



Bosnia-Herzegovina



Sarajevo 1984

VISITING SARAJEVO



As during any other Olympic Games, the competitors in Sarajevo were “sentenced” to the self-service at the national restaurants; however,

from the early evening hours till dawn, the city turned into a fireworks of culinary and restaurant competition in all events. The old Coubertin rule was applied, but also a much older one attributed to Montesquieu, who summed it up in one sentence: “Eating is one of the four aims in life. I still haven’t decided what the other three are.”

It was said of Sarajevo a long time ago. “this is the place where East and West meet”. The same can be said of the cuisine that people from Sarajevo enjoy. For the great majority of competitors at the XIV Olympic Winter Games in Sarajevo in 1984, it was their first encounter with dishes that for the most part came from the East. First of all, in Oriental restaurants, all dishes are kept on a heated buffet table, where they remain warm and ready to serve. You do not have to know the language, you just have to point your finger. Foreign visitors - who may not notice the bemused smile they draw from the cooks - almost always ask for “a little of everything”. This is their first mistake. For a cook and gastronome the most important thing is to taste the characteristic flavour of the food. Requests for “a little of everything” do not respect the savour of the individual dishes and may therefore offend the feelings of a good cook. The next mistake foreigners make is to wash down a tasty mouthful with a glass of beer or wine. Such things do not exist in a traditional Oriental restaurant - one should ask for sour milk, yoghurt or fruit juice.

It is difficult to think of a culinary tradition that has not influenced the charac-

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teristics of Bosnian cuisine, of which Sarajevo is the leader. There is no doubt about the influence of the East, but east of Sarajevo is Greece which, according to some people, is the “main culprit”. Linguistic analysis has discovered a strong influence of Turkish and Arab culinary art. An introduction to Bosnian cooking for beginners which, unfortunately, has never been written either before or after the Olympic Games, might read like this:

The main ingredient is meat, roasted whole over live coals or in pieces (the well-known *shish-kebabs* and *sasliks*). Meat in pieces can have different forms including minced meat, which is typically used to make *cevapcivi*, whose name is almost impossible for foreigners to pronounce; the cuts range in size from very small pieces to single slices that can satisfy a normal appetite. Lamb and calf are favourites but chicken and fish are also common.

The next basic rule is that in Bosnian dishes there is no brown flour. A Bosnian stew, which may be prepared with all kinds of meat and in numerous ways, is cooked in its own juice, occasionally with a few vegetables. If it is necessary to add fat, it is incorporated slowly in the course of cooking.

The third rule is: don’t leave Bosnia if you have not tasted the meat and vege-

table pies. The word itself speaks of an Eastern influence but in Bosnia preparation of the dish developed in all directions and it is now a popular favourite. This dish is made of thinly rolled dough stuffed with different ingredients: lamb or veal meat cut in very small pieces, cream cheese, spinach with cheese, etc., and there is also a kind of ‘pauper’s pie’ stuffed with small pieces of potatoes or nettle. What pizza is to the Italians, pie is to the Bosnians, according to a Bosnian cookery book. All these products and others were offered to the participants and guests at the 1984 Olympic Winter Games in Sarajevo.

The Sarajevo hosts of XIV Olympic Winter Games did not try to favour the local culinary practices. On the contrary, it was their chance to present themselves as masters of good food, good drink and good restaurant music from all parts of the former Yugoslavia. The best cooks came, bringing with them everything edible from the sea, specialities of Croatian Zagorje, special dishes from Serbia and spicy ingredients from places near Hungary.

The restaurants were named after geographic regions and diners could have their pick. All the restaurants were crowded throughout the twenty days, which indicates that the guests were quite happy (with the exception of Kirk Douglas, the American actor, who paid the very high price charged by the greedy owner of a small restaurant which later went out of business, not because Douglas had protested but because of the citizens of Sarajevo, who believed that his behaviour spoiled the general image of hospitality of their people).

It would be wrong to believe that (with the exception of the Oriental restaurants) alcoholic drink was not served.



In all the restaurants there were different coloured drinks on the tables, including the transparent, home-made brandy made of plums or grapes. Among white or red wine drinkers, bar-men say that the former group is craftier because they use a little trick - they

add some soda-water or mineral water to the wine making a mixed drink reminiscent of the former Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

There is a Bosnian song that ends with the words here comes the dawn, my enemy", but it does not have to be like

that. The dawn helped many a person to leave an Olympic restaurant and to find him home, his room or his position on the track. Climbing up the steep Sarajevo streets or towards the white snowy places, they might have thought they were climbing straight to heaven.

The IOC President with Spanish athletes at the Olympic restaurant.

