ALBANIA, BULGARIA & MACEDONIA

KOSOVO AND CORFU

DETAILED ITINERARY

Nov 13/25

Ohrid Castle

Welcome to Old Europe - remote, unexploited and unspoiled. With cobblestone streets, Roman ruins, cosmopolitan cities, quaint towns, medieval monasteries and castles, UNESCO Sites and pristine nature.

Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania are easily some of Europe's last, mostly unexplored gems. We also visit Kosovo, the youngest country of Europe, and Corfu (Greece).

After exploring the 5,000 year old cosmopolitan capital city of Sofia, with its wide boulevards and grand churches, we travel to the city of Plovdiv, one of Europe's oldest cities. Visit Asenovgrad Castle, a medieval fortress in the Bulgarian Rhodope Mountains.

In Macedonia, visit Heraclea, founded in the 4th century BC. In Ohrid, we visit its beautiful lake and famous monastery on its shores.

In Kosovo we visit Prizren, one of the loveliest towns in the Balkans dating back to the Turkish era.

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

• 22 land days • Maximum 14 travelers • Start in Sofia, Bulgaria and finish in Tirana, Albania • All meals included • Historic cities of Plovdiv, Ohrid, Berat and Shkodra • Apolonia archaeological sites, Rozafa and Kruja Castles • Tirana including Mt. Dajti by cable car, and Mother Teresa's memorial statue of Skhodra • Ottoman towns of Prizren and Gjirokastra • Corfu, Greece • Ancient cities of Heraclea and Butrint (UNESCO) • Lakes of Ohrid and Prespa

DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

Sept 05 - Sep 26, 2026 - $9595 USD

Activity Level: 2

Comfort Level: Some long drives. Due to the layout of the itinerary, the unique places we visit and local European rules, we will not travel by microbus on this tour. Instead we will use up to 3 small vans which allow for ease of travel through towns and cities.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Comfortable hotels with private bathrooms.

We then continue to Albania, where we enjoy scenic drives to magnificent Roman ruins, including the ancient cities of Berat and Butrint.

Relax and savor the atmosphere on the beautiful Greek island of Corfu on the Ionian Sea.

Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania offer the perfect off-the-beaten track adventure in seldom traveled Eastern Europe.

DAY 1 ARRIVAL IN SOFIA, BULGARIA

You will be met on arrival at the airport in Sofia and transferred to your hotel. In the evening, we meet for our welcome dinner and orientation.

Overnight in Sofia.

DAY 2 SOFIA SIGHTSEEING

Today we explore the main sites of Sofia. The history of Sofia as a town began in the last millennium B.C., as it entered the Iron Age. Centuries earlier, when bronze technology had been mastered, the horse domesticated, and the advent of wheeled vehicles which could go fast, all contributed to the migration of tribes and nations all in Europe. The Thracians had already left their mark of a permanent presence in the Sofia Basin.

The city became the capital of Bulgaria in 1879. We see the ruins of the Roman town and walk along the Roman streets, passing the temples of several different religions, located in this part of the town -St. Nedelia and St. Petka - Eastern Orthodox churches, St. Joseph -a Roman Catholic church, Banya Bashi Mosque and the synagogue. We visit the first covered market in Sofia - Central Halli, and the Sofia History Museum. It is located in the former building of the Central Mineral Baths. We then continue along the massive administrative

buildings created by one of the first great projects of the Communist Party and pass by the office of the Bulgarian President. From here we will visit one of the oldest churches - the Rotunda of St.George and continue to the city garden with the National Theater. From the garden, we follow the 'yellow-brick' road and pass by the Russian church of St. Nicolas as well as the Central Military Club. We visit St.Alexander Nevski Cathedral, one of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in Europe, and the church of St. Sophia, built by the Roman emperor Justinian in the 6th century.

Overnight in Sofia.

DAY 3 PLOVDIV AND ASENOVGRAD CASTLE

This morning we travel to the greatest Bulgarian city, Plovdiv. As one of Europe's oldest cities, Plovdiv will amaze you with its history and sights. Here we visit the ancient Roman amphitheater, the Roman odeon and the Roman stadium. After lunch, we explore Asenovgrad Castle, a medieval fortress in the Bulgarian Rhodope Mountains. This is one of the best-preserved castles in Bulgaria. Set on the edge of a high, rocky ridge, this medieval fortress dates back to the Thracians.

Overnight in Sofia.

DAY 4 RILA MONASTERY

We commence our day at Bulgaria's greatest known heritage site, the eastern orthodox Rila Monastery, founded in 927 A.D. Rila Monastery is regarded as one of Bulgaria's most important cultural, historical and architectural monuments and is a key tourist attraction for both Bulgaria and Southern Europe. Ever since its creation, the Rila Monastery has been supported and respected by the Bulgarian rulers, and the complex acted as a depository of Bulgarian language and culture in the ages of foreign rule. The monastery complex, regarded as one of the foremost masterpieces of Bulgarian National Revival architecture, was declared a national historical monument in 1976 and became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983.

Overnight in Sofia.

DAY 5 TO SKOPJE, MACEDONIA

After breakfast, we depart for Skopje, Macedonia. After lunch we will visit the Stone Bridge, the St. Spas Church, Mustafa Pasha Mosque, the huge bazaar area with its famous inn, Kapan Ann, and the main street with its modern statues, which was part of the "Skopje 2014" project. It includes statues depicting the most important historical figures of Macedonia, including Alexander the Great. Macedonia was part of former Yugoslavia, from which it gained its independence in 1991. The population is largely Macedonian, a Slavic speaking eastern orthodox majority, but also having a 25% Albanian minority, who are largely Muslim.

Overnight in Skopje.

DAY 6 TO BITOLA, ANCIENT CITY OF HERACLES, TO OHRID

Today we drive to Bitola where we visit the ancient Macedonian city of Heraclea, founded in the 4th century BC. Marvel at the pristine condition of ancient buildings and palaces with their well preserved mosaics. Later we drive to Ohrid, located on the shore of the fabled Lake Ohrid, one of the largest lakes in the Balkans. Lake Ohrid is one of Europe's deepest and oldest lakes, preserving a unique aquatic ecosystem with more than 200 endemic species with worldwide importance. It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1979.

On one of the 3 days that we are in Ohrid, we will enjoy a live music performance during dinner.

Overnight in Ohrid.

DAY 7 KALISTA CAVE MONASTERY, VEVCANI SPRINGS, OLD OHRID SIGHTSEEING (UPPER TOWN)

Today, we enjoy the most interesting sites in and around Ohrid. First, we visit Kalista Cave Monastery on the lakeshore, which is unique with its special settings and location. After lunch near the lovely Vevcani Springs, we return to Ohrid, where we visit the archeological site of Ploeshnik, the Church of St. Bogorodica Perivleptos and the Tcar Samoil fortress. If weather permits, we will take a boat-taxi to get back to our hotel and have a waterside view of our lovely town. As today is a busy day, should we run short on time, we will have time to continue our visits on the morning of day 8.

Overnight in Ohrid.

DAY 8 OLD OHRID SIGHTSEEING (LOWER TOWN), GALICIA NATIONAL PARK AND LAKE PRESPA

After finishing the important sites of Ohrid, we enjoy an extremely scenic drive through the countryside. We make our way to Lake Prespa via Galicica Mountains National Park, situated between the two lakes of Ohrid and Prespa. Here, we can enjoy one of the 20 best drives in Europe, as voted by Forbes. This drive offers splendid views in every direction. This park has a wealth of endemic flora and fauna. If we are lucky, we may see eagles, vultures, Balkan butterflies and even land turtles. Our destination is the village of Oteshevo. Enroute we also stop above a sunken village in the Gulf of Bones.

Lake Prespa is shared between Greece, Macedonia and Albania. In 1999, the Society for the Protection of Prespa received the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for its conservation efforts, primarily for protecting and breeding a colony

of one of the most endangered waterbirds of the world, the Dalmatian Pelican. The area contains four national parks located in Albania, Greece, and Republic of Macedonia. For dinner, we can try the famous Koran fish (Lake Ohrid brown trout) which is only found in this area.

Overnight in Ohrid.

DAY 9 MAVROVO MONASTERY, SAR PLANINA NATIONAL PARK, TO PRIZREN, KOSOVO

Our long drive today takes us along the banks of the Black Drin River, through Struga, Debar and Gostivar. We make a stop along the way at the monastery of Jovan Bigorski. We cross into Kosovo through breathtaking mountain scenery of the Sar Planina mountains.

Albanian inhabited Kosovo is the youngest independent country in Europe, which is still the subject of a territorial dispute with the Republic of Serbia. Kosovo declared independence on February 17, 2008, but Serbia continues to claim it as part of its own sovereign territory. Kosovo's independence has been recognised by 108 out of 193 United Nations member states today.

Overnight in Prizren.

DAY 10 PEJA, GJAKOVA, PRIZREN

Today we drive to Peja and Gjakova where we visit the Peja Patriarchate and Decani Monastery before returning to Prizren. Prizen is one of the most scenic towns of the Balkans with a magnificent setting on the slopes of the Sar Mountains, and the former capital of historic Serbia. The municipality of Prizen is still the most culturally and ethnically heterogeneous area of Kosovo, retaining vibrant communities of Bosniaks, Turks, and Romani, in addition to the majority Kosovo Albanian population. This afternoon is free to enjoy this very secluded part of the Balkans.

Overnight in Prizren.

Heraclea

Rila Monastery

Berat

DAY 11 PRIZREN SIGHTSEEING, TO ALBANIA

This morning we enjoy a guided tour around Prizren to learn about the recent turbulent history and enjoy views of the fortress, stone bridges, minarets and mosques. We then make our way to Albania on a very scenic road through the Albanian Alps.

Overnight in Valbona.

DAY 12 VALBONA NATIONAL PARK

Today we enjoy the Valbona Valley, one of most beautiful parts of the Northern Albanian Alps with over 8000 hectares, becoming a national park in 1996. Depending on the weather, we will have an opportunity to hike a lovely trail and visit a local family restaurant in the region. The remainder of the afternoon is yours to relax and enjoy the magnificent area near our hotel.

Overnight in Valbona.

DAY 13 BOATING ON DRIN RIVER, ROZAFA CASTLE

Today we board our small ship/ferry, cruising to Koman along the Drin River. (Depending on the timetable, this may either be done morning or afternoon.) This is one of the most magnificent river valleys of the Balkans, a real 'must see' rivalling the famous "three gorges" of China. Upon our arrival in Koman, we board our bus and drive to Shkodra, located on the southernmost shore of beautiful Lake Shkodra in northwestern Albania.

At sunset we visit nearby Rozafa Castle, which rises imposingly on a rocky hill, 130 meters above the sea, surrounded by the Bojana and Drin Rivers. This is one of the largest and most impressive fortresses of the entire region, dating back to the Illyrian times. Here we learn about local legends, explore the ruins and enjoy beautiful views over the rugged landscapes.

Overnight in Shkodra.

DAY 14 SHKODRA, MEMORIAL OF SKANDERBEG, KRUJA, TO TIRANA

Skhkodra is one of the oldest and most historic towns in Albania. It is a vibrant and important cultural and economic center and has a pulsating street life. Many visitors feel that Shkodra is the soul of Albania. The most attractive quarters of the city are commonly called the Pjaca. We stop quickly to take a photo of Mother Teresa's memorial statue before continuing on to Lezha where we see the memorial of Skanderbeg, the most prominent figure of medieval Albanian history. From here we make our way to Kruja, where we see the Old Castle. After visiting the nearby Ethnographic Museum, we stroll through the Old Bazaar.

We then make our way to Tirana, the capital of Albania. Modern Tirana was founded as an Ottoman town in 1614. Tirana became Albania's capital city in 1920 and has a population of over 800,000, including the new quarters around the city. The Tirana River runs through the city which also has four artificial lakes. We arrive in Tirana just in time for dinner.

Overnight in Tirana.

DAY 15 TIRANA SIGHTSEEING

After breakfast we visit the Headquarters of the Muslim Bektashi Sect, followed by a leisurely excursion to Mt. Dajti by cable car. From here, we enjoy amazing views of the illuminated city, including the Adriatic Sea in the distance.

After lunch we drive through the ex-communist blocks and enjoy some free time in Tirana.

Overnight in Tirana.

DAY 16 ARDENICA MONASTERY, APOLLONIA RUINFIELDS, DRIVE ALONG LLOGARA NP'S COAST TO SARANDE

We start our day with a drive to Ardenica Monastery, an Eastern Orthodox monument, which was started in 1282. The monastery has Byzantine-orthodox architecture and includes the Saint Mary Church and the chapel of the Saint Trinity. We then make our way to visit the huge Roman ruins of Apolonia, founded in 588 BCE by Greek colonists from Corfu and Corinth. The site was initially occupied by Illyrian tribes and was perhaps the most important of the several classical towns of the area, as well as an important port along the route between Rome and Byzantium.

Later we drive along the mountainous roads of the Llogara National Park and the Albanian Riviera, enjoying the beautiful scenery and fantastic landscapes of the Ionian coastline. We arrive in Sarande in the late evening.

Overnight in Sarande.

DAY 17 FERRY TO CORFU (GREECE), KERKYRE SIGHTSEEING

Early this morning, we take a ferry to the island of Corfu, Greece. Upon our arrival, we will visit the historic Corfu (Kerkyra) city, including the Jewish memorials.

After lunch, the afternoon is yours to explore the streets and shops of the city, or just to relax and enjoy the water of the Ionian Sea.

Overnight in Corfu.

DAY 18 DAY IN PALEOKASTRITSA AND ACHELLIEON

This morning we visit Paleokastritsa to see the local monastery. Here we enjoy commanding views of the area. We make our way through the scenic Ropa Valley and visit the New Fortress. We also visit the Achilleion Palace, built by the Empress of Austria, Elisabeth of Bavaria, also known as Sisi, wife of Austro-Hungarian Monarch Franz Joseph. She lost her only son, Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria, when he committed murder-suicide in The Mayerling Incident of 1889. A year later, in 1890, she built a summer palace with the powerful mythical hero Achilles as its central theme.

Overnight in Corfu.

DAY 19 BUTRINT RUINFIELDS TO GJIROKASTRA (UNESCO)

After making our way back to mainland Albania, we drive to nearby Butrint (UNESCO), Albania's most important archaeological site. Butrint was an ancient Greek city and later, a Roman city in Epirus, located on a hill overlooking the Vivari Channel and Butrint National Park.

We will enjoy lunch at Ksamili Beach, which is a beautiful spot and often referred to as the Maldives of Europe. Later we arrive to one of the most remarkable Albanian towns, Gjirokastra. We also visit an Ethnographic museum, housed in the building in which Enver Hoxha was born.

Overnight in Gjirokastra.

DAY 20 OTTOMAN TOWN OF GJIROKASTRA, TO BERAT

This morning we explore Gjirokastra, the birthplace of former iron-fisted dictator of Albania, Enver Hoxha. Its old town is inscribed on the World Heritage List as "a rare example of a well-preserved Ottoman town, built by farmers of large estates". Gjirokastra is situated in a valley between the Gjere Mountains and the Drino River. The city is overlooked by Gjirokastra Castle, which includes a

pre-Ottoman citadel with a weapons museum and former political prison. Later we drive to Berat along the Drino River, one of the most scenic river valleys of the country. We also see the King's Mosque, and the Bachelor Mosque or the Helvetian Tekke, which was built in 1782.

Overnight in Berat.

DAY 21 BERAT SIGHTSEEING, DURRES, TO TIRANA

This morning we explore Berat, which lies on the eastern bank of the Osum River. Berat has a wealth of beautiful buildings of high architectural and historical interest. Berat is known to Albanians as "The City of a Thousand Windows" or "The City of Two Thousand Steps". It was proclaimed a 'Museum City' by the dictator Enver Hoxha in June 1961. We visit the citadel on the top hill of the city and Onufri Museum, which has 16th century mural paintings by Onufri, Albanians most famous Medieval painter.

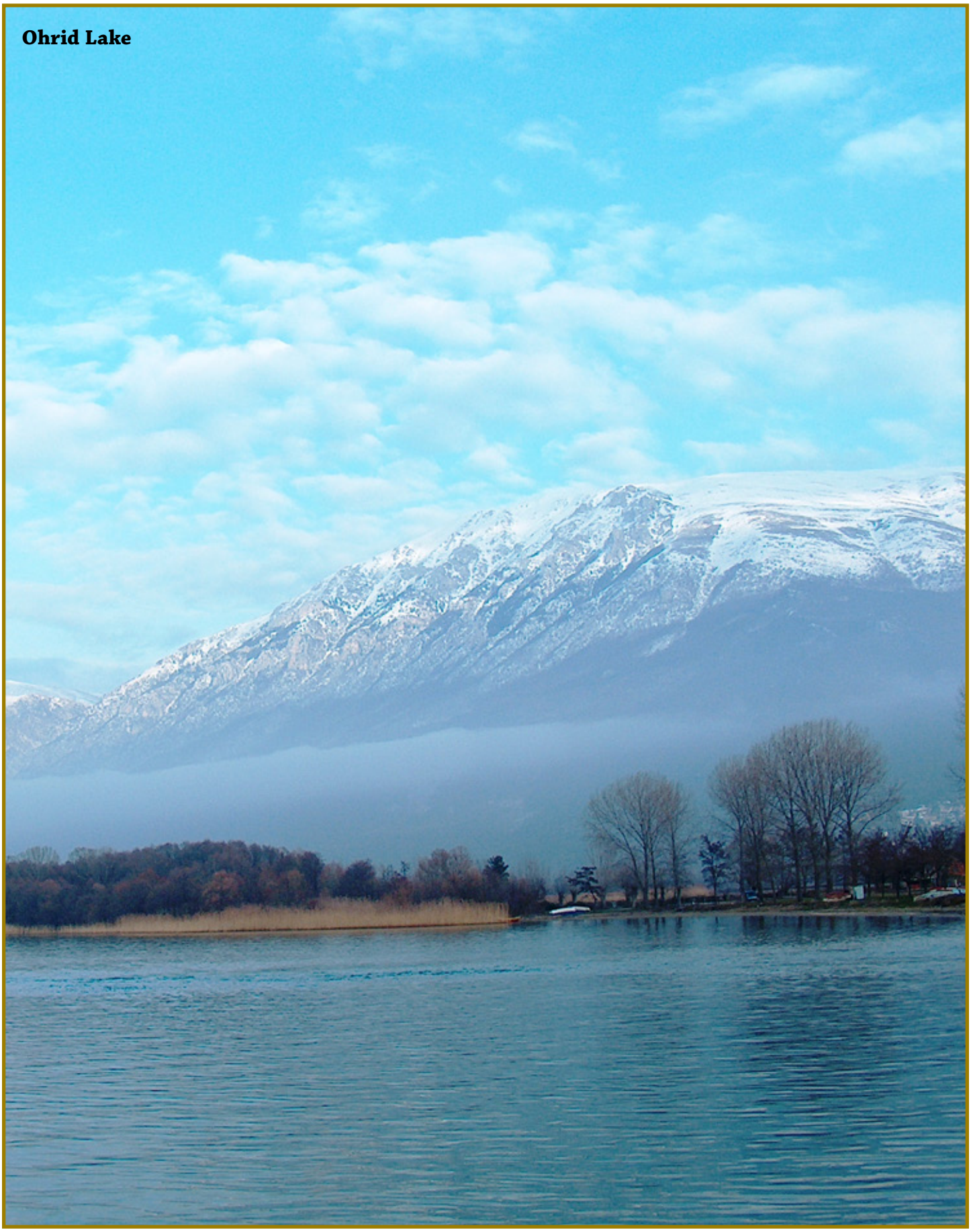
After lunch, we drive to the second largest city in Albania, Durres, which sits on the Adriatic Sea. The city is located on the central Albanian coast, where we visit the Roman amphitheater, before making our way back to Tirana in time for our farewell dinner.

Overnight in Tirana.

DAY 22 DEPART TIRANA, ALBANIA

Today we say goodbye to our new friends and the wonderful adventure we had as we transfer to the airport for our onward journey.

Kruja Castle


Ohrid Lake

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 14 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. They allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (porterage), national guide and bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas, travel insurance, photo and/or video fees and public bathroom fees

4. ARE THESE "EDUCATIONAL" TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, "educational". We visit museums, national parks and reserves and have talks and discussions on many aspects of history, culture and nature. But this is only a portion of the educational experience. We believe that it is equally educational to meet local people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most "educational" moments are wandering through the streets of a small town.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All local transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We travel by 2 or 3, nine-seater vans, by boat, by ferry and by foot.

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

Comfortable, well-located hotels with private bathrooms.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

Our adventure takes place during the pleasant spring & fall months. Temperatures can vary between the low 70's °F to the high 80's°F (20 – 27°C). In the mountains expect cooler temperatures. Sudden showers and thunderstorms are common.

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of $500 USD (plus insurance if you require it) is due at time of booking and will reserve your place on the tour. Payment of the full land cost is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and are outlined in the "Terms and Conditions" section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is mandatory for this adventure. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit

10. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed "What to Take" list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

11. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals during the itinerary are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. We eat a variety of local foods prepared in a wide range of settings.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries — not group flights. Stop over en route, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the adventure, please call our office for more details. A Trip Specialist will be happy to answer your questions. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.

Church of John at Kaneo, Lake Ohrid

Berat Castle