

Trip Details

Balkan Discovery

Join us on this fascinating Balkan Discovery to witness the living history as well as unparalleled natural beauty. Share a cup of tea with the lively and passionate people; fall in awe against the magnificent mountain range and crystal mirror-like lakes; meanwhile soak in the massive history that shaped the future of Europe. This Balkans tour takes you through all the highlights from palaces of the Tsars in Sofia and charming Belgrade to the pearl of Adriatic, Dubrovnik, to the pretty Montenegrin villages and Albanian towns, via the heart of stunning Macedonia.

Duration	10 Days	Group Size	13-35 People
Destination	Balkans	Age Req.	18+
Start/Ends in	Sofia/Sofia	Trip Theme	Classic, Overland
Hotels	4 Star	Departs	April to December

Why You Will Love This Tour

- * Explore the essential highlights of 7 Balkan countries in 9 days, staying at comfortable 4-star hotels (3-Star in Budva) and travelling on a private modern coach.
- * Travel with a local guide throughout your trip to get the best insight and tips, plus enjoy professional guided tours in Belgrade, Dubrovnik, Kotor, Ohrid and Skopje.
- * Delve into history and greet the colourful Balkan cultures riding from one capital to another, while frequenting popular hotspots and gems off the beaten track.
- * Swim the Adriatic and walk around the impressive medieval fortresses of Dubrovnik and Kotor, and meet the vibrant nightlife of Budva.
- * Uncover the stunning natural beauty of Ohrid Lake with an optional trip to the serene St. Naum Monastery.

Arrival Details

The group welcome meeting with you guide and other travellers is held around 18:30 at the hotel lobby on Day 1 of your tour, unless otherwise notified.

Meeting Point

Hotel Vega - SOFIA

Address : C75, D-r G.M. Dimitrov Blvd.,1700 Sofia, Bulgaria

Phone : 00359 2 806 6000 **Emergency Number:** +44 (0) 208 099 75 36

Airport Transfers

All tours starting in Sofia include arrival airport transfer if your flight lands in Sofia on the first day of your tour between 5am and 11:30pm

To arrange your airport transfer please email us the following information at least 2 weeks before your departure date. info@traveltalktours.com

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

Making Your Own Way to the Starting Point

The arrival hotel is 8 km away from the Sofia Airport (SOF). It takes about 15 min. - 20 min. by taxi depending on the traffic. You can take a taxi from the airport directly to the hotel, which is expected to cost around BGN 10-15. You can use OK Supertrans AD taxi company (yellow cabs). We recommend to avoid cabs offered outside the office of the taxi operator or in front of the terminal as these can be more costly.

Finishing Point

The finishing point for this tour is:

Hotel Vega - SOFIA

Address : C75, D-r G.M. Dimitrov Blvd.,1700 Sofia, Bulgaria

Phone : 00359 2 806 6000 **Emergency Number:** +44 (0) 208 099 75 36

Highlights

- * **Belgrade:** One of the oldest cities in Europe and the only one built on the confluence of two rivers, also known as the city that never sleeps.
- * **Budva:** Budva is a town in Montenegro and known for best nightlife on the Adriatic Sea, it's known for sandy beaches and nightlife.
- * **Dubrovnik:** This complex is one of the most beautiful and strongest fortified systems in Europe, but the lively streets show that there is more!
- * **Kotor:** Kotor is a fortified town on Montenegro's Adriatic coast, in a bay near the limestone cliffs of Mt. Lovćen.
- * **Mostar:** Mostar is a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and known for the iconic Stari Most (Old Bridge) and the jumpers off the bridge.
- * **Ohrid:** Ohrid is a large town in North Macedonia on the shore of Lake Ohrid and a UNESCO heritage site since 1980.
- * **Sarajevo:** Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia, is a compact city on the Miljacka River, the center has museums commemorating local history.
- * **Shkodra:** Shkodër or Shkodra is the fourth largest city in Albania and one of the oldest places in the Balkan peninsula.
- * **Skopje:** Skopje is the capital and largest city of the North Macedonia and it lies in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula region.
- * **Sofia:** Sofia is the capital and largest city of Bulgaria.it has rich history from Roman and Ottoman Empires. Also famous with it's night life.
- * **Tirana:** Tirana is the capital and largest city of Albania.It is also culturel and economical, politically center of the country.
- * **Trebinje:** Trebinje is a small sized city situated in the Trebišnjica river valley in south eastern Herzegovina, about 30 km by road from Dubrovnik.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary may be subject to small changes depending on the conditions during the tour. Alternative accommodation of similar standards may be used depending on the group size and hotel availability.

Day 1: Sofia

Welcome to Sofia! At the airport, keep an eye out for the Travel Talk sign for your transfer to the hotel. At the hotel around 7pm, have an informal welcome meeting with your guide and fellow travellers. After you get all the critical information about the tour, head out for our optional group dinner around 8:15pm and walk the streets of Sofia.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Vega – 4 Star

- **Included Activities**

Welcome Meeting

- **Optional Activities**

Group Dinner

Day 2: Sofia, Belgrade

After a substantial breakfast, hop on the bus and make your way to the Serbian capital, Belgrade. With stunning views over the Danube and Sava rivers by the mighty medieval Belgrade Fortress, head to the heart of the capitol. Starting off at the vibrant pretty shopping street, Knez Mihailova, filled with cafes, shops and charming sites, kick off the walking tour to discover the incredible landmarks Belgrade has in store and their marvellous histories.

- **Accommodation**

Abba Hotel – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Belgrade City Tour

Day 3: Belgrade, Sarajevo

Next stop Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital, the city that has been through it all! It is where the Western and Eastern Roman Empire split and where people of many nations and religions met, lived and warred. You can still see many reminders of the Yugoslav War in bullet holes and cannon marks all around town. Though, still an oriental beauty with a unique twist, and a delight to discover on your walking tour in the old town. The city offers endless delicacies to taste, but the specialty is lamb.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Ibis Styles – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Sarajevo City Tour

Day 4: Sarajevo, Mostar, Trebinje

Today, we drive for the amazing Adriatic shore, but first a stop at Mostar! As you arrive in this dreamland, walk through the Old Town of this Herzegovina pearl, see the iconic highlights Old Bridge – Stari Most, and the old čaršija (market). Enjoy your lunch with an amazing view at one of the local venues, discover the old town and make sure to try the delicious Turkish coffee. In the afternoon, we ride to Trebinje for our

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Central Park – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Mostar City Tour

- **Optional Activities**

Kravice Waterfalls – EUR 20

Day 5: Trebinje, Dubrovnik, Trebinje

Get ready for a long day at Dubrovnik, the “Pearl of the Adriatic”! With its well-preserved majestic walls encircling the whole town and its sea of terra-cotta roof tiles, giving life to the “King’s Landing”, the whole town is an amazing UNESCO World Heritage Site. Even the drive down to town from the mountain-side is a breath-taking highlight in itself! We start off with a guided walking tour of the Old Town and marvel at the millennial history of this fairy-like town. Walk atop the mighty walls, discover cute narrow streets, taste delicious seafood or jump off into the crystal-blue waters. In the evening, we return to Trebinje for a good night’s rest.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Central Park – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Dubrovnik City Tour

- **Optional Activities**

Dubrovnik Boat Trip – EUR 35

- **Entrance Fees**

Dubrovnik City Walls – EUR 15

Day 6: Trebinje, Kotor, Budva

Next stop Montenegro! Arrive in Kotor after a scenic drive and meet its calming natural beauty and characteristic architecture, a less-crowded version of Dubrovnik with its impressive medieval citadel. Following a walking tour of the old town with your expert local guide and some free time, make your way to the popular touristic hub of the region, Budva. Your guide will take you on a brief walking tour of the vibrant summer town with great food, impressive views and lively nightlife.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Park - 3 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Kotor City Tour

Budva Walking Tour

Day 7: Budva, Tirana, Ohrid

Hit the road after breakfast, next stop Albania! A panoramic city tour of Tirana will introduce the best preserved and most beautiful samples of Albanian architecture, and drop us off at the town centre for some

free time to discover the bustling Skenderbeg square. . In the afternoon, continue towards Ohrid, Macedonia and check-in to your comfy hotel. You can rest up after a long day, or join the optional Balkan

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Sileks – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Panoramic Tour of Tirana

Ohrid Walking Tour

- **Optional Activities**

Balkan Night With Dinner – EUR 25

Day 8: Ohrid, Skopje

Start off the day with a guided city tour of Old Ohrid hosting hundreds of chapels and churches scattered all around. In the afternoon travel to Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, for the night.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Panoramika – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Ohrid City Tour

- **Optional Activities**

St. Naum Tour - EUR 15

Day 9: Skopje, Sofia

Prepare to discover the beautiful Skopje with a guided sightseeing tour filled with stunning architecture, grand monuments and unique history. Pose with the famous statue of Alexander the Great or walk through the Macedonian Arc de Triumph. The city has countless landmarks and a vibrant street life with many cafes and bars around. In the afternoon, leave for Sofia, where our trip ends and we say goodbye to our new friends. You can explore the shopping streets, highlights and the nightlife as you wish.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Vega – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Skopje City Tour

Day 10 : Sofia

Early in the morning, join a walking tour of the Sofia town centre and visit all the famous landmarks including the National Library, Sofia University, The Parliament, and continue on to The St. Alexander Nevsky Patriarchal Cathedral, the National Theatre and St. Sofia Church. While your guide fills you in about the diverse history of Bulgaria and the communist era, you'll get to see the houses of the Council of Ministers, presidency and the former communist party headquarters. As you stroll towards the vibrant shopping streets, feel free to get lost and discover the shops and cafes around. After the city tour, start bidding farewells to your new mates and end the tour.

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Sofia City Tour

Inclusions & Exclusions

The tour price covers the following services:

Accommodation: 4 star hotels

Airport Transfer: Arrival transfer on day one.

Meals: 9 breakfasts

Transportation: Air-conditioned modern non-smoking coach or mini-bus

Guide: Services of experienced Travel Talk local guides licenced by the Ministry of Tourism

Sightseeing: Sofia, Belgrade, Skopje, Sarajevo, Mostar Bridge, Ohrid, Tirana, Dubrovnik, Kotor, Budva

What is NOT included in the tour price?

- Any flights not mentioned above
- Travel insurance
- Meals not stated above
- Items of a personal nature
- Tips & gestures
- Entrance fees to the sights and museums
- Optional activities
- Other services not stated in the itinerary

Hotels & Accommodation

Solo travellers will be roomed with another solo traveller of the same gender in a twin or triple room, or can upgrade to a solo room by paying the single supplement. You may choose the solo room option when booking online or contact us to arrange a private room. Your tour leader will allocate rooms upon arrival at the starting hotel in accordance with the rooming lists, last minute changes may not be guaranteed.

HOTEL VEGA – SOFIA – 4 Star

The hotel offers various facilities such as a restaurant, a fitness centre and a bar. Rooms are fitted with a coffee/tea maker and water Sofia Airport is 8 km away.

ABBA HOTEL – BELGRADE – 4 Star

Discover some of the most elegant hotel rooms in Belgrade, designed to immerse the guests in absolute comfort and unparalleled luxury.

IBIS STYLE HOTEL – SARAJEVO – 4 Star

Ibis Style Hotel offers various facilities such as swimming pool and a wellness centre. The hotel has a rich continental breakfast buffet.

HOTEL CENTRAL PARK – TREBINJE – 4 Star

Hotel Central Park is located in Trebinje and has a terrace with a nice and cozy restaurant. The hotel is in a building that has a very interesting history.

HOTEL PARK – BUDVA – 3 Star

Situated just steps away from Slovenska beach in Budva. A special attraction is the unpredictable hotel garden in the shade of palms.

SILEKS HOTEL – OHRID – 4 Star

Hotel Sileks is located in tourist complex St.Stefan. Offering it's guests an outdoor swimming pool, also has a private beach. All rooms in the hotel have a balcony.

HOTEL PANORAMIKA – SKOPJE – 4 Star

This hotel has much to offer, swimming pool, spa with sauna, steam bath and gym center.The property is located a 20-minute walk from Macedonia Square.

Distances

Please find below the approximate driving times between the destinations visited in the Balkans. We will always strive to take a short break every few hours to enable passengers to stretch their legs, purchase snacks and use wash facilities during long drives.

Please note that crossing borders may take only several minutes or up to a few hours, depending on how busy the border control is. The driving times listed below do not take into account the waiting time to cross the border.

- Sofia – Belgrade: 400 km - 4.5 hrs
- Belgrade – Sarajevo: 290 km - 5 hrs
- Sarajevo – Mostar: 130 km - 2 hrs
- Mostar – Trebinje: 120 km - 2 hrs
- Trebinje – Dubrovnik: 32 km - 1 hr
- Trebinje – Kotor: 80 km - 2 hrs
- Kotor – Budva: 23 km - 30 mins
- Budva – Tirana: 180 km - 3.5 hrs
- Tirana – Ohrid: 135 km - 2.5 hrs
- Ohrid – Skopje: 170 km - 3 hrs
- Skopje – Sofia: 240 km - 4 hrs

Budgeting

Please note that entrance fees to sights and optional activities are not included in the tour price. Optional activities are not operated by Travel Talk and may require a certain number of attendees to run. Your guide will be happy to inform you further about the available optional activities at the start of your tour. Optional activities are also listed under each day in your tour itinerary.

Optional Activities

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| • Kravice Waterfalls | EUR 20 |
| • Dubrovnik Boat Trip | EUR 35 |
| • Balkan Night With Dinner | EUR 25 |
| • St. Naum Tour | EUR 15 |

Personal Spending

The Balkans region covers Europe's three great southern peninsulas and is comprised of 12 nations, meaning there's multiple currencies that you will handle throughout your tour. The main currencies include Serbian Dinar, Bosnian Mark, Kuna (Croatia), Lek (Albania) and Euro (Greece). We recommend carrying extra Euros which are accepted in most larger hotels or shops across the region. Here you will find the average cost for a meal or drink and advice for best practice in tipping.

Meals

Lunch at restaurant	US\$ 7-10
Dinner at restaurant	US\$ 12-15
Ćevapi at a stall	US\$ 3-5
Baklava	US\$ 1-2

Drinks

Bottle of water	US\$ 0.5
Coffee	US\$ 1-3
Tea	US\$ 1-2
Bottle of beer	US\$ 1-3

Tipping

Tipping is not compulsory in the Balkans region but is appreciated for good service. If satisfied with service, then we suggest leaving a tip of ~10% in restaurants. While at bars or taxis, rounding off the amount is considered sufficient. Your Guide and Driver would also appreciate tipping as a sign of gratitude at the end of your tour.

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, 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.

Budva is the beating heart of shopping in Montenegro. Filled with fashion shops and boutiques that sell everything from traditional products to designer clothing and fine jewellery, the Old Town is the perfect place to go if you're looking to shop until you drop.

The cosmopolitan city of Belgrade offers quality shopping encounters with a range of luxurious shopping malls and supermarkets, local bakeries and street markets worth exploring. The city centre is packed with boutiques and souvenir shops selling traditional textiles, Serbian pottery and historic memorabilia from the Yugoslavia days. The open-air bazaars of Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra are worthy of a stop to hunt down some uniquely Serbian souvenirs.

Essential Information: Balkans

Passport & Visas

If you're from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, United States or Canada, you can enter the following Balkan countries for a touristic stay of up to 90 days without a visa: Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Albania, North Macedonia, Greece. Passport validity entry requirements may change per nationality. We generally recommend to have a passport with at least 6 months of remaining validity.

This information is provided only as a guidance, we strongly advise that you check with the consulate or embassy as this information can change at any time and with little notice. It is your responsibility to make sure that all the required travel documents are ready when travelling.

Travel Advice

We are closely monitoring the latest travel updates to Morocco and follow the advice of the UK Foreign Office (FCDO).

For the latest travel advice from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/>

We recommend all travellers to check their Government National Travel Advisory prior to their departure:

- Australia - <https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/>
- Canada - <https://travel.gc.ca/>
- New Zealand - <https://www.safetravel.govt.nz/>
- USA - <https://travel.state.gov/>

Travel Insurance

All passengers travelling with Travel Talk are required to have personal travel insurance before participating in any of our tours. Your guide will collect your travel insurance details on the first day of your trip. It is your responsibility to make sure you have an adequate and suitable travel insurance for you in place, you may read more at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/travel-insurance>

Health & Safety

The health and safety of our passengers, staff and communities visited is of utmost priority. As we monitor and comply with the official advice from the UK Foreign Office, as well as World Health Organization and government authorities regularly, we have implemented several policies and precautions on our tours for your wellbeing. You may find our Safe Travels Protocols at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/safe-travels>



Travel Talk Adventures has received the Safe Travels stamp by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), which allows travellers to recognise companies around the world that have adopted health and hygiene global standardised protocols – so consumers can experience ‘Safe Travels’.

Please make sure to regularly check your Government’s travel advice before travelling and be well-informed of any requirements. Your tour guide will also notify you of the regulations and protocols to follow throughout your trip with us.

Please note that if any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary or possess a potential risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, we reserve the right to remove them from all or part of a trip.

Please consult with your doctor for the latest medical travel information and any vaccinations you may need. We recommend that you bring any personal medical requirements and medications with you as these may be difficult to obtain while on tour.

Weather

The Balkans is a geographically diverse region spanning over multiple countries and 500,000km², hosting various climates. However, it is fair to expect a somewhat continental climate with hot summers and cool winters, and a milder Mediterranean climate on the coastline.

The Summer months of July and August are considered Europe’s busiest with high temperatures attracting flocks of locals and travellers to the breath-taking coastal regions. The shoulder seasons of April to June and September to October are also considered a great time to visit the Balkans. During these months, the weather tends to be milder, with the major tourist cities less populated. The Winter months between

March are quite colder with occasional snow. Meanwhile, the coastal regions of Croatia, Montenegro and Albania are known for their significantly warmer winters than the Central Balkans.

Months	Belgrade		Kotor		Ohrid		Skopje	
	C°	F	C°	F	C°	F	C°	F
January	2	41	5	48	2	50	1	32
February	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
August	23	73	27	81	21	82	24	73
September	19	68	23	73	17	77	18	64
October	20	61	13	64	13	68	13	55
November	13	54	8	59	8	59	8	46
December	6	46	5	50	3	54	2	36

Money Matters

The Balkans region covers Europe's three great southern peninsulas and is comprised of 12 nations, meaning there's multiple currencies that you will handle throughout your tour. The main currencies include Serbian Dinar, Bosnia-Herzegovina Mark, Croatian Kuna, Albanian Lek, Macedonian Denar and Euro (Montenegro, Greece). Euro is easily convertible to the local currencies and may be accepted at certain locations, however it is always more advantageous to pay in the local currency.

Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in major cities and tourist sites across the Balkans. However, if you are travelling off the beaten track, come prepared with a small stash of cash on hand for inexpensive purchases at small shops and vendors, entrance fees or small meals. ATMs can be easily found in many places across the cities.

We recommend you do not exchange bulk sums of money at the airport, as the exchange rates are usually more favourable in the major cities. Your tour leader will be happy to help if you need any assistance.

Please remember that everyone has different spending habits, some prefer to spend more on souvenirs, some on experiences and others on a night out! Make sure to budget your trip to your spending habits for shopping, drinking, and tipping.

Tipping is not compulsory in the Balkans region but is appreciated for good service. If satisfied with the service, then we suggest leaving a tip of ~10% in restaurants. While at bars or taxis, rounding off the amount is considered sufficient. Your Tour Leader and Driver would also appreciate tipping as a sign of gratitude at the end of your tour.

Eating & Drinking

Balkan cuisine is vast and diverse in itself while also carrying hints of Greek, Persian and Turkish cuisines. While some popular regional recipes have shaped according to the tastes of each country, there are plentiful unique dishes to each area. Balkans food is typically known to be a hearty, meat-heavy cuisine with a large sharing aspect involved. So, if you are eager to dive straight into the Balkan culture through its food, be sure to try these essential dishes from various areas.

Čobanac: This hearty meat stew, originally from Croatia, is cooked in a cauldron hung over an open fire pit.

Ajvar: Like pesto is to Italy, Ajvar is to the Balkans. The sauce is served with almost any meaty order and consists of mainly roasted red peppers and garlic.

Dolma: The most eaten Dolma dish consists of rice wrapped in leaves. The filling and wrap can vary widely, but in the Balkans region dolma's made of onion, zucchini, cabbage, meat and stuffed tomatoes are common.

Pljeskavica: A round patty made of beef, lamb, pork or veal, depending on where you are visiting in the Balkans. It is common to eat these patties plain or on a bun with ajvar spread, like a Balkan-style burger!

Banitsa: This Bulgarian inspired dish is made of eggs and cheese baked into a flaky, melt-in-your-mouth pastry. Other varieties of the dish include yoghurt, honey, pumpkin or spinach.

Stuffed Pepper: A common Balkan food, stuffed peppers are usually filled to the brim with simple ingredients including meat, rice, paprika, tomato sauce, onions and garlic.

Baklava: Baklava is a sweet syrupy layered pastry with honey and nuts, quite popular in Greece and Turkey.

Gozleme: Thin savoury pancakes filled with cheese, mushroom, spinach, or potato.

When it comes to drinking – Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Bulgaria all offer unexpected delights for wine-lovers! The Balkans region is known for its diverse range of affordable drops. Along with the classic beer destinations, a number of young brewers from the Balkans have managed to put their name on the 'beer map' with Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece home to fantastic micro-breweries. Finally, 'Rakija', 'Raki' or 'Rakia' is by far the most famous spirit of the Balkans, which can be made of almost any fruit!

Essentials to Bring

- * Face mask/cover and hand sanitiser enough for your personal use throughout the trip – See more at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/safe-travels>
- * Travel Documents: Passport, Visa (if required), flight or transport ticket (and photocopies)
- * Travel Talk Tour Voucher (printed or digital)
- * Travel Insurance Policy (and photocopy)
- * Personal medical kit and medicine
- * Money (cash, credit card, travellers' cheques)
- * Power Adapter
- * Reusable water bottle
- * Ear plugs and eye mask
- * Sun protection – hat, sunglasses, sunscreen
- * Comfortable, closed walking shoes
- * Wind/water proof jacket
- * Warm clothes, hat, and gloves for cold weather
- * Sandals, swimwear, shorts for warm weather

Internet Access

Complimentary Wi-Fi is available in most hotels, some cafes, and restaurants visited during Travel Talk tours. If you come from another EU Country, you may be able to use your phone without any additional roaming charges, please consult with your mobile provider. Make sure to enable data roaming on your mobile if you wish to use 3G/4G abroad, although the connection may be unreliable in smaller towns and rural areas. Purchasing a European SIM card for the duration of your tour may be a cost-effective option. Your guide will be happy to advise on this.

Culture and Traditions

The Balkans region of Europe is particularly rich in folklore and traditions. Ethnic diversity is one of the Balkans' most characteristic social and political features. It has been said that the Balkans have produced more history than they can consume. The region has not been controlled by only one government since the Roman Empire, and it continues to compete with the East-West divide since the Empire's split in the 4th century. Your Tour Leader will provide immense detail of such events throughout your tour, but here is a light preview to get you started!

Albania: Religious practice in Albania is diverse with several religions including Islam, Christianity and Judaism all co-existing peacefully. Until fairly recently, the beautiful landscapes, fortress towns and dazzling beaches of Albania were merely a rumour for most travellers. But, with the end of communism in 1991, Albania opened its gates to tourists.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Boasting a unique East-meets-West atmosphere that blends Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian histories, Bosnia the former-Yugoslavian nation is a treasure-trove of natural beauty, culture and history. The country still holds scars from its heart-breaking civil war of the 1990s which finished only 20 years ago. In Bosnia, coffee is not only traditional, but a way of life. Bosnian coffee is strong, thick and served from a metal pot into a handle-less tumbler. In terms of religious beliefs, Bosnia is and always has been a melting pot. The Ottomans brought Islam, Catholicism came from the west, and Orthodox Christianity from the east. All of which have added to the vast history and charm of this marvellous country.

Croatia: A land steeped in history, captivating traditions, and cultural heritage. The colourful Croatian culture is deeply rooted in its vast history and reflected in its wonderful architecture and monuments. The country holds its cultural richness with a mixture between European, Mediterranean and Balkan traditions. The Slavic heritage of Croatian people is especially evident throughout the display of charming festivals and national holidays, where cities and villages come to life in traditional costume, folk music and feasts. The bulk of Croatia's cultural and traditional festivals take place in the country's capital, Zagreb, in the Spring and Autumn. Although, Dubrovnik and Split also offer a lot in the way of heavyweight music, culture, and drama

Bulgaria: The culture of Bulgaria is based on an interesting blend of Thracian, Slavic and Bulgar traditions, along with the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many ancient customs remain, such as Thracian fire dancing, which is recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage! Even today, Bulgaria still has a strong folkloric tradition that pervades many aspects of art, literature, music, celebrations, and daily life.

Serbia: Still considered well-off the tourist trail, Serbia is located in the heart of the Balkans and is considered diverse, welcoming and full of culture. The capital city, Belgrade is particularly famous for its nightlife, and this has more to do with an inherent desire to celebrate at any occasion. The Serbian people are a proud nation and closely tied to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The church plays such an important role in the history of the Serbian people that it is difficult to separate them entirely, and religion still plays a vital role in the lives of many ordinary people.

Montenegro: Montenegro is a country of diverse cultures, influenced by its location and junction between Eastern and Western Europe, drawing influences from Ancient Rome, Byzantines and the Ottomans. Generally, Montenegrins are immensely proud of their culture and traditions with art, music, and food major composites of culture in Montenegro. Eastern Orthodoxy is the predominant religion and play a crucial role in daily life, while groups of Catholic Christians and Muslims also coexist peacefully.

North Macedonia: Even by Balkan standards, North Macedonia's history is characterised by complexity and controversy. It was not until 1991 that the country officially attained its status as an independent nation, having been previously incorporated into the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia at the conclusion of World War II. With the collapse of European communism came Macedonian independence. Ethnic North Macedonians – who make up the majority of the population and are largely Orthodox Christians, and the country's notable Albanian Muslim population tend to share certain common values despite their differences.

How to Dress

In general, there are few dress restrictions in Eastern Europe. However, when visiting churches, monasteries or other religious sites modest dress is required - shorts or open-shoulder tops may not be permitted, for both men and women. It is important to cover from shoulders to knees as a sign of respect and women are also often required to wear a headscarf at religious sites.

Solo Travellers

We have many solo travellers joining our tours. Solo travellers will be roomed with another traveller of the same gender. If you would like a private solo room, subject to availability and a single supplement, please contact us.

Rules to Follow

We are committed to ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone. We do not tolerate any form of violence (physical or verbal), bullying or harassment involving customers, partners, Travel Talk staff or locals. Sexual relationships between a tour leader and a passenger are forbidden.

We will not tolerate any illegal activity, including but not limited to: use and possession of illegal drugs, trespassing, and disrupting public order. If you consume alcohol, please ensure that you drink responsibly and follow the local laws and regulations.

If someone is acting inappropriately regarding these matters, please notify your tour leader immediately or contact us on the emergency contact number provided below.

You must follow the advice of your tour leader and local officials regarding health and safety measures. We operate all tours under our Safe Travels protocols for the wellbeing of our passengers, staff and communities visited. Please ensure that you have read the Safe Travels protocols (<https://www.traveltalktours.com/safe-travels-with-traveltalk/>) and are fully prepared for your trip.

Your tour leader has the right to remove from the group anyone not abiding by these rules, with no right of compensation or refund. See more at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/booking-terms/>

Please remember that our travellers come from different parts of the world and will have various needs and preferences. Be understanding and patient with your fellow travellers, and always strive to be on time.

Responsible Travel

We believe that travel is a force for good and show our support through various initiatives and charity organizations, as well as keeping the principals of responsible and sustainable travel at the core of our ethos. These values are engrained in our business culture and the design of our trips just the same. Together with you, we strive to make a positive impact on local people and economies, respecting the local culture, environment, social fabric and customs; encouraging respectful and meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

Read more at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/responsible-travel/>