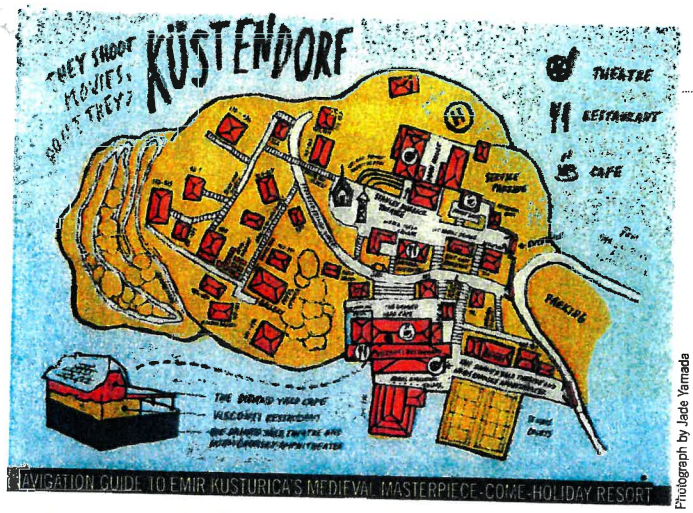

NAVIGATION GUIDE TO EMIR KUSTURICA'S MEDIEVAL MASTERPIECE-COME-HOLIDAY RESORT

Photograph by Jade Yamada

MUSIC, MOONSHINE, AND SERBIAN BOND VILLIANS

MM'S VP BRAVES INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE EN ROUTE TO KÜSTENDORF

After roughly 14 hours flying through assorted stopovers, my travel companion and I deplaned at Tesla Airport in Belgrade, Serbia. We approached a man holding a Küstendorf International Film and Music Festival program. It appeared reasonable that he was here for us, so we allowed him to take our bags. Another gentleman loaded our car and drove us off.

No one had told us it was four hours to the actual festival location in Drvengrad (the real name of the village dubbed "Küstendorf"). Two hours in, I began to worry. Our driver claimed to speak no English and looked right out of central casting for the role of a James Bond villain, complete with the requisite henchman black turtleneck. I frantically texted Tim Rhys at *MovieMaker* HQ: "Cell phone almost dead. Is drive really 4 hours? Have I been kidnapped?!" Tim assured me I hadn't.

With that reassurance and a now-dead cellphone, I stretched out in the comfortable car and fell asleep until awoken at what appeared to be a medieval village surrounded by a wooden fence—which is in fact an all-inclusive resort, complete with restaurants, an indoor pool, tennis courts, a state-of-the art theater and numerous little cottages-come-hotel rooms. We'd arrived past midnight, but the village was swarming with activity. The theater venue was packed with a free concert performed by Zaz, Serbia's top rock band, with a sound reminiscent of Natalie Merchant and the 10,000 Maniacs.

All meals are free and plentiful at Küstendorf; you are charged just for drinks. We had lunch with a group of young moviemakers from around the world, all with short films in competition at the festival. Representing the USA was Columbia University grad student Kevin Lau's "Made in Chinatown" (a 17-minute tragic love story about a frog, a seamstress, and a factory king). After lunch, we followed our newfound friends to the screening room for a showing of a magnificent print of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* The theme of this year's festival was a salute to '70s auteurs, with screenings of Kenneth Bowser's documentary *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* and several films from that period, such as *Midnight Cowboy, Five Easy Pieces, Soldier Blue,* and *Cabaret.* Scholarly discussions followed each film, and an exhibit showcased Polish poster art of the featured '70s films.

That night's Closing Ceremonies rang out with cultural music, fireworks, dance and the announcements of the winning short films, awarded by an international jury that included actress Bérénice Bejo (*The Artist, The Past*) and screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga (*Babel*). Slovakians Andrej Kolencik and Peter Beganyi took home the Golden Egg for their film "The Exhibition." It gets hazy from there: The local drink was akin to moonshine flavored with honey, and due to a language barrier, the waiter brought me a full bottle rather than a small carafe. We ate, drank and performed the Serbian version of the Hora alongside the celebrity judges and festival founder Emir Kusturica, the acclaimed Serbian director. Remarkably, we awoke in time for a bus ride back to the airport with a groggy group of filmmakers, some clutching their new awards tightly as they slept.

Robert Redford's annual Sundance keynote speech usually mentions his longing for that festival to return to a less commercial, more art-driven event. Kusturica has created, in a remote winter mountain village, the very film festival that Redford's own sensibilities and sentimentalities desire. They say that if it isn't hard, it isn't worth doing. Getting to Küstendorf is hard, but the trip is *so* worth doing. After all, it's easy to get some shuteye on the way once you realize that your driver isn't an enemy spy.

—*David Albert Pierce, Esq.*

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