



18 Wonderful Days **Sofia to Athens** **Mountains, Myths & Ancient Empires featuring Macedonia, Greece, Corfu & Meteora**

Explore incredible mountain monasteries and historic sites

Chasms, mountains, blue lakes and Greek temples

From beautiful Sofia, wind your way all the way down the Balkan Peninsula, relaxing in Macedonia, touching Albania and really getting beneath that tourist veneer in Greece. In Bulgaria enjoy a visit to the exquisite Rila Monastery before lunch beside a tumbling river. In Macedonia relax in Alexander the Great's Skopje, with its enormous statues, and grand old Turkish Bazaar before cruising under the cliffs of the gorgeous Matka Canyon to the Vrelo Caves. Relax over three nights beside the shores of delightful Lake Ohrid, take in the panoramic views of the lake from Tsar Samuel's Fortress, enjoy a lake cruise to visit Naum Monastery, the Freshwater springs and lakeside lunch. Discover the UNESCO listed 'Bay of Bones' reconstructed village built of wooden piles sunk into the crystal-clear lake waters, drive deep into Greece's spectacular Pindos Mountains to stay three nights in the fabulous, multi award winning Aristi Mountain Resort. Explore the UNESCO listed Zagori region known for its steep mountains and cliffs, perched Monasteries, stone bridges and timeless feeling remote villages, and dine on a shady terrace with views across the enormous Vikos Gorge. Visit Corfu, explore the old town and take an exclusive 4WD tour deep into the mountains, for a remote village lunch. Stay 2 nights in Kalabaka and visit three of Meteora's amazing, perched monasteries, visit Delphi's incredible ruins and dine in a shady restaurant high over the olive tree filled plains and the Sea of Corinth. At Thermopylae, take in the site of the famous Spartan stand against the Persians and spend a final night beside the beach nearby beautiful Cape Sounion. After a refreshing dip in the crystal-clear sea, relax through the evening beside the magnificent 2,500-year-old, cliff top ruins of the Temple of Poseidon and take in the awesome sunset spilling over the Aegean Islands. What an adventure!



Travel in a first-class air-conditioned touring coach



A complimentary glass of wine, beer or soft drink with all included dinners
30 meals including breakfast daily (B), 4 lunches (L) and 9 evening meals (D)
Welcome drink on Day 1



Hotel portorage of 1 bag per person (where available)
17 nights specially selected hotel accommodation
Free WiFi at most hotels (where available)



ALL tips for your Tour Manager, Driver and Local Guides
Local guides as described in the itinerary
Fully escorted by our experienced Tour Manager
Personal audio system whilst on tour (where available)



ALL excursions, scenic drives, sightseeing and entrances as described



Sofia Welcome

Day 1



Grand Hotel Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria



D

Your tour commences this evening in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. If you have arrived today on your international flight, experience tells us it is best to keep active through this afternoon and Sofia is such a delightful city at this time of year with so much to see and do. Dinner tonight is included but first enjoy a welcome drink. This is an ideal opportunity to meet your Tour Manager and fellow travellers. Your hotel is in an excellent central location so it's easy for you to walk to all the sights nearby.

Did you know... *Two departures of our amazing 19-day Crossroads of Balkan Empires featuring Romania & Transylvania, Serbia & Bulgaria tour end in Sofia on the same day, in the same hotel that this tour starts? Perfectly timed so you can combine these two incredible tours together and create one enormous experience!*

Stunning Rila Monastery and riverside Bulgarian lunch

Day 2



Grand Hotel Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria



B,L

Heading south we enter the Rila National Park to visit the UNESCO Heritage listed Rila Monastery. Surrounded by nature and nestled in the mountains this extraordinary, serene monastery is the spiritual, cultural and religious centre for all Bulgarians. Dating back 1,000 years, much was re-built a 'mere' 500 years ago, and the vibrant, coloured frescoed walls and ceilings were added later. They are visually stunning and outstanding! Orthodox Monasteries are always visually beautiful, however at Rila they are exceptional. Fortunately, we have ample time to absorb the beauty. Just down the road from the Monastery we have included a relaxing lunch of authentic Bulgarian cuisine on a restaurant terrace near the river. Heading back to Sofia, the remainder of your afternoon and evening is free.

Mount Vodno, The Millenium Cross and Skopje tour

Day 3



Hotel Senigallia, Skopje, North Macedonia



B,D

Heading into Macedonia we arrive at its capital, Skopje, around lunchtime. First stop will be on top of Mount Vodno with its 360-degree, panoramic views across the Macedonian countryside and down onto Skopje city. Here we also find the Millennium Cross. Later we are joined by a local guide for a short walking tour of the pedestrian city centre. Our hotel for the next 2 nights is right in the absolute heart of the city. Called the Senigallia, it is a really quirky hotel located in a building that looks just like an old Spanish Galleon. Being like a boat they naturally built it in the Vardar River, right in the very heart of town. What a stunning location being 100 meters to the main square and the famous Stone Bridge, and the old Bazaar area is about 300 metres in the other direction. As you would expect with a boat, you will sleep in gorgeous wooden cabins, the restaurant and bar are on the open, but shaded decks. The food and service are excellent. This will be one of the most memorable hotels you will ever stay in. Dinner tonight is 'on board', on deck with views directly onto the famous Stone Bridge and the Bridge of Civilizations in Macedonia with its lines of statues. At night the view across the river on to the gorgeously illuminated Archaeological Museum and Arts complex are outstanding.

Alexander the Great and 'My Time' in Skopje

Day 4



Hotel Senigallia, Skopje, North Macedonia



B

Your day is completely free. 'My Time' to do as much or as little as you want. The famous Stone Bridge, built in 1469 by the Ottoman Sultan is approximately 100 metres away from your hotel, and it sits at the entrance to the impressive, pedestrian friendly Macedonia Square. Right in the middle of the square is an absolutely massive statue of Macedonia's favourite child - Alexander the Great. Cross the Stone Bridge and within minutes you pass the massive statue of Alexander's father Phillip, before entering the cobbled streets and alleys of the fabulous Old Bazaar, also known as the Turkish Bazaar. Here you will discover market stalls and shops selling souvenirs and clothes standing next to galleries, mosques and museums. Dining out in the Bazaar is such a pleasure with lots of traditional and modern restaurants and bars. Make sure you relax in one of the numerous cafes sipping a Turkish Coffee whilst watching the world go by. What a fabulous, relaxing day.

Matka Canyon cruise, Vrelo Cave and Tsar Samuel's Fortress

Day 5



Inex Olgica Hotel & Spa, Lake Ohrid



B,L,D

After a leisurely start we soon see signs for Matka Canyon. Here we board a boat to gently glide down the length of this incredibly beautiful canyon. Matka is a natural canyon where they created an artificial lake nearly 90 years ago, when they dammed the Treska River. Little did they know that with its steep mountain slopes above the peaceful waterway, that it would become a place renowned for its serenity and beauty. Halfway along the gorge we disembark to visit the Vrelo Caves. Known for having one of the deepest underwater cave systems in the world, we visit the main illuminated halls of stalactites and stalagmites which are easily accessible. Back on board we cruise back down the canyon. Beautiful!

Reboarding our coach we continue towards Ohrid, stopping at Gostivar to enjoy lunch in a picturesque restaurant beside the tumbling Vardar River.

On arrival in Ohrid, where we stay three nights, we make a visit to Tsar Samuel's Fortress to enjoy the panoramic views down onto Ohrid town and along the beautiful lake. Dinner tonight is in our hotel.

'My Time' beside Lake Ohrid

Day 6



Inex Olgica Hotel & Spa, Lake Ohrid



B

Lake Ohrid is so beautiful, the water crystal clear and inviting, the port and old town so enjoyable, the quayside is littered with umbrellaed restaurants and cafes, it just begs for a full free day to explore, shop, and indulge in relaxation. 'My Time' at its best. Perhaps stay active and enjoy the coastal walk to Kaneo. Snaking its way along the coast, on land and on boardwalks, you will follow the cool translucent water to Kaneo Fishing Village with its restaurants and tavernas. Completing the walk up to the old stone Church of Sveti Jovan is a must. It is not a long coastal walk, but it is so rewarding, however if your legs are tired you can always catch a small water taxi there, or back!

Lake cruise and lunch, Naum Monastery, Natural Springs and Bay of Bones

Day 7



Inex Olgica Hotel & Spa, Lake Ohrid



B,L

What a day out we have planned for you. On a couple of privately hired boats we will cruise to the bottom of the lake and back! As we cruise south the mountains rear high to our left and on our right is the rugged Albanian coastline. Our first stop will be at the UNESCO listed 'Bay of Bones' Museum. This is a re-creation of a prehistoric pile-dwelling village dating back to between 1,200 and 600-years BC. The village, surrounded by incredibly clear water, sits above the submerged archaeological site, and so far some 6,000 wooden piles have been detected. It is fascinating to wander around this wooden platform village which shows the life of this fishing community so long ago. At the foot of the lake, we disembark to visit the Macedonian Orthodox Monastery of Naum which was established in the Bulgarian Empire way back in the year 905! Later we enjoy a visit to the nearby crystal clear, freshwater springs, which bubble out of the mountain and feed and fill Lake Ohrid. Reboarding our boat, we cruise up the coast to the tiny lakeside village of Trpejca where we have included lunch in a restaurant beside the lake. How wonderful! Last stop of the day will be at the Church of Mother Mary of Zaum, which is only accessible by boat.

Korçë in Albania, Kastoria and extraordinary Aristi

Day 8



Aristi Mountain Resort & Villas, Aristi



B,D

Driving the length of the lake we enter Albania and enjoy a morning stop in the town of Korçë. Later we continue to the lakeside village of Kastoria. Along the lakeside there are a number of cafes and restaurants, and this makes a perfect stop for a leisurely lunch in a pretty location.

In the afternoon let's get wild, as we head deep into the Pindos Mountains to the UNESCO listed region of Zagori. Known for its steep mountains and cliffs with perched Monasteries, remote villages, stone bridges and that timeless feeling. Right in the heart of the region is the little village of Aristi and this is where we stay for the next three nights.

Where do we stay? Somewhere really special – the Aristi Mountain Resort and Villas. How lovely is this resort? Amongst many awards it has been 6 times awarded as “World's Leading Eco-Lodge”, in World Travel Awards. In their own words, “The experience at Aristi Mountain Resort & Villas transcends mere accommodation, as it is an immersive journey, where comfort converges with the timeless beauty of the Greek mountains.” Using local materials, like stone and wood the resort blends into the village hillside. Here you will also find sauna, spa, a treatments centre, indoor and outdoor pools. Amazing facilities for what is such a small intimate resort. Your bedrooms all have fantastic mountain views.

This evening dinner will be on the terrace of the award-winning Salvia restaurant. The views are across the valley to the canyon are magnificent. Named after the indigenous herb Salvia, known for its medicinal and aromatic properties in the Zagori area, many ingredients featured in the dishes come from their on-site greenhouse and organic garden.

Ancient Stone Bridges, Oxia viewpoint and Monodendri village

Day 9



Aristi Mountain Resort & Villas, Aristi



B

Today we discover the amazing Vikos Gorge. But first we visit a couple of the historical stone bridges that litter the area, including the Lazaridi Kontodimou Bridge which was built back in 1753 and Kyr Noutsos. These beautiful single span, arched bridges cross deep, craggy gorges and were built to connect the various mountain villages. Each is quite striking and set in wild locations, they are quite easily accessible by foot, and you will have time to explore them.

Next stop will be at the Oxia viewpoint. After a very short walk you will come to the lookout and the mighty Vikos Canyon falls far away beneath you. Utterly stunning! According to the Guinness Book of Records the 32-kilometre long Vikos Canyon is the ‘deepest canyon in the world – relative to its width’. Really striking.

At nearby Monodendri we will pause for free time for lunch. The village square is typical of the villages in the Zagori being centred around a magnificent Plane Tree. Allowing you plenty of time, you can take a walk (600 metres) to the tiny Monastery of Agia Paraskevi, set on the cliffs with a small terrace overhanging another section of the Vikos Gorge.

Later we return to our Award-winning hotel where the rest of the afternoon and evening is free. Maybe stroll down to one of the Tavernas in Aristi village or relax and enjoy your hotel's excellent swimming pool and spa facilities. Or maybe just sit on the Salvia Restaurant terrace, sip some wine and enjoy the huge panoramic views across to ‘Snake Road’!

Vikos, a refreshing swim and dinner in a mountain village

Day 10



Aristi Mountain Resort & Villas, Aristi



B,D

Today is very much about what you want to do, getting the best out of nature, your resort and your special surroundings. After a very leisurely start we will drive across to the far side of the valley and wind our way along the mountainside to the village of Vikos, which sits beside the canyon. You will have time at leisure in Vikos, take in the views, before returning to the resort for the afternoon. For those interested we will drop you down at the picturesque river bend on the Voidomatis River to enjoy a freshwater swim and relax for an hour or so.

This evening, we will take the ‘Snake Road’, winding our way up 17 hairpin bends to the mountain village of Megalo Papingo where we have included dinner in a restaurant on their vine covered terrace. As the sun wanes, the rocks and cliffs turn golden and the views across to the illuminated, mountains are outstanding. Ouzo anyone?

Ferry across the Ionian Sea to Kerkyra - Corfu

Day 11



Divani Corfu Palace Hotel, Corfu



B,D

We leave the Zagori region of the Pindos Mountains and travel down to the coast where, at Igoumenitsa we catch the ferry* across to the idyllic Greek Island of Corfu, where we stay the next three nights. Set in the Ionian Sea, Corfu town is known for its stone paved pedestrian streets and pastel-coloured Venetian architecture. On the front is a landscaped esplanade and above town overlooking the harbour is a 15th-century old Fortress. Our hotel is located a short drive from Corfu's UNESCO-listed historic centre.

**Please note that we will be travelling on the ferry to Corfu as foot passengers, and there is no luggage portorage available. But do not worry as the process is really easy as we can easily wheel our luggage up the long, broad ramps and store the bags together on board.*

Corfu Walking Tour, Corfiot products and 'My Time'

Day 12



Divani Corfu Palace Hotel, Corfu



B

This morning, we are joined by a local guide who will take us on a walking tour of the old town. Corfu town is really pretty with paved streets, historical character buildings, stone arched arcades sheltering shops, boutiques and cafes, and in the evening it is so pretty and such a pleasure to enjoy the 'promenading'. During our walking tour we have included the sampling and tasting of a variety of Corfiot (local Corfu) products including the likes of numbulo (smoked and cured pork), sikomaida (flavoured figs), locally grown kumquat, olives & mantola (sugared almonds). Yum! The rest of your day and evening is free – wonderful 'My Time' to explore this splendid historical town at your own pace.

Full Day 4WD 'Wild Corfu' tour, mountain village lunch

Day 13



Divani Corfu Palace Hotel, Corfu



B,L

There is nothing like a day in the mountains! We have a big adventure day planned for you as we have arranged a full day 4 WD tour of the stunning northern region of the island. Driving in convoy, we will experience both on-road and off-road driving, as we head away from the tourist spots and into the hills and mountains, delve into quaint villages, visit an olive mill and an ancient Monastery. We begin with a scenic drive to Vistonas village, where the Enotis olive mill invites you to enjoy a tasting and to immerse yourself in the rich heritage of olive cultivation. Later we will enjoy a coffee break in charming Sokraki village, and you will have opportunity to stroll through its streets, soaking in the authenticity of rural Corfu life. Time to kick in the adventure with an awe-inspiring journey, with stunning vistas, to visit the historic and spiritual Pantokrator Monastery. Next, we experience an exhilarating off-road drive above Sinies, pausing for photos, on our way to Old Perithia, a village oozing ambience and frozen in time, where we indulge in a leisurely lunch, savouring local delicacies. From here we return to our hotel, taking in the island's picturesque landscapes. What a magnificent day!

Mainland Greece to Meteora Panoramic Drive

Day 14



Divani Meteora Hotel, Kalabaka



B,D

Taking the ferry back to mainland Greece we drive inland to reach Kalabaka, located on the doorstep of the fabulous Meteora Monasteries. On arrival we have included an orientation drive, with photo stops, to take in the amazing, rock perched Monasteries. The fascinating thing about these Monasteries is that they are perched amongst a series of huge rocky outcrops, that distinctly jut out from the very different surrounding countryside. Riddled with ancient hermit caves, oozing history and religious sanctity, this orientation drive will perfectly set up your visits throughout tomorrow. The views from Sunset Rock take in a sweeping panorama of 5 of these 6 monasteries. Fantastic! Our hotel for the next two nights is in Kalabaka. What better way to round off the afternoon than a dip in the hotel's very large pool with its inviting bar and lounge chairs?

Day 15 Suspended in the air - UNESCO Meteora Monasteries

Day 15



Divani Meteora Hotel, Kalabaka



B

The most important thing to note is that most of the Meteora Monasteries are famously perched high on almost inaccessible sandstone pillars. In fact, the Greek word Meteora means “suspended in the air”. Therefore, to access the more dramatic sites usually entails a walk of between 150 and 300 steps down – and then the same up to the monastery. Later of course you must retrace your steps. We have planned a special day with three different monastery visits, each with different levels of ease of access. The first visit of the day will be to the Holy Monastery of Great Meteoron. Founded in the 14th century by Saint Athanasios the Meteorite this is considered the oldest and largest of the Meteoron Monasteries. As with all the monasteries, this ‘male’ monastery holds many amazing frescoes and works of art. Next visit will be the 14th century Monastery of St Stephen which is run by nuns. Unlike other monasteries, St Stephens is really easily accessed by a small stone bridge directly from the car park. Inside again are monastic cells, places of worship and contemplation, frescoes and paintings. Last visit of the day will be one contrastingly run by nuns, the Monastery of Rousanou. Dating back to 1545, the access is relatively easy with a shady uphill walk, noticeably less steps, to a bridge, with some dramatic drops! Inside everything is quite tiny, with small chapels and prayer rooms, all gorgeously decorated from floor to across the ceilings with frescoes, icons and paintings. Three visits, a series of astounding views, what a terrific day!

Thermopylae, Ancient Delphi and Dinner with a View

Day 16



Amalia Hotel, Delphi, Central Greece



B,D

This morning, we head south to the famous ancient Greek city of Delphi. Enroute we will stop at Thermopylae, the site of the famous battle in 480 BC between the Spartan 300 and the massed might of the Persian Emperor Xerxes. Here you will see the statue of the Spartan King Leonidas, and the museum and café make a perfect mid-morning stop. Make sure you watch the short 3D video of the battle. Later we continue to Delphi, arriving around lunchtime. We have left the afternoon free for you to relax in your hotel, maybe around the pool, and escape the afternoon heat. Late afternoon we will visit the famous archaeological ruins on the edge of town. The museum is absolutely fabulous, with some amazing marble sculptures discovered in the vast Greek temple ruins that ascend the hillside behind. Timing is everything and with the crowds long gone, exploring the ruins and visiting the temple of the Oracle of Delphi is such a pleasure. As a finale we have included dinner in a shaded cliff top Greek restaurant with massive views down across the plains of olive trees to the Gulf of Corinth in the distance.

Cape Sounion ‘My Time’ & Famous Temple of Poseidon Sunset

Day 17



Plaza Resort Hotel, Anavyssos Beach



B,D

After a leisurely start we head south, bypassing Athens, to the serene coastal town of Anavyssos, with stunning views of the Saronic Gulf. Arriving around lunchtime we settle into our hotel where we stay our final night. Our 5 star hotel is located on the sandy shores of Anavyssos Beach with stunning views of the Aegean Sea and boasts a private sandy beach and an outdoor pool surrounded by lush green gardens. Perfect for that refreshing dip in the glittering blue Aegean Sea. Your afternoon is completely free. ‘My Time’ -what a location to enjoy an afternoon of pleasure and leisure!

A short drive around the beautiful bay brings us to Cape Sounion on the tip of the mainland and the place of myths and legends. Cape Sounion has a rich history and is home to the magnificent 5th century BC ruins of the ancient Temple of Poseidon. The current temple was re-built 2,500 years ago after the Persians destroyed an earlier version, Lord Byron enthused about it in his poems, and most famously King Aegeus, incorrectly believing his son Theseus had been killed by the Minotaur, threw himself off the cliffs. In tribute, that is why the Sea became known as ‘the Aegean’!

This evening, we have an incredible treat for you as we take you to Cape Sounion and up to the Temple of Poseidon to bathe in the world famous sunset. Equally as famous as any sunset you will find in the Greek Islands the sunsets are spectacular. Literally find yourself a rock or an ancient piece of marble to sit on, gaze out as the sea and sky take in the vibrant colours, whilst the ebbing sun turns the Doric columns of the ancient Greek Temple first yellow, then orange and gold. With the last rays of the sun depleted we return to our hotel for our farewell dinner. What an utterly memorable day and evening.

Transfer to Athens – Tour ends

Day 18



Plaza Resort Hotel, Anavyssos Beach



B

Sadly, your tour ends after breakfast. We have included a group transfer to Athens Airport and the Athens city centre. Whilst the airport is not far, we recommend you book flights that depart after 2.00 p.m. The city centre drop off point is Royal Olympic Hotel, located a short stroll from Syntagma Square.

Hand Selected Experiences

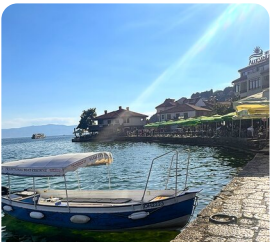
These are just a few of the very special hand selected experiences that will really make your touring experience exceptional and unique, and don't forget, with Albatross they are always included.



Rila
UNESCO Heritage
listed Orthodox
Monastery



**Matka Canyon &
Vrelo Caves**
Canyon cruise & Cave
visit



Lake Ohrid
Boat cruise along the
crystal clear water of
Lake Ohrid & lunch in
a lakeside village



Bay of Bones
Visit the UNESCO
listed 'Bay of Bones'
Museum



**Aristi Mountain
Resort**
Enjoy a fabulous 3
night stay in the multi
award winning Aristi
Mountain Resort and
Villas.



Vikos Gorge
Stunning Vikos
Canyon – 'the Grand
Canyon of Greece'



Megalo Papingo
Drive the 'Snake Road'
to enjoy dinner on the
vine covered terrace
of a village Taverna



Corfu
Sample and taste
typical 'Corfiot' local
products



Corfu Mountains
A 4WD mountain
adventure



Meteora
Suspended in the air -
UNESCO Meteora
Monasteries



Delphi
Dinner with a view



Cape Sounion
Temple of Poseidon
Sunset

Dates and Prices

Correct as of 01:29 on 23rd December 2025

Start Date End Date Twin Price Solo Price Guaranteed to Depart

12 Jun 2026	29 Jun 2026	AUD\$14,887	AUD\$18,887	✓	Space Available
21 Aug 2026	07 Sep 2026	AUD\$14,887	AUD\$18,887	✓	Space Available
11 Sep 2026	28 Sep 2026	AUD\$14,887	AUD\$18,887	✓	Space Available
11 Jun 2027	28 Jun 2027	TBC	TBC		Pre-Register
20 Aug 2027	06 Sep 2027	TBC	TBC		Pre-Register
10 Sep 2027	27 Sep 2027	TBC	TBC		Pre-Register

* The itinerary and hotels featured are based on 2026 tour departures and may be subject to change. Any questions, please contact our European Tour Specialists for further details.

Tour Suitability

- In mid-summer, the heat may be energy sapping.
- There are a number of beautiful towns and historic sites we visit which require exploring on foot.
- You will be required to hop on and off 4WD vehicles.
- In this itinerary there will be the use of smaller chartered boats. Porterage or assistance is unavailable. Whilst not actually very difficult to do I do need to point out that you must be able to wheel your own bags on and off the ferries without assistance.

Please refer to our Tour Suitability section for more information.

Terms & Conditions

- Information provided is true and correct at time of issue. Airfares not included. For further details please contact your consultant or full terms and conditions may be found at www.albatrosstours.com.au/booking-conditions. Albatross Tours ABN 45 010 585 143. ATIA Accreditation No: A11341. CATO Accreditation No. 69562707