



Essential Balkans

2020



Essential Balkans

Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 14 Days

Start on any day of the week

The Balkan Peninsula in southeast Europe is surrounded on three sides by the Adriatic Sea, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. A remarkably complex region, the mountainous peninsula is fascinating, diverse and incredibly beautiful. Its prime position has made it a meeting point of ancient Greece and Rome, Christianity and Islam. Agriculture made its way here from the Fertile Crescent, and ruins of Greek and Roman amphitheaters are tucked away in former capital cities. Visit seven Balkan countries in fourteen days on this compact overland journey through history. The circular driving itinerary begins in Split near Croatia's southern coastal tip. Drive east into Bosnia and Herzegovina to visit Mostar's UNESCO-listed bridge, as well as 1984 Winter Olympics host city, Sarajevo. Cross the border into Serbia, stopping in beautiful Belgrade before heading down to Macedonia and its Ottoman-influenced capital, Skopje. Make a day trip into Kosovo, and spend a night near the shore of UNESCO-listed Lake Ohrid on the way to Tirana, capital of Albania. Circle around to Montenegro's centuries-old city of Kotor, today a UNESCO World Heritage Site, before ending in Dubrovnik on the sun-washed Dalmatian Coast.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Split, Croatia
Day 2	Split
Day 3	Split • Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina • Sarajevo
Day 4	Sarajevo
Day 5	Sarajevo • Belgrade, Serbia
Day 6	Belgrade
Day 7	Belgrade • Skopje, Macedonia
Day 8	Skopje • day trip to Pristina, Kosovo
Day 9	Skopje • Ohrid
Day 10	Ohrid • Tirana, Albania
Day 11	Tirana • Kruja • Shkodra • Kotor, Montenegro
Day 12	Kotor • Perast • Dubrovnik, Croatia
Day 13	Dubrovnik
Day 14	Depart Dubrovnik



Tour Highlights

Split	Cathedral of St. Duje, Diocletian's Palace (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Temple of Jupiter
Trogir	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Cathedral of St. Lawrence
Mostar	Old Bridge (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Koski Mehmed Pasha Mosque, Turkish House, Kujundziluk Bazaar
Sarajevo	Capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, location of 1984 Winter Olympics, Tunnel Museum, Bascarsija Ottoman Market market, Svrzina Kuca Oriental House, Princip Bridge (assassination site of Archduke Ferdinand), Bey's Mosque, National Museum of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Sarajevo Haggadah (UNESCO Memory of the World)
Belgrade	Capital of Serbia. Kalemegdan Fortress, Upper Town, including Despot's Gate and Roman Well, Skadarlija, Palace of Princess Ljubica and Milos Obrenovic, mausoleum of Josip Tito
Pristina	Capital of Kosovo, 19th century clock tower, Imperial Mosque, public baths
Skopje	Macedonia's capital, Old Stone Bridge, Memorial House of Saint Teresa
Ohrid	Lake Ohrid and surroundings (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Heraclea, Church of St. Sophia, Church of Sveta Bogorodica Perivlepta, Stone Fortress, Plaoshnik, old fortifications
Tirana	Capital of Albania, National History Museum, Et'hem Bey Mosque, Clock Tower, cable car to Mt. Dajti
Kruja	Kruja Fortress, Ethnographic Museum, Turkish Bazaar, New Kruja
Kotor	UNESCO-listed town, beautiful Dalmatian Coast, Cathedral of St. Tryphon
Perast	Our Lady of the Rocks
Dubrovnik	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), 15th century clock, Rector's Palace, Assumption Cathedral

Daily Itinerary

Day One

Arrive Split, Croatia

On arrival in Split, transfer to the city and check in to the hotel. This evening meet your guide to discuss the program. Touring begins tomorrow morning. Split is the second-largest city in Croatia and is located on the Dalmatian Coast. The scenery of Split ranges from palm-lined promenades to ancient Roman ruins. The city became famous in the 3rd century when the Roman emperor Diocletian chose Split for the location of the palace he would eventually retire to. The palace ruins still stand today; they are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and are complemented by the ruins of the nearby village of Salona, which was deserted by the Romans in the 7th century. Meals: Independent/en route – *Marmont Hotel, Comaro Hotel, or similar*



Day Two Split

After breakfast, depart with your guide and driver for the nearby village of **Trogir**, a beautifully-preserved island town west of Split founded by Greek colonists in the 3rd century BC. Its medieval walled Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site filled with Gothic and Romanesque churches, palaces and public buildings.

One of Trogir's finest sights is its **Cathedral of St. Lawrence**, known locally as Sveti Ivan, St. John's, after a 12th century bishop. Built over several centuries, the massive stone church was begun in the 13th and not finished until the 17th. Celebrated Croatian master sculptor Radovan carved the church's main portal, encrusted with figures of animals, angels, saints and ordinary people.

After time for an independent lunch, return to Split for an afternoon of touring. Built over Emperor Diocletian's 3rd century marble and limestone mausoleum, the **Cathedral of St. Duje** (also known as the Cathedral of St. Domnius dedicated to St. Mary) with its monumental 11th century bell tower is a symbol of the city. The original mausoleum retains its 24 columns and its dome, once covered with mosaics. The carved cathedral doors are a fine example of Romanesque sculpture.

The small temple across from the Cathedral was originally **dedicated to Jupiter**, and displays a narrow statue of the god under the barrel vault ceiling. A headless black granite sphinx guards the entrance to the temple, which was used as a baptismal during the Christina era.

Next, visit **Diocletian's Palace**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The palace was built in the 3rd century by the Roman emperor Diocletian as a residence for his upcoming retirement. The large-scale structure was, however, completely abandoned by the Romans not long after its construction and remained untouched for centuries. Finally, in the 7th century, nearby residents inhabited the protective walled structure while seeking refuge from invading barbarians. Since then, the population of the palace has remained steady, and the residents and businesses within the palace still make up old town Split today.

The complex, which includes 220 remaining buildings, is the centerpiece of the city, and its marble covered structures are remarkably well-preserved and functional. Observe life within the palace walls, which has evolved to become a fascinating combination of old and new.

Return to the hotel for overnight.
Meals: B – *Marmont Hotel, Comaro Hotel, or similar*



Day Three

Split • Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina • Sarajevo

Depart early from Split, heading east to Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. First, stop in **Mostar** en route. Founded in the 15th century, Mostar was 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.

Touring today begins when you enter the early 17th century **Koski Mehmed Pasha Mosque** with its stained glass and massive chandelier and climb to the top of its slim minaret for a fine view of Stari Most, the river and the old part of town.

The beautifully proportioned **Old Bridge** in Mostar is a symbol of the city, standing in its original form for 427 years until it was destroyed in 1993. Commissioned by Suleiman the Magnificent and designed by a student of the famed Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan, the tall arch of the bridge radiates grace and power. Its reconstruction, which recreated the original silhouette, is considered a work of art as well as a gesture towards peace.

Next, visit the 350-year-old **Turkish House**, which was built for a wealthy Bosnian family and is representative of how the upper class lived then. Furnished in lush period carpets and dark woods, the house encloses private gardens and has a special room for women high above the street where they cannot be seen.



Wander the narrow cobbled streets of the old **Kujundziluk Bazaar**. Dating back to the 16th century, the Ottoman-era streets are lined with workshops selling copperware, carpets, jewelry and fabrics, as well as cafés and little restaurants serving savory Turkish dishes.

Following an independent lunch, continue on to Sarajevo for overnight.

Meals: B – *Europa Hotel, Central Hotel, or similar*



Day Four Sarajevo

Have breakfast at the hotel this morning before beginning a full day tour of the city. 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.

Visit the **Sarajevo Tunnel Museum** with a survivor who used the tunnel to get in and out of Sarajevo during the siege. 60 feet of the life-saving tunnel remain under the house where the tunnel began. A 20-minute film familiarizes you with the building and operation of the tunnel, and many of the original tools and materiel are on display.

Stroll through the Sarajevo's **old Turkish quarter, Bascarsija**, where the first bazaars were held and the stalls in the covered markets still sell handmade items and savory street food. The beautiful 16th century Gazi Husrev-bey Mosque is here in the old neighborhood as well.

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.



After an independent lunch, visit the **Svrzina Kuca Oriental House**, an 18th-century home decorated in a typical style for its era.

The Ottoman-era Latin Bridge with its four elegant arches over the Miljcka River was renamed the **Princip Bridge** after Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. 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 the Arch-Duke Ferdinand and his wife is marked with a plaque.

Today's touring ends with a visit to the **National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina**. Established in 1888, the National Museum is ensconced in a 20th century building with an Italian Renaissance facade. Its finest possession is the "Sarajevo Haggadah," possibly the oldest Sephardic Jewish manuscript in the world. An illuminated Passover Haggadah originating in Barcelona around 1350, the manuscript is hand-lettered on bleached calfskin and illuminated with copper and gold. Its 34 pages of illustrations are still brilliant today, though stained with wine from centuries of use. The Sarajevo Haggadah was added to



UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2017. **Please note:** The Haggadah is only open to museum visitors on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and the first Saturday of every month from 12:00-1:00PM.

Return to the hotel for overnight.
Meals: B – *Europa Hotel, Central Hotel, or similar*

Day Five Sarajevo • Belgrade, Serbia

Breakfast at the hotel this morning prepares you for transfer to Belgrade, Serbia today. En route, stop for an independent lunch with recommendations from your driver.

Arrive in **Belgrade, Serbia** late this afternoon and enjoy the rest of the day free for rest or independent exploration.
Meals: B – *Hotel Moskva or similar*

Day Six Belgrade

Following breakfast at the hotel, set out on a full-day exploration of Belgrade with your guide and driver. Belgrade is the capital of Serbia, as it 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 such as 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 1.7 million, swiftly becoming one of the hippest places in Europe. On an overview tour of the city, pass by the **Cathedral of St. Sava**, one of the largest Serbian Orthodox churches in the world, Slavija Square near the downtown, the 19th century Old Palace and the National Museum, among other sights.

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 Roman Singidunum and the Byzantine fortifications that followed. The **Despot Gate and Roman Well** are found in the fortress’ Upper Town and the 18th century Turkish baths in the Lower.

The **"Roman Well"** in Kalemegdan Fortress was actually built in the 18th century. The well is said to have been built over an earlier Roman well, is 167 feet deep, with two spiral staircases that intersect



about halfway down. Probably dug during the Austrian reconstruction of the fortress, the well was abandoned and used as a place to dispose of prisoners.

Skadarlija 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.

Following lunch, enter the **Palace of Princess Ljubica**, wife of Prince Milos Obrenovic, whose residence was built in 1831 in the Balkan style, fusing Ottoman and Hapsburg traditions. The well-preserved noble palace contains costumes and furnishings from Princess Ljubica's tenure here, from 1831 to 1843.

Finally, visit the **House of Flowers, the mausoleum of Josip Broz Tito**, set in a winter garden complex near his former home. Built in 1975, the House of Flowers was designed as a retreat for the Yugoslav leader, who was buried here according to his wishes in 1980.

Meals: B – *Hotel Moskva or similar*

Day Seven

Belgrade • Skopje, North Macedonia

This morning after breakfast, depart with your driver for Skopje. En route, stop for an independent lunch with suggestions from your driver.

Upon arrival in Skopje this evening, check in to the hotel for the night.

Meals: B – *Alexander Square Boutique Hotel, Aleksander Palace Hotel, or similar*

Day Eight

Skopje • day trip to Pristina, Kosovo

This morning, meet your driver for the transfer to **Pristina, Kosovo** for a short day trip. Upon arrival, meet your local expert guide and begin 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 hammam, are of interest. Also, walk by the Parliament



building and the Skanderbeg Monument, dedicated to Albania's hero. Spend about two hours taking in the sites here together, and then enjoy an independent lunch.

After lunch, return to Skopje for an afternoon of touring. 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 *caravanserais* have been transformed into traditional restaurants and little cafes and cubbyhole shops line the streets. This is where Saint Teresa (formerly known as Mother Teresa) was born and raised, and there is a monument to her on the main street.



Visit the **Old Stone Bridge** over the Vardar River. The bridge 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.

Next, tour the the medieval **Skopje Fortress**. Located on the highest point of Skopje's Old Town, the fortress was built over older Byzantine fortifications. Its massive stone walls rise about the Vardar River.

Opened in 2009, the **Memorial House of Saint Teresa** (formerly Mother 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.

Return to the hotel for overnight.

Meals: B – *Alexander Square Boutique Hotel, Aleksander Palace Hotel, or similar*



Day Nine
Skopje • Ohrid

Following breakfast at the hotel, depart for Ohrid with your driver. Upon arrival in **Ohrid**, meet your local expert guide for a full day of touring. Ohrid is one of the oldest human settlements in Europe, and along with Lake Ohrid, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. First mentioned in 363 BC under its ancient name of Lychnidos, the town is today a popular destination for North Macedonians. Its St. Pantelejmon 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.



The first stop today is **Heraclea**, founded by Philip II of Macedon near the middle of the 4th century BC. Conquered by the Romans in the 2nd century BC, Heraclea was an important stop on the Via Egnatia Road. Several Roman monuments remain here, including baths and an amphitheater. Byzantine ruins are here as well, including several basilicas with rich mosaics. Following an independent lunch, visit Ohrid's 11th century **Church of St. Sophia**, which 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 nicely.

Sitting high above the lake, just past the upper gateway leading to the old town and fortified medieval stone fortress, is Ohrid's 13th-century **Church of Sveta Bogorodica Perivlepta**. Modeled after Byzantine monasteries in southern Greece, this classic red-brick church contains several important and well-preserved frescoes from the late medieval period, painted by master Greek artists Michael Astrapas and Eutybios, which demonstrate the early beginnings of the European Renaissance movement. During the Ottoman era, sacred relics from St. Clement's Church were saved from destruction and transferred here for protection, as were a number of other important artifacts and historic records from nearby churches in the surrounding area. Some of these treasures became part of the collection at the Icon Gallery, located directly across from the church.

According to recent archaeological excavations, our next stop, the great **medieval stone fortress** above Ohrid's Old Town, was built over a much more ancient one, perhaps built by Phillip of Macedon. In the 11th century, the fortress was the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire, ruled by King Samuil.

Another archaeological site, **Plaoshnik**, sits on a hill above Ohrid features the painstaking reconstruction of St. Clement's Church, accurately rebuilt 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.

Ohrid is also 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.

Later this afternoon, board a small private boat on **Lake Ohrid** for a 30-45 minute boat ride, enjoy the beautiful water and surroundings of the lake.

Return to the hotel after touring for an independent dinner and overnight.
Meals: B – *Hotel City Palace or similar*



Day Ten Ohrid • Tirana, Albania

Set out from the hotel today for the half-day drive to Tirana, the capital of Albania. Upon arrival, begin a full day of touring with your local expert guide.

Tirana is 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 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**. The museum is divided into several different rooms, each representing a different era in Albanian history from its past as Illyria to its present as an independent, democratic nation. There are some placards in English and visitors of any nationality can understand the large mosaic on the building's facade, a visual representation of thousands of years of Albanian history.

Following lunch, visit the **Et'hem Bey Mosque** in the center of Tirana. Construction on the mosque began 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.

Nearby, and also built by Et'hem Bey, is the **Clock Tower** in Skanderberg Square. You can climb this 19th century tower's 90 stairs for great views from the top.





Finally, 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, followed by overnight at the hotel.
Meals: B – *Opera Hotel or similar*

Day Eleven

**Tirana • Kruja • Shkodra • Kotor,
Montenegro**

Depart after breakfast today to head for Kotor, Montenegro. En route, stop for touring in Kruja and Shkodra.

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.

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.

Next, 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.



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 G.W. Bush, the first U.S. president to pay a visit to Albania. Recently a new monument dedicated to the President was erected.

Continue on to **Shkodra** this afternoon. 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 clocktower built by an eccentric Englishman, several large mosques and a large citadel on the south side of the city that offers views out across the lake.

Following an independent lunch, depart for Kotor. Upon arrival check in to your hotel and enjoy an independent dinner.

Meals: B – *Hotel Astoria or similar*

Day Twelve

Kotor • Perast • Dubrovnik, Croatia

This morning, visit some of the highlights of Kotor before departing for Dubrovnik, Croatia.



The small city of **Kotor**, with a population of some 13,500 souls, is a double UNESCO site. Its first UNESCO listing, in 1979, is in honor of its harmonious architecture, its lovely setting on the Bay of Kotor, and its historical role in the waxing and waning of the Venetian city-state. In 2017, the city was included on a list of six properties making up the "Venetian Works of Defense between the 16th and 17th Centuries: Stato da Terra – Western Stato da Mar." Its well-preserved medieval walls, stretching three miles above the city, delineate its Old Town, where

narrow alleyways connect palaces and churches, including the 12th century Cathedral of St. Tryphon.

The Cathedral of Saint Tryphon is the largest and most impressive building in Kotor. Originally constructed in the 12th century, the cathedral was destroyed in a 1667 earthquake. At the time of rebuilding two baroque bell towers were added, but due to inadequate funding money for reconstruction ran out, leaving the towers mismatched. Inside is a lovely ornate altar screen that masks holy relics of the church.

Following touring in Kotor, depart for Dubrovnik, with an en route stop in Perast. The lovely baroque seaside town of **Perast** claims a population of just over 350 today. In its heyday under the Venetian Republic, however, nearly 2,000 people lived and worked in this splendid setting. The city has 16 baroque palaces and 17 Catholic Churches from the 17th and the 18th centuries.



Board a small boat bound for the little artificial islet of **Our Lady of the Rocks** in Kotor Bay. According to legend it was built up over the centuries by sailors who threw rocks into the bay here in thanks for successful voyages. On the tiny island stands the atmospheric old Catholic Church, built of stone in 1632.



Following an independent lunch, continue on to Dubrovnik. Upon arrival check in to your hotel and enjoy an independent dinner.
Meals: B – *Hotel Lero or similar*

Day Thirteen Dubrovnik

This morning, set out with your guide and driver on a full-day exploration Croatia's capital. **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 encircle the Old Town, and afford wonderful views of land and sea.

Then, visit the Museum of Dubrovnik in the **Rector's Palace**, with its artifacts, furniture and paintings. The "rector" of Dubrovnik was a short-term appointee who for a month could only leave the palace on official business.

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.



Following an independent lunch, venture outside of the city to visit the ancient Dalmatian town of **Cavtat**, which began as a Greek settlement called Epidaurus.

Take a walking tour through the cobbled streets to the Racic Family mausoleum, designed and decorated by famed Croatian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic.

Though only some 15 miles away from Dubrovnik, **the Konavle region**, located at the southernmost tip of Croatia between the Bosnian and Montenegrin borders, boasts a uniquely lush and green landscape that seems a world away from Dubrovnik's dry and rugged coastline. Surrounded by both the mountains and the sea, this is one of Croatia's most agriculturally fertile areas, with perhaps its most famous product being malvasija, a native grape that produces a very rich and full-bodied white wine.

Explore one of the **old water mills** on the River Ljuta and walk in the riverside park. Then continue to the centuries-old **Glavic House** for a tasting of Southern Dalmatian specialties.

Return to the city for an independent dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B – *Hotel Lero or similar*

Day Fourteen **Depart Dubrovnik**

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

Meals: B

Private Journey Prices

Three and four star hotel basis throughout, hotels as listed in the itinerary – *tour start dates in April and October 2020:*

2 traveler minimum, from \$7,995 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,095

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$14,295

Tour start date May-June 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$8,395 per person, twin share



Single supplement, from \$1,295
Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$14,895

Tour start date July-September 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$8,495 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,475

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$15,195

Hotel Upgrade Prices

Upgrades to the 5 star level where available – Hotel Park, Split; Hotel Europe, Sarajevo; Hotel Square Nine, Belgrade; Hotel Marriott, Skopje; Hotel Rogner Europark, Tirana; Hotel Hilton Dubrovnik – all hotels are as listed or similar. Hotels in cities not mentioned are the same as listed in the standard program. *Rates based on tour start date April and October 2020:*

2 traveler minimum, from \$8,895 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,395

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$15,595

Tour start date May-June 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$9,095 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,795

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$15,995

Tour start date September 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$9,195 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,850

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$16,095

Tour start date July-August 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$9,295 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,895

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$16,195

Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and start day, and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates. 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**, see above for information about upgraded accommodations. All room types, even in upgraded properties, are standard entry-level doubles or twins; please call for room category upgrade pricing and information.
- Breakfast daily, per the itinerary. Lunches and dinners are left independent to allow exploration.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides in each city.
- One arrival and one departure airport 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.
- Ground transportation throughout itinerary by private van or car (type of vehicle depends on the size of your party). Note, one vehicle and driver will be used throughout the itinerary.
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary.



- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, *Touring with MIR* handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international airfare 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).
- Baggage handling.
- Gratuities to local guides, drivers, porters and other service personnel.
- Visa/passport fees if required (U.S. passport holders do not require any visas for this program).
- 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.

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 will vary from small, moderate three star to four star hotels, some quite 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 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. 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.



Start Planning Next Year Now

2021 Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 14 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

Three and four star hotel basis throughout, hotels as listed in the itinerary – *tour start dates in April and October 2020:*

2 traveler minimum, from \$8,095 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,195

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$14,395

Tour start date May-June 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$8,495 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,395

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$14,995

Tour start date July-September 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$8,595 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,495

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$15,295

Hotel Upgrade Prices

Upgrades to the 5 star level where available – Hotel Park, Split; Hotel Europe, Sarajevo; Hotel Square Nine, Belgrade; Hotel Marriott, Skopje; Hotel Rogner Europark, Tirana; Hotel Hilton Dubrovnik – all hotels are as listed or similar. Hotels in cities not mentioned are the same as listed in the standard program. *Rates based on tour start date April and October 2020:*

2 traveler minimum, from \$8,995 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,495

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$15,695

Tour start date May-June 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$9,195 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,850

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$16,095

Tour start date September 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$9,295 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,895

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$16,195

Tour start date July-August 2020:

2 traveler minimum, from \$9,395 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$1,995

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, \$16,295

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



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 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 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 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 Kosovo here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/kosovo-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>

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 throughout typically range from lows in the mid 50s to highs in the mid- to upper 70s. In July and August highs often get into 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 carrier for this tour is Lufthansa, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to Croatia.

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 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 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.

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 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 Poland, 6 days. On this focused tour, visit four Polish UNESCO sites in six days – Warsaw’s Old Town, Krakow’s Historic Center, the Auschwitz/Birkenau camp and the Wieliczka Salt Mine.

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 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.) 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).

Flexible Essential Trips

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

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