

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Rare Bird Club of BirdLife International

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## Terms and Conditions

Please take the time to read our full legal [terms and conditions](#). They include information on your rights, including the cancellation policy.

## Travel Insurance

It is a condition of travelling with us that you take out travel insurance before coming on this tour. EU citizens shouldn't rely on the E1-11, which isn't valid in North Macedonia. We respectfully ask you to have in mind that medical services in the Balkans may not be of the same to those that you are used to at home. Therefore, travel insurance with transport and repatriation cover could be more than just peace of mind.

**If there is a reason why you cannot take out travel insurance, please contact Sarah at BLI.**

## Cost

<b>Main Tour:</b>	<b>£2.700pp</b>	<b>(£800 to Birdlife)</b>
<i>Single Supplement:</i>	<i>£130</i>	
<b>Extension Tour:</b>	<b>£1,650pp</b>	<b>(£200 to Birdlife)</b>
<i>Single Supplement:</i>	<i>£130</i>	

**Nb. The costs are a land only price.**

Hotel upgrade between tours: £100 per room  
(i.e. £100 for a single, or £50 each for couples)

The tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result. Further information on this is in the accompanying [Terms and Conditions](#) document.

### What's included in the price

- Main Tour: all meals from dinner on Day One to lunch on Day Eight.
- Extension: all meals from dinner on Day One to lunch on Day Five;
- Bottled drinking water – however, we kindly request that you bring your own reusable bottle that we can fill up for you. This saves us buying dozens of small bottles each day. In most places during the tour, the tap water is also drinkable;
- All accommodation during the tour;
- All ground transportation;
- Transport to and from the airport
- All national park and other entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services, but not the Balkan Tracks leader).
- Financial Failure Insurance (in line with the EU's Package Tour Regulations)

### What's not included in the price

- ANY flights, (see above);
- Travel insurance (please don't forget this)
- Visa fees (as of March 2021, tourist visas for under 90 days aren't required for UK, EU and US citizens visiting Greece and North Macedonia. Please double check with your respective government department/ministries before booking);
- Any drinks with or between meals, expect bottled water during the day;
- Snacks between meals
- Special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.
- Single Supplement:
  - The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If you choose to share but we cannot match you with another to do so, then the single supplement will still apply. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

### **Note on Tipping**

As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Balkan Tracks leaders. Therefore, if you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

### Group size

This tour will run with 6 guests at a minimum and 12 as a maximum.

The tour price is based upon the group size above. If the tour does not have sufficient registration, a supplement charge will be offered to those who have booked or expressed an interest in booking.

### Booking & Deposit

Booking is done via an [online booking form](#). Or you can email or post a copy of the booking form to Birdlife. Please contact Sarah Proud at BirdLife International for all booking enquiries.

#### *Deposit*

**March 2021: we will pause taking deposits for the moment.**

The deposit is £300.00 per person.

The remaining balance is due at least 8 weeks before the first day of the tour.

### Changes to Itinerary

As with all tours of this nature, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Balkan Tracks leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Should there be an unseasonably hot and dry, or equally a really wet spring, then we may also change locations slightly, to higher or lower altitudes, in order to accommodate any shift in wildflowers.

If there are to be any changes, we will only jiggle things around to ensure that you see as many birds and varying habitats, in optimum condition as possible, over the course of the eight days.

### Arrival & Departure Details

First, a reminder that these tour prices do not include any airfares.

Either side of the trip, we highly recommend Thessaloniki as a destination for a day, whilst history fans would be happy with two full days and three nights. More information on this can be found in the '[Local Sights - What to do In Thessaloniki](#)' page.

**Day 1 of the Main tour** is set aside as an arrival day.

- For those arriving after midday, we can collect you from the airport and take you to the hotel.
- If you are arriving earlier in Thessaloniki, we invite you to meet us in the lobby of Hotel Panorama at 18:00 in order to walk next door for dinner at 18:30. Taxis from the centre to Panorama should take 30-minutes in normal traffic.
- Should you have flights that arrive too late for that, the hotel is a 15-minute taxi ride from the airport and we hope that you can join us as soon as possible.

**Day 8 of the Main tour** ends with lunch in Thessaloniki. We aim to arrive in the centre by 13:00 Greek time.

From the centre of Thessaloniki, it is a 30-minute drive to the airport and our driver can take you straight there.

**COVID Note: flight schedules from 2019/20 are expected to change for 2022. Athens and Thessaloniki may not have the same number of airlines and number of flights flying in each day.**

If one wishes to take afternoon or evening flights, please have in mind that we have to cross the border back into Greece on this day. It is usually no more than 30 minutes, but that cannot be guaranteed. To be at the airport 90-120 minutes before a flight, and to avoid any anxiety, we would advise looking at flights from 17:00 onwards. Indeed, there is a flight to Athens at 17:30 that can connect to Heathrow. Athens is also a fantastic place to spend some time.

However, whilst an international airport, Thessaloniki receives more budget airline flights than others, and at the time of writing we don't believe you will find direct flights from Heathrow or Gatwick to Thessaloniki after 17:00. Stansted and Luton would be available, albeit with budget airlines. Things may change in 2022.

**The end of the extension tour** finishes at lunch, but we can arrive in Thessaloniki in the morning, which could allow for flights – to be safe – after 12:00 noon. But please get in touch if your connections are close.

The above information for arrivals and departures is a guide as of December 2019. Precise information will be sent to you in the Tour Confirmation package once the tour is quorate and confirmed.

If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late, or you are considering flying first to Athens or Sofia before travelling to Thessaloniki and would like assistance in this regard, or have any questions about other things to see and do in Greece, Sarah can put you in touch with Chris Mounsey from Balkan Tracks.

A **reading list** and **recommended hotels** will be found in the Tour Confirmation package for those who book on, but if you'd like to see it early, please do get in touch.

## Flights

**COVID Note: flight schedules from 2019/20 are expected to change for 2022.**

Thessaloniki (Salonica) – SKG - is the recommend airport for international flights for this tour. As noted above, it may only have one flight a day to other major cities. It does have, however, multiple flights to Athens each day.

Please DO NOT book any flights until you have double checked with Sarah at BirdLife International that the tour is quorate and confirmed.

## Train/Ferry

For those wishing to travel without flying, there are some spellbinding routes through France, Switzerland and Italy to reach Thessaloniki, or Athens, by train and ferry via Italy.

For the adventurous, trains can whizz you from London to Belgrade, and then there are seasonal routes to Skopje or Sofia before a change to Thessaloniki. If this would interest you, please ask Sarah to put you in touch with Chris at Balkan Tracks about this. In April 2020 he will be travelling to Athens via this route:

1. Breakfast at St Pancras  
Lunch at Train Bleu in Paris  
Dinner and overnight in Geneva
2. Train through the Swiss Alps and alongside Lake Como before dinner in Padua
3. Train to Bari for the overnight ferry to Greece
4. Arrive Greece

## Tour Transport & Driving Times

The cost includes a 12-20 seater minibus with professional driver, which is used exclusively throughout the tour, from picking you up at the airport until dropping you back at the airport. There may be some habitats where we move to 4x4 vehicles if the road is not in good enough condition for the minibus.

### ***Driving***

There is one full driving day – Day Four - with an initial 90-minute stretch from the hotel and then an approximately two-hour drive to Kavadarsti. That said, we will be stopping often and for good periods of time to enjoy these remote habitats and villages with their incredible scenery. So you will not be cooped up inside.

As the region does not have many international airports that does necessitate three hour drives on the first and last day, but again, there will be birding and comfort stops, and the views are fantastic.

Road conditions in Greece and North Macedonia are generally good and with tarmac. As with many nature trips, we can't escape driving in the mountains, which does of course mean the roads can be a touch on the windy side.

### **Accommodation**

Throughout the trip, hotels range from modest in remoter areas to very comfortable in Thessaloniki.

North Macedonia, as a whole, is not a common tourist destination for anyone other than locals.

Very recently this has started to change in cities, and to a lesser extent around the national parks, but there are no eco-lodges or such yet, and wine country has only just started to see the advent of wine tourism.

That being said, the hotels we use are all clean, serviced and with hot and cold water. Hotels have Wi-Fi, although its sometimes the case that it does not reach every room given rural broadband speeds and bandwidths.

**Important note: we prefer to use small, family run hotels, such as Mylos or Alkioni below. With larger groups, guides and drivers, they can sometimes not have space. If needs be we will book the nearest, larger hotel of equivalent standard.**

**1. Hotel Panorama, Thessaloniki, Greece**

A 4-star hotel with fine views

**2. Mylos Hotel, Prespa, Greece**

Converted mill and farmhouse that retains the original architectural features

**3. Hotel Ciflik, Pelister, Bitola, North Macedonia**

A 3-star hotel, on the edge of Pelister National Park

#### 4. [Uni Palas 2, Kavadartsi, North Macedonia](#)

This is the hotel we will most likely use for the Tikves region. Its website is only in Macedonian so you may want to open it in Google Chrome and then right click to translate. Whilst it seems very much a child of the '80s in design and feel, it's not actually that old. And it is also used by other bird and butterfly tour groups every year. We only ask that you don't expect too much other than the basics.

#### *Extension*

5. In the centre of Thessaloniki we look first to book the the Macedonia Palace or Bristol. It's a Saturday and if they don't have rooms we'll find another 4 or 5 star hotel.

#### 6. **Alkioni, Kerkini**

A family run hotel, outside the town and with excellent views (see the photo from Lithotopos in the itinerary above, this is from a bedroom balcony) Sometimes it is full in June, so we would go next door to Erodios

### Meals

The food in rural North Macedonia and northern Greece is a delicious mix of home-cooked Balkan meats and dairy mixed with Greek and Anatolian flavours.

Vegetarians can be catered for, as the region is rich in meze and salads. For vegans or those with intolerances such as glucose or lactose we'll contact you first to get some ideas for what you'd like to eat each day. It's a more limited menu, as is often the case, but we've not had any difficulty before.

On some days we will bring packed lunches with us to remoter birding areas, which include local pies, peppers, boiled egg, feta, fruit and often yoghurt.

### Weather

May usually sees temperatures of 20-25c (68-77ff) by 14:00. By June in the plains it rises to 30c. The heat though is dry. The Prespa lakes are at 3,000ft (900m) and so even in May/June it can be noticeably cooler at night. Light rain may be experienced in the mountains throughout the trip.

### 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.

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. North Macedonia is not.**

The UK Foreign Office recommends that no British citizen travels without at least 6 months remaining on their passports.

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 Greece and North Macedonia. It is especially important that EU citizens check whether they are able to cross 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.