



Serbia

A landlocked land of great rivers, where the Sava meets the Danube, with painted medieval monasteries, Roman palaces, grilled meat, plum brandy and famously warm hospitality.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Belgrade

POPULATION

About 6.6 million (2022 census, not counting Kosovo)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Serbian, written in both Cyrillic and Latin letters. Cyrillic is the official script

CURRENCY

Serbian dinar (RSD)

AREA

About 77,600 km² without Kosovo, about 88,500 km² including it

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary republic

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Midžor, 2,169 m, in the Balkan Mountains on the border with Bulgaria (higher peaks lie in Kosovo)

LONGEST RIVER

The Danube flows 588 km through Serbia. The longest river system entirely inside the country is the Great Morava with the West Morava, 493 km

NEIGHBOURS

Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. In the south it also borders Kosovo, whose independence Serbia does not recognise

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+381

A 45-minute trip to Serbia

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- 0 to 5 min** Welcome. Show the map page and find Serbia together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there?
- 5 to 15 min** Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 5400 BC: Vinča culture by the Danube; 1804: First Serbian Uprising; 2008: Kosovo declares independence.
- 15 to 25 min** At the table: talk about Ćevapi (grilled minced meat) and Pljeskavica (grilled meat patty). Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help.
- 25 to 30 min** Say it like a local: practise "Dobro jutro" (Good morning), "Dobar dan" (Good day, hello), "Dobro veče" (Good evening). Everyone says them together.
- 30 to 40 min** Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at <https://worldstroll.com/countries/serbia/group>. No scores needed.
- 40 to 45 min** Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page.

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)

- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Serbia and its cities



- Belgrade (City of Belgrade): The Belgrade Fortress and Kalemegdan Park, Knez Mihailova, the main pedestrian street, Skadarlija, the old bohemian quarter
- Novi Sad (Vojvodina): Petrovaradin Fortress across the river, European Capital of Culture in 2022, The Library of Matica srpska, founded in 1826
- Niš (Nišava District): The birthplace of Constantine the Great, Skull Tower, Nišville jazz festival

- Kragujevac (Šumadija): Serbia's first constitution, 1835, The Šumarice memorial park, A large car factory
- Subotica (Vojvodina): The Art Nouveau City Hall, Its Hungarian name, Szabadka, Nearby Lake Palić
- Kraljevo (Raška District): Žiča Monastery, where kings were crowned, Studenica Monastery nearby, The seven crowns on its coat of arms
- Novi Pazar (Raška District): The Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, The Altun-Alem Mosque, Stari Ras and Sopoćani Monastery nearby
- Smederevo (Podunavlje District): Smederevo Fortress, Vineyards and the Smederevka grape, The Danube riverside
- Užice (Zlatibor District): Užice smoked ham, pršuta, The Republic of Užice of 1941, Gateway to Zlatibor and Mokra Gora
- Zaječar (Zaječar District): Felix Romuliana nearby, Gitarijada rock festival, Its Roman heritage
- Sremski Karlovci (Vojvodina): The Treaty of Karlowitz, 1699, The Karlovci Gymnasium, Wine from the slopes of Fruška Gora

A short history of Serbia

Serbia's story runs from Stone Age farmers on the Danube and Roman emperors' palaces, through a medieval kingdom and empire, centuries under the Ottomans and an uprising for freedom, to Yugoslavia and a return to independence in 2006.

5400 BC **Vinča culture by the Danube**

From about 5400 BC, Neolithic farmers of the Vinča culture built some of the largest settlements in prehistoric Europe. The culture is named after Vinča, a site on the Danube just outside today's Belgrade.

AD 298 **Galerius builds Felix Romuliana**

The Roman emperor Galerius began a great palace and temple complex near his birthplace, today Gamzigrad near Zaječar. He named it Felix Romuliana after his mother, Romula.

1166 **Stefan Nemanja comes to power**

Stefan Nemanja became Grand Prince (Grand Župan) of Serbia and founded the Nemanjić dynasty, which ruled Serbia until 1371. He founded Studenica Monastery around 1190, and after giving up the throne in 1196 he became a monk there.

1217 **Serbia becomes a kingdom**

Nemanja's son Stefan was crowned king, and he is remembered as Stefan the First-Crowned. The Serbian state was now a kingdom.

1219 **Sava heads an independent Church**

Stefan's brother, the monk Sava, was recognised as the

first Archbishop of an independent Serbian Church. Saint Sava is the patron saint of Serbia.

1346 Dušan crowned emperor

Stefan Dušan was crowned Emperor of the Serbs. His empire stretched from the Danube to the Gulf of Corinth, and his law code, Dušan's Code, is a treasure of medieval Serbia.

1389 Battle of Kosovo

On 15 June 1389 a Serbian-led army under Prince Lazar fought an Ottoman army under Sultan Murad I. Both leaders were killed. The battle holds a central place in Serbian memory, song and legend.

1459 Smederevo falls to the Ottomans

The fortress city of Smederevo, the last capital of the medieval Serbian state, fell to the Ottomans. For most of the next 350 years, Serbia was under Ottoman rule.

1804 First Serbian Uprising

Serbs rose against Ottoman rule under Karađorđe Petrović. The uprisings of the Serbian Revolution lasted until 1815 and laid the foundations of modern Serbia.

1835 First Serbian constitution

Serbia's first constitution was adopted in Kragujevac on 15 February 1835, the same day of the year on which the First Serbian Uprising had begun in 1804. That date, Sretenje, is celebrated every year as Statehood Day.

1878 Independence recognised in Berlin

The Congress of Berlin formally recognised Serbia as an independent state. Four years later, in 1882, the principality became the Kingdom of Serbia.

1914

Austria-Hungary declares war

After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914, the start of the First World War. Serbia won its first battles but suffered enormous losses.

1918

A South Slav kingdom is formed

On 1 December 1918 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was proclaimed in Belgrade. It was renamed Yugoslavia in 1929.

1945

A republic within Yugoslavia

After the Second World War, Serbia became one of the six republics of socialist Yugoslavia, with Belgrade as the federal capital.

2006

Serbia independent again

After Montenegro voted for independence in May 2006, Serbia declared its own independence on 5 June 2006 as the successor of the union of Serbia and Montenegro.

2008

Kosovo declares independence

On 17 February 2008 the Assembly of Kosovo declared independence. Serbia rejects the declaration and regards Kosovo as its province, while many other countries recognise Kosovo. Talks between the two sides are mediated by the European Union.

What people eat in Serbia

Serbian food is hearty and generous, a meeting of Central European, Turkish and Mediterranean cooking. Grilled meat is the star, bread comes with almost every meal, and cheese, kajmak and pies are everyday pleasures. Breakfast is often a savoury pastry from the bakery, and lunch, eaten in the early afternoon, is the main meal: it usually starts with a soup, goes on to meat with salad and ends with something sweet and a small cup of coffee.

Ćevapi (grilled minced meat) (ćevapi, ćevapčići)

Across Serbia and the former Yugoslavia, famous in Leskovac in the south

Small finger-shaped rolls of minced meat, grilled over charcoal and served five or ten at a time on a plate or in a soft flatbread, with chopped raw onion, kajmak and sometimes ajvar. In Serbia they are made of beef, lamb, pork or a mixture.

Pljeskavica (grilled meat patty) (pljeskavica)

All of Serbia, with a famous spicy version from Leskovac

A large, thin patty of spiced minced pork, beef and lamb, grilled and served with onions, kajmak and urnebes, either on a plate or in a flatbread like a hamburger. It is one of Serbia's national dishes.

Karađorđe's schnitzel (Karađorđeva šnicla)

Belgrade, 1950s

A veal or pork steak rolled around kajmak, then breaded and fried golden. It is served with tartar sauce and a slice of lemon, often with chips.

Sarma (stuffed cabbage rolls) (sarma)

All of Serbia, a winter and holiday favourite

Leaves of soured cabbage rolled around minced meat and rice, then simmered slowly for hours, often with smoked meat. It is a classic of

winter feasts and family celebrations.

Pasulj (bean stew) (pasulj)

All of Serbia, eaten especially in winter

A thick stew of white beans cooked slowly with onion, paprika and smoked meat such as bacon or sausage. It is served with bread and sometimes sour cream. A baked version is called prebranac.

Gibanica (cheese and egg pie) (gibanica)

All of Serbia, a breakfast and celebration favourite

A golden pie of thin filo pastry, crumpled in layers with a filling of white cheese, eggs, milk and kajmak. It is eaten warm for breakfast, at celebrations and as a snack.

Burek (burek)

Brought by the Ottomans, now sold in every Serbian bakery

A large round pie of thin, flaky pastry filled with minced meat, cheese, spinach or potato, cut into wedges. In Serbia it is a classic breakfast, often with a glass of drinking yoghurt.

Proja (cornbread) (proja)

Rural Serbia

A simple, moist cornbread made from maize flour, oil and sparkling water, sometimes with white cheese. It is often eaten for breakfast with kajmak, ajvar or sour cream.

Ajvar (roasted red pepper relish) (ajvar)

All of Serbia, with a protected homemade version from Leskovac

A thick relish of roasted, peeled and slowly cooked red peppers, from sweet to fiery. Families make it together in autumn, when peppers are plentiful, and keep it in jars for the winter.

Kajmak (kajmak)

Especially western Serbia, around Čačak

A rich, creamy dairy spread, something between clotted cream and soft cheese, skimmed from the top of slowly heated milk and left to

ripen. It is eaten with bread, grilled meat and cornbread.

Urnebes (spicy cheese spread) (urnebes)

Niš and southern Serbia

A spread of white cheese and kajmak mixed with hot peppers, sometimes with garlic. It can be mild or very hot and is served with grilled meat.

Serbian salad (srpska salata)

All of Serbia

Diced tomatoes, cucumbers and onions with a simple dressing of oil and vinegar, often with a little hot pepper. It is served alongside grilled meat. With grated white cheese on top it becomes šopska salad.

Fisherman's soup (riblja čorba)

Vojvodina and the Danube

A red, paprika-spiced soup of freshwater river fish, common on the Pannonian Plain in the north. Soup starts almost every Serbian lunch, and fish soup is thought of as a delicacy.

Tufahije (walnut-stuffed apples) (tufahije)

A Balkan dessert, popular in Serbia and neighbouring countries

Whole apples filled with walnuts and poached in sugar syrup, served in a glass with their own syrup and a crown of whipped cream, usually with coffee.

Šljivovica (plum brandy) (šljivovica)

All of Serbia

A strong brandy distilled from plums, Serbia's national drink and the most common kind of rakija. It is offered to guests, served before meals and poured at every big family occasion, from weddings to the slava.

Home-style coffee (domaća kafa)

All of Serbia

Very finely ground coffee boiled in a small long-handled pot and served in little cups, grounds and all. It is the most common hot drink in Serbia, usually made at home and shared with family or friends.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Before eating, people wish each other 'Prijatno!' (enjoy your meal). The same word is also a friendly way to say goodbye.
- When glasses are raised, say 'Živeli!' (cheers) and look the other person in the eye.
- Bread is treated with great respect. Guests may be welcomed with bread and salt, and many Serbs feel it is wrong to throw bread away.
- Lunch in the early afternoon is the main meal of the day, and it usually begins with a soup.
- Guests are often welcomed with slatko, a spoonful of fruit preserve, and coffee, sometimes with a glass of rakija.
- If you are invited to a home for the first time, bring a small gift such as flowers or chocolates.

Sarma (stuffed cabbage rolls)

Leaves of soured cabbage rolled around minced meat and rice, then simmered slowly for hours, often with smoked meat. It is a classic of winter feasts and family celebrations.

Ingredients

- 1 whole head of soured (pickled) cabbage, or a jar of large sauerkraut leaves
- 500 g minced pork and beef, mixed
- 100 g short-grain rice, rinsed
- 1 large onion, finely chopped, and 2 tablespoons sunflower oil
- 1 teaspoon sweet paprika, salt and black pepper
- 200 g smoked pork ribs or smoked bacon, in pieces
- 1 bay leaf and about 1 litre of water

Method

1. Separate the cabbage leaves carefully. If they are very salty, rinse them in cold water. Cut out the thick part of each rib so the leaf rolls easily.
2. Soften the onion in the oil, let it cool, then mix it with the minced meat, rice, paprika, a little salt and pepper.
3. Put a heaped tablespoon of filling near the base of each leaf, fold in the sides and roll it up firmly.
4. Line a large heavy pot with a few spare leaves. Pack the rolls in tightly, tucking the smoked meat and bay leaf between them, and cover with chopped leftover cabbage.

5. Pour in water to just cover, put a plate on top to keep the rolls in place, cover and simmer very gently for about 3 hours. Check the meat is cooked through before serving with bread and sour cream.

Pasulj (bean stew)

A thick stew of white beans cooked slowly with onion, paprika and smoked meat such as bacon or sausage. It is served with bread and sometimes sour cream. A baked version is called prebranac.

Ingredients

- 400 g dried white beans, soaked overnight
- 250 g smoked bacon or smoked sausage, in pieces
- 2 onions, chopped, and 2 carrots, sliced
- 2 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 2 tablespoons sunflower oil and 1 tablespoon flour
- 2 teaspoons sweet paprika and 2 bay leaves
- Salt, black pepper and chopped parsley

Method

1. Drain the soaked beans, cover with fresh water, bring to the boil for 10 minutes, then drain again.
2. Put the beans back in the pot with the smoked meat, carrots, bay leaves and about 2 litres of water. Simmer gently for about 2 hours, until the beans are soft.
3. In a small pan, cook the onions and garlic in the oil until golden. Stir in the flour, then take off the heat and stir in the paprika.
4. Stir this mixture into the beans and simmer for another 20 minutes, until thick. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Scatter with parsley and serve hot with fresh bread.

Gibanica (cheese and egg pie)

A golden pie of thin filo pastry, crumpled in layers with a filling of white cheese, eggs, milk and kajmak. It is eaten warm for breakfast, at celebrations and as a snack.

Ingredients

- 500 g filo pastry sheets
- 400 g crumbly white cheese, such as feta
- 2 tablespoons kajmak or sour cream (optional)
- 4 eggs
- 250 ml milk and 100 ml sparkling water
- 100 ml sunflower oil, plus a little for the tin
- 1 teaspoon baking powder and a pinch of salt

Method

1. Heat the oven to 200°C and oil a baking tin of about 25 by 35 cm.
2. Beat the eggs with the milk, sparkling water, half of the oil, the baking powder and salt. Crumble in the cheese, stir in the kajmak or sour cream if using, and mix well.
3. Lay two sheets of filo in the tin. Dip or brush the other sheets one at a time in the egg mixture, crumple them loosely and lay them side by side in the tin.
4. Cover with the last two sheets, pour over any remaining egg mixture and drizzle with the rest of the oil.
5. Bake for 35 to 45 minutes, until puffed and deep golden and the filling is set. Rest for 10 minutes before cutting.

Proja (cornbread)

A simple, moist cornbread made from maize flour, oil and sparkling water, sometimes with white cheese. It is often eaten for breakfast with kajmak, ajvar or sour cream.

Ingredients

- 300 g fine cornmeal (maize flour)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder and 1 teaspoon salt
- 100 ml sunflower oil
- 300 ml sparkling water
- 150 g crumbly white cheese, optional

Method

1. Heat the oven to 200°C and oil a baking tin of about 20 by 30 cm.
2. Mix the cornmeal, baking powder and salt in a bowl.
3. Stir in the oil and sparkling water to make a thick batter. Fold in the cheese if using.
4. Spread the batter in the tin, about 3 cm deep.
5. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until golden on top. Cut into squares and serve warm with kajmak or sour cream.

Useful phrases

Dobro jutro

DOH-broh YOO-troh · Good morning

Dobar dan

DOH-bar DAHN · Good day, hello

Dobro več

DOH-broh VEH-cheh · Good evening

Laku noć

LAH-koo nohch · Good night

Doviđenja

doh-vee-JEH-nyah · Goodbye

Kako ste?

KAH-koh steh · How are you? (polite)

Dobro, hvala

DOH-broh, HVAH-lah · Well, thank you

Drago mi je

DRAH-goh mee yeh · Pleased to meet you

Izvinite

eez-VEE-nee-teh · Excuse me, sorry

Ne razumem

neh rah-ZOO-mehm · I don't understand

Govorite li engleski?

GOH-voh-ree-teh lee EHN-glehs-kee · Do you speak English?

Koliko ovo košta?

koh-LEE-koh OH-voh KOHSH-tah · How much is this?

Račun, molim

RAH-choon, MOH-leem · The bill, please

Prijatno!

PREE-yaht-noh · Enjoy your meal! (also a friendly goodbye)

Živeli!

ZHEE-veh-lee · Cheers!

Bilo je ukusno

BEE-loh yeh OO-koos-noh · It was delicious

Gde je toalet?

GDEH yeh TWAH-leht · Where is the toilet?

Treba mi doktor

TREH-bah mee DOHK-tohr · I need a doctor

Upomoć!

OO-poh-mohch · Help!

Things you might not know

1. Serbian is written in two alphabets. Cyrillic is the official script, used by the government, while the Latin alphabet is common in shops, advertising and daily life. The two match letter for letter, and road signs often show both.
2. In the 19th century the language reformer Vuk Karadžić rebuilt Serbian Cyrillic on the rule 'write as you speak and read as it is written'. Each sound has its own letter, so Serbian is spelled almost exactly as it sounds.
3. About 18 Roman emperors are believed to have been born in what is now Serbia, more than in any modern country except Italy. The most famous is Constantine the Great, born in Naissus, today's Niš.
4. Serbia grows a great deal of fruit. In 2023 it was the world's third-largest producer of raspberries, and the plum is its national fruit, the source of šljivovica brandy.
5. The inventor Nikola Tesla was born in 1856 to a Serbian family in Smiljan, a village now in Croatia. His ashes rest in an urn at the Nikola Tesla Museum in Belgrade, and Belgrade's airport is named after him.
6. The writer Ivo Andrić won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1961. His best-known novel is The Bridge on the Drina.
7. Serbia won the Eurovision Song Contest in 2007 with the singer Marija Šerifović. Belgrade hosted the contest the following year.

8. As of September 2026, the Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic holds the men's record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles.
9. Serbs celebrate Christmas on 7 January, because the Serbian Orthodox Church follows the old Julian calendar. On Christmas Eve families bring in a badnjak, an oak branch, and on Christmas Day they break a round bread called česnica with a coin hidden inside.
10. Serbian families celebrate the slava, the feast day of the family's own patron saint, which is passed down through the male line. UNESCO added it to its list of intangible cultural heritage in 2014.
11. The Guča Trumpet Festival, held every August in the small town of Guča since 1961, is billed as the world's largest celebration of brass band music. Hundreds of thousands of visitors come to hear the bands.
12. Serbia has driven on the right since 1926. Before that, Vojvodina, which had been part of Austria-Hungary, drove on the left.
13. The Uvac gorge in south-west Serbia, with its winding river meanders, is home to the largest colony of griffon vultures in the Balkans.
14. On the Romanian border the Danube squeezes through the Iron Gates gorge in Đerdap National Park. In 2020 the area became Serbia's first UNESCO Global Geopark.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Serbia, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Ćevapi (grilled minced meat) or Pljeskavica (grilled meat patty)? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- A republic within Yugoslavia (1945). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen Belgrade Fortress and Kalemegdan Park, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Serbia, which would it be and why?
- Which fact surprised you the most today?

QUIZ

How well do you know Serbia?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. Smederevo Fortress was built in the 15th century as a capital of the medieval Serbian state.

- A) True
- B) False

2. Why is it wise to carry small dinar notes?

- A) Coins cannot be used in shops
- B) Big notes are no longer valid
- C) Cards are not accepted anywhere
- D) Taxis and small shops often have no change for big notes

3. What does 'hvala' mean?

- A) hello
- B) goodbye
- C) thank you
- D) please

4. What is the local phone number for an ambulance in Serbia?

- A) 1987
- B) 193
- C) 194
- D) 192

5. Which country's vote for independence in 2006 led Serbia to declare its own independence?

- A) North Macedonia
- B) Croatia
- C) Montenegro
- D) Slovenia

6. Which writer, author of The Bridge on the Drina, won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1961?

- A) Miloš Crnjanski
- B) Vuk Karadžić
- C) Ivo Andrić
- D) Danilo Kiš

7. What is the capital of Serbia?

- A) Novi Sad
- B) Niš
- C) Belgrade
- D) Kragujevac

8. Karađorđe's schnitzel is a rolled steak filled with what before it is breaded and fried?

- A) Walnuts
- B) Rice and minced meat
- C) Kajmak
- D) Ajvar

9. In Serbian, 'molim' can mean both 'please' and 'you're welcome'.

- A) True
- B) False

10. Visitors to Serbia must be registered with the local police within 24 hours of arrival.

- A) True
- B) False

11. What is the currency of Serbia?

- A) Hungarian forint
- B) Serbian dinar
- C) Euro
- D) Bulgarian lev

12. What is a slava?

- A) A plum brandy
- B) A round Christmas bread
- C) A family's feast day for its patron saint
- D) A brass band festival

Quiz answers

1. True

True. It was built between 1427 and 1430 for Despot Đurađ Branković.

2. D) Taxis and small shops often have no change for big notes

Taxis and small shops often have no change for big notes, such as 5,000 dinars, so break them in supermarkets.

3. C) thank you

Hvala means thank you. The usual reply is 'molim', you're welcome.

4. C) 194

194 is the ambulance. 192 is the police, 193 the fire service and 1987 roadside assistance. From a mobile, 112 also works.

5. C) Montenegro

Montenegro voted to leave the union in May 2006, and Serbia declared independence on 5 June 2006.

6. C) Ivo Andrić

Ivo Andrić won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1961.

7. C) Belgrade

Belgrade is the capital and largest city, where the Sava flows into the Danube.

8. C) Kajmak

The steak is rolled around kajmak, then breaded and fried, and served with tartar sauce and lemon.

9. True

True. Molim is used for please, as the reply to thank you, and even for 'pardon?'.

10. True

True. Hotels register you automatically at check-in. Elsewhere, ask your host, as you can be fined if it is not done.

11. B) Serbian dinar

Serbia uses the Serbian dinar (RSD). Euros are sometimes accepted, but usually at a worse price.

12. C) A family's feast day for its patron saint

The slava is a family's feast day for its patron saint, passed down through the male line. UNESCO listed it in 2014.

Serbia visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next steps

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

Play the interactive version, collect a stamp in your passport:

<https://worldstroll.com/countries/serbia>