



Balkan Odyssey: Crossroads of Cultures 2020



Balkan Odyssey: Crossroads of Cultures

A Seven Nation Journey Through History

Two departures in 2020 – Premier Series– 16 Days

May 7-22 • September 10-25

From low-lying Belgrade up through the Dinaric Alps, down to the Dalmatian Coast of Croatia and back up to mountainous North Macedonia, this overland journey ties together seven of the wildly divergent Balkan countries. Catholic, Muslim, Orthodox, politically contradictory, ethnically varied, this kaleidoscopic region offers an apprenticeship in diversity. Begin in Serbia's capital, Belgrade, an old city swiftly becoming one of the hippest places in Europe. Travel overland to lovely Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Continue west to Dubrovnik in southern Croatia on the sparkling Dalmatian Coast, at one time a powerful rival of Venice. Travel south along the Adriatic to Montenegro, visiting UNESCO-listed Kotor and 15th century Cetinje on the way to Budva, an early Roman city with a walled Old Town. Cross the border into Albania and explore Kruja, with its citadel where Skanderbeg, one of the most powerful leaders of medieval Europe, famously defeated the Ottomans in 1450. Continue to Tirana, Albania's capital. Head north through North Macedonia to Skopje, where Saint Teresa (formerly Mother Teresa) was born and raised, and take a day trip into Kosovo to learn about its recent struggles for independence.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Thursday	Arrive Belgrade, Serbia
Day 2, Friday	Belgrade
Day 3, Saturday	Belgrade • Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Day 4, Sunday	Sarajevo
Day 5, Monday	Sarajevo • Mostar • Blagaj • Dubrovnik, Croatia
Day 6, Tuesday	Dubrovnik
Day 7, Wednesday	Dubrovnik • Kotor, Montenegro • Cetinje • Budva
Day 8, Thursday	Budva • Shkodra, Albania • Kruja • Tirana
Day 9, Friday	Tirana
Day 10, Saturday	Tirana • Durres • Apollonia • Berat
Day 11, Sunday	Berat • Ohrid, North Macedonia
Day 12, Monday	Ohrid
Day 13, Tuesday	Ohrid • Skopje
Day 14, Wednesday	Skopje • day trip to Pristina, Kosovo
Day 15, Thursday	Skopje, North Macedonia
Day 16, Friday	Depart Skopje



MIR Signature Experiences

- Wander the bohemian quarter of Belgrade, a vibrant and busy area filled with shops, coffee houses and restaurants.
- Visit the Sarajevo Tunnel Museum with a survivor who used the tunnel to escape the shelling; hear his personal story.
- Take a leisurely walk on the wide city walls that have protected Dubrovnik since the 13th century.
- Stop at the small alpine village of Njegos and enjoy a tasting of the village's special cheese, *Njeguski sir*, and red wine made with the localized Vranac grape.
- Enjoy a ride on the 2.6-mile cable car from the outskirts of Tirana up to Dajti Mountain for fabulous views of the city.
- Explore Pristina, capital of Kosovo, the Balkans territory that declared independence from Serbia in February of 2008.
- Experience a North Macedonian feast in Skopje, with live music, Balkan dancing and a table piled high with succulent dishes.

Tour Highlights

Belgrade	Kalemegdan Fortress, Upper Town, including Despot Gate and Turkish baths, Skadarlija artists' quarter
Sarajevo	Location of 1984 Winter Olympics, Bascarsija Ottoman market, Svrzina Kuca Oriental house, Princip Bridge (assassination site of Archduke Ferdinand), Tunnel Museum, Bey's Mosque
Mostar	Historic Old Town, Old Bridge (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Blagaj	Blagaj Dervish Monastery
Dubrovnik	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Assumption Cathedral, Franciscan Church and Monastery, Rector's Palace, Museum of Dubrovnik
Kotor	Fortress from Illyrian and Roman times (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Njegos	Small alpine village, local cheese and red wine tasting
Cetinje	New Cetinje Monastery
Budva	Walled Old Town dating from Roman times
Shkodra	Albanian patriotic statues, clock tower, citadel
Kruja	Fortress, Ethnographic Museum, medieval Turkish bazaar, New Kruja
Tirana	Palace of Culture, cable car to Dajti Mountain
Durres	Largest Roman amphitheater in the Balkans, Archaeological Museum, Roman baths
Apollonia	Ancient Roman ruins
Berat	Medieval citadel, Onuphre Icon Museum, Leaden Mosque
Sveti Naum	Monastery near the shore of Lake Ohrid
Ohrid	Ohrid Lake and surroundings (UNESCO World Heritage Site), St. Panteleimon Monastery, displays of Ohrid pearls, St. Sophia Church, ancient Greek amphitheater, icon gallery, medieval frescoes
Sveti Jovan Bigorski	Orthodox monastery with elaborately-carved iconostasis
Pristina	19th century clock tower, Imperial Mosque, public bath
Skopje	North Macedonia's capital, Old Stone Bridge, Turkish quarter, Memorial House of Mother Teresa (now Saint Teresa), farewell dinner at Old Caravanserai restaurant



Daily Itinerary

Day One, Thursday

Arrive Belgrade, Serbia

Arrive and transfer to the hotel. Today is left free to rest and recover from jet lag. This evening enjoy a **welcome dinner** to start off the tour.

Meals: D – *Moskva Hotel or similar*

Day Two, Friday

Belgrade

Breakfast at the hotel starts off a full day of exploring the city. **Belgrade** is the capital of Serbia, and once was the capital of a united Yugoslavia. The area around Belgrade supported human life as far back as Neolithic times. In the 1st century BC the Romans made it a border outpost, calling it Singidunum. Strategically located on the Danube, Singidunum became the starting point of the important Via Militaris road, and was the home of a Roman garrison for many years.

From then until the present day, Belgrade has been destroyed and rebuilt between 30 and 40 times by conquerors like Attila the Hun, the Visigoths, the Magyars and the Turks. The Slavs first appeared in the 7th century, and managed to persist through many different dynasties. Today Belgrade is a dynamic and sophisticated city of 1.2 million.

One of the highlights of Belgrade is **Kalemegdan Fortress**, named by the Turks and meaning “fortress amid battlefields.” This ancient citadel includes what is left of Singidunum, and the Roman and Byzantine fortifications which followed. The **Despot Gate** is found in the fortress’ Upper Town and the 18th century Turkish baths building in the Lower.

After lunch at a local restaurant, touring continues with a visit to **Skadarlija**. This is the bohemian quarter of Belgrade, originally the Gypsy Quarter, where gypsies pitched their tents in front of the town ramparts. Later populated by writers and artists, the area had numerous inns that played host to many of Serbia’s best-loved authors and actors. Today a vibrant and busy area filled with shops, coffee houses and restaurants, it is sometimes compared with Paris’ Montmartre district.

This evening enjoy an independent dinner.
Meals: B, L – *Moskva Hotel or similar*



Day Three, Saturday

Belgrade • Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Set out from the hotel today for the half-day drive to **Sarajevo**. Stop along the route for an independent lunch and touring as time allows. This area in the Sarajevo Valley surrounded by the Dinaric Alps has been settled since prehistoric times. The Ottomans made it theirs in the 15th century, but it belonged to the Austrian-Hungarian empire in 1914, when Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated here, setting off World War I. Since then, it has been the location of the **1984 Winter Olympics** and the site of the longest siege in modern history, lasting from April 1992 to February 1996.

Arrival will be mid-afternoon, allowing time for independent exploration of the city before dinner in a local restaurant. Sarajevo is still undergoing reconstruction from the estimated 300 mortar rounds fired at it daily during the siege. Much of the city has been rebuilt or repaired, and thousands of trees have been planted.

Meals: B, D – *Europe Hotel, Colours Inn, or similar*

Day Four, Sunday

Sarajevo

During the Bosnian War, Serbian and Yugoslav forces besieged and shelled the city of Sarajevo for over 1,000 days, the longest siege in the history of modern warfare. Between March and July of 1993, soldiers and citizens dug a 2,600-foot tunnel that linked the besieged city to the NATO-controlled airport. An estimated 20 tons of food was smuggled into the city through the tunnel, as were medical supplies and munitions. A small oil pipeline and electric and phone lines were laid through the tunnel; soldiers and seriously wounded people could be sent into and out of the city.

Today visit the **Sarajevo Tunnel Museum** with a survivor who used the tunnel to escape the shelling and hear his personal story. Sixty feet of the life-saving tunnel remain under the house where the tunnel began and many of the original tools and materials are on display.



After lunch at a local restaurant, visit the **Bey's Mosque**. The Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque (or Bey's Mosque, as it is also known) was commissioned in 1531 by the regional ruler, Gazi Husrev-beg. Located in the historic center of Sarajevo, the graceful domed mosque was renovated in 1996 and is considered a fine example of Ottoman architecture.

Also visit the **Bascarsija**, the old Ottoman market area; the extravagantly decorated **Svrzina Kuca** Oriental house; and one



of the oldest bridges in the city, the Princip Bridge. This Ottoman-era Latin Bridge, with its four elegant arches over the Miljacka River, was renamed the **Princip Bridge** after Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, setting in motion the events that triggered the First World War. Calling himself “a Yugoslav nationalist,” Princip was to become a Yugoslavian hero for his act. The spot where Princip stood to fire the shots that killed Archduke Ferdinand and his wife is marked with a plaque.

The rest of the afternoon is free for independent exploration. Dinner tonight is independent.
Meals: B, L – *Europe Hotel, Colours Inn, or similar*

Day Five, Monday

Sarajevo • Mostar • Blagaj • Dubrovnik, Croatia

Depart after breakfast today to Dubrovnik via Mostar. The first part of the drive, to Mostar, takes only a few hours. **Mostar** was founded in the 15th century and became an important Ottoman regional center until the late 19th century. Named after its **Old Bridge, Stari Most**, the town passed from the Ottomans to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the late 19th century. After WWI, it became a part of newly-formed Yugoslavia. Engulfed in war after Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence in 1992, the town was shelled repeatedly. Its Old Town, including its namesake bridge, was all but destroyed. After the war ended, UNESCO and donor nations launched a five-year project to rebuild the historic Old Town and the bridge in an effort to heal the deep ethnic divide that characterized the destruction. The resulting reconstruction was inscribed on the **UNESCO World Heritage List** in 2005.

Enjoy an independent lunch here before continuing towards Dubrovnik. The next stop is **Blagaj**. Blagaj is a historic town set near the source of the Buna River, a clear karstic spring bubbling up from a limestone cave. Overlooking the spring, Sufi dervishes built a stone *tekke*, or monastery, known as the **Blagaj Dervish Monastery**, in 1520. Above the town is the old medieval or Ottoman Blagaj Fortress, built atop older hill forts. The architectural ensemble of Blagaj has been on the UNESCO Tentative List since 2007.

Arrive in Dubrovnik in the evening. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.
Meals: B, D – *Hotel Hilton Dubrovnik or similar*



Day Six, Tuesday
Dubrovnik



After breakfast, begin with a walking tour of Dubrovnik.

Dubrovnik, meaning “village of oak,” seems to grow out of a walled peninsula jutting into the Adriatic Sea in southern Croatia. The original oak dwellings have long since burned, however, and for hundreds of years the town has been a rock fortress. Its rugged stone walls have protected it from attack by sea since the 6th century. Dubrovnik has been a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 1979, its simple limestone buildings with their warm yellow and red roof tiles unified by a medieval building code.

Dubrovnik has been under attack by armies and by earthquakes many times, but careful restoration work has been a hallmark of the city ever since it was severely damaged in a 1667 earthquake. More recently, the Institute for the Restoration of Dubrovnik was founded in 1979 after another earthquake. This entity – with the help of donations from around the world – is responsible for restoring the city after the 1991 shelling by the Serbs. It was impossible, however, to match the color of the original tiles, since the original tile factory shut down in the 1950s.

Take a leisurely **walk on the wide city walls** that have protected Dubrovnik since the 13th century. Punctuated by sturdy square fortresses and round towers, the walls encircling the Old Town afford wonderful views of land and sea.

Dubrovnik’s beautiful 17th century **Assumption Cathedral** was built in the Roman baroque style over the remains of several former churches destroyed by earthquakes. A wonderful three-panel painting of the Assumption of the Virgin by Titian adorns the altar. Next door is the Cathedral Treasury, displaying more than 200 sacred objects, including a purported fragment of the True Cross.

Tour the **Franciscan Monastery and its church**. Much of the original ensemble, built in the 14th century, was destroyed in the huge earthquake of 1667, but a beautiful Pietà, sculpted by noted masters Petar and Leonard Andrijić, remains. The fine columns of the cloister colonnade also survived the earthquake. The baroque altar and pulpit of the church date from 1713.

Visit the **Museum of Dubrovnik** in the **Rector’s Palace**, with its artifacts, furniture and paintings. The “rector” of Dubrovnik was a one-month appointee allowed to leave the palace only on official business.

The rest of the afternoon is left free for independent exploration. Dinner tonight is independent.
Meals: B, L – *Hotel Hilton Dubrovnik or similar*

Day Seven, Wednesday

Dubrovnik • Kotor, Montenegro • Cetinje • Budva

After a hotel breakfast, depart for Montenegro. The first stop is **Kotor**. The natural harbor of Kotor Bay on the Adriatic Coast was a significant commercial and artistic center in the Middle Ages. Take a **walking tour** of the town of Kotor, seated at the farthest end of the meandering bay, guarded by bastions and



fortress walls dating from Illyrian and Roman times. The area has been a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 1979.

Continue on toward Cetinje, taking a zig-zag route up Mt. Lovcen, called the Ladder of Cattaro, with



spectacular views of the bay. Stop at the small alpine **village of Njegusi** and enjoy a tasting of the village's special cheese, *Njeguski sir*, and red wine made with the localized Vranac grape.

Founded in the 15th century as the capital of what later became Montenegro, **Cetinje** became the home of the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan as well. Its earliest monastery was destroyed by the Turks in 1692, and today's **New Cetinje Monastery** was begun in 1701. Montenegrin education and culture were nurtured here.

2,500-year-old **Budva** was the former Yugoslavia's most popular beach resort. Today it is Montenegro's most popular

beach resort, with miles of Dalmatian Coast beaches and beautiful red-roofed buildings. An early Roman city, Budva was part of the city-state of Venice during the 15th century. Today it is an up-to-the-minute yachting and sailing resort, frequented by a chic and well-heeled international assortment of travelers.

Meals: B, D – *Avala Hotel, Becici Hotel, or similar*

Day Eight, Thursday

Budva • Shkodra, Albania • Kruja • Tirana

Depart after breakfast toward Tirana, stopping for a short exploration of **Shkodra**, in Albania. Resting on the shores of Lake Skadar near the Adriatic Coast and the border with Montenegro, Shkodra's appeal comes from both its striking setting and its multifaceted history. Though most of its inhabitants are Muslim and Shkodra was once known as a center of Islamic scholarship, the city retains close ties to Italy through its Roman Catholic minority. A walk through town reveals **Albanian patriotic statues**, a **clock tower** built by an eccentric Englishman, several large mosques and a **citadel** on the south side of the city that offers views out across the lake.

Continue to **Kruja**. On the side of a hill at the foot of limestone peaks, the citadel of Kruja looks down on the town. From here, in 1450, the charismatic leader Skanderbeg and his small hand-picked army defeated the Ottoman Sultan Murad II's army of 100,000.

Withstanding numerous attacks from the Ottoman Turks, the **fortress in Kruja** marked the last stand before Albania fell to the conquering empire in 1478. Albania's rebel forces, led by Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg, withstood years of battle, and the castle now serves as both a historical landmark and a symbol of the fierce national pride that Albanians feel. A museum inside the castle allows visitors to learn more about Skanderbeg, Albania's national hero.





Take a tour of the fascinating **Ethnographic Museum**, in the large traditional home of an 18th century general. The house is filled with period furnishings and implements, such as a built-in butter churn, a loom, a flour mill and wonderful rugs and embroidered fabrics.

Browse the wooden stalls of the **medieval Turkish bazaar**, a great place to shop for traditional handicrafts, such as alabaster jewelry, silver filigree, hand-carved wooden items and hand-loomed carpets.

Make a quick stop in **New Kruja**, sometimes referred to as “Bush Town,” to commemorate the 2007 visit by former President G.W. Bush, the first U.S. president to pay a visit to Albania.

Arriving in Tirana, check in to the hotel and enjoy dinner.

Meals: B, D – *Sheraton Hotel, Rogner Hotel, or similar*

Day Nine, Friday

Tirana

After breakfast today, begin a full day tour of **Tirana**, Albania’s capital, located 20 km from the Adriatic on the Ishm River. Until it became the capital in the 1920s, Tirana was a small 17th century town with no more than 12,000 people living here. Urbanization efforts began in the 1950s, and Nikita Khrushchev laid the first stone of the **Palace of Culture** in 1959. Since the collapse of Albania’s communist government in the early 1990s, many of the grim Soviet-type buildings have been repainted in bright colors, and new restaurants and cafes are springing up. Centering on Skanderbeg Square, named in honor of the national hero, the town is easiest to explore on foot.

Take the 2.6-mile **cable car** from the outskirts of Tirana up to Dajti Mountain for fabulous views of the city and the surrounding wooded national park. The 14-minute ride ascends to the “Balcony of Tirana,” 3,445 feet above sea level.

Dinner tonight is independent.

Meals: B, L – *Sheraton Hotel, Rogner Hotel, or similar*



Day Ten, Saturday

Tirana • Durres • Apollonia • Berat

After breakfast, depart Tirana for **Durres**. Albania's second largest city grew around an excellent natural harbor on the Adriatic across from important southern Italian ports. Founded around 600 BC by Illyrians, the harbor was coveted and fought over since its discovery. It has reportedly changed hands over 33 times in the last 900 years. The Roman Empire conquered Durres in the 2nd century BC, and the city became the starting point of one of the most important Roman roads, the Via Egnatia to Constantinople. Visit the largest **Roman amphitheater** in the Balkans; the **Archaeological Museum**, bursting with over 2,000 years worth of treasure from the region around the city; and the **Roman baths**, dating from the time of Emperor Hadrian.

In a peaceful part of the Krygjata Valley along the Vjoses River stand the ruins of the ancient town of **Apollonia**, built as far back as 558 BC. Surrounded by a Roman wall near the Adriatic Coast, Apollonia was mentioned by both Aristotle and Cicero, and in its day was known as an important center of trade.

Continue to **Berat**. This city sits on one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in Albania, with settlements here since prehistoric times. One of the best-preserved medieval citadels in the Balkans is located directly above the Old Town, in the shadow of the **Tomori Mountains**. The dramatic architecture of Berat reflects both its Ottoman roots and its Albanian heritage, and the whitewashed houses that sit above the Osumit River give the city its nickname, "Town of a Thousand Windows." On the other side of the river, the Orthodox church of Shen Spyridon dominates the Gorica Quarter, historically a Slavic settlement.

Visit the beautifully preserved 13th century Byzantine church and monastery of Shen Meri (Saint Mary), which rises from a low hill overlooking the ruins of a Roman bath, a small acropolis, a Roman library and the Odeon. Housed in the Church of Shen Meri, the **Onuphre Icon Museum** contains the finest examples of religious art in Albania.

Next visit the **Leaden Mosque**. One of the oldest mosques in the city center, the Leaden Mosque has a well preserved minaret decorated with intricate stained glass work.

Head back to Berat in the late afternoon, arriving at the hotel in time for dinner and overnight.

Meals: B, L, D – *Grand White City Hotel, Mangalem Hotel, or similar*



Day Eleven, Sunday

Berat • Ohrid, North Macedonia

Depart this morning after breakfast for North Macedonia. Upon arrival in Ohrid, enjoy an independent lunch before touring of the city commences. **Ohrid** is one of oldest human settlements in Europe, and as such, has been designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, as has the lake on whose shores it sits.

First mentioned in 363 BC under its ancient name of Lychnidos, the town is today a popular destination for North Macedonians. Its **St. Panteleimon Monastery** is the oldest Slav monastery in



the world. Ohrid abounds with ancient archaeological sites, including **an ancient Greek amphitheater** and a fortress. Its antiquities, red-roofed old houses, beautiful setting and fabulous collection of medieval icons combine to make it a fascinating town.

Continue exploring the traditional Turkish architecture and winding streets of Ohrid. Visit beautiful **St. Sophia Church**, its wall covered with an unmatched display of 11th century frescoes; the remains of North Macedonia's only **ancient Greek amphitheater**, set into the slope of a hill; the monument to St. Clement, disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius and founder of a major medieval cultural center; the **icon gallery** in the courtyard of St. Bogorodica Perivlepta church, second only to Moscow's famed icon collection; and make a stop to admire the **fabulous medieval frescoes** on the walls of little St. Clement's church.

Meals: B, D – *Hotel City, Millennium Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Twelve, Monday Ohrid

This morning make a trip to **Sveti (Saint) Naum**. Located on the slopes of Mount Galicica near the shore of Lake Ohrid, the monastery of St. Naum was founded in 900. St. Naum was a student of the North Macedonian monks Cyril and Methodius, who invented the Cyrillic alphabet. The saint himself was buried here in 910.



Upon your return to Ohrid, set off on foot to explore the city. Check out the displays of “**Ohrid pearls**,” which are made from the scales of a small fish said to exist only in Lake Ohrid. The recipe for making the pearls is reportedly a closely-guarded secret.

The town is surrounded by old fortifications, some from as early as the 3rd century BC. Reinforced many times over the centuries, the walls include traces of four gates, one of which used to connect with the ancient Greek amphitheater.

In the afternoon, pay a visit to the town's lively bazaar, where women sell *ajvar* made from the peppers in the local market.

This evening, dinner is accompanied by **live music and a performance of Balkan dance**.

Meals: B, L, D – *Hotel City, Millennium Palace Hotel or similar*



Day Thirteen, Tuesday

Ohrid • Skopje

Get an early start this morning and head for Skopje. En route visit the hillside **Monastery of Sveti Jovan Bigorski**, or St. John the Baptist. The monastery features a gorgeous elaborately carved iconostasis in its church. The working monastery has been destroyed and rebuilt many times and is today a serene combination of new and old. Enjoy a tour of the grounds conducted by one of the monks, who talks about his daily routine and responsibilities. Browse the small monastery shop where the monks sell balms, tinctures and liqueurs made from local herbs according to age-old recipes.

Arriving in Skopje early this evening, check in to the hotel and enjoy dinner.
Meals: B, D – *Mariott Skopje, Aleksandar Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Fourteen, Wednesday

Skopje • day trip to Pristina, Kosovo

Pristina is the capital of **Kosovo**, the Balkans territory that declared independence from Serbia in February of 2008. The city's population of more than 210,000 has a majority of ethnic Albanians. In existence since late Roman times, Pristina was an important Serbian capital for many years before it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in the late 14th century. Architecture and culture were strongly influenced by its years under Ottoman rule. In particular, the **19th century clock tower** near the bazaar, the 15th century **Imperial Mosque** and nearby **public bath**, or *hamam*, are of interest.

Since Serbia continues to claim Kosovo as part of its territory, and tensions between the two have not yet been totally resolved, the **NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR)** remains here to ensure the peace.

Return to Skopje and enjoy some free time to shop or explore on your own before dinner.
Meals: B, L, D – *Mariott Skopje, Aleksandar Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Fifteen, Thursday

Skopje, North Macedonia



photo: Victor Bloomfield

Explore **Skopje** today. North Macedonia's capital and largest city, Skopje has a population of about 500,000. The area has been inhabited since the Neolithic Age and has been ruled at various times by ancient Rome, Byzantium, the First Bulgarian Empire and the Ottoman Turks. Its Ottoman influence can be seen best in the wonderful **old Turkish quarter**, where the teeming bazaar displays hand-loomed carpets, antique silver, spices, woven pillows and *nargileh* (water pipes). Old caravanserai have been transformed into traditional restaurants and little cafes, and cubbyhole shops line the streets. This is where Saint Teresa – formerly Mother Teresa – was born and raised, and there is a monument to her on the main street.



Opened in 2009, the **Memorial House of Saint Teresa** was built over the site where she was baptized almost 100 years before. The memorial includes a modern re-imagining of the house where she grew up, combined with a chapel and an auditorium. Exhibits include photos, documents and artifacts from her early life in Skopje and her humanitarian work in India.

Visit the **Old Stone Bridge** over the Vardar River, built by Mehmet the Conqueror in the mid-15th century, providing a pedestrian link between the **Old Bazaar** and the newer parts of the city.

Lunch is independent, and the afternoon is free for last-minute shopping or packing. Gather for a festive **farewell dinner** this evening at the Old Caravanserai Restaurant. One of three remaining Ottoman caravanserais still standing in the Old Bazaar, this structure was built in 1492, the year Columbus discovered America.

Meals: B, D – *Mariott Skopje, Aleksandar Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Sixteen, Friday

Depart Skopje

Following breakfast, the trip concludes with a transfer to the airport.

Meals: B

Dates for 2020 – Two Departures – Premier Series

The land itinerary is scheduled on the following dates. Please note that you will need to depart the U.S. one day prior to the tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

May 7-22, 2020

September 10-25, 2020

Package Prices – 2020 Pricing Information

6-16 passengers, \$7,995 per person, twin share

Single supplement, \$1,525

Land Tour Includes

- Accommodations as noted in itinerary.
- 15 breakfasts, 7 lunches, and 11 dinners. Some lunches and dinners are left independent to allow for exploration.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides, drivers and other staff, including a MIR Tour Manager.
- Arrival/departure airport transfers. MIR will arrange for all travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates in the tour start/end cities.
- Ground transportation throughout itinerary by private coach or van (size of vehicle depends on group size).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary.
- Baggage handling where available.
- Gratuities to local guides, drivers, porters and other service personnel.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, *Touring with MIR* hand-book with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international air-



- fare is not included in the land tour cost).
- Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates, and more.

Not Included

- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.
- Meals not specified as included on the itinerary.
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Gratuities to Tour Manager.
- Expenses incurred as a result of delay, modification or extension of a tour due to causes beyond MIR's control.
- Visa fees, if required (U.S. passport holders do not require any visas for this program).
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance.

Interested in travel insurance?

To learn more about all the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp or contact Travel Guard at 1.877.709.5596.

Start Planning Next Year Now

Dates for 2021- Two Departures – Premier Series

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Next year's dates and prices are shown below – please call if you're ready to book now.

May 6-21, 2021
September 9-24, 2021

Package Prices – 2021

Package prices for 2021 have not yet been determined, please call for information

Premier Series

MIR's Premier Series programs feature some of our most distinctive tour concepts and include uncommon and educational experiences, including visits to small towns and villages outside the major urban areas and capital cities. While all MIR trips feature comfortable, well-located hotels, Premier Series programs take advantage of five-star or best-in-class properties along the way wherever possible.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

While the accommodations are designed to be the best available for travel in this part of the world, some are quite small, moderate three star to four star hotels with very basic amenities and services. It is important to keep in mind that some of the countries of the Balkans may not be up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; nevertheless you may encounter problems with plumbing, bureaucratic service, road conditions, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and



steps and availability and quality of public restrooms. Some areas, relatively speaking, have seen few travelers, and the infrastructure is not yet fully developed.

While this program is designed to be the most comfortable possible for travel in this region, this is an adventuresome trip. It is rated as **rigorous touring** due to the daily walking involved, some long driving days, the conditions of some roads, and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. All travelers must be able to walk 1-2 miles per day, keeping up with fellow group travelers. Many streets are of cobblestone, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums rarely have elevators. Flexibility and a sense of humor are essential components of the enjoyment of your trip.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this schedule is accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We do our best to inform you in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in these countries, this may not always be possible.

Are You Prepared?

A Travel Guard travel insurance plan can help cover your vacation investment, offset expenses from travel mishaps and provide you with emergency travel assistance. To learn more about all of the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Serbia here:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/serbia-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Bosnia and Herzegovina here:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/bosnia-and-herzegovina-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Croatia here:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/croatia-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Montenegro here:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/montenegro-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Albania here:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/albania-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to North Macedonia here:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/macedonia-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Kosovo here:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/kosovo-travel-advisory.html>

If you are not already enrolled in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, please consider enrolling. For more information:
<https://step.state.gov/step/>

Weather

This region of Europe enjoys a transitional maritime/continental climate, with warm summers and fairly mild winters. In May, temperatures typically range from lows in the mid 50s to highs in the mid 70s. In



September and October, temperatures tend to range from lows in the 50s to highs in the mid 60s to low 70s, with a possibility of rain.

We recommend checking temperature ranges online. Research using sites such as Weatherbase, available online at www.weatherbase.com, will help you get a snapshot of daily average temperatures as well as precipitation days and more.

International Airfare

MIR's in-house, full-service air department is available to assist with your air travel needs. Check with MIR before booking air on your own, as we are happy to research and compare the best fares available through multiple channels. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel and seasonality, seat availability, special airline promotions, how restrictive ticket changes are, how long the fares can be held without purchase, routing considerations such as stopovers, and more. Tour dates are based on the land tour only. Our preferred carriers for this tour are Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to the Balkans.

Please call us at 800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

Visas

U.S. passport holders do not require visas for the Balkan countries. Citizens of other countries may require visas; please contact us for more details. Visa regulations and prices are always subject to change.

Pre- and Post-Tour Extensions

You may want to do a pre- or post-tour in nearby Slovenia, connecting through Zagreb to or from Ljubljana. Extensions can also be crafted to Bulgaria or Romania, Ukraine, Belarus, or Western Russia. Call us at 1-800-424-7289 for more details.

Also Nearby...

For more tours in Eastern Europe and Western Russia, you may want to check out the following:

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Essential Balkans, 14 days. Visit seven Balkan countries in fourteen days on this compact overland journey through history. A remarkably complex region, the mountainous Balkan Peninsula is fascinating, diverse and incredibly beautiful.

Essential Baltics, 7 days. Take an overland survey of the Baltic capitals – Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn – exploring their UNESCO-listed Old Towns, featuring cobbled streets and red-tiled roofs. Visit important rural sites like Lithuania's Hill of Crosses and Latvia's baroque Rundale Castle.

Essential Ukraine, 8 days. Ukraine is the new borderland between Europe and Russia. Explore this resilient region influenced by Polish princes, Cossack *hetmen*, Turkish khans, Russian communists and Ukrainian poets and nationalists.



Essential St. Petersburg, 7 days. St. Petersburg, home of the czars and their courts, is a rich repository of extravagant palaces, brilliant museums and renowned theaters overflowing with music and dance. Its fashionable boulevards and serene canals glisten in the “White Nights” of summer and dazzle on sunny winter days.

Essential Russia, 7 days. A compact and compelling survey of Russia’s political capital, Moscow, and its cultural capital, St. Petersburg, this tour communicates the character of Western Russia in a succinct and meaningful series of experiences.

Small Group Tours

Belarus, Ukraine & Moldova, 14 days. Traverse a little-known region that has changed hands from its earliest history. Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova are three of the least frequented and least familiar countries in Europe. Time slowed drastically here after the devastation of WWII, but these beautiful countries are emerging from the shadows.

Bulgaria & Romania: Frescoes & Fortresses, 16 days. Explore the complex history and fascinating culture of Bulgaria and Romania, two Balkan countries whose rugged terrain and consequent isolation have helped preserve their heritage. Discover the luminous frescoes of the painted monasteries, breathe in the fragrance of the Valley of the Roses, and spend an afternoon visiting with villagers in a tiny Transylvanian town.

Russia’s Imperial Capitals & Ancient Villages, 11 days. Discover where Russian art, architecture and culture began. In between the urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, experience the Russian countryside. The oldest and loveliest churches in Russia, Sergiev Posad’s wooden crafts and Fedoskino’s glowing lacquer boxes all put a shine on Russia’s Golden Ring.

Kaliningrad & The Baltics, 13 days. This overland journey roves the countryside and urban centers of four distinct nations: the three independent Baltic countries – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – and Kaliningrad, an exclave of Russia.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2020 Tour Reservation Form and Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement. Please read this document carefully and contact us with any questions.

Cancellation and Refund Policy

Payment Terms: Non-refundable deposits are accepted by check, Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Final land payments may be made by check or credit card for reservations made directly with MIR. If booking through a travel agent, please contact your agent to find out what form of payment they accept. (MIR can accept final payment from travel agents by agency check only.) Air fares are subject to change until ticketed; payment policies vary by carrier.

If you cancel your trip please notify MIR in writing. Upon MIR’s receipt of notice the following charges apply to land tours (policies for air tickets, custom group trips vary).

Small Group Tours

Cost of cancellation, if received:

61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of \$750;

31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;



30 days prior to or after trip departure, no refund.

References

We encourage you to speak directly with satisfied past travelers. Please request a list of references.

Why MIR?

Regional knowledge is crucial to the success of any trip to our corner of the world. MIR combines detailed information about geography and infrastructure, history and art, language and culture, with the depth of knowledge that comes only from decades of regional experience. You may wonder how we differ from other tour operators...

Destination Specialization

MIR focuses exclusively on the exceptional region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This area has been our overriding passion since 1986; we don't do the rest of the world. Our hard-earned expertise gained over the last three decades can take you from end to end of the largest country in the world – Russia – and to all of its neighbors. We specialize in travel to Siberia, the Silk Route, St. Petersburg & Beyond. Our destinations include: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), Turkey, Mongolia, China, Tibet, and Central/East Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia).

30 Years of Experience

A travel company doesn't last more than 30 years in the business without a solid track record. MIR has helped thousands of individuals achieve their travel goals. Our dedication and experience have earned us their trust and the trust of many well-respected institutions. Today MIR is the preferred tour operator for museum, alumni and special interest organizations across the country.

Recommended & Respected

MIR has twice been rated one of the "Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth" by *National Geographic Adventure*. Several of our tours have won awards in top travel publications, such as *Outside* magazine and *National Geographic Traveler*. Our trips have been featured in books such as *Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean* and *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.

More Questions?

Please feel free to call us with questions at 1-800-424-7289, 8:30am-5:30pm Pacific Time.


MIR Corporation
85 South Washington Street, Suite 210
Seattle, WA 98104
800-424-7289, 206-624-7289
Fax 206-624-7360
info@mircorp.com
www.mircorp.com





Sellers of Travel: Washington#601-099-932, California# 2082306-40

© Photos: MIR Corporation, Martin Klimenta, Dragan Bosnic, General Turist, Jochen Tack, bhtourism.ba, exploringmacedonia.com, Lisa Peterson, Peter Guttman, Chris Lira, Victor Bloomfield

MIR and the MIR logo  are trademarks of MIR Corporation.

