occasional matches on a Friday or Monday. Summer kick-offs are

5.30pm, 7pm 8pm or 8.30pm, then around 4.30pm in mid-September, 3.30pm in early October, 2.30pm in late October, 1.30pm in November and 1pm in December, games being gradually scheduled later through spring. Clubs at better-equipped grounds, most notably FK Sarajevo at Koševo, can be more flexible in terms of timing. The last three rounds all take place at 5pm on the Saturday. The Prva liga for both the FBiH and RS start later, the second week of August, run until mid-November, start up in early March then finish in early May. Most rounds take

place on a Saturday, around the same time, 5.30pm/6pm in summer, then early afternoon towards winter.

## Entry level

Stadiums range from the arena that staged an Olympic opening ceremony in Sarajevo to the basic, one-stand ground at **Krupa na Vrbasu**. Average attendances are below 2,000, that figure buoyed by gates of around 4,000 at Sarajevo's main two clubs. A kiosk by the main gate will be marked Prodaja Ulaznice (Ticket Sales), Продаја карата in RS. An across-the-board price of



5KM/€2.50 is the norm, or a range of 4KM-8KM/€2-€4 at a bigger stadium such as Koševo. If there is more than one stand, it will be designated as either Tribina Sjever (North), Jug (South), Istok (East) and Zapad (West). On your ticket for international matches, *ulaz* is the gate, *sektor* the sector, *red* the row and *sjedište* your seat. *Cijena* is the price. Most grounds have a bar attached, also open during the week. The grilled meat in Bosnia is said to be the best in the Balkans – if there's also a *čevapdžinica*, such as at Željezničar, carnivores shouldn't miss out. **LE**



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Sarajevo

[www.liberoguide.com/sarajevo](http://www.liberoguide.com/sarajevo)



## Sarajevo

The city known for the shot and the siege linked with major conflicts at either end of the 20th century, **Sarajevo** cannot fail to move anyone who visits it. Although gleaming towers and growing tourism now characterise the modern-day capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, scars remain of the four-year bombardment of the city in the 1990s.

Sarajevo had memorably staged the Winter Olympics only a few years before. The opening ceremony took place at the **Koševo City Stadium**, also referred to as the **Asim Ferhatović-Hase Stadium** after the revered striker who played for host club **FK Sarajevo**. After nearly two decades for the Bordo-bijeli, the Maroon and Whites, 'Hase' led his club to their first Yugoslav title in his retirement season of 1966-67. Narrow runners-up Dinamo Zagreb won a European trophy

that same campaign, while third-placed Partizan Belgrade had not long beaten Bobby Charlton's Manchester United to set up a closely fought European Cup final with Real Madrid. This was a very strong Yugoslav league – and won by a team from Sarajevo.

Eternal city rivals **Željezničar**, 'Željo', also won the Yugoslav title in 1972. Since 1998, two Sarajevo giants have claimed 11 Bosnian championship between them, the most recent FK's



in 2020. While Koševo is considered the national stadium, a role shared with Bilino Polje in Zenica, the 2018 renovation of Željezničar's **Grbavica** has seen it used for international games since, however – such as for Bosnia's 2-0 win over Northern Ireland that same year in the Nations League.

Football came to Sarajevo with the Habsburgs, as they industrialised the city in the late 1800s, bringing trains and trams. Hotels were built, including the Evropa, with its Viennese-style café, a meeting place for the sports societies that were also springing up. In 1908, local students, including the son of the hotel owner, brought a football back from Zagreb.

The boys played on fields in Cengiç Vila, just over the narrow Miljacka river from Grbavica. As elsewhere

in the region, Slavia Prague were used as the shining example of a football club independent from Vienna – although the Đački sportski klub (ĐSK) persuaded a young Rapid Vienna defender, Karl Harmer, to come and coach them. Playing in the red and white of Slavia, ĐSK beat a Viennese military XI in their first match in 1911. Most team members were of Serbian origin.

Shortly afterwards, local Croats formed Hrvatski ŠK, renamed Sarajevo amaterski športski klub (SAŠK) after World War I. ĐSK became the Srpski sportski klub (SSK) and set up a modest ground in the area of Koševo. It was destroyed as anti-Serb feeling swept Sarajevo following the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914. When Sarajevo became part of Yugoslavia after 1919, SSK became →





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Sarajevo

[www.libero guide.com/sarajevo](http://www.libero guide.com/sarajevo)

Slavija and built another ground in the district of Marijin dvor. Renamed Šesti april after 1945, this was the main football ground in town until it was knocked down when Grbavica was built with its stands and benches. Željezničar also played at Šesti april, as did SD Torpedo, forerunners of FK Sarajevo. Željezničar had been founded as a railway workers' team in 1921. Working-class and ethnically mixed, they would trail the Croats of SAŠK and the Serbians of Slavija, the main city rivalry between the wars. Both competed in the top Yugoslav League, each achieving a runners-up spot.

During World War II, Slavija played in a separate Serbian league, SAŠK a Croat one, linked to the Nazi puppet state. The incoming Communist authorities closed down SAŠK, later reformed in 1999 as SAŠK Napredak. Today they compete in the Bosnia-Herzegovina's Druga liga, the third tier. Once successful Slavija were also disbanded in 1945 and reformed in the 1990s. League runners-up in 2009, the Falcons competed in the Europa League that same year. Slavija are currently in the RS First League, playing at the **Gradski Stadion** in the Serbian Istočno part of town towards the airport.

With SAŠK and Slavija out of the picture in 1946, FK Sarajevo were formed as SD Torpedo, in honour of their Muscovite counterparts, from



local clubs Udarnik and Sloboda. Soon renamed SDM Sarajevo, then FK, the new club attracted the best players in the city. Željo were soon overshadowed by FK, losing 6-1 in the first league *Vječiti derbi* in 1954. Well-situated Bosniaks supported FK, working-class locals on Sarajevo's south side, Željo. Later, Horde Zla ultras followed FK, the Manijaci Željo. Derby day became a riot of colour.

With Grbavica on the front line, the stadium and the residential blocks

around it suffered significant damage during the Siege. Koševo is surrounded by cemeteries. Somehow both clubs managed to compete in the inaugural league of 1994-95, playing out a 1-1 draw in Zenica, before the first derby at Koševo in November 1995. Six months later, 20,000 gathered for derby day at a rebuilt Grbavica.

Promoted to the Premijer in 2020, **Olimpik** were formed during the conflict in 1993, their name taken from the 1984 Games, their nickname The

Wolves after the event mascot Vučko. Built and opened during the Siege, the Otoka Stadium stands just over the Miljacka from the Bosnian FA offices.

## Bearings

**Sarajevo Airport** is 8km (five miles) south-west of the city. A **bus** (5KM/€2.50, pay on board) runs to **Baščaršija** in the city centre every hour or so. A **Sarajevo Taxi** (+387 33 660 666) from Terminal B to the city centre should cost about 30KM/€15. Most overland transport links are by



bus. **Sarajevo bus station** is on put Života by the **train terminal**, near the city centre. The bus from Belgrade (7hrs) arrives at **Istočno Sarajevo**, in the Serbian part of town near the airport, a 20KM/€10 taxi journey to the centre.

City transport run by **Gras** consists of trams, buses and trolleybuses. **Tickets** (1.60KM/€0.80 or 3KM/€1.50 for 2 journeys, day pass/*dnevna* 5.30KM/€2.65) are available from newsstands or pay 2KM/€1 for 1 journey on board. The historic centre is walkable but you'll need public transport or a taxi for either main stadium, Koševo way north of the city centre up steep Alipašina, Grbavica on the south bank just over the river. If you're after a few football souvenirs, old-school tracksuit tops bearing the logos of either club, head for the stalls near **Baščaršija Mosque** in the old quarter. ➔



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Sarajevo

[www.libero guide.com/sarajevo](http://www.libero guide.com/sarajevo)



## Bed

**Visit Sarajevo** ([visitsarajevo.ba](http://visitsarajevo.ba)) has a database of accommodation. There are no hotels in the immediate vicinity of either stadium although the sleek **Novotel Bristol** is near the bridge that leads to Grbavica. A pool, gym, café and restaurant all feature. Sarajevo's historic centre is filled with lodging options at both ends of the scale. The most venerable hotel in the city is **Europe**, previously the *Evropa*, built in 1882 and still containing a Viennese coffeehouse – as well as a pool, spa and

restaurant. The young footballers who gathered at the café in the early 1900s would never have known such luxury. Also on central Zelenih beretki, under the same umbrella, the **Hotel Astra** offers upper mid-range comfort, with a decent restaurant, too. Guests may use the pool and spa at the **Europe**. Another classy choice round the corner on Čumurija, the **Central** features a 25-metre pool, day spa and top-notch gym. The restaurant is also excellent. Closer to the river on Despića, the **Opal Home** is a contemporary four-star of

12 rooms and a modest sauna. Also overlooking the Miljacka but the other side the Latin Bridge, the gleaming new business-oriented **President** comprises 72 air-conditioned rooms. Close by, the homely **Pansion Sebilj** has modest rooms at €20, near the market, with a riverside café.

## Beer

The hallowed local beer, **Sarajevsko pivo**, saved the city during the Siege. Founded as far back as 1864, this was the largest brewery in the Austro-



Tesla Pub



Sarajevska Pivara

Hungarian Empire, no idle boast. Today you can visit its museum and sample the goods in the **tavern**, a ten-minute walk from the Latin Bridge on the south side of the river. The main bar hub is on the north bank. Here, opposite the Hotel Europe, the **City Pub** has long been a major meeting place, with all kinds of live music, TV football, outdoor seating and lashings of Sarajevsko pivo. Almost next door, the **Tesla Pub** is named and themed after the

great inventor – he's the guy outside waiting for his next light-bulb moment. Football also shown. There's also live music at the friendly **Celtic Pub** on Ferhadija, as well as match screenings and all kinds of whiskies. Nearby, the **Guinness Pub** suffers by comparison but its terrace offers welcome respite from the summer sun. Also close, the **Sarajevsko Pub** on Koturova is a great little spot for combining the city's namesake beer with a burger and some match-watching. The terrace overlooks the Sacred Heart Cathedral. By the Eternal Flame, the contemporary **Brew Imperial Society** attracts a crowd with its sought-after beers, regular live entertainment and parties. On the other side of town, by the old market of **Baščaršija**, the **Čevabdžinica Željo** on Kundurdžiluk is named after the football club – note the blue badge. Top-notch *čevapi*, meat rissoles in blankets of flat bread, come with plenty of Sarajevsko pivo. **LG**





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 FK Sarajevo

[www.liberoguide.com/fk-sarajevo](http://www.liberoguide.com/fk-sarajevo)

## FK Sarajevo

Five-time Bosnian champions, twice champions of Yugoslavia, **FK Sarajevo** (fksarajevo.ba) are owned by entrepreneurs from the Far East who see potential in this club founded in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Eternal rivals of working-class railway team Željezničar, the Bordo-bijeli, the Maroon-and-Whites, always attracted the better connected members of Sarajevo society. Based at **Koševo**, the Olympic Stadium that staged the opening ceremony of the 1984 Winter Games, the club now trains at a complex financed by Vincent Tan, the Malaysian owner of Cardiff City with a 30% stake in FKS. Back-to-back titles in 2019 and 2020 reflect this unprecedented investment in Bosnian football.

Opened in 1947, Koševo has long been Bosnia's national stadium, hosting major events such as the post-war U2 concert of 1997 and the visit of Pope that same year. Some 70,000 gathered for Bono and John Paul II, 38,000 for Željezničar's game with Alan Shearer's Newcastle in 2002. For Sarajevo games, the Horde Zla generate noise and colour in the north end, the Tribina Sjever. Depending on numbers, away fans are given most of the south end, the Tribina Jug (B1-B4). Older Sarajevo fans sit on the east side in the Tribina Istok, press



and VIP on the west side, Tribina Zapad. Current capacity is 34,500.

### Transport

Koševo is between two steep main roads, Patriotske lige and Alipašina, north of town. **Bus No.20** runs up Patriotske lige to the **Stadion Koševo stop** on the east side, **bus Nos.12A, 14A, 15A and 16A** to the **Stadion Koševo stop** on the west side and south, away end.

A **taxi** from town would only be around 6KM/€3.

### Tickets

Advance tickets are distributed through **KupiKartu** outlets such as exchange offices in town or travel agencies such as **Kompas** at Maršala Tita 8. On match days, buy tickets from the kiosks on the concourse as you walk down from Patriotske lige to the stadium.



For domestic fixtures, you'll pay around 3KM-4KM/€1.50-€2 for the Tribina Sjever, 8KM/€4 for the Tribina Istok and €12/€6 for the Tribina Zapad.

### Shops

The main **club shop** is in town at Maršala Tita 38B, with another **outlet** in the Gazi Husrev-begova retail hub Bezistan by the Hotel Europe. You can also find Sarajevo and Željezničar tracksuit tops and shirts at the stalls near **Baščaršija Mosque** in the old quarter.

### Bars

Between Patriotske lige and the main entrance to the stadium, the **Restoran Stadion** is the ideal spot pre-match, a friendly local bar/restaurant with the scarves and shirts of visiting fans – Hearts, Feyenoord, Valencia – hanging in a goal net dividing the bar area from the dining tables. Seats are also set up outside. Also on this side of the stadium, on the main road, the **Caffe Bar Dundee** at Patriotske lige 29 is a comfortable shisha bar with football shown and coffee, soft and energy drinks also served. If you're walking



up Patriotske lige from town, halfway up, the **Restoran Maksumić** at No.20 is a classic Bosnian grill restaurant with beer served. **LG**





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 **Olimpik**

*www.liberoguide.com/olimpik*



## Olimpik

Football in Sarajevo may have long been characterised by the eternal rivalry between record champions FK and Željo but there's another club close to the heart of the city: **Olimpik** (olimpik.ba). The club was formed by six friends at the height of the Siege in 1993, the same year that shells were aimed at a pick-up football game between the tower blocks in Dobrinja, near Sarajevo Airport, killing players and onlookers.

Named after the event that showcased a positive, welcoming Sarajevo to the world a decade before, the Winter Olympics of 1984, Olimpik even took their nickname from Games mascot Vučko, a friendly wolf. Vukovi, the Wolves, started out with indoor futsal matches then took part in the inaugural First League of Bosnia & Herzegovina in Tuzla a year later, winning two out of four games. As Sarajevo slowly emerged from war, a two-division league system operated, Olimpik bouncing between the two. Promotion

in 2000 coincided with the inaugural Premijer liga, but Olimpik only got a foothold on the top flight a decade later.

Finishing two points off a European place in 2011 and 2012, the Wolves won the cup in 2015, after narrow penalty wins over Zrinjski Mostar in the semi-final and Široki Brijeg in the two-game final, the second leg staged at the national Koševo Stadium in Sarajevo. At the same location just over a month later, Olimpik, as they had been temporarily renamed, made



their European debut against Spartak Trnava. After taking an early lead, the Bosnians bowed to the greater experience of the Slovaks, who notched an away goal, then held on for a 0-0 draw at home. Though relegated the following season, Olimpik, as they had been re-renamed, could rely on the goals of Adnan Osmanović to help them climb out of the second tier – eventually. Promoted in 2020, Vukovi are currently captained by this former Bosnian youth international, still in his early twenties.

Home is the **Otoka Stadium**, in the leafy district of the same name halfway to the airport. A half-moon of open seating along one sideline comprises the 3,000 capacity. Away fans enter through gate A behind the main stand.

### Transport

The stadium is behind the Olympic swimming pool, alongside **Alipašin most**. **Tram Nos.3** and **5** run from

**Baščaršija** and main stops in town, calling at **Univerzitet**, where the **No.4** from the railway station and the **No.6** from Skenderija also stop. Allow 15-20mins from the centre.

### Tickets

Admission is 5KM/€2.50 from the kiosk on match days, cash-only. Availability isn't an issue – even derbies against city rivals FK Sarajevo and Željezničar don't sell out.

### Bars

Considering the Bosnian FA offices are almost next door, there are few drinking options nearby. In the Vistafon sport centre between the stadium and the main road, the **Restoran Boston** serves standard food and drinks in smart if bland surroundings. In a modern retail centre behind Istiqlal Mosque, both the **Pizzeria AME** and **Morisco Café** have TVs and tables outside for convivial pre-match drinking.



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 **Željezničar**

*www.liberoguide.com/zeljznicar*



## Željezničar

If there's one Bosnian club most know but few can pronounce, it's **Željezničar** (fkzeljeznicar.ba). A familiar name in Europe since the early 1970s, 'Railway Worker', aka 'Željo', were founded in 1921, often broke and homeless, using pitches across Sarajevo. Sited in the area of the same name when Communist authorities were developing south of the river in the early 1950s, the **Grbavica Stadium** is where Željo came within minutes of a European final in 1985, a late away goal from Videoton granting the Hungarians a glamorous mismatch against eventual UEFA Cup winners Real Madrid. Other prestigious fixtures, against Brian Clough's Derby County and Bobby Robson's Newcastle, were played before bigger crowds at the national Koševo Stadium, home of city rivals FK Sarajevo. The Vječiti derbi between them defines Bosnian football. Both won a strong Yugoslav league, then emerged from



the Bosnian War as the leading clubs. Grbavica was right on the front line, the stadium and tower blocks around it significantly damaged.

The last decade has seen the clubs finish 1 and 2 or 2 and 3 in the Premijer liga six times. Currently Željo have six Bosnian titles to wealthier Sarajevo's five, financial backing sure to redress the balance. Željo have the stronger academy, however, the most notable example being later Manchester City star Edin Džeko – sold for €25,000.

Željo ultras, the Manijaci, occupy the open south goal, Južna tribina, by the scoreboard and behind a half-moon of old terracing. When FK Sarajevo visit, the Horde Zla are segregated in the east corner of the North Stand, Sjeverna tribina, nearest Zvornička. Older Željo fans usually fill out the rest of this end. The newer East Stand opened in 2017 was funded by contributions, including Edin Džeko's. These recent improvements have allowed international matches to return to the Grbavica, Belgium and

Northern Ireland among the visitors. Capacity is 13,000.

### Transport

Five trolleybuses stop at **Stadion Grbavica** (and Grbavica, further away): **Nos.102** and **107** via **Skenderija**, also calling at Koševo Stadion, and **Nos.102, 103** and **104** from **Trg Austrije** on this south side of the river.

### Tickets & shop

Buy your KM5/€2.50 ticket before kick-off from the **blue kiosks** on Zvornička.



Arrive early for the derby or try the modern, well-stocked **Željo Shop** (Mon-Fri 9.30am-5.30pm, Sat 9.30am-2.30pm, match days) a couple of days beforehand. Blue is the colour, with white the second-choice top.

### Bars

Bars, cafés and čevaperies serving grilled meat ring the Grbavica. Two streets over on trg heroja, the **Union Jack** has pool tables inside and TV sport on the terrace. Also popular pre-match, homely **LoLeMi** on Topal Osman-paše provides a decent choice of beers. Directly opposite the ground on Zvornička, smarter terrace café **Macchiato** has TV sport. On the stadium side, old-school **Plavi** now operates as a pizzeria – for grilled meat, head to **Derbi** right behind the North Stand. Alongside, the **Bosanski Burek** serves that Balkan flaky pastry best prepared in Bosnia. Carnivores can also patronise the **Fast Food Flesh** or **Gostionica Stadion**, both nearby. **LG**





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Banja Luka

[www.liberoguide.com/banja-luka](http://www.liberoguide.com/banja-luka)

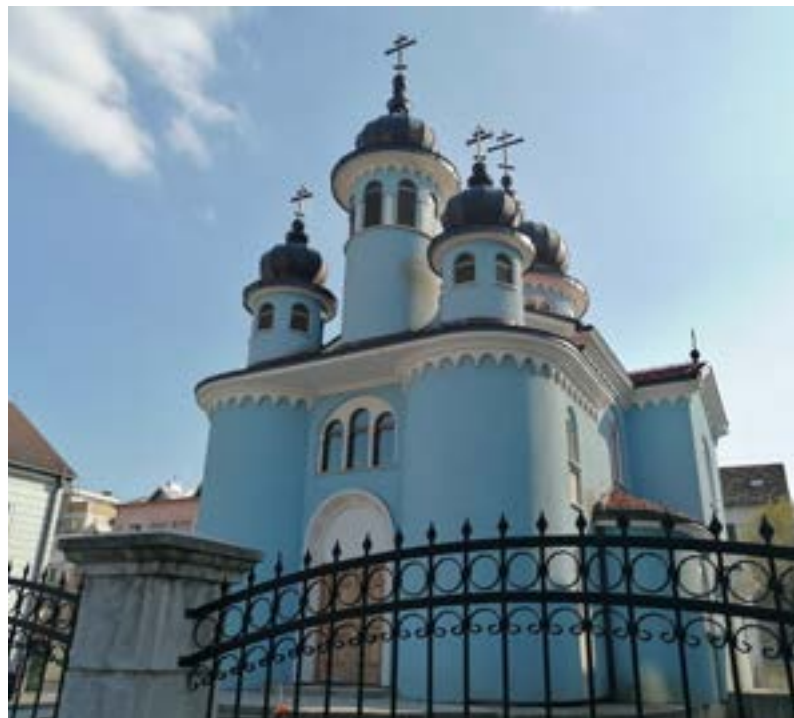


## Banja Luka

Capital of the Republika Srpska, **Banja Luka** is home to **Borac**, founded by left-leaning locals in 1926. The Premijer liga champions of 2011, however, have not always been the top team in town. Before 1945, SK Krajišnik, named after this ethnically mixed region of Krajina, were the most prominent club. In 1935-36, they made the quarter-finals of the Yugoslav Championship. A year later, the **Gradski stadion** was unveiled, ostensibly built for Krajišnik, with national champions BSK Belgrade invited for the curtain-raising game. The club's links with Nazi-backed war-time Croatia saw it disbanded in 1945, the Socialist credentials of Borac bringing them to the fore. Krajišnik's main rivals, student team Đački SK Balkan, also vanished without trace.



Half a century later, war again swept across Krajina. With the conflict raging in December 1992, the Gradski hosted a showcase match between two representative XIs, Republika Srpska and Srpska Krajina. Neither entity officially existed at the time but their presence on a football pitch proved a morale boost for Belgrade's ambitions. With



a separate league since set up for the Republika Srpska, Borac have won it a record five times, four as second-tier champions. The last time was in 2019, when local railway club Željezničar finished third, playing at their little ground near the train station. One flight above, the better-known Željezničar from Sarajevo are now Borac's fiercest rivals.

### Bearings

Underused **Banja Luka Airport** is 23km (14 miles) north of town. A

**Smiljić shuttle bus** runs to **Stara autobuska stanica** (10KM/€5, 30min journey time), the old bus station that's an open car park on main Vidovdanska behind the Museum of Contemporary Art. A **Banjalučki taxi** (+387 51 232 310, banjaluckitaxi@gmail.com) should cost 35KM/€17.50.

Two **Centrotrans buses** a day run from **Sarajevo** 229km (142 miles) away, journey time 5hrs (35KM/€17.50). The main inter-city bus station is north of town on Prote

Nikole Kostića, 200 metres from the **train station**, 1.5km from the Gradski stadion towards the centre. **City buses** cover town, pay the driver 1.60KM/€0.80.

### Bed

**Banja Luka Tourism** (banjaluka-tourism.com) has a database of hotels. The nearest to the stadium, the contemporary **Courtyard by Marriott** on Prvog kraljskog korpusa, offers airport transfers. Further into town by the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the landmark **Hotel Bosna** dates back to 1885, its retro look the result of a 1970s' rebuild. Nearby on Srpska, the **Talija** has a top-floor pool while the **Vidović** on Ivana Franja Jukića is a bright, mid-range option.

### Beer

Bar-lined **Braće Mažar i majke Marije** is where you find the **Peckham Pub** offering many beers, fairytale-inspired **Bajka** with its pretty courtyard and the **Mala Pivnica**, aka the **Dublin Pub**, again with scores of beer choices.

Attached to the Hotel Bosna, **Debela Berta** provides a decent match-watching option. Close by, alongside the Hotel Talija, the bizarrely-named **Mac Tire Pub** screens football action, with food a major focus. Also near the Hotel Bosna, the **City Pub** is a live venue and a showcase for craft Gorštak beers from nearby Glamočani Laktaši. **LG**



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Borac Banja Luka

[www.libero guide.com/borac-banja-luka](http://www.libero guide.com/borac-banja-luka)



## Borac Banja Luka

Playing in the colours of the Serbian flag, **Borac Banja Luka** (fkborac.net) are the main club in the Republika Srpska, and the last non-Sarajevo or non-Mostar side to win the Premijer liga. The year before this 2011 title triumph, Crveno-plavi ('the Red-and-Blues') won the Bosnia & Herzegovina Cup, the two-leg tussle with Željezničar ample proof of the lively rivalry between two main cities. A full house at the **Gradski**

**stadion** witnessed the visitors from Sarajevo rescuing a late draw, before a packed Grbavica hosted a thrilling 2-2 second leg. If ever there was an advert for cross-ethnic top-class football in Bosnia & Herzegovina, this was it.

Yet Borac haven't always been Banja Luka's flagship club – in fact, they were formed in 1926 specifically to challenge wealthier SK Krajišnik. If shop and factory owners ran the more successful rivals, their workers and employees formed Borac, convening at the Putnik

bar by a street now named after the club's main founder and later Partisan martyr, Veselin Masleša.

While the Gradski stadion had been built for Krajišnik, Borac's Communist credentials saw them favoured post-1945, becoming the main team in town. Long stints in the Yugoslav top flight continued even after 1992, Borac still basking in the glory of their shock cup win over Red Star Belgrade, Prosinečki, Piksi Stojković and all, in 1988. Big fish in Republika Srpska,



occasional challengers in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Borac still echo great tradition, as conveyed by the Lešinari ('Vultures') ultras in the open East Stand, the Istočna tribina alongside Gundulićeva. Opposite, the Zapadna tribina is covered, while the Severna tribina behind the north goal is a fairly recent addition, providing extra scope for allocating the away sector. Capacity is an all-seated 9,700.

### Transport

The stadium is a 10min **taxi journey** (6KM/€3) from the main bus or train stations, the walk a bit too far and tricky with a motorway in between. From the city, head up **Kralja Petra i Karađorđevića** from the Hotel Bosna or Cathedral, turning right at aleja Svetog Save, then left into Vladike Platona.

### Tickets & shop

The red-and-blue kiosks marked ПРОДАЈА КАРТА sell tickets on match days, KM5/€2.50, cash only, availability only an issue for major games against Željezničar. Alongside, by the Garijeva Pivnica, a **shop** fronted by a huge Borac badge sells red-and-blue souvenirs.

### Bars

Locales line **Vladike Platona** right up to the club offices behind the West Stand, starting with the **Club 180**, then the **Lotrek**, both smart if somewhat bland. The **Antico Caffè** shows TV football in a livelier atmosphere, similar to the **Meteor**. By the West Stand, the **Garijeva Pivnica** is as good a stadium bar as you could find, with plenty of TVs and a clientele of twenty- and thirtysomethings laying into local Nektar beer. Tables line the pavement outside to deal with the overspill. Drinks promotions and regular live music keep everything still buzzing later on. Halfway along the stand, the large terrace at the **Caffè Stadion** gets equally busy, Nektar also the beer of choice. **LE**





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 **Bijeljina**

*www.liberoguide.com/bijeljina*

## Bijeljina

In the far north-east corner of the country near the border between Republika Srpska and Serbia, **Bijeljina** is a sizeable city with a long football past. Winners of the Bosnian-Herzegovina Cup in 2016, **Radnik** ('Worker') **Bijeljina** were formed in the overnight transformation of Yugoslav football in 1945 under Tito. Along with Red Star Belgrade, Dinamo Zagreb and Partizan Belgrade, Spartaks and Slogas were set up around the country from smaller pre-war teams. One was Radnik Bijeljina.

Previously, after World War I within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, local clubs Podrinje and Zora had competed in the second tier of the Serbian Football Championship in 1920-21, but the top sides from Belgrade were a league above in every way. The game here remained within the Sub-Association of Belgrade.

Even after 1945, Radnik played in the Tuzla regional league, before joining the one for Novi Sad. The **Gradski stadion**, opened south-east of town in 1954, only hosted football at national level in the 1970s when Radnik played six seasons in Yugoslavia's Second League. When the city actually produced a footballer of international class, later Aston Villa striker Savo Milošević, he was off to Belgrade before his 15th birthday.



It was another prominent Serbian international, Mladen Krstajić, who steered Radnik in the right direction in recent times. Returning after a

decade in the Bundesliga, this former centre-back spent five years as club chairman. Radnik became a regular in fixture in the Premijer liga, twice competing in Europe and winning the Republika Srpska Cup a record number of times.

### Bearings

**Tuzla Airport** is the nearest to Bijeljina 77km (48 miles) away. **Tuzla Taxi Airport** (+387 61 830 830) has a flat fee of 20KM/€10 into town and 70KM/€35 to Bijeljina. Alternatively, a daily **Centrotrans bus** from Tuzla (12KM/€6) takes 1hr 25mins. **Sarajevo**

is 195km (121 miles) away. A daily **Centrotrans bus** (30KM/€15) takes 4hrs 15mins. **Bijeljina bus station** is just east of town a 5-10min walk away, the stadium the same distance south-east. **Public buses** (1.50KM/€0.75) serve the surrounding area. Call **Taxi Bijeljina** on +387 65 820 006 or +387 65 648 516.

### Bed

The closest hotel to the stadium, the **Drina**, is also the best in town. A four-star at Kneza Miloša/Karadordeva near the bus station, it marries tradition with contemporary needs,



with a spa complex and restaurant in an 1892 landmark. Also close, on Patrijarha Pavla, the **Sico** is sleek and modern, while similarly and mid-range **Homa** on Njegoševa features a popular café terrace. North of town where Majevička meets Miloša Obilića, the **Motel Azzurro** provides comfortable, affordable lodging.

### Beer

Terrace bars and cafés abound, particularly on **Nikole Tesle**, the other side of City Park from the stadium. The best, beer-focused **Majstor za Pivo**, hosts DJ nights and shows major sports events. The **Shamrock** also has a big screen. **Park** is more a pizzeria but serves Nektar beer from Banja Luka on the large terrace. **Hemingway** on Svetog Save and the **Garden Pub** on Filipa Višnjića both come alive in summer. **LG**



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Radnik Bijeljina

[www.liberoguide.com/radnik-bijeljina](http://www.liberoguide.com/radnik-bijeljina)

## Radnik Bijeljina

Over the last decade, only two clubs from Republika Srpska have appeared in Europe. One is Borac Banja Luka, the other, record RS Cup winners **Radnik Bijeljina** (facebook.com/FKRadnikBijeljina). As it turned out, Radnik ('Worker') had to switch the home legs of their two Europa League campaigns to Banja Luka, their own **Gradski stadion** deemed unsuitable.

Current coach Darko Nestorović was responsible for gaining Radnik promotion in 2012. In his absence, while he was managing Bosnia's national U-21 side and Al-Arabi in Kuwait, Radnik have been a consistent presence in the Premijer liga. They have also won the Republika Srpska Cup four seasons running and picked up the equivalent trophy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 2016.

Two ex-internationals have been key to this success: chairman Mladen Krstajić, who brought a decade of experience in the Bundesliga to Bijeljina, and current team captain, the veteran Velibor Đurić, who twice won the title with Zrinjski Mostar.

Both were involved in Radnik's two European ties, defeats to Beroe Stara Zagora in 2016-17 and Spartak Trnava in 2019-20, when Đurić scored in the first leg. Taking a 2-0 lead to Slovakia,



Radnik conceded a late goal in Trnava to level the aggregate. As extra-time beckoned, the ageing Đurić was substituted, his calming presence missing during a penalty shoot-out circus of retaken spot kicks. With Krstajić since headed for ambitious Bačka Topola in the Serbian league and Đurić close to retirement, it may be some time before Radnik get another chance in Europe.

Opened in 1954, the Gradski stadion has been renovated in recent seasons but still only comprises one modest

main stand, partly covered, lined with seating in signature blue club colours. Behind each goal and the opposite sideline is little but fields, the distinctive white outline of Rođenja Presvete Bogodorice Orthodox Church on the skyline to the north. Stadium capacity is 6,000.

### Transport

From the **bus station**, head straight down Kneza Miloša past the Hotel Drina, keeping City Park to your left. On your right, Balkanska leads to the stadium. Allow 7-8 minutes.



5KM/€2.50, cash only, but for modest opposition you'll probably just wander in. Ask at the club offices about blue souvenirs – plus there's always kudos in a club badge in Cyrillic script with '1945' on it.

### Bars

On the stadium side of City Park, along Potporučnika Smajića, **Četvoro** (look out for the number 4 sign) is a homely little restaurant with an enclosed front terrace and a TV within. Close by, amid the greenery, parents tuck into gooey cake and ice cream at smart, spacious **Gradski Park** while the kids play on the slide, see-saw and sports courts alongside. Friendly waitstaff also serve Jelen on draught and Franziskaner by the bottle, and there's a TV over the bar. Just before you get to the ground, at the corner of Potporučnika Smajića and Kneza Miloša, you'll find grilled Balkan delights at **Čevabdžinica Gold**. **LB**



### Tickets & shop

With average gates in the hundreds, there's little rush for tickets at Radnik Bijeljina. Admission is

RADNIK





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Doboj/Kakanj

[www.liberoguide.com/doboj-kakanj](http://www.liberoguide.com/doboj-kakanj)



## Doboj/Kakanj

Every country has its Castel di Sangro story, in which a little team from a tiny community hits the big time. Italy's was made into a best-selling sports book. Bosnia's became the subject of a documentary film made for Al Jazeera by Jasenko Korjenic: *Bosanski Hoffenheim*, the title part-referring to Germany's own Cinderella tale.

**FK Mladost** made the Premijer liga in 2015, the very moment captured by the film crew as club owner Mensur Mušija dives into a sea of fans. In fact, the pharmaceutical entrepreneur exhorts the words 'Premijer liga! Premijer liga!' to the hordes in red. If anything, the most surprising phenomenon of Mladost's rise is the



following, the multi-generational Crvena legija, the Red Legion. For the town many of these fans come from, **Kakanj**, has had a team since 1920, Rudar. Featuring crossed hammers on their badge, Rudar ('Miner') Kakanj have thrice finished within one league place of promotion. They remain rooted to the second rung, welcoming the likes of Zvijezda Gradačac and



Budučnost Banovići to their Pod Vardom ground north of town.

Mladost fans, however, as seen in the film, don red for the match-day march to the nearby settlement of **Doboj** – known as Doboj (Kakanj) to differentiate it from the railway town in Republika Srpska – to cross the river Bosnia to the **MGM Farm Arena**. While Rudar are tied in with coal – and Kakanj with the mining disaster

of 1965 that killed all in a cave-in – Mladost are linked to cement. Backing from HeidelbergCement, the German multinational present here, allowed Mušija and the local council, delighted to see Doboj on the national stage, create a football ground from a modest pitch just off the A1 road to nearby Zenica. Capacity is 3,000 – 500 more than the population of the village itself. MGM Farm is Mušija's pharmaceutical firm.

## Bearings

Kakanj is 50km (31 miles) north of Sarajevo Airport. An hourly **bus** (9KM/€4.50) from the station in town takes 1hr 40min to reach Doboj (Kakanj), then Kakanj 2min later. There's also an **express service** (45min-1hr) to Kakanj, where the bus station is just over the river from town, with a taxi stand alongside. The two settlements are 1km apart.

## Bed

One of only two hotels in town, the functional but comfortable **Motel Tiron** stands by the MGM Farm complex on main 311. Iahke brigade towards Doboj. In Kakanj town centre, the modern **Hotel Kakanj** is where sports teams stay, making use of its 18 rooms and Naša kuća restaurant overlooking the main street of Alije Izetbegovića.

## Beer

Kakanj has the only drinking options. Two attractive cafés, the **Venezia** and TV-equipped **Gotiva**, have waterfront terraces on Branilaca, parallel to the Zgošća stream. On main Alije Izetbegovića, the **Pivnica Kakanj** is resolutely old-school, while the equally lived-in **Retro Pub** is more Western in feel – Sarajevsko is the beer of choice in one, Tuborg in the other. Over the river, near the main roundabout, the **Konoba Kakanj**, **Restoran Lipa** and **Kod Šuhre** all serve beer and honest local food.

DOBOJ/KAKANJ



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 FK Mladost

[www.libero guide.com/fk-mladost](http://www.libero guide.com/fk-mladost)



## FK Mladost

**FK Mladost** ([facebook.com/mladostdk](https://facebook.com/mladostdk)) are the smallest club in the Premijer liga, representing a settlement of 2,500 people. **Doboj**, or Doboj (Kakanj) as it is referred to, beside an industrial town in the heart of Bosnia, consists of one main road, one mosque, cement works and the **MGM Farm Arena**, a football ground of 3,000 capacity. HeidelbergCement sponsors the club, enabling the stadium to be modernised



and host top-flight football after Mladost's meteoric rise from winners of the lowly Zenica-Doboj Canton league in 2010 to champions of the second-tier First League of Bosnia-Herzegovina within five years.

The man behind this transformation, owner/chairman Mensur Mušija, whose pharmaceutical company lends the stadium its name, is the main focus of a documentary about this journey, *Bosanski Hoffenheim*, created by Jasenko Korjenić for Al Jazeera.

The title, comparing Mladost to the German fairytale side, proved apt as the cameras were there when the club achieved its historic promotion in 2015. Roared on by the Red Legion, the Crvena legija, little Mladost had won the league at only the second attempt, joining the top sides from Sarajevo and Mostar. Instead of Rudar Kakanj from the town next door, three-time champions Zenica would be the local rivals. In fact, the first few home games of Mladost's debut top-flight campaign were moved there.

Keeping top scorer Haris Dilaver, Mladost stayed above the relegation zone, then again even after selling him to Plataniás in Greece. Changing coaches with predictable regularity, Mušija has still managed to keep the magic going, though average gates are now in the hundreds. Away fans – fewer now that Zenica have been relegated, though Željo travel in decent numbers – occupy the low-rise terracing behind the north goal, Tribina Sjever. Everyone else, especially Crvena legija, whose stencilled murals of Roman centurions

dot the surrounding walls, occupies the red seats in the main West Stand, Tribina Zapad. When you approach the main entrance after crossing the river, a sign by the red ticket kiosk directs you to either sector. All is open to the elements, convivial in May, bitter in November, though there's a pitch-side bar for shelter. The south, scoreboard, end is empty but for a couple of buildings.

### Transport

If you're getting the bus from Sarajevo, if you alight at **Doboj (Kakanj)**, two minutes before Kakanj (tell the driver), you're dropped just before the mosque and main fork in the road. From there, it's a 5-10min walk away from the mosque to the ground, staying on the same side of the street, keeping the RIMA supermarket to your right. The road forks left, taking you over the bridge and the river Bosnia. From Kakanj, it's a 15min walk, along this same road.

### Tickets

Admission is 5KM/€2.50 from the red kiosk by the main entrance, the first thing you see after the bridge. Tribina Zapad is with the home fans/neutrals.

### Bars

The neat, signature red **FK Mladost clubhouse bar** occupies the north-east corner of the ground, with chairs ranged around its covered terrace by the pitch. **LE**

FK MLADOST





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Krupa na Vrbasu

[www.liberoguide.com/krupa-na-vrbasu](http://www.liberoguide.com/krupa-na-vrbasu)



## Krupa na Vrbasu

Intrepid football travellers who alight at **Krupa na Vrbasu** after the 40-minute journey by local bus from Banja Luka might think that this picturesque settlement of 1,000+ people consists of a football ground and little else. Indeed, the **Gradski stadion**, home of **FK Krupa**, twice promoted to the Premijer liga in recent seasons, will be the first feature you find as you turn towards the river Vrbas. But there's more. Explore a little and you find a

rafting club, a waterfall, a medieval monastery church and a few dozen buildings, with a few more scattered up the hillsides.

As you realise that this must be the smallest community in Europe to support a top-flight football team, you ask yourself, how? The answer is, partly, Draško Ilić. The head of Development for Agriculture and Villages in Republika Srpska is also chairman of FK Krupa. Formed in 1983, the Blues were not only promoted to the Premijer in 2016, they finished fourth, one off a European

spot, the following season. Ilić was behind the one-stand, 3,500-capacity Gradski stadion. Promoted again in 2020, FK Krupa are now back with the big boys – and provide a top-flight groundhop for anyone willing to try.

### Bearings

**Banja Luka Airport** is 50km (31 miles) north of Krupa na Vrbasu, and 23km (14 miles) north of Banja Luka itself. See p10 for details of transport from the airport into the city. From the local bus stop by the train station – *not* the main bus station – **Bočac bus Nos.3** to **Bočac**, **4** to **Agino Selo**



### Bed

The only accommodation near Krupa is the riverside **Vrbas Kamp** (+387 66 946 749), wooden tent-shaped huts (20KM–30KM/€10–€15) dotted by the river for rafters, rowers and outdoor types. Common areas for relaxing, cooking and dining areas are comfortable. Note that it only operates in warmer months and is 6km north of Krupa in **Rekavice**.

### Beer

There's a couple of places on the main road and a couple further up towards the waterfall. Roadside **Sany**, about 300 metres south of the main bus stop, has a sunny terrace and TV sport above the gambling machines at the back. From the main junction, up the road in the opposite direction from the stadium, **Seosko domaćinstvo Vidović** serves tasty traditional fish and grilled meat, with plenty of local wine and beer, in a gorgeous rural setting. Further up the same track, **Krupski slapovi** is similar in style and offer, overlooking the waterfall it's named after. **LG**



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 FK Krupa

[www.liberoguide.com/fk-krupa](http://www.liberoguide.com/fk-krupa)

## FK Krupa

No football ground in Europe feels more rural or more remote than the **Gradski stadion**, home of **FK Krupa** ([fkkrupa.net](http://fkkrupa.net)), promoted to the Premijer liga for a second time in 2020. Here, a 40-minute local bus journey from Banja Luka in Republika Srpska, amid a scattering of natural and historic attractions – waterfalls, a fast-flowing river tackled by rafters, an Orthodox monastery dating back to the 1300s – a top-flight football club is not what you expect to find.

But here FK Krupa chairman Draško Ilić has developed another rustic initiative to promote the region, integral to his role as head of Development for Agriculture and Villages in Republika Srpska. His third hat, until 2018, was president of the Banja Luka Football Association, before being suspended for allowing non-members into the local league. Ilić successfully made the case that no-one else could have raised the profile of Bosanska Krajina so positively. Back in the mid-1990s, this former frontier of the Ottoman Empire was notorious for the atrocities committed here during the Yugoslav War.

The other key character in the Krupa story is Slobodan Starčević. A coach with no notable playing career, this former assistant at Borac Banja Luka



came in 2014, won two promotions and took FK Krupa to the Bosnian Cup final in 2017. He now oversees the national Under-21 side. FK Krupa then achieved a promotion back to the Premijer liga in 2019-20 under former Celta Vigo striker Džimi Marić. Bosnia's top clubs will again be striding out at the Gradski stadion, consisting of one long all-seater main stand running along the nearest sideline to the main road. Close by are nothing but fields, beyond the river Vrbas whose name differentiates this Krupa from the one near Bihać. Capacity is 3,500, almost



three times more than the population of the surrounding community. All is done out in signature blue, with one of Bosnia's best stadium bars by the main stand.

### Transport

Public transport is tricky, certainly in terms of getting back after the game to anywhere with a bed. Infrequent **Bočac bus Nos.3, 4 and 5** from **Banja Luka city bus stop** near the **train station** take 40mins to reach Krupa na

Vrbasu, dropping off on the main road near the stadium. A **taxi** (+387 51 232 310, [banjaluckitaxi@gmail.com](mailto:banjaluckitaxi@gmail.com)) would be wiser – but the rate of 40KM/€20 from Banja Luka might be doubled to call them out to pick you up from Krupa, then go back again.

### Tickets

Admission is a straightforward 5KM/€2.50 from the blue kiosk on the day – choose your seat somewhere in the main stand.

### Bars

On the main road opposite the turning for the stadium, the **Gric Gric Grill** is a better class of roadside stop, bottles of Jelen, Tuborg and Nektar served on a raised terrace, along with grilled meats. Signposted from the main road, beside the main stand, stadium bar the **Premijer** is neat, contemporary and bare-brick inside, with a long terrace ideal for pre-match beers outdoors. A separate serving outlet operates on match days. **LG**

FK KRUPA





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Mostar

[www.lib eroguide.com/mostar](http://www.lib eroguide.com/mostar)



## Mostar

**Mostar** is the capital of Herzegovina, a rugged region south-west of Bosnia between the southern tip of Dalmatia and the Dinaric Alps. The green Neretva river that feeds it also divides it, bisecting Mostar, whose Old Bridge gave the city its name. Destroyed in 1993, rebuilt a decade later, this



Ottoman landmark brings tourists from Dalmatia but no longer bonds Mostar. Each side of town, the Croat west and the Bosniak east, now has its own bus station, its own school system – and its own football club.

Their origins dating back to the very beginnings of the game here, **Zrinjski Mostar** represent the Croatian community. Reformed in 1992, they

joined the First League of Herzegovina for local Croatian clubs, a forerunner of today's Premijer liga, which they've since won an equal record six times. Zrinjski play at the **Stadion pod Bijelim Brijegom**, built for city rivals **Velež Mostar** in the 1950s. Staging 'Rođeni's' great domestic cup runs and European triumphs of the 1970s and 1980s, the stadium found itself on the Croat side

during the brutal Siege of Mostar between 1992 and 1994. Banned by the Yugoslavia's Communist authorities for half a century, revived Zrinjski duly moved into the revered stadium, a major bone of contention when the city had so much other division and bloodshed to deal with. The east side, in particular, was in ruins. Playing in Zenica, Velež took part in the First League of Bosnia and

Herzegovina for clubs from Sarajevo, Tuzla and other main Bosnian cities.

The league was fused with its Croatian counterpart to create the Premijer liga in 2000-01. This, in turn, revived the Mostar derby, a bitter affair riven with grievance. By then, Velež had set up in Vrapčići on the city's far north-eastern outskirts, Now called the **Stadion Rođeni** after the club's nickname ('Our Own'), the site had been earmarked by Velež just before World War II. After 1945, the decision was made to build a stadium in the western suburb of Bijeli Brijeg. Back then, populist Velež were the only team in town, the pride of Mostar, effectively a one-club city without Zrinjski.

But Zrinjski had the longer history. After Bosnia-Herzegovina came under Austro-Hungarian control in 1878, Central Europe exerted its control and influence, bringing in the army and administrators, urban planning and the railway. With the Adriatic an hour away, transport connections opened up this former Ottoman outpost. In 1903, Oskar Lajhner, the son of a local banker, received a football as a present from Budapest. Hungarian soldiers based at the Sjeverni logor garrison, alongside the Neretva north-east of town, showed Lajhner and friends how the game was played. A student team was duly formed, the **Đački športski klub**.

MOSTAR



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Mostar

[www.liberoguide.com/mostar](http://www.liberoguide.com/mostar)

In 1911, pupils of the Osman school from Sarajevo stopped off in Mostar on the way home from Split. Their two games with Đački were the first ever to take place in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A year later, the Mostar club was renamed Zrinjski after the noble Croatian/Hungarian dynasty. Dissolved during World War I, Zrinjski were revived in 1922, the same year that a prominent Communist activist founded workers' club Velež, named after a nearby mountain. Their badge a five-pointed red star, Velež had clear political leanings. The Belgrade authorities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia favoured the Jugoslovenski sport klub, co-founded by Oskar Lajhner in 1919. All based at Sjeverni logor, JSK, Velež and Zrinjski were Mostar's dominant teams between the wars, the Croats also playing friendlies in Zagreb and Dubrovnik. After the Nazi-backed Croatia republic was created in 1941, it subsumed Bosnia-Herzegovina and set up its own football league, dominated by Zagreb. Zrinjski's involvement led to their ban in 1945, the Communist regime happy to back Velež. Twice relegated in recent times, Velež remain interwoven with Mostar's urban fabric while Zrinjski enjoy ministerial backing and fanatical support at Bijeli Brijeg.

## Bearings

**Mostar Airport** 6km (four miles) south of town serves **Croatia Airlines**



flights from **Zagreb**. **Moj Taxi** (+387 1503) should charge 12KM/€6 into town. **Sarajevo** is 121km (75 miles) away. **Trains** to Mostar are infrequent. Regular **Autoprevoz** and **Centrotrans buses** (20KM/€10) take 2hrs 30mins, arriving at the **East station** by the train terminal on Maršala Tita. Buses from **Split** or **Dubrovnik** (each 3hrs 30mins, €14) also use the **West station** north of Bijeli Brijeg. Local yellow **Mostar Bus** services (1.50KM/€0.75 on board) cover the city.

## Bed

Of the many hotels on the west bank, none are alongside Bijeli Brijeg. A 10min walk along Stjepana Radića, the modern **Mostar** has a spa, restaurant and hairdresser's. Nearby, overlooking Musala (aka Tito's) Bridge, the mid-range **Bristol** feels old-school though



was rebuilt after the Siege. Further down towards the Old Bridge, by its replica **Kriva Čuprija**, the classy four-star of the same name offers swish rooms and a top restaurant. Nearby on Kapetanova, the **Motel Deny** comprises seven simple but comfortable rooms while on Jusovina, the smart **Pension Čardak** has free parking. On the east side, by the bus station and Carinski Bridge, **Aldi** is



a great find, its balconies and pool overlooking the Neretva.

## Beer

Pubs and bars dot the main streets on the west side while tourists flock to the food-focused spots near the river. First port of call should be the wonderful **Shankly's Pub** on Ante Starčevića, Liverpool-themed down to the bar food, screening matches and full of lively football buzz amid framed shirts. DJs spin at weekends. Its equivalent on the east side, the Italianate **Forza** on Braće Fejića (look

out for Stella umbrellas) also shows games in smarter surroundings more suitable to sipping Aperol spritz. Old Velež photos are a nice touch. For a late place that rocks, **Marshall** on Rade Bitange amps up the tunes. Staying in the Old Town, the **Black Dog Pub** by Kriva Čuprija specialises in craft beer, with live music staged on the terrace and a TV screen within the bare-brick interior. Further west, among the many terrace bars around Rondo, the **London Pub** feels neither like London nor any pub but shows games and serves beer. **LG**





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Velež Mostar

[www.liberoguide.com/velez-mostar](http://www.liberoguide.com/velez-mostar)



## Velež Mostar

The five-pointed red star has been proudly worn by **Velež Mostar** (fkvelez.ba) from the earliest days of Communism to the present day nearly a century later. In between, for two decades, *Rođeni* ('Our Own') were one of the most feared and revered sides in Yugoslavia, missing out on the 1974 title on goal difference. That same year, in the most memorable of several European campaigns, Velež overcame soon-to-be English champions Derby County, 4-1.

The euphoria of that heroic win, Velež 3-1 down from the away leg then settling the tie with an 86th-minute penalty by Dušan Bajević, was tempered in the next round when eventual UEFA Cup finalists Twente Enschede struck even later – there wasn't even time to kick off afterwards. 'Princ' Bajević was



one third of a Mostar-born trio at Velež from boyhood, all members of Yugoslavia's World Cup squad of 1974. The threesome, Bajević, goalkeeper Enver Marić and midfielder Franjo Vladić, were nicknamed BMV after the luxury cars made by Yugoslav Gastarbeiter in Germany. Similarly, after each player made his mark abroad, they would come back to the Stadion pod Bijelim Brijegom, the

ground built for Velež in west Mostar. What boy didn't dream of playing at Velež? Which bedroom wall or bar in Mostar didn't display a Velež team photo or pennant?

The brutal division of Mostar during the Siege of 1992-94 and rise of Croat nationalism in Herzegovina had two major consequences for Velež: the revival of city rivals

Zrinjski, and the loss of the Stadion pod Bijelim Brijegom, now in Croat hands. Supported financially and politically by Zagreb, Zrinjski became a major force in the domestic game. Velež duly moved to a field in Vrapčići beyond north-east Mostar, mismanagement resulting in relegation and underachievement. Out of this mess, the club at least managed to create the **Stadion**

**Rođeni**, packed to its 7,000 capacity for the successful 2019 promotion clash with FK Igman. The Mostar derby with Zrinjski, re-established in 2000, remains the highlight of every year – assuming Velež are in the Premijer liga. The stadium is a reluctant work in progress, the home Red Army recently built a new East Stand, Istočna tribina, the south Južna tribina the next task in hand.

### Transport

Infrequent **bus Nos.22** and **23** run from **Musala**, near the eastern foot of the bridge of the same name, to **Vrapčići**. The only practical alternative is a **taxi** (KM10-12/€5-€6) as walking is too far and too dangerous on this main road north from town.

### Tickets & shop

Admission is KM5/€2.50 on the day, availability only an issue for the derby with Zrinjski. You'll find stalls of red souvenirs outside the ground on match days.

### Bars

Just north of the stadium on main Mehe Tase, the traditional **Restoran Leami** serves Pan and Tuborg beers, and classic grilled dishes. Tables line the covered terrace and bare-brick interior equipped with a TV. South of the ground, the chintzy **Restoran Castle** is hired out for weddings by romantic Velež fans but also operates daily. **LB**



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Zrinjski Mostar

[www.lib eroguide.com/zrinjski-mostar](http://www.lib eroguide.com/zrinjski-mostar)

## Zrinjski Mostar

Equal record league champions **Zrinjski Mostar** (hskzrinjski.ba) have been the biggest success story of the Premijer liga. With historic links to the earliest origins of the game in Bosnia-Herzegovina, prominent between the wars, Zrinjski were banned by the Communist authorities in 1945 for the club's involvement with the independent league set up by Nazi-backed Croatia.

Reformed in 1992 when Zagreb was seeking to establish control and greater Croatian influence in war-torn Mostar, Zrinjski benefitted from significant financial and political backing to become the leading team in town and, indeed, Herzegovina. This involved taking over the **Stadion pod Bijelim Brijegom**, the stadium built for the club Zrinjski usurped. Founded by Communists, Velež once enjoyed popular support across Mostar but their Croat fans flocked to Zrinjski in the 1990s.

Drafting in promising talent from Dinamo Zagreb – an 18-year-old Luka Modrić was voted Player of the Year when loaned here in 2003-04 – Zrinjski won a first title the following season. The club attracted the highest gates that campaign, nearly 6,000, as the Ultras Mostar moved over from the West Stand to bring collective support



to the Tribina stajanje, the standing section of the Istočna tribina, the East Stand. European progress proved slow, however, with a debut defeat to Dudelange of Luxembourg, and a whitewash by Partizan Belgrade, the result later reversed because of crowd trouble in Mostar.

In the league, the revived derby with Velež and the newly established one with nearby Široki Brijeg are the stand-

out fixtures. In truth though, even with the three-in-a-row titles between 2016 and 2018, the domestic game has lost its attraction, average gates falling below 3,000. A modest run in the Europa League in 2019-20, including a win over Utrecht, points to a future beyond the limitations of left-over ethnic grievances. Stadium capacity is 9,000, away supporters allocated a sector in the all-seated West Stand, Zapadna tribina.

### Transport

The stadium is a 10-15min walk from **Mostar West bus station**, turning right down Vukovarska then Hrvatske mladeži. **Bus Nos. 1, 3, 4 and 5** call at the nearest stop, **Ekonomška škola**, but weekend services are few. From town, it's a 15-20min walk from Musala/Tito's Bridge, past the Hotel Bristol, straight down **Mostarskog bataljona/Kralja Zvonimira**. A taxi should cost around 8KM/€4.



### Tickets & shop

Admission is 5KM/€2.50 on the day. Halfway between the train station and the stadium, the **Fan Shop Zrinjski** (Kralja Tvrtka/Brune Bušića, Mon-Sat 9am-9pm) stocks the club's current Peru-style shirts and a range of stylish T-shirts. Many feature the Croatia motif – not the wisest item to wear around the Bosniak side of town.

### Bars

Towards the stadium, casual drinking options line the main roads of **Stjepana Radića** and **Kralja Tomislava**, where you'll find terrace bars **Che City Pub**, **Escobar** and TV-equipped **Mali Puž**. The last place on Stjepana Radića, **Tecó**, serves superior sandwiches and bottled beers by Mostar craft brewers Cooltura, including Amber, APA and Smoked. Its terrace overlooks the north end of the ground where, just inside, a modest **café** is lined with old photos and shelves of trophies. **LE**

ZRINJSKI MOSTAR





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Široki Brijeg

[www.lib eroguide.com/siroki-brijeg](http://www.lib eroguide.com/siroki-brijeg)



## Široki Brijeg

For a town of fewer than 30,000 people with no high-level football tradition, the success of **Široki Brijeg** in the 21st century has been quite amazing. The flagship club representing this little town just outside Mostar, **NK Široki Brijeg** have won five major trophies and finished league runners-up or cup finalists ten times since unified competition in 2002-03.

Like local rivals Zrinjski Mostar, Plavi ('the Blues') seized upon earlier

grievances, some justifiable, to reclaim their Croatian heritage in the early 1990s. Široki Brijeg, both town and football club, had previously been named Lištica after the local river. Actually, the first club here, founded in 1948, was called Borak after the source of the Lištica. Then came Boksit, then Lištica, then Mladost. As Mladost-Dubint, the club won the inaugural, then first three editions of the First League of Herzeg-Bosnia for Croatian clubs in the region set up in the early 1990s. As Široki Brijeg, they won the next two. This success continued as the league was fused

with its equivalent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, then with its counterpart in the Republika Srpska. Like Zrinjski Mostar, Široki Brijeg have a HDZ politician at the helm, from Croatia's ruling centre-right party. Given the fact that Široki Brijeg ultras are named Škripari after the Croatian nationalists who continued fighting Yugoslav Partisans *after* World War II here, it's no surprise that several controversial incidents have arisen. With no league title won since 2006, however, crowds have dipped at the **Stadion Pecara**, the stadium south-east of town in place since 1953. The task now is to attract a



Garden



new generation of fans, perhaps with a younger, more nuanced mindset.

## Bearings

**Mostar Airport** 29km (18 miles) east of town serves **Croatia Airlines** flights from **Zagreb**. **Gradski Taxi Široki**

**Brijeg** (+387 63 106 000) should charge around 36KM/€18 into town. Local **Miškić buses** run from **Mostar Zapadni station** to Široki Brijeg (12KM/€6, 40min journey time), infrequently at weekends. There are also services from **Sarajevo** 143km (89 miles) away, and **Split** 124km (77 miles) away. **Široki Brijeg bus station** is a 10min walk south-west of town, the stadium a 10min walk east.

## Bed

The only hotel in town, the four-star **Park** on trg dr Ante Starčevića, features TV football in the café, a rooftop restaurant and free parking. You'll also find a few simple rooms at the **Dvije Topole** restaurant on the same street, Fra Didaka Buntića, as the stadium 300 metres away.

## Beer

A handful of drinking options are found on and off the main square, trg Širokobrijeskih žrtava, starting with the **Garden summer bar**, open year round, its large terrace ideal in sunny weather. Close by on Fra Didaka Buntića, the **Irish Pub Spancil Hill** serves sought-after beers, most notably local craft Lovac, as well as pints of Bavarian Paulaner. Great for TV football, too. On the same road, towards the stadium, the standard **Dvije Topole** serves Karlovačko beer and traditional dishes. Within the Hotel Park, the smart **Gradska Kavana** stocks quality spirits. **LO**



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 NK Široki Brijeg

[www.libero guide.com/nk-siroki-brijeg](http://www.libero guide.com/nk-siroki-brijeg)



## NK Široki Brijeg

2020 is only the third summer since 2002 that the name of **NK Široki Brijeg** ([nk-sirokibrijeg.com](http://nk-sirokibrijeg.com)) isn't in the hat for the early rounds of European competition. Since that debut campaign in 2002-03, Plavi ('the Blues') from outside Mostar in Herzegovina have shared a football pitch with some pretty obscure opposition, mainly from around Eastern Europe – Urartu of Armenia, Irtysh Pavlodar of

Kazakhstan and FK Zeta of Montenegro – but aggregate victories have been few and far between.

And yet they've notched up 16 European campaigns in just under two decades. Given the pedigree of the two main clubs in Sarajevo and the longevity of, say, Sloboda Tuzla or Borac Banja Luka, the question must be asked, why Široki Brijeg? The club previously known as Borak, Boksit, Lištica and Mladost had never been prominent between foundation in 1948

and 1992, when Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence and war broke out. In Herzegovina, Croatia sought to establish control and influence in all fields, including football.

Winning the inaugural First League of Herzeg-Bosnia for Croatian clubs in 1993-94, the renamed Mladost-Dubint Široki Brijeg took advantage of backing from Zagreb to claim the first five titles, then welcome high-calibre players once Široki Brijeg and nearest rivals Zrinjski Mostar joined Bosnian



and Serbian teams in the Premijer liga. Formed at Dinamo Zagreb, Croatian under-21 striker Domagoj Abramović was top scorer both times when Široki Brijeg won titles in 2004 and 2006, while Brazilian Wagner Santos Lago bossed the club's midfield during that successful 2005-06 campaign, bowing out in 2018 as a 40-year-old stalwart setting a record number of goals and appearances. He has since returned to look after the club's under-19 side.

Always there or thereabouts, cup winners three times, Široki Brijeg have hosted the likes of Aberdeen and Hearts among the more obscure opponents at the **Stadion Pecara**. Opened in 1953,

this compact, 7,000-capacity ground was completely modernised in the late 1990s and now has stands on three sides, with hoardings and the scoreboard behind the west goal. Alongside in the North Stand, Sjeverna tribina, the local Škripari ultras bounce for all 90 minutes. Home fans also occupy the covered Južna tribina opposite, while visiting supporters are allocated a sector behind the east goal, Istočna tribina.

### Transport

The stadium is a 10min walk from town along Fra Didaka Buntića, 15-20min from the bus station, first up Antuna Michanovića, then Fra Didaka Buntića past the Hotel Park. A **taxi** should be 4KM/€2 from town, 6KM/€3 from the station.

### Tickets & shop

Admission is 5KM/€2.50 on the day from the windows on Fra Didaka Buntića. On the same road, in the modern sports hall past the stadium, blue shirts and scarves are sold at the **Fan Shop Široki**.

### Bars

Two simple bars, the **Caffe Indirekt** and the **Caffe Stadion**, are set into the stadium on the Fra Didaka Buntića side, both with chairs outside. Further along, the club's **Restoran Plavo Bijeli** is a more substantial operation, with a long covered terrace and a TV showing match action inside. **LB**





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Tuzla

[www.libero guide.com/tuzla](http://www.libero guide.com/tuzla)



## Tuzla

Neither of its two top-flight clubs has yet won any major silverware, but the eastern Bosnian city of **Tuzla** may be the new powerbase for the domestic game thanks to the enterprise of one man: Azmir Husić.

Originally from nearby Glogova, a witness to Srebrenica, Husić headed to America after the war to make money in trucking. A lifelong fan of **Sloboda Tuzla**, he returned to revive

the rusting stalwarts and, on a crazy whim, persuaded legendary coach Ćiro Blažević of Croatia World Cup '98 fame to help him accomplish it.

Inspired by the Russian Revolution, local Communists had formed century-old Sloboda as FK Gorki after the Soviet writer. Tuzla's four main communities each had a football team, Zrinjski for the Croats, Obilić the Serbs, Bura Bosniaks and Maccabi, Jews. Renamed Sloboda played at Zrinjski's ground by the Solina river. Across town to the west, the **Tušanj Gradski Stadion** was then built in 1957.



In 2014, Blažević was tasked with getting Sloboda back to the Bosnian Premijer. That achieved, Husić turned his attention to FK Sloga in Simin Han, a small community 7km east of Tuzla. As chairman, Husić steered this modest club to the Premijer in 2018, arranged for them to groundshare the Tušanj Stadion and rebranded them **Tuzla City**. On their badge, he placed the emblematic flower of Srebrenica.

With Bosnia's second city now boasting two top-tier clubs, Husić set his sights on an influential position in the FA. If successful, his first task might be to modernise the Tušanj Stadion, resplendent in Socialist red but otherwise begging for a contemporary upgrade.

## Bearings

**Tuzla Airport** is 16km (ten miles) south of town, with no public transport links. **Bingo Taxi Tuzla** (+387 61 135 794)

quotes 20KM/€10. The city centre is served by **GiPS local buses**, pay the driver KM1/€0.50 on board. **Sarajevo** is 120km (75 miles) from Tuzla. A **Centrottrans bus** (23KM/€11.50) takes 3hrs 10mins. **Tuzla bus station** is on the west, stadium, side of the centre.

## Bed

Behind the Sloboda bar in town, the five-star **Golden Star** on Jevrejska is sleek and business-friendly. Deeper into town, **Heartland City** on Kazan Mahala offers upper mid-range comfort. Best hotel in town is the **Mellian** on aleja Alije Izetbegovića, on the west side of town, with a spa centre, pool and restaurant. Across the river on ZAVNOBiH-a, the **Hotel Tuzla** also has its own pool and restaurant.

## Beer

Tuzla is the home of **Tuzlanski beer**, showcased within the sturdy bare-brick walls of the **Pivnica Taverna** opposite the brewery on Maršala Tita. Close by at Koste Racine 3, Irish pub **St James's** is a main match-watching spot, with live music thrown in. On the city side of Gradski Park, the popular **Park Pub** on Đorđe Mihajlovića screens games and serves Erdinger and Grimbergen, among others, the terrace busy in summer. Nearby on Hadžibakirbega Tuzlića, the intimate **Nardi Pub** attracts a lively younger clientele with big-screen sport and live music. On Turalibegova, the **Old Story Pub** focuses more on food. **LE**



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Tušanj Gradski Stadion

[www.liberoguide.com/tusanj-gradski-stadion](http://www.liberoguide.com/tusanj-gradski-stadion)



## Tušanj Gradski Stadion

Tuzla's **Tušanj Gradski Stadion** (stadiontusanj.ba) echoes its Socialist origins, its colour scheme fire red, its shape a classic bowl surrounded by towering resident blocks. Unveiled in 1957, this municipal ground has since served Sloboda Tuzla and, just over 60 years later, became Bosnia's main groundshare when **Tuzla City**

moved in following promotion to the Premijer liga in 2018. Capacity is just over 7,000, gates attracted by either club rarely close to even half that figure.

The curtain-raiser between Sloboda and a Zagreb XI, shortly before the Soviets sent Sputnik into space, was more for show. Sloboda had already played *Željezničar* here a year before, in August 1956, but it was back in 1947 that local schoolchildren and pioneer scouts pitched in to shift bricks and stones at this site north-



west of the city centre. Tušanj was and remains a sparsely populated area, its main features a salt mine and a mosque.



Thirty years later, the stadium staged its first European tie, Sloboda's 4-3 win over Las Palmas before a full house of 12,000 – all paying their ten dinars knowing that an aggregate win would be impossible, given the 5-0 first-leg defeat in the Canary Islands. Ten years after that, as the ultra phenomenon swept Italy, then Yugoslavia, the *Fukare Tuzla* were formed, and Sloboda's fieriest following has occupied the North Stand, the *Tribina Sjever*, ever since.

This is the only covered area of the stadium, apart from the press boxes. Banks of open seating rise up on the east and west sides, the south end empty but for the scoreboard and office windows. The running track is still used for athletics meets, once the showcase for former European champion shot putter Zlatan Saračević of the Sloboda club. After Bosnia-Herzegovina was granted a last-minute inclusion in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Saračević became the country's first flag bearer

before a TV audience of millions. Their flights arranged by the Slovenian Olympic Association, his ten fellow athletes had been unable to train in Bosnia, and could only return home as part of a humanitarian convoy.

### Transport

The stadium is a 15min walk west of town along the main road north of the centre that changes names from *Kulina bana* to *Džafer mahala* to *Muhameda Hevalja Uskufija* to *Rudarska*. Many buses, including **Nos. 1, 2 and 3**, stop at **Ekonomska Škola** nearby. A **taxi** from town should cost around KM6-KM8/€3-€4.

### Tickets

Pay on the day at the row of **ticket gates** on *Rudarska*, admission a modest 5KM/€2.50.

### Bars

By the junction of *Muhameda Hevalja Uskufija* and *Mirze Hadžimehmedovića*, old-school **Bosna** is all things to all men, a restaurant, a confectionery and a pre-match bar. In spring and summer, a leafy terrace operates alongside. Further up on *Meše Selimovića*, the smart, two-floor **Konoba MB** is handy for the home end, its beers including Czech *Krušovice*. On the same stretch closer to the ground, the **Bufet Ajša** serves classic Balkan grilled meats and, as suggested by the red colour scheme of its covered terrace, *Karlovačko* beer. **LD**





# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Sloboda Tuzla

[www.liberoguide.com/sloboda-tuzla](http://www.liberoguide.com/sloboda-tuzla)

## Sloboda Tuzla

One of the great names in the Bosnian game, **Sloboda Tuzla** (fksloboda.ba) were recently revived by lifelong fan Azmir Husić. As club chairman, he first persuaded legendary coach Ćiro Blažević to gain Sloboda promotion back to the Premijer, then hired Husref Musemić to steer Sloboda to runners-up spots in the league and cup in 2016. A Bosnian Cup finalist on seven unsuccessful occasions, historic Sloboda had never come so close to the title and, with Husić and Musemić now working together at newly reformed local rivals Tuzla City, it may be a while before it happens again.

Much was made of the club's centenary in 2019, including a gala match with Dinamo Zagreb and a coffee-table album bearing a five-pointed red star on its cover.

Formed by local Communists in the wake of the Russian Revolution, Sloboda ('Freedom') started out as FK Gorki, were banned by the authorities then renamed. Moving into the newly built **Tušanjski Gradski Stadion** in 1957, Sloboda had their Yugoslav heyday in 1977, finishing third in the league ahead of Partizan Belgrade. There was even a brief but memorable foray into Europe, the subsequent UEFA Cup campaign a trek of 5,000km and four stopovers to Las Palmas – who



romped home 5-0. Following the so-called *katastrofa*, the seven-goal return leg, a 4-3 win for Sloboda at Tušanj is considered a historic triumph.

Relegation in 2012 – Sloboda had exactly the same record as Slavija Sarajevo but had conceded one goal more in head-to-head games – came after 42 seasons of unbroken top-flight football, within Yugoslavia or Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was then that Azmir Husić returned from America, having made his fortune in trucking.

Since 2016, and another early European exit, at the hands of Beitar Jerusalem, Sloboda have hit the horse latitudes, not in European contention and drifting back towards relegation. The club remains, though, integral to daily life in Tuzla, with a fans' bar and supporters' outlet in town, red-and-black shirts dangling from market



stalls, murals everywhere and an ultras group, Fukare, with a multi-generational reach after more than three decades of activity.

### Transport & tickets

With 'Sloboda' and '1919' written in black across seats of signature red, the Tušanjski Gradski Stadion is very much the club's home. For details of transport and tickets, see p25. You can

also buy tickets from the **UG Prijatelji FK Sloboda** outlet in town (see below).

### Bars & shop

Fans gather at two prominent outlets in town, a store and ticket outlet, and a lively sports bar. **Udruženje Gradana (UG) Prijatelji FK Sloboda** (Patriotske lige 4, daily 8am-11pm) is where to go for red-and-black merchandise and match tickets. Even without any football

connection, the **Café Bar Sloboda** (daily 7am-1am) would still be the best drinking destination in the historic centre. Terrace tables emblazoned with the Sloboda logo spread over Solni trg, where DJs set up on summer nights. Screens show match action, while staff dispense Pan, Tuborg and Erdinger beers, plus burgers and toasted sandwiches. As the Sloboda motto says, Music, Love, Chill.



# BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA 2020-21 Tuzla City

[www.liberoguide.com/tuzla-city](http://www.liberoguide.com/tuzla-city)



## Tuzla City

Looking at the rebranding of the club, its name now **Tuzla City** (fktuzlacity.com), its badge sky blue, you might think that the former FK Sloga from Simin Han are part of the global reach of a certain multimillion-dirham operation based in Manchester. Also on the badge, however, is the symbolic flower of Srebrenica, put there by club president Azmir Husić. A soldier in the Bosnia-Herzegovina Army at the time, Husić later headed for America, returning to Tuzla where he invested his funds and his know-how into both football clubs, his boyhood heroes of Sloboda and modest FK Sloga.

Synonymous with the busy industrial hub of Tuzla, Sloboda had nearly a century of history and decades of top-tier tradition behind them. A few kilometres east at Simin Han, in a sleepy community of 1,000-

plus residents, one main road and a few streets, FK Sloga had been founded in 1955. Almost as soon as Husić arrived in 2012, they won their division in the Tuzla canton, then a higher one a year later. After a third straight promotion in 2014-15, this time at national level, FK Sloga were forced to play another season in the third-tier Druga liga North.

With this, Husić set about modernising his club's modest Bare ground, creating a training complex essential to his plans. Within two seasons, FK Sloga would win the second-tier Prva liga by five clear points and move into town to groundshare the municipal **Tušanj Gradski Stadion** with Sloboda. It was at this point, on the eve of their debut campaign in the Premijer liga, that FK Sloga became Tuzla City. While the goals of former Serbia U-21 international striker Vojo Ubiparip kept the club afloat – just – in that



first season, back at Simin Han, a system was being put in place for a series of six youth teams from under-8s all the way up to under-19s.

As for the first team, Husić recalled Milenko Bošnjaković, the locally born coach behind those divisional wins in 2015 and 2016, and brought in players such as former Croatia U-21 centre-back Darick Morris and recent Bosnia U-21 goalkeeper Azir Muminović. By mid-September, an unbeaten

run had taken Tuzla City to the top of the Premijer liga. By the end of September, one defeat and one draw had seen the departure of Muminović and the arrival of Enver Baljić. One of country's first international stars and an assistant coach in Bosnia's successful qualification for the 2014 World Cup, the former Fenerbahce forward would be another major figure to terminate his coaching contract at Tuzla City but his half-season in charge kept the club close

to a European place. Eventually, only one point would separate Tuzla City from the Europa League in 2020.

### Transport & tickets

For details of the Tušanj Gradski Stadion, see p25. For Simin Han, a taxi from Tuzla takes 10mins and costs 12KM/€6. The **bus** (2KM/€1) takes 15mins. **Simin Han bus station** is over the river from the mosque and the ground 100 metres behind it on Zlatnih ljljana. **LG**