TOUR CODE

GM1

ADVENTURESABROAD

GREECE, MACEDONIA & KOSOVO

NEW TOUR!

15 days

Updated 01/11/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Athens*

Today we arrive in Athens, off-and-on the capital of Greece in its many incarnations over several thousand years. The city received a major facelift for the 2004 Olympics and is looking better than ever, with buildings and monuments cleaned and renovated, and newly created pedestrian areas near the Ancient Agora and Acropolis.

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

Day 2 *Athens: City Tour*

Today we enjoy a guided tour of Athens, the very heart and soul of Greece. Athens has been very nicely pedestrianized in recent years, and most sites of interest are easily and pleasantly accessed by foot or subway (rather than being trapped in Athens' horrendous traffic).

Our guided tour begins at the new Acropolis Museum, located at the foot of the Acropolis. The museum was built to house every artifact found on the rock, from the Greek Bronze Age to Roman and Byzantine Greece. Nearly 4,000 objects are exhibited over an area of 14,000 square metres.

From here it is just a brief walk to enter the Acropolis, near the site of the Dionysos Theatre. Constructed in the 6th century BC, it is one of the world's oldest theatres and the place where the great works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed. We will also see a more recent theatre, the Odeon of Herod Atticus from the second century AD, which is still used for concerts and performances.

Ascending to the top of the Acropolis, we will see magnificent buildings dating from the 5th century BC, the Golden Age of Athens. On the highest point on the Acropolis is the Parthenon, often considered the finest monument to Greek civilization. The temple was dedicated to Athena "Parthenos," the virgin and patron goddess of the city.

After our Acropolis tour, we'll descend and enter the Ancient Agora located adjacent to the Plaka, the old town of Athens. Among the numerous sights in this archaeological park are the well-preserved Temple of Hephaistos and the landmark Roman era Tower of the Winds. From here you are free to wander and explore on your own, or make your way back to the hotel with your Tour Leader's assistance.

Overnight in Athens. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Athens - Delphi: Site Tour*

Today we depart from Athens and head northwest towards Delphi. Our journey to Delphi takes us through some marvelous countryside, and soon we reach Mount Parnassus, where we will make stops at Levadia and Arachova. These picturesque villages are also very beautiful winter resorts of the region. Both are known for their locally produced goods. From here we head towards Delphi.

Delphi is one of most impressive archaeological sites in Greece, a place full of energy, and the place where heaven and earth met. Here lies the Sanctuary of Apollo, where Oracle Pythia was talking to the God, asking for his wisdom on behalf of the numerous visitors seeking for celestial help. The Temple of Apollo, the Temple of Athena Pronaia, the Castalian Spring, the Gymnasium and the Ancient Theatre will all be seen on our visit here this afternoon.

A visit to the Archeological Museum of Delphi gives us the chance to see up close the famous bronze Charioteer of Delphi, Eniochos, the actual stone marking the Centre of the Ancient World and a vast array of statues and artifacts.

Overnight in Delphi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Delphi - Kalambaka - Monasteries of Meteora*

Today we drive from Delphi to Kalambaka. Our route takes us through the central plains, a rich agricultural land often referred to as the "bread basket" of Greece.

Later this afternoon we have a panoramic drive around the Monasteries of Meteora, built upon rocks that rise vertically from the plains below. These "Rocks of the Air" are visible for miles around and are crowned with old monasteries that cling to their summits. The afternoon light provides ideal conditions for photography. Making our roadside photo stops today allow us to spend more time on the sites tomorrow when we visit the monasteries.

Overnight in Kalambaka. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Meteora Area*

The Meteora is one of the largest and most important complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries and is second only to Mount Athos. The monasteries are built on natural sandstone rock pillars, at the northwestern edge of the Plain of Thessaly. In a region of almost inaccessible sandstone peaks, monks settled on these 'columns of the sky' from the 11th century onwards.

'Suspended in the air' (the meaning of Meteora in Greek), these monasteries represent a unique artistic achievement and are one of the most powerful examples of the architectural transformation of a site into a place of retreat, meditation and prayer.

Today we will visit several monasteries (usually 3 in total; periodic closures determine which ones we visit), including the Metamorphosis (Grand Meteora), built on the highest rock at 613 m (2,030 ft) above sea level. Its striking series of frescoes depict the persecution of Christians by the Romans.

Overnight in Kalambaka. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Meteora - Thessaloniki*

Today we depart from Kalambaka and start our journey to Thessaloniki. Our route will take us through Trikala and Larissa, as well as the archeological site of Dion. In the afternoon we will arrive in Thessaloniki.

Thessaloniki, also known as Thessalonica and historically known as Salonica, is the second-largest city in Greece and the capital of the region of Central Macedonia. Its honorific title as "co-capital" stands as a reference to its historical status as the "co-reigning" city of the Byzantine Empire alongside Constantinople. Today the city is renowned for its

festivals, events and vibrant cultural life in general, and is considered to be Greece's cultural capital.

Founded in 315 BC by Cassander of Macedon, Thessaloniki's history spans some 2,300 years. An important metropolis by the Roman period, Thessaloniki was the second largest and wealthiest city of the Byzantine Empire. Today the city is home to numerous notable Byzantine monuments, including the Paleochristian and Byzantine monuments of Thessaloniki, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as several Roman, Ottoman and Sephardic Jewish structures. The city's main university, Aristotle University, is the largest in Greece and the Balkans.

Overnight in Thessaloniki. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Thessaloniki: City Tour*

Today we will enjoy a full-day sightseeing tour of the city, visiting many of the unique monuments and getting a sense of the true glory of its Byzantine past. Thessaloniki since ancient years was the city where East meets with West, a crossroad of civilizations! A huge commercial centre not only for Greece but for the whole Balkan region, Thessaloniki today is not only a beautiful European city but also retains strong sense of history! Contemporary buildings, age-old buildings, and of course the numerous Byzantine monuments are blending perfectly and creating a friendly environment!

We will see some of the oldest and most characteristic churches of the Christian World, and of course we will visit the Museum of Byzantine Culture, awarded with the Council of Europe's Museum Prize for the year 2005.

In the afternoon we will visit the splendid Archaeological Museum, another of the town's must-see attractions. We will also allow some time for a stroll in the Ano Poli (Upper City), the old Turkish Quarter.

A simple meander along Aristotelous and Egnatia streets, allows us to take in the city's main markets, the ancient agora, several small churches and Turkish baths, the Alatza mosque, and the city's main church, St. Demetrius. The main attraction here is the city itself: a vibrant and vital city with squares built around churches and Roman palaces, whose harbourside cafes and promenades revitalize inhabitants and visitors alike.

Overnight in Thessaloniki. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Thessaloniki, Greece - Lake Ohrid, Macedonia*

This morning we depart for the Macedonian hinterland. Our scenic journey will take us through Pella, the ancient capital of the Macedonia kingdom (King Philippos and Alexander the Great). In Pella we will visit the exquisite floor mosaics of the 4th century BC. villas, and we will make a stop at the local museum. We then continue through the plateau of western Macedonia and arrive at the picturesque town of Edessa. Here we will make a short visit, and perhaps enjoy a stop for some local coffee before proceeding to the border.

In the afternoon 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 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 9 *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 10 *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 11 *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 12 *Skopje, Macedonia - Prizren, Kosovo*

Just a short drive north from Skopje brings us to the border with Kosovo. Kosovo became a nation when its parliament declared independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008. The United States and many European countries have recognized Kosovo's independence, while Serbia and some of its allies, most notably Russia, have denounced the declaration as illegal.

Cultures and religions have been clashing here for centuries, ever since the joint Serbian and Albanian force was defeated by the Ottomans in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. But, between times of great unrest, this landlocked country has seen long periods of peaceful coexistence and mutual cultural enrichment. While the predominantly Muslim Albanians dominate the population, and Serbs, mostly Orthodox Christians, come second, there is a plethora of other smaller groups displaying unique cultures and ways of life.

In the 1990s poor economic policies, international sanctions, limited access to trade and finance, and ethnic conflict severely damaged Kosovo's economy, and it now has one of the poorest economies in Europe.

We head towards the historical city of Prizren, a true open-air museum considered by many to be one of the most beautiful towns of Kosovo. Prizren, situated on the slopes of the Sharr Mountains and on the banks of the river Bistrica. This town is known for its wonderfully-preserved architectural heritage; one can see lovely dwelling quarters, houses with balconies facing gardens full of foliage, and narrow, winding streets cutting through the town.

The large Sinan Pasha Mosque dating from 1561 dominates the small city center. As we wander around the town we will see many examples of 18th and 19th century Ottoman houses; which have nearly all disappeared in Pristina. The small cobbled Shadervan Square is home to several cafés. Upstream is the attractive arched 15th century Ottoman bridge. Behind the mosque, the road climbs up past a neighborhood of destroyed Serb houses, and the small, preserved 14th century Saint Saviour church. At the top of the road is the 11th century Kaljaja Fortress with its upper and lower town.

Overnight Prizren. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Prizren - Decan - Pristina*

This morning we depart from Prizren and head towards Pristina. En route we will stop at the Decani Monastery, regarded as the largest and best-preserved medieval monastery in Kosovo. The founding charter of the monastery is dated 1330. The monastic church, dedicated to Christ Pantocrator and built from blocks of red-purple, light-yellow and onyx marble, was constructed by builders working under a Franciscan monk, Vitus of Kotor. The church is distinguished by its imposing size and Romanesque and Early Gothic structure and design.

We then continue to Pristina, located at the northeast edge of the Kosovo plain in the centre of Kosovo. It is on the

route between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Serbia proper. This is the economic, cultural, political, and administrative centre of Kosovo.

Overnight in Pristina. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Pristina: City Tour*

Today we will enjoy a sightseeing tour of Pristina, and will stroll along its streets and the main square located right in the heart of the town. One of Pristina's liveliest areas is without a doubt the large bazaar. With the bustling atmosphere typical of all Balkan markets, one can find all varieties of goods here for sale. We will see the 19th century Ottoman clock tower nearby to the bazaar. Opposite the clock tower is the Fatih or Imperial Mosque, built in 1461 under Turkish Sultan Mehmet II Fatih ('the conqueror'). The Carshia Mosque (Xhamia e Carshise) or 'market mosque' is Pristina's oldest building, constructed in the 15th century.

We will take some time to enjoy the Ethnographic Museum. Located in a lovely traditional 18th century house, this is one of the only original buildings left in the old bazaar area.

A short drive into the countryside just a few kilometers south of Pristina will bring us to the town of Gracanica, home to the Gracanica Monastery, perhaps Kosovo's greatest religious monument. Completed in 1321 and built by the legendary king of Serbia, Milutin Nemanjic, the Serbian Orthodox monastery church represents the height of Serbian Byzantine tradition. (If time does not allow for this visit today then your tour leader may opt to move this sightseeing to tomorrow morning).

Overnight in Pristina. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Departure*

Departure from Pristina.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.