

The Symphony of Bell Towers



Krushevo (pronounced 'krushevo') remains one of the most beautiful Macedonian towns. A unique combination of a picturesque location, traditional architecture, rare crafts and recreational facilities turn it into a magnet for tourists.

The traditional architecture of the town is deeply associated with its formation. The city started from scratch when refugee Vlach (Aromanian) population settled here after their hometown of Moskopole (in present-day Albania) was destroyed in 1778 by the notorious Ottoman ruler Ali-Pasa. Both Moskopole and Krusevo lie on considerable elevations, have a similar urban shape, and the same number of churches. The Vlachs retained their old economy consisting of stock breeding and trading, thus preserving and developing their trades over time. In Krusevo, the architectural style developed in an original way relying on the masonry skills of the neighbouring Mijak masters who were widely known as excellent builders. They inhabited

the town together with other communities who felt insecure in the plains where many gangs constantly attacked the villages. The houses they built are free standing, mostly symmetrical, without open spaces typical of other towns in Macedonia. The backs of the houses are built of stone, while the front is of the so-called *bondruk* construction of wooden columns and beams covered with white plaster. There is almost always a well in the ground floor. The main façades are characterized by painted decorations in blue, often with Masonic symbols. A small balcony with a triangular pediment on the upper floor accentuates the symmetry of the house.

Large churches subtly dominate this condensed urban fabric. They are mostly three-nave basilicas built in busy locations. The frescoes, icons and iconostases are evidence of the wealth of the residents and examples of the artistic style of the religious painting and building of the 19th century, when the majority of them were built.

The cathedral church lies just a few meters



away from the city centre, in the old bazaar, and is devoted to St. Nikola, just as the old church in Moskopole. But this church faced the same destiny as its older counterpart. Erected in 1832 it was burned in the famous Ilinden uprising in 1903, when the entire town was heavily, bombed and stormed. The present day shape of the church dates

back to 1905, when the city revived after the tragic event. Unfortunately the old wooden iconostasis burnt in the fire, being one of the few made by the famous woodcarver Petre Filipovski-Garkata, a master behind the iconostases at St. Savoir in Skopje and St. Jovan Bigorski Monastery. However a few icons dating back to 1884 have been



preserved. The bell tower with the city clock is on the southern side of the church.

The Church devoted to St. John was built in 1897. Among Krusevo residents it is known as the Vlach church. There are two large stoves inside, as in a typical Krusevo house. The wooden iconostasis is carved in low relief by Nestor and Lazar Aleksievski. They carved it for over four years. Carving sketches and tools can still be seen in the church. The frescoes at the entrance were transferred from the St. Athanasius church in the village of Lokveni, and they date back to 1627.

Holy Mother of God's Church is a single-nave church built in 1867. It is in the middle of the so-called Mijak *maalo* (neighbourhood). The façade of the church is covered with carved stone. The roof has a high timber octagon in the middle. The inside of the church is divided into three parts by columns. A monumental iconostasis from the 19th century dominates the interior, and very rich fresco painting can be found in every part of the church.

The Holy Trinity Church was built in 1881

in the so-called Gypsy *maalo*. Today it is almost in the courtyard of the town's best hotel Montana. This church also suffered during the Ilinden Uprising and it was restored only recently.

The newest Krusevo church is the one belonging to the Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration. It was started by the famous Krusevo pop star Tose Proevski, whose tragic death in 2007 prevented him from finishing it. However people moved by his death continued his project, so that the Monastery now is almost finished. It rises above the ruins of an ancient monastery on the Musica mountain, the highest point in Krusevo at the elevation of 1788 m, just half an hour's walk from the town.

Another monastery just outside Krusevo welcomes travellers arriving from Prilep. The Holy Salvation Monastery built in 1836 lies half way up the hill on the road to Krusevo. Hikers can spend the night in the recently renovated konak before continuing the ascent to the city.

