

For tours departing beyond 2009, itineraries may be subject to change. This will be confirmed by the publication of the 2010 brochure (issued in Oct 09).

2009
Tour Dossier

EXPLORE!
WORLDWIDE

BULGARIA • MACEDONIA • GREECE Dossier Ref. AM

Ancient Macedonia

Amended 04 Jun 2009. Valid from 01 Apr 2009 to 31 Dec 2009
Since first issue this dossier has been updated with amendments to the following sections: Itinerary, travel from London, sightseeing, meal plan, visa foreign exchange & vaccinations

As our itineraries may be amended from time to time, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers, please ensure you have the most up-to-date copy of this dossier immediately before you travel. You can download the dossier from our website, www.explore.co.uk. Of course we will notify you of any significant changes, but sometimes minor changes may simply be added to the tour dossier.

JOINING TOUR ABROAD

15 days/14 nights Land Only
Sofia back to Sofia

Join Sofia (day 1)
End Sofia (day 15)

Clients booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the joining point in Sofia. Please refer to separate 'Joining Instructions' for exact location of meeting point and time of rendezvous with tour leader.

GROUP TRAVEL FROM LONDON

15 days/14 nights Tour including
Connecting Group Flights
London-Sofia-London

Depart from London Heathrow airport to join tour in Sofia (day 1 of Land Only itinerary). Transfer to hotel.

Return from Sofia (day 15 of Land Only itinerary) to arrive London Heathrow the same day.

Passengers with **non-group flights** booked through Explore should refer to their individual confirmation invoice for flight details. Transfers to and from the airport are not included unless purchased in addition to the tour package.

SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Among the many highlights featured on this tour, we particularly mention:

- * **LAKE OHRID** Enjoy a truly stunning lake and mountain setting with a wide choice of activities available locally.
- * **OHRID TOWN** Sightseeing tour of Old Town including fort and amphitheatre.

CO₂ Offsets Included

The biggest environmental impact of your holiday with Explore is the CO₂ generated by your flights. As a responsible tour operator, we have included in our tour prices the costs of offsetting CO₂ emissions from all international and domestic flights forming part of the tour. Our chosen offset partner is Climate Care. If you are making independent flight arrangements to join one of our tours, may we urge you to take responsibility for your CO₂ emissions by offsetting through Climate Care, or a similar offsetting scheme.

- * **MATKA GORGE** Chance to enjoy a boat trip.
- * **RILA NATIONAL PARK** glacial lakes and pine forests.
- * **RILA MONASTERY** Spectacular UNESCO World Heritage site.
- * **SOPIA** Old town sightseeing.
- * **VERGINA** Visit royal tombs of Macedonian kings.
- * **MT ATHOS** Boat excursion along the coast of Athos.
- * **THASSOS ISLAND** Day trip by ferry.

This tour of discovery combines western Bulgaria with northern Greece and the off-beat former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on a journey that delves into the past of ancient Macedonia – once the mighty all-conquering civilisation of Alexander the Great – and compares the quite distinct cultural differences today. These are lands of mountains, abundant flora and fauna, traditional folk music and crafts, quaint mountain villages, deep-rooted culture, and an old-world way of life. After exploring the sites of Sofia we enjoy some quite breathtaking scenery as we cross into eastern Macedonia to spend a night at the 12th century Monastery of St Joakim Osogovski. Travelling east we then explore Skopje, the capital of Macedonia. Our route then traverses Mavrovo National Park, before twisting through the dramatic Black Drim river valley to Lake Ohrid. The setting is simply sublime, with a dramatic mountain backdrop almost encircling the tranquil waters of the lake. Crossing the Livada Pass, en-route through Galicica National Park, we descend to the shores of Lake Prespa and the ancient Macedonian town of Heraclea (founded by Philip II, father of Alexander), before we head to the hills to spend our last night in Macedonia in Pelister National Park. Crossing into Greece, our next stop is at Pella, birthplace of Alexander the Great, before reaching the shores of the Med and the bustling metropolis of Thessaloniki. A boat trip along the coast of the fabled monastic retreat Mt Athos, a day trip by ferry to Thassos Island, and a visit to ancient Philippi complete our activities in northern Greece. Finally we head north back into Bulgaria to enjoy Rila Monastery and complete our circuit in Sofia.

LAND ONLY ITINERARY

Be Prepared: While our intention is to adhere to the day-to-day route printed below, a degree of flexibility is built into the itinerary.

Earth Matters

• **The Travel Foundation**
Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk

• **Tourism Concern**
Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
• For further information on responsible travel go to <http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/>



Accommodation and Included Meals: please find the key to our accommodation ratings overleaf, and note that included meals are indicated in the itinerary below and are shown on the day they are provided (B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner).

Day 1. Join tour Sofia

Arriving in Sofia this afternoon we transfer to our hotel and check in. There should be time this evening to explore the Old Town on foot. Lit by streetlights we can stroll along the yellow-paved central boulevard, marvelling at the architectural mix of this compact city.
Overnight hotel H+.

Day 2. City tour of Sofia; drive to Kriva Palanka

Sofia is an old settlement, situated in the basin between the Balkan Mountain range and Vitosha Mountains. There are three major landmarks; the neo-Byzantine Alexander Nevski Cathedral, which was built to commemorate the 200,000 Russian soldiers who died fighting for Bulgaria's independence. After our visit we will drive to the Monastery of St Joakim Osogovski at Kriva Palanka in Macedonia. Founded in the 12th century the monastery became a place of worship for both Christians and Muslims, situated as it was on the main route to Constantinople. We stop and visit the monastery with its 18th century frescoes. We check-in and spend the night in this unique accommodation. **Overnight monastery H+ (included meals: B).**

Day 3. Drive to Skopje

This morning we drive to Kratovo to explore this historic Roman mining town, located in the crater of an extinct volcano, before we head on to Skopje, Macedonia's capital. This afternoon we will make a tour of the city, visiting the site of Fortress Kale, the Church of St Spas and the old Bazaar, before ending our tour in the new city. **2 nights hotel H+ (included meals: Bx2).**

Day 4. In Skopje

A half-day excursion this morning takes us to Matka Gorge, on the outskirts of the city, where we visit spectacular karst formations and the man made Matka Lake, created by the damming of the Treska River. The gorge is the result of fluctuating temperatures and the impact of the mountain rivers, resulting in a vista of flutes and valleys, crevices and caves that carve their way through the 5000 hectare

To book please call 0844 499 0901 • www.explore.co.uk

For bookings outside the UK please contact your local travel agent representing Explore.

Page 1 of 4

canyon. Of the 1000 or so species of plants in the gorge some 20% are endemic, including the Kosanini Violet and Nataly's Ramonda. There are also 119 varieties of butterfly in the canyon. There is an option to take a boat ride out onto the lake above the dam and appreciate the canyon and visit one of its numerous caves. Returning to Skopje this afternoon the rest of the day is free for personal sightseeing, perhaps to visit some of the museums, mosques and galleries dotted around the city, or perhaps pay another visit to the bazaar. Skopje is an excellent city in which to wander, given that much of the centre is pedestrianised.

Day 5. Drive to Lake Ohrid via Mavrovo National Park

Today we drive a scenic route, largely through the Black Drim River Valley, to reach the shores of Lake Ohrid. En-route we'll make a stop to visit one of Macedonia's finest monasteries – St Jovan Bigorski – dedicated to St John the Baptist. The monastery is famous for its remarkable iconostasis, perhaps the most beautiful one in Macedonia, constructed by quite intricate woodcarving between 1829 and 1835. On arrival at Ohrid town we'll have time to settle into our hotel before heading into the centre for a first glimpse. Alternatively, you may wish to stretch your legs with a walk along the lakeshore. **3 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

Days 6 & 7. Exploring Lake Ohrid

Our setting for the next few days is simply sublime, with a dramatic mountain backdrop almost encircling the tranquil waters of Lake Ohrid. Founded over 2,400 years ago, Ohrid has a wealth of heritage and is today an important cultural and spiritual centre. To help its protection both the town and lake were classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980. Lake Ohrid is one of the oldest in the world and allegedly there are some 365 churches, monasteries and other religious sites around the lake. We start with a walking tour of Ohrid that includes a visit to Tsar Samuel's Fortress and the Roman amphitheatre for sensational panoramic views. Then there's chance to stroll around the Old Town on cobblestone lanes. During our two full days based in Ohrid flexibility is key to our stay here as there are many optional activities available. Boats run frequent trips across the lake or if you prefer to walk, a variety of walking trails exist in the area. There will also be an option to walk between two of the villages perched high above the lake. The lakeshore has a good array of beaches should you wish to take it easy at some time during your visit. A good choice of restaurants and old Turkish shops (in the Lower Town area) also exist. Each year, between mid-July and mid-August, the Ohrid Summer Festival takes place, with concerts and plays held in outdoor venues around town. **(Included meals: Bx2).**

Day 8. Drive to Pelister National Park

Located close to Ohrid is Galicica National Park, part of the Sara-Pind mountain range. With its exceptional natural beauty and wealth of endemic flora and fauna the park was created in 1958, covering an area between the lakes of Ohrid and Prespa. Large, deep valleys and a long mountain crest typify the relief of the massif, with peaks reaching over 2,000m. With the crest falling between the two lakes ensuring dramatic views over both lakes on a clear day. Today we set out to explore the region by bus, a short walk and by rowing boat. First we drive to the Monastery of St Naum, close to the Albanian border. Here we'll enjoy a short trip by rowing boat to the bubbling springs that feed Lake Ohrid. Then continuing across Galicica National Park and over the Livada Pass (1,568m), we head down to Lake Prespa and then onwards to the nearby Pelister National Park, our stop for the night. There are several walking trails around the hotel. **Overnight hotel H+ (included meals: B, D).**

Day 9. Drive to Thessaloniki, Greece

This morning we visit the ancient site of Heraclea. Founded in the 4th century BC by Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, Heraclea grew to be an important trading town under the Romans, before being sacked by the northern tribes and eventually falling into decay after an earthquake in AD518. After our visit we leave Macedonia behind and drive on to Thessaloniki in Greece. Travelling east we reach Pella. Lying on the Macedonia Plain, Pella is most famous as the birthplace of Alexander the Great, who was born here in 356BC. Nowadays the main draw of Pella though is the mosaics depicting mythological scenes in coloured stone. After visiting the town we continue on to Thessaloniki, Greece's second city. Filled with the reminders of Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman rule, Thessaloniki is a vibrant city situated on the Thermaic Gulf. **2 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

Day 10. In Thessaloniki

After a city tour we head for Vergina the ancient city of Aigai, ancient capital of the Macedonian Kings, was only discovered in 1977, and we shall visit the spectacular royal tombs of King Phillip II and the young Prince Alexander IV amongst others during our visit. Moving on from Vergina we head for Thessaloniki. We visit some of the prime sites of the city with a local guide. Our tour will take in the White Tower, the city's symbol and most pronounced landmark. We also see the 3rd century Rotunda, the oldest of the city's churches and the old Turkish quarter of Kastra. The steep narrow streets of the district are all that is left of the city's 19th century period and a walk amongst the whitewashed houses and overhanging balconies leads to some quite magnificent views down into the Gulf and across the new

city. We will end our tour close to both the Byzantine and the Archaeological Museum, where you have the option to take a tour independently. **(Included meals: B).**

Day 11. Drive to Kavala via Halkidiki Peninsula

Leaving Thessaloniki early this morning we head across the Halkidiki Peninsula to Kavala, set in the foothills of Mount Symvolon on the Gulf of Kavala. Travelling along scenic roads we pass through Arnea to the Athos Peninsula, the easternmost tip of the three-pronged Halkidiki. Here we head for Ouranopoli at the northern end of secretive Athos, from where we take a boat along the coast of Mount Athos. Known as "The Holy Mountain", it is a semi-autonomous region of monastic orders originally settled in the 4th century. At its peak there were said to be 40 monasteries on the peninsula, today the number has declined to half that. After viewing the monasteries from our boat we return to dry land and drive onto Kavala, a most attractive city formed around a harbour with an old quarter dominated by a Byzantine fortress. **2 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

Day 12. In Kavala, visit Thassos Island

Today we travel by ferry to Thassos Island where we have a free day to explore the island by foot or local bus, or relax on one of its superb beaches. Around the capital of Limenas there are a number of archaeological sites, including an ancient Roman theatre and a medieval fortress that offers some stunning views of the surrounding area. Later in the afternoon we return by ferry to the mainland. **(Included meals: B).**

Day 13. Drive to Bansko, Bulgaria

This morning we leave Greece and head back to Bulgaria. We drive to Bansko via the ancient site of Philippi. Philippi's fame is two fold. It was the first European city to accept Christianity in the 5th century, but prior to that it was the scene of a decisive battle between two Roman armies in the 1st century AD. On one side the army of imperial Rome, led by Mark Anthony and Octavian, on the other representatives of republican Rome, led by Cassius and Brutus. The outcome of the battle was a victory for the

Booking a Single Room

All of our tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. On this particular tour we are pleased to be able to offer customers the option of pre-booking a guaranteed single room. Due to the variety of accommodation used on this tour, single rooms are available for a majority of the nightstops, however it would still mean sharing on night two.

EXPLORE ACCOMMODATION RATINGS : An important feature of many Explore tours is the wide range of accommodation used, and since the beginning our philosophy has been to select accommodation to suit the itinerary - not the other way round.

To help gauge the comfort level on your chosen tour, we have graded the accommodation standards at all night-stops using the rating guide below. Please keep in mind however that standards can vary from one trip to the next, and occasionally we may need to change a night-stop without advance warning.

Hotels / lodges / guesthouses - or similar

H++ : Comfortable hotels, lodges or guesthouses with twin or single rooms and en suite facilities. With air-conditioning/heating where appropriate and with reliable hot and cold water. Generally good levels of service and often with added amenities such as restaurant, bar, gardens or swimming pool.

H+ : Standard hotels, lodges or guesthouses, usually with twin or single rooms and en suite facilities. These are generally standard, no-frills hotels with adequate amenities and service standards. Whilst comfort levels are perfectly acceptable to most, please don't expect too much! These are often small, family run establishments.

H : Basic hotels, lodges or guesthouses (also village houses, mountain huts, hotels etc often come into this category). Accommodation may be communal or dorm-style, and WC / washing facilities are usually shared. Running hot and cold water may be unreliable or even unavailable. These can be the most rewarding and memorable places to stay, but comfort levels are low.

Camping

C++ : Comfortable, full service camping generally in permanent, fixed camps with walk-in tents, proper beds and often with en-suite facilities and other amenities such as dining area, bar, gardens and a swimming pool. Your bed-linen is provided.

C+ : Standard camping in private or public campsites, usually with WC and washing / showering facilities in a shared ablutions building. Typically in two person tents, and some level of participation is often required. Generally bed linen or sleeping bags are not provided.

C : Basic camping in wild camps where facilities / amenities may be limited or non-existent. Generally there is no running water, and we dig a temporary bush toilet. Two person tents are often used, but occasionally we sleep under the stars. Participation normally required and sleeping bags usually not provided.

Note: other accommodation, for example, aboard boats or on overnight sleeper trains is described individually at the appropriate point in the tour itinerary above.

To book please call 0844 499 0901 • www.explore.co.uk

For bookings outside the UK please contact your local travel agent representing Explore.

Page 2 of 4

imperialist and the death of the republic (not to mention Cassius and Brutus). We will also visit the baptistry of Lydia, time permitting.
Overnight hotel H+ (included meals: B).

Day 14. Morning at leisure, afternoon drive to Sofia

Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, Rila Monastery is an important religious and cultural centre for the Bulgarian people. In beautiful condition it has the most stunning brightly coloured frescoes. Originally founded in 927 the monastery served to preserve Bulgarian culture during the 400 years of Turkish rule. Today the magnificent church and its museums house a priceless collection of frescoes, gilded iconostasis, religious art and artifacts and this morning we spend time exploring the monastery complex. This afternoon we complete our journey through Ancient Macedonia when we return to Sofia for our final evening. On arrival there should be time to explore a little more of this charming city and maybe do some last minute shopping. **Overnight hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

Day 15. Tour ends Sofia (Included meals: B).

PERSONAL EXPENSES

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry. There is no international departure tax.

Foreign Exchange

Local Currency: Bulgaria: Leva.

Macedonia: Denari. **Greece:** Euros.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: All major currencies may be exchanged, but Euros are easiest to exchange.

Where to Exchange: Banks or 'Forex' offices in main towns/cities.

ATM Availability: In all main towns and cities. Don't rely on this as a means for drawing funds.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very limited acceptance.

Travellers Cheques: Difficult to exchange

Additional Information: There are no restrictions on the import and export of local or foreign currency.

Up-to-date information re: global exchange rates can be obtained at <https://www.currency-express.com/explore/>

Meal Plan

Local Food and Drink: 14 breakfasts and 1 dinner are included on this trip; please be prepared to pay for all other meals. Prices quoted are correct as of the date this dossier was originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location and the prices below are given as an average guide only.

	UK	Mace	Bulg	Greece
Coffee/Tea	£1.20	£0.80	£0.80	€2.50
Soft Drink	0.80	1.00	0.60	2.50
Bottle of Beer	2.50	1.00	1.80	3.00
Bottle of Water	1.00	0.50	0.70	1.00
Bottle of Wine	10.00	5.00	6.50	15.00
2 Course Meal*	10.00	7.00	8.00	15.00
3 Course Meal**	18.00	10.00	15.00	25.00

*Cheap local fare in a small cafe or restaurant.

**Typical food in a simple, reasonably comfortable mid-range restaurant.

Tipping

Local Staff: Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly you should allow approx. €30 for gratuities for local staff.

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your tour leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Other Sightseeing

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date this dossier was originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

LAKE OHRID Allow approx. €10.00 for misc. entrance fees and €10.00 for local transport. Boat trip €10; Guided walk to local villages including lunch and transport at end of walk €35.

MATKA GORGE Boat trip approx. €5.00 pp.

GREECE Allow €20-30 for misc. entrance fees.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Seasonal Climate

Macedonia: As a landlocked country, the Republic of Macedonia has a pronounced continental climate, with very cold winters and hot summers. Daily sunshine hours are high during the summer months (9-10 per day during June-Aug). Come prepared for rain showers at any time due to the mountainous nature of the country.

Greece: Enjoys one of the most favourable climates in the Mediterranean, with mild to hot weather most of the year, with perhaps May and September being ideal. Rain rarely falls between these months, July and August can be very hot and evenings can be particularly pleasant.

Bulgaria: Has a somewhat temperate climate, influence by the combination of Mediterranean and Eastern European weather systems. The winters are mild and the summers warm and fresh. The alpine regions can be cooler, but Ezerovo is one of the sunniest areas in this part of Europe, with some 280 days of sunshine a year.

Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at <http://www.explore.co.uk/> weather. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable. Up-to-date information on the weather worldwide can be found by following the BBC weather link on this page.

Visa Requirements

Bulgaria: Visas are NOT required for UK, NZ, US, CAN & AUS nationals.

Macedonia: Visas are NOT required for nationals of UK, NZ, CAN, AUS and US.

Greece: Visas are NOT required for UK, NZ, US, CAN & AUS nationals. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related issues with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

There has been a recent outbreak of mumps in Macedonia. If you have not had mumps as a child we recommend you contact your Doctors surgery for advice on what precautions you should take. We also recommend protection against typhoid, hepatitis A, polio and tetanus.

Special Note: Vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

Electric Supply and Plugs

For comprehensive information regarding voltages and plug types in use in the countries visited, follow the relevant link at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Traveladvice/>

Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all bookings. You must take your policy document with you on tour, as your tour leader will ask to see this at the start of the trip. Your documentation must state in writing that you are the named policyholder and that the cover is valid for your period of travel. Your policy document must also indicate that you have medical expenses and emergency repatriation cover and a 24-hour contact telephone number for your Insurance Company must be shown on your documentation in case of emergency.

If you are unable to provide all this information at the start of the trip you will not be allowed to join the trip. If you have purchased Explore Insurance you should carry the Master Certificate leaflet with you, which outlines the conditions of the policy together with a copy of your Confirmation Invoice, which is your proof of purchase of insurance. Explore Worldwide are an Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Limited, who is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services authority.

Know Before You Go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination including safety and security, local laws and customs, entry requirements and health. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Traveladvice/>

PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP

A complete list of clothing and personal gear is contained in Explore's '**General Information Booklet**', available only after a booking has been accepted. Here we make a few specific recommendations with regard to your tour.

Luggage: One main piece of baggage and a daysac. Total allowance: **44lb/20kg**. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself. An overnight bag will be useful.

Clothing: Pack for '**All Tours**' plus '**Hot Conditions**'. Weather is changeable in the mountains and it can be cool, especially at night, so bring a warmer jacket/fleece. A raincoat is essential at all times in case of the odd shower. You should dress with respect in the rural villages so bring some long trousers. Wearing shorts is not permitted in monasteries.

Footwear: Trainers/Walking shoes for any walks and comfortable shoes or sandals for visiting the sites and towns.

Equipment: Take a towel, a water bottle, binoculars, insect repellent, a sunhat and sunscreen. A torch is useful in case of powercuts/emergencies. Walking poles may also be useful.

Need help on clothing or equipment?

Then we suggest you contact Nomad Travel, our equipment partner, who specialise in kitting people out for adventurous travel. You receive a special 10% discount in-store or online. Visit one of their stores, phone 0845 260 0044, or visit their website www.nomadtravel.co.uk/explore for further information.

To book please call 0844 499 0901 • www.explore.co.uk

For bookings outside the UK please contact your local travel agent representing Explore.

Page 3 of 4

