

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Ancient Macedonia (AM 2017)



TRIPDURATION
15
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: AM

Trip Highlights - Ancient Macedonia

- ✓ Lake Ohrid - Enjoy a truly stunning lake and mountain setting; tour the historical buildings situated around the lake
- ✓ Rila Monastery - Spectacular UNESCO World Heritage Site with its brightly coloured frescoes
- ✓ Matka Gorge - Experience the natural wonder of Matka Gorge; chance for a boat trip
- ✓ Sofia - Old town sightseeing
- ✓ Vergina - Visit the ancient capital of Macedonian Kings
- ✓ Mt. Athos - Boat excursion along the coast of Athos to reach 'the holy mountain'
- ✓ Thassos Island - Day trip by ferry to visit its Roman remains and Medieval fortress

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 13 nights Standard Hotel
1 night Standard Monastery

Included Meals: 14 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 1 dinner

Start Point: Join trip: Sofia
End Point: Trip ends: Sofia

Transport: Bus, Boat, Ferry

Countries: Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece

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Ancient Macedonia

Journey through eastern Bulgaria, northern Greece and Macedonia to uncover the lost empire of Alexander the Great. We explore a range of cultural landmarks including the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Lake Ohrid and the Rila Monastery. We also take a boat trip along the Mediterranean coast to the fabled Mount Athos, visit the mosaics of Pella and walk in the pretty Pelister National Park.

Why Book this trip

This trip is ideal for those travellers who are interested in history and culture. Stunning scenery intersperses our journey as we make our way through the lost empire of Alexander the Great. Staying at a 12th century monastery sheds light on life of times gone by.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.

Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced Tour Leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your Tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join trip in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria

Join the trip in Sofia, Bulgaria's capital, and check-in to our hotel. Sofia has a long history which can be seen by the onion-domed churches, Ottoman mosques, Roman ruins and old Soviet monuments. However, it is largely modern and youthful with a wealth of museums, art galleries, cafes and restaurants. Depending on your flight times or if you're extending your stay by a night then you may like to visit the Archaeological Museum where there are Thracian, Roman and Medieval artefacts on display in a former mosque dating from 1496. Or perhaps the Museum of Socialist Art where you'll find many of the items removed from around the country when the Soviet era came to an end such as unwanted statues of Lenin, the red star



from Sofia's Party House and footage from old propaganda films. There are also the ancient ruins of Serdica, which were discovered during the building of a new metro station. Now partially excavated you can see a small section of eight streets, an early Christian church and a bathhouse from this old Roman city. A short distance from Sofia is the beautiful Vitosha Nature Park with a number of hiking routes up Vitosha Mountain and it is also home to the working Dragalevtsi Monastery, which is probably the oldest of its kind in the country. It contains colourful murals and is renowned as being one of the hiding places of the anti-Turkish rebel leader Vasil Levski. This evening you'll have your first chance to sample the local cuisine. Food in Bulgaria tends to be hearty and made from fresh local produce and dinner usually starts with a salad such as 'shopska salata' consisting of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and white cheese. Other specialities include 'kebabche' small and spicy minced meat rolls and 'surmi' stuffed cabbage or vine leaves. Both red and white wines are popular, as is the local brandy 'rakia' or the aniseed spirit 'mastika'.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Sofia city tour; stay overnight in a Macedonian monastery

We start our day with a guided walking tour of Sofia where we visit the neo-Byzantine Alexander Nevski Cathedral, which was built to commemorate the 200,000 Russian soldiers who died fighting for Bulgaria's independence. Along the way we will also see the synagogue, Presidential Palace and Saint Sofia's Church. After our walk we have free time for lunch before we leave the city and drive to the border with Macedonia and on to the Saint Joakim Osogovski Monastery. This well preserved historic monastery is nestled amongst the picturesque hillside forests and this is where we spend the night. The drive today will take us around three hours in total. 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 (modern day Istanbul). We will see the brightly coloured 18th century frescoes before settling in to our unique accommodation.

Overnight: **Standard Monastery**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 Explore Kratovo and Skopje including Kale Fortress

This morning we drive to the charming historical Roman mining town of Kratovo, located in the crater of an extinct volcano. A local guide will take us down the winding cobbled narrow streets and show us the main sights of this small town, known for its Ottoman towers and high stone bridges which cross the deep ravine which divides the town in two. We will also have the opportunity to sample a homemade lunch accompanied by traditional music played on a sheepskin bagpipe before we head on to Skopje, Macedonia's capital. This afternoon we will go on a guided walking tour of Skopje including Fortress Kale, the Church of Saint Spas and the old Turkish bazaar, which is the largest and most well preserved in south-east Europe. In 1963 a huge earthquake rocked the city and destroyed an estimated 75%, but it is still rich in historic culture and Ottoman heritage. Skopje has been used a pawn in many wars, including World War II and many empires have ruled over the city, all having influenced the architecture, religion and traditions. Despite the turbulent and sometimes violent history, Skopje is now a peaceful city where residents are free to practice all religions, the main faiths being Macedonian Orthodox and Islam. The city boasts many beautiful churches and mosques, although you'll notice mostly minarets on the skyline due to a historic law that was enforced by the Turks stating Christian buildings could not be taller than mosques. This evening you are free to have dinner. A popular Macedonian dish is 'turlitava', a meat and vegetable stew baked in a terracotta pot. 'Ravanija' is a traditional dessert which originates from when the country was under Turkish rule; it's a type of cake with a sherbet top. Macedonian wine is a popular choice with red being the more dominate option; usually made using the Vranec grape or sometimes Stanusina Crna, which is indigenous to the country.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 Excursion to the dramatic Matka Gorge with the chance for a boat trip

A half-day excursion this morning takes us to Matka Gorge, on the outskirts of the city, where we visit the spectacular karst formations and the manmade Matka Lake, created by the damming of the Treska River. Fluctuating temperatures and the impact of the mountain rivers has resulted in a landscape of valleys, crevices and caves that carve their way through the 50 square kilometre canyon. Of the 1000 or so species of plants in the gorge some 20% are endemic, including the Kosanini Violet and the dainty lavender coloured Nataly's Ramonda. There are also 119 varieties of butterfly in the canyon. There is the option to take a boat ride out onto the lake above the dam and appreciate the canyon views and visit one of its numerous caves. Or you may prefer to take a walk along the gorge and visit an old church that is tucked in beside the water. Returning to Skopje this afternoon the rest of the day is free for you to explore and perhaps to visit some of the museums, mosques and galleries dotted around the city, or maybe pay another visit to the bustling bazaar. Skopje is an excellent city in which to wander, given that much of the centre is pedestrianised.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

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DAY 5 Scenic 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 make a stop to visit one of Macedonia's finest monasteries - Saint Jovan Bigorski - dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. It is famous for its remarkable iconostasis, which is among the most beautiful in Macedonia, constructed by intricate wood carving between 1829 and 1835. We will also stop at the foot of Mount Jablanica in the typical Macedonian village of Vevchani. Here we have time for lunch and to see the pretty meandering streets and babbling waterfalls. On arrival in Ohrid town late this afternoon we have time to settle into our hotel before heading into the centre for free time for dinner this evening. Alternatively, you may like to stretch your legs with a walk along the lakeshore.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 6 Guided walking tour of Ohrid; afternoon relaxing by the lake

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 2400 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 lakes in the world and allegedly there are some 365 churches, monasteries and other religious sites around the lake. We start today with a walking tour of Ohrid including a visit to Tsar Samuel's Fortress, Saint Sophia's Church and the Roman amphitheatre for sensational panoramic views. When we reach Saint Clement's Church and the Plaosnik archaeological site we will walk down the steps to the Church of Saint John at Kaneo with its fantastic views out over the lake. From here we board a boat for the short ride back to the centre of Ohrid. This afternoon is free for you to relax and further explore. You might like to stroll around the cobbled lanes of the Old Town or boats run frequent trips across the lake and there will be the option to walk between two of the villages perched high above it. The lakeshore has a good array of beaches should you wish to take it easy. There's a good choice of restaurants and old Turkish shops in the lower town area. Each year, between mid-July and mid-August, the Ohrid Summer Festival takes place, with concerts and plays held in outdoor venues around town.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 Free day in Ohrid with the chance to visit Albania

Today is free for you to continue discovering Lake Ohrid or you might like to join a full day excursion further afield to neighbouring Albania. Lake Ohrid straddles the border line and this morning our drive will take us through Struga at the northern tip of the lake and across the Albanian border. Our first stop is in the small fishing village of Lin, where we will see mosaics dating from the Ottoman period. From here we continue to the town of Podgradec where we have four hours free time to relax in the town, enjoy the Ohrid springs or visit the summer villa of the former dictator Enver Hoxha. We will also have time for lunch and the opportunity to try the local specialty of Ohrid trout. We return to Ohrid crossing back over the border at the southern end of the lake near Saint Naum having driven the whole way around the lake.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 Visit to Saint Naum Monastery en route 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 Ohrid and Prespa. Large, deep valleys and a long mountain ridge typify the relief of the massif, with peaks reaching over 2000 metres. With the crest falling between the two lakes it ensures dramatic views over both on a clear day. Today we set out to explore this region by bus, a short walk and by rowing boat. Firstly we drive along the lakeshore to the photogenic Saint Naum Monastery, located on a bluff stretching out into the lake and close to the Albanian border. Inside the monastery we can admire the 19th century frescoes and iconostasis dating from 1711. Next we enjoy a short trip by rowing boat to the bubbling springs that feed Lake Ohrid. Then we continue across Galicica National Park and over the Livada Pass (at 1568 metres), before heading down to Lake Prespa for a short walk. We drive on to Podmochani village to visit the privately owned Ethno Museum. A local farmer has amassed an impressive collection of jewellery, weaponry, coins and over 140 national costumes, some of which date back over 300 years. Lastly we drive on to the nearby Pelister National Park where we will spend the night. This evening there is the opportunity to join a cooking class in our hotel to make the Macedonian speciality Zelnik.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 9 Admire ancient Heraclea; guided tour of Thessaloniki (Greece)

This morning we visit the ancient site of Heraclea with a local guide. 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 raided by the northern tribes and eventually falling into decay after an earthquake in AD518. After our visit we leave Macedonia behind and drive 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. This afternoon on a guided tour we will discover the steep narrow streets and walk among the whitewashed houses with overhanging balconies leading to magnificent views down to the gulf and across the city. Along the way we'll see the Roman Rotunda, the White Tower, Acropolis and impressive Saint Demetrius Church. After our tour you will have the opportunity for a short visit to either the Archaeological Museum or Byzantine Museum. This evening you're free to have dinner and sample your first taste of traditional Greek cuisine, such as scrumptious aubergines, tomatoes and cheese washed down with ouzo or raki or perhaps you'd prefer to sample some of the fresh local seafood. The city tavernas here are known for their delicious grilled meats and the slow-cooked pork shank is especially worth trying.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 10 Visit the birthplace of Alexander the Great and UNESCO listed Vergina

This morning we drive to Pella to take a guided tour of the ancient site and visit the museum. 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 is the mosaics depicting mythological scenes in coloured stone. Next we head for Vergina, which in ancient times was known as the city of Aigai and was the capital of the Macedonian kings. The ruins of Aigai were only rediscovered in 1977. With our local guide we will visit the spectacular royal tombs of King Phillip II and the young prince Alexander IV among others sights during our visit. After free time for lunch we will head back to Thessaloniki where you are free for the rest of the afternoon.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 11 Drive to Kavala via Halkidiki Peninsula; boat trip to Mount Athos

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 of the three-pronged Halkidiki. We continue to Ouranopoli at the northern end, 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 and it's still forbidden for women to step foot on the island. At its peak there were said to be 40 monasteries, but today the number has declined by half. After viewing the monasteries from our boat we have free time back on the mainland for lunch and to relax on the beach before continuing our journey to Kavala, a very attractive city formed around a harbour with an old quarter dominated by a Byzantine fortress.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 12 Excursion to Thassos Island to explore or relax on the beach

We begin today by driving to Keramoti to catch the ferry to Thassos Island (the crossing takes around 30 minutes). We have free time to explore the island on foot or local bus from the capital of Limenas, or relax on one of its superb beaches. Around Limenas there are a number of archaeological sites, including an ancient Roman theatre and a medieval fortress that offers stunning views of the surrounding area. Later in the afternoon we return by ferry to the mainland and to Kavala.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 13 Explore historical Philippi; drive to Bansko (Bulgaria)

This morning we leave Greece and head back to Bulgaria. We drive to Bansko via the ancient site of Philippi for a guided tour. Philippi's claim to fame is twofold: 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 was the army of imperial Rome, led by Mark Anthony and Octavian, and on the other representatives of republican Rome, led by Cassius and Brutus. The outcome of the battle was a victory for the imperialist and the death of the republic (not to mention Cassius and Brutus). We will also visit the Baptistry of Lydia, time permitting. In winter Bansko is a popular ski resort, sitting at 927 metres above sea level in the foothills of the Pirin Mountains.

It has a pretty old town centre with its winding cobbled streets and stone clad buildings with red terracotta tiled roofs. There are a variety of restaurants, bars and shops here.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 14 Discover the beautiful Rila Monastery; free afternoon in Sofia

Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, Rila Monastery is an important religious and cultural centre for the Bulgarian people. Remaining in wonderful condition it has the most stunning brightly coloured frescoes and distinctive striped brickwork. Originally founded in the 10th century the monastery served to preserve Bulgarian culture during the 400 years of Turkish rule and was a hiding place for the Bulgarian revolutionaries. Today the magnificent church and its museum house a priceless collection of frescoes, gilded iconostasis and religious art and artefacts. This morning we will have time to explore 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: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 15 Trip ends in Sofia

The trip ends at our hotel in Sofia.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 14 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 1 dinner included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Bulgaria

Lunch £: 9.00

Dinner £: 15.00

Macedonia

Lunch £: 4.00

Dinner £: 8.50

Greece

Lunch £: 8.00 - 12.00

Dinner £: 12.00 - 16.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bulgaria

Bottle of Beer £: 2.30

Water £: 1.80

Macedonia

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00

Water £: 1.00

Greece

Bottle of Beer £: 3.50

Water £: 0.90

Other Sightseeing & Activities

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 these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Kratovo: Homemade lunch with bagpipe music €8.00.

Matka Gorge: Boat trip 400 Macedonian denar (MKD).

Lake Ohrid: Boat trip €25.00 per boat; excursion to Albania €20.00-40.00 (depending on passenger numbers). If there are 6 or more participants this excursion will be accompanied by the Explore Leader or if not then it will be driver only.

Pelister National Park: Cooking class €10.00 (including instruction and local ingredients).

Thessaloniki: Archaeological Museum €8.00; Byzantine Museum €8.00 pp.

Tipping - Tour Leader

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

Tipping - Local Crew

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

In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Foreign Exchange

Bulgaria

ATM Availability: Major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Larger hotels and restaurants – of very limited use on this trip.

Travellers Cheques: We do not recommend Travellers cheques. Places to exchange Travellers cheques are very limited.

Local Currency: Bulgarian Leva.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: All major currencies may be exchanged, but Euros are easiest to exchange. We suggest you travel with Euros cash.

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

Macedonia

ATM Availability: Major towns and cities have ATMs for cash withdrawal, but these are limited in more rural areas.

Credit Card Acceptance: Accepted in major restaurants and hotels.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers Cheques can only be exchanged in some banks.

Local Currency: Macedonian Denar.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Euros, US Dollars and Pound Sterling can all be exchanged for local currency. However, Euro is the best currency for exchange in most places. Please note if using Pound Sterling then only Bank of England issued bank notes are accepted. Scottish and Northern Irish bank notes are not accepted. Please consult your Explore Leader for more information on currency exchange.

Where to Exchange: Banks or official Forex Offices in the main towns and cities. British banks don't generally exchange Macedonian Denar, so you should exchange any unwanted local currency before you leave Macedonia. Your Explore Leader will advise you on arrival.

Greece

ATM Availability: Cash can be drawn from ATMs from all types of cards in most areas in Greece, including the islands.

Credit Card Acceptance: In major restaurants.

Travellers Cheques: Banking hours may make exchanging Travellers Cheques more difficult.

Local Currency: Euro

Recommended Currency for Exchange: GBP Sterling or US Dollars, cash.

Where to Exchange: We recommend that you change any currency into Euros prior to arrival. Bureau de Change are generally only found in major cities and large airports

Joining your Trip

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

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The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

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Travel Aware

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

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

Bulgaria: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens.

Macedonia: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens.

Greece: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens.

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on **0208 5431846**.

Vaccinations & Protection

Bulgaria

We recommend protection against typhoid, hepatitis A, polio and tetanus. 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.

Macedonia

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend being up-to-date with your routine vaccination courses and boosters as recommended in the UK including protection against measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, diphtheria, hepatitis A, typhoid and polio. Check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to 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. Vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Greece

Nothing compulsory but we recommend protection against tetanus and polio. 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. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

Bulgaria

Bulgaria has a somewhat temperate climate, influenced 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.

Macedonia

Macedonia has a transitional climate from Mediterranean to continental. Summers are hot and dry and winters are moderately cold. It is a landlocked country, so isn't cooled by coastal breezes and is separated from both the Adriatic and Aegean Seas by mountain ranges. The wettest time is in late spring and autumn, but rainfall isn't abundant in the valleys, such as around Skopje. Rainfall in summer is uncommon. Temperatures from May to October are generally in the mid to high 20's (in °C) and reach into the 30's (in °C) in July and August - although it can reach as high as 40°C sometimes.

Greece

Greece has predominantly hot, dry summers, May - October with temperatures reaching into the mid thirties in July and August. May and October themselves can be less predictable and may have some rain and cooler evenings. Wild flowers bloom in April and May adding much colour to the trails. At the beginning and end of the season the villages tend to be very quiet. 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.

Clothing

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. It can be hot in summer so wear light weight cotton clothing and layers.

Bring your swimming costume and a towel with you.

You should dress with respect in the rural villages so bring some long trousers, as wearing shorts is not permitted in monasteries. When entering some churches and mosques women should cover their head and shoulders, so it's handy to pack a scarf.

Equipment

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

Footwear

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

Luggage: On Tour

You will need one main piece of baggage and a daypack. Please do not overload yourself with luggage as at some points during this trip you will be required to transport it yourself (e.g. from vehicles, to your rooms).

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Bulgaria

Population: 7,358,000.

Size of Country: 110,910 sq km.

Major Language: Bulgarian, Russian and French.

Religion: Bulgarian Orthodox, Muslim

Time Difference to GMT: +2

Macedonia

Population: 2,069,162

Size of Country: 25,713 square kilometres

Major Language: Macedonian

Religion: Orthodox Christian

Time Difference to GMT: +1

Greece

Population: 11,305,118

Size of Country: 131,990 sq km

Major Language: Greek

Religion: Orthodox

Time Difference to GMT: +2

Electric Supply & Plugs

Bulgaria

2 Pin Round

Macedonia

2 Pin Round

Greece

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel,

Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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