

# Trip Details

## All About Balkans

Join on a discovery of the iconic cities and impressive highlights of the Balkans. Get to discover Sofia, Skopje, Belgrade, Sarajevo and Tirana. Roam the ever-popular and lively Croatian coast while craving the calming serenity and charm of Albania and Montenegro. Chase Alexander the Great from Macedonia to Greece and uncover the mysteries of floating monasteries of Meteora. Meet the Oracle of Delphi before climbing up to the Acropolis to get a panoramic view of a capital of ancient world, Athens. Above all, touch shoulders with countless Balkan civilizations as you witness their beautiful interaction and create lifelong travel memories.

<b>Duration</b>	12 Days	<b>Group Size</b>	13-35 People
<b>Destination</b>	Balkans	<b>Age Req.</b>	18+
<b>Start/Ends in</b>	Sofia/Athens	<b>Trip Theme</b>	Discovery, Overland
<b>Hotels</b>	4 Star	<b>Departs</b>	April to December

## Why You Will Love This Tour

- \* Explore the essential highlights of 7 Balkan countries in 9 days, staying at comfortable 4-star hotels (3-Star in Budva) and travelling on a private modern coach.
- \* Travel with a local guide throughout your trip to get the best insight and tips, plus enjoy professional guided tours in Belgrade, Dubrovnik, Kotor, Ohrid and Skopje.
- \* Delve into history and greet the colourful Balkan cultures riding from one capital to another, while frequenting popular hotspots and gems off the beaten track.
- \* Swim the Adriatic and walk around the impressive medieval fortresses of Dubrovnik and Kotor, and meet the vibrant nightlife of Budva.
- \* Head inland to Greece through vibrant Thessaloniki, the floating monasteries of Meteora and the ancient home of Oracle of Delphi before finishing in Athens.

## Arrival Details

The group welcome meeting with you guide and other travellers is held around 18:30 at the hotel lobby on Day 1 of your tour, unless otherwise notified.

### Meeting Point

#### Hotel Vega - SOFIA

**Address :** C75, D-r G.M. Dimitrov Blvd.,1700 Sofia, Bulgaria

**Phone :** 00359 2 806 6000      **Emergency Number:** +44 (0) 208 099 75 36

### Airport Transfers

All tours starting in Sofia include arrival airport transfer if your flight lands in Sofia on the first day of your tour between 5am and 11:30pm

To arrange your airport transfer please email us the following information at least 2 weeks before your departure date. [info@traveltalktours.com](mailto:info@traveltalktours.com)

- Travel Date
- Flight Number
- Local Arrival Time
- Name/s of the Passengers

## Making Your Own Way to the Starting Point

The arrival hotel is 8 km away from the Sofia Airport (SOF). It takes about 15 min. - 20 min. by taxi depending on the traffic. You can take a taxi from the airport directly to the hotel, which is expected to cost around BGN 10-15. You can use OK Supertrans AD taxi company ( yellow cabs). We recommend to avoid cabs offered outside the office of the taxi operator or in front of the terminal as these can be more costly.

## Finishing Point

### ARION HOTEL – ATHENS – 3 Star

**Address :** Ag. Dimitriou 18, Psiri, Athens

**Phone :** +30 210 3216 777      **Emergency Number:** +44 (0) 208 099 75 36

## Highlights

- \* **Belgrade:** One of the oldest cities in Europe and the only one built on the confluence of two rivers, also known as the city that never sleeps.
- \* **Budva:** Budva is a town in Montenegro and known for best nightlife on the Adriatic Sea, it's known for sandy beaches and nightlife.
- \* **Dubrovnik:** This complex is one of the most beautiful and strongest fortified systems in Europe, but the lively streets show that there is more!
- \* **Kotor:** Kotor is a fortified town on Montenegro's Adriatic coast, in a bay near the limestone cliffs of Mt. Lovćen.
- \* **Mostar:** Mostar is a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and known for the iconic Stari Most (Old Bridge) and the jumpers off the bridge.
- \* **Ohrid:** Ohrid is a large town in North Macedonia on the shore of Lake Ohrid and a UNESCO heritage site since 1980.
- \* **Sarajevo:** Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia, is a compact city on the Miljacka River, the center has museums commemorating local history.
- \* **Shkodra:** Shkodër or Shkodra is the fourth largest city in Albania and one of the oldest places in the Balkan peninsula.
- \* **Skopje:** Skopje is the capital and largest city of the North Macedonia and it lies in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula region.
- \* **Tirana:** Tirana is the capital and largest city of Albania. It is also cultural and economical, politically center of the country.
- \* **Trebinje:** Trebinje is a small sized city situated in the Trebišnjica river valley in south eastern Herzegovina, about 30 km by road from Dubrovnik.
- \* **Athens:** You will fall in love with the perfect combination of culture, history and the dynamic contemporary life in one of the oldest cities in the world.
- \* **Delphi:** Delphi lying on the slopes of Mount Parnassus high above the Gulf of Corinth, is one of the most famous historic sites in Greece.
- \* **Kalambaka:** Kalambaka is a town and seat of the Municipality of Meteora in the Trikala regional unit, part of Thessaly in Greece.
- \* **Thessaloniki:** Thessaloniki is the second largest city of Greece and has a rich history from the Roman period. It lies in the Aegean sea coast.

## Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary may be subject to small changes depending on the conditions during the tour. Alternative accommodation of similar standards may be used depending on the group size and hotel availability.

### Day 1: Sofia

Welcome to Sofia! At the airport, keep an eye out for the Travel Talk sign for your transfer to the hotel. At the hotel around 7pm, have an informal welcome meeting with your guide and fellow travellers. After you get all the critical information about the tour, head out for our optional group dinner around 8:15pm and walk the streets of Sofia.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Vega – 4 Star

- **Included Activities**

Welcome Meeting

- **Optional Activities**

Group Dinner

### Day 2: Sofia, Belgrade

After a substantial breakfast, hop on the bus and make your way to the Serbian capital, Belgrade. With stunning views over the Danube and Sava rivers by the mighty medieval Belgrade Fortress, head to the heart of the capitol. Starting off at the vibrant pretty shopping street, Knez Mihailova, filled with cafes, shops and charming sites, kick off the walking tour to discover the incredible landmarks Belgrade has in store and their marvellous histories.

- **Accommodation**

Abba Hotel – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Belgrade City Tour

### Day 3: Belgrade, Sarajevo

Next stop Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital, the city that has been through it all! It is where the Western and Eastern Roman Empire split and where people of many nations and religions met, lived and warred. You can still see many reminders of the Yugoslav War in bullet holes and cannon marks all around town. Though, still an oriental beauty with a unique twist, and a delight to discover on your walking tour in the old town. The city offers endless delicacies to taste, but the specialty is lamb.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Ibis Styles – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Sarajevo City Tour

#### Day 4: Sarajevo, Mostar, Trebinje

Today, we drive for the amazing Adriatic shore, but first a stop at Mostar! As you arrive in this dreamland, walk through the Old Town of this Herzegovina pearl, see the iconic highlights Old Bridge – Stari Most, and the old čaršija (market). Enjoy your lunch with an amazing view at one of the local venues, discover the old town and make sure to try the delicious Turkish coffee. In the afternoon, we ride to Trebinje for our

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Central Park – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Mostar City Tour

- **Optional Activities**

Kravice Waterfalls – EUR 30

#### Day 5: Trebinje, Dubrovnik, Trebinje

Get ready for a long day at Dubrovnik, the “Pearl of the Adriatic”! With its well-preserved majestic walls encircling the whole town and its sea of terra-cotta roof tiles, giving life to the “King’s Landing”, the whole town is an amazing UNESCO World Heritage Site. Even the drive down to town from the mountain-side is a breath-taking highlight in itself! We start off with a guided walking tour of the Old Town and marvel at the millennial history of this fairy-like town. Walk atop the mighty walls, discover cute narrow streets, taste delicious seafood or jump off into the crystal-blue waters. In the evening, we return to Trebinje for a good night’s rest.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Central Park – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Dubrovnik City Tour

- **Optional Activities**

Dubrovnik Boat Trip – EUR 40

- **Entrance Fees**

Dubrovnik City Walls – EUR 15

#### Day 6: Trebinje, Kotor, Budva

Next stop Montenegro! Arrive in Kotor after a scenic drive and meet its calming natural beauty and characteristic architecture, a less-crowded version of Dubrovnik with its impressive medieval citadel. Following a walking tour of the old town with your expert local guide and some free time, make your way to the popular touristic hub of the region, Budva. Your guide will take you on a brief walking tour of the vibrant summer town with great food, impressive views and lively nightlife.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Park - 3 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Kotor City Tour  
Budva Walking Tour

#### Day 7: Budva, Tirana, Ohrid

Hit the road after breakfast, next stop Albania! A panoramic city tour of Tirana will introduce the best preserved and most beautiful samples of Albanian architecture, and drop us off at the town centre for some free time to discover the bustling Skenderbeg square. . In the afternoon, continue towards Ohrid, Macedonia and check-in to your comfy hotel. You can rest up after a long day, or join the optional Balkan

- **Accommodation**

Hotel Sileks – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Panoramic Tour of Tirana  
Ohrid Walking Tour

- **Optional Activities**

Balkan Night With Dinner – EUR 30

#### Day 8: Ohrid, Skopje

Start off the day with a guided city tour of Old Ohrid hosting hundreds of chapels and churches scattered all around. In the afternoon travel to Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, for the night.

- **Accommodation** Hotel

Panoramika – 4 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Ohrid City Tour

- **Optional Activities**

St. Naum Tour - EUR 20

#### Day 9: Skopje, Thessaloniki

Prepare to discover the beautiful Skopje with a guided sightseeing tour filled with stunning architecture, grand monuments and unique history. Pose with the famous statue of Alexander the Great or walk through the Macedonian Arc de Triumph. The city has countless landmarks and a vibrant street life with many cafes and bars around. In the afternoon cross the border heading towards the second largest Greek city, Thessaloniki, for the night.

- **Accommodation**

Hotel ABC – 3 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Skopje City Tour

### Day 10 : Kalambaka, Meteora, Delphi

Starting off the day with a panoramic Thessaloniki tour on the bus, depart for Kalambaka, the gateway to Meteora. Meteora is famous for its breath-taking scenery and ageless monasteries, almost suspended between the earth and sky. The town hosts one of the largest and steepest complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries, literally named as “middle of the sky”. The World Heritage-listed site is out-of-this-world with its unique landscape of immense monolithic pillars and huge rounded boulders hosting monasteries on top, and one of the most visited locations in Greece. Each monastery has a central courtyard surrounded by chapels and living cells of monks, who have inhabited the region since the 11th century – for far less than the first inhabitants from 50,000 years ago. Later in the afternoon, hop on the bus for Delphi.

- **Accommodation**

Hermes Hotel – 3 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Meteora Tour

### Day 11 : Delphi, Athens

Eat up at breakfast, you will be discovering Delphi and all its wonders. Built high atop the cliffs with spectacular scenery, the town made its name in ancient Greek mythology. Chosen as the centre of the earth, here is where the famous powerful Oracles of Delphi resided. UNESCO World Heritage Site of Delphi had a tremendous influence in the ancient world, uniting many city-states under the Hellenic spirit as displayed in rich monuments and ancient stories. In the afternoon, embark on a scenic drive to Athens. As you get your bearings and all the information you need about the capital from your guide, arrive at the hotel to freshen up. Prepare to cap off the amazing tour Greek-style; bring in the mezes, it’s time to do some

- **Accommodation**

Arion Hotel – 3 Star

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

- **Included Activities**

Delphi Tour

### Day 12 : Athens

Have your final breakfast on us and start bidding farewells to your travel mates before checking out of the hotel (11:00). Time to start counting days for your next adventure with Travel Talk!

- **Meals Included**

Breakfast

## Inclusions & Exclusions

**Accommodation:** 4 & 3 star hotels

**Airport Transfer:** Arrival transfer on day one.

**Meals:** 11 breakfasts

**Transportation:** Air-conditioned modern non-smoking coach or mini-bus

**Guide:** Services of experienced Travel Talk local guides licenced by the Ministry of Tourism

**Sightseeing:** Sofia, Belgrade, Skopje, Sarajevo, Mostar Bridge, Ohrid, Tirana, Dubrovnik, Kotor, Budva  
Meteora, Delphi, Kalambaka, Thessaloniki

### What is NOT included in the tour price?

- Any flights not mentioned above
- Travel insurance
- Meals not stated above
- Items of a personal nature
- Tips & gestures
- Entrance fees to the sights and museums
- Optional activities
- Other services not stated in the itinerary

## Hotels & Accommodation

Solo travellers will be roomed with another solo traveller of the same gender in a twin or triple room, or can upgrade to a solo room by paying the single supplement. Your tour leader will allocate rooms upon arrival at the starting hotel in accordance with the rooming lists, last minute changes may not be guaranteed.

### **HOTEL VEGA – SOFIA – 4 Star**

The hotel offers various facilities such as a restaurant, a fitness centre and a bar. Rooms are fitted with a coffee/tea maker and water Sofia Airport is 8 km away.

### **ABBA HOTEL – BELGRADE – 4 Star**

Discover some of the most elegant hotel rooms in Belgrade, designed to immerse the guests in absolute comfort and unparalleled luxury.

### **IBIS STYLE HOTEL – SARAJEVO – 4 Star**

Ibis Style Hotel offers various facilities such as swimming pool and a wellness centre. The hotel has a rich continental breakfast buffet.

### **HOTEL CENTRAL PARK – TREBINJE – 4 Star**

Hotel Central Park is located in Trebinje and has a terrace with a nice and cozy restaurant. The hotel is in a building that has a very interesting history.

### **HOTEL PARK – BUDVA – 3 Star**

Situated just steps away from Slovenska beach in Budva. A special attraction is the unpredictable hotel garden in the shade of palms.

### **SILEKS HOTEL – OHRID – 4 Star**

Hotel Sileks is located in tourist complex St. Stefan. Offering its guests an outdoor swimming pool, also has a private beach. All rooms in the hotel have a balcony.

### **HOTEL PANORAMIKA – SKOPJE – 4 Star**

This hotel has much to offer, swimming pool, spa with sauna, steam bath and gym center. The property is located a 20-minute walk from Macedonia Square.

### **ABC HOTEL – THESSALONIKI – 3 Star**

Located in a short walking distance to the Archaeological & Byzantine Museums, the shopping center as well as numerous restaurants, cafes, taverns and bars.

### **HERMES HOTEL – DELPHI – 3 Star**

The Hermes is a charming traditional mountain style hotel in the city of Delphi with view of the olive grove. The archaeological sites are a short distance away.

### **ARION HOTEL – ATHENS – 3 Star**

Within walking distance of Athens' top attractions such as the Acropolis, Plaka, this hotel is yet hidden away from the old town.

## Distances

Please find below the approximate driving times between the destinations visited in the Balkans. We will always strive to take a short break every few hours to enable passengers to stretch their legs, purchase snacks and use wash facilities during long drives.

Please note that crossing borders may take only several minutes or up to a few hours, depending on how busy the border control is. The driving times listed below do not take into account the waiting time to cross the border.

- Sofia – Belgrade: 400 km - 4.5 hrs
- Belgrade – Sarajevo: 290 km - 5 hrs
- Sarajevo – Mostar: 130 km - 2 hrs
- Mostar – Trebinje: 120 km - 2 hrs
- Trebinje – Dubrovnik: 32 km - 1 hr
- Trebinje – Kotor: 80 km - 2 hrs
- Kotor – Budva: 23 km - 30 mins
- Budva – Tirana: 180 km - 3.5 hrs
- Tirana – Ohrid: 135 km - 2.5 hrs
- Ohrid – Skopje: 170 km - 3 hrs
- Skopje – Thessaloniki: 230 km - 4 hrs
- Thessaloniki – Kalambaka: 230 km - 3 hrs
- Meteora – Delphi: 4.5 hrs
- Delphi – Athens: 2 hrs

## Budgeting

Please note that entrance fees to sights and optional activities are not included in the tour price. Optional activities are not operated by Travel Talk and may require a certain number of attendees to run. Your guide will be happy to inform you further about the available optional activities at the start of your tour. Optional activities are also listed under each day in your tour itinerary.

### Optional Activities

- |                            |        |
|----------------------------|--------|
| • Kravice Waterfalls       | EUR 30 |
| • Dubrovnik Boat Trip      | EUR 40 |
| • Balkan Night With Dinner | EUR 30 |
| • St. Naum Tour            | EUR 20 |

### Personal Spending

The Balkans region covers Europe's three great southern peninsulas and is comprised of 12 nations, meaning there's multiple currencies that you will handle throughout your tour. The main currencies include Serbian Dinar, Bosnian Mark, Kuna (Croatia), Lek (Albania) and Euro (Greece). We recommend carrying extra Euros which are accepted in most larger hotels or shops across the region. Here you will find the average cost for a meal or drink and advice for best practice in tipping.

#### Meals

Lunch at restaurant	US\$ 7-10
Dinner at restaurant	US\$ 12-15
Ćevapi at a stall	US\$ 3-5
Baklava	US\$ 1-2



### Drinks

Bottle of water	US\$ 0.5
Coffee	US\$ 1-3
Tea	US\$ 1-2
Bottle of beer	US\$ 1-3

### Tipping

Tipping is not compulsory in the Balkans region but is appreciated for good service. If satisfied with service, then we suggest leaving a tip of ~10% in restaurants. While at bars or taxis, rounding off the amount is considered sufficient. Your Guide and Driver would also appreciate tipping as a sign of gratitude at the end of your tour.

### Shopping

No holiday is complete without a little shopping, like many other Balkan destinations you will find that there is some great shopping and purchases to be made in Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina. From the standard tourist souvenirs to fine boutique jewellery and clothing shops, souvenirs you are bound to find something to satisfy the shopping itch.

Budva is the beating heart of shopping in Montenegro. Filled with fashion shops and boutiques that sell everything from traditional products to designer clothing and fine jewellery, the Old Town is the perfect place to go if you're looking to shop until you drop.

The cosmopolitan city of Belgrade offers quality shopping encounters with a range of luxurious shopping malls and supermarkets, local bakeries and street markets worth exploring. The city centre is packed with boutiques and souvenir shops selling traditional textiles, Serbian pottery and historic memorabilia from the Yugoslavia days. The open-air bazaars of Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra are worthy of a stop to hunt down some uniquely Serbian souvenirs.

From hand-made jewellery to traditional Greek produce, the ancient city of Athens is teeming with culture and tradition which is translated through craftsmanship like few other capital cities. Must-buy products in Athens include Olive Oil, Ouzo, the Mati Eye and Kompoloi.

## Essential Information: Balkans

### Passport & Visas

If you're from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, United States or Canada, you can enter the following Balkan countries for a touristic stay of up to 90 days without a visa: Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Albania, North Macedonia, Greece. Passport validity entry requirements may change per nationality. We generally recommend to have a passport with at least 6 months of remaining validity.

This information is provided only as a guidance, we strongly advise that you check with the consulate or embassy as this information can change at any time and with little notice. It is your responsibility to make sure that all the required travel documents are ready when travelling.

### Travel Advice

We are closely monitoring the latest travel updates to Morocco and follow the advice of the UK Foreign Office (FCDO).

For the latest travel advice from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/>

We recommend all travellers to check their Government National Travel Advisory prior to their departure:

- Australia - <https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/>
- Canada - <https://travel.gc.ca/>
- New Zealand - <https://www.safetravel.govt.nz/>
- USA - <https://travel.state.gov/>

## Travel Insurance

All passengers travelling with Travel Talk are required to have personal travel insurance before participating in any of our tours. Your guide will collect your travel insurance details on the first day of your trip. It is your responsibility to make sure you have an adequate and suitable travel insurance for you in place, you may read more at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/travel-insurance>

## Health & Safety

The health and safety of our passengers, staff and communities visited is of utmost priority. As we monitor and comply with the official advice from the UK Foreign Office, as well as World Health Organization and government authorities regularly, we have implemented several policies and precautions on our tours for your wellbeing. You may find our Safe Travels Protocols at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/safe-travels>



Travel Talk Adventures has received the Safe Travels stamp by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC), which allows travellers to recognise companies around the world that have adopted health and hygiene global standardised protocols – so consumers can experience ‘Safe Travels’.

Please make sure to regularly check your Government’s travel advice before travelling and be well-informed of any requirements. Your tour guide will also notify you of the regulations and protocols to follow throughout your trip with us.

Please note that if any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary or possess a potential risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, we reserve the right to remove them from all or part of a trip.

Please consult with your doctor for the latest medical travel information and any vaccinations you may need. We recommend that you bring any personal medical requirements and medications with you as these may be difficult to obtain while on tour.

## Weather

The Balkans is a geographically diverse region spanning over multiple countries and 500,000km<sup>2</sup>, hosting various climates. However, it is fair to expect a somewhat continental climate with hot summers and cool winters, and a milder Mediterranean climate on the coastline.

The Summer months of July and August are considered Europe’s busiest with high temperatures attracting flocks of locals and travellers to the breath-taking coastal regions. The shoulder seasons of April to June and September to October are also considered a great time to visit the Balkans. During these months, the weather tends to be milder, with the major tourist cities less populated. The Winter months between December and March are quite colder with occasional snow. Meanwhile, the coastal regions of Croatia, Montenegro and Albania are known for their significantly warmer winters than the Central Balkans.

Months	Belgrade		Kotor		Ohrid		Skopje	
	C°	F	C°	F	C°	F	C°	F
January	2	41	5	48	2	50	1	32
February	3	43	10	50	3	52	3	34
March	8	45	8	52	6	55	8	41
April	13	54	13	61	10	61	13	52
May	17	61	20	68	15	68	17	61
June	19	70	25	77	19	77	22	68
July	23	73	28	82	21	82	22	73
August	23	73	27	81	21	82	24	73
September	19	68	23	73	17	77	18	64
October	20	61	13	64	13	68	13	55
November	13	54	8	59	8	59	8	46
December	6	46	5	50	3	54	2	36

## Money Matters

The Balkans region covers Europe's three great southern peninsulas and is comprised of 12 nations, meaning there's multiple currencies that you will handle throughout your tour. The main currencies include Serbian Dinar, Bosnia-Herzegovina Mark, Croatian Kuna, Albanian Lek, Macedonian Denar and Euro (Montenegro, Greece). Euro is easily convertible to the local currencies and may be accepted at certain locations, however it is always more advantageous to pay in the local currency.

Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in major cities and tourist sites across the Balkans. However, if you are travelling off the beaten track, come prepared with a small stash of cash on hand for inexpensive purchases at small shops and vendors, entrance fees or small meals. ATMs can be easily found in many places across the cities.

We recommend you do not exchange bulk sums of money at the airport, as the exchange rates are usually more favourable in the major cities. Your tour leader will be happy to help if you need any assistance.

Please remember that everyone has different spending habits, some prefer to spend more on souvenirs, some on experiences and others on a night out! Make sure to budget your trip to your spending habits for shopping, drinking, and tipping.

Tipping is not compulsory in the Balkans region but is appreciated for good service. If satisfied with the service, then we suggest leaving a tip of ~10% in restaurants. While at bars or taxis, rounding off the amount is considered sufficient. Your Tour Leader and Driver would also appreciate tipping as a sign of gratitude at the end of your tour.

## Eating & Drinking

Balkan cuisine is vast and diverse in itself while also carrying hints of Greek, Persian and Turkish cuisines. While some popular regional recipes have shaped according to the tastes of each country, there are plentiful unique dishes to each area. Balkans food is typically known to be a hearty, meat-heavy cuisine with a large sharing aspect involved. So, if you are eager to dive straight into the Balkan culture through its food, be sure to try these essential dishes from various areas.

**Čobanac:** This hearty meat stew, originally from Croatia, is cooked in a cauldron hung over an open fire pit.

**Ajvar:** Like pesto is to Italy, Ajvar is to the Balkans. The sauce is served with almost any meaty order and consists of mainly roasted red peppers and garlic.

**Dolma:** The most eaten Dolma dish consists of rice wrapped in leaves. The filling and wrap can vary widely, but in the Balkans region dolma's made of onion, zucchini, cabbage, meat and stuff tomatoes are common.

**Pljeskavica:** A round patty made of beef, lamb, pork or veal, depending on where you are visiting in the Balkans. It is common to eat these patties plain or on a bun with ajvar spread, like a Balkan-style burger!

**Banitsa:** This Bulgarian inspired dish is made of eggs and cheese baked into a flaky, melt-in-your-mouth pastry. Other varieties of the dish include yoghurt, honey, pumpkin or spinach.

**Stuffed Pepper:** A common Balkan food, stuffed peppers are usually filled to the brim with simple ingredients including meat, rice, paprika, tomato sauce, onions and garlic.

**Baklava:** Baklava is a sweet syrupy layered pastry with honey and nuts, quite popular in Greece and Turkey.

**Gozleme:** Thin savoury pancakes filled with cheese, mushroom, spinach, or potato.

When it comes to drinking – Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Bulgaria all offer unexpected delights for wine-lovers! The Balkans region is known for its diverse range of affordable drops. Along with the classic beer destinations, a number of young brewers from the Balkans have managed to put their name on the 'beer map' with Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece home to fantastic micro-breweries. Finally, 'Rakija', 'Raki' or 'Rakia' is by far the most famous spirit of the Balkans, which can be made of almost any fruit!

## Essentials to Bring

- \* Face mask/cover and hand sanitiser enough for your personal use throughout the trip – See more at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/safe-travels>
- \* Travel Documents: Passport, Visa (if required), flight or transport ticket (and photocopies)
- \* Travel Talk Tour Voucher (printed or digital)
- \* Travel Insurance Policy (and photocopy)
- \* Personal medical kit and medicine
- \* Money (cash, credit card, travellers' cheques)
- \* Power Adapter
- \* Reusable water bottle
- \* Ear plugs and eye mask
- \* Sun protection – hat, sunglasses, sunscreen
- \* Comfortable, closed walking shoes
- \* Wind/water proof jacket
- \* Warm clothes, hat, and gloves for cold weather
- \* Sandals, swimwear, shorts for warm weather

## Internet Access

Complimentary Wi-Fi is available in most hotels, some cafes, and restaurants visited during Travel Talk tours. If you come from another EU Country, you may be able to use your phone without any additional roaming charges, please consult with your mobile provider. Make sure to enable data roaming on your mobile if you wish to use 3G/4G abroad, although the connection may be unreliable in smaller towns and rural areas. Purchasing a European SIM card for the duration of your tour may be a cost-effective option. Your guide will be happy to advise on this.

## Culture and Traditions

The Balkans region of Europe is particularly rich in folklore and traditions. Ethnic diversity is one of the Balkans' most characteristic social and political features. It has been said that the Balkans have produced more history than they can consume. The region has not been controlled by only one government since the Roman Empire, and it continues to compete with the East-West divide since the Empire's split in the 4th century. Your Tour Leader will provide immense detail of such events throughout your tour, but here is a light preview to get you started!

**Albania:** Religious practice in Albania is diverse with several religions including Islam, Christianity and Judaism all co-existing peacefully. Until fairly recently, the beautiful landscapes, fortress towns and dazzling beaches of Albania were merely a rumour for most travellers. But, with the end of communism in 1991, Albania opened its gates to tourists.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Boasting a unique East-meets-West atmosphere that blends Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian histories, Bosnia the former-Yugoslavian nation is a treasure-trove of natural beauty, culture and history. The country still holds scars from its heart-breaking civil war of the 1990s which finished only 20 years ago. In Bosnia, coffee is not only traditional, but a way of life. Bosnian coffee is strong, thick and served from a metal pot into a handle-less tumbler. In terms of religious beliefs, Bosnia is and always has been a melting pot. The Ottomans brought Islam, Catholicism came from the west, and Orthodox Christianity from the east. All of which have added to the vast history and charm of this marvellous country.

**Croatia:** A land steeped in history, captivating traditions, and cultural heritage. The colourful Croatian culture is deeply rooted in its vast history and reflected in its wonderful architecture and monuments. The country holds its cultural richness with a mixture between European, Mediterranean and Balkan traditions. The Slavic heritage of Croatian people is especially evident throughout the display of charming festivals and national holidays, where cities and villages come to life in traditional costume, folk music and feasts. The bulk of Croatia's cultural and traditional festivals take place in the country's capital, Zagreb, in the Spring and Autumn. Although, Dubrovnik and Split also offer a lot in the way of heavyweight music, culture, and drama

**Bulgaria:** The culture of Bulgaria is based on an interesting blend of Thracian, Slavic and Bulgar traditions, along with the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many ancient customs remain, such as Thracian fire dancing, which is recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage! Even today, Bulgaria still has a strong folkloric tradition that pervades many aspects of art, literature, music, celebrations, and daily life.

**Serbia:** Still considered well-off the tourist trail, Serbia is located in the heart of the Balkans and is considered diverse, welcoming and full of culture. The capital city, Belgrade is particularly famous for its nightlife, and this has more to do with an inherent desire to celebrate at any occasion. The Serbian people are a proud nation and closely tied to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The church plays such an important role in the history of the Serbian people that it is difficult to separate them entirely, and religion still plays a vital role in the lives of many ordinary people.

**Montenegro:** Montenegro is a country of diverse cultures, influenced by its location and junction between Eastern and Western Europe, drawing influences from Ancient Rome, Byzantines and the Ottomans. Generally, Montenegrins are immensely proud of their culture and traditions with art, music, and food major composites of culture in Montenegro. Eastern Orthodoxy is the predominant religion and play a crucial role in daily life, while groups of Catholic Christians and Muslims also coexist peacefully.

**North Macedonia:** Even by Balkan standards, North Macedonia's history is characterised by complexity and controversy. It was not until 1991 that the country officially attained its status as an independent nation, having been previously incorporated into the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia at the conclusion of World War II. With the collapse of European communism came Macedonian independence. Ethnic North Macedonians – who make up the majority of the population and are largely Orthodox Christians, and the country's notable Albanian Muslim population tend to share certain common values despite their differences.

**Greece:** The Greek culture remains heavily influenced by its ancient past. Greeks are particularly proud of their culture, speaking of their nation with intense passion and sense of belonging. Greece is held to be the cradle of Western civilisation, the birthplace of democracy, Western philosophy, literature, drama, historiography, and the Olympic Games. Since ancient times, the Greek have lived by the expression of 'Kefi' meaning life is meant to be lived to its fullest. Kefi is a way of life and is seen as the 'Spirit of Greece' because despite the hardships the country has faced overtime, the locals actively seek happiness and positivity in daily life through small moments such as a shared meal or through music and dance.

## How to Dress

In general, there are few dress restrictions in Eastern Europe. However, when visiting churches, monasteries or other religious sites modest dress is required - shorts or open-shoulder tops may not be permitted, for both men and women. It is important to cover from shoulders to knees as a sign of respect and women are also often required to wear a headscarf at religious sites.

## Solo Travellers

We have many solo travellers joining our tours. Solo travellers will be roomed with another traveller of the same gender. If you would like a private solo room, subject to availability and a single supplement, please contact us.

## Rules to Follow

We are committed to ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone. We do not tolerate any form of violence (physical or verbal), bullying or harassment involving customers, partners, Travel Talk staff or locals. Sexual relationships between a tour leader and a passenger are forbidden.

We will not tolerate any illegal activity, including but not limited to: use and possession of illegal drugs, trespassing, and disrupting public order. If you consume alcohol, please ensure that you drink responsibly and follow the local laws and regulations.

If someone is acting inappropriately regarding these matters, please notify your tour leader immediately or contact us on the emergency contact number provided below.

You must follow the advice of your tour leader and local officials regarding health and safety measures. We operate all tours under our Safe Travels protocols for the wellbeing of our passengers, staff and communities visited. Please ensure that you have read the Safe Travels protocols (<https://www.traveltalktours.com/safe-travels-with-traveltalk/>) and are fully prepared for your trip.

Your tour leader has the right to remove from the group anyone not abiding by these rules, with no right of compensation or refund. See more at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/booking-terms/>

Please remember that our travellers come from different parts of the world and will have various needs and preferences. Be understanding and patient with your fellow travellers, and always strive to be on time.

## Responsible Travel

We believe that travel is a force for good and show our support through various initiatives and charity organizations, as well as keeping the principals of responsible and sustainable travel at the core of our ethos. These values are engrained in our business culture and the design of our trips just the same. Together with you, we strive to make a positive impact on local people and economies, respecting the local culture, environment, social fabric and customs; encouraging respectful and meaningful cross-cultural exchange. Read more at <https://www.traveltalktours.com/responsible-travel/>