



Interview by Serbian Ambassador to Japan Bojana Adamovic-Dragovic for "World" tourism magazine

SERBIA TODAY

The Balkan peninsula is becoming increasingly attractive to tourists visiting Europe. Satoro Haruna (from the Tokyo Office) who toured the region in May, talked to the Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia in Tokyo, Mrs. B. Adamovic-Dragovic.

Q: I recently had an opportunity to revisit Belgrade, after twenty years. My memories from those days go back to faceless socialist-style residential buildings, but what I saw now was a completely different picture.

A: First, thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak about Serbia which the people of Japan know very little about. I am also pleased that you have sensed the positive change. Our Government sees tourism as one of the major economic areas. This is not only because of the inflow of money to Serbia, but because it wishes to spread the picture of Serbia as it is today. It wants to disseminate a better picture of Serbia as a tourist destination to foreigners who still remember it from the 1990s – break up of the state and instability. Changes have brought about private hotels, private companies; everything is changing more rapidly and for the better. The red tape used to take longer, but nowadays everything is faster.

Q: Serbia has a lot of beautiful sites, which of those would you single out for Japanese tourists?

A: There are so many magnificent landmarks, more than could fit into an article, but let's take as an example Belgrade, as the capital, whose five hundred-year-old fortress overlooks the confluence of the Sava and Danube and the nicely restored old town-centre. Next are the promenades along the banks of these rivers, which should not be missed. I never thought that it was possible to have a good time by the river, although I grew up in Belgrade. Today, however, many restaurants and cafes have emerged there. The promenade has been rearranged and boats are crisscrossing the rivers day and night.

Belgrade is visited by some 850 tourists each year, but almost half of them visit only Belgrade and not other parts of Serbia as well, which I think is a pity.

Q: Apart from Belgrade, which places would you recommend to tourists?

A: Since Serbia is, approximately, the size of Hokkaido, it does not take long to go from one place to another. I heard that the Japanese are interested in visiting either historical places or those where they can feel the tradition of a country. Serbia has abundant remains from the stone-age and the Roman period, whereas tourists are primarily interested in medieval Serbian monasteries with beautiful frescos. The Danube, which brings together eastern and western parts of Europe, is also unavoidable, with many points of interest on its banks.

Q: What about Novi Sad? I liked it very much.

A: If I hadn't been born in Belgrade, I would like to have been born in Novi Sad. The view from the Petrovaradin Fortress overlooking the Danube is nice and the historical part - the old town is also very nice. Many composers and artists used to live there; it was an educational-cultural centre. The atmosphere from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire can be felt even today. Additionally, in the vicinity of Novi Sad there are places of interest and monasteries. For example, Sremski Karlovci is a small town, but a very nice one, with wineries and a museum of honey.

Q: I also visited that town which was, as they say, the venue of the first round table conference ever held in the world, that is, under the threat of the invasion of the Ottomans, representatives of Austria-Hungary, Venice and Russia met there.

A: Yes, it was an important town at the time and the centre of historical and cultural events. You should certainly see it with your group of tourists, along with visiting one of the local wineries.

Q: Unfortunately, there is not much space in this article and there are so many beautiful places in Serbia...

A: It was my intention to make a short presentation of Serbia today. However, I would like to point out that there are three things in Serbia that never change and those are hospitality, tasty food and strong admiration of Japan. As Serbia has been, since the time immemorial, at the crossroads of East and West, it has highly developed the culture of hospitality which has taken root even more with the passing of different peoples through its territory.

You should also indulge in Serbian dishes, for which I highly recommend the Skadarlija quarter, in Belgrade. This cobble road is referred to as "Serbian Monmartre", which is where artists come together. Every evening you can enjoy the traditional dishes there, with the sounds of live old-town music. The place offers good entertainment, where you can even run across fortune tellers, sellers of flowers, etc. It is related to some romantic stories that writers and poets used to write their verses on napkins there, while enjoying their wine.

We have admired the Japanese since olden times; your people also left a good impression on us through business contacts and I would also say that our nations are similar when it comes to hospitality.

Q: Could you recommend a restaurant?

A: There are so many of them and I would once again mention Skadarlija where you can enjoy

Serbian food in a very pleasant atmosphere. There are also restaurants opened in refurbished old traditional houses in the southern part of Belgrade, where traditional dishes are served.

Q: That sounds good and I think we could take our tourists there. Thank you for your time.

A: You should, by all means, come to our Embassy again with your clients. We are always at your disposal for more detailed information.

Thank you again for giving me an opportunity to present Serbia and I hope that the Japanese people will return with very good impressions. I would also like to hear those impressions, both good and bad.

Serbia is looking forward to your visit!