

The Balkans

Departs
10th September 2025

Blue Dot Travel





\$14,860 pp

Twin-share, excludes
international flights
Single supp \$1,800

THE BALKANS

MACEDONIA, ALBANIA, MONTENEGRO, SLOVENIA, SERBIA, CROATIA, AND BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

The Balkans is a sprawling peninsula which derives its name from the Turkish word meaning 'a chain of wooded mountains'. Those mountains are the Balkans, a place where farming first reached Europe way back in the Neolithic era.

To the west is the Adriatic Sea, with the Mediterranean Sea to the south and the Black Sea to the east. It is perhaps easier to think of the Balkan States as "South-eastern Europe". Wholly or partially on the peninsula, the region is made up of many fascinating countries. Our tour includes seven of them – Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia and Serbia. Their polyglot nature has been forged in turn by the Greeks, Romans and Slavs, and even fell part of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century. A genuine cultural crossroads, the Balkan region was where Orthodoxy met Christianity, and Christianity met Islam.

While many of these names have been synonymous with political turmoil in modern history (Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo in 1914, sparking the First World War), the current reality is a collection of countries and cultures now relishing their own identities, and enjoying a resurgence of interaction with the outside world. The region is rich in pre-history and history, with Neanderthal relics found in many areas, plus many towns still with dramatic mediaeval fortifications in place.

While typically characterised by peaceful mountainous terrain, many of these Balkan destinations feature pristine coastlines and seascapes, affording dazzling variety as you travel seamlessly from one country to another. Many of the places we visit are not yet popular with tourists, but this will change.

Are you ready for this journey of surprise and delight?



**Wednesday 10th September
DEPARTURE**

Depart Australia for Belgrade—flights to be confirmed (most likely via Dubai).



**Day 1, Thursday
11th September
BELGRADE,
SERBIA**

Welcome to Serbia's capital city. You'll be transferred to your hotel on arrival to check in and freshen up. Today begins with

a Belgrade city tour. Belgrade fascinates with its history - its seven centuries have been so eventful that it's difficult to single out the most important episodes. We'll stop briefly by Parliament and the Royal Palace, then visit St. Mark's Church, the Cathedral of St. Sava and the Old Cathedral - one of the largest religious edifices in Europe. The tour includes the Serbian National Library, National Theatre and Republic Square. Enjoy an official welcome dinner and overnight in Belgrade. **D**

**Day 2, Friday 12th September
BELGRADE**

After breakfast, continue our tour of Belgrade and the key highlights including Bel-Grade Fortress. This

landmark, literally enthroned upon the city, 50 meters high, can be seen from afar and shapes the skyline. It dates back to the 15th century. Today, it hosts many museums and sights. From the walls of the fortress opens a spectacular view of the confluence of the Sava and the Danube rivers. Seven similar fortresses on the Danube were built on Serbian territory. This fact confirms the great importance of this area at the intersection of cultures and political influences between the Orient and the Occident. Afterwards, we head to the region of Sumadija where, 80 km south of Belgrade, in a small town where ground-breaking historical events took place. Founded in 1781, after only 20 years of its foundation, Topola became the capital of the First Serbian Insurrection. It is in the middle of the picturesque hinterland, surrounded by forests and meadows. Topola has strong ties with Oplenac, a volcanic hill that still belongs to the descendants of the Serbian royal family. Return to Belgrade. **B/D**

**Day 3, Saturday 13th September
SARAJEVO, BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA**

Today, we head to Sarajevo - a vibrant city in the heart of Bosnia and Herzegovina, known for its rich history, stunning architecture, and captivating culture. Upon checking into the hotel, we'll begin a city tour by visiting Marshal Tito's Barracks, Avaz Business Tower, and the Parliament. Strolling through the old town, you will feel all the different cultures shaping today's city. The

Venetians, Byzantines, Ottomans, and Austrians all had a hand in creating the present image of Sarajevo. Stroll the Bascarsija district, where the famous bazaar is located. Visit the place of the fatal assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, as well as the town hall and “House of Defiance”. Sarajevo has a deep spiritual ambience, so we visit worship houses of various religions: the oldest preserved mosque in the country - Beg Mosque, the old Serbian Orthodox Church, the Synagogue and the Catholic Cathedral. Overnight in Sarajevo. *B/D*



 **Day 4, Sunday
14th
September
SARAJEVO AND
MOSTAR**

Today we are going to learn about the tragic recent Bosnian history. At the end of the 20th century, the

country was engulfed in war, and its capital endured an exhausting 3-year siege. The city was cut off from the rest of Bosnia. To rescue the capital from this disaster, a tunnel was constructed to connect Sarajevo with the neighbourhoods controlled by Bosniaks. This underground tunnel saved the citizens from starvation and provided the chance to escape from the deadly fire of war. We will visit the museum ‘Tunnel of Hope’ in the house where the entrance to the tunnel is hidden. Among other things, you will see the weapons used during the siege and walk a few steps through the tunnel to get an idea of what the refugees might have felt stepping towards their rescue. Afterwards, we will be moving to the oriental-inspired city of Mostar. The whole city center of Mostar is UNESCO World Heritage Listed. Cobblestoned streets and splendid nature around will captivate you from the first second. The landmark of the city is the famous Old Bridge over the Neretva. Its history dates back to the 16th century, but in 1993 it was destroyed by the Bosnian War and rebuilt within ten years. Since then, the bridge has symbolised peaceful coexistence among different nations. Here we also visit the old Turkish quarter Kujundziluk with typical Turkish houses. Lunch is included today in the local guest house in Lahij. Then, we’ll drive to Sheki and have a tea stop with the locals. In Sheki, visit the Albanian church, which is located in Kish village. As the legend says, this church is the first Christian church built not only on the territory of Caucasian Albania but in general - in the whole of Transcaucasia. Dinner at a local restaurant near the hotel. Check-in for one night in Sheki. *B/L/D*



**Day 5, Monday 15th
September
ZAGREB, CROATIA**

Welcome to Zagreb – a charming city with an Austro-Hungarian past that is felt everywhere, from architecture to

cuisine. After check-in and a short break, the group will explore Zagreb by foot. We’ll get to know the main sights of the Croatian capital: Upper Town, National Theatre,

St. Mark’s Church with its mosaic roof, perfectly preserved Stone Gates, and the Cathedral of the Assumption, towering into the sky. Overnight in Zagreb. *B/D*



**Day 6, Tuesday 16th September
PLITVICE LAKES**

After breakfast, we’ll head to the main natural wonder of Croatia – Plitvice Lakes. It is an area with exceptional natural beauty and Croatia’s oldest and largest national park. In 1979, Plitvice Lakes became a UNESCO World Heritage site. This is one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the world, with crystal cascades and waterfalls created by 16 different lakes. We will visit some popular routes to admire Mother Nature’s finest work. Return to Zagreb in the evening. *B/D*

**Day 7, Wednesday
17th September
LJUBLJANA,
SLOVENIA**

Surrounded by the hills and ice-capped Alps, Ljubljana is one of the few European capitals where peace and quiet prevail over noise and hectic pace. After we check into the hotel, we’ll stroll the narrow streets of Old City and the medieval Ljubljana castle on the hill. The main decoration of the town square is the Baroque fountain of the three rivers of Carniola. We also walk through central Preseren Square—the image of the square shapes the baroque Franciscan church. Near it, admire the landmark of the city, the quirky Tromostovje, and three pedestrian bridges over Ljubljanica. We cannot miss visiting the Ljubljana castle. The impregnable fortress towers high above the city. *B/D*



**Day 8, Thursday 18th September
BLED — BOHINI VALLEY — LJUBLJANA**

Today is wholly dedicated to the natural wonders of Slovenia. Our first destination is the town of Bled. The city is a popular Slovenian resort located on the picturesque lake Bled with crystal clear water. We admire the blue pearl of Slovenia from the board of a traditional wooden boat called Pletna. We take a trip to the picturesque island in the middle of the lake and visit the imposing St. Mary’s church, whose bell is said to grant wishes. Our next destination is the Bohinj Valley in the heart of the Julian Alps. In winter, the snow-covered mountain slopes are a paradise for winter sports enthusiasts, and in summer, the picturesque mountain valley attracts alpinists, fishermen, and rafters. Drive back to Ljubljana for dinner. *B/D*

**Day 9, Friday 19th September
ZADAR, CROATIA**

On our way to Zadar we visit Rijeka - a vibrant port city located on the Adriatic coast of Croatia. It is known for its rich history, diverse culture, and beautiful coastal setting. While strolling around Rijeka, you explore its historic streets, admire the panoramic views, and savour the local flavours. Rijeka captivates visitors with its charm and unique character. Overnight in Zadar. *B/D*



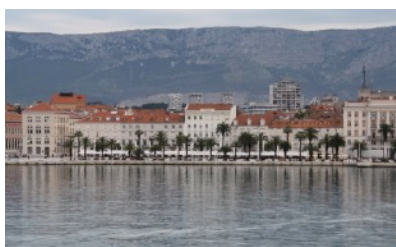
**Day 10, Saturday
20th September
ZADAR**

Zadar is an intriguing city home to a historic old town of Roman ruins, defensive walls, medieval churches, cosmopolitan cafes,

and quality museums set on a small peninsula. Here, we also see one of the most recognisable churches in Croatia - St. Donat's church of the 9th century. Another famous landmark is the ancient ruins of the Roman Forum. You will also witness a sea organ where waves create their own melody. In the afternoon, embark on a captivating journey to one of the picturesque local wineries, where you will learn about the local winemaking process and sample some of the best they have to offer. Overnight in Zadar. *B/D*

**Day 11, Sunday 21st September
ZADAR — SIBENIK — SPLIT**

Explore two other Mediterranean towns as we continue our journey along the coast to Split today. Our first stop is Sibenik (pronounced Shibenik), where we'll stroll through its narrow streets, taking in the charming atmosphere and being captivated by the sight of the impressive St. James Cathedral. It is among a few European cathedrals, fully built only of stone. We also visit one of four Sibenik's fortresses - St. Michaels fort. Sibenik once was one of the most important strategic towns on the Mediterranean. Our next destination, Trogir, dates back to the Greek period. Its architecture was exquisitely complemented by Baroque style. We indulge in the Mediterranean milieu, watching mighty fortress Kamerlengo and St. Laurentius Cathedral. We'll arrive in Split early in the evening in time for dinner. *B/D*



**Day 12,
Monday 22nd
September
SPLIT**

Sitting on the Dalmatian coast, the oldest part of the city is located on the premises of a Roman palace built in the

early 4th century by the emperor Diocletian. These are among the most enigmatic Roman ruins in the world. The imposing St. Domnius Cathedral of the 8th century rises nearby, regarded as the oldest Catholic cathedral in the world, functioning in its original structure. After the architectural combo in the old town, you will have free time to explore the city on your own. You can stroll along Riva – a seafront promenade with bustling cafes, pride of all people from Split or to taste fresh mouth-watering dishes in cozy restaurants. Overnight in Split. *B/L/D*

**Day 13, Tuesday 23rd September
SPLIT — MALI STON**

Today we take the ferry and sail to one of the most beautiful islands of Croatia - Hvar. No wonder it is named 'San Tropez of Croatia' as the wealthy and famous adore spending leisure here. Hvar, except for its

beaches and harbour, is well known for its oldest European theatre, beautiful Renaissance squares and churches, Gothic buildings, wine and olive trees. In the evening, we come to Ston - a charming town in Croatia's picturesque coastline. We'll indulge in its renowned prized delicacy: oysters cultivated in the pristine waters of the Bay of Mali Ston. Check into the lovely hotel in this peaceful village. *B/L/D*

**Day 14,
Wednesday
24th September
STON**

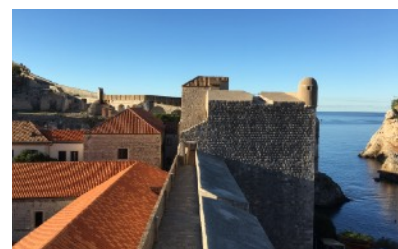
After breakfast, those up for a walk will take a light hike over the hill from Mali Ston to Ston and enjoy a



pleasant stroll through the enchanting streets. Then we will depart for one of the most beautiful cities in Europe - Dubrovnik. Beyond any doubt, one of the best ways to feel the soul of this city is to walk along its majestic defensive walls spanning almost 2 kilometres. The view over the old town and the glimmering Adriatic sea is blissful from their top. We visit some of the forts and feel the atmosphere of those times. Overnight in Dubrovnik. *B/D*

**Day 15,
Thursday 25th
September
DUBROVNIK**

Dubrovnik is everything that the postcards show... and more. The medieval walled city was



completed in the 13th century and has been preserved and rebuilt. The old city of Dubrovnik remains unchanged. Its medieval ramparts encircle the city, which can be entered through two main gates, crossing a stone bridge under the watchful gaze of the city's patron saint, Blaise or Vlaho. The main street of the old city is called Stradun or Placa and is the city's main artery, lined with graceful stone palazzos where people work and live. Heavily damaged during the 1991-92 Serbo-Montenegrin aggression, Dubrovnik is now completely restored. With the support of people worldwide, Dubrovnik has been reclaimed not just as a Croatian treasure but as one of the world's treasures, a fact officially recognised when the United Nations declared it a World Cultural Heritage Site. We'll visit the Franciscan Monastery with its 14th-century pharmacy and the Rector's Palace. You'll have the afternoon free to walk the wall, take the cable car or shop. *B/D*


**Day 16, Friday 26th
September
KOTOR AND THE
BUDVA RIVIERA,
MONTENEGRO**

Today, the world-famous Bay of Kotor awaits us. This unique fjord is hemmed in by cliffs, rippling gulfs and sparkling straits, so you will



definitely fall in love with this gorgeous place. Kotor's impregnable 'Great Wall of Europe' encloses the old town and the mountain towering above. After visiting the core sights and taking a lunch break, we head towards the most famous destination in Montenegro - Budva Riviera. Its history spans around 2500 years, so we may discern Roman ruins in the centre of Budva. But the town reached its height during the rule of the Venetians, who built defensive walls encircling the old town. Discover the three shrines representing various historical epochs and religions on the square of churches. We'll overnight in a small village outside of Budva called Virpazar. **B/D**



 **Day 17, Saturday 27th September**
SKADAR LAKE, ALBANIA

Today, we will explore a secret natural wonder of Europe - Skadar Lake. The

lake is neatly 'spilled' around the mountains and shared by Montenegro and Albania. It is the biggest lake of Southern Europe and one of the most pristine ecosystems in Europe. Virpazar is called the gates to Skadar Lake National Park. It is a small fishing village with a small fortress and breathtaking views. We'll take a boat tour through the wetlands to admire its beauty. After a lunch stop, we will head towards Albania. Welcome to the land between the crescent and the cross! Albania was a no man's land for tourists only a few years ago. The fewer expectations you have when you come here, the more pleasant surprises await you- like rich cultural heritage and exceptionally hospitable people. Driving through Northern Albania, we'll stop in the oldest historical city, Shkodra. Visit the massive ruins of Illyrian Rozafa Castle are perched on a hill above the Buna River. From there, we enjoy a perfect view of the confluence of the Drina and Buna and the nearby national park. Overnight in Tirana. **B/D**



Day 18, Sunday 28th September
TIRANA

Today we look behind the scenes of a city that hides many treasures. Though oversized buildings predominate in the

capital of Albania, there is enough space for wide boulevards and spacious parks. The largest and most important square in Tirana is named after Prince Skanderbeg – a national hero – who stopped the Ottomans' forays into the Balkans in the 15th century. After the fall of Communism, the mayor was tired of the grey dreariness of the city and painted the buildings in bright colours. We'll visit the capital's most important buildings, such as the town hall and the national theatre, and walk through the government district. Afterwards, we'll drive to Durres, not only the largest port but also one of the oldest settlements in the country. This is where the path called Via Egnatia (from Rome to Greece) began and lay through the flourishing country of

Illyria on the territory of today's Albania. We can see the rich past of Durres as once a strategic point in various places: remains of a Byzantine wall, a Venetian Tower, ancient Baths of Trajan and the largest amphitheatre in the Balkans - all these and some more were accidentally found only in the 1960s during construction works. Head back to Tirana. **B/L/D**



Day 19, Monday 29th September
KRUJA

Today, we drive to Kruja. Located in the middle of an almost forgotten semi-desert mountainous area on a steep mountain slope, it forms a kind of oasis, which is unsurprising because the very name of the town, translated from the Albanian language, means "source". Several times in history, the city was the last bastion in the battles against Ottomans, and Kruja is associated with the name of a national hero of Albania - Prince Skanderbeg. After his death, Kruja fell under Ottoman rule for 400 years, which is reflected in the rather oriental-looking appearance of this old town. We'll walk the old Turkish bazaar – one of Albania's largest folk art markets. You can buy handicrafts and see craftsmen working, including rugmakers and weavers. Our next stop is Elbasan. Our sightseeing tour includes an overview of the 15th-century King Mosque and the Bezistan Church, a bishop church from the 4th century with interesting mosaics and frescoes. We reach the city of Ohrid in the evening. **B/D**

Day 20, Tuesday 30th September
OHRID

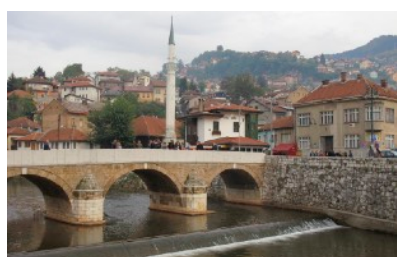
Ohrid, known as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans," is a city of breathtaking beauty and profound historical significance.



Nestled on the shores of Lake Ohrid, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a treasure trove of cultural and natural wonders. Fabulous landscapes, crystal clear water and an incredible abundance of fish make it a paradise for relaxation and fishing. The reason for this is the uniqueness of the lake, especially its fauna. Along with Baikal and Tanganyika, it is one of the oldest lakes in the world (around 5 million years old). To say even more, Ohrid town is the best preserved and most complete ensemble of ancient urban architecture in this part of Europe. When in Ohrid town, we delve into its historical grandeur. Visit St. Clement's Cathedral - built after a local scholar who followed St. Naum centuries ago. We also cannot miss the newly reconstructed Samuil fortress. Wonderful views of the citadel walls and winding streets descending to the old town will leave pleasant impressions. The remains of an ancient amphitheatre emphasise the historical significance of the town. Our next must-visit destination is St. Sofia Church - a remarkable architectural gem with a rich history. This Byzantine-style church dates back to the 11th century and is one of the region's most significant religious and cultural landmarks. Overnight in Ohrid. **B/D**

Day 21, Wednesday 1st October SKOPJE AND SURROUNDS

Today we get acquainted with the picturesque gorge of Matka. The area where a blue ribbon of the Treska River meanders along the mighty cliffs is a popular resort. Not only is it a heaven for tourists and hikers, but also - a revered pilgrimage destination. Then we arrive in Skopje - a city of great cultural heritage, which skillfully assembled buildings from different eras. Every step is proof that it is a city of contrasts - between the ancient and the modern, and also between Christianity and Islam. We begin our acquaintance with the heart of the city, the square of Macedonia, designed in the 20th century and abound with pompous monuments of proud riders, mighty rulers on thrones and the heart-warming fountain 'Mother of Macedonia'. Bustling with cafes, the square is a popular meeting place. We visit the house of Mother Theresa. Built on the place of her baptistery, it houses the memorabilia that belonged to this woman - a Nobel Prize laureate who devoted her life to fighting poverty. Then we cross the Vardar River over the Ottoman stone bridge for a look into the deep past. The Old Bazaar, surrounded by mosques, caravansaries and hammams, appears timeless. We also visit the oldest church in Skopje - the church of the Holy Ascension. Nearby, we approach perhaps the main highlight of Skopje - the fortress of Kale. We visit this imposing citadel, remembering that the settlement around it dates back to pre-Christian times. Overnight in Skopje. *B/D*



Day 22, Thursday 2nd October KOSOVO

A day trip visit to the Republic of Kosovo, a disputed territory on the border of North Macedonia, promises a unique

experience. During our journey, we will visit Kosovo's most significant landmark - the strict capital Pristina. On our way to Pristina, we make a stop to praise the monastery complex Gračanica, a masterpiece of sacral architecture of Byzantine times whose main treasure is a five-angled church. The unique structure and well-preserved frescoes gave the church great cultural importance, which guaranteed it a place among UNESCO heritage sites. Kosovo self-proclaimed its independence from Serbia in 2008, and our guide will confide in you the reasons behind the complicated relations among Balkan countries that led to this event. In Pristina, we again experience the blend of Christianity and Islam, watching Catholic cathedrals and mosques stand next to each other. During the 'modernisation' of Pristina in Yugoslavian times, the city was enriched with many contemporary architectural pieces, like the building of the State Library, startling with its revolutionary form. The most important site for Kosovans must be the 'NEWBORN' memorial, symbolising the new age for the independent country Kosovo. We walk through Skanderbeg Square - the main square of Pristina, named after a medieval Albanian knight defending these lands from Ottomans. The exposition of

the ethnographic museum tells us about the rich history of Kosovo's land. Back to Skopje in the evening. *B/L/D*

Day 23, Friday 3rd October NIS

After breakfast, we head towards Serbia today. First, we visit one of the oldest cities in the Balkans, Niš. It is the birthplace of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great. Over the centuries, Niš often played a significant role in the region's history. The centre of Niš is a bit chaotic. Beautiful architectural buildings get lost among random grey ones. We will stroll through King Milan Square, located right next to the river with the Monument to the Liberators of Niš right in the middle. Furthermore, to fully enjoy and soak the atmosphere of Niš, we will visit the so-called Tinker's Alley (Kopitareva Street) - the urban quarter from the early 18th century that once was the centre of tinkers and craftsmen but now is the main hotspot in the city for cafes, bars, and restaurants. Across the Nišava river from the central square, you will find Niš Fortress, which dates back to the early 18th century. Today, Niš fortress is one of the most popular recreational areas in the city, still full of historical remnants from the old times. You can find well-preserved walls and gates, a Turkish steam bath, and ancient ruins. Closer to the evening, the group will arrive in Belgrade. *B*



Day 24, Saturday 4th October NOVI SAD

Today, we will visit Novi Sad, the most beautiful city in Serbia, which is about an hour's drive from Belgrade. It is called by some - 'Serbian Athens'. We'll admire the imposing Roman Catholic Mary church and the extravagant town hall in the city's heart. A little bit further, the mighty fortress towers over the Danube. In the 17th century, Petrovaradin was the largest fortress in Europe. The fort is also famous for its tower with the upside-down clocks. Surprisingly, the short hand points to minutes and the large one - to hours. It was made up for sailors to see the time from afar. We'll head back to Belgrade for our farewell dinner! *B/D*



Day 25, Sunday 5th October DEPARTURE

After breakfast, we'll transfer to the airport for the flight from Belgrade home to Australia, arriving home the following day. *B*

Day 26, Monday 6th October ARRIVE HOME



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section. Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.