

Dark shadows of Novi Sad



Step into the dark shadows of Novi Sad and follow the traces of myths, forgotten histories, and hidden and mysterious urban stories. This tour reveals the city not only as a place of beauty, but also as a space of memory, fear, imagination and responsibility.

Practical information



Starting location: Synagogue
Novi Sad, Serbia
(45°15'18.0"N 19°50'43.4"E)



Duration: ~130 minutes
Distance: 7.8 km by foot
(Around 10,000 steps)



Material
Needed



Phone , comfortable shoes
Optional: Flashlight, water



Accessibility Level: Moderate

The tour includes longer walking distances, stairs,
uneven terrain, and darker underground areas.



The safety of participants is a priority throughout the tour. The route follows accessible public paths; however, certain locations, such as Petrovaradin Fortress and the underground galleries, may include uneven terrain, low lighting, and confined spaces.



Stop 1 : Novi Sad Synagogue – Memory of flourishing and suffering

The Novi Sad Synagogue is one of the most striking architectural and historical landmarks in the city. Built in the early 20th century, it originally served as a central gathering place for the Jewish community, reflecting its cultural, religious, and social life. Before World War II, Novi Sad had a large and influential Jewish community that shaped the city's culture, trade, and intellectual life. Today, the synagogue remains one of the few visible reminders of a community that was almost erased during the Holocaust.

Today, the synagogue has been repurposed as a concert hall and cultural venue. Its beautifully restored interior now hosts musical performances, exhibitions, and other cultural events, allowing visitors to appreciate its architectural beauty while engaging with the city's cultural life. This dual role—as a place of memory and a lively cultural center—makes it a unique example of how historical sites can connect the past with the present.



Discuss: Does transforming a religious building into a cultural center preserve its dignity, or does it diminish it?



Walk toward Liberty Square for about 5 minutes to reach the Cathedral of the Name of Mary.



Stop 2 : Catholic Porta – Spiritual Power

Catholic Porta looks like a peaceful place in the heart of Novi Sad: an open space where people meet, pass by, wait for friends, attend concerts, festivals and public events. For many citizens, it is not only connected with the Church of the Name of Mary, but also with everyday city life — a meeting point, a landmark and a familiar public space.

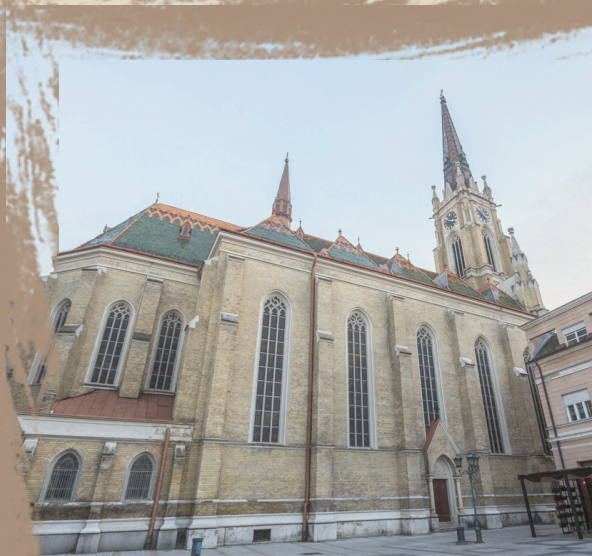
But this place also carries darker historical layers. Before the present Neo-Gothic church was built at the end of the 19th century, older Catholic churches stood on this site, and one earlier Roman Catholic parish church was heavily damaged during the violent conflicts of 1848–1849, when Novi Sad itself suffered destruction. This reminds us that sacred places are not separated from history: they can witness war, political change, social tension and the transformation of public memory.

This stop shows how one urban space can hold different meanings at the same time: prayer, gathering, celebration, conflict and memory.

Scan me



In Novi Sad, religion has never been only private. Churches and religious institutions often shaped education, charity, social norms, and public life.



Stop 3 : Ilije Ognjanovića Street – First film chase

Today, Ilije Ognjanovića Street is lined with cafés, shops, and hidden passages that connect one courtyard to another. More than a century ago, these same narrow streets and passageways provided the perfect setting for *Lopov kao detektiv* (The Thief as Detective), one of the earliest Serbian fiction films. Around 1915, the young filmmaker Vladimir Totović transformed this everyday street into a stage for scenes of pursuit, deception, and escape, using its maze-like layout to create suspense.

While the audience later watched a fictional chase unfold on screen, the city itself was living through the uncertainty of World War I. Totović's remarkable talent was cut short when he was mobilized and died at only 19 years old.



Soon after the filming ended, many of the young men who had walked these streets exchanged costumes for military uniforms. Some, including Vladimir Totović, never returned, leaving the city with memories instead of futures.

Stop 4 : Liberty Square – Hidden Conflicts

Liberty Square has long been the political and social center of Novi Sad. Throughout history, it has been a place where people gathered during political protests, public celebrations, demonstrations, and major historical changes. During different political systems and periods of crisis, this square reflected the tensions and divisions present in society.

The architecture surrounding the square tells a story of transformation, with buildings that witnessed changing governments, ideologies, and public life. Today, it is one of the busiest and most recognizable places in the city, but its past also carries memories of uncertainty, conflict, and social change.



Discuss: Can acknowledging the darker aspects of history in familiar spaces help communities heal, remember, and educate future generations?



Walk across Varadin Bridge toward Petrovaradin and continue straight to Podgrađe, located just before the stairs leading to the Fortress.

Stop 5 : Podgradje – Shadows of the Past - Dark “Raven”



The neighborhood has long been associated with local legends and folklore, including the nickname “Dark Raven,” connected to the atmosphere created by its narrow alleys, hidden courtyards, and the shadows beneath the fortress walls. Over time, stories about crime, disappearances, smuggling, and mysterious events became part of the local imagination and contributed to the area’s darker reputation. The area also reflects social inequalities and the contrast between official city narratives and the everyday realities of ordinary people.

Historically, Podgrađe was home to craftsmen, traders, soldiers, and working-class families whose everyday lives were shaped by trade, poverty, and military activity, creating a strong contrast between the romantic image of the area and the difficult realities of life within it.

Scan me



Walk up the stairs through the Fortress entrance and continue following the main path until you reach the Clock Tower.





Stop 6 : Fortress Clock – Drunken clock

The Petrovaradin Fortress Clock, known as the “Drunken Clock,” is one of Novi Sad's most recognizable landmarks. Its unusual hands were designed so that boatmen on the Danube could read the time from a distance, connecting the fortress to the city's trade and everyday life.

Yet the clock witnessed more than peaceful river traffic. In 1849, during the Hungarian Revolution, Petrovaradin Fortress became a major artillery position from which Novi Sad was heavily bombarded. More than two-thirds of the city was destroyed, while the Clock Tower remained standing as a witness to one of the darkest moments in the city's history.

Today, the clock symbolizes not only local identity and legend, but also the resilience of Novi Sad through war and reconstruction.

“The clock kept marking every hour through bombardment, war, and the city's recovery.”

From the Clock Tower, walk past the City Museum toward the publicly accessible entrance of the underground galleries within the Fortress complex.



Stop 7 : Underground military galleries – Ghost hunters

Beneath the Petrovaradin Fortress lies a vast network of underground military galleries — a hidden city built for strategy, movement, and survival. These tunnels allowed soldiers to move unseen, store supplies, and defend the fortress through a complex system of corridors, chambers, and secret exits.

Over time, the galleries witnessed both war and everyday life, leaving behind traces of those who once moved through them.

Today, this space exists between history and imagination. The darkness, silence, and labyrinthine structure create an atmosphere that invites mystery and speculation.

Because of the darkness and maze-like structure, the galleries became surrounded by stories about ghosts, disappearances, and strange sounds — showing how abandoned historical spaces often generate myths.

The galleries show how spaces once built for war and control can later become places of public memory, tourism, and collective storytelling.

SCAN ME



What we see here is not only history — but also the stories we create to explain it.

From the underground galleries entrance, continue through the Fortress pathways toward the less crowded eastern side of the complex, where local stories connected to the legend of “Peti” are often associated with hidden corners and abandoned spaces.



Stop 8 : Legend of “Peti” – Myth vs Fact

The legend of “Peti” is one of Novi Sad’s most mysterious local stories, blending folklore, imagination, and history. According to the legend, Peti is a strange, elusive creature said to appear in dark, hidden places such as forests, abandoned buildings, or the corners of Petrovaradin Fortress.

Descriptions vary — some see it as a shadowy, bird-like figure, while others describe it as a spirit connected to forgotten spaces.

More than just a story, Peti reflects the human need to explain the unknown and add meaning to places we don’t fully understand.

It shows how myths shape the way we experience and interpret the city.



Unlike traditional Serbian folklore creatures, Peti exists mostly through fragmented local stories and online retellings.



Continue toward the main Fortress gates, where Maltese Cross symbols can be found on the older stone walls and façades.



Stop 9 : Enigma of the Maltese cross

Near the entrance gates and older façades within the Petrovaradin Fortress, visitors can notice small carvings and symbols embedded into the stone walls, including versions of the Maltese Cross. Often overlooked, these markings connect the fortress to older military, religious, and cultural influences that shaped the area over centuries.

The Maltese Cross is historically associated with protection, faith, and military orders such as the Knights Hospitaller. Although its exact meaning within the fortress is not always clear, the symbol became part of local stories and interpretations connected to hidden histories and forgotten traces within the city.

This stop invite you to reflect on how symbols placed in public spaces can survive long after their original meaning is forgotten, while still influencing how people interpret history and identity today.



This small symbol reveals how history, belief, and mystery intertwine — and how meaning is often shaped by interpretation.

Continue past the Maltese Cross symbols toward the outer Fortress walls, where ventilation openings and visible parts of the underground tunnel system can still be seen.



Stop 10 : Tunnel under Danube – Invisible Systems



Beneath the Petrovaradin Fortress lies a real network of underground military tunnels and galleries, parts of which are still accessible today. Built for defense, movement, and survival, these passages once allowed soldiers to move unseen through the fortress.

Over time, local stories and legends suggested that some of these tunnels continued beneath the Danube and connected Petrovaradin with Novi Sad. According to the legend, hidden passages linked churches and secret locations below the city. Although no confirmed historical evidence has proven the existence of a tunnel beneath the river, the story remained part of local folklore for generations.

Even Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen mentioned such stories during his travels along the Danube in 1838. Today, the legend exists between history, imagination, and urban memory, reflecting how hidden spaces often become part of collective storytelling.

Whether real or imagined, stories like this become part of the city's collective identity, showing how communities preserve mystery, memory, and local heritage through storytelling.

From the tunnel area near the outer Fortress walls, walk down through Petrovaradin using Beogradska Street, then continue along Reljkovićeve Street until you reach the Church of Tekije near the main road.



Stop 11 : Church at Tekije – Snow in August

The Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Snow at Tekije stands near Petrovaradin, on a place with many historical layers. Before it became a Christian sanctuary, this location was connected with Ottoman religious life, and the word “tekija” itself refers to a resting place often linked with dervishes and roads. According to local tradition, the church is connected with the Battle of Vezirac in 1716, when the Habsburg Christian army defeated the Ottoman army near Petrovaradin. The legend says that “snow in August” appeared as a miraculous sign of the Virgin Mary’s protection.

SCAN ME



Freedom in a community is not only about living in it, but also about listening, questioning, and remembering. Because the darker side of Novi Sad reminds us that every city carries stories that challenge the way we see its past, present, and identity.

MYSTERY

But understanding a city also means understanding what is hidden beneath the surface.



Throughout this journey, you have seen that Novi Sad is more than streets and buildings.

It is a city of:
memories
questions
hidden stories
silent traces



From forgotten legends to visible scars of history, every place carries layers of meaning. Some stories are celebrated, while others remain in the shadows.



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Contact

EDIT Center

Novi Sad, Serbia

editcentar@gmail.com

youtheditcenter@gmail.com

CONTACT



editcentar.org

explorestories.eu



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