Bosnia and Herzegovina builds tourism bridges

Bosnia and Herzegovina hopes to mirror neighbouring Croatia's success in winning back tourists a decade after the end of the destructive Balkan conflict.

The country today launched a campaign to change its war-torn image and persuade tourists to sample its untouched mountain wilderness, multi-cultural heritage and thriving cafe culture. Speaking at the London launch Bosnia's High Representative **Paddy Ashdown** said the country had moved very quickly towards a stable peace and that post-war rebuilding was nearing completion. "We've decided that this is the time to change the wrong image of Bosnia and Herzegovina and we want to use tourism to do it."

Until now, tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been limited by a lack of tourist infrastructure and information on places to visit. However a tourist information centre is now operating in Sarajevo and the country's first guidebook, The Bradt Travel Guide to Bosnia and Herzegovina has just been published.

From next month, new airline Fly Bosnia will start running twice weekly non-stop flights from Gatwick and Manchester to Sarajevo. Although some areas remain off-limits due to the war's landmine legacy, work is in progress to clear these. "We think we're a year from becoming mine-safe," explained Lord Ashdown. "But the minefields are well-known and clearly marked."

A more positive outcome of the conflict is that Bosnia and Herzegovina has remained largely undeveloped. Its snow-topped limestone mountains, clear rivers and lakes and lush valleys are ideal territory for skiing, mountain biking, trekking and

paragliding, while its location at the heart of Europe has engendered a rich mix of eastern and western cultures.

“If you want the kind of holiday in which you lie on the beach and have ready access to five-star hotels then don’t come to Bosnia and Herzegovina,” said Lord Ashdown. “But if you want the kind of holiday where you can go to mountain villages and still see people wearing their national dress to work and where you can walk for days without meeting a single soul, Bosnia and Herzegovina can give you exactly that.”

One of the country’s oldest and newest tourist attractions is Bosnia and Herzegovina’s national symbol, the bridge that spans the Neretva River at Mostar. Originally completed in 1566, it linked east and west Mostar for 400 years before being destroyed by dozens of tank rounds in 1993. Newly rebuilt to the original design and using much of the old stone, the bridge will officially reopen in July. The country hopes it will not only help attract visitors but stand as a symbol of the region’s unification.