

# 17 DAYS – EXPLORING BALKAN

Experience the very best of the Balkans! Explore the sun-soaked Adriatic coast, the rejuvenated cities of Tirana, Mostar and Belgrade, and the historic sights of ancient Greece in one exciting tour!

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1: Arrive in Athens

Welcome to Athens! If you arrive early enough, head into the city to see for yourself all the treasures this ancient city has to offer. Meet up with your tour leader at our hotel in the afternoon, and then enjoy an orientation tour of Greece's capital. Tonight, you'll meet the rest of the tour group at our included welcome dinner.

Dinner. Overnight accommodation

### DAY 2: Delphi - Meteora - Kalambaka

Today we'll head north through the Greek mainland, stopping off on the way in Delphi. In antiquity, Delphi was considered the "omphalos" (navel) of the earth, and the place where people from around the world would visit in order to receive an "oracle" from "Pythia". We will admire the Sanctuary of Apollo, the Treasury of the Athenians and we will also visit the museum of Delphi. This afternoon we'll arrive in Meteora. The dramatic 'columns of the sky' were settled on by monks from the 11th century, and by the 1400s there were 24 in total. We'll visit St. Stephen's Monastery, which was founded in 1400 by St. Antoninus Cantacuzene and is now a nunnery. This evening we'll stay in the nearby town of Kalambaka.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation

### DAY 3: Kalambaka - Ohrid

This morning we'll travel on into Macedonia and the undiscovered jewel of Ohrid. A UNESCO World Heritage Site on the shores of Lake Ohrid, this city is one of the oldest human settlements in Europe, and is notable for once having had 365 churches, one for each day of the year. We'll explore the Old Town on a guided tour, where you'll see the famous sights, including the Church of St. John at Kaneo, which is situated on a cliff overlooking Lake Ohrid. To finish off the day we'll enjoy an included dinner this evening.

Breakfast. Dinner. Overnight accommodation

### DAY 4: Ohrid - Tirana

This morning we'll leave Macedonia for its Balkan neighbour Albania, driving onto the capital city, Tirana. In a story typical of many cities in this part of Europe, Tirana has undergone a remarkable transformation, shaking off communism to become a vibrant, fun city. You'll be introduced to the city on a walking tour, from the buildings painted in bright colours, to the architecture influenced by the Ottomans, Italians and of course communism. This evening, we will stay at a resort, where dinner will be included.

Breakfast. Dinner. Overnight accommodation

### DAY 5: Budva - Kotor - Dubrovnik

Heading north, we leave Albania behind and travel through Montenegro. Our first stop is at the picturesque coastal town of Budva, known for its well preserved medieval



walled city, which you will have some free time to explore. We then make a comfort stop at the UNESCO World Heritage listed town of Kotor. The old port of Kotor is surrounded by fortifications built during the Venetian period, and is a picturesque Mediterranean landscape. It is then time to make our way to the walled city of Dubrovnik in Croatia, where your tour leader will take you on a walking guided tour of the old town to see the Franciscan Monastery, Dominican Monastery, Cathedral, Onofrio fountain, Orlando's column, Sponza Palace, Rector's Palace, Stradun and the City Walls.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation

### DAY 6: Dubrovnik - Free day

You have a full free day to explore Dubrovnik's incredible history! Want the best views of the 'old town' and islands? Catch the cable car to the top of Mount Srdj and enjoy! It is highly recommended for a scenic sunset photo or two. Visit one of the city's many museums; the Maritime Museum is one of the most popular, or maybe just browse the shops, including the traditional jewellery shops where you can find unique handmade silver or gold jewellery.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 7: Mostar - Northern Croatia**

Today you will travel to another country, Bosnia-Herzegovina and head to the town of Mostar. Mostar is an enchanting and historical town, and you will have some free time to explore the numerous religious buildings, and see the the Roman and Ottoman influences. After your time in Mostar, the coach will travel back into Croatia for an overnight stay.

Breakfast. Dinner. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 8: Plitvice Lakes - Ljubljana**

Your European tour continues today with a mix of sublime scenery and a stunning Slovenian capital. Today you will be treated to some of the most picturesque natural landscapes in the whole of Europe. The Plitvice Lakes National Park is known internationally for its cascading lakes, waterfalls and dynamic landscape. We will take you into the reserve, so you can stroll along the boardwalks and marvel at the incredible natural scenery of Croatia's largest national park. This is one of the most beautiful stops on the tour and is home to numerous rare animals, so make sure you have plenty of space in your cameras! After your brush with nature, it's off to the pint-sized city of Ljubljana in Slovenia. A local guide will escort you on a walking tour of this fairytale city, pointing out the numerous bridges and brilliantly preserved baroque, gothic and medieval architecture. This evening you will have the option of joining the Slovenian evening optional excursion, a fun night of live music, singing and dancing with a three-course meal..

Breakfast. Dinner. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 9: Ljubljana - Budapest**

Today we'll cross into Hungary and head for the capital, Budapest a city cited as one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. Straddling the historic Danube River, Budapest is well preserved and boasts numerous UNESCO World Heritage Sites - its natural geo-thermal springs are a highlight. Enjoy a driving tour of the city, and then use your free time this evening to explore, or join our optional excursion to the Széchenyi Medicinal Bath, one of the most famous icons of the city and Europe's largest medicinal bath.

Breakfast. Dinner. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 10: Budapest - Free day**

With traces of the past evident in the interesting and unusual details, this is your chance to get up close and personal with Budapest. Look out for remnants of the conflicts of WWII and the uprising of 1956, try Hungarian cuisine (so much more to it than just goulash), sample world-renowned wines, and soak your weary rambler's bones in one of the city's bath-houses – something Budapest has been known for since the Roman times, with some 123 thermal and 400 mineral springs from 14 different sources. Then, maybe catch the sunset with an evening stroll along the Danube.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation



#### **DAY 11: Budapest - Belgrade**

Saying goodbye to Budapest, we make our way to the Serbian capital of Belgrade. On arrival in Belgrade we'll enjoy a tour of Serbia's capital city with a local guide, who will introduce us to the city's highlights, including Republic Square, Bohemian Quarter (Skadarlija), Kalemegdan park and Belgrade fortress.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 12: Nis - Sofia**

Our first destination today is a stop off in Nis, a historic city in south-eastern Serbia that was ruled by the Turks from the 14th-19th centuries. Included in your tour package is a visit to the Tower of Skulls, one of the most prominent reminders of its Ottoman past. We'll then make our way to Sofia, where we'll enjoy a driving and walking tour of Bulgaria's capital city to introduce you to the main sights and help you plan for your free day tomorrow.

Breakfast. Dinner. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 13: Sofia - Free day**

Enjoy a free day to explore Sofia. A young and city, the capital combines a pleasing east-meets-west atmosphere against a backdrop of contrasting communist and contemporary architecture. There's a partially exposed 1,800-year-

old Roman city to discover, plenty of relaxing green spaces, and a variety of churches and mosques to explore. Alternatively, the hiking trails of Mt Vitosha are a short bus ride away.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 14: Sofia - Thessaloniki**

Today we head back to Greece, arriving in the northern port city Thessaloniki in the afternoon. Its compact size makes it a delightfully walkable city, which you'll discover for yourself on an orientation tour of the historic centre. The tour will finish on the waterfront close to the famous White Tower, where you will find plenty of restaurants and bars to enjoy the evening.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 15: Thessaloniki - Athens**

Today we'll head south through the Greek countryside back to Athens. On our way we'll stop off in Kamena Vourla, a small town on the south coast of the Malian Gulf, and a beautiful spot to grab lunch. On arrival in Athens we'll check into our hotel before enjoying a farewell dinner on the last night of the tour.

Breakfast. Dinner. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 16: Free day in Athens**

Today you will have a free day in Athens. You can visit museum or galleries, spend your day shopping or exploring the most famous sights.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation

#### **DAY 17: End of tour**

After breakfast get ready for your private transfer which will take you to the airport. In case your flight is leaving later in the afternoon or in the evening you could take in more of Athens sights, do some last minute shopping or even join one of our half day optional tours.

Breakfast. Overnight accommodation

#### **WHAT'S INCLUDED**

- 16 nights' accommodation in twin rooms with private ensuite facilities. Single travellers have the option to pay a single supplement to ensure a private room.
- 16 breakfasts, 8 dinners
- Return private airport transfer on the first and the last day.

- All taxes and fees
- Any public transport used as part of the tour (excludes free days)
- Modern air conditioned coach with reclining seats, TV for showing DVDs, and toilet.
- 18 Experiences (including guided walking tours, orientation walks, driving tours of cities plus other exciting experiences)
- A complimentary memorable gift of your once in a lifetime.

#### **ACCOMMODATION**

##### **Athens**

Oscar Hotel

##### **Meteora**

Hotel Orfeas Kalabaka

##### **Ohrid**

Hotel Tino Ohrid

##### **Tirana**

Te Stela Resort

##### **Dubrovnik**

Hotel Adriatic

##### **Starigrad**

Hotel Vicko

##### **Ljubljana**

Hotel Park

##### **Budapest**

Ibis Budapest City

##### **Belgrade**

Hotel Park

##### **Sofia**

Park inn by Radisson Sofia

##### **Thessaloniki**

City Hotel Thessaloniki

##### **Athens**

Oscar Hotel

