

THE BALKANS

PRE-DEPARTURE GUIDE

traveltalk
adventure travel company



Travel Talk Balkans tours take you on an unforgettable journey across a fascinating region that has shaped the history of modern Europe. It is where Europe meets the Orient (East); where Christians and Muslims have cohabited for centuries, and formed its unique cultural and social fabric. This geography hosted huge incidents in history from the splitting of Roman Empire into two, to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand that sparked World War I, and witnessed many wars and struggles – the “powder-keg of Europe” due to strong ideals of the natives. Whilst the Balkans hold such a rich history, the region is truly blessed with its astonishing natural beauty; magnificent mountains covered in tall green forests, crystal waters and endless white beaches. The Balkans are a unique facade of Europe with its familiar, yet distinct style and vibe – where people of many nations have met, lived, and warred over thousands of years. Travel Talk Balkan tours gives you the option to map out your favourite countries with a wide range of tours from 4 days up to 21 days. Follow the legacy of each nation, country by country; sail like a pirate to Dubrovnik, march through the remnants of the Yugoslav war, pose with Alexander the Great, and let Socrates enlighten you in Athens.

VISAS

Visa is not required for a maximum stay up to 90 days for Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada passport holders to enter the following countries; Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Albania, Macedonia, Greece, for other nationalities you can check the visa requirements from the link below.
<http://www.doyouneedvisa.com>

ESSENTIALS

Before you leave your country, we recommend you to make sure you have followings with you ;

- ➔ Passport
- ➔ Airline or transportation ticket
- ➔ Tour voucher
- ➔ Insurance policy
- ➔ Visas (if necessary)
- ➔ Pre-departure information
- ➔ Label on your travel bag
- ➔ Money (cash and/or travellers cheques)
- ➔ Credit card

HEALTH AND SAFETY

It is recommended to all passengers travelling on Travel Talk tours to have personal insurance to cover all medical and repatriation costs. While there are no mandatory vaccinations for travellers to Balkan countries, it is advisable to ensure tetanus inoculations are up to date. Some travellers feel more confident with hepatitis and meningitis inoculations as well. Please consult a medical practitioner for advice. Bottled water is readily available throughout your tour and we recommend that you purchase this rather than drink the local tap water. While the local water is usually heavily chlorinated and safe, many people get upset stomachs after drinking it.

WHAT TO WEAR...

In Spring (April-May) and Autumn (October/November) it will be comfortable during the day but may be cool or even chilly at night and you may encounter rain. It is advised to bring a warm jacket or sweater and a windbreaker.

In Summer (June-September) wear cool, cotton clothing, a hat and sunblock lotion. It is recommended to have a light sweater for cool evenings but rain won't be a big problem. Get ready for hot, hot weather.

In Winter (December-March) you will need warm, woolen clothing and rain gear.

MONEY

Credit cards, foreign currencies (US Dollar, Euro, British Pound) are accepted in most hotels and shops, and nearly all ATMs accept international bank cards in the Balkan countries.

Serbia : Local currency is Dinar, 1 GBP is about 135 Serbian Dinar.

Bosnia & Hergovina : Local currency is Bosnian Mark, 1 GBP is about 2,25 Bosnian Mark.

Croatia : Local currency is Kuna, 1 GBP is about 8 Kuna.

Albania : Local currency is Lek, 1 GBP is about 150 Lek.

Macedonia : Local Currency is Denar, 1 GBP is about 70 Denar.

Greece : Local currency is Euro, 1 GBP is about 1,10 Euro.

WEATHER

Balkan countries have wet, cold and often snowy winters and has the highest rainfall from November to February. Spring in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Albania, are damp with mild temperatures and it is relatively dry in the summer

Month	Belgrade		Kotor		Ohrid		Skopje	
	C	F	C	F	C	F	C	F
Jan	2	41	5	48	2	50	1	32
Feb	3	43	10	50	3	52	3	34
March	8	45	8	52	6	55	8	41
April	13	54	13	61	10	61	13	52
May	17	61	20	68	15	68	17	61
June	19	70	25	77	19	77	22	68
July	23	73	28	82	21	82	22	73
Aug	23	73	27	81	21	82	24	73
Sept	19	68	23	73	17	77	18	64
Oct	20	61	13	64	13	68	13	55
Nov	13	54	8	59	8	59	8	46
Dec	6	46	5	50	3	54	2	36

DISTANCES

The following information will give you a better idea of the times travelled to help you plan your day;

Belgrade – Sarajevo : 5 hours
Sarajevo - Trebinje : 4 hours
Trebinje - Podgorica: 2 hours
Podgorica – Ohrid: 5 hours
Ohrid – Skopje : 3 hours
Split to Omis : 1 hour (Sailing)
Omis to Makarska: 2,5 hours (Sailing)
Makarska to Hvar : 5 hours (Sailing)
Hvar to Korcula : 5,5 hours (Sailing)
Korcula to Mljet : 2 hours (Sailing)
Mljet to Dubrovnik: 6 hours(Sailing)
Dubrovnik – Kotor : 2 hours
Kotor - Budva : 30 Minute
Budva – Podgorica : 1 hour
Podgorica – Ohrid : 5 hours
Ohrid – Skopje : 2,5 hours
Skopje - Thessaloniki : 3 hours

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EATING & DRINKING

Serbia has a unique, extremely diverse mix because of all the major influences it has had over years of being under foreign rule. When it was under the Byzantine Empire, it received a lot of Mediterranean influences. Then, when it was under the Ottoman Empire, oriental and Turkish characteristics were imbued.

When it comes to drinks, there are a host of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages available in Serbia. For tradition lovers, the traditional drink in Serbia is Rakija. For the more contemporary drinkers, there is a wide abundance of beer and wine.

Croatia cuisine is Slavic, with the influence from the neighboring countries which played a part in forming the country's history in the distant or more recent past. The dishes in the inland regions are based on the produce from the land such as meat, pulses and cereals. On the coast, where fish, seafood and vegetables are widely used, the cultivation of grapes and the production of wine is a centuries-old tradition in both continental and coastal regions. The spectrum of high-quality wines and brandies is indeed wide (there are up to 700 wines with protected geographical origin). In the south people customary drink «Bevanda» with their food (heavy, richly flavored red wine mixed with plain water), and in the north-western regions, «Gemist» (dry, flavored wines mixed with mineral water).

Bosnia and Herzegovina's cuisine are mainly dishes made out of meat particularly Beef, and Lamb. Part of Bosnians do not eat pork because they are Muslims. Traditional food is often prepared with meat, and meals are plentiful and delicious. The meat is of extraordinary quality, often organic, and well prepared. Meat is the ingredient of some of the most popular Bosnian dishes such as bosanski lonac, ćevapi, begova čorba, burek, and grah. Regarding the alcoholic beverages, beer, wine and different homemade spirits are quite popular in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The local beer offer is quite extensive – Sarajevo beer, Pilsner Tuzla, Preminger Bihać, Nektar Banja Luka etc. Herzegovina traditionally produces good wine. Red and white dry wine from Herzegovina is of the surprising quality.

Greece, to speak of Greek cuisine will awaken any tastebuds. There need not be anything overcomplicated here, as the local cuisine is as fresh and exquisite as anywhere, sharing many characteristics with other cuisines of the region. Greek cuisine makes good use of olive oil, vegetables, herbs, wine, fish and various meats including lamb, poultry, rabbit and pork. Also important are olives, cheese, eggplant, zucchini and yogurt.

Macedonia, Macedonian cuisine is one of the most popular cuisines in the Balkans, containing Turkish, Greek and Middle Eastern influences and spiced with some Italian, Mediterranean and Hungarian influences too. The relatively warm climate of the country provides excellent growth conditions for a variety of vegetables, herbs and fruits. Macedonian cuisine is also noted for the diversity and quality of its dairy products, wines, and local alcoholic beverages, such as rakija. Tavče-gravče and mastika are considered the national dish and drink of the Republic of Macedonia,

Albanian cuisine is characterized by the use of spices such as black pepper and Mediterranean herbs such as oregano, mint, basil, rosemary and more in cooking meat and fish, but also chilli pepper and garlic. Olive oil and butter are a main ingredient in dishes. Meat (lamb, beef, chicken, pork and rabbit) is used heavily in dishes in most of the country. Seafood specialties are also common in the coastal cities. Vegetables are used in almost every dish. Usually, Albanian farmers grow every vegetable

SHOPPING

No holiday is complete without a little shopping, like many other Balkan destinations you will find that there is some great shopping and purchases to be made in Serbia, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina. From the standard tourist souvenirs to fine boutique jewellery and clothing shops, souvenirs you are bound to find something to satisfy the shopping itch.

ELECTRICITY

All appliances require a double round pin type plug for 220 volts AC, 50-hertz.

ARRIVAL

B Hotel

Address: 24 Zemunska Street, Belgrade – Serbia
Phone: +381 11 4040840

Continental Hotel

Address: Bul. Aleksandar Makedonski B.B., Skopje
Phone: + 389 23 133 333

Dubrovnik Meeting Point

The meeting point is your boat, "M/S Lav or M/S Ribic" at Gruz Port in Dubrovnik. Check in time is 13:00 p.m.

Split Meeting Point

Address: The meeting point is your boat, "M/S Lav or M/S Ribic" at Split Harbour. Meeting time is 13:00 p.m. sharp. The boat has to leave the port at 13:00 p.m.

AIRPORT TRANSFER

Complementary arrival airport transfer is available on the first day of the tour for the flights landing to Belgrade between 05:00am and 23:00pm (Only available for the tours departing from Belgrade, **Nikola Tesla Airport**). To confirm your airport transfer please email us following informations at least 10 days before your departure date. info@traveltalktours.com

- Travel Date
- Flight Number
- Local Arrival Time
- Name/s of the Passengers

Our rep will meet you according to your arrival time with a 'Travel Talk' sign at the airport, make sure you have received your airport transfer confirmation email. For private transfers please contact our Sales Office +44 20 8099 95 96 or info@traveltalktours.com

PRE & POST TOUR ACCOMMODATION

Should you require pre or post tour accommodation, please notify us (or your agent) at the time of booking and we can make the arrangements for you. This information will be clearly stated on your voucher.

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ACCOMMODATION

The hotel selection on Travel Talk tours is 4 star locally rated and the main criteria in the hotel selection process is cleanliness, private bathroom facilities, usually but not always centrally located. If you are travelling on your own, you'll be allocated a twin or triple room with other group members of the same gender. Travellers who have paid a single supplement will stay in single rooms. We can not guarantee the availability of double beds for couple travellers. Your Tour Leader will organise the rooming arrangements when checking into the hotels according to the rooming lists. Therefore we can also not guarantee any last minute changes to suit personal requirements of our passengers.

TIPPING

Among the Balkan countries, tipping is not obligatory in restaurants, but if you are satisfied with the service then leave a 10 to 15% tip. At bars and with taxis leave a tip by rounding off the amount.

OPENING HOURS

The opening hours for shops are not regulated in in the Balkan countries, but banks and main post offices generally open from.

Serbia : Weekdays 08:00 -19:00, Saturdays : 08:00 – 15:00

Croatia : Weekdays 08:00 – 16:00, Closed in weekend.

Bosnia & Herzegovina : Weekdays 09:00 – 17:00, Closed in weekend.

Greece : Weekdays 08:00 – 14:00, Closed in weekend.

Macedonia : Weekdays 09:00 – 17:00, Closed in weekend.

Albania : Weekdays 10:00 – 18:00, Closed in weekend.

TOUR LEADER

Your tour leader's role is to ensure that all aspects of the trip run smoothly. He/she will share their local knowledge, advise you on ways to spend your free time and coordinate the day-to-day running of the tour. From time to time situations can occur and things may not go according to plan, and your leader may require your cooperation and understanding. If you have any problems on tour, please let your leader know so that the correct steps can be taken. Please bear in mind that when you travel on a combined tour, you will have different groups and a different leader for each leg.

ENTRANCE FEES

To be confirmed...

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

To be confirmed...

MISSED YOUR WELCOME MEETING ?

Being avid travellers ourselves, we know that unforeseen circumstances arise. If you are late and miss the welcome meeting, don't stress, just check the information board in the hotel lobby for the next day's programme. Should you be a day late, contact your leader for arrangements to meet up.

THE TOUR PRICE AND LOCAL PAYMENT

We ease your cash needs by dividing the tour cost into two payments: tour price and local payment. You only need to pay the tour price in advance to be able to book on tour and the compulsory local payment needs to be paid when your trip commences. The local payment is part of the tour cost and does not cover any extra costs like meals, entrance fees, drinks, tips, personal expenses or other type of travel costs.