

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Secrets of Prespa and Ohrid

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#### Terms and Conditions

You can find our full legal terms and conditions [here](#). Below are the answers to Frequently Asked Questions.

#### Travel Insurance

Insurance is not just about losing your luggage. You must, must, must take out travel insurance before coming on this tour. Do not just rely on the E1-11, which isn't valid in Albania and North Macedonia anyway, and may be affected or invalidated by Brexit.

If you did have an accident, the health care services in the Balkans may not match what you are used to at home. Anyone can slip and fall, whether walking in the city or on a mountain.

You may wish to investigate whether your travel insurance covers the cost of your own termination of the contract with us, or as to the cost of assistance, including repatriation, in the event of accident, illness or death.

### What's included in the price

- Full-board, three meals a day: breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Juice, coffee or tea at breakfast (sometimes hotels provide one glass of alcohol with lunch and dinner, but it is not the norm)
- Accommodation (3-star equivalent. There's no EU star system in Albania and North Macedonia, but every hotel is warm, clean, cosy and with Wi-Fi)
- Transport to and from the airport
- Transport during the full itinerary
- Financial Failure Insurance (see section on [Package Tour Regulations](#))
- All expert and local guides
- Entry to any museums, archaeological sites or monuments
- Water and fruit in the minibus

### What's not included in the price

- Flights (further information on flights below)
- Travel insurance (do not forget this!)
- Drinks in hotels, or at lunch and dinner
- Snacks
- Tips – whilst we pay everyone the going rate, if any of our expert or local guides, drivers, hotels go above and beyond, then by all means speak to the main guide about appropriate levels of tips, as the relative cost of living in each country is of course different.

### Booking

You can click the 'Book Now' button on any tour or click 'Booking' in the top right corner of the website. This opens a booking form, which will then generate an invoice with payment details for the deposit.

Alternatively, you can email us on [info@balkantracks.com](mailto:info@balkantracks.com) or call Chris on 0044 7506 381 757

### Cost and payment

The cost at the top of the page is for this 9-day itinerary, including or not including everything mentioned in the two paragraphs above. It is a land only price and does not include the single supplement.

### *Children*

If you are bringing children we are happy to reduce the price for them, especially for young children who will stay in the same room as you and not eat full size portions.

### *Tailor-made*

If you were to customise the tour, then we can work with you to keep the trip inside your budget, maybe by enabling you to self-guide yourself.

### *Private groups*

Should you bring a group of four or more we are happy to discuss a sizeable discount for the group leader. Sometimes this can be a free place. And you are free as group leader to take this discount or spread it across the participants.

### *Deposit*

To reserve your place and book onto the tour we request a deposit of £300.00 per person. The remaining balance is due at least 8 weeks before the first day of the tour.

### Getting here - flights, train or ferry

You will most likely be able to find more convenient flights from your local airport than us. But we do have a list of common flights and connections, so do ask us if you're wondering when and where to fly to.

Thessaloniki is served daily by a variety of direct flights from a variety of airports. As is often the case, cheaper flights from the UK tend to arrive and depart early in the morning or late at night.

For those wishing to travel without flying, here is how to arrive in Thessaloniki by train through the Balkans, or train and ferry via Italy – <https://www.seat61.com/Greece.htm> - [Salonika](#)

The flexibility from booking your own flights also means that you or your group could fly into Athens, Ohrid, Skopje, Sofia or Tirana and meet us in Thessaloniki. Plus, the Man in Seat 61 (see link above) can show overland routes to the cities above.

### Add-on extras

Alternatively, you could fly to Thessaloniki, have ten days with us, and then head to the beach after.

We'd also wholeheartedly recommend a night, or actually two in Thessaloniki. This way you can have at least a full day to stroll around this historic city, detailed exceptionally by Mark Mazower in his book, **Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews**.

Over the years we've stayed in all sorts of hostels and hotels in and around the city, and can also advise you on walking routes and where to eat. The city itself produces a great map, which most hotels have in reception.

As a major port city, Thessaloniki - or Salonika - has been at the heart of the region for centuries. Founded in 315 BC by Cassander of Macedon, it became the second largest and

wealthiest city of the Byzantine Empire after Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). Conquered by the Ottomans in 1430, it then passed to modern Greece on 8 November 1912.

Remains from throughout history survive today amongst the modern buildings and this small city has 13 UNESCO heritage sites within a short walk of each other, including the Roman market and forum, tiny churches, cathedrals, monasteries and the castle atop the Old Town. Rambling cobbled streets with tiny shops and taverns. Mosques and Hamman dotted around the city. An incredible archaeological museum, together with fine photographic, Byzantine and Jewish history museums – indeed, on the eve of WWII, Thessaloniki had Europe’s largest Jewish population. One mustn’t forget Mediterranean café culture at its best along the coastal road and throughout the city. It’s simply a superbly relaxed yet little known and visited gem of a town.

Northern Greece and the Southern Balkans aren’t particularly well explored, but we can help you there with tips on routes and renting a car. Lake Kerkini is an hour away and then there’s the Monasteries of Metora, the oracle to Zeus at Dodoni and Ali Pasha’s complex at Ioannina, Delphi, Phillipi, Mt Olympus, the Albanian coast, wine tours, the Peloponnese or even add-ons to nearby Bulgaria.

There is so much to see here, so do feel free to chat with Chris about trains, planes, hotels and maps on 0044 7506 381 757 or [info@balkantracks.com](mailto:info@balkantracks.com)

### Dates & Flexibility for Personalised tours

If you can’t make or don’t fancy one of our set tours, we have a lot of experience customising our tours for private groups.

Dalmatian pelicans start coming back in February, and early plants start coming up, but winters are very cold in Prespa at 850m asl.

Nature is best in spring, which is more or less April to early June. Spring here, like in northern and central Europe, can bring rain.

In July you'll enjoy hot weather and you can still see bee-eaters and a good selection of butterflies, but not like in the core months of April to June. Temperatures can also reach 33-35 in July, so it curtails walking for many folks.

So the itinerary and dates chosen for this tour are our suggestions, based on our experience and trying to balance "seeing everything", with still being relaxed and having a holiday. But we're equally happy to customise it, add more or fewer days, or to focus on your favourite species.

## Group size

For us, responsible tourism doesn't work with large or even medium sized groups. We run exclusive tours where you get as much access as possible to the people we meet and the sites we visit. This tour will run with 4 guests at a minimum, and 7 as a maximum.

For customised tours, our preference is for couples or small groups of friends, from 1 to 7 people, but we have designed tours for slightly larger groups.

In line with the [2018 Package Tour Regulations](#), if a guest books on and pays a deposit and/or payment in full, we reserve the right to cancel the tour if we do not receive at least 4 guests on this tour. This will not be later than 20 days before the start of the package. We would write to you to terminate the package travel contract and provide you with a full refund of any payments made for the package.

## Transport & Self-drive

The cost includes a 9 seater minibus (usually 1 driver plus a maximum of 7 guests), which is used exclusively throughout the tour, from picking you up at the airport until dropping you back at the airport.

On occasions, with private tours, if there will be more than 8 guests we will either hire a 12-20 seat minibus and driver, or consider whether to bring a second car with us. This will impact a touch on the cost, to be spread of course by all participants.

At present we do not know of a Greek rental car company that will give insurance to travel to Albania and North Macedonia. This prevents us from offering self-drive holidays if you fly to Thessaloniki. We have done customised tours using Ohrid airport in North Macedonia, which allow this option.

## Accommodation

If you're interested in eco-tourism in the Balkans you probably don't expect 5-star accommodation, golf clubs or Spa Hotels. The guest houses in our region are small, cosy and family run, and, where possible, we use traditional stone houses converted to accommodation. We have stayed as guests ourselves in all the places on this tour (the director uses his mother as a Guinea pig), and we know that they are clean, warm, with hot water, en-suite and have Wi-Fi. If you would like further information on any accommodation used on the tour, please do contact us.

We use the following hotels as first choices for this tour. As some of them are small guesthouses, occasionally our group is too big and we need to change. If so, we will inform you.

*Day 1: Pefka Hotel, Panorama, Thessaloniki, Greece.*

3 star, family run, restaurant area, Wi-Fi, A/C and central heating, English speaking reception, hair dryers

*Days 2-3: Lakeview Hotel, Oteshevo, North Macedonia*

Family run, restaurant area, Wi-Fi in restaurant and most rooms, central heating, English speaking reception

*Days 4-5: Bujtina e Bardhe, Korce, Albania*

Family run, restaurant area, Wi-Fi in restaurant and most rooms, A/C for hot and cold weather, English speaking reception

*Days 6-8: Mylos Hotel, Laimos, Greece*

3 star, family run, restaurant area, Wi-Fi in restaurant, heating, English speaking reception

## Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included in the cost.

Breakfast is Continental, with the occasional, regional addition of pastry pies (cheese pie, spinach pie etc.).

Lunches alternate between packed lunches from the hotel or a local tavern.

Dinners are in the hotel or a local tavern.

We try our best to use small, family-run hotels and restaurants, but even when we can't, we agree on the menu in advance and try to ensure that it's local recipes.

Meals are "Balkan style". This means that all the food is in the middle of the table and we share. So, if you have any requests or allergies, or prefer to have your own plate, you must advise us at least 4 weeks in advance so that we can arrange different menus with each venue.

Vegetarians can be catered for, as the region is rich in meze and salads. Vegan has been done a few times too, but we'll contact you to get some ideas for what you'd like to eat each day. It's a more limited menu, as even without meat the regional food revolves around dairy products. But it's possible. We've also done the tour for people with glucose or lactose intolerances.

## Language

The tours are in English, which allows us to translate between the various Balkan languages.

But don't worry if you're not a native English speaker, you won't need a high level of English yourself. The many local guides that we use are not native English speakers, so they won't be using complicated words or speaking fast. They will be happy to speak slowly and repeat when necessary.

### Responsible Tourism - how you give back to the region

You can read about this in '[Our Philosophy](#)' section or watch our two-minute video about this [here](#).

### Weather

People read Greece and think sun, lemons and olive trees. The Prespa/ Ohrid region is where the Mediterranean climate meets Central European. So summers are still warm, but in the mountains, at altitude, we have snowy winters and similar springs and autumns to those in northern Europe. Nature in the region is best seen in spring, before the sun scorches the land and birds begin to migrate back. There's still a lot to see and enjoy in July, especially birds and butterflies, but it can reach 30-35C in mid-July, so you need to consider if that's too hot for you to be walking around.

Spring in any mountains can be wet, and any eco-tour in Europe runs the risk of rain. There's nothing we can do about it, although it would be extremely unfortunate to have 7 days of continuous rain. April is the wettest month, May is fairly mild, June is warm and can see showers, and July is quite hot.

### What to Bring

3 weeks before departure we send you two sides of A4 with pretty much everything you could ever think of packing, and all the things previous guests have forgotten to bring and told us they wished they had. But the below are essentials:

- **Good walking boots** - if it's wet, walking shoes won't be enough. We also walk on sand near the lake. Oftentimes people get away with walking shoes, but low boots are best
- **Plenty of good walking socks**
- **Waterproof coat and trousers** - in really bad rain we will alter the itinerary, but bring them just in case
- **Hats and gloves** - even in June and July, if we are above 1,000m, it can get cold very quickly once clouds cover the sun. Not icy cold, but if it was 25 degrees when you left the hotel then drops to 10c, you'll appreciate some light hats and gloves.
- **Plug adapters** for visitors from the UK (all three countries have the same plugs and voltage)

### Pace, difficulty, mobility

We've tried to design the tours so that each day feels like a gentle ramble at a pace that allows people to enjoy what they see, and for those who like to photograph things, to feel that they're not rushed. It's not a photography tour though, so very keen photographers won't necessarily have the time to wait for the perfect shot.

Whilst we don't tend to stray too far from the minibus, we can be walking on dirt roads or through meadows for anything from twenty minutes up to two hours before returning to the vehicle. As we go at a very slow pace, we aren't going to do more than a couple of miles or three kilometres even in two hours.

The region is mountainous, but we won't be doing any hikes and will do most of the climbing by minibus. One could imagine walks to be similar to a stroll in the Downs, Peaks or Lake District, but not a hike; there won't be any sections where you need to scramble or use hands, but the gradient can vary. We recommend walking sticks for those who would use them for walks back home.

One should also bear in mind that some of the mountain villages can have steep roads inside the village; they're not long, but the gradient is noticeable. The hermits' chapel in Greek Prespa has 100 stone steps and occasionally people wait by the boat on the shore. Again though, we'd be patient and wait for anyone who wanted to see it but needed to ascend and descend at their leisure – a real shame to miss it.

For further information on each day's walking, please do email or call us.

### Visas and Passports

**IMPORTANT: Greece is a member of the EU and the Schengen Zone. Albania and North Macedonia are not.**

The UK Foreign Office recommends that no British citizen travels without at least 6 months remaining on their passports (this is their advice in light of Brexit on 29 March 2019, regardless of whether there is deal or no deal). Citizens of other countries should speak to their government department for specific advice.

All citizens, UK and otherwise, are responsible for having the correct travel documents to enter Albania, Greece and North Macedonia. It is especially important that EU citizens check whether they are able to cross all three borders with their ID cards instead of passports. Either way, we strongly recommend that you bring passports. Old identity cards, especially those which are still handwritten, have been rejected at certain border crossings.

## Cancelling

Guests may terminate the contract at any time before the start of the package in return for payment of a termination fee. For full details of circumstances for termination by you, us or force majeure, please have a look at our [Terms and Conditions](#).

You may wish to investigate whether your travel insurance covers the cost of your own termination of the contract with us, or as to the cost of assistance, including repatriation, in the event of accident, illness or death.

## Contact Details

The tour is run by Balkan Tracks Limited of Unit 8A, Red Lane Mill, Sunny Bank Mills, Farsley, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS28 5UJ

Any questions should be fielded to Christopher at [info@balkantracks.com](mailto:info@balkantracks.com) or feel free to ring him on 0044 (0)7506 381 757.