

OBSERVATION I

# Back on top

A cable-car service has been brought back to life in Sarajevo. We hitch a ride in a city on the up.

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1



2

There's enthusiastic chatter and jovial jostling in the heaving queues for Sarajevo's newly re-opened cable cars. Setting off from the red-tiled Ottoman-era Old Town that's flanked by the shaggy wilderness of steep Trebevic Mountain, Sarajevans young and old have to look sharp not to miss their step as they hop into the constantly rotating gondolas.

As glass-fronted cars glide smoothly past each other, flushed groups smile and wave, while couples snuggle into the plush seats to take in the view. The higher they rise, the more the city opens up beneath: slim minarets of the Old Town poke through the clouds while wide Austro-Hungarian boulevards and socialist apartment blocks appear in the valley beyond.

But things weren't always so amiable. "Between Tower Seven and Tower Eight you can still see the trenches," says Dejan Gavric, the civil engineer who worked on restoring the beloved cable cars. When they were inaugurated in 1959, these capsules were a point of pride for this multi-ethnic city. But in the 1990s, during the bitter war that accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia, they were destroyed when Trebevic became a battleground. The mountain's proximity to the city made for a convenient hideout for Serbian snipers, who rained down bullets onto the besieged population below.

The new cable cars were co-funded by the city and private sponsors, who wanted to revive the scarred mountain as a natural haven and celebrate it as the proud host of the 1984 Olympics bobsleigh competition. South Tyrol-based ski-lift manufacturer Leitner was tasked with making the 33 gondolas, five of which



3

**"Older people have a lot of good memories, like their first kiss high up in a cabin"**

to the top – even on weekdays. "Older people have a lot of good memories associated with the original cable cars, like their first kiss high up in a cabin," says Gavric, laughing. "Younger people are just discovering them now." One of them is Dino Suljic, a 21-year-old university student who has brought his girlfriend to the mountaintop to take in the views. "I'm from another city in Bosnia and I never saw the old cars," he says. "But never mind that: I am so happy that we got to ride today. It's such a good thing for Sarajevo."

"These cable cars are one of the symbols of the city," says Gavric, stepping out of a green gondola onto the summit. Looking out across Sarajevo, he shields his eyes from the bright Balkan sun. "They are a promise for a better future." — (M)



4

- (1) Picture-perfect moment (2) Posing with an old cable car (3) City views (4) On top of the world