Tour Code
AD6

ADVENTURESABROAD

Adriatic to Ohrid

Imperial Crossroads of the Balkans

30 days

Created on: 7 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrive in Ljubljana, Slovenia

Welcome to Ljubljana, Slovenia's enchanting capital where fairy-tale architecture meets vibrant café culture. This compact gem, rebuilt after a devastating 1511 earthquake, earned the nickname "Bela Ljubljana" (White Ljubljana) for its luminous baroque facades. Tonight we gather with fellow travellers for our first dinner together, beginning our journey through three nations where empires once collided and cultures beautifully merged.

Overnight in Ljubljana.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Ljubljana: City Tour

Today we explore Ljubljana's baroque heart, where every street whispers stories of reinvention. Our ascent to Ljubljana Castle reveals the city's 16th-century fortress, housing a remarkable Virtual Museum that chronicles Slovenia's path from medieval trading post to independent nation. From the main tower, we witness panoramic views stretching across red-tiled rooftops to the Julian Alps beyond.

We then descend through the old town's cobbled arteries, discovering Parliament buildings and the university before reaching Ljubljana Cathedral. Here, modern bronze doors commemorate Slovenia's struggle for independence through intricate reliefs. Our morning culminates in the bustling outdoor markets, where locals select wild mushrooms, mountain herbs, and fresh produce from nearby farms. The air fills with the scents of lavender, fresh bread, and the earthy aroma of seasonal vegetables, creating a sensory symphony that defines Slovenian daily life.

Overnight Ljubljana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Ljubljana - Skofja Loka - Bled

Through rolling green countryside dotted with traditional farmhouses, we journey to some of Slovenia's oldest inhabited settlements. Our first stop is Skofja Loka, "Bishop's Meadow," where medieval streets wind beneath a 13th-century castle. We explore Mestni Trg's historic core, visiting St. James' Church and the Granary before ascending to the castle, now home to Slovenia's finest ethnographic museum.

Continuing through hamlets where potato and corn crops thrive beneath church spires, we reach Radovljica, a medieval town encircled by ancient moats. A guided visit to the Beekeeping Museum introduces Slovenia's beloved beekeeping tradition, including the colourful painted hive panels that make Slovenian apiaries so distinctive.

Our route then unfolds the breathtaking approach to Bled, where an emerald glacial lake mirrors surrounding peaks. The fairy-tale vista emerges: Bled Castle perched impossibly high on sheer cliffs, tiny Bled Otok island crowned with its white church, all framed by the towering Karavanke Mountains and Julian Alps creating one of Europe's most photographed panoramas.

Overnight in Bled.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Bled & Lake Bohinj

Lake Bled has been considered sacred for millennia, its mirror-like surface reflecting Slovenia's highest peaks. We begin at the 11th-century

castle, dramatically positioned on a 130-metre cliff, housing medieval artifacts and offering spectacular lake vistas. Next, we board a traditional pletna boat—unchanged in design for centuries—to reach Slovenia's only natural island. On Bled Otok, the Church of St. Mary of the Assumption holds an enchanting legend: ring the bell and your wish will be granted.

This afternoon we venture through lush valleys to Lake Bohinj, Slovenia's largest permanent lake and gateway to Triglav National Park. Fed by the Savica waterfall, immortalised in France Pre□eren's epic poem "Baptism at the Savica Waterfall," this pristine alpine lake remains protected from development. We visit the Church of St. John the Baptist in Bohinjska Bistrica, famous for its medieval frescoes.

Our cable car ascends 1,537 metres up Mount Vogel, providing breathtaking panoramas of the Julian Alps and glimpses of Mount Triglav, Slovenia's holy mountain and national symbol.

Overnight in Bled.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Bled - Kranjska Gora - Bovec - Kobarid*

We leave Bled for Kranjska Gora, Slovenia's best-known Alpine resort town, where we stop for a short walk and a break beneath the Julian Alps.

The Predil Pass then carries us through Slovenia's most dramatic mountain gateway, a historic corridor where ancient trade routes carved passages between the Adriatic and Central Europe. This strategic passage witnessed Roman legions and modern armies alike. As we descend we pass through Log pod Mangartom, a community that rebuilt after a devastating landslide in 2000, testament to Alpine resilience where beauty and danger intertwine.

Bovec emerges in the pristine Soa Valley like a gem between emerald waters and towering peaks. Beneath Slovenia's highest ski resort, Kanin, this charming town evolved from strategic stronghold to adventure tourism capital. The impossibly turquoise Soa River, flowing from Triglav's glacial sources, creates landscapes seemingly untouched by time.

Yet peaceful valleys harbour dark history. At Kobarid, industrial warfare scarred tranquil mountainsides. In October 1917, the Battle of Caporetto became World War I's most devastating offensive, immortalised by Ernest Hemingway in "A Farewell to Arms." The WWI Museum presents this catastrophe through artifacts and testimonies, helping us understand how 300,000 casualties fell in eighteen days of fighting.

* PLEASE NOTE: Due to limited hotel availability, we may accomplish the above listed sightseeing and then return to spend the night in Bovec rather than staying in Kobarid.

Overnight in Kobarid (or Bovec, depending on accommodation availability).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Kobarid - Predjama - Postojna Caves - Piran

Following the impossibly blue-green Soa River, we transition from Alpine territory to the limestone plateau of Primorska. The Soa flows through a fairy-tale landscape of waterfalls, pools, ravines and canyons, supporting distinct flora and fauna while creating stunning vistas at every turn.

We continue through the "karst" region to Postojna Caves for a guided exploration. This landscape was once submerged by ancient seas; today subterranean rivers have carved magnificent caverns while rich red soil fills poljes—depressions left when caverns collapsed. The 27-kilometre cave system, over two million years old, consists of spectacular caverns, halls and passages filled with enormous stalactites and stalagmites. The caves harbour unique ecosystems, most famously the Proteus Anguinus or "human fish"—a small pink, blind salamander equipped with both gills and rudimentary lungs.

Our next marvel is Predjama Castle, built impossibly into a 123-metre limestone cliff face at a cave entrance. This medieval fortress, utilised by a robber baron centuries ago, has been described as "a masterpiece of medieval ingenuity, courage, cunning and defiance."

We conclude in Piran, beautifully positioned on the Adriatic—a living museum of medieval architecture.

Overnight in Piran.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Piran, Slovenia - Porec, Croatia - Pula - Opatija

We depart Slovenia for Croatia, first stopping in Porec, a seaside gem dating to Roman times. Walking through ancient narrow lanes, we visit the Euphrasian Basilica, housing some of the world's finest Byzantine mosaics, comparable to Ravenna's masterpieces. This UNESCO World Heritage site represents Croatian artistic achievement across centuries.

We continue to Pula, called Pola by the first Illyrian settlers and Polensium by Romans. Near the harbour stands one of the town's most impressive monuments: the amphitheatre, built entirely of local limestone and designed for gladiatorial contests accommodating 22,000 spectators. We also explore ruins of the Roman Temple of Augustus, testament to the city's imperial heritage.

Our day concludes in Opatija, Croatia's oldest established resort and still among its most popular. A Rijeka businessman built the first villa here in 1844, but after a visit by the trend-setting Austrian Empress, the town was promoted as an aristocratic health resort. The elegant Habsburg-era architecture and manicured parks still evoke this golden age of spa culture.

(Depending on accommodation availability, we may overnight in Opatija or continue to nearby Rijeka.)

Overnight in Opatija or Rijeka.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Opatija/Rijeka - Samobor - Zagreb

We spend our final morning on the Kvarner coast before turning our backs on the Adriatic and heading inland.

Opatija earned its reputation as the Habsburg Riviera the old-fashioned way: a Rijeka merchant built the first villa here in 1844, the Empress Elisabeth came to take the waters, and within a decade the Austrian aristocracy had followed. The grand hotels and sanatoriums that line the Lungomare — a promenade stretching along the sea cliffs — tell the story of an age when a train journey from Vienna could deposit the empire's elite into Mediterranean sunshine within hours.

Depending on tour overnight location, we may spend part of the morning in Rijeka, Opatija's larger neighbour and one of Croatia's principal port cities, where the old Hungarian and Italian quarters reveal yet another layer of this endlessly contested coastline, and/or some time in Opatija.

Then we turn inland. Our route climbs away from the sea through green karst hills before we pause in Samobor, a baroque market town twenty kilometres short of Zagreb. While Opatija's promenade was being strolled by Austrian aristocrats, Samobor's coffeehouses were filling with Croatian poets and political thinkers laying the groundwork for independence — the same coastline, two very different ideas about the empire. Today it's known for its food: the spiced mu□tarda on every table, Bermet liqueur as an aperitif, and the krem□nita cream cake that has been the town's calling card for generations. Time here is on your own for lunch and exploring before we continue to the capital.

Overnight in Zagreb.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Zagreb City Touring

Zagreb began as two rival settlements on adjacent hills — fortified Gradec to the west and ecclesiastical Kaptol to the east, separated by a stream and centuries of mutual suspicion. Officially merged in 1850, they retain distinct characters that a morning on foot reveals with satisfying clarity.

We begin at Ban Jelacic Square, where the equestrian statue of 19th-century governor Josip Jelacic marks the boundary between Zagreb's medieval upper town and its elegant lower boulevards. Dolac Market operates just above the square, its red umbrellas sheltering vendors selling mountain cheeses, cured meats, and seasonal produce since 1930.

Ascending to Gradec, we pass through the Stone Gate — sole survivor of the town's four medieval entrances, home to a painting of the Virgin Mary that emerged unscathed when fire destroyed the gateway in 1731. St. Mark's Church crowns the hill, its tiled roof displaying medieval coats of arms above the square where Parliament and the baroque Ban's Palace face each other. We descend to Kaptol and Zagreb Cathedral, whose neo-Gothic twin spires have anchored the skyline since the medieval settlement's earliest days, rebuilt repeatedly after Mongol invasion, earthquake, and war.

Our tour concludes at the Croatian Natural History Museum, reopened in 2024 after extensive post-earthquake renovation. The historic Amadeo Palace now houses 39 interactive halls including the famous Krapina Neanderthal collection — among the most significant Neanderthal remains ever discovered, found just 50 km from Zagreb in 1899 and still reshaping understanding of Neanderthal behaviour — and an atrium Rock Map constructed from Croatia's own geological materials.

The afternoon is yours. Zagreb's cafe culture rewards unhurried sitting.

Overnight in Zagreb.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Zagreb - Plitvice Lakes

We depart for Plitvice, a UNESCO World Heritage site and breathtaking natural wonder renowned for its stunning cascade of sixteen terraced lakes, each more mesmerising than the last. As we delve deeper into the park, lush verdant forests of towering pines, beeches, and firs create a serene and awe-inspiring ambience.

The lakes, formed over millennia by gradual calcium carbonate deposition, shimmer in various shades of blue and green, creating truly magical spectacles. Our leisurely walk follows well-maintained wooden pathways, offering panoramic views of cascading waterfalls and crystal-clear lakes.* We hike the Lower Lakes, where cascades tumble between quiet pools. Those with energy to spare can then continue on to the Upper Lakes, including a peaceful boat ride across the largest lake. Your Tour Leader will help anyone who prefers to stop after the Lower Lakes make their way to the hotel, while the others carry on.

Wandering through this natural wonderland, we encounter diverse flora and fauna. We watch for the park's 120 bird species, including majestic eagles and elusive owls. The lakes harbour various fish species such as trout and carp, plus mammals like deer and wild boar. This pristine ecosystem demonstrates nature's remarkable ability to create beauty through geological processes spanning countless centuries.

* Good walkers will have no trouble with these well-maintained trails.

Overnight in Plitvice.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Plitvice Lakes - Zadar - Split

We travel to the coast via Zadar, ancient capital of Byzantine Dalmatia. This large city crowds its historic centre onto a small peninsula jutting into the Adriatic. When Germans occupied it in 1943, Allied bombings destroyed about 60% of the city. Zadar rebuilt once more, as it had many times throughout its tumultuous history, explaining the variety of architectural styles from Roman Corinthian columns to Romanesque churches.

We enter through Venetian gates and proceed to the Roman Forum, Church of St. Donatus and Cathedral of Anastasius, visiting the Archaeological Museum with its fine collection of Roman and medieval artifacts. NOTE: If the Archaeological Museum is closed due to erratic opening hours, we'll visit the Treasury, a collection of relics maintained by Benedictine nuns in the Church and Nunnery of St. Mary.

We continue to Trogir, where we admire from outside the 13th-century portal of the Cathedral of St. Lawrence, a masterpiece of Romanesque sculpture by Master Radovan. Interior visits depend on seasonal opening hours. Then we proceed to Split (ancient Spalato), Croatia's second-largest city. The historic centre actually lies within the walls of Emperor Diocletian's enormous retirement palace, built

between 295-305 AD. This palace served as residence, military fortress, and later, fortified town. Massive walls pierce with four main gates create a rectangular plan where ancient and modern life intertwines seamlessly.

Overnight in Split.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Split - Ferry to Hvar

This morning we explore ancient Split's heart through a walking tour. We visit the cryptoporticus (underground vaults) of Diocletian's Palace, the Mausoleum and Church of St. Domnius, and the Peristyle court, while exploring narrow streets still paved with lustrous white stone from Bra Island. We exit through the Golden Gate to see Ivan Me□trovi's huge bronze statue of St. Gregory of Nin, modern Croatia's most celebrated sculptor's masterwork.

We then take a short ferry ride to Hvar island. En route we pass Brac Island, which provided lustrous white stone for Sibenik Cathedral, Diocletian's Palace, Liverpool Cathedral, and Washington DC's White House. Hvar receives 2,724 hours of sunshine annually—more than anywhere else in Croatia—earning its nickname "Island of the Sun."

Greeks from Paros first settled here in the 4th century BC at Pharos, modern Stari Grad. In the 13th century, the capital transferred to Hvar town (a Slavic mutation of Pharos), prospering during 3.5 centuries of Venetian rule. This picturesque town and marina pulses with constant activity, where ancient stone buildings house trendy restaurants and boutique shops, creating an intoxicating blend of history and contemporary Mediterranean lifestyle.

Overnight in Hvar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Hvar: Walking Tour

Hvar, often called the "Croatian Riviera," is a stunning Adriatic island renowned for sun-kissed beaches, picturesque towns, and rich history. The capital, also named Hvar, charms visitors with its vibrant coastal atmosphere and beautifully preserved architecture.

Our morning tour glimpses Hvar's historical and cultural heritage. The 15th-century Franciscan Monastery particularly fascinates, housing a Renaissance cloister and collection of rare manuscripts and books. The monastery church boasts an impressive painting collection. St. Stephen's Cathedral showcases the island's architectural and religious significance, its Renaissance façade overlooking the main square where locals and visitors gather for evening promenades.

Your afternoon unfolds at your own pace. Wander through narrow, winding streets admiring Venetian-style architecture and boutique shops offering local lavender products, olive oils, and handcrafted jewellery. For the adventurous, hiking up to the Venetian fortress reveals breathtaking panoramic views of the town and surrounding islands. The fortress, built in the 16th century to defend against Ottoman attacks, provides perspective on Hvar's strategic importance in controlling Adriatic sea routes.

Evening brings the town alive as restaurants spill onto ancient stone squares, serving fresh seafood paired with wines from the island's sun-drenched vineyards.

Overnight in Hvar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Hvar, Croatia - Pocitelj, Bosnia-Herzegovina - Mostar

We embark on a scenic route from sun-kissed Hvar to enchanting Mostar. Our adventure begins with a ferry ride to charming coastal Drvenik, then we wind along the picturesque Dalmatian coast, drinking in breathtaking Adriatic Sea views.

Approaching the Metkovi border crossing, we turn inland and enter captivating Herzegovina region. Our first stop is historic Poitelj, a true gem nestled along the Neretva River. This picturesque town presents a fascinating blend of Mediterranean and Oriental influences, evident in stunning architecture including the iconic Ottoman-era fortress and charming old bazaar.

After exploring Poitelj's timeless beauty, we continue to Mostar, a city that has captivated visitors for centuries. Despite significant wartime damage, Mostar has undergone remarkable restoration efforts, reclaiming its position as one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's most iconic destinations.

Upon arrival, we're greeted by the enchanting sight of the iconic Stari Most (Old Bridge), a magnificent Ottoman-era bridge spanning the emerald-green Neretva River. This historic bridge, reconstructed after wartime destruction using traditional methods and original materials, stands alongside the charming old town as testament to the city's rich cultural heritage and remarkable resilience in the face of adversity.

Overnight in Mostar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina: Walking Tour - Dubrovnik, Croatia

We begin with a walking tour of Mostar, exploring the ancient city dating to the 16th and 17th centuries. We visit a traditional house from this period, providing insights into Ottoman-era domestic life, and examine the recently rebuilt Mostar Bridge, the city's enduring emblem. Our tour includes the Museum of War and Genocide Victims, a poignant memorial dedicated to victims of the Bosnian War (1992-1995). Through harrowing exhibits, personal accounts, and multimedia displays, the museum illuminates the atrocities committed during this devastating conflict.

After our Mostar tour, we journey to Dubrovnik with a stop in the fortified town of Ston en route, arriving in late afternoon.
Dubrovnik's history, as ancient Ragusa, begins in the 7th century under Byzantine protection. In the 12th century, Ragusa—formerly an island—merged with mainland settlements when the channel between was filled with material. Today this area forms the main street, the Placa or Stradun. After shaking off Venice's yoke in 1385, Ragusa became an independent republic, remaining one of the Mediterranean's most powerful maritime forces for over four centuries until 1808.

Ragusa served as the link between the Mediterranean and Balkans, developing into an important trade and shipping centre. During the 16th-century "Golden Age," she possessed the world's third-largest merchant fleet with consulates in over 50 countries.

Overnight in Dubrovnik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Dubrovnik: Walking Tour

This morning features a walking tour of Dubrovnik's historic centre. Dubrovnik has been called "Croatian Athens" and the "Pearl of the Mediterranean" for its astounding beauty, sophisticated history and culture, and prosperity.

Over its tumultuous history, the city required extensive reconstruction; the 1667 earthquake destroyed much of the city, and in recent memory, the town was bombarded by over 2,000 shells in 1991-92. After great international efforts, the city has been restored to former glory, with towering fortifications, magnificent medieval architecture, red-tiled roofs, winding paved streets, and picturesque harbours.

Our guide introduces the Cathedral and Sponza Palace and the landmarks along the way, including Onofrio's Fountain, the Clock Tower, Roland's Column and the Church of St. Blaise, Dubrovnik's patron saint, mostly from the outside as time does not allow entering each one. Those who wish can then go inside at their own pace, using the Dubrovnik Pass, which is included.

We also walk Dubrovnik's walls, considered by many a highlight of our visit. The total circuit spans nearly 2 kilometres, and from the bastions we enjoy magnificent views of the city's monuments, including Mineta Tower, Revelin Tower, and the mighty fortress of St. Lawrence, with walls 12 metres thick!

Your afternoon is free to enjoy this memorable place.

Overnight in Dubrovnik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Dubrovnik, Croatia - Montenegro - Tirana, Albania

A morning drive takes us along beautiful Adriatic coast. We cross the border into Montenegro just before Boka Kotorska Bay. Our route also takes us near the tourist resort of Becici, then the little town of Milocer with its beautiful beach and the palace of one of the last Yugoslavian queen before WWII. We pass Petrovac, another lovely coastal resort, the main harbour of Bar and the old town of Ulcinj before crossing the border into Albania.

NOTE: You will likely say farewell to your Adriatic Tour Leader in Dubrovnik and meet your Albania Tour Leader on arrival in Tirana. Today's journey is scenic and comfortable, but it will likely be a full day of travel without a leader or guide.

Overnight in Tirana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Tirana & Kruja

Our morning takes us to Kruja, a town dramatically situated on a hillside, a place that once stood as the heart of Albanian resistance against the Ottoman Empire, led by their national hero, Skanderbeg. Here we explore the historic fortress of Kruja, offering views that sweep across the landscape. Within its walls, we visit the Ethnographic Museum, providing insights into local traditions housed in a fine example of Ottoman-era architecture. Time will also be allocated to wander through the old bazaar, a trove of souvenirs including unique, handcrafted items.

Later, our journey returns us to Tirana, where we discover the capital's highlights. We plan to see the Ethem Bey Mosque (please note that restoration work may lead us to visit the World Bektashi Headquarters just outside Tirana instead). Our exploration of Tirana's recent past takes us to the House of Leaves, a fascinating museum occupying a former residence of the Sigurimi, Albania's Cold War-era secret police. Its walls once witnessed the surveillance apparatus that monitored citizens during the communist period, and today house exhibitions detailing political persecution and espionage operations between 1944 and 1991.

We continue through the Blloku district, once forbidden to ordinary Albanians and reserved for the communist elite. Here we view the former villa of dictator Enver Hoxha, a modest structure that stands in stark contrast to the vibrant cafés and shops that now fill this once-restricted quarter.

Our evening will be spent in Tirana.

Overnight in Tirana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Tirana - Durres - Berat

Our day begins with a drive towards Berat, a journey that first takes us through Durres (once known as Durrazzo), Albania's second city and a place with ancient roots. Legend tells us it was founded by the Illyrian King Epidamnos, who lent it his name, while the port was named after his grandson, Dyrrah. For centuries, this was the Adriatic's principal port, later marking a moment in history in 1939 when Italian forces met a brief but determined resistance, those lost becoming remembered as early figures of the National Liberation War.

In Durres, we explore the impressive Roman amphitheatre, one of the largest in the Balkans, situated near the harbour and currently considered for UNESCO World Heritage status. Our exploration continues with a walk to the remnants of the Roman Baths, located near the central square.

Our final destination for the day is Berat, often called the "city of a thousand windows," a UNESCO-protected "museum city" and a true highlight of Albania. Once known as Antipatrea, it rises along the slopes of Mount Tomorri, with its commanding castle. Within the castle

walls, we find dwellings and the Onufri Museum, showcasing the works of the renowned 16th-century painter and his son.

Much of our time in Berat will be spent in its old quarter, perhaps one of the best-preserved Ottoman-era cities in the Balkans, featuring a vibrant lower town and a beautiful medieval citadel perched atop the hill. A key experience here is visiting the still-inhabited citadel, where we can see the remains of mosques and several medieval Orthodox churches, complete with restored frescoes and icons. The notable Onufri museum, with its exceptional collection of Albanian icons, resides within a beautiful church here. In the lower town, we view the Leaded Mosque, the Bachelor's Mosque (please note potential renovations), the Sultan's Mosque, and an Ottoman-era inn.

Overnight in Berat.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Berat - Ardenica Monastery - Apollonia - Saranda

Today we travel to the rarely-visited yet magnificent Ardenica Monastery, remotely located on a hilltop between the towns of Lushjë and Fier. In the fantastic interiors of the 18th century Church of St Mary, the iconostasis dominates the nave, but equally impressive is the golden pulpit, which positively heaves with adornments, not to mention the frescoes of the Zografi brothers that can be seen on display upstairs.

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 town of Saranda, 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.

Overnight in Saranda.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Saranda & Butrint

This morning, we set out to explore Butrint, a site that holds a special place as Albania's most significant archaeological treasure, where the echoes of Greek and Roman civilizations resonate through the ancient stones.

The story of Butrint unfolds from the 7th century BC, a time when it emerged as a Greek settlement. Its strategic importance grew, leading to its later establishment as a Roman colony, and subsequently, it experienced periods under the influence of both the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire. Interestingly, the ancient poet Virgil wove a tale suggesting that the legendary Trojans once settled here, a romantic notion that continues to intrigue, though archaeological findings have yet to substantiate it.

Within a hundred years of the Greeks' arrival, Butrint had developed into a formidable fortified trading city, crowned by its own acropolis, the ruins of which offer us a tangible connection to this distant past. As we explore the rediscovered city, we'll find ourselves immersed in a microcosm spanning nearly three millennia of Mediterranean history. The impressive 6th-century BC fortification still stands, a testament to the city's ancient military power and a poignant symbol of the rich and dynamic culture that once flourished within its boundaries. Walking through these ruins, one can almost envision the lives and times of those who walked these paths centuries ago.

Overnight in Saranda.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 22 Saranda - Gjirokastra

Today's journey takes us towards Gjirokastra, a town of striking beauty nestled on a mountainside overlooking the Drino River, and also the birthplace of Albania's former long-time leader, Enver Hoxha. En route, we'll pause to experience the natural wonder of the "Blue Eye," a captivating freshwater spring formed in the shape of an eye, surrounded by lush greenery.

Gjirokastra itself is a designated UNESCO World Heritage site, a "museum city" that graces the eastern slopes of "Mali i Gjerë." The city's origins can be traced back to its castle, erected in the fourth century AD. In 1417, the Ottoman army's arrival marked a new chapter, with the

city reaching its zenith between 1800 and 1830, a period that saw the construction of grand assembly houses. The Bazaar and Hazmurate were among its earliest neighbourhoods. A defining characteristic of Gjirokastra is the extensive use of stone in its architecture, giving the houses the appearance of miniature fortresses, connected by cobblestone streets that all converge at the vibrant bazaar. This unique feature has also earned Gjirokastra the evocative name, "The Stone City."

During our time here, we will visit the Skenduli house, a remarkable illustration of the harmonious blend between Albanian and Ottoman architectural styles. We will also explore the pre-Ottoman citadel, which houses a weapons museum and a former political prison, offering a glimpse into different facets of the city's past.

Overnight in Gjirokastra.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 23 Gjirokastra - Kamenica - Korca

This will be a rewarding day of travel (approximately 200km) through the captivating southeastern part of Albania. The journey itself offers a delightful panorama of mountains, rivers, forests, national parks, gorges, and the quaint charm of isolated villages. We will likely make a few stops in Leskovik and nearby villages, where former communist military bunkers, now often serving as animal shelters, offer an intriguing glimpse into the past.

En route to Korca, we will also pause to visit the Tumulus of Kamenica after a break for lunch in Rehova. This tumulus stands as the largest burial monument of its kind among the numerous tumuli discovered in Albania and neighbouring Balkan countries. The site also features a museum dedicated to the prehistory of Albania and the surrounding region.

Our route to Korca (pronounced 'Korchah') continues through Kelcyra and the spectacular Vjosa canyons extending to Permet, the mountains around Leskovik, and the colourful landscapes of Erseka. Korca is a historic city with rich cultural traditions and interesting architecture from the Ottoman era, including one of Albania's most significant mosques.

Overnight in Korca.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 24 Korca: City Touring & Voskopoja

Korça is one of the largest and most important cultural and economic centers of Albania. The city is known for its typical quarters composed of low houses and villas, which are paved with cobblestone. Because of its beauty, French-style villas and coffee culture, Korca is often called the 'little Paris of Albania'.

This morning we visit the Bazaar of Korca and National Museum of Medieval Art. This must-see museum houses 7,000 items of cultural significance and even a few pieces by Onufri, the most famous icon painter in the country. The old Bazaar has great early historical, cultural and artistic value for the city. It is characterized by one and two story buildings in classic Korça style, separated by narrow cobbled streets that open onto a central square. In past centuries, the bazaar has functioned as a market for trade not just within Albania, but also from Turkiye, Greece, Trieste, and Venice. It has been noted for the row of inns, including the Old Elbasan and Old Monastery Inn, which served to host travellers visiting the market from outside the city. The market reached its apex during the late 19th and early 20th centuries with more than 1,000 stores; with so many shops, the bazaar was like a city within a city.

This afternoon we visit the nearby 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 25 Korca - Pogradec, Albania - Ohrid, North Macedonia

Today we travel 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 North Macedonia (known before 2018 as just 'Macedonia'), a landlocked and mostly mountainous country in southeastern Europe. North 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 route continues to Bitola, where we stop at Heraclea Lyncestis, among Macedonia's best archaeological sites. We see the Roman baths, portico and amphitheatre, and the striking Early Christian basilica and episcopal palace ruins, with beautiful, well-preserved floor mosaics—they're unique in depicting endemic trees and animals.

From Bitola, we travel north along Lake Ohrid's western shore toward the town of Ohrid. En route, we stop at the Monastery of Saint Naum, perched dramatically at the lake's southern tip on the border with Albania. Founded in the 10th century by Saint Naum, a disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius, this monastery occupies a stunning position overlooking the turquoise waters where underground springs from Lake Prespa emerge into Lake Ohrid. The monastery church contains beautiful frescoes and the tomb of its founder, and the surrounding grounds offer peaceful gardens and views across the water.

Our final destination is the city of Ohrid, an attractive town on the Balkan Peninsula and the pride of North Macedonia. With its historic town centre and stunning lake vistas, this place 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. Time-permitting, we may accomplish some of our Ohrid sightseeing today upon arrival.

Overnight in Ohrid.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 26 Ohrid: Area Tour

This morning we explore Ohrid's old town on foot. The ancient Greeks called this place Lychnidos, "City of Light." When Slavs arrived in the 10th century they renamed it Arida, and it became a major cultural centre. The Cyrillic alphabet originated here through the work of Saints Cyril and Methodius, establishing Ohrid as the cradle of Slavic written language.

Ohrid earned its nickname "City of 365 Churches" through centuries of religious construction. We visit St. Panteleimon Monastery, dating to the 9th century and recognized as the world's oldest Slav monastery. The town contains numerous archaeological sites, including a Roman amphitheatre and fortress ruins. We walk through the local bazaar where traditional crafts continue.

As the day draws to a close, we board a boat for a panoramic sunset cruise on Lake Ohrid. One of Europe's oldest and deepest lakes, Ohrid supports unique endemic species found nowhere else. From the water, we watch the sun descend behind the mountains, casting golden light across the ancient town's churches and fortress walls.

We've spent a week crossing borders, navigating spaces between empires and faiths. Here on this lake, as the light shifts from gold to blue, the borders feel less important. Ohrid has outlasted every empire that claimed it by refusing to be claimed—by remaining, simply, itself. Tomorrow we cross into Albania, a country that tried isolation and is only now rejoining the conversation.

Overnight in Ohrid.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 27 Galcica National Park & Bitola

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, punctuated with villages of whitewashed houses with red tiled roofs.

We'll stop at Heraclea Lyncestis, among Macedonia's best archaeological sites. We see the Roman baths, portico and amphitheatre, and the striking Early Christian basilica and episcopal palace ruins, with beautiful, well-preserved floor mosaics – they're unique in depicting endemic trees and animals.

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, is a cathedral well-known for its wood carved iconostasis and ecclesiastical furniture.

* Please note that both mosques have been periodically closed for renovation, which seems to occur on an unpredictable schedule. Should this be the case for our visit, we may visit Kemal Ataturk and the Bitola Museums instead.

Overnight in Ohrid.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 28 Lake Ohrid - Tetovo - Skopje

Today's route will take us across the National Park of Mavrovo with its majestic lake, river, gorges, and waterfalls. En route we stop at the amazing monastery of Sveti Jovan Bigorski. 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 also include the Arabati Baba Teqe, a blending of mosque, church and shrine for Sufi Muslims.

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 29 Skopje: City Tour

Skopje is not only the capital but also the largest city in North Macedonia.

Located in a valley on both sides of River Vardar, Skopje traces its ancient history back over 2,000 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. We'll also include the new new Archeology Museum, where more than 6,000 artifacts from all historical periods, from prehistory until the Middle Ages are presented.

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 31 Departure

Departure from Skopje.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast