



**Essential Albania,
Macedonia, and Kosovo
2020**



Essential Albania, Macedonia & Kosovo

Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 10 Days

Your choice of dates, start any day

Perched just above Greece, Albania, and North Macedonia share some of that country's natural beauty and benign climate. The newest European country, Kosovo, reaches down between them, uniting the three nations on the jigsaw puzzle of the Balkan map. Albania boasts miles of Adriatic and Ionian Sea coastline, as well as spectacular Roman ruins. Land-locked Kosovo has a reputation for fine skiing and mountaineering, sophisticated cafés and shops, and a forward-looking young population. And North Macedonia is a compact jewel of a country, blue with lakes and green with forested mountains. Visit all three, from the mountains to the sea, on this 10-day jaunt across the little-traveled yet fascinating lower Balkan Peninsula.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Tirana, Albania
Day 2	Tirana
Day 3	Tirana • day trip to Kruja
Day 4	Tirana • Durres • Apollonia • Berat
Day 5	Berat • Ohrid, North Macedonia
Day 6	Ohrid
Day 7	Ohrid • Skopje
Day 8	Skopje • day trip to Pristina, Kosovo
Day 9	Skopje
Day 10	Depart Skopje



Tour Highlights

Tirana	Capital of Albania, Skanderbeg Square, Palace of Culture, National History Museum, Et'hem Bey Mosque, Bunk'Art, cable car to Dajti Mountain
Kruja	15th century fortress, Ethnographic Museum, medieval Turkish bazaar, local workshop, New Kruja
Durres	Albania's second-largest city, Roman amphitheater, Roman baths
Apollonia	Founded in 558 BC, 13th century Byzantine church and monastery of Shen Meri (St. Mary), Apollonia Museum
Berat	Dramatic Ottoman-house architecture, Church of Shen Spyridon, Onfuri Museum
Ohrid	One of the oldest human settlements in Europe (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Church of St. Sophia, Icon Gallery, archaeological site of Plaoshnik, monastery of St. Naum
Skopje	North Macedonia's capital, Old Bazaar, Old Stone Bridge, Memorial House of Saint Teresa, Macedonia square, St. Jovan Bigorski Monastery
Pristina	Capital of Kosovo, 15th century Carshia Mosque, 14th century Church of the Holy Virgin in Gracanica Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage Site), meeting with local family

Daily Itinerary

Day One Arrive Tirana, Albania

Arriving in Tirana and check in to the hotel for overnight.
Meals: Independent/en route – *Monarc Hotel or similar*

Day Two Tirana

This morning, meet your guide and driver for a full day of exploring Albania's capital city.

Tirana, Albania's capital, is located 20 km from the Adriatic Sea 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 cafés are springing up. Centering on **Skanderbeg Square**, named in honor of the national hero responsible for



defeating the Ottomans, the town is easiest to explore on foot.

Get a feel for the long, often-troubled history of Albania at the **National History Museum**, where most exhibits and displays are signed in English. The museum is divided into several rooms each representing an era an independent democratic in Albanian history, from its past as Illyria to its present a nation. Visitors of any nationality can quickly understand the large mosaic on the building's facade, a visual representation of Albania's history stretching back thousands of years

The Et'hem Bey Mosque in the center of Tirana was begun in 1789 and finished by Et'hem Bey, the great-grandson of Suleiman Pasha Bargjini. Its frescoes depict rarely-allowed natural features such as waterfalls and trees.

Located on the eastern edge of Tirana, **Bunk'Art** is housed inside one of the capital city's most fascinating and unusual sites: a massive, five-story underground atomic shelter. Secretly built in the 1970s to accommodate late communist dictator Enver Hoxha and Albania's political and military elite in the event of a nuclear attack, the bunker was a sprawling maze of hallways and more than 100 fallout rooms, with living quarters and apartments, meeting rooms, and offices. More than two football fields in length, the presidential shelter is just one of some 750,000 bunkers built across Albania under Hoxha's orders.

In 2014, the Albanian government and a nonprofit arts group took over the presidential atomic shelter, transforming 24 of the 100 rooms into a contemporary arts and culture center called "Bunk'Art." There's also an Albanian history museum with rooms just as they were in the 1970s, including Enver Hoxha's office with his original furniture, desk, radio, phone, and maps. Special exhibits, photographs, and artifacts tell the story of Albania's dark communist past and history of repression.

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.

Return to the hotel for overnight.

Meals: B – *MonarC Hotel or similar*



Day Three

Tirana • day trip to Kruja

Depart this morning for a day trip to the nearby village of Kruja for a full day of touring.

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. Visit the **restored castle and citadel**, with its Skanderbeg Museum and bazaar.



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.

A particular highlight of the fortress is the Dollma Tekke, a house of prayer for the Bektashi sect of Islam. A mystical sect with its roots in Sufism, the Bektashi order was prevalent in the Ottoman Empire and spread throughout Anatolia and the Balkans.

Take a tour of the fascinating **Ethnographic Museum**, located 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.



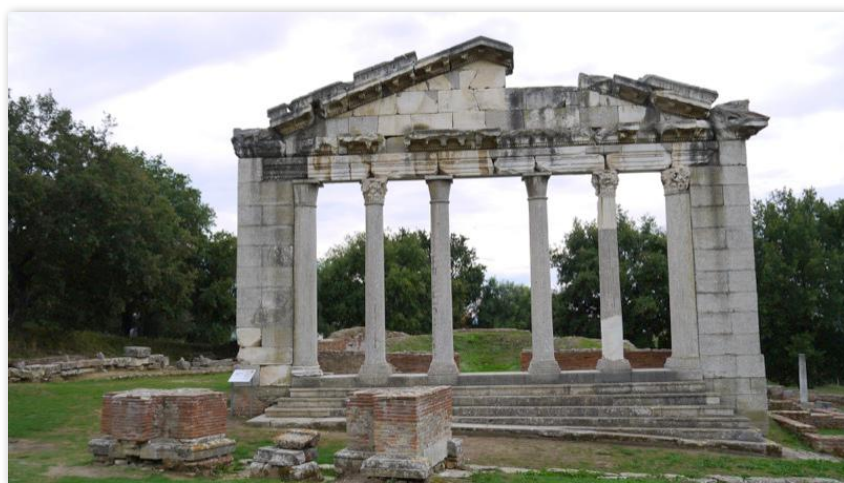
Browse the wooden stalls of the medieval **Turkish bazaar**, a great place to shop for traditional handicrafts such as alabaster jewelry, silver filigree, hand-carved wooden items and hand-loomed carpets.

Pay a visit to a **local workshop** that creates traditional Albanian hats called *qeleshe*, also known as *plis*. Shaped from a single piece of felt, these white woolen skull caps are worn by Albanian men throughout much of the highland regions and in agricultural communities in the southern half of the country, as well as in Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro.

Outside medieval Kruja, there is a newer settlement called **New Kruja**. This small place is often referred to as "Bush Town," to commemorate the 2007 visit by former President George W. Bush, the first U.S. president to pay a visit to Albania. Recently a new monument dedicated to the President was erected.

Return to Tirana for overnight.

Meals: B – *MonarC* or similar



Day Four

Tirana • Durres • Apollonia • Berat

After breakfast, set off for Berat, with en route stops for touring in Durres and Apollonia.

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 and the **Roman baths**, dating from the time of Emperor Hadrian.

In a peaceful part of the Krygjata Valley along the Vjosa 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. The beautifully preserved 13th century **Byzantine church and monastery of Shen Meri (Saint Mary)**, rise from a low hill overlooking the ruins of a Roman bath, a small acropolis, a Roman library and the Odeon. The monastery houses the **Apollonia Museum**, with information about the ancient city.

Depart for Berat for overnight stay.

Meals: B – *Mangalemi Hotel* or similar



Day Five

Berat • Ohrid, North Macedonia

The city of **Berat** sits on one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in Albania. There have been 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 Ottoman-house architecture** of Berat reflects both its Ottoman roots and its Albanian heritage, and the white-washed 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.

Located in St. Mary’s church, the **Onfuri Museum** is named for the celebrated painter of the same name. The museum’s collection features icons and liturgical objects created by Albanian artists spanning the 16th to 20th centuries and is famed for its gilded iconostasis. The building itself is Berat’s best example of post-Byzantine architecture.

Depart for Ohrid, North Macedonia for hotel check-in, independent dinner, and overnight.

Meals: B – *Millennium Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Six

Ohrid

Ohrid is one of the oldest human settlements in Europe and, along with Ohrid Lake, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

First mentioned in 363 BC, under its ancient name of Lychnidos, today the town is a popular destination for North Macedonians. Its St. Pantaleon Monastery is the oldest Slav monastery in the world. Ohrid abounds with ancient archaeological sites, including an amphitheater and a fortress. Its antiquities, red-roofed old houses, beautiful setting and fabulous collection of medieval icons combine to make it a riveting town.

Ohrid’s 11th century **Church of St. Sophia** sits at the foot of the hill near the lakeshore, its heavy stone walls protecting medieval treasures. Some of its frescoes were painted by one of the most important artists of the time, Theoranius. During Ottoman times, the frescoes were plastered over, a desecration that turned out to have preserved them well.

Icons from the 11th to the 19th century, many of them considered masterpieces, have been gathered at the **Icon Gallery of Ohrid**, tracing the evolution of artistic styles as well as the changing rules for the depiction of sacred subjects.



Ohrid 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.

The archaeological site of **Plaoshnik** on a hill above Ohrid features the painstaking reconstruction of **St. Clement's Church**, accurately built according to its Byzantine architectural plans. Originally constructed by St. Clement in 893 over the remains of an even earlier church, it was dedicated to St. Pantaleon and became the center of a monastery and important literary school. The reconstructed church includes glass floor segments revealing the foundations of the earlier church. St. Clement's relics were returned here in 2002.

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 Macedonian monks Cyril and Methodius, who invented the Cyrillic alphabet. The saint himself was buried here in 910.

Enjoy a walk through the **local farmers' market** in Ohrid's Old Town. Known as the Green Market, vendors in this bustling place sell fresh fruits and vegetables, such as the ubiquitous dried red peppers hung from poles and used in traditional dishes such as *ajvar*; fresh handmade cheeses and sausages; along with walnuts and Ohrid cherries – both local specialties.

Return to the hotel for overnight.

Meals: B – *Millenium Palace Hotel or similar*

Day Seven

Ohrid • Skopje

After breakfast and check-out this morning, meet your driver and guide for transfer to Skopje, with an en route stop for touring at St. Jovan Bigorski Monastery.

The hillside **Monastery of Sveti Jovan Bigorski**, or St. John the Baptist, 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.

After touring the monastery, part with your guide and continue on to Skopje with your driver only. Upon arrival, check in to the hotel for overnight.

Meals: B – *Alexander Square Boutique Hotel or similar*



Day Eight

Skopje • day trip to Pristina, Kosovo



This morning, meet your driver for transfer to Pristina, Kosovo, where you will meet your guide for touring.

Pristina is the capital of Kosovo, the Balkans territory that declared independence from Serbia in February of 2008. The population of some 207,000 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. Also, walk by the Parliament building and the Skanderbeg Monument, dedicated to Albania's hero.

Kosovars renamed one of Pristina's main streets **Bill Clinton Boulevard** in gratitude for the American president's help in influencing NATO to send in air strikes against the Serbian army threatening Kosovo. In 2009 a 10-foot statue of the former president was unveiled on the boulevard as Clinton himself presided.

Constructed in the 15th century by Turkish Sultan Bajazi and recognized as the oldest building in Pristina, the **Carshia**

Mosque stands alone in front of the Kosovo Museum. Travelers are often only able to admire the stone facade of this prayer center due to the city's regular renovation efforts, and to see its juxtaposition against Pristina's more modern structures. The **UNESCO World Heritage Site** called "**Medieval Monuments in Kosovo**" consists of four monastery churches built and frescoed between the 13th and 17th centuries. These masterful Serbian monuments reflect the fusion of Byzantine decorative art with western Romanesque traditions. The frescoes in all four churches are wonderful examples of medieval wall painting.

One of the most prominent medieval monuments from this site is the 14th century Church of the Holy Virgin on the grounds of the **Gracanica Monastery**. The Serbian Orthodox monastery is located near Pristina in a Serbian enclave, and the beautiful church is the only building remaining from its founding. A tour of the fascinating monastery and church is conducted by a local Orthodox monk, and if you are lucky, you may catch a glimpse of a wedding or baptism.

Meet with a **local family of Kosovan Albanians** in a traditional Albanian home to hear the story of their lives during the Kosovo War with Serbia. The Albanian Kosovars rebelled in 1998, and Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic sent in the Serb army. NATO planes bombed Serbia for two months, forcing it in 1999 to relinquish control over Kosovo, which was then ruled by a UN transitional administration. In 2008, Kosovo declared itself independent of Serbia.

Return to Skopje for overnight.

Meals: B – *Alexander Square Boutique Hotel or similar*



Day Nine

Skopje

This morning, meet your driver and guide for a full-day tour of the city. Macedonia's capital and largest city, **Skopje** has a population of about 700,000. 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. Old caravanserais have been transformed into traditional restaurants and little cafes and cubbyhole shops line the streets. This is where Mother Teresa was born and raised, and there is a monument to her on the main street.

Stroll the flagstone streets of **Skopje Old Bazaar**, located in this spot since the 12th century. The largest bazaar in the Balkans, travelers will find fine, hand-loomed carpets, antique silver, spices, woven pillows and *nargileh* (water pipes). It begins at the Old Stone Bridge and stretches to the newer Bit-Pazar, with its abundance of fruits and vegetables.

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



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

Macedonia Square is Skopje's main square in the central part of the city where it crosses the Vardar River. It continues to be extensively renovated, with new monuments, fountains and museums. Of note is a new white fountain topped with the massive eight-story figure of Alexander the Great on his equally massive steed, Bucephalus. A recent addition is a massive eight-story white fountain called "Warrior on a Horse," showcasing Alexander the Great atop his steed."

Meals: B – *Alexander Square Boutique Hotel or similar*

Day Ten

Depart Skopje

The journey ends this morning with a transfer to the airport for departure.

Meals: B



Tour Days of Operation

Private departures of this land itinerary can begin on the day of your choice in 2020. Please note you will need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to your tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

Private Journey Prices – 2020

2 traveler minimum, from \$4,695 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$525

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, from \$6,695

Hotel Upgrade Prices

Upgrade to five-star in select cities: Rogner Europark or similar in Tirana and Marriott Skopje or similar – other properties as listed in the standard version.

2 traveler minimum, from \$5,195 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$695

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, from \$8,595

Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates.

Extensions and additional nights are available on request. Contact us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.

Your Private Journey Includes

- Shared accommodations in well-located superior tourist class hotels throughout the itinerary. See **Hotel Upgrade Prices** above for upgraded accommodations.
- Breakfast daily, per the itinerary. Lunches and dinners are independent to allow exploration.
- Local guides in each city.
- One arrival and one departure transfer. (Additional arrival and departure transfers are available at additional cost.) MIR arranges for travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not.
- Transportation throughout itinerary by private van or car (type of vehicle depends on the size of your party).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list and reading list.
- Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international airfare is not included in the land tour cost).
- *Touring with MIR* handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates, and more.

Not Included

- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Baggage handling.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Gratuities to local guides and drivers.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.
- Expenses incurred as a result of delay, modification or extension of a tour due to causes beyond MIR's control.
- 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

2021 Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 10 Days

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Please call if you're ready to book now.

Private departures of this land itinerary can begin on the day of your choice in 2021. Please note you will need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to your tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

Private Journey Prices – 2020

2 traveler minimum, from \$4,795 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$595

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, from \$6,795

Hotel Upgrade Prices

Upgrade to five-star in select cities: Rogner Europark or similar in Tirana and Marriott Skopje or similar – other properties as listed in the standard version.

2 traveler minimum, from \$5,295 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$725

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, from \$8,695

Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates. Extensions and additional nights are available on request. Contact us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Flexible Essential Private Trips are compact, well-designed private tour itineraries – researched and ready to book on the dates you choose. They work perfectly as brief overviews of a country or as effortless extensions to group tours – great for solo travelers, couples, or private parties who prefer to travel independently but appreciate a savvy pre-designed program.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

While the accommodations are designed to be comfortable for travel in this part of the world, they are generally moderate four star hotels, which in this region can still be small with basic amenities and services. (Please see **Hotel Upgrade** pricing section above if interested in upgrading hotels.) It is important to keep in mind that this region 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. Many streets are of cobblestone, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums rarely have elevators. In the hotels, you may find that showers/baths have steep steps up or ledges, which can become slippery and require extra caution. Handrails will not usually be present indoors or outdoors, and care and caution are required to avoid a fall. 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 Albania, 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 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 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. Spring and summer are the best times to travel here, particularly when driving overland. These are all agricultural countries, with the landscape varying from cultivated fields to forests. In May and June, temperatures in this region range from lows in the mid 50s to highs in the mid- to upper 70s. In July and August highs are often in the 80s and above, with September and October bringing cooler temperatures again, and the possibility of more rain.

Please remember, weather at all times of year has an element of the unpredictable. This information comes from weatherbase.com and is based on data from previous temperatures on record. It is always advisable to check with weatherbase.com closer to your departure date for current conditions and forecasts for the specific region you will be visiting.



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 Albania, Macedonia, and Kosovo. Citizens of other countries may require visas; please contact us for more details.

Pre- and Post-Tour Extensions

You may want to do a pre- or post-tour in nearby Balkan countries such as Croatia and Montenegro. 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 14 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 such as 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

Balkan Odyssey: Crossroads of Cultures, 16 days. 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 wildly divergent Balkan countries – Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo.

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.

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 World War Two, but these beautiful countries are emerging from the shadows.

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.) Airfares 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):

Flexible Essential 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.

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