

SERBIA  
Experience

FREE COPY

# Serbian Monasteries

The most famous Serbian fresco, White Angel of Mileševa, was first broadcast via satellite in 1963, as Europe's greeting for America. A little later, the same signal was sent into space.

Mileševa monastery, White Angel fresco, detail, XV century



# Stari Ras

### Between East and West

The solemn and rejoicing Sopoćani figures exude internal beauty and dignified expression. That is the antique concept of art, a sort of Renaissance celebrating the beauty of human nature. Sopoćani is the Sistine Chapel of the Serbian Middle Ages.



Sopoćani monastery, Ascension of the Mother of God, fresco, detail, XII century

# Kosovo and Metohija

### Rise of Serbian Empire

At the beginning of XIV century, King Milutin relocated the capital of Serbia to Prižren (Kosovo) and went to conquer Byzantium's southern territories. A five-year-old Byzantine princess, Simonida, who, as the guarantor of peace, was married to Milutin, brought to Serbia Constantinople's education, ceremonies, manner of dressing and food culture, and the Serbian culture transformed in a direct contact with Imperial Byzantium.



Dečani monastery, XV century

In Serbia, there are more than two hundred monasteries\*, 54 of which have been declared cultural monuments, while Stari Ras (Old Ras) with Sopoćani, Studenica and the medieval Serbian monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija, namely Dečani, Gračanica, Pecka patrijaršija (Patriarchate of Peć) and Bogorodica Ljeviška (Our Lady of Ljeviš) have been inscribed on the UNESCO world cultural heritage list. For their superior cultural and spiritual values, that heritage is, at the same time, a permanent value of the European heritage and the whole world.

Hidden in the wooded areas, under the cliffs or on the mountain rivers' sources, the monasteries enshrine the serenity of monastic life. By them, refectories, temporary lodgings and repositories were built, and stone walls belt them. Yet, historically, the Serbian monasteries have not isolated themselves from the rest of the world. They have always been places for people to gather, so, today as well, their gates welcome all visitors of good will.

In the Middle Ages, monasteries were very significant: since the European culture was developing under the aegis of the church, those places for praying and pilgrimage became national anchorages and hotbeds for education and art.

Knowing well their role and significance, all Serbian rulers without exception, starting with the Nemanjić family, built numerous monasteries. Instead of building sumptuous palaces, these fighters for high principles built monasteries as their pledge for the future. Their endowments testify to their donors' faith, perseverance and devotion to spiritual values, and also to the creative energy of that era.



Studenica monastery, XII century

If you visit Žiça, Studenica, Gradac, Đurđevi Stupovi or Sopoćani, you will find yourself on the European "Transromanica" route which links Europe's Romanic heritage. On that important cultural route, which makes its promotion possible, the Serbian monasteries are a must exactly because of their original contribution to the European cultural heritage. [www.transromanica.com](http://www.transromanica.com)

\*Monasteries presented in this publication are Orthodox. More information on facilities of other confessions are available on [www.serbia.travel](http://www.serbia.travel), where you can also download our publication „Cultural Treasures of Serbia“.



Studenica monastery, XII century

## Monasteries - backbone of identity

As the Byzantine power weakened in XIII century, an opportunity arose for Nemanja's successors to build the state and cultural identities of their country. In Žiça, Stefan the First-Crowned was crowned king, and Sava Nemanjić made the monastery the center of the independent Serbian Archbishopric. The idea of an ideal Christian blend of the Church and the state was embodied in the monasteries – they became the spiritual, political and cultural centers, and, there, the most important pages of the Serbs' history were being written.



Žiça monastery, XII century



Žiça monastery, XII century

in the decoration of the marble façades and in the sculpture on the portals and the windows; however, its interiority is spiritually Byzantine and the walls are painted with frescoes of surreal beauty.

## Painting Perfection

The monumental Beli Anđeo (White Angel) in the monastery of Mileševa is the most beautiful example of that extraordinary style based on harmony and the classical ideals of beauty. In Sopoćani, built a little later, that style reached perfection. The solemn and rejoicing Sopoćani figures exude internal beauty and dignified expression. That is the antique concept of art, a sort of Renaissance celebrating the beauty of human nature. Sopoćani is the Sistine Chapel of the Serbian Middle Ages.

## A Touch of Gothic

The most beloved Serbian Queen, Jelena Anžuska (Helen Anjou), was the one to bring the touch of the Gothic style to Serbia. The French princess, married to King Uroš I, is remembered to have been a great benefactress and the first female donor in Serbia. Her endowment Gradac was made on the example of Studenica, with the interweaving of the French Gothic style elements.

## In the spirit of Byzantium

In his life, King Milutin built more than 40 endowments. Throughout Kosovo, famous builders from Constantinople and Thessaloniki built churches in the form of a cross in a square, with one or five domes, whose exteriority was richly decorated with stones and bricks. The masterpiece of that style is Gračanica, a harmonious and dynamic building making you feel it is lightweight and sky-rocketing, where the Byzantine idea of the church as a picture of universe is perfectly realized. King Milutin brought distinguished Byzantine painters Michael and Euthychios to decorate his endowments. Their extraordinary frescoes in Bogorodica Ljeviška, as well as in other royal endowments, not at least lag behind the most beautiful Constantinople's pieces of art of that era.



Pecka Patrijaršija monastery, XIII century

## Monasteries - centres of education and culture

After Milutin's death, conquering continued in the south and, simultaneously, estate-owners and ecclesiastical circles abruptly gained greater power. They became new donors and built more and more monasteries. Pecka patrijaršija was the spiritual center of the state and also the place where the Serbian state reached the peak of its fame – in Peć, Stefan Dušan was crowned Emperor and Serbia became an empire. Throughout Dušan's vast empire, monasteries were also significant educational and cultural centres. There, books were translated and copied, schools and big libraries established, and, in the imperial monastery of Dečani, there was the famous school for icon-painting.



Gračanica monastery, XIV century

Kosovo and Metohija is an autonomous province within Republic of Serbia and on the basis of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999, is under the provisional United Nations civilian and military administration.

*Experience!* **SERBIA**

NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION OF SERBIA

**Monasteries Map**

**SERBIA**

[www.serbia.travel](http://www.serbia.travel)

**Holidays**

<b>7<sup>th</sup> of January</b>	Christmas Day
<b>Orthodox Easter</b>	from Good Friday to Easter Monday

**Banks and post offices**

Monday to Friday from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM, Saturday from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM, Only specially designated banks and post offices are open on Sundays.

[www.nbs.rs](http://www.nbs.rs)

[www.post.rs](http://www.post.rs)

**Shops and green markets**

Shops: Monday to Saturday 6:00 AM to 9:00 PM, Sunday from 6:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Stores in shopping malls are open from 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM every day. Green markets: Monday to Sunday from 6:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

**Museums**

Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM

# Moravian Serbia

### On European Defensive Wall

The powerful empire of the Serbian Middle Ages fell after Emperor Dušan's death. After the Turks had penetrated into the Balkan Peninsula, the state center relocated to the west, to the valley of the Morava. However, besides the chaotic political circumstances, in Prince Lazar's and his son Despot Stefan's state, culture unusually flourished.



Manasija monastery, XV century

# Fruška gora

### Serbian Holy Mountain

Although Fruška gora hills in Srem are by far known for its beautiful nature and noble sorts of grapes used for producing the best quality wine, it is, first of all, known for its monasteries.



Krusedol monastery, XVI century

# Monasteries of Ovčar-Kablar Gorge

### Harbor of Serbian Culture

In the picturesque gorge of the West Morava, on the precipitous slopes of Ovčar and Kablar mountains, there is a unique community of monasteries known as the Serbian Holy Mountain.

Sretenje monastery, XVI century

# Prepositories

### Gems of Ecclesiastical art

The most famous Serbian manuscript, Miroslav's Evangel, written at the court of Prince Miroslav, Nemanja's brother, around 1180, is decorated with luxurious miniatures, vignettes, and the Romanic style initial letters.

UNESCO, Memory of the World Register

Miroslav Gospel, XII century



Faced with the Islamic invasion in a long and almost incessant warring during the last decades of XIV and in the first half of XV century, the monasteries became real fortifications. Ravanica and Manasija are belted by the great walls fortified with tall towers for defending from the Turks' attacks. Within the monasteries' walls, Serbia defied the enemy with its culture, which was the ultimate defense. Despot Stefan accommodated the learned, writers and artists from conquered countries. In Manasija, the Resava Manuscript School worked hard, and, there, the despot himself wrote his "Slovo ljubve", one of the most beautiful poems of the Serbian medieval poetry.



Manasija monastery, Holy warriors, fresco, detail, XV century

## Famous Decorative Sculptures

The Moravian churches Lazarica, Ravanica, Ljubostinja and Kalenic are a new type of church, where decorative sculpture had a significant place. On the portals, windows, rosettes and arches, interweaving bands and fantastic animals as well as human figures come one after another. The Moravian ornament is a brand novelty and a proof of the epoch's creative power.

## Lavish paintings of a lyrical atmosphere

On the Morava School's frescoes, the great Byzantine painting tradition blazed for the last time. Manasija's and Kalenic's elegant aristocratic painting exudes lyrical atmosphere and sophistication. Divine clothes, precious jewels, shining vessels and unusual hoods following the fashion of that time transformed the walls of the Moravian churches into a historical document for understanding the spirit of the time which disappeared for good with the fall of Smederevo, in 1459, and the decline of the Serbian medieval state.

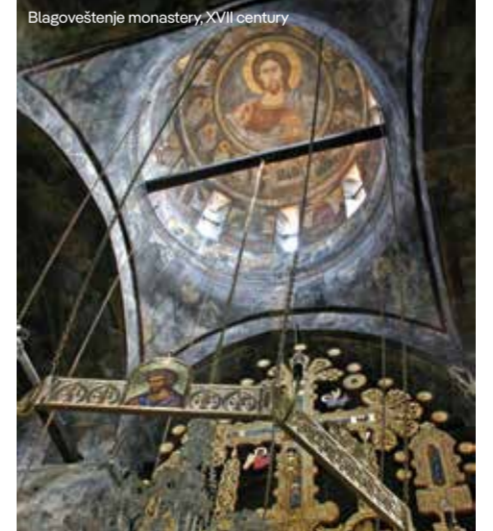


Vrdnik monastery, XVI century

Mountain because on its slopes there are numerous monasteries and the spiritual center of exiled Serbs was established there – Metropolitanate of Karlovci. In Fruška gora's monasteries, the spirituality and culture of the Serbs were preserved through centuries; also, they were an important political center and the symbol of the national resistance to the Turkish Empire.

## Authentic Baroque Style

In the monasteries Krusedol, Vrdnik or Novo Hopovo (New Hopovo), there is evidence of a great artistic renaissance that emerged when it met with the West-European culture. In Fruška gora, the authentic baroque style was inception, the first printing shops opened and Serbian graphics was born. Very tall and luxurious baroque bell-towers were built to churches, and baroque iconostases, big and richly carved wooden separation walls covered with icons painted by the best Serbian painters of that time inside them. While opening towards the European culture, there was a vivid remembrance of the golden era of the Nemanjić family epoch, so, the specific style of the Serbian baroque came to surface in that blend of the modern and the traditional. For all that, the seventeenth preserved Fruška gora's monasteries have a great significance in Serbia's cultural and historical heritage.



Blagoveštenje monastery, XVII century

## Custodians of spirituality

For centuries, those monasteries preserved the orthodox spirituality and national awareness of the Serbs; also, refugees hid there, in the gorge and nearby caves. Cultural and artistic activities were not discontinued in the Serbian Holy Mountain in the most difficult times, either. In XVI century, schools for copying books worked there, churches were decorated with frescoes, icons were painted and valuable objects were designed.



Nikoče monastery, XV century

Repositories emerged at the same time with the foundation of the monasteries since, from the distant past, donors and numerous pilgrims gifted valuable artistic and liturgical objects. Today, in the monasteries' repositories' china cabinets, visitors can see the monasteries' relics, evangels, chalices, gold crosses, ecclesiastical embroidery, silver-plated icons and many other valuable objects.



St. John the Baptist, Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, icon, 1644.



## Life Devoted to Prayer and Work

Although mostly built in the medieval epoch, the monasteries are rather active today, too. Monks living there live according to the ancient monastic rule: pray and work. That is why serenity and happiness coming out of the harmonious blend of the spiritual and the physical, permeate them. Also, they are distinguished by the familiar hospitality of orthodox monasticism from the Holy Mountain to Russia, so they will host you with respect and human warmth. Fruits of monastic work vary from spiritual, such as books, icons and prayer beads to physical, such as honey, wine, medicinal teas and nice fabrics. Entering a monastery in Serbia makes you feel as if you were stepping out from the pacey living of the real world and stepping into a living antiquity which, today as well, testifies that eternity is not far from us.

# Experience! SERBIA

NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION OF SERBIA

## Legend

- International Border
- Border Crossing (land, river)
- Provincial Border
- Highway
- One-lane Highway
- Distances in Kilometers
- Highway
- Regional Road
- Railway
- Settlement Signs
- NIŠ** City
- BRUS** County center
- Rivers and Lakes
- Monastery
- Transromania Cultural Route
- UNESCO Cultural Site

R ~ 1 : 800 000



Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Serbia