



EXPAT EXPLORE TRAVEL LTD.
TRAVEL SPECIALIST VENTURES
General Sales Agent (Philippines)
travelspecialist001@yahoo.com
921-0580 / 373-1449

Balkan Explorer - 16 Days

Start point: Athens

End point: Athens

DAY 1: Arrive in Athens (D)



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.

Experiences

Arrive in Athens and meet the tour leader and the rest of your group this afternoon. If you have time, explore Athens before the orientation tour and welcome dinner tonight.

Accommodation

Oscar Hotel

Other Foods to try

Olive's have been an intrinsic part of Greek culture for thousands of years. Legend has it that Athena gave an olive tree to the city of Athens, thus gaining its favour. Olives are eaten in many different ways, including stuffed with peppers, and olive oil is of course used liberally in Greek cooking.

DAY 2: Delphi – Meteora (B)



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. Later this afternoon we'll arrive in Kalabaka, ready to explore Meteora tomorrow morning!

Experiences

Explore the ancient ruins of Delphi and the Archaeological Museum. Delphi is recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in having had a major influence in the Ancient world, and you get the opportunity to see why for yourself.

Accommodation

Hotel Orfeas Kalabaka

Other Foods to try

Classic dips are a big part of any Greek meal - try taramasalata (fish roe), tzatziki (yoghurt, cucumber and garlic), melitzanosalata (aubergine) and fava (split pea purée).

DAY 3: Meteora – Ohrid (B/D)



Today we have the full morning to explore Meteora! These 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. We’ll then 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. To finish off the day we’ll enjoy an included dinner this evening.

Experiences

Explore Meteora and its formation of Eastern Orthodox monasteries perched dramatically on massive monolithic pillars.

Overnight in Ohrid, Macedonia’s atmospheric and historic city on the shores of Lake Ohrid.

Accommodation

Hotel Tino Ohrid

Other Foods to try

Burek is a delicious savoury puff pastry made of a thin flaky dough known as phyllo. Typical fillings include feta cheese, spinach, minced meat and potatoes.

DAY 4: Ohrid – Tirana (B/D)



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.

Experiences

Walking tour of Tirana, where you will see sights like Skanderbeg Square, Clock tower, Et'hem Beu Mosque, National Historical Museum, National Gallery of Arts and Tabak Bridge.

Accommodation

Te Stela Resort

Other Foods to try

Tonight there is an included dinner, where you will have the opportunity to sample traditional Albanian dishes. A typical Mediterranean style cuisine, it is influenced heavily by Italian and Turkish cooking.

DAY 5: Budva - Kotor – Dubrovnik (B)



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.

Experiences

Explore Budva and Kotor in Montenegro, where you will have some free time to explore each of these historic towns.

This afternoon you'll enjoy a walking tour of Dubrovnik, where you will be acquainted with this stunning medieval walled city. The city is a tapestry of spectacular architecture - including churches, monasteries, fountains and museums. Learn about the city's history, stroll the marble streets, take a walk along the ancient city walls or try one of the many charming restaurants.

Accommodation

Hotel Adriatic

Other Foods to try

Try zelena menestra, a dish from Dubrovnik that has been around for hundreds of years - the oldest known recipe is from 1480. It consists of potatoes, prosciutto (thin, dry-cured ham), mutton, vegetables and potatoes.

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.

Optional Excursions

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

DAY 7: Mostar - Northern Croatia (B/D)



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.

Experiences

Visit Mostar: have some free time to explore this charming medieval Balkan town.

Accommodation

Hotel Vicko

Other Foods to try

Pasticada s njokima is known as the "Queen of Dalmatian cuisine" and is probably the most popular dish on the Dalmatian coast. Beef fillet is marinated for several days and then cooked low and slow, before being served with gnocchi. Your tour leader will be able to recommend the best place to try this delicious dish.

DAY 8: Plitvice Lakes – Ljubljana (B/D)



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.

Experiences

Visit Plitvice Lakes National Park: a breathtaking region of natural beauty, the lush Plitvice National Park boasts some of Croatia's best scenery. An incredible network of lakes and waterfalls, this is one of the tour's highlights.

Walking tour of Ljubljana: your local guide will take you on a walking tour of this city, the capital of Slovenia where you will see the medieval old town, Preseren Square, City Centre, the Riverfront, Dragon Bridge and Cobblers Bridge. In your free time you may wish to see St. Nicholas Church built in the 13th century to honour St. Nicholas, patron of fishermen and boatmen and the present structure dates from 1701 and is a fine example of Baroque architecture.

Accommodation

Hotel Park

Other Foods to try

Croatian cuisine is heavily influenced by Italian and Mediterranean cuisine - plenty of fish, olive oil, vegetables and herbs. Pasta is very popular; manistra na pome (pasta with tomato sauce) is a staple.

DAY 9: Ljubljana – Budapest (B/D)



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.

Experiences

Driving tour of Budapest: we meet the local guide who takes you on a driving tour of this fabulous city pointing out places of interest and imparting their local knowledge and history. You will experience amazing views from Gellert Hill and the Citadel, drive through the city to include a stop at Heroes Square, see Budapest Parliament, St Stephen Basilica, the State opera, Castle District and then drive along Andrássy Avenue crossing the river to stop at Matthias Church and Fisherman's Bastion area.

Accommodation

Ibis Budapest City

Other Foods to try

Hungarian Goulash - a soup or stew of meat and vegetables, seasoned with paprika and other spices. With an origin tracing back to the 9th century, it's a national dish of Hungary and has become an iconic symbol of the country.

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.

Optional Excursions

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

DAY 11: Budapest – Belgrade (B)



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.

Experiences

Explore Belgrade with a guided walking tour. A fascinating place, Belgrade radiates gritty exuberance in its many architectural contrasts with socialist blocks set amongst more grandiose buildings. Belgrade is where the Sava River meets the Danube. Knez Mihailova (Prince Mihailo Street) is a pedestrian street with historical buildings on either side, with many grand coffee houses, and is protected by law as one of the oldest and most valuable landmarks of the city.

Accommodation

Hotel Park

Other Foods to try

A mix of oriental, central European and local Balkan cuisines. The food is typically 'heavy', with plenty of meat, vegetables and pastry.

DAY 12: Nis – Sofia (B/D)



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.

Experiences

Take a comfort stop in Nis, where we'll visit the Tower of Skulls. During the Battle of Čegar, Serbian revolutionaries were attacked by Turkish forces on the outskirts of Niš. After the battle ended in a Turkish victory, a tower was constructed from the skulls of the killed Serbian revolutionaries.

Enjoy a walking and driving tour of Sofia.

Accommodation

Park inn by Radisson Sofia

Other Foods to try

Like much of the Balkans, Bulgarian food shares similarities with the cuisines of Greece and Turkey, with tomato, cucumber, cheese salad (shopska salad), moussaka (musaka), filo pastries (byurek) and stuffed vine leaves (sarmi) popular.

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.

Optional Excursions

* Stated prices and availability are subject to change.

DAY 14: Sofia – Thessaloniki (D)



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.

Experiences

Enjoy an orientation walking tour Thessaloniki, and see historic sights like the Arch of Galerius, the old Byzantine walls, the Rotunda and the White Tower.

Accommodation

City Hotel Thessaloniki

Other Foods to try

There are many slight variations on the classic moussaka throughout the Mediterranean and Balkan regions, but they all have the same basic format: layers of aubergine, minced meat, tomato, onion and garlic. It is then topped with potato and a cheesy, bechamel sauce.

DAY 15: Thessaloniki – Athens (B/D)



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.

Experiences

Comfort Stop in Kamena Vourla.

Farewell Dinner. Enjoy your final night on tour with your tour leader and fellow travellers, and take this opportunity to share contact details with your new friends!

Athens, Mykonos & Santorini bolt-on: extend your stay in Greece and explore the beautiful Aegean islands of Mykonos & Santorini tour! This tour starts on Day 15 in Athens, and includes ferry travel from Athens to Mykonos, where you'll enjoy a three night stay. You'll then spend three nights on Santorini, before taking an included flight back to Athens for your onward journey. Please [click here](#) more information.

Accommodation

Oscar Hotel

Other Foods to try

Greeks love their sweet foods as much as any other country. Most include honey and flaky pastry, including the classic baklava - layers of honey, filo pastry and ground nuts.

DAY 16: End of tour (B)



After breakfast, your 16 day Balkan extravaganza concludes - unfortunately it is time to say your goodbyes to your fellow travellers. We hope you have enjoyed your tour with Expat Explore!

Experiences

Athens, Mykonos & Santorini bolt-on: extend your stay in Greece and explore the beautiful Aegean islands of Mykonos & Santorini tour! This tour starts on Day 16 in Athens, and includes ferry travel from Athens to Mykonos, where you'll enjoy a three night stay. You'll then spend three nights on Santorini, before taking an included flight back to Athens for your onward journey. Please [click here](#) for more information.