Bosnia-Herzegovina

Location
The nation of Bosnia-Herzegovina is located in southeastern Europe on the Balkan Peninsula. Its geographic coordinates are 44°N and 18°E, and it covers an area of about 51,200 square kilometers (19,750 square miles). It shares north and west borders with the country of Croatia, an eastern border with Serbia and a southern border with Montenegro. It also has a small coastal border (~20km) on its western edge that meets the Adriatic Sea.

The country also exists as the combination of two geographic regions, Bosnia which represents the northern portion and Herzegovina the remaining southern section.

Geography
The majority of the country is described as having a variety of mountainous terrain. Across the Western Border, the Dinaric Alps and several of its extensive ranges cover the landscape producing impressive peaks and some areas that even today remain inaccessible by road. Included in these ranges is Mount Maglic, the highest peak in the country at 7,828 feet. Another unusual mountainous area, are the Karst regions in the southern portion of the country. These regions are comprised of limestone plateaus, which have been eroded and creviced by the rain, leaving a rugged and grooved terrain. One interesting aspect to this area is the formation of “rock-born” rivers that appear from a cliff face, disappear underground, and reappear some distance later. These sections are generally infertile and rather unfriendly with their underground caves and jagged landscape.
The landscape in the center of the country is typically classified as dense forests that have emerged in the more fertile valleys or plateaus less subject to continuous erosion. This area of the country is known to be spotted with glacial lakes and natural springs.

There are six major rivers in the country; most of them occupy the northern portion of the country. The Sava forms the northern border with Croatia. The Bosna, Drina, Una and Vrbas all flow in a northern direction, eventually emptying into the Sava. The Karst landscape is home to the Neretva River, which after passing through Croatia, flows to the Adriatic Sea. Lowland areas tend to border the northern rivers and tributaries.

**Climate**

The country as a whole tends to experience hot summers and very cold winters, which seems odd for this Mediterranean region. However, the position of the Dinaric Alps tends to shelter the country from ocean effects keeping the temperature range moderate.

The south is generally warmer than the north and coastal locations are more temperate and wet. The mountains generally have more severe winters and do not get as warm in the summer. The temperatures tend to average from 29-40°F in the winter months to 72-100°F in the summer. Also, the average rainfall throughout the country is around 35.6 inches.

**History**

It is estimated that the region of Bosnia-Herzegovina was first inhabited in the seventh century BC, by the Illyrians, an Indo-European people who were responsible for settling most of the Balkan Peninsula. Christianity was introduced by the Roman Empire when they conquered the region in the first century AD. The Serbs and Croats, who were powerful Slav tribes, arrived and began ruling the region in the seventh century.
and continued through the twelfth century. Hungary claimed ruling authority over Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1180 and sent representative viceroys, called bans, to maintain their land and oversee expansion in the region. The bans ruled until 1463 and during the Empire’s decline, one lord broke away from Bosnia with his land creating the region of Herzegovina.

In 1463, Turkey occupied and captured Bosnia and it became governed as a province of the Ottoman Empire. This occupation included the introduction of the Muslim religion and conversion of many Bosnians. In 1875, peasant class uprisings in Bosnia and Bulgaria caused concern for regional unity and Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1877. To help control the civil rebellions and politics of the area, international powers placed the Austro-Hungarian Empire in control of Bosnia. The bordering Serbs and Croats struggled with the Austro-Hungarian Empire for power over the Bosnian region in an attempt to create a united independent state, Yugoslavia. When a Bosnian Serb assassinated the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, the Empire declared war on Serbia: the start of World War I.

After the war, the nation of combined southern Slavs was formed and renamed Yugoslavia in 1929. Germany occupied Yugoslavia with the outbreak of World War II, and the fronted fascist state created by the Germans was responsible for the killing of most of Bosnia’s Jews and a huge number of Serbs. With the help of Allied Forces, a resistance movement started by Josip Broz Tito, Bosnia was freed from German control in 1945. Tito created a union of federal republics and the communist ruled Yugoslavia was formed in 1946.

Tito died in 1980, and there was no great leader to hold the Yugoslav nation together. Several groups declared independence in 1991 and, in March of 1992, Bosnia
and Herzegovina followed suit. This initiated a regional war as Serbs tried to take control of the country to create “a Greater Serbia,” in areas where Serbs formed the majority.

The huge Serbian army was instructed to drive out or kill all Non-Serb inhabitants of these regions. The attacks began in 1992 and included the occupation and destruction of Sarajevo and other Bosniak towns. Ethnic cleansing and concentration camps continued to devastate the Bosniaks and Croats of the region. Finally, the UN stepped in with initial peacekeeping forces, which were rather unsuccessful. A U.S. sponsored peace talk finally ended the civil war in November 1995.

These talks divided the nation into two separate political entities. The Serb Republika Srpska which occupies 49% of the land area and its capital at Banja Luka, and the Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina that covers the other 51% of the nation and maintains Sarajevo as its capital. Each entities has its own local government of parliament and president, but the central government of Bosnia is controlled by a tripartite presidency with one Serb, one Bosniak, and one Croat. The division of power is further maintained in the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe oversee elections and is in charge of maintaining political stability formerly under the rule of Yugoslavia.

The UN still maintains a military Stabilization Force in the region and many involved countries continue their support with economic and humanitarian aid as the country recovers.

**Important Dates**

National Holidays: Republic Day (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) March 1
Republic Day (Serbian Republic) January 9

New Year’s January 1-2

Labor Day May 1-2

St. Vitus Day (Serbian Republic) June 28

Statehood Day November 25

Religious Holidays: Catholics and Protestants: Christmas, December 25

Orthodox: Christmas, January 7

Muslims: Ramasan Bairam, holy month of Ramadan, Kurban

Bairam

Christians: Easter

Ascension August 7

All Saints' Day November 1

Jews: Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah

Population
The estimated population in 2001 was 4,339,400 people. This estimate has a great deal of variability due to the circumstance of war recovery and the constant immigration and emigration of refugees from surrounding areas, continued military action, and effects from ethnic cleansing. The population growth rate is at about 1.38% and the current life expectancy is 71.75 years. This age has again leveled out after the warring data.
The breakdown of the population into ethnic groups is as follows: 44% Bosniak, 31% Serbian, 17% Croatian, 6% Yugoslavian, and 2% Other ethnic divisions. The three largest cities are Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Tuzla. The population at this time is also fairly divided with 49% having an urban residency and the other 51% living in rural areas. After the war, economic depression and high unemployment rates are creating a more rapid shift towards urbanization.

Currency

A national currency of the convertible marka was introduced in 1998. Currently (March 02, 2002) the conversion rate to U.S. dollars is 1.00 USD = 2.23 BAM. The breakdown of the marka is 1 marka = 100 pfenniga.

The U.S. has estimated the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Bosnia-Herzegovina to be $6.5 billion and the per capita GDP at approximately $1,700.

Education

A lot of effort and financial support have been directed towards education in the post-Civil War years of this country. Before the war, school programs and educational advancements had been rapidly improving, however, war schools became military targets for ethnic hatred during the war.

Currently, primary school is free and required for all Bosnian children. This is attended for eight years before advancement into four years of secondary education. Secondary education generally has three directional paths: general education, vocational, or technical. Completion of these programs and meeting entrance criteria qualify students to enter universities.
There are four main universities in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla and Banja Luka. Although all were hit very hard by both facultative and financial difficulties during the war, present day rebuilding is underway and assistance to both students and universities is being provided by the existing governments.

There are an estimated 40,000 students enrolled in university or vocational skilled level training throughout the country, and the literacy rate is constantly increasing from its current 92.7%.

**Language**

The official language of the country is Serbo-Croatian, but has also been called Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbian. It consists of thirty phonemes each with its own symbol or letter. Depending upon the region of the country, different dialects or accents become apparent in the language and some ethnocentric groups may attempt to separate these differences. The language can be written in Latin and Cyrillic scripts.

Due to the great ethnic diversity in this area, minority groups or gypsies may also speak Romany, Hungarian, Albanian, or Slovene.

**Religion**

The mixed history of this nation has lead to an interesting mix of religions throughout the country. It is also one of the catalysts causing disputes over land or division as was the case with the ‘92-’95 Civil War. This has created a strong coupling between religion and ethnicity and the association with political groups.

The three major religions in the country are Muslim (40%), Eastern Orthodox Christians (31%), and Roman Catholics (15%). The three groups are also closely linked to the ethnic groups living in the two divisions of the nation. The Bosniaks practice Islam, Serbians are Orthodox
Christians, and the Croatians follow the Roman Catholic Church. The remainder of the population classifies itself as 4% Protestant Christians and 10% of Other religious affiliation.

The ruling governments of both regions have ensured religious freedom as a right for its people. However, in some cases, those making up the minority religious affiliation are sometimes deterred or threatened from worshipping.

**Agriculture**

The ruggedness and mountains that cover this country create a scenario where only 14% of the land is classified as suitable for crop cultivation and only 5% of the land is sustaining permanent crops. The crops that are cultivated include wheat, corn, fruits and vegetables. Almost all farms are privatized, but in general, they are small and inefficient. Other problems facing farmers are air pollution and acid rain from the abundance of metallurgical factories. Also, the war caused the breakdown of a lot of infrastructure, which can cause frequent water shortages or the inability to process their products.

Approximately 20% of the nation’s land is considered permanent pastures, this is because most of the grazing animals are able to live off the small amount of thistle and grass stubs that grow in the rugged portions of the country. Livestock that is produced include cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, chickens, turkeys and ducks. Also, Lippizaner horses are popular in this region after being introduced by the Austrians, and the Bosnians have earned quite a reputation in the art of dressage.

**Trade**

The effects of years of communist rule and several wars have left a huge hole in the economy of this nation. The ruggedness of the land and the amount of mineral natural
resources found in this region of the world have created a huge industrial concentration. Industries like steel, oil refining, logging, and mining generate over half of the country’s economy. During communist rule and prior to the war, the majority of Yugoslav and the surrounding region’s military hardware were produced in this region. These facilities actually produced a huge amount of capital and provided employment for people in the area. The war halted all of these industries and created an even larger economic crisis in the region. Post-war production is on the rise, but still operating at less than 80% of prewar capabilities. The urban and industrial infrastructure is in the process of reconstruction. The shift in economical dependence has shifted to the services sector, such as health care, transportation, and education, which now account for 58% of domestic production. Unemployment is currently around 40% as the nation struggles to find jobs for its returning refugees.

Natural resources include; coal, iron, bauxite, manganese, forests, copper, chromium, lead, zinc, and hydropower. The nation currently exports about $950 million to the nations of Croatia, Switzerland, Italy and Germany. However, it imports from Croatia, Slovenia, Germany and Italy an estimated $2.45 billion in products. There is always a net import of food products.

The post-war nation is still heavily dependent on international loans and humanitarian aids in order to rebuild and support its country. As time passes, less aid is needed and the country continues to gain strength.

**Food**

The food in this country is heavily influenced by its surrounding countries and the migration of different people in and out of its boundaries. There is strong Yugoslav, Turkish and Muslim influences all over the region and the combination of these groups have created some
truly unique traditions. Bosanski lonac, a Bosnian hot pot stew, is a combination of meat and vegetables that is cooked and served layered in a special ceramic pot. The dish combines meat, cheese, vegetables and sauces stuffed in other vegetables, wrapped in kale leaves or filling pies and is an important staple. Lamb is the standard meat in the Herzegovina region and Kapama, is a lamb stew. Desserts include various Mediterranean dishes like baklava, lokum or Turkish Delight. This area is famous for some of their chocolate-layered cakes. The nation exports its brandy and locals enjoy both the plum and grape varieties.

**Landmarks**

Unfortunately, years of war and ethnically targeted attacks have left many of the culturally historic regions of this nation greatly damaged or destroyed. The tourism trend has been an odd desire to witness first hand the physical effects of Civil War. However, traveling anywhere in the country is difficult due to the reconstruction of the roads, railways and bridges. Another concern is the occasional displayed dislike towards other cultures and the instability of surrounding nations, which have caused the maintaining of travel warnings and restricted areas throughout the country.

Scenic sections of the country include medieval fortress cities like Jajce and the capital cities of Sarajevo and Banja Luka for their political and cultural influences. Sarajevo had also been popular for viewing the Olympic facilities that were occupied during the 1984 Winter Games, as well as for the Film Festival held there annually in late August. Another popular attraction had been to visit the town of Medjugorje, where in 1981 an apparition of the Virgin Mary was supposed to have appeared to six school children, and where she now supposedly appears daily to the children and other religious pilgrims.