

# The mighty **Balkans** tour with Kadir Zehir



## **DATES:**

**Arrival in Athens for Sept 19th 2024**

**Concludes in Kotor Oct 8th 2024**

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## **Day 1: Arrival to Athens Airport: GREECE 19 /09/2024**

Please arrange to arrive at Athens airport and transfer to the hotel. If you are booking your own flights please also arrange your own arrival to the hotel. We will meet for a short welcome talk before dinner. Overnight in **Athens**. If you would like to do any sightseeing in Athens please arrange to arrive a day or two prior.[D]

## **Day 2 ATHENS to Meteora, Greece : 20/9 360 km 4.5 hour**

Early departure from Athens to drive to the magical **Meteora**. The Greek meaning is 'middle of the sky' or 'in the heavens above' is a formation of huge rounded boulders which appear suspended in the sky in a magical way. The best examples of Eastern orthodox monasteries are also in this region. More than 20 monasteries were built by the hermit monks in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to escape from the Turkish invasion. Six monasteries precariously built on top of the pillars still remain today.

We will have an orientation tour of the town on arrival and then later in the day we will enjoy **sunset** in the Meteora area, which will include some lovely narrow roads off the beaten path and weather permitting- a lovely sunset! [BD]

## **Day 3 METEORA: 21/9 -Explore Meteora**

This morning you will join a half day bus tour exploring this special area. Visit 3 main monasteries of Meteora and discover the natural beauty and the cultural heritage of this area. This **Meteora Half-day** Sightseeing Tour will take you back to the dark ages and the story of the first hermits and monks who laid the foundations of what later on became the monastic community of Meteora. After the tour you will have free time to spend around the township. [B]

## **Day 4 METEORA- KSMAIL/ SARANDE : 22/9 Greece- Albania 4 hour drive time 1 border crossing**

Departing Meteora after breakfast heading to the scenic **Ioannina lake** where you will have a short break where you will be free to explore the **Castle of Ioannina area**, or walk along the lake area before heading towards the **Blue Eye**. Here we will stop for a walk around a natural icy cold mountain spring named for its rich color. We will arrive at the Albanian coastline for the evening. [B]

## **Day 5 KSMAIL- BERAT : 23/9 Albania 3.5 hours drive time**

We start with a short drive to the UNESCO site of **Butrint National Park**, which is home to an ancient city that dates back to the 8th century BC. Anyone who loves archaeology, culture, and beauty will appreciate this impressive site. Ruins from various civilizations, such as the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and Venetians perched on a hilltop and surrounded by forest. You can explore the amphitheatre, the temple of Asclepius, the baptistery, the castle, and more, while enjoying the lush greenery and the views of the lake and the sea. After a couple of hours exploring we will set off for Berat.

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**Berat** is a most striking town with a collection of white Ottoman houses climbing up the hill to its castle, earning it the title of 'town of a thousand windows' and listed as a Unesco World Heritage site in 2008. Despite now being a tourism destination in Albania, Berat has managed to retain its easy-going charm and friendly atmosphere. You will have time to wander through the town after we have checked into the hotel. [B]

## **Day 6 BERAT- TIRANA: 24/9 Albania 100 km 2 hour drive**

We head to the capital of Albania, **Tirana**- a city that has a long history, although now modern and colourful it has boulevards lined with relics of the cities Ottoman and Communist past. We will have time walking with Kadir to visit the massive **Skanderbeg city square, Ethembey mosque[1821] and the clock tower**. We will also visit **Bunk'art 2** dozens of underground room reconstructing the history of the Albanian Ministry of Internal Affairs from 1912 to 1991. The bunkers reveal the secrets of "Sigurimi", the political police that was the harsh persecution weapon used by the regime of Enver Hoxha [BD]

## **Day 7 TIRANA- OHRID: 25/9 Albania - Macedonia 170km km 3 ½ hours 1 border crossing**

We leave Albania and head to **North Macedonia**. On route to **Ohrid** in North Macedonia we are going to visit the peaceful **St Naum monastery** on the southern shore of Lake Ohrid which is one of the water sources for the lake. The Eastern Orthodox, St Naum is the resting place of the priest St Naum, who established it in 905 AD. We then travel onto the gorgeous lakeside town of **Ohrid**, perched on the border of Macedonia and Albania. The lake is one of the deepest, oldest and most biologically interesting in the world. It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979. You will have a short orientation walk in this picturesque town and then you will have free time to wander the streets to discover its ancient churches, fortress walls and theatre, bazaars and old style houses similar to Safranbolu. Later in the afternoon, we will meet to have a **short boat trip** on the beautiful Lake Ohrid . Overnight Ohrid [ B]

## **Day 8 OHRID- SKOPJE: 26/9 Macedonia 172 km 3.5 hours driving**

This morning we will make our way to **Skopje**, the political and cultural capital of Macedonia. With history spanning from Roman to Byzantine, Ottoman and Yugoslav rule, Macedonia offers a fascinating mix of cultures. Before heading to Skopje we will visit the **Alaca mosque**, a most interesting painted mosque from the Ottoman era. Following this we will visit **Matka Canyon**, a deep ravine which is in the small town of Tetova just out of Skopje. We will have a short walk admiring the large rock walls towering beside the water.

In Skopje we will arrive at **Macedonia square**, the modern city centre, with neo-classical buildings and grand monuments built to bolster national pride. We will then walk across **Kamen Most**, a stone bridge over the river Vardar, an iconic sight that acts as a handy connection between Macedonia Square and the Old Bazaar. We will enjoy the narrow lanes of **Caršija**, Skopje's most atmospheric neighbourhood. As a testament to Skopje's Ottoman past there are many mosques, caravanserais and hamams in these winding streets. After a guided walk, we will check in to the hotel and then you will have some free time to explore further. [B]

## **Day 9 SKOPJE- SOFIA: 27/9 Macedonia - Bulgaria 250 km 3.5 hours - 1 border crossing**

We will travel to Sofia, one of the oldest cities in Europe, history going back to 7000B.C. When we reach Sofia, we will do a guided walking city tour [ 3.2km] covering the main sights in central Sofia and visit **Alexander Nevski Cathedral** which is one of the largest in Europe.[B]

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## **Day 10 SOFIA - BELGRADE: 28/9 Bulgaria- Serbia 350 km 5 hours 1 border crossing**

Belgrade is the capital of Serbia and has been under the control of the Romans, Byzantine Ottomans, Serbian and Austrian empires. Looming over the old city is **Kalemegdan Citadel** on the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers. The view from the fortress is fantastic and not to be missed. We will visit **St Sava Church**, one of the largest Orthodox churches in the world. The city itself offers excellent shopping opportunities along the vibrant pedestrian street **Kneza Mihaila** with luxurious upscale boutiques, great food opportunities and impressive architecture. [B]

## **Day 11 BELGRADE -SARAJEVO: 29/9 Bosnia and Herzegovina 350 km 5 hours 1 border crossing**

Today's drive will take us to **Sarajevo**, a city with a fascinating mix of western and eastern cultures and the Capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will spend an hour walking together to orientate you to the old city [**Bascarsija** ] After this you will have time to explore the '**Latin Bridge**', **Morica Han**, **Gazi Husrev bey mosque and bazaar** , **Sarajevo Catholic Cathedral or the the city hall or take a visit to Gallery 11/07/95** [BD]

## **Day 12 SARAJEVO- MOSTAR : 30/09 Bosnia and Herzegovina 150 km 2.5 hours**

We will visit the **Tunnel of hope war tunnels** as we leave for Mostar. On route we will stop to view a significant example of Ottoman bridge architecture, the Old Konjic Bridge , which spans **the Neretva River in the town of Konjic**. Before arriving at our destination of Mostar we will visit **Blagaj Tekke**.This Dervish Islamic centre was built during the Ottoman period and it is considered one of the most mystical places in all of Bosnia and Herzegovina. [BD]

## **Day 13 MOSTAR: 1/10 100km - 2 hours**

We will visit **Politelj** [is an old walled Turkish village, where they still speak Turkish on the streets and we will admire the historical mosque and fort before continuing to the stunning **Kravice waterfall**, a haven in the hot summer days. After lunch we will return to Mostar to visit the famous **Mostar bridge** that divides the Muslim and Catholic side of town and it is jaw droppingly beautiful. No doubt you will want to spend some time wandering over the bridge and village and watching those brave enough to plunge off the bridge. The view from the top of the Mehmed Pasha mosque is fantastic for those that can brave the stair climb [BL]

## **Day 14 MOSTAR- SPLIT: 2/10 Croatia 166 km 2.5 hours 1 border crossing**

We travel on to **Split** and enter Croatia. The best way to explore this city is by a **walking tour!** You will take a pleasant walk through the city with a professional guide and listen about the history and legends of this city that has become the centre of the region.

You will have time to explore the **Diocletian's Palace**, the churches and museums or just relax in one of the many beautiful locations of this city. [B]

**Day 15 SPLIT- KORČULA: 3/10 Croatia FERRY crossing** We will have a 3.5 hour scenic ferry in the morning from Split to Korčula island. The ferry will have food and drink and toilet facilities. After arriving at 2pm, we will then drive 45 min to Korčula old town . Check in and rest of the day free to get oriented. [B]

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## **Day 16 KORČULA : 4/10 Croatia**

Take the time to explore and enjoy your free day in Korčula. Korčula is a relaxing walled island town steeped in history and rich culture with vistas from everywhere you look. Korčula is one of the best-preserved medieval towns in the Adriatic. Enjoy the many narrow streets, beautiful churches and magnificent places in this charming old town. [B]

Recommendations include: Climbing the bell tower of St Marks for the amazing view & lunch with breathtaking views on the waterfront.

## **Day 17 KORCULA- DUBROVNIK : 05/10 Croatia 2.5 hours**

After a short ferry ride we will drive along the Peljesac Peninsula to **Ston**, a small town famous for oysters and its town walls, one of the longest in the world. A short break to maybe try the famous oysters or just to admire the city and its walls.

We will then go directly to **Dubrovnik** where the bus will drop us for a walking city tour and then a few free hours to wander independently or with Kadir. The city is easy to explore on foot and is full of character with a paved town centre and enclosed in 13<sup>th</sup> century stone walls. There are museums, monasteries with nice gardens and pretty churches to visit. You may elect to take a walk on the famous Dubrovnik city walls or a scenic cable car to the panoramic viewpoint and café. [ weather dependant and at own expense] [BD]

## **Day 18 DUBROVNIK- KOTOR 6/10 Croatia -Montenegro 2.5 hours - 1 border crossing**

We move on towards the next and final destination, the gorgeous Montenegrin town of **Kotor**. It is a 5<sup>th</sup> century UNESCO listed town located on a picturesque secluded fjord, surrounded by towering rocky mountains. This pretty town has an old city worth getting lost in! After a short walk with Kadir you will be free to explore. Trying to decide whether to climb around the medieval walls for the excellent city and bay view or wander on the waterfront or just sit in a café on the cobbled streets will be the most difficult decision. In the evening the city walls are prettily lit up to provide a unique night-time perspective. [B]

## **Day 19 KOTOR 7/10**

Today, those interested can return to the old town of Kotor, to either wander around independently or to hike to the top of the city walls for rewarding spectacular views. The hotel is also a perfect place to relax and get ready for the return trip home. [BD]

## **Day 20 8/10 departure day**

Transfer to the Tivat airport for connecting flights to Istanbul, Belgrade. [ B]

It is also possible to fly from Podgorica airport [ Transfer fee will occur- allow 2 hour transfer time]