TOUR CODE

AL1

ADVENTURESABROAD

ALBANIA & MACEDONIA

'Land of the Eagles'

14 days

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Day 1 *Arrival in Tirana*

Today we arrive in Tirana, capital of Albania. Tirana is located on a plain on the site of a Byzantine fortress and has been the capital since 1920.

Once infamous for its isolation, Albania is one of the smallest as well as the poorest countries of Europe. Today this is a country that is slowly making the transition to open-market economy and moving on the road to progress. In the heart of the Mediterranean, on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, Albania is soon to become one of Europe's most interesting getaways. Still relatively unspoiled by globalization, you will notice an inspiring mixture of civilizations and cultures, making this country truly unique.

Overnight in Tirana. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Tirana - Kruja - Tirana*

This morning we travel to Kruja, a small town perched high on the face of a hill and the centre of the Albanian resistance against the Ottoman Turks under the leadership of national hero, Scanderbeg. We visit the fortress of Kruja, the Scanderbeg Museum, Ethnographic Museum, and the old bazaar full of souvenirs, including hand-made articles.

Afterwards we depart for Tirana. We take a tour of the capital including Ethem Bey Mosque, Clock Tower and Shijaku House, built in15th century, where we will experience the collection of beautiful paintings of Master Shijaku.

Late afternoon we return to our hotel in Tirana.

Overnight in Tirana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Tirana - Durres - Berat*

Today we will drive to Berat via Durres (formerly Durrazzo), Albania's second largest city and one of its oldest towns. Legend has it that Durrazzo was founded by the Illyrian King, Epidamnos, who called it by his own name and named the port after his grandson, Dyrrah. It was for centuries the largest port on the Adriatic and got back into world highlights when in 1939, the Italian troops met brief but fierce resistance, and those killed defending it are now regarded as the first martyrs of the War of National Liberation.

Our visit to Durres will include the archaeological museum and the Roman amphitheatre. The amphitheatre is the largest in the Balkans and located in the city close to the harbour. This 1st century construction is currently under consideration for inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage site. We will also walk from the amphitheatre over to the ruins of the Roman Baths located behind the Aleksander Moisiu Theatre on the central square.

Our final destination for today is Berat, known as a "city of one thousand windows", and declared a "museum city" and

UNESCO protected site. A highlight of any trip to Albania, Berat is one of the country's most beautiful towns. The old name of the city was Antipatrea, built on the slopes of mountain Timori, with a castle dominating over the city. Within the city walls there are houses and the Onufri Museum, where we see paintings by this outstanding painter from the 16th century, as well as paintings from his son Nikolla.

We will spend most of our time touring in the old part of the town. This is perhaps one of the best-preserved Ottoman cities in the Balkans, with a lively lower town and a beautiful medieval citadel district on top of the hill. One of Berat's highlights is a visit to the inhabited citadel. Once inside the walls, we can visit ruined mosques and several medieval Orthodox churches, all intact and with restored frescoes and icons. The famous Onufri museum is housed in a wonderful church and holds the best collection of Albanian icons. In the lower town we will see the Leaded Mosque, so named for the roofing material, the Bachelor's Mosque, the Sultan's Mosque and the Ottoman han (inn).

Overnight in Berat. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Berat - Bylis - Apollonia - Fier*

Today we travel to Bylis, an ancient centre of the Illyrian tribe, Bylins, and one of the most important and largest Illyrian cities during 4th century BC. By the 1st century AD, Bylis became a Roman colony. During 5th and 6th centuries, it became an important diocesan centre, which is reflected by the six basilicas whose floors are laid with mosaics of early Christian motifs.

We continue to Apollonia, founded in 558 BC by settlers from Corfu and Corinth. After a tour of the Roman site's library and beautiful Odeon, we proceed to the nearby town of Fier.

Overnight in Fier. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Fier - Zvernec Monastery - Vlora - Saranda*

This morning we drive to the Monastery of Zvernec, just outside Vlora situated on an island rich with vegetation. We visit the church with its frescoes before continuing to Vlora, the town of Albanian Independence, to visit the Independence Museum. Our journey continues through the wonderful Albanian Riviera to Saranda.

Saranda is the southernmost town on the Albanian coast. It became important in Roman times as a strategic point along the sea route between Italy and Greece. On the way we pay a quick visit to the 'Blue Eye", a fresh water spring in the shape of an eye, amongst dense vegetation. It is a beautiful and relaxing natural site with spectacular turquoise colour.

Overnight in Saranda. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Saranda - Butrint - Saranda*

Today we have a morning visit to the Greek and Roman ruins of Butrint, Albania's most important archaeological site. Butrint dates from the 7th century BC, later becoming a Roman colony, then falling under the sway of the Venetians and Turks. Virgil claimed that the Trojans settled Butrint, but no evidence of this has yet been found. Within a century of the Greeks arriving, Butrint had become a fortified trading city with its own acropolis, the ruins of which we can still visit. The rediscovered city is a microcosm of almost 3,000 years of Mediterranean history -- its 6th century BC fortification evokes the city's military power and symbolizes the rich culture of the once thriving ancient city.

After a leisurely lunch overlooking the Ionian Sea we return to Saranda with the balance of the day free.

Overnight in Saranda. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Saranda - Gjirokastra - Korca*

After breakfast we drive to Gjirokastra, the birthplace of iron-fisted former dictator of Albania, Enver Hoxha. Gjirokastra is a picturesque town, perched on the side of a mountain above the Drino River. Above the Bazaar Mosque in the centre of town is the Memedheu ABC Monument, commemorating the Renaissance of Albanian education around the turn of the 20th century. We will visit the district museum housed in the building in which Enver Hoxha was born. We also visit the pre-Ottoman citadel with a weapons museum and former political prison.

We continue to Korca (pronounced: 'Korchah') through Kelcyra and the spectacular Vjosa canyons stretching to Permet, the mountains of Leskovik and the colourful fields of Erseka. Korca is a historic place with rich cultural traditions and some interesting buildings from the Ottoman period, including one of the most important mosques in Albania. Our sightseeing in Korca includes the Museum of Medieval Arts. Opened in 1980, it covers a period from the 5th to the 19th century and there you can see works by Albania's most famous painters of the Middle Ages.

Overnight in Korca. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Korca - Voskopoja - Korca*

After breakfast we depart for the town of Voskopoja which became one of the most developed and prosperous cities in the European part of the Ottoman Empire between the 17 and 18th centuries. Testament to this are the first Printing House in the Balkans in 1720, the Academia of Voskopoja founded in 1744, the famous Basilicas, the painted house walls by the famous Albanian painters including David Selenica and the Zeografi brothers.

Overnight in Korca Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Korca - Pogradec, Albania - Ohrid, Macedonia*

This morning we proceed to Pogradec next to Lake Ohrid, the deepest in the Balkans. We stop at Tushemisht village for a visit of the villa of the former Albanian dictator, Enver Hoxha.

We cross into Macedonia, a landlocked and mostly mountainous country in southeastern Europe, Macedonia proclaimed independence from Yugoslavia in September 1991. Its mountainous landscape is right at the heart of the Balkans, sprinkled with beautiful valleys and lakes, with a rich Hellenic heritage. Its churches and mosques contain many fine examples of art and architecture from the Byzantine and Ottoman periods.

Our final destination today is the city of Ohrid, a beautiful little town on the Balkan Peninsula and is the pride of Macedonia. With its historic town centre and stunning Lake vistas, this place really is a gem. For Orthodox Macedonians it is the spiritual heart of their country and a focus of national pride. It was here that Sts Clement and Naum in the 9th century founded the first Slavic university.

Overnight in Ohrid. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Ohrid: Area Tour*

Today we start our sightseeing with a boat tour on the lake. Our journey will take us along the eastern shores of the lake and down to the southern tip. We will disembark for a tour of the 10th century Monastery of Saint Naum before returning to the town of Ohrid on the northern shores. Upon our return we continue with a walking tour around the old 'town-museum' of Ohrid, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The old part of the town was known in ancient times as Lychnidos, the City of Lights. Slavs gave it the name of Arida in the 10th century, and it became a major center of culture and art for this area. It is the cradle of Slavic written language and literature, from where the alphabet called Cyrillic was created by the two brothers Cyril and Methody.

Ohrid is also known as the "City of 365 churches" and we visit a few of the most important ones. St. Panteleimon Monastery from the 9th century is the oldest Slav monastery in the world. Ohrid abounds with ancient archaeological sites, including an amphitheatre and fortress. During our tour of Ohrid we will also walk through the local bazaar.

There may be some free time this afternoon for you to further explore Ohrid on your own.

Overnight in Ohrid. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Ohrid - Galcica National Park & Bitola - Ohrid*

Today we we proceed to Prespa Lake for a drive through the National Park of Galcica, bordered on two sides by lakes Prespa and Ohrid. The views the park afforded of both lakes is impressive. The waters of Ohrid Lake are breathtaking -- variegated with different blues as if home to large reefs of rock beneath the surface. The shores are also punctuated with lovely villages of whitewashed houses with red tiled roofs.

Afterwards we proceed to Bitola for a walk along the old and well known Sirok Sokak (Broad Street), where the Consulates of European countries were located at the time of the Ottoman Empire.

After free time for lunch and refreshment, we continue to Gazi Haydar Kadi Mosque, dating from 1561. This mosque, with perfect proportions and two minarets, is one of the most beautiful examples of classical Turkish style of architecture. We also include Yeni Mosque, built in 1558 and well-known for its exquisite decorative ornaments and stalactites. Finally, St. Dimitrija, built in 1830, a cathedral well-known for its wood carved iconostasis and ecclesiastical furniture.

Overnight in Ohrid. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Lake Ohrid - Tetovo - Skopje*

Today's route will take us past Lake Matka and Tetovo. We will also cross the National Park of Mavrovo with its majestic lake, river, gorges and waterfalls. In Tetovo we will stop to visit the Painted Mosque located by the Pena River, constructed in 1459 on the foundation of an older edifice. An example of early Constantinople style, this mosque is adorned with an elaborate painted facade and interior, making it unique in Macedonia. In the turbe next to the mosque is the body of the two women who provided money for the mosque to be built in 1459.

We finish in Skopje, once located at the far north reaches of the Byzantine Empire. The name of the city itself reflects its geographic location and role within the empire, as the word Skopia translates to watch-tower / lookout / observation point.

Overnight in Skopje. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Skopje: City Tour*

Skopje is not only the capital but also the largest city in the Republic of Macedonia. Located in a valley on both sides of River Vardar, Skopje traces its ancient history back over 2000 years to when it was known as Skupi. This region has been ruled at various times by ancient Rome, Byzantium, the First Bulgarion Empire and the Ottoman Turks. The Skopje Old Bazaar emerged and developed in an area between the Stone Bridge and the Bazaar, and between the Kale fortress and the Serava River. As early as in late middle age, all economic activity of the town took place here. In the period between the 16th and 17th century, the Old Bazaar reached its urban and economic zenith, developing into one of the largest and most significant oriental old bazaars in the Balkans. Today the Old Bazaar abounds in cultural and historic monuments. During our walk we will be sure to visit the Museum of the Old Skopje Bazaar. Located on the 1st floor of a 15th century inn, this small museum is an essential stop for insight into Skopje's historical importance.

A walk through the old part of the town allows us to explore this historical city. We will see the Stone Bridge -- a symbol of Skopje built by Turks in 15th century. This is a landmark of the city and an important link between the bazaar area and the modern part of town. The Kale Fortress, with walls dating back from the 6th century, is where a town was first started. This was the great town of Justinia Prima, founded by emperor Justinian, and later used as military barracks by the Ottomans from the 14th to 20th centuries.

Other notable Ottoman monuments we will see today include the Mustapha Pasha Mosque, a marvel of Ottoman architecture towering above the old bazaar area, and the Daut Pasha Hamam (bath) considered a masterpiece of 15th century Islamic civil architecture.

Overnight in Skopje. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Departure*

Departure from Skopje.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.