

SERBIA (*Srbija*)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 7,176,794

Area: 77,474 square km (slightly smaller than South Carolina)

Capital: Belgrade (pop. 1.182 million)

Languages: Serbian (official) 88.1%, Hungarian 3.4%, Bosnian 1.9%, Romany 1.4%

EDUCATION

The Serbian education system consists of pre-school, primary school (grades 1-8), secondary school (grades 9-12) and higher education. Study of the English language is mandatory starting in 1st grade. Students are required to take a test at the end of 8th grade to determine placement for secondary school. After primary school, students can choose between gymnasium (like American high school), or the more specialized “professional” and “vocational” schools. The grading system a 5-point scale, with 5 being the highest possible grade, and 1 the lowest.



Slavic peoples first arrived in the Roman province of Illyria in the mid-6th century CE. It was there that the first Serbian principality emerged and adopted Christianity in the late 9th century. After centuries of warfare with the Byzantine Empire, the zenith of Serbian power came with the establishment of the Serbian Empire in 1346. However, the arrival of the Ottoman Empire challenged Serbian sovereignty, and after centuries of warfare, Belgrade fell to the Ottomans in 1521. Serbia reasserted itself in the early 19th century, starting a 100-year period in which Serbs took center stage in European Great Power politics. Serbian nationalists fiercely resisted the authority of the Ottoman and Austrian Empires, which sought to dominate them, and began to feel responsible for the liberation of all Southern Slavs (Yugoslavia translates to “land of the Southern Slavs”). Serbian-Yugoslav nationalist Gavrilo Princeps assassinated Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, triggering the start of World War I. The war devastated Serbia, resulting in the deaths of over 20% of the population. Yugoslavia was formed after allied victory. Yugoslavia was occupied by Germany in 1941, but was liberated by Marshall Tito’s partisans, who established a communist government. Tito earned a reputation as a maverick within the Socialist bloc, politically distancing Belgrade from Moscow. Yugoslavia began its disintegration in 1991.

RELIGION

The dominant religion in Serbia is Eastern Orthodox Christianity, constituting 84.6% of the population. The Serbian Orthodox Church is the second oldest Slavic church in the world, and has a widespread following throughout the former Yugoslavia. Small Catholic (5%) and Muslim (3.1%), Protestant, and Jewish communities exist as well.

ETHNICITY

Ethnic Serbs make up 83.3% of the country. The largest minority groups are Hungarians (3.5%) and Romany (2.1%). Most of the ethnic Hungarians live in the north, and the disputed Kosovo region has a majority ethnic Albanian population.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

A typical Serbian household consists of multiple generations living together, and it is not uncommon for extended families to live in close proximity. Guests in Serbian homes are traditionally given a spoonful of either honey or *slatko*, a sweet strawberry preserve. Serbian holidays include New Years Day, Christmas, Statehood Day (Commemorating Serbian Uprising against Ottomans), Easter, May Day, and Armistice Day (End of WWI).





CONTEMPORARY SERBIA

The break up of Yugoslavia began with the secession of Slovenia in June 1991. That was followed by similar independence movements by Macedonia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which replaced the Communist Yugoslav state, consisted of only Serbia and Montenegro, and resisted the secession movements of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Allegedly seeking to protect rights of ethnic Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, the Serbs carried out a brutal campaign of repression and ethnic cleansing. Accusations of genocide perpetrated by the Serbian government of Slobodan Milošević led to UN and NATO intervention. By 1995, peace was restored, and Croatian and Bosnian independence was achieved.

Conflict broke out again in 1998, as Kosovo, a semi-autonomous province of Serbia, agitated for independence. Renewed claims of Serbian atrocities led to further NATO airstrikes, forcing a compromise to be reached. Kosovo declared independence in 2008, and is recognized as a sovereign state by most countries today, including the United States (but not Serbia, which still considers Kosovo to be an autonomous province). Yugoslavia was dissolved once and for all in 2006 with the peaceful secession of Montenegro. Serbia's traumatic 1990s have thus far prohibited its entry into the EU or NATO; however, Serbia entered into negotiations to join the EU in January 2014.

Serbia has maintained good relations with Russia and has refused to participate in Western sanctions against Moscow during the Ukrainian crisis. However, Serbia has pursued a liberal policy towards Syrian refugees, allowing more than 750,000 to transit through Serbia from 2015-July 2016.



(Belgrade Fortress)

SERBIANS IN THE USA

Serbian immigration rates to the United States were highest in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as many faced lives of poverty and oppression from the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Most who migrated to the US intended to make money and then return home to Serbia. Their settlement in the US was widespread, but most prominent in the Midwest. Today, there are officially 181,171 Serbian-Americans, but the number who identify as Yugoslav is much higher.



The Serbian flag features the Pan-Slavic colors red, blue, and white, arranged in horizontal bands, overlaid by the Serbian coat of arms.



(Dunavska Street, Novi Sad)

NAMES

Serbian names consist of a first name and a surname. It is common for surnames to end in -ić (-ich), such as Petrović and Marković. Typical male names include Darko, Dragan, and Miroslav. Typical female names include Andjela, Katarina, and Sofija.

FAMOUS SERBIANS

Tennis players Novak Djokovic and Ana Ivanovic, Serbian-American Former Governor Rod Blagojevich, Inventor Nikola Tesla, NBA Coach Gregg Popovich, Former NBA Player Peja Stojaković

SERBIAN WORDS

HelloZdravo
How are you?Kako si?
Welcome!..... Dobrodošli!
My name is... Moje ime je...
Excuse meIzvinite
Yes Da
No.....Ne
I understand..... Razumem
I don't understand.....Ne razumem
Thank you!..... Hvala vam!
Goodbye zbogom
Cheers! Živeli!

USEFUL LINKS

- bbc.com/news/world-europe-17907947
- cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ri.html
- inserbia.info/today/category/culture-entertainment-2/