



Along the Via Egnatia: Macedonia, Albania and Corfu 2027b

25 SEP – 12 OCT 2027

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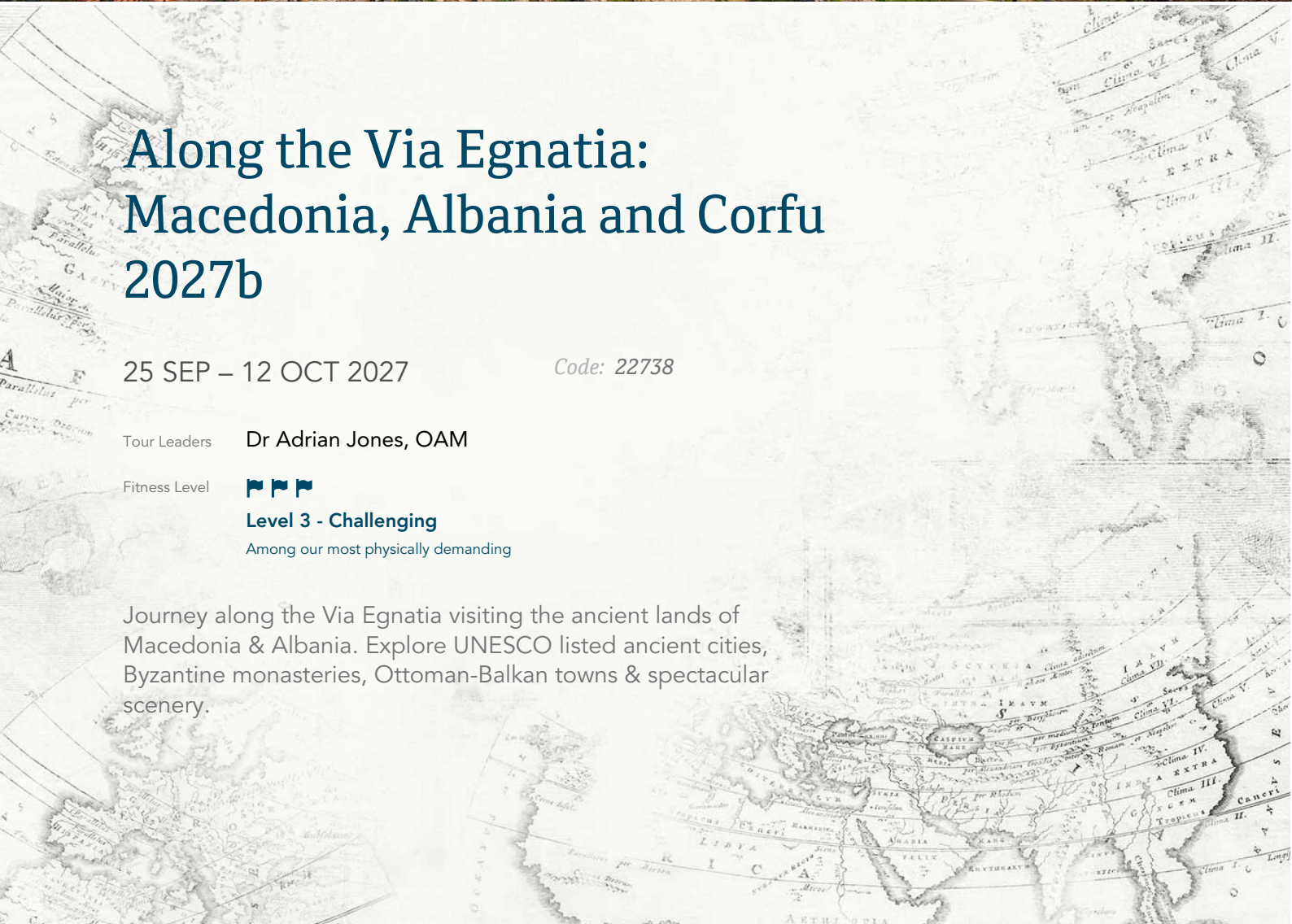
Tour Leaders **Dr Adrian Jones, OAM**

Fitness Level **🚩🚩🚩**

Level 3 - Challenging

Among our most physically demanding

Journey along the Via Egnatia visiting the ancient lands of Macedonia & Albania. Explore UNESCO listed ancient cities, Byzantine monasteries, Ottoman-Balkan towns & spectacular scenery.



Overview

Journey along the *Via Egnatia* with [Dr Adrian Jones OAM](#) visiting the ancient lands of Macedonia and Albania. Adrian will be assisted by local archaeologists in Greece, North Macedonia and Albania.

While based in Thessaloniki, Adrian will be joined by our guest lecturer, [Dr Andrew Farrington](#), Assistant Professor in Ancient Greek History, Democritus University of Thrace. In Albania we will be joined by [Dr Ols Lafe](#), archaeologist and Director of the Center for the Development of Ancient and Medieval Albanian Heritage, a scientific research centre based at the state university "Aleksandër Moisiu" in Durrës.

Visit 8 UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Sites:

- Archaeological site of Philippi, Greece: founded by Philip II in 356 BCE, this Macedonian and Roman colony includes a forum, well-preserved theatre and impressive Byzantine monuments.
- Archaeological site of Aigai, Greece: first capital of the ancient Macedonian kings, the unspoiled royal tomb of Philip II. We also visit the [Palace of Aigai](#), where Alexander the Great became king, which opened in January 2024.
- Paleochristian and Byzantine Monuments of Thessaloniki in Macedonian Greece.
- Ohrid, North Macedonia: beautiful Lake Ohrid hosts the oldest Slav churches, monasteries, icons and frescoes dating from the 10th century to the 13th centuries.
- Historical centres of Berat and Gjirokatra, Albania: best preserved Ottoman-Balkan towns.
- Butrint, Albania: the best and most beautiful ancient site of Albania.
- Old Town of Corfu, Greece: its three forts were used for four centuries to defend the maritime trading interests of the Republic of Venice against the Ottoman Empire.

Other Highlights:

- Wander in the footsteps of Cicero, Brutus and Cassius, and St Paul along the Roman *Via Egnatia* (erected 146 to 120 BCE) from Thessaloniki to Durrës.
- Encounter ancient cities: Amphipolis, Pella, Heraclea Lyncestis, Durrës and Apollonia.
- Enjoy spectacular scenery: waterfalls in Edessa, mountains in North Macedonia, and sea views that launched a thousand travel posters in Corfu.
- Visit magnificent Byzantine churches and monasteries, including St Clement's and St Naum's at Lake Ohrid, Treskavec at Prilep and St Nicholas' in Varos.
- View superb examples of Macedonian wood carving including those created by masters of the famous Mijak school, such as the iconostases at St Demetrius Church in Bitola.

Overnight Thessaloniki (4 nights) • Bitola (3 nights) • Ohrid (2 nights) • Tirana (2 nights) • Berat (2 nights) • Gjirokastra (1 night) • Sarandë (1 night) • Corfu (2 nights)

The Via Egnatia

According to archaeologist Barry Cunliffe, Europe is the most patchy and jumbled region – in peoples, religions, cultures and languages – on Earth (save for the highlands of New Guinea). This journey doubles down on diversity. We traverse the mind-blowing mid-Balkans: an Ionian island, the Pindus mountains, fertile plains of Thrace and Macedonia; *the most diverse* (yet least travelled!) region in *the marvellous multiplex that is otherwise known as Europe*.

We follow a famous Roman road, the *Via Egnatia*, a route linking Rome to Byzantium (Istanbul) and its eastern provinces. The road was about 6 metres wide. It traversed 1,120km, crossing the Balkans, extending

the *Via Appia* running from Rome to Brindisium (Brindisi). Across the Adriatic at Brindisi, our *Via Egnatia* commenced at Epidamnus (Dyrrachium, Durrës), then it went up and over Roman provinces of Illyricum, Macedonia and Thrace – now Albania, North Macedonia, Greece and European Turkey. In the earliest decades of the 1st-century CE, an Anatolian-Greek geographer and traveller based in Rome, Strabo, mentioned the *Via Egnatia* as the strategic road connecting west and east halves of the Roman Empire. The *Via Egnatia* revitalised an insecure region. Most Balkan places we visit were once *colonia* (populated by Roman veteran colonists) or *municipia* (founded or colonised by indigenes) linked some sort of imperial ‘peace’ (*Pax*): Macedonian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman. Issues of colonisation and associated identity ‘transfers’, chosen or mandated, are our key theme.

Quirky old fact: Unlike the Greek city-states, emphasising colonising separately by sea, the Romans considered roads civilising... in common. Stanza 4 of *Silvae* (92 CE) by a Latin poet, Statius, dubbed another *Via*: a ‘triumph of man who tames wilderness, bringing about order and civilisation where there were wood and marshes only’. Beside Rome’s coins in common with a profile of ‘their’ emperor, and beside a common layout for Roman cities, roads united all, fulfilling strategic, commercial and administrative functions. Engineered to be even, straight and mostly to enable two-way traffic, Roman roads were marked by milestones and required big bridges. One key Roman Republican and Imperial title was *Pontifex Maximus*, or ‘great bridge-builder’. This title morphed into the Republic’s high priest of Rome, then the Pope,... who may now need to build some more bridges.

When the Roman Empire split itself in two (from 292 to 324; from 364 to 476), the *Via Egnatia* still linked Rome to Constantinople, but security was now harder to maintain. With the barbarian invasions, the Empire in the West collapsed in 476, but the road was still vital to upholding East Roman (i.e., Byzantine) power in Macedonia and Thrace. Though no longer maintained as in olden days, the *Via Egnatia* remained a way to ‘civilise-in-common’; we visit beautiful churches of “the Byzantine Commonwealth” in towns and monasteries along the road.

Mass migration of peoples—like Vlach and Albanian-Illyrian herders already in the Balkans, and of Slav farmers into the Balkans (around 600 CE)—complicated its demography and culture, contributing to the even richer ethno-mosaic of the Balkans compared to Europe. After the sack in 1204 of Constantinople by the Venetian-led Fourth Crusade, the *Via Egnatia* declined, too insecure to link the new and rapacious Catholic feudal states in Constantinople, Macedonia, Thrace and Greece (1204–1256) to their Papal allies and European relatives. Ottoman advance into the Balkans in the 14th-century eventually restored the *Via Egnatia* as an artery of (yet another) Empire, however. We visit many Ottoman mosques, lodges, caravansarays and forts sited amid Graeco-Roman-Slav-Byzantine-Vlach-Albanian towns along the road.

So this rolling road we travel was peopled by soldiers, runaways and crusaders, by apostles, monks and bishops, by tax-collectors, bandits and merchants, and by many an anxious peasant venturing to market in the closest town. Caravans of up to 200 mules and donkeys loaded with honey, skins, wine, wood and sulphur plied the road. Diplomats and spies came that way too; the former with state security; the latter with only their wits to help. Many ethnic groups passed by/through: Orthodox clergy; Venetian, Greek, Armenian, Ragusan (Dubrovnik) and Sephardic Jewish traders; herds-folk—Albanian (*Arbërore*), Greek (Sarakatsani), Vlach (*Aromanian*) or Turkish (*Yörük*); peasants—mostly Albanian, Greek and South Slav; an occasional *Pomak* (South Slav converts to Islam); Ottoman janissaries and state officials (seldom seen in a village!); and itinerant *Roma* (since the 11th-century).

No wonder the region of our *Via Egnatia* is Europe’s most diverse place!

Leaders



Dr Adrian Jones, OAM

A retired Associate Professor of History, and a frequent contributor to ABC local radio, Adrian is a Harvard graduate and expert in Greek and Russian, Ottoman and Balkan history: ancient, medieval, modern. He leads ASA tours of the Balkans, especially both Macedonia and Albania, Romania, Istanbul and Slovenia-Croatia. Adrian loves to connect the Ancient to the Modern, and he loves to compare Europe's East to Europe's West.

Recently retired, Dr Adrian Jones, OAM was Associate Professor of European History at La Trobe University. Adrian loves to combine travel, cuisine and history, which he also reprises on segments on ABC local radio and on ABC Radio National. He enjoys the challenges of connecting epochs, cultures, languages and places. He graduated with a BA from the University of Melbourne, an MA from La Trobe University and an MA and PhD from Harvard University, eventually specialising in Russian, Turkish, French and Balkan history. His publications include a scholarly monograph, *Late-Imperial Russia: An Interpretation* (1997) and a local history, *Follow the Gleam* (2000), which won the prize for the best book on Victorian history in 2001. Adrian has published scholarly articles on the philosophy of history, historiography, educational theory, comparative revolutions, and French, Balkan, Russian and Turkish social and intellectual history. Adrian is currently finishing one book about Mustafa Kemal and the ANZACs and starting another on Russian-Romanian-Ottoman relations in the early-eighteenth-century: the era of "Tulip Age" Sultan, Ahmet III, of a Moldavian prince, Dimitrie Cantemir, who should be famous, and of the greatest of the Russian Tsars, Peter the Great. A foundation Director of the [Australian] *National Centre for History Education* and a former Chair of *The History Council of Victoria*, Adrian was awarded a national Teaching Council award in 2008, and an *Order of Australia Medal* in 2009 for his teaching and professional activities. Adrian currently leads ASA tours to Russia, to Romania, along the Via Egnatia in Macedonia (Greek and Slav) through Albania to Corfu, an in-depth program to Istanbul, and to Slovenia-and-inland Croatia.

Travel Tuesdays: Explore the World Virtually
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1 SEP – 21 SEP 2027



Itinerary

This itinerary provides an outline of the proposed daily program. The daily activities described in this itinerary may be rotated and/or modified in order to accommodate changes in museum opening hours, flight schedules etc. The tour includes breakfast daily, lunches and dinners indicated in the detailed itinerary where: **B**=breakfast, **L**=lunch and **D**=dinner.

Thessaloniki – 4 nights

Day 1: Saturday 25 September, Arrive Thessaloniki

- Tour commences at 1.00pm in the foyer of the City Hotel
- Welcome Meeting
- Afternoon orientation walk
- Museum of Byzantine Culture
- Light Dinner

Meeting Point: The tour commences at 1.00pm in the foyer of the [City Hotel](#) located in the heart of the city. We commence our tour with a short Welcome Meeting, followed by an orientation stroll in the vicinity of our hotel.

We are in Macedonia. Thessaloniki, now a Greek town, has a marvellous multicultural history. This tour dwells on and in all that. We travel across time and place in one of Europe's most diverse and fecund regions.

The town we first encounter tonight—Thessaloniki (Salonica)—was founded in 315 BCE by a Macedonian usurper king, Cassander, who named the city after his wife, Thessaloniki, daughter of Philip II, and Alexander the Great's sister. All were Greek in language and culture. All were wealthy and innovative rulers in a mighty new dynasty then dominating all of Persia, Egypt and Greece. But many actual Greeks nonetheless dismissed Macedonians like them as 'barbarians' who somehow didn't belong, speak or

behave like 'proper' Greeks.

Cultural diversity charts ironies and influences like this. As we journey these next weeks, we encounter many more ironies and cross-influences. They help us learn as we travel. In the Hellenistic Age and under the Romans, Thessaloniki became a key staging post on the *Via Egnatia*. A Roman co-Emperor Galerius made this Macedonian city his HQ, between 293 and 311 CE, persecuting Christian communities St Paul had helped form here around 50 CE. Sts Cyril and Methodius were born in this great multicultural city (in 815 and 827); they forged the links of most Slavs to the Byzantine Orthodox Commonwealth, creating a Glagolitic-Cyrillic alphabet used ever since in Russia-Ukraine, Serbia-Montenegro, Bulgaria-Macedonia. Only Constantinople topped Thessaloniki in the Byzantine mindset. Then Thessaloniki became Ottomans in 1430, remaining Ottoman till 1912, when the city suddenly became part of Greece, even if it was not yet Greek. Atatürk, father of modern Turkey, was born here in 1881. Ottoman Thessaloniki also sheltered many Sephardic Jews expelled from Iberia in 1492. Jews prospered in this extraordinary Ottoman city, becoming 61% of its population by 1555. These Sephardim even maintained their *Ladino* dialect of Castile (NW Spain); scholars came here to hear the voice of Cervantes. By 1900, Jews were still nearly 60% of city residents, beside a Turkish community (29% then), the ruins of just one of whose baths and mosques is opposite our hotel. (Most Turks were forced out between 1912 and 1922). Only 13% of Thessalonians were Greek in 1900.

In travel, sometimes the people and things we don't see are as important as what we see. Four dreadful years of Nazi-occupation, starting on 10 April 1941, changed Thessaloniki irrevocably: on 8 July 1942, all adult male local Jews were herded into Liberty Square (just behind the Corso) to be registered, humiliated and forced into labour. Most Thessalonians were disgusted. Nazis then built a ghetto beside the rail, starting deportations in March 1943: 2,000+ people per train per day. 47,000 of 60,000 Salonica Jews—men, women & children—were murdered by September 1943. Told they were going off to labour, they died in Auschwitz.

This "City of Ghosts"—city historian Mark Mazower's term—now became Greek, but the descendants of the 5% of Salonica Jews who survived and/or returned continue to play roles in this Balkan city. Greek Thessaloniki maintains, quite unlike Athens, its multicultural heritage. Start looking for it tonight, 'ghosts' and all. Look for multiculturalism in the food, and look up and around at the different heritages revealed in built and religious environments.

In the late afternoon we visit the Museum of Byzantine Culture. This will be our first chance to get a comprehensive overview of the Byzantine past of the city, and of ideas underpinning its extraordinary span of 1,200-years.

This evening we dine together at the hotel. (Overnight Thessaloniki) D

Day 2: Sunday 26 September, Thessaloniki

- Arch of Galerius, Palace of Galerius
- Byzantine Churches including the Rotunda of Galerius (Church of Agios Georgios), S. Demetrios, Panaghia Acheiropoietos, Agia Sophia (UNESCO World Heritage sites)
- Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki
- Welcome Dinner

Today we explore, on foot, the multicultural Roman and Byzantine heritages of this city. We visit the Galerian buildings located in the historical centre of Thessaloniki. Built in the early 4th-century by a co-Emperor Galerius, Thessaloniki was then the Roman capital of Macedonia. This imperial HQ precinct

consisted of a Palace, a triumphal Arch and a Rotunda. The remains of the impressive Palace, excavated in the 1970s, are in Navarino Square, named for the Allied naval victory securing in 1829 the independence of [south] Greece, sought by Greek revolutionaries since 1821. Parts of the Arch still stand. The Rotunda, Thessaloniki's oldest monument, was once a pagan polytheist civic temple, a Christian basilica, a Muslim mosque, again a Christian church, now an archaeological site.

Galerius was a Roman general, part Thracian, part Dacian. His arch was built in 305 to celebrate his victory over Sassanid Persia. He had captured their capital, Ctesiphon, in 298. Originally an *octopylon* (eight-pillared gate) forming a triple arch, all that remains are three pillars and a part of the brick masonry above. Composed of a masonry core, the two main pillars were faced with marble sculptural relief panels narrating Galerius' wars against Persians. The opening of the central arch is 9.7m wide, 12.5m high; secondary openings on either side are 4.8m wide, 6.5m high. The central arch once spanned *Via Egnatia*: the primary east-west Roman road from Dyrrhacium (Durrës) on the Adriatic to Byzantium. It passed here as a *Decumanus* (major street). Another road connected the Rotunda (125m northeast) with the Palace (235m southwest), skirting the arch along its long axis.

We will also encounter today a number of Byzantine churches on UNESCO World Heritage List. They include the *Rotunda of Galerius* (Church of St George), Thessaloniki's oldest church, the most important surviving example of a church from the early Christian period of the Eastern Roman Empire. This cylindrical structure, built in 306, has a diameter of 24.5m, 6m thick walls and a flat brick dome 30m high at the peak, whose original pagan design had an *oculus* like the Pantheon in Rome. At the order of Constantine the Great, it became a Christian church in the 320s when it was embellished with superb mosaics. It now functioned as a church for over 1,200 years till Thessaloniki fell to the Ottomans in 1430. Now a mosque, a minaret was added which still stands today. It remained a mosque until 1912, when the Greeks captured the city during the First Balkan War.

Visits to other churches include the church of St Demetrios (5th-century CE), a double-aisled basilica, the largest church in Greece with mosaic icons of the saint and his devotees. The Church of the *Panagia Acheiropoietos* ('Holy Virgin not made with hands', ca 470 CE): a basilica in the Syrian style with Roman floor and ceiling mosaics depicting birds, fruit and flowers. The Church of the Holy Wisdom (*Agia Sophia*, 9th- & 10th-centuries) whose dome has a fine mosaic of Christ Pantokrator and of His Ascension.

This afternoon we also visit the National Archaeological Museum to study more exhibits from the kingdom of Macedon. Its collection features Archaic-to-late-Roman sculptures from Macedonia. It includes exhibits from the palace complex built by Galerius in Thessaloniki city centre, and a reconstruction of the facade of the Macedonian tomb in Ayia Paraskevi, and finds (mainly gold artefacts) of the Archaic and Classical periods from the cemetery at Sindos, now a Vardar river suburb of Thessaloniki. This museum also houses other stunning finds from Vergina and masterpieces of Macedonian metalwork.

Tonight we enjoy a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant. (Overnight Thessaloniki) BD

Day 3: Monday 27 September, Thessaloniki – Vergina – Thessaloniki

- Archaeological Site of Aigai (UNESCO World Heritage site): including Central Museum Building, Royal Tombs-Display of Treasures and Palace of Aigai

This morning we journey to Vergina, a village 75 km from Thessaloniki renowned in the past few decades for the discovery of Aigai, first capital of the Macedonian kings and today a UNESCO World Heritage site. Here we visit the Royal Tombs and the Palace of Aigai.

The tombs of Philip II (b. 382, r. 359-336 BCE) and of a young prince, Alexander IV, are important. Cist graves and magnificent tombs under an artificial hill (*tumulus*) were excavated in 1977 by archaeologist, Manolis Andronikos. An underground building was constructed in 1993 to protect the tombs, ensuring the stable temperature and humidity needed to preserve wall paintings. From the outside, it replicates the old *tumulus*. Inside, treasures found in there are displayed: grave *stelai*, artefacts and wall-paintings.

The Palace of Aigai, which opened to the public in January 2024, is considered the biggest, and together with the Parthenon, the most significant building of Classical Greece. It was here that Alexander the Great was proclaimed king before he launched a conquest that took him as far as modern-day Afghanistan. Constructed during the reign of Phillip II, on a raised outcrop, the palace was visible from the whole Macedonian basin. The site was continuously inhabited from the Early Bronze Age (3rd Millennium BC) and reached its zenith in the Archaic (7th-6th centuries BC) and Classical periods (5th-4th centuries), when it was the most important centre of the area and the seat of the Macedonian kings.

One of our themes today is: rulers and ruled. The things you see today will help you begin to contrast the material lives of ordinary folk with the lives of their mighty Macedonian kings who conquered Greece (by 339), Persia, Egypt, NW India and Afghanistan (334-to-323). When we think of ancient Greece, we tend only to think of Athens and its extraordinary democracy. We also have taken on board a vision of an especially "good life" to be found in city-states—like Athens, but not limited to Athens—ideas which emphasised by the ancient Greeks themselves, such in Thucydides' rendition of a funeral speech delivered by Pericles (Book 2, chs 35-46) and in Aristotle's most famous passage is in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, (1097-98). The delight in this vision may even have helped prompt your travel. But travel to ancient Macedonia may make you query this model.

Another of today's themes begins to enable us to evaluate, with respect, the buzzing fly on every wall in Macedonia, 'Northern' and Greek: national identities. We have a paradox to ponder: many contemporary Greeks are annoyed that different Slav-speaking peoples to their north, whom we'll soon visit, named their new state and culture "Macedonian"; yet we also know many ancient Greeks doubted whether ancient Macedonians were wholly Greek. Both views are true and false, I think. Your travel will help you decide for yourself. We come to listen and learn, not hector. One thing we know for sure, however, is that similar multicultural and Indigenous identity issues are also important now to all Australasians.

This evening will be at leisure. You may wish to dine at one of the many local tavernas in the Ladadika district on the sea front, or take a taxi or walk uphill to Toixo Toixo, a taverna near the walls (1430) of the old Ottoman castle. (Overnight Thessaloniki) BL

Day 4: Tuesday 28 September, Thessaloniki – Philippi – Amphipolis – Thessaloniki

- Archaeological site of Philippi (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Archaeological site of Amphipolis

Today we visit two Graeco-Roman multicultural "colonial" towns. The region was Thracian at first, not Greek, then it fell under Persian rule (492-to-479). Our first destination is to the 2nd and 3rd-century ruins of the Roman hub of "colonial" Philippi. Here we explore superimposed Roman amenities on Macedonian walls and buildings: 2 forums (commercial and administrative), various sanctuaries for Gods (Graeco-Roman and Egyptian!), arena for gladiators, two-storey theatre, public toilets and public bathhouse. Ruins of churches we see emerged between 400 and 580, save for a mosaic floor dating from an earlier church, ca 320s. There is no trace of the churches St Paul saw when he passed by in 49 or 50 CE. Byzantines re-fortified the citadel.

We continue along the *Via Egnatia* to lunch in Krinides, once a colony, founded in 360 BCE, of the Island of Thasos, but immediately seized by Philip II, who re-named it immodestly as Philippi. Gold was also mined here nearby. A Spanish-born Roman Emperor, Trajan (b. 53, r. 98-117), also upgraded this now-settled and fortified section of *Via Egnatia*, here the former Royal Road of Macedon, wanting to move troops faster for war with *Dacia* (Romania) and *Parthia* (east Anatolia/Iran). Trajan modestly inscribed "*longa intermissione neglectam... curavit*" on a mile-post beside Kalampaki, now in the Archaeological Museum at Philippi.

Amphipolis was colonised first (7th-century BCE?) by Greeks from Paros (Cyclades), famous for its white marble. Athens made several flawed attempts (especially in 465 & 437) to take it over, however. Amphipoleans always preferred freedom, but when Athens invaded again in 424 and 422, they chose Sparta. They even chose to honour a talented Spartan, Brasidas, by burying him in their *Agora* in 424, dismaying his Athenian rival commander, Thucydides, whose defeat by Brasidas at Amphipolis forced Thucydides into the life of an historian-in-exile!

Every major power—Athenian and Spartan then, Persian before, Macedonian soon—craved the wealth of Amphipolis, a walled world on a bend in the Strymon River, near the Aegean Sea. This entrepôt reached into its fertile interior and accessed mined silver and alluvial gold. As the power of Macedonia rose in its west, however, free Amphipolis was bargained over again, in the 370s, eventually falling to Philip II in 358 and remaining "Macedonian" till Aemilius Paulus seized all of Macedonia for Rome by winning a battle at Pydna in 168. After a failed local revolt in 148, the Roman Republic's new Proconsul of Macedonia, Gnaeus Egnatius, ordered our *Via Egnatia* to be constructed. It was built between 146 and 120. Our road was thus a tool of Roman imperial control; we now tend to think road-upgrades are our reward and/or 'their' trophy. One wonders what Amphipoleans thought when they were obliged to help build and fund the road.

We will wander and ponder the ruins of Amphipolis and its Archaeological Museum. We can also nod to its Sanctuary for "The Muse of History, *Klio*", who gave us Thucydides. We also hope to access *Kasta Tumulus*, north of the walls, with its collection of archaic cist graves. Amphipolis also developed a thriving Christian community, housing a bishop, four mosaic-floored churches and a main church, built between 450 and 580. Amphipolis was then abandoned after Slav raids sometime in the 8th or 9th centuries, only to be re-settled by Orthodox monks in the 13th and 14th-centuries. These monks built the towers on either side of the river. They were likely hesychasts (rhythmic-repetitive chanting mystics) from Mt Athos who embraced isolation, but who had imperial patrons: not least, John VI Kantakouzenos (1292-1383), Byzantine Emperor (1347-54). A now-lost inscription dated 1367 on one of the towers once intrigued, noting two "brothers-German founders, Alexius and Ioannes", while adding the name of a [Greek] monk, Theodorus. (Overnight Thessaloniki) BL

Bitola, North Macedonia – 3 nights

Day 5: Wednesday 29 September, Thessaloniki – Pella – Edessa – Bitola

- Archaeological site of Pella
- Waterfalls of Edessa

This morning we depart Thessaloniki and travel west along the *Via Egnatia* to Bitola (Northern Macedonia). Our first stop is Pella, founded by King Achelaos of Macedonia (r. 413-399) who transferred his capital here from Aigai (Vergina) about 410 BCE. Originally Pella was a port on the north coast of the Thermaic Gulf. King Philip II (b. 383, r. 359-36) planned the conquest of Greece, becoming in 337 "Autocrat of Greece"; his son, Alexander III ("the Great", b. 356, r. 336-323) then planned the conquest of the world.

Pella was sacked by the Romans in 168. While many city treasures went to Rome, it became a significant

stop on *the Via Egnatia* until an earthquake destroyed it in the first century BCE. The city never recovered. Extensive excavation began here in 1957. Some of ancient Macedonia's best mosaics, dating from the end of the 4th-century BCE, are found here in two houses in the city, 'House of Dionysos' and 'House of the Abduction of Helen', the mosaics either depicting geometric decoration covering the entire surface floor—some still *in situ*, some in the excellent adjacent Archaeological Museum—or depicting subjects such as hunts. They are composed of black, white and yellow pebbles. They include the *Lion Hunt*, showing Alexander the Great as saved by Krateros, a composition depicting Dionysos riding on a panther, and scenes depicting Theseus carrying off Helen as Deianeira flees. There was also great local interest in depictions of a fight with Amazons and Centaurs. This was a violent world which loved Greek myths.

Next we drive to Edessa, an attractive town renowned among Greeks for greenery and waterfalls, where we will have lunch. Edessa affords a splendid view of the plain below. The ancient settlement was closer to the plain, but from the 6th-century or so the town and then the churches retreated uphill to the rock for defence around the Byzantine Castle of Vodena. Edessa is situated on the *Via Egnatia*, which we now follow to Bitola, the second largest city in what is now the Republic of (Northern) Macedonia a few kilometres from the Greek border.

How then did [Slav] Macedonia come to be? The "Northern" additional bit in the name of this new independent nation (from 8 September 1991) of "Macedonia" emerged from a bilateral compromise brokered with Greece in February 1991. A separate South-Slav modern nation wanting to be called "Macedonia" had been on the agenda of local Slav-nationalist clergy and violent insurgents, from 1891 to 1912. Under the acronym IMRO/~~XXXX~~, they fought with terror, propaganda and banditry to resist agendas of comparable other nationalist clergy, politicians and insurgents from Serbia, Bulgaria or Greece who could not accept "Macedonia" as anything but "theirs": i.e. respectably as "their" south Serbia, west Bulgaria, or north Greece. Each could point to a fleeting era in a past when each affinity applied. The situation was then made even more complex by the fact that each now also actively resisted the Ottoman overlordship which had endured over the region for so long, 1390s to 1912. Each now attacked people whom they designated as "Turks", who were usually either Ottoman officials or abiding locals who had embraced various kinds of Sufi Islam. Hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees were forced out of these regions of the Balkans (and of the Caucasus), starting from 1878, ending around 1912-22. The Nazi invasion of 1941-44 then further divided the region between Bulgarian and Italian occupation sectors, their respective boundaries were in the south between Struga and Ohrid, and in the north between Tetovo and Skopje. A separate "Macedonia" agenda was then re-enabled by Marshal Tito's Yugoslavia (1945-90). It was first announced (to widen the local appeal of Yugoslav confederal Communist Resistance) at Ilinden on 2 August 1944, but it could only be belatedly implemented as a sixth Yugoslav federal republic in 1963, because Greece was convulsed by civil war (1945-47), because Tito split from Moscow in 1948, and because of inconsistent Bulgarian Communist support. The Yugoslav Macedonian Republic was then the last republic to choose to secede from the Yugoslav Federation on 8 September 1991. It was forced out by Serb leader's Milošević's determination in 1990 to deploy Macedonian troops to fight in Bosnia. You are entering a young and poor, optimistic and resilient nation! (Overnight Bitola) BL

Day 6: Thursday 30 September, Bitola – Heraclea Lyncestis – Bitola

- Archaeological site of Heraclea Lyncestis
- Walking tour of Bitola including: St Demetrius Church, The Consulates, Clock tower, Yeni mosque (exterior), Isak mosque (exterior), Bazaar and Bezisten

This morning we visit the Roman ruins of Heraclea Lyncestis. Famous for its dazzling mosaics, ancient theatre and Roman baths, Heraclea is the most vividly preserved city from the Ancient Macedonian Empire surviving in the country. Founded by Philip II of Macedon in the 4th century BCE. and conquered by the

Romans two centuries later, it was built on the *Via Egnatia* and became one of the key stations on this trading route. Heraclea figured in the campaigns of Julius Caesar during the civil wars as a supply depot, and inscriptions of veterans who settled there date as early as the turn of the era. From the 4th-6th centuries CE Heraclea also had an Episcopal seat. The first excavations were done before the First World War, but only since then have the full glories of the ancient city been revealed. Beautiful Roman baths, the Episcopal church and baptistry, a Jewish temple, portico and a Roman theatre, now used for summer concerts and theatre shows, all survive in excellent condition.

Following lunch at a local restaurant, we spend the afternoon exploring the city of Bitola (an Old Church Slavonic word for a monk's abode, with this name of the city rendered as *Manastir* in Turkish and in Byzantine Greek). Traditionally a trading centre, Bitola is an extraordinary mixture of old and new and a meeting point of different cultures and civilisations, where, for many centuries, Christians, Muslims and Jews have lived together in relative harmony.

During the Ottoman period consulates from twelve countries were situated here and Bitola was known as the 'City of the Consuls'. It was also home to a number of prestigious schools, including a military academy, which was attended by the famous Turkish reformer Kemal Atatürk. Once there were 60 mosques in the city of which only 12 remain today. We will visit a number of buildings representative of the Ottoman period, including the Bezisten (covered Turkish mall), the Isak Mosque, built in 1508-1509; the Yeni (New) Mosque, built in 1559; and the Mosque of Yahdar-Kadi, built in 1562 by Sinan, the most prominent Ottoman architect of the time. Another cultural and historical monument in Bitola is the Orthodox Church St Demetrius. The church was built in 1830 with voluntary contributions of the local merchants and craftsmen. During Ottoman occupation churches were supposed to look plain on the outside, however, the church is lavishly decorated on the inside compensating for its lack of splendour on the outside. (Overnight Bitola) BL

Day 7: Friday 1 October, Bitola – Prilep – Mount Zlatovrv – Bitola

- Old Bazaar, Prilep
- 4WD excursion to Treskavec Monastery, Mount Zlatovrv
- Church of St Nicholas in Varos, Prilep

Today we drive to Prilep situated in the northern part of Pelagonia Plain. Known as 'the city under Marko's Towers', the town is located on the skirts of the 'Towers', or fortress, of the legendary hero King Marko who is featured in Macedonian folk songs and tales as a powerful, wise ruler, and fighter against the Turks. On arrival we take a short walking tour through the Old Bazaar.

Our next destination is the Treskavec Monastery located in the mountains 10km north of Prilep. The site, a natural citadel at the edge of a small upland plain is over 1100m above sea level and is reached by jeep. On our arrival we will enjoy a picnic lunch and enjoy the spectacular view. An inscription on stone records the name of the early town and reveals that its inhabitants belonged to a local cult of Ephesian Artemis. The inscription stone was reused as a base for a cross on top of one of the church domes. Other inscriptions at Treskavec include several 1st-century Roman dedications to Apollo. The old fortress was used by the Romans, and later the Byzantines. During the Middle Ages, King Marko rebuilt the citadel extensively, making it an important military stronghold. In 1014 Tsar Samoil came here after the defeat on Belasica; Samoil died in Prilep from a heart attack reputedly after encountering his blind soldiers.

The Treskavec Monastery has been in continued use since it was founded in the 12th century and the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin was constructed the following century and features a cross-in-square plan and a central dome. A narthex and an exonarthex with two symmetrically arranged domes were added in the 14th century. Although suffering from water damage, the church preserves a highly significant body

of Byzantine paintings, including the first-known representation of the 'Heavenly Court', as well as unique, high-quality images of 'Heavenly Jerusalem' and 'the Calendar', which are located in the exonarthex. 15th century paintings executed by a workshop at Kastoria in Greece are preserved in the nave. Marble blocks reused in the altar parapet provide evidence for an early Christian structure on the site. The monastery also retains portions of its 14th century kitchen and dining room, as well as important inscriptions and historical portraits that link it to both Byzantine and Serbian patronage.

Macedonia is one of the richest regions in terms of medieval wall paintings, both in the Balkans and in Europe as a whole and our final visit for the day is to view the Byzantine frescoes at the Church of St Nicholas in Varos (1290) before returning to Bitola. (Overnight Bitola) BL

Ohrid, North Macedonia – 2 nights

Day 8: Saturday 2 October, Bitola – Prespa Lake – St Naum – Bay of Bones – Ohrid

- Prespa Lake
- St Naum Monastery
- Boat tour of Lake Ohrid to the Museum on Water, Bay of Bones (reconstruction of Bronze Age lake settlement)

We begin our day with a journey to Prespa Lake where we will have a short morning tea break. The Prespa area has been settled since the bronze and Neolithic ages and during the Roman Empire, the *Via Egnatia* passed here. Because Great Prespa Lake sits about 150m above Lake Ohrid, which lies only about 10km to the west, its waters run through underground channels in the karst (porous limestone bedrock) and emerge from springs which feed streams running into Lake Ohrid.

Mid-morning we continue our journey west over the Galichica mountain to Lake Ohrid to lunch at the Monastery of St Naum, situated 29km from the town of Ohrid, and only 1 kilometre from the Albanian border. As with most Byzantine monasteries, St. Naum was chosen primarily for its location – it is on a high, rocky outcrop over the lake, above deep forests and the life-giving springs of the River Crn Drim. The monk whose name it bears built the monastic complex and church at the turn of the 10th century. He was a companion of St Clement of Ohrid and like him a disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the Apostles to the Slavs. Macedonians believe you can still hear the saint's heartbeat by pressing an ear to his stone coffin inside the church.

The monastery has been renewed and enlarged several times over the centuries. While most of its iconostasis and frescoes date from the 16th and 17th centuries, earlier etchings in the Byzantine Greek vernacular also remain. But numerous orthographical mistakes indicate that Slavic-speaking local monks wrote them. Other inscriptions in the church make up some of the oldest epigraphic evidence of Slavic literacy. The icons of St Naum are among the best achievements of religious painting in the Balkans. They date from the first half of the 18th century. The wood-carved iconostasis was made in 1711 by an unknown artisan. A final element of interest at St Naum is located not on the inside of the church but outside: the preponderance of multi-coloured peacocks strutting around and luxuriating in the grass.

After visiting the monastery we will take a boat on ancient Lake Ohrid. Our destination is the Museum on Water at the 'Bay of Bones'. This is an important region of Neolithic shore villages. This means that some of the earliest specialist fishing and farming communities to be found in Europe were based right here. They lived in huts built over log piles driven into swamps. These people's specialist skills with seeds and wood, soon led to the development of ancillary skills in metal-smithing. A Bronze Age was beginning.

From here we continue our journey to our hotel, beautifully situated overlooking this majestic lake. Look for the freshwater "Ohrid" trout on local menus. It's special to this lake, and to nearby Lake Prespa, and to Lake Baikal in south-central Siberia. Now can you please explain how one rare species can only be found in two adjacent lakes (that's easy) and in another far far away? (Overnight Ohrid) BLD

Day 9: Sunday 3 October, Lake Ohrid Region (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

- Antique theatre
- St Clement Monastery & Icon Gallery, Plaoshnik
- Samuil's fortress
- Early Christian Basilica and Baptistery ruins
- St John the Theologian, Kaneo (exterior only)
- Church of Holy Wisdom (Agia Sophia)
- City Museum at Robevci House

This morning we take a walking tour of Ohrid, one of the oldest settlements in Europe located on the shores of Lake Ohrid and on the old *Via Egnatia* route. Both city and lake are UNESCO World Heritage sites. Similarly, there are only a few lakes in the world today whose antiquity can be compared with Lake Ohrid; only Tanganyika in Africa and Titicaca in South America are from the same geological period.

Ohrid is notable for once having had 365 churches, one for each day of the year, and it is often referred to as the Macedonian Jerusalem. We will visit three of the 40 odd that remain today, see the antique theatre that dates from the Hellenic and Roman period, and the fortress of Samuil, built between 990 and 1015 when Ohrid was the capital and stronghold of Tsar Samuil's Bulgarian Empire.

Plaoshnik, the Old Town of Ohrid, is where in the 9th century the city's patron St Clement of Ohrid, a Bulgarian scholar and writer, founded the first Slavonic university; the modification of the original Cyrillic alphabet is attributed to him. Here we visit the church of St Clement, a classic Orthodox Byzantine church that dominates the Old Town. Its frescoes depict dramatic scenes with an almost documentary precision and are characteristic of the early period of the two great masters of fresco painting in Macedonia, Michail Astrappa and Eutychius.

The famous Gallery of Icons is located within the complex of the church of St Clement. The collection comprises numerous icons, 30 of which are masterpieces that place this Gallery as one of three of its kind in the world. Along with fresco painting, icons also reflected the cult of the Slavonic educators Ss Clement and Naum. The oldest preserved icons are those of Ss Basil the Great and Nicholas and The Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste: the former icon, portraying the two archpriests at life-size, dates from the first half of the 11th century, and the latter, a bit later. The artistic approach of both icons matches the frescoes in the cathedral church of Holy Wisdom, seat of the Ohrid Archbishopric for several centuries. It is also located in the old city centre.

The church of St John at Kaneo stands alone on a small promontory jutting out into the lake at the western end of the Old Town and provides spectacular panoramic views of the lake and surrounding mountains. The construction date of the church remains unknown. Documents detailing the church property suggest that it was built before the year 1447, however, archaeologists believe that the church was constructed in the 13th century. Thought to be influenced by the architecture of Armenian churches, the church is in the shape of a cross.

The church of Holy Wisdom was transformed into a mosque in the second half of the 15th century when most of its frescoes were whitewashed. It was converted back to an Orthodox Church in 1912 and during its

conservation, begun in 1951, frescoes dating from the 11th and 14th centuries were revealed, attracting much public attention. The portraits of the six Roman popes, the barefooted Christ, as well as the cycle of the 'Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste', create a unique gallery of paintings in Byzantine art.

When we visit the Robevci House/City Museum in Ohrid, we could easily be in wooden old-Stambul or else in Safranbolu in old Anatolia. We encounter an old Ottoman wooden house, which once had separate men's and women's salons. These homes hosted servants bustling in an inner courtyard. The charm of the neighbourhood with houses rising and projecting over the narrow street was a great boon for the élite women who lived here in semi-seclusion. They could conduct a lively and discreet neighbourhood conversation 12m above the street! (Overnight Ohrid) BL

Tirana, Albania – 2 nights

Day 10: Monday 4 October, Ohrid – Elbesan – Tirana

- Elbesan
- Archaeological site of Ad Quintum, Elbesan
- Orientation walk of Tirana incl. Skanderbeg Square, Ottoman Serai & old mosque of Ethem Bey

Leaving Lake Ohrid we cross into Albania at Qafa e Thanë and continue to Elbasan, which first came into prominence in the Roman period when it was known as Masio Scampa (a word of Illyrian origin). The Romans built a castle here. The town that formed around that castle had a bishop, cathedral and basilicas as early as the 5th century. The fortress was eventually destroyed by the Bulgars in intermittent attacks over the 9th-10th-centuries. The great Ottoman, Sultan Mehmet II, ordered in 1467 the construction of a massive four-sided castle, with a deep moat and three gates. He named it Ilibasan or 'strong place'. It became a centre of Ottoman urban civilisation over the next 400 years and by the end of the 17th-century it had 2,000 inhabitants. The fortress was then dismantled by the reformer Reşid Paşa in 1832 because it was seen as a centre of resistance to Ottoman military modernisation. Yet things were changing even here in Albania, an age-old Ottoman heartland. Imitating 'Young Turk' movements since the 1890s, an Albanian nationalist movement in Albania was born right here at Elbasan; there had been a prior meeting in Bitola in Macedonia in 1905. These first Albanian National Congress held in Bitola and Elbasan also studied educational and cultural questions, and promulgated the bold decision to render Albanian in a Latin script—not Cyrillic, not Arabic—a decision which infuriated the Young Turks but which also inspired Mustaf Kemal to think again in Turkey in 1926 and change their script. The Muslim majority opposed European proposals to instal Prince William of Weid as King in 1914. Between 1915 and 1918, Elbasan was then occupied by Serbs, Bulgars, Austrians and Italians. Postwar negotiations led by Italy and Yugoslavia installed Ahmet Zogu in power in 1922-24, and then acquiesced when he made himself King in 1928, his rule lasting till Mussolini invaded Albania in 9 April 1939.

Following lunch at a local restaurant we travel to the outskirts of Elbesan to visit the ruins of a second-century *mutatio* ("changing station" or "way station") built where two branches of the Via Egnatia converged. The site includes horse stables and a well-preserved *thermae* (bathhouse) which takes advantage of the abundant springs nearby.

Mid-afternoon we journey on to Tirana; on the road into the capital we will pass the Fortress of Pertrela, built in the fifteenth century it was under the command of Skanderbeg's sister, Mamica Kastrioti.

Tirana has been the capital of Albania since 1920. Located an hour's drive from the Adriatic Sea near the Dajti Mountain, the city was established in 1614 by Sulejman Bargjini. It began to grow at the beginning of the 18th century and today Tirana is not only the most populated city in Albania, but also its biggest

political and economic centre.

We begin our visit of Tirana with an orientation walk around Skanderbeg Square, the central focus of the city from which radiate the grand boulevards laid out by King Zog. The boulevards originally went nowhere but today they give the city centre its distinctive character. We shall view the old Ottoman Serai (palace) and the old mosque of Ethem Bey, built during 1789–1823, which is the city’s main surviving building of the Ottoman period. (Overnight Tirana) BLD

Day 11: Tuesday 5 October, Tirana – Krujë – Tirana

- Bunk’Art 2, Tirana
- Lunch & performance by ‘Meti’, a member of the Krujë folkloric group
- Mountain Fortress of Krujë: Skanderbeg Museum, Old Bazaar & Citadel
- Ismail Kadare house museum

This morning we visit Bunk’Art 2, the second of two communist era bunkers and underground tunnel systems that have recently been transformed into an interactive artistic space. Secretly built from 1981-86, beneath the Ministry of Internal Affairs along the city’s main boulevard, the underground structure was given the code name ‘Objekti Shtylla’ (Object Pole) in order to keep its construction undetected. The museum focuses on the role of the police and security services in Albania through the turbulent 20th century.

Next, we head to the ancient town of Krujë, birthplace of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, the famous 15th century Albanian leader who resisted the Ottoman Empire for 25 years. Regarded as a national hero, the Skanderbeg Museum was built to honour him. Despite Skanderbeg’s resistance, however, the Ottomans took possession of the city and today its Old Bazaar with shops full of silver filigree jewellery, authentic folk costumes, woven rugs, and traditional felt hats, is a legacy from this period of the town’s history.

The most important sight of Krujë is the citadel; this fortress dates back to the 5th or 6th century. Within walking distance of the citadel are the Turkish baths, a church and rows of medieval houses. Lunch will be served at a local restaurant. Here we meet ‘Meti’, a member of the Krujë folkloric group, who will play some traditional instruments for us.

This evening there will be an optional pre-dinner visit to the home of Albania’s best-known novelist, Ismail Kadare (1936- 2024) who is regarded as one of the greatest writers and intellectuals of the 20th and 21st centuries, and as a universal voice against totalitarianism. He was nominated 15 times for the Nobel literature prize. Despite missing out on the Nobel, Kadare received numerous awards in his lifetime, including the Man Booker international prize in 2005, the Prince of Asturias prize for the arts in 2009, and the America award in literature in 2023. His best known works include *The General of the Dead Army* and *The Palace of Dreams*. His home, where he wrote most of his books, was turned into a museum in 2019. Following his death in July 2024, two days of mourning were declared. (Overnight Tirana) BL

Berat, Albania – 2 nights

Day 12: Wednesday 6 October, Tirana – Durrës – Apollonia – Berat

- Durrës the starting point of the Via Egnatia: Circular Forum, Roman amphitheatre, Byzantine city walls and Venetian Tower
- Archaeological site of Apollonia
- Monastery of St Mary at Apollonia

This morning we visit the ancient Graeco-Roman port-city of Epidamnos/Dyrrachium (Durrës), established in the 7th century BCE, and originally settled by the native Illyrian Taulant tribe. The port was for centuries the largest on the Adriatic. During the 1st century BCE it became the starting point of the *Via Egnatia*, the Roman road that linked the Adriatic to Constantinople, making it an important trade and communications centre. During this time an amphitheatre of 15-20,000 seats was built, together with an aqueduct, library and other buildings used for social and religious use. During the Byzantine period (395-1341) the city of Dyrrachium continued to function as one of the most important cities in the area and as the capital of the province of New Epirus. The city's defensive walls surrounding the city, the Forum and Basilica date from this period.

We begin our tour of Durrës with a visit to the Circular Forum, a colonnaded piazza paved with marble uncovered during recent excavations. It is a set-piece of late antique civic architecture very similar to the great circular fora of Constantinople, laid out by Constantine (274-37) and Theodosius II (401-450). We also visit the 2nd century Roman amphitheatre, one of the largest in the Balkans and the chief surviving Roman structure in Durrës. The city walls, depicted in one of the many watercolours by English artist Edward Lear during his visit to Albania in 1848, were built during the 5th-6th century CE but a small square inner fort with polygonal towers located on the SW (seaward) side of the city walls are Venetian additions dating from the 15th century CE.

We next journey south to the district of Fier, which boasts a number of different historical sites of great interest. After a picnic lunch we visit the archaeological site of Apollonia, founded in 588 BCE by the Corinthians. Apollonia, used by Aristotle as a model in his analysis of oligarchy because of its distinct and separate Greek and Illyrian communities, was an important site on one of the branches of the *Via Egnatia*. It was a vital stronghold in Caesar's civil war with Pompey and in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE it supported the Romans in their Macedonian wars. The city was also important in early Christian history with its bishop attending the councils of Ephesus and Chalkis in 431 and 451 CE. Recent excavations have revealed finds of the Mycenaean later Bronze Age, linking the settlement to the Bronze Age Aegean.

The first excavations on this site, undertaken by the French Archaeological Mission in 1923-30, uncovered the first city defences of fine ashlar masonry dating from the mid-4th century BCE; the acropolis flanked by a terrace wall from which a gateway leads up to the site of the temple of Artemis date from the 6th century BCE. To the south of the gate is a phallic pillar sacred to Apollo and to the north of it is a 4th century BCE stoa. In front is a complex of 2nd century CE buildings including an *odeion* (covered theatre), a triumphal arch, a *bouleuterion* (council house) and a building that was probably a library. Later excavations by Albanian archaeologists have uncovered houses and a gymnasium from the 2nd-3rd centuries CE, a peristyle courtyard house on the west side of the city near the theatre from the 3rd century BCE, and an impressive *nymphaeum* from the 4th or 3rd century BCE.

South of the *bouleuterion* is the monastery of St Mary. The cross-in-square church dates from the 13th century, although remains from the early 6th century have recently been discovered demonstrating that the site has a long history. The church has important 13th century frescoes painted at a time when Byzantium had regained control of this section of the Adriatic coast for the last time; they are the final Byzantine/Roman triumphal monument on the Adriatic. (Overnight Berat) BLD

Day 13: Thursday 7 October, Historic centre of Berat (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

- Citadel of Berat (Kala Quarter): Church of St Mary (Merise) incl. the Onufri Icon Museum, Church of St Mary Blachernae (Merise Vllahernes), Church of St Nicholas (Kollit) & Church of Holy Trinity (Triadhes) & the Traditional House of Cac Dollani
- Lunch at Agriturismo Kodra e Gjëlber

- Mangalem Quarter: Sultan's Mosque, Han and the Teqe of the Helveti, The Lead Mosque, Bachelors' Mosque, remains of an Ottoman Serai

In 2008, Berat was included on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Like Gjirokastra in the south, Berat was inscribed as a rare example of a well-preserved Ottoman town that bears witness to the coexistence of various religious and cultural communities down the centuries.

Berat is often referred to as 'the city of one-thousand windows', an impression created by the way its white houses climb up the steep slopes of Mount Tomorri to the citadel located at its peak. The settlement has been inhabited since the Bronze Age (2600-1800 BCE) and was the centre of the Illyrian kingdom of Dassaretis from around the middle of the fourth century BCE when the stronghold that still dominates the town was first built. Roman invaders, campaigning against the king of Macedon, added to the fortifications of the citadel when they took the city in 200 BCE; it was refortified again by the Byzantine Emperor, Theodosius II in 440 CE, and again, after the Slav invasions of the seventh century who named the city Beograd, the White City, from which some argue the name Berat derives.

After a series of other occupiers, the Ottoman Turks took the city in 1417 and it largely remained an Ottoman stronghold until the end of the 19th century. The city fell to Albanian nationalists in 1914. They were evicted by Austro-Hungarian troops in 1916, who in turn were ousted two years later by the Italian army who held Berat until 1921. The communist dominated Provisional Government of Albania, which came to power under the leadership of Enver Hoxha, was formed here in October 1944. During its Ottoman occupation, the town's Christian population by agreement remained largely based within the walls and the surrounds of the citadel. Like their ancestors, many people still live within the walls of the citadel in traditional houses that generally comprise of two floors, a ground floor for storage and activities such as pressing olive oil or distilling *raki*, and a first floor housing the family's living quarters. A visit to the Ethnographic Museum, located in a late eighteenth-century house, will demonstrate this traditional layout.

The citadel once housed numerous medieval churches. Today only seven churches remain. One, the church of St Mary (Merise), now houses the Icon Museum, which has an outstanding collection of icons painted by the sixteenth-century Albanian Icon master painter, Onufri, whose work adorned many Orthodox churches in Albania and Greece.

The oldest church now extant inside the citadel is the 13th century St Mary Blachernae (Merise Vllahernes). Its interior was completely redecorated in 1578 by Onufri's son Nikolla. On the northwest side of the citadel is the Church of Holy Trinity (Triadhes). Built at the beginning of the 14th century, it is a little gem of later Byzantine architecture. The church has been built on split-levels, with the narthex being lower than the cruciform nave, as the church has been terraced into the hillside. The Church of St Nicholas, (Kollit) is a 16th century amalgamation of several older chapels; fragments of the original fresco decoration survive.

Nearby, we also visit Cac Dollani, a fine example of a traditional house, and a former base for 'The National Liberation Movement' (LNC).

Following lunch at Agriturismo Kodra e Gjëlber which lies in the hills outside of Berat, we spend the afternoon exploring the old town. Berat is also home to three of Albania's oldest mosques. Originally some mosques were built within the citadel primarily to serve the garrison manning the fortress. Today all that remains of these are the ruins of the White and the Red Mosques dating from the fifteenth century; the Red Mosque is the oldest mosque in Albania. Below the citadel in the township, which was the preserve of its Muslim inhabitants, a number of fine mosques and buildings associated with them were built. Several of these survive today. The King's Mosque (Xhamia e Mbretit) built in the reign of Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512) is behind the market at the foot of Rruga e Kalasë in the present town centre. It is a much

grander structure than the other two mosques we will visit and has a wide women's gallery and a grand *minbar* (pulpit) where the Hoxha preached the Friday sermon. On the *qibla* wall is the *mihrab*, a niche that orients the faithful to pray toward Mecca. An open gallery outside also has a *mihrab* for worshippers unable to be accommodated within the mosque.

Adjacent to the mosque is a restored *han*, or caravanserai, which now houses the local Directorate of the Institute of Monuments. Across the courtyard is the Teqe of the Helveti, which served as a religious school. Built in 1790, it has a handsome porch and a fine gilded ceiling. Dominating the main square of Berat is the Lead Mosque. Built in 1553-4, it is notable for having clay vessels inserted into the walls, a device used from antiquity to supposedly improve the acoustics of a building. The other surviving mosque of architectural interest is the 18th century Bachelor's Mosque located in the Mangalem Quarter and used by the local artisans and craftsmen who worked in the area. It has a pitched roof with wide eaves, below which are paintings of urban landscapes done in 1827, reminiscent of those in the Ethem Bey Mosque in Tirana. The interior is similarly decorated with painted clock faces indicating the hours of prayer.

Berat's spiritual sites of mosques and medieval churches have always been considered important, even during its communist period, and in 1976 the government designated Berat a 'museum city' and as a consequence the town centre escaped the communist urban planning implemented elsewhere in the country. The Mangalem Quarter is a conservation area of well-restored late 18th and 19th century traditional houses. (Overnight Berat) BL

Gjirokastra, Albania – 1 night

Day 14: Friday 8 October, Berat – Byllis – Gjirokastra

- Archaeological site of Byllis

This morning we leave Berat and travel to the archaeological site of Byllis, near the village of Hekal. To reach the actual site we will travel in either 4x4s or minibuses. Once the largest city in Southern Illyria, it was an important city of the Illyrian tribe of Bylliones. The site, which is spread over 30ha of hilltop overlooking the river Vjosa, was later a Roman colony and then a Byzantine settlement. Some consider it one of the very best examples to be seen in Europe of how classical cities were transformed in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Byllis was identified in the early nineteenth century by the British traveller, Henry Holland, but systematic excavation did not begin until 1917-18, first by the Austrian archaeologist Praschniker, and later by Albanian archaeologists. Excavations have uncovered walls that date from the last half of the 4th century BCE and within them are the remains of Illyrian private houses, Roman buildings, including a theatre with a seating capacity of 7000, an agora bordered by stoas, and a peristyle house with bath and mosaics, and Byzantine basilicas paved with outstanding mosaics.

From Byllis we travel south to the hillside town of Gjirokastra. The town, which features over 600 Ottoman-era houses, was described beautifully by Albania's most famous author, Ismail Kadare (b 1936), in *Chronicle in Stone*. (Overnight Gjirokastra) BLD

Saranda, Albania – 1 night

Day 15: Saturday 9 October, Gjirokastra – Sarandë

- Ottoman city of Gjirokastra (UNESCO World Heritage Site): Medieval Fortress incl. the Gjirokastra Museum and National Museum of Arms, Skenduli House & Bazaar

Gjiorkastra, which means Silver Fortress, is a picturesque museum town dominated by its mighty citadel, the largest in Albania, towering over the Drina Valley. Like Berat, its attractive, many-storied houses cling to the slopes of Mali Gjere (wide mountain) and it is also a UNESCO World Heritage City. While the town's heyday was in the thirteenth century, it is famous for its nineteenth century Ottoman architecture and it is considered one of the best examples of an Ottoman town outside of Turkey. Gjiorkastra has been important for a number of influential political figures in Albanian history: Ali Pasha Tepelena strengthened the citadel here in 1811 during his rise to power, and it is the birthplace of Albania's former Communist dictator, Enver Hoxha (1908-1985). It is also the hometown of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare (b.1936) who has been a Nobel Prize in Literature candidate.

Our first visit will be to the castle, which stands like a balcony over the city and houses the Gjiorkastra Museum which presents the fascinating history of the town and information on luminaries connected with Gjiorkastra such as Lord Byron and Edward Lear. There is also the National Museum of Arms housed in a former prison, which displays Albanian arms from independence in 1912 to the end of World War II. It's also possible to visit the cells where political prisoners were kept between 1929 and 1968.

Following some time at leisure for lunch and to explore the bazaar, we visit Skenduli House, the family home of Nasip Skenduli. This three-storey Ottoman house, which dates from 1823, includes twin towers and a double-arched facade. It's almost unchanged interiors feature carved wooden ceilings, stained-glass windows and detailed wall frescoes. There will be some free time to explore the Old Bazaar which makes up the centre of the Old Town before we journey south to Sarandë. (Overnight Sarandë) BD

Corfu – 2 nights

Day 16: Sunday 10 October, Sarandë – Butrint – Corfu

- Archaeological site of Butrint (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Ferry to Corfu

Situated opposite the island of Corfu, Sarandë is now mostly visited by day-trippers from Corfu who come to Albania to visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Butrint, located 20km south of Sarandë. Today we will do likewise and visit the impressive site of Butrint, before catching the ferry to Corfu.

Butrint, ancient Buthrotum, occupies a small peninsula between the Straits of Corfu and Lake Butrint, and is set in a spectacular location. Although as a site of habitation it has effectively been 'dead' for 200 years, it nevertheless still runs a regular bus service, has a football team, an annual festival and a radio station, such is its popularity since its rediscovery in 1924 by the young Italian archaeologist Luigi Maria Ugolini who had been dispatched by Mussolini to excavate the city. Mussolini and his fascist party saw themselves as the successors of imperial Rome and sought to uncover evidence of 'Romanita' all over the Mediterranean.

According to one legend, Butrint was founded by exiles fleeing the fall of Troy; Virgil described it as Troy in miniature. Others believe Corfoit traders settled the site in the eighth century BCE and the town is often associated with the legend of Aeneas. Whatever its origins, Butrint has been inhabited since antiquity; it has Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman monuments and is in many ways a microcosm of Mediterranean history, representing in all its phases of development, the rise and fall of all the great empires that dominated the region. It is possible to see monuments that span over 2000 years, from the Hellenistic temples dating from fourth century BCE to remarkably well-preserved seating of its fourth-century CE theatre to the Ottoman defences from the nineteenth century.

Butrint prospered throughout its long history by exploiting its strategic position at the head of the Ksamili

peninsula, beside a coastal lagoon and the natural Vivari channel which connects it to the sea. Mariners stopped by to collect fresh water on their way to Apollonia or Durrës and it became a site of pilgrimage for worshippers of Asclepius, the ancient Greek god of medicine and healing, all of which swelled the city's coffers. The temple of Asclepius, located to the south of the fourth century BCE theatre that had seating for about 1500 people, was rebuilt in the second century CE after the city was made a Roman colony under Julius Caesar and reaffirmed by Emperor Augustus.

One of the most important buildings of the later Roman city is a vast townhouse arranged around a central courtyard that was built in the early fifth century CE. It was probably the home of a major local magnate and had fine mosaics paving the rooms and porticoes and elaborately painted walls. The site was later used as a cemetery and a rubbish tip before being finally abandoned in the ninth century.

Butrint was the seat of a bishop by 485 CE and in the lower city are two major ecclesiastical buildings, a sixth century baptistery constructed on the site of an earlier bathhouse, and a Great Basilica, dating to the end of the fifth century or the beginning of the sixth, which despite its size, was not an Episcopal church but a funerary basilica containing graves. Butrint shrank in size through the seventh-ninth centuries but was revived in the tenth and eleventh centuries when it became an important base of the Depotate of Epirus after 1205. In 1386 the Republic of Venice purchased it to be a bastion in the on-going war with the Genoese and it remained in their hands until 1797, when it was briefly occupied by the Napoleonic French who fought the army of Ali Pasha who then constructed a castle at the head of the channel to protect Butrint from the designs of the British on Corfu. Thereafter it became part of the Ottoman Empire. Across the channel you will see a triangular fortress that was the location of the meeting between Sir Thomas Maitland, Governor of Corfu, and Ali Pasha where they signed a post Napoleonic settlement for the area.

After lunch we return to Sarandë late afternoon to catch the ferry to Kerkyra (Corfu Town). (Overnight Corfu)
BL

Day 17: Monday 11 October, Corfu Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

- Archaeological Museum
- Walking tour of Corfu Old Town incl. Church of Agios Spyridon
- Afternoon at leisure
- Farewell Dinner

Once eulogized by Lord Byron as the 'shores of glory', Corfu is one of Greece's loveliest islands. Its capital, Kerkyra, or Corfu Town, bears the marks of Romans, Normans, Venetians, French, Turks, Germans and the British. Our first visit this morning to the Archaeological Museum will help put the history of some of these successive civilisations into context. The museum, which has finally opened after nearly a decade of renovations, includes the massive gorgon pediment (590–580 BCE) from the Temple of Artemis on the nearby Kanoni Peninsula.

We spend the remainder of the morning exploring Corfu Old Town. Ruled by Venetian nobility from 1386 to 1797, much of the town's architecture reflects their long occupation and Corfu is much more Italian than anywhere else in Greece. In the area known as Campiello, the town is built on a hill, giving the added complication of steps and curved streets. Despite the hill and the lack of any water, the whole place is very reminiscent of Venice, with tall buildings, little squares and washing lines strung across narrow alleys, indeed the New Fortress still bears the insignia of the Venetian Republic. Our walk includes a visit to the Church of Agios Spyridon, a small 16th-century basilica decorated with magnificent frescoes and containing the remains of Corfu's patron saint, Spyridon. We end our tour outside the Palace of St Michael and St George. The palace was once home to Corfu's British rulers and it is considered the finest of the British

buildings in Corfu and one of its landmarks.

The afternoon is at leisure. You may wish to visit the Corfu Museum of Asian Art. Housed within the palace, the museum is home to a stunning collection of artefacts including Chinese, Japanese and Central Asian nomadic art. Alternatively you may wish to visit the Byzantine Museum which is housed in the fifteenth-century Panaghia Antivouniotissa (Our Lady Opposite The Mountain) church.

This evening we celebrate the end of our journey with a farewell dinner at a local restaurant. (Overnight Corfu Town) BD

Day 18: Tuesday 12 October, Depart Corfu

- Tour concludes in the morning
- At leisure/Check out

Our tour ends in Corfu after breakfast. In the morning you will be required to check out of the hotel. Please contact ASA if you require assistance with a transfer to Corfu Airport. B

Accommodation

All hotels are rated 4-star locally and are comfortable and conveniently situated. All hotels provide rooms with en suite bathroom.

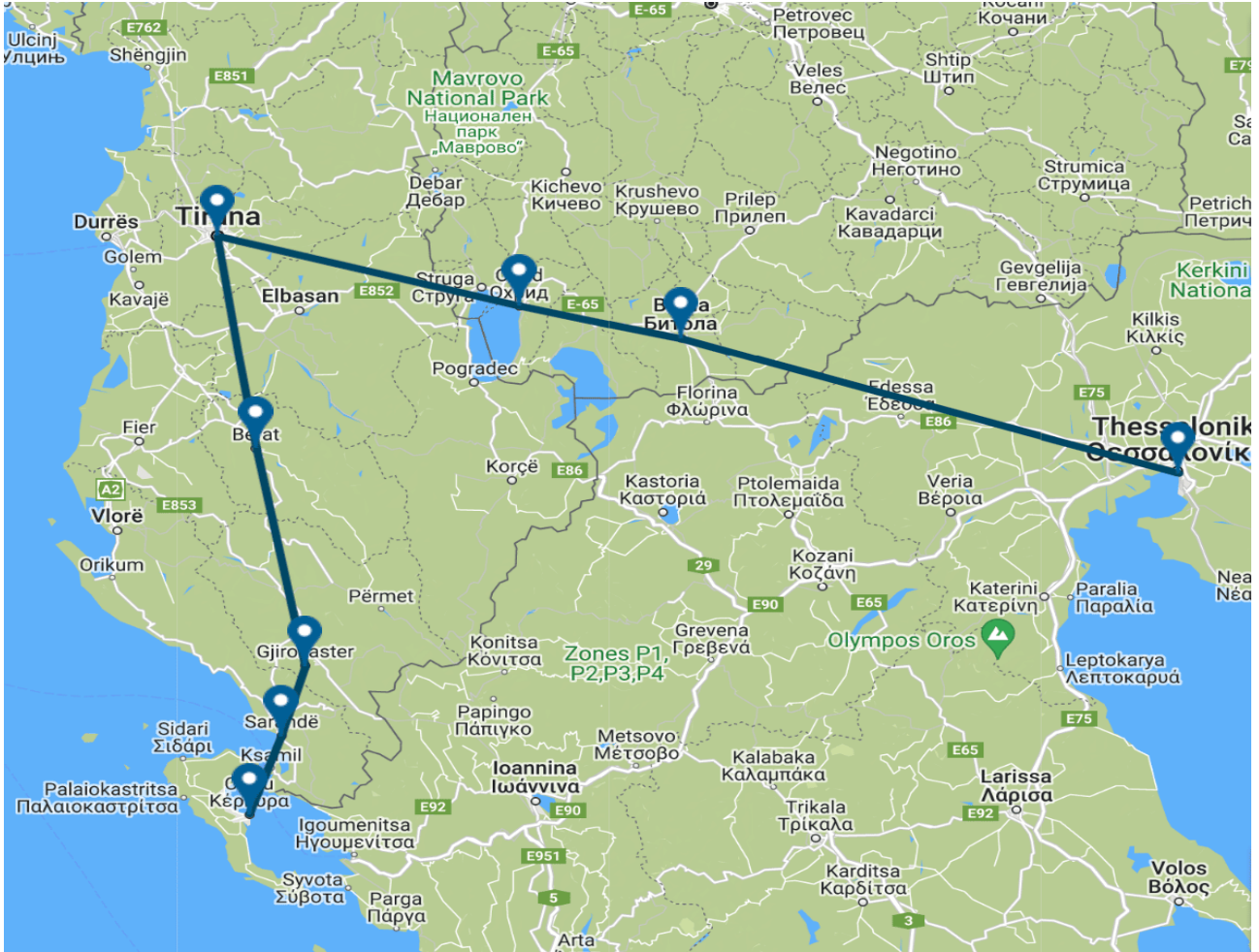
- Thessaloniki (4 nights): 4-star [City Hotel](#) – located in the city centre, 50 metres from Aristotelous Square.
- Bitola (3 nights): 4-star [Hotel Millenium Palace](#) – located in the city centre.
- Ohrid (2 nights): 4-star [Nova Riviera Hotel](#) – located on the shores of Lake Ohrid close to the old town, offering offering picturesque panoramic views of the lake, the old town and the famous Samoil's fortress.
- Tirana (2 nights): 4-star [Hotel Elisa Tirana - affiliated by Meliá](#) – opened in late 2023, this new hotel is located 1.1km from Skanderbeg Square.
- Berat (2 nights): 4-star [Portik Hotel](#) – featuring striking modern architecture, each of the rooms have views of the historic city.
- Gjirokastra (1 night): 4-star [Hotel Argjiro](#) – a charming hotel located in the heart of the historical centre.
- Sarandë (1 night): 4-star [Brilant Hotel](#) – a modern hotel on the Albanian Riviera overlooking the Ionian Sea.
- Corfu (2 nights): 4-star [Cavalieri Hotel](#) – housed in a former 17th century nobleman's mansion, located in the centre of Corfu. The hotel features a rooftop terrace with uninterrupted views of Corfu Town and the fortress.

Note: hotels are subject to change, in which case a hotel of similar standard will be provided.

Single Supplement

Payment of this supplement will ensure accommodation in a single-occupancy room throughout the tour. In most hotels, this will be a double/twin room for single occupancy. The number of rooms available for single occupancy is extremely limited. People wishing to take this supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.

Tour Map



Tour Price & Inclusions

AUD \$TBA Land Content Only – Early-Bird Special: Book before 30 September 2026

AUD \$TBA Land Content Only

AUD \$TBA Single Supplement

Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms with private facilities in 4-star hotels
- Meals as indicated in the tour itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch & D=dinner
- Drinks at welcome and farewell meals. Other meals may not have drinks included.
- Transportation by air-conditioned coach
- Boat tour of Lake Ohrid to the Museum on Water in the Bay of Bones, ferry from Sarandë to Corfu.
- Porterage of one piece of luggage per person at hotels (porterage is NOT available at some hotels, and for the ferry from Sarandë to Corfu)
- Lecture and site-visit program; tour reference material/notes
- National Guide in Greece, North Macedonia and Albania
- Entrance fees
- Use of audio headsets during site visits
- Tips for the coach driver, National Guide and restaurants for included meals

Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia-Thessaloniki, Corfu-Athens-Australia
- Evening meals & lunches not indicated in the tour itinerary
- Personal spending money
- Arrival & departure airport transfers
- Luggage in excess of 20kg (44lbs)
- Travel insurance
- Visas (if applicable)



Fitness Criteria & Practical Information

Fitness Level 

Level 3 - Challenging

Among our most physically demanding

You must be able to:

- manage at least five to seven hours of physical activity per day with ease.
- walk at a regular to moderate pace; some days for at least 5-7km, over terrain which may include rocky and uneven paths, sometimes with steep steps or inclines.
- negotiate challenging historic and archaeological sites many of which are large and unsheltered and include several flights of steps.
- stand for one to two hours during visits to galleries and museums without the need to sit.
- cope with a demanding tour schedule which includes some longer days, several early morning starts, two one-night stays, extensive coach travel and 4WD excursion to the Treskavec Monastery.
- board/alight coaches, the ferry to Corfu and small boats for excursions on Lake Ohrid.
- withstand varying climatic conditions including heat and humidity.
- handle a shower over a bath; walk-in showers may not be available at all hotels.
- manage your own luggage at some hotels and for the Sarandë-Corfu ferry.

Fitness Levels

Please also view the fitness criteria required for our tours, graded from Level 1 to Level 3, at www.asatours.com.au/fitness-level/

All ASA tours are active programs suitable for people with a good level of mental and physical fitness and good mobility. They are not suitable for people who lack stamina, have difficulty walking at the group's pace or who have mobility issues. An unavoidable aspect of every tour is the need to manage walking, stair-climbing and standing for long periods of time.

It is a condition of travel that all participants agree to accept ASA's directions in relation to their suitability to participate in activities undertaken on the tour, and that ASA retains the sole discretion to direct a tour participant to refrain from a particular activity on part of the tour. Before enrolling on an ASA tour please read the fitness requirements carefully.

Managing your luggage for the Sarandë – Corfu ferry

You must be able to wheel your own luggage from the coach through the ferry terminal and then onto the ferry where storage racks are available on the ground level. The turn-around time for ferries is extremely efficient and therefore you need to be able to board the ferry with your luggage without delays.

Booking Conditions

ASA INTENTION TO TRAVEL APPLICATION FORM

Some ASA tours fill almost immediately. Don't miss out! You can register your 'Intention to Travel' by completing this application and returning this to ASA with a AUD \$200.00 per person deposit. Once the tour price has been published, the itinerary and ASA Reservation Application Form will be sent to you. From the time you receive the itinerary you will have two weeks to either:

- Send us a completed ASA Reservation Application Form together with an additional deposit of AUD \$800.00 per person. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation. At this time your deposit of AUD \$1000.00 is subject to the tour's Booking Conditions.

Or

- CANCEL your Intention to Travel in writing. ASA will refund your AUD \$200.00 per person deposit, less a \$66.00 service fee (including GST).



Intention to Travel Application

TOUR NAME _____
TOUR DATES _____

Booking before the tour price is available

Some ASA tours fill almost immediately. Don't miss out! You can register your 'Intention to Travel' by completing this application and returning this to ASA with a AUD\$200.00 per person deposit. Once the tour price has been published, the itinerary and ASA Reservation Application Form will be sent to you. From the time you receive the itinerary you will have two weeks to either:

- Send us a completed ASA Reservation Application Form together with an additional deposit of AUD\$800.00 per person applicable for International tours OR AUD\$300.00 per person applicable for Australian tours. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation. At this time your full deposit is subject to the tour's Booking Conditions.

OR

- Cancel your Intention to Travel in writing. ASA will refund your AUD\$200.00 per person deposit, less a \$66.00 service fee (including GST).

Applicant Details (as in passport)

TITLE Mr Mrs Ms Miss Dr Other _____
FIRST NAME _____ Preferred FIRST NAME _____
MIDDLE NAME _____ SURNAME _____
POSTAL ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ COUNTRY _____ POSTCODE _____
TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____
EMAIL address _____
Date of birth / / _____ GENDER Male Female

Tour Accommodation (rooming preferences)

I/we would like: a twin-bedded room a double-bedded room a room for sole occupancy
I am travelling: on my own with a friend/family member Travel Companion _____

Meals

I do not have any specific dietary requests

Please **X** the box if you **CAN NOT** eat any of the following:

fish poultry red meat dairy products

eggs pork nuts

Other _____

Correspondence

Your preferred method of correspondence Postal Mail Email Address _____

Participation Criteria

To participate in an ASA tour, you must be reasonably fit, in good health and able to participate in all activities without assistance from Tour Leaders or other tour members. If you require assistance, a fit and able travel companion must undertake to accompany and assist you with all tasks for the duration of the whole tour.

ASA's ability to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your specific needs, your health and safety and the health and safety of other tour members, is of paramount importance to us. For this reason the ASA Reservation Application includes a Medical Information section. As a general guideline, you must be able to accomplish each of these activities *without assistance or support*:-

- walk & stand unassisted for at least 2-3 hours a day in hot, humid conditions
- walk confidently on and over uneven surfaces
- climb at least 3 flights of stairs
- embark and disembark from ferries, buses and trains
- walk up and down steep slopes
- walk at a steady pace and no less than 1 km every 15 - 20 minutes
- organise, manage and carry your own luggage
- follow and remember tour instructions
- meet punctually at designated times and places
- administer your own medication.

Applicant's Signature _____

Dated _____



Intention to Travel Payment

Tour / Course Name

Name of Traveller 1 _____

Name of Traveller 2 _____

I have enclosed a payment to the value of \$ _____ (including CC or bank fee if applicable) for this tour

Payment by (please indicate): Cheque Direct Debit (see below) Credit Card (see below)

International Payments

Welcome to our international travellers! If you are making a payment and do not have an Australian bank account/credit card, we can only accept payment as follows:

- via credit card with the applicable fee - the credit card company/bank will set the exchange rate
- via bank transfer; please give your surname and tour code (eg. Smith 21705) as a reference and ask your bank to allow for all charges.

Bank cheques or personal cheques will not be accepted.

By Cheque (accept Australian cheques only)

Please make cheques payable to *Australians Studying Abroad*

Direct Deposit or Internet Banking

You will need to:

1. Provide your bank with ASA's bank details (see below) and the amount you wish to transfer OR make a direct deposit through any ANZ branch
2. Include any fees levied by the banks
3. Provide a reference number (Mobile or last name recommended).
4. Complete section below, including confirmation no. (given when transaction completed).

Australians Studying Abroad bank details

Bank ANZ
Branch 420 St Kilda Road, Melbourne Vic
Swift Code ANZBAU3M
BSB 013-423
Account No 3472-32759

Bank confirmation No. _____

Reference used: Mobile or last name recommended

Date Money Transferred _____

Credit Card Payment

Credit card fees apply: Mastercard, Visa & American Express 2%

Please debit my: Mastercard Visa American Express

I authorise ASA to debit my credit card for the amount due plus the applicable fee as above

Credit Card Number _____

Expiry Date _____ Security Code (CVC) _____

Bank the Card is linked to (eg. NAB or ANZ) _____

Cardholders Name _____

Cardholders Billing Address _____

Postcode _____

State _____ Country _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Cardholders Signature _____

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