

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Undiscovered Balkans (KOA 2017)



TRIP DURATION
14
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: KOA

Trip Highlights - Undiscovered Balkans

- ✓ Balkan Capitals - Discover the capitals of Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia
- ✓ Valbona Valley - One of the most beautiful alpine valleys in Albania
- ✓ Decani Monastery - Visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site
- ✓ Prizren - Explore the postcard pretty town of Prizren by wandering along its cobbled streets
- ✓ Rahovec Wine - Enjoy wine tasting in Rahovec, the wine cellar of Kosovo
- ✓ Lake Ohrid - A stunning lake and mountain setting boasting many cultural monuments

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 13 nights Standard Hotel

Included Meals: 13 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 4 dinners

Start Point: Join trip: Kruja

End Point: Trip ends: Tirana

Transport: Bus, Cable Car

Countries: Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia

Undiscovered Balkans

Discover three fascinating countries on this two-week trip, including one of the world's newest countries: Kosovo. Independent since 2008, Kosovo is often referred to as 'newborn.' Along with Albania and Macedonia, this is a region that is off the beaten track and most travellers still know little about. On this trip you'll have the chance to get to know them by exploring their varied treasures from their rich history to their incredible scenery including dramatic mountains, lakes and pretty valleys.

Why Book this trip

On this multi-country adventure to Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia we'll get off the beaten track and discover areas that most travellers still know little about. The trip gives you a great introduction to the region with a blend of cultural highlights and walking amongst the impressive mountain scenery. For 2017 we'll now spend two nights in Tirana and we've included a new excursion by cable car up Mount Dajti for a highland walk and we'll also have dinner in Tirana's famed Blloku District.

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

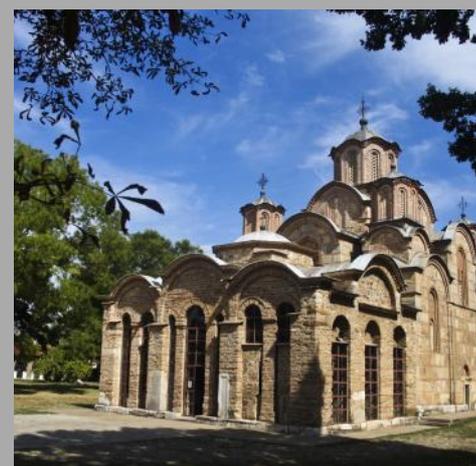
Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

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 Kruja

Join trip in Kruja and check in to our hotel.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Dinner

DAY 2 Visit Kruja bazaar; drive to Shkodra and visit Rozafa Fortress

The main highlight in Kruja is the citadel, from where Albania's greatest hero, Skanderbeg, led the resistance against the Ottoman domination. He succeeded in ousting the Turks in 1443 and Albania was free for the next 30 years. Today the fortress is a place of pilgrimage and inspiration for Albanians; it enjoys a classic setting high on a ridge staring out to the Adriatic coast, approached via pine clad hills. We will visit the fortress and the bazaar before continuing to Shkodra. Shkodra is the traditional centre of the Gheg cultural region and is one of the oldest cities in Europe. We visit the Rozafa fortress, which enjoys a panoramic views of the town and lake. The afternoon is free to explore.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 Scenic journey through Kosovo to the Valbona Valley

Today we leave Shkodra and head for the Valbona Valley. Depending on the time of year and the ferry operating schedule we will either take a scenic ferry ride across Lake Koman to Fierza (taking around two and a half hours) or drive on the National Road through the scenic mountain landscape. Your Explore Leader will advise on the day which option we will be taking. We'll then cross the border into Kosovo and continue our drive to Gjakova where we have time for lunch. This afternoon we pass through the small town of Bajram Curri, as we enter the picturesque Valbona Valley. We check-in to a mountain hotel located in the centre of the vale, amidst the jagged peaks of the Accursed Mountains. We enjoy the afternoon exploring the village on foot.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4 Alpine hike in the scenic valley and meet a local shepherd's family

Valbona is one of the most beautiful alpine valleys of Albania. Today we will hike to the side valley of Kukaj, making our way through forest towards alpine pastures that offer breathtaking views of the valley and the surrounding mountains. We will have a picnic lunch and later visit a shepherd's family to taste a cup of fresh mountain tea. In the afternoon there is time to relax before a traditional dinner of lamb on the spit is served (vegetarian options also available).

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5 Enter Kosovo and visit the Decani Monastery on the way to Peja

Today we cross the border into Kosovo where we spend the next five days. Kosovo is the world's newest country and has been independent only since 2008. Unfortunately, to most people Kosovo is most known for its war. However, it is a fascinating country boasting lots of treasures from past empires including Greek, Roman, Turkish and Ottoman. Driving through the town of Gjakova, we will than stop to visit the 'kulla' of Junik (traditional Albanian mountain houses) before arriving at the beautiful Decani Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Monastery was established in 1327 by the Serb King Stefan Uros III Decanski and is a superbly situated showpiece of Orthodox art. Then, we drive to the town of Peja. The afternoon will be spent visiting the town's attractions on foot.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 6 Explore the Peja Highlands and the church complex of Peja Patriarch

Today we will visit the highlands of Peja. As we exit the town we stop to visit the church complex of Peja Patriarch, surrounded by the peaks of the Rugova Bjeshk (highlands), the Kosovo part of the Accursed Mountains and boasting amazing frescoes. Our day will continue with an impressive drive through the dramatic Rugova Gorge to the alpine location of Boga, where we will stop and start a hike to a nearby lake. In the evening, we return to Peja and spend the evening in town.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 Visit a waterfall, war memorial and monastery en route to Prizren

This morning we leave Peja and our first stop is at the Drini Bardhe Waterfall near to the Montenegro border. Known as White Drin because of the white water that rushes down these 25 metre high falls, it's one of the most picturesque in the area. After time here for photos our drive continues towards the outskirts of Pristina where we visit the Kosovo Battle Memorial. The memorial is devoted to the martyred Serb knights and is located where the Battle of Kosovo took place on 28th June 1389. Next we visit the splendid Monastery of Gracanica, which is one of the finest examples of Byzantine architecture in the country. It was built on the site of a ruined 6th century basilica by the Serbian King, Stefan Milutin, in 1321 and was declared a Monument of Exceptional Cultural Importance in 1990. We drive the short distance into Pristina, Kosovo's capital, which largely escaped damage during the war. Our Explore leader will take us on an orientation walk of the main sights and we'll have some free time here for lunch. Pristina isn't the most attractive city that we visit on this trip, but it has an energetic atmosphere and a great coffee culture and locals boast that they make the best macchiato in the world. You'll find numerous cafes along the main pedestrianised Nena Tereza Boulevard. In Old Pristina you'll be able to see a 26 metre high clock tower in the central bazaar area, which reminds stall holders and shoppers when it's time for prayer. The city's oldest mosques are found in this area as well. The National Library with its brutalist architecture is definitely eye catching. There are some unusual pieces of Americana in the city too, such as a mini replica of the Statue of Liberty on top of Hotel Victory and a bronze statue of Bill Clinton on the corner of Bill Clinton Boulevard. We continue our drive to Prizren - a town dominated by Ottoman villas and is perhaps the most authentic town in Kosovo. We'll spend the next two nights here and the rest of this afternoon is free for you to relax and settle in. Prizren is set at the foot of the Sharr Mountains and is Kosovo's second city. It's rich in history and you can see the architectural marks left by both the Byzantine and Ottoman empires. You can discover the 14th century UNESCO listed Church of the Virgin of Ljevis and Church of Saint George, which are both Serbian Orthodox in faith. There are a number of traditional handicraft shops to explore and a good selection of restaurants to choose from. Prizren is especially known for its filigree jewellery, which has been handmade locally here since the 15th century. In terms of food barbeque restaurants are very popular and the grilled meats and Sharr cheese are a local speciality. It's also a good spot to try the baklava for dessert.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 Wine tasting in Rahovec and visit to a Serbian enclave village

This morning we will stroll down the narrow cobbled streets of Prizren and around the Shadervan area we'll find the city's main Ottoman influences including the Sinan Pasha Mosque and the Old Stone Bridge. We'll also be able to see the outside of the old hammam (Turkish bath) before heading for Prizren Fortress, which dominates the skyline and you can get great views from its hilltop position. On the opposite side of the river to Shadervan we'll visit Prizren League House, which was once the headquarters where a failed uprising began to unite all Albanians within the region into a singular state. This afternoon we drive through rolling hills until we reach nearby Rahovec - the wine cellar of Kosovo. Wine has been made in this area for over 2000 years and we will visit a few wine makers before making our way to the village of Hoqa e Vjeter - a Serbian enclave village, where we will visit a monastery that also makes wine. Later this afternoon we return to Prizren for a free evening.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 9 Walk in Sharr National Park; arrive in Skopje in Macedonia

The day will start with a wonderful drive from Prizren through the forests of the Sharr National Park. A short walk on a forest trail near to Preval will bring us to tranquil meadows where we can taste a picnic lunch made from fresh local produce and enjoy the stunning scenery around us. Our walk will take around two hours and will cover a distance of four kilometres. In the afternoon we will continue to drive on a beautiful forest road along the Kacanik Valley that will lead to the border crossing at ElezHan, where we will say farewell to Kosovo and hello to Macedonia. We'll make a stop in the vast and magnificent Matka Canyon before arriving in the capital city of Skopje. The historic city of Skopje was rocked by a huge earthquake in 1963 which unfortunately destroyed an estimated 75% of the city's buildings, but it is still rich in 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. It 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.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 10 Discover Skopje, Tetovo Mosque and drive to Mavrovo National Park

Today we visit the main attractions of the Macedonian capital including the Kale Fortress, the Sveti Spas Monastery and the Ottoman Bazaar, which is the largest and most well preserved in south-east Europe. The fortress is found on the highest point and gives us great views back over the city and Vardar River below. It is believed to have originally been constructed in the 6th century, but has

been reconstructed and expended over the years, as different wars were fought and new empires took over. Sveti Spas Monastery, or the Church of the Holy Saviour as it's also known, is a small and modest building tucked away in the corner of a courtyard, but inside you'll find an elaborately carved wooden iconostasis (screen separating the sanctuary and nave) and a few 16th century frescoes. A short transfer will then bring us to the town of Tetovo, where we visit its colourful mosque, Sarena Dzamija, meaning decorated mosque. On the banks of the Pena River in the oldest part of the town we'll visit this brightly painted building with its detailed exterior and interior. After our visit we drive on to the picturesque location of Mavrovo National Park, where we can take a leisurely lakeside walk near our hotel for the night.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 11 Explore Lake Ohrid and Saint Naum Monastery; arrive in Pogradec

We leave Mavrovo this morning and take the scenic road towards the Debar region, continuing along the lakes of the Black Drin River that generates most of the hydropower of the country. We stop in Struga to visit the springs of the river and have time for lunch in these scenic surroundings. In the afternoon a short drive will bring us to Lake Ohrid, which is situated against a dramatic mountain backdrop. 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 in the world and allegedly there are some 365 churches, monasteries and other religious sites around the lake. We will visit the city's main attractions as well as Saint Naum Monastery before driving back into Albania and to Pogradec where we spend the night. Saint Naum is an imposing sight on a peninsula on the lake near to the Albanian border. The monastery is surrounded by sandy beaches and inside we find impressive frescoes. Pogradec is a town on the shores of Lake Ohrid and the waterfront is an ideal spot for dining out this evening.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 12 Drive to Albania's capital Tirana and take a walking tour

Before starting the climb of the Thana Pass, we will visit the fisherman village of Lin where the ruins of a paleochristian church are found as well as Roman mosaics. We will continue our drive through the valley of Shkumbin and Elbasan town, until we reach Tirana. Tirana was made the capital of Albania in 1920 in order to provide a power base in the geographical centre of the country. There has been a fortress on the fertile Plain of Tirana since Roman times, although the city only really came into its own in the 18th century. Today it is Albania's largest city. We will take a walking tour of the city's main sights including Skanderberg Square and monument, the Opera House, Albanian National Bank and Et'hem Bey Mosque. This evening you may wish to visit the sky tower with views over the city.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 13 Cable car up Mount Dajti and free afternoon in Tirana

This morning we drive the short distance to the base of the Dajti Express cable car, which is the longest cable way in the Balkans. Our 15 minutes journey takes us almost to the top of Mount Dajti at around 1000 metres. From here we'll hike to the summit of Tujani for views over the city below and the surrounding highlands. Our trek will take us around three to four hours and will cover a distance of 4.5 kilometres. Our maximum altitude reached will be 1503 metres. There will be the opportunity to have lunch in a traditional mountain restaurant before taking the cable car back down and returning to the city where you have the afternoon free to explore. The city comes to life in the evening and especially in the animated Blloku district. During the communist regime this area of the city was restricted and only members of the Albanian Politburo (main political party) were permitted to enter and own villas in this upmarket area. We'll enjoy a final dinner in this district this evening in a traditional Albanian restaurant.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 14 Trip ends in Tirana

The trip ends in Tirana this morning after breakfast.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

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Included Activities

There is a considerable amount of walking on this trip, which is rated as easy to moderate and includes walking in mountainous terrain. Please be prepared for this and ensure you pack walking boots/shoes and walking poles if you require them.

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 13 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 4 dinners 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.

Albania

Lunch £: 4.00

Dinner £: 10.00

Kosovo

Lunch £: 6

Dinner £: 13

Macedonia

Lunch £: 4.00

Dinner £: 8.50

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.

Albania

Bottle of Beer £: 1.50

Water £: 0.50

Kosovo

Bottle of Beer £: 1.20

Water £: 1.00

Macedonia

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00

Water £: 1.00

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

Some free time has been allowed for you to explore on your own or with your travelling companions.

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 20 Euros for tipping.

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

Albania

ATM Availability: Most larger towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Credit cards are not widely accepted in Albania.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers Cheques are not widely accepted in Albania, though you should take some as a back-up in case of emergencies.

Local Currency: Albanian Lek.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Sterling, US Dollars and Euros cash is widely accepted in bureaux de change in major towns and cities. Most transactions in Albania are done on a strictly cash only basis using the Lek.

Where to Exchange: Bureau de change in major towns and cities.

Kosovo

ATM Availability: There are some ATM's in the capital Pristina and other major cities, but not in more rural areas.

Credit Card Acceptance: Credit cards are not widely accepted and most monetary transactions are made in cash.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers Cheques are not widely accepted and can only be exchanged in some banks.

Local Currency: Euro.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Pound Sterling and US Dollars can be exchanged for local currency. The Serbian Dinar is sometimes accepted in Serb-majority areas. 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.

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.

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.

EXPLORE!
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

Albania: 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.

Kosovo: 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

Albania

We recommend protection against hepatitis A, typhoid, polio and tetanus. Rabies vaccination is recommended by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office due to the large number of stray dogs in Albania. You should seek further advice from your travel clinic. Tick-borne encephalitis is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Check 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. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Kosovo

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.

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.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

Albania

Albania has a mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers (ranging from 9 - 11 hours of sunshine a day in Tirana). Temperatures can reach up to 40°C in July. October to April is much cooler and can be wet. Albania is a mountainous country and the high peaks are snow-capped all year. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at <http://www.explore.co.uk/weather>. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable.

Kosovo

Kosovo has a largely continental climate with warm summers and cold winters. There is a chance of sporadic rain in spring and autumn, though generally it is in the form of short showers. Thunderstorms can occur in summer, generally helping to cool the air. 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 sometimes it can reach as high as 40°C.

Macedonia

Macedonia has a transitional climate from Mediterranean to continental. Summers are hot and dry and winters are moderately cold. It is a land locked 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.

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. You should dress with respect in the rural villages so bring some long trousers. Don't forget your swimming costume.

Equipment

Take a water bottle, a sun hat and suncream. A torch is useful in case of powercuts/emergencies.

Footwear

Lightweight walking/trail boots for any optional day walks and comfortable shoes or sandals for visiting the sites and towns.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself. Please bear in mind there are lots of stairs in Albania and no portarage in the hotels.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Albania

Population: 4,000,000

Size of Country: 28,748 sq km

Major Language: Albanian, Greek, Vlach, Romani, Slavic dialects

Religion: Islam, Albanian Orthodox, Roman Catholic

Time Difference to GMT: +1

Kosovo

Population: 1,859,203

Size of Country: 10,908 square kilometres

Major Language: Albanian and Serbian

Religion: Islam

Time Difference to GMT: +1

Macedonia

Population: 2,069,162

Size of Country: 25,713 square kilometres

Major Language: Macedonian

Religion: Orthodox Christian

Time Difference to GMT: +1

Electric Supply & Plugs

Albania

2 Pin Round

Kosovo

2 Pin Round

Macedonia

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.

These trip notes were printed on 18/08/2017 20:26:25