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MACEDONIA AND ALBANIA EXPLORER

9 days / 8 nights

*Come and explore Europe's last undiscovered destinations –
Macedonia and Albania*

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience the feeling of stepping back in time to Ottoman Empire in Old Bazaar in Skopje
- Visit one of the oldest human settlements in Europe, Macedonian Ohrid
- Feel a mixture of culture, landscapes and religions from Albanian Orthodox to Sunni Muslim, and from beautiful beaches to Rocky Mountains
- Enjoy the warm hospitality of the local people



GENERAL INFORMATION

MACEDONIA

Landlocked in the heart of the Balkans, The Republic of Macedonia is one of Europe's youngest, smallest countries, but is simultaneously one of its oldest nations. Mountainous Macedonia still has an air of mystery to it. Simultaneously ancient and brand new, it's struggling to find its place in the post-communist world. Black-clad Orthodox monks are just as much a part of this renewal as the hordes of teenagers, bedecked in the latest Italian fashions, sipping coffee in the stylish bars of the capital.

For outdoors types Macedonia is a paradise. Its extensive wilderness allows ample opportunities for hikers, mountain climbers and skiers. Meanwhile, ancient ruins and monasteries will fascinate anyone with even a smidgen of interest in history. In short, for a little place it's crammed with something for just about everyone.

Quite apart from Macedonia's spectacular peaks, lakes and rivers, it's the hospitality of the people of this most southern of Slavic nations that will make your visit truly memorable.

ALBANIA

In the heart of the Mediterranean, on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, Albania is fast becoming one of the world's most interesting getaways. Still relatively unspoiled by globalization, tourists will notice an inspiring mixture of civilizations and cultures - making this European country truly unique.

Home of both Mother Theresa, Albania today offers not only beach and mountain holidays, a vibrant city life and a relaxing outdoor cafe culture, but also something increasingly rare in Europe these days, a glance into a culture that is all its own. Raised on a diet of separation and hardship, Albania is distinctly Albanian.

Not just the preserve of the adventurous, Albania is a warm and sincerely hospitable country – with enough rough edges to keep it interesting.



SUGGESTED ITINERARY

DAY 1

Arrival to Skopje airport
Meet and greet at the airport and drive to Prizren (98km)
Free for lunch
A sightseeing tour of Prizren
Check-in to a hotel
Free for dinner
Overnight in Prizren

PRIZREN – a charming Balkan city

Prizren is a town with around 70,000 inhabitants, and it is a true open air museum, one of the most beautiful towns of Kosovo. It is situated on the slopes of the Sharr Mountains and on the banks of the river Bistrica. Thanks to its preserved architecture, this town with houses built under the Kalaja is a special curiosity. It is rich in dwelling quarters and houses with balconies facing gardens full of foliage. Numerous narrow, winding streets cut the whole town up, giving the town an oriental physiognomy. Since the end of World War II, Prizren has developed into a modern town with food processing, textile, pharmaceutical, and metal processing industry, at the same time efforts have been made to preserve its ancient architecture.



DAY 2

Breakfast in the hotel and check-out
Drive towards Kukes (40km) for a visit
Continue to Kruja (130km) for a visit
Free for lunch
Continue to Tirana (33km)
Check-in to a hotel
A sightseeing tour of Tirana
Free for dinner
Overnight in Tirana

KUKES – the first town ever to be nominated for the Nobel Peace prize

Kukes is one of the most attractive regional centres of Albania. It is situated in the Kukes district in 100 kilometres from Tirana, the capital of the Republic. The most interesting and famous sights can be found right in the nearest suburbs of Kukes. It is Gjallica and Kosharisht, beautiful hills, barrows and historical monuments. This town is famous for its role in the Kosovo conflict for taking in 450,000 refugees from Kosovo (Serbia). This led, in 2,000, to it becoming the first ever town to be nominated for the Nobel Peace prize.

KRUJA – centre of Albanian resistance

Kruja is a medieval town in north central Albania built 560 meters above sea level, on the slopes of Sari - Salltiku Mountain. The name of Kruja derives from the Albanian word krua, meaning 'water spring'. The citadel has become the main Illyrian fortress in the area in the 4th century AD. In the year 879, Kruja was mentioned for the first time as a Christian religious center. The first Albanian feudal state was created here circa 1190. It is touted as a good daytrip from the capital, not only for sightseeing but also for souvenir-hunting.



TIRANA – the capital and the largest city of Albania

Tirana is the capital and the largest city of Albania. It is also country's administrative, cultural, economic, and industrial center. The founding and later development of the city of Tirana were made possible by its geographic position on a fertile plain, rich in forest lands and water. The year 1614 is considered the date that Tirana was founded, when Sulejman Pasha Bargjini built a mosque, a hamam (Turkish bath), a bakery, and several shops. Tirana began to develop in the beginning of the sixteenth century, when a bazar was established, and its craftsmen made silk, cotton, and leather fabrics, ceramics, iron, silver, and gold artefacts. On February 8th, 1920, the provisional government formed at the Congress of Lushje moved to Tirana, and at this point Tirana became the capital of the country. This played an important role for the development of the town.



DAY 3

Breakfast in the hotel and check-out
Drive to Berat (125km) for a visit and some free time for lunch
Continue to Vlorë (83km) via Logara pass
A sightseeing tour of Vlorë
Check-in to a hotel
Free for dinner
Overnight in Vlorë

BERAT – the city of 1,000 windows

The stunning museum town of Berat is a well-preserved Ottoman city (perhaps the best in the Balkans) with a lively lower town and a beautiful medieval citadel district on top of the hill. The town is also renowned for its scenic beauty and as the "Town of a Thousand Windows", due to the many large windows of the old decorated houses overlooking the town. It is unclear whether it really means "Thousand" or "One over Another" windows. Indeed, the quarter is built in a very steep place and windows seem to be one over another.



VLORË – independence town

Vlorë is one of the biggest and oldest towns and the second largest port city of Albania, after Durrës. The city was for a short time the capital of Albania. Founded as an ancient Greek colony in the 6th century BC by the name of Aulon and continuously inhabited for about 26 centuries, Vlorë is home to the Port of Vlorë and University of Vlorë as the most important economic and cultural city of south western Albania. It is situated on the Bay of Vlorë, an inlet on the Adriatic Sea, almost surrounded by mountains. Vlorë was created in antiquity as Greek colony. Its first name, still used today in Greece, was Aulón, meaning "valley".



DAY 4

Breakfast in the hotel and check-out
Drive to Saranda (120km) via Dhermi
On the way a visit of Ali Pasha castle
Check-in to a hotel
A sightseeing tour of Saranda and free for lunch
In the afternoon transfer to Butrint and a visit of the archaeological park
Return to Saranda
Free for dinner
Overnight in Saranda



ALI PASHA CASTLE

Ali Pasha Castle is situated in Porto Palermo. Most probably it was built by the Venetians as it could be relieved by sea and it has the same triangular plan with round towers found in the Venetian fort at Butrint. The castle is named after Ali Pasha of Tepelena as it was his second residence until 1820. The current fortress was rebuilt in 1819 from its surface with 3 towers.

SARANDA – one of the most important tourist attractions of the Albanian riviera

Saranda is the ancient, charming fishing village and a popular tourist resort. With its excellent climate and stunning location overlooking the Ionian Sea it is definitely one of the loveliest settings in Albania. The town of Saranda is built in amphitheatre style rising up a hill, with stone steps linking the top of the hill, right down to the sea promenade.

Saranda is also an ideal base for exploring many attractions of the southwest of the country, especially the amazing archaeological site of Butrint. No trip to Albania would be complete without a visit to the ancient town of Butrint, one of Albania's and the Balkans' major archaeological centres, protected under UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

BUTRINT – the changing settlement

Ancient Buthrotum, a port from Hellenistic to Ottoman times, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in south-west Albania. Situated on the Straits of Corfu, and surrounded by a picturesque lagoon, it is one of the most remarkable archaeological sites in the Adriatic Sea region. Following twelve years of archaeological excavations and major investment in site management, the site and its museum make it an exceptionally attractive place to visit. Walking through the ruins of Butrint, it is hard to imagine the different forms the town has taken, and the differing fortunes of its inhabitants through the generations.

According to one legend, the city was founded by fleeing Trojans after the burning of Troy by the victorious Greeks, in the 12th Century B.C. 'Butrint' provides a glimpse of Mediterranean civilization from the Bronze Age through the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman periods - all a top a cliff overlooking Corfu.



DAY 5

Breakfast in the hotel and check-out
Drive to Ioannina (145km)
A short visit of Ioannina and free for lunch
Continue to Bitola (240km)
Check-in to a hotel
Free for dinner
Overnight in Bitola

IOANNINA

Ioannina is the largest city of Epirus and capital of the prefecture. Built on the northwest side of lake Pamvotida, Ioannina is one of the most beautiful cities in Greece, with an important course in the nation's history. The modern buildings and shopping centres coexist with the well preserved buildings of the beautiful old city (around Kastro), the imposing monuments, the picturesque neighbourhoods, the popular-art workshops, the pedestrian walkways and the large squares. Ioannina has a large and thriving academic community which brings a lively and creative dynamism to the city.



BITOLA

Bitola is the second largest city in Macedonia located in the south-western part of the country and also one of the oldest cities in Macedonia dating from the 4th century B.C. The city still bears the marks of the diplomacy and is well known as “the city of the consuls”. Bitola is located on an important strategic and trade point near the Greek boarder at the base of Pelister Mountain which presents one of the three National Parks in Macedonia. As all of the cities in Macedonia it has combined its architecture and monuments adding parts of the many cultures that were present thousands of years ago. Still the ottoman rule has left the biggest mark on the city and its present look leaving many buildings to testify for their ruling such as the covered bazaar, the old bazaar, many mosques, the Turkish bath Deboj and so on.



DAY 6

Breakfast in the hotel and check-out
Drive to National Park Pelister for a visit
Drive towards Ohrid via Prespa Lake
Stop for a visit of St. Naum monastery (82km), boat ride
and free for lunch
Continue to Ohrid (31km)
Check-in to a hotel
Free for dinner
Overnight in Ohrid

NATIONAL PARK PELISTER

The National Park of Pelister sits aside Macedonia’s southern borderline with Greece, running along the Baba Mountain (the third-highest in Macedonia). It is located only 15 km from Macedonia’s second biggest city Bitola, and makes for an invigorating natural escape from urban life.

Pelister is characterized by lush, well-watered forests and unique geological formations, which include layers of Paleozoic and Mesozoic magma rock and layers of quartz. The core of the mountain is made of granite, some even 465 million years old. The mountain has a large number of peaks higher than 2,000 meters) separated by deep valleys. Mt. Pelister itself stands magisterially at 2,601 meters high. The park is also rich in springs, streams and rivers, and contains two glacial lakes locally known as the Mountain’s Eyes.

ST. NAUM MONASTERY – the baroque-styled icons and frescoes holder

The Monastery of Saint Naum is an Eastern Orthodox monastery, named after the medieval Saint Naum who founded it. Saint Naum, also known as Naum of Ohrid was a medieval Bulgarian scholar and missionary among the Slavs. He is venerated as a saint in the Orthodox Church and was buried in the Church at the Monastery. The monastery is located only 1km from the Albanian border and sits on the Southern shores of Lake Ohrid.

OHRID – the jewel in the crown of Macedonia

The city of the immortal Ohrid is the sublime lakeside point that for many represents the culmination of the Macedonian experience, a kingdom of light and water, a repository of ancient ruins from Macedonia’s earlier kingdoms. Ohrid’s major attractions are all located within a remarkably concentrated and eminently walkable area, among and above the narrow streets of the Old Town lined with restaurants and cafés perfectly suited for relaxing in the cool summer evenings. Ohrid’s many café bars and nightclubs also make for a vibrant nightlife. As for the lake itself, it is so large and so deep that one might mistake it for a small sea. Full range of water sports, fishing and boating is available, and numerous churches alongside Ohrid’s lake shores make for fascinating side trips



and walks. The wooded ridge above the lake's eastern shore is largely taken up by the National Park of Galichica, an unspoiled wilderness ideally suitable for nature enthusiasts. The uniqueness of Lake Ohrid and the city's historical architecture has been attested by UNESCO, honouring it with an official designation as one of the few places on the cultural institution's list "World Inheritance".

DAY 7

Breakfast in the hotel and check-out
A sightseeing tour of Ohrid and free for lunch
Free afternoon
Free for dinner
Overnight in Ohrid



DAY 8

Breakfast in the hotel and check-out
Drive to Skopje via Mavrovo national park
Visit the canyon of the river Radika
Visit Mavrovo lake (115km) and free for lunch
Continue to Skopje (100km)
On the way visit the monastery St. Jovan Bigorski
Check-in to a hotel
Free for dinner
Overnight in Skopje

MAVROVO NATIONAL PARK

Mavrovo National Park features deep canyons, snowy peaks and blue lakes combine with dense forests that abound with diverse wildlife and it is one of the leading tourist areas in the country. Perhaps one of the features that make the Mavrovo National Park so attractive to visitors is its vivid topography. The relief of the park contains three Alpine mountain systems: the Shar, Korab and Bistra mountains. Between the three mountains extends what some call the most beautiful canyon in Europe: the Radika gorge. More than 24 km long, it displays spectacular landscapes.

SKOPJE – the capital of Macedonia

In its 2,500 years of existence, Macedonia's welcoming capital city has had many different embodiments. All of them – from Roman to Byzantine, from Ottoman to Yugoslav – have left permanent traces on the city as is evidenced by Skopje's varied architecture and its mix of cultures. Yet in addition to its strong historical associations, Skopje is a forward-looking city offering an abundance of modern amenities and attractions.

Here one can find sleek modern hotels above the cobblestoned Ottoman streets, outstanding neoclassical homes right around the corner from grand old Yugoslav-era buildings, red-bricked Byzantine churches and rounded Turkish mosques, chic cafés, shopping malls and brightly-coloured new offices.

DAY 9

Breakfast in the hotel and check-out
A sightseeing tour of Skopje
Drive to Skopje airport for your departure flight



SERVICES

SERVICES INCLUDED:

TRANSFERS:

Air conditioned comfortable vehicle through the whole tour

ACCOMMODATION (in DBL or SGL room, breakfast included):

1 night in 4* hotel in Prizren, 1 night in 4/5* hotel in Tirana, 1 night 4* hotel in Vlora, 1 night in 4* hotel in Saranda, 1 night in 4* hotel in Bitola, 2 nights in 4* hotel in Ohrid, 1 night in 3*/4* hotel in Skopje

GUIDES:

English speaking guide through the whole tour including meals and accommodation. Local guide for Butrint archaeological site.

ENTRANCE FEES:

National Park Pelister, St.Naum monastery with boat ride and St. Jovan Bigorski Monastery in Ohrid, Mavrovo National Park, Daut Pasha hammamin, Cifte Amam – National Art Gallery and church of St. Spas in Skopje, National historical museum of Tirana, Murad mosque and Kuzum baba sacred place in Vlora, Ali Pasha castle, Butrint archaeological site

OTHER:

Organization of the tour and VAT

SERVICES EXCLUDED:

- Services not mentioned in the program
- Meals unless where specified
- Porterage
- Tips