

The Balkans

Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Slovenia, Serbia,
Kosovo, Croatia, and Bosnia & Herzegovina



Blue Dot Travel
Go somewhere different

September 2027 | 26 Days

\$16,900 per person, twin share

Solo Supplement: \$2,500

Tour Highlights

- History around every corner!
- Dubrovnik's Old Town, a beautifully preserved medieval gem
- Croatia's crystal-clear cascading Plitvice Lakes
- Boat trip on Slovenia's magical Lake Bled
- Split's historic heart and the well-preserved Diocletian's Palace
- The stunning Dalmatian Coast
- Ferry trip to the gorgeous island of Hvar
- Montenegro's Bay of Kotor & Budva Riviera
- The flourishing arts scene in Tirana, Albania's capital
- The lakeside resort of Ohrid



The Balkans



Tour overview

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 region where farming first reached Europe 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 comprises many fascinating countries. Our tour includes eight of them: Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Serbia. Their polyglot nature has been shaped by the Greeks, Romans, and Slavs, and even fell under the Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century.

A genuine cultural crossroads, the Balkans were 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 that now relish their own identities and enjoy a resurgence of interaction with the outside world. The region is rich in prehistory and history, with Neanderthal relics found across many areas, and many towns still retain dramatic medieval fortifications.

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?



Activity rating: Moderate

You must be capable of: walking up to 8,000 steps daily; occasionally ascending 3-4 flights of steps; standing at attractions for up to 1 hour; boarding and disembarking transport unaided, and handling your own luggage.

Wednesday 1st September DEPARTURE

Depart Australia for Belgrade. We will provide you with an individualised flight itinerary for your trip.

Day 1, Thursday 2nd September BELGRADE, SERBIA

Welcome to Serbia's capital city. Belgrade has a fascinating history – its seven centuries have been so eventful that it's difficult to single out the most important episodes. On arrival, we'll be transferred to our hotel, then meet in the evening for our welcome dinner. Overnight: Belgrade **D**

Day 2, Friday 3rd September BELGRADE

Today we'll take a city tour of Belgrade. Belgrade's landmark Kalemegdan Fortress, 50 metres high, shapes the skyline. It dates back to the 15th century. Today, it hosts many museums and sights. From the walls of the fortress, a spectacular view opens of the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers. We'll explore the city's highlights, including the Temple of St. Sava, one of the largest Orthodox churches in the world, and the Nikola Tesla Museum, which houses the legacy of one of the world's most influential scientists. In the afternoon, we'll drive to the Sumadija region and Topola and enjoy a wine tasting at Aleksandrovic Winery. Overnight: Belgrade **B/D**

Day 3, Saturday 4th September BELGRADE – MOKRA GORA – ZLATIBOR

Today, we'll head to Southern Serbia in Mokra Gora, situated on the northern slopes of the Zlatibor Mountains. (295km – 4hrs). Enjoy views of the mountains and river streams as we travel aboard the Šargan 8 heritage train from the base of Tara Mountain to the village of Šargan. Our next stop is Sirogojno, a beautifully preserved open-air village that brings Serbia's rural heritage to life through traditional wooden homes, crafts and mountain culture. Our final stop is the mountain town of Zlatibor. Overnight: Zlatibor **B/D**

Day 4, Sunday 5th September ZLATIBOR – SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Leaving Serbia, we head to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. You'll need your passport handy as we complete this straightforward border crossing. We'll continue to Sarajevo, a vibrant city known for its rich history, architecture and culture. We'll start with a visit to the 'Tunnel of Hope' 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, 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 Bosnia. The museum houses a collection of weapons used during the siege. In the afternoon, we'll explore the old town, enjoying the mix of cultures that shape today's city. The Venetians, Byzantines, Ottomans, and Austrians all contributed to Sarajevo's current image. This is reflected in the city's religious sites: Gazi Hysrev-Beg, the oldest preserved mosque in the country; the old Serbian Orthodox Church; the Synagogue; and the Catholic Cathedral. We'll stroll the Bascarsija district's famous bazaar, visit the "House of Defiance" and the site of the fatal assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Overnight: Sarajevo **B/L/D**

Day 5, Monday 6th September DAYTRIP TO MOSTAR

We'll spend the day exploring the orientally inspired city of Mostar, whose city centre is UNESCO World Heritage-listed. The city's landmark is the famous Old Bridge over the Neretva. Its history dates back to the 16th century, but it was destroyed in 1993 during the Bosnian War. It was rebuilt, and the bridge now symbolises peaceful coexistence among different nations. Here, we'll also visit the historic Turkish quarter of Kujundziluk, featuring traditional Turkish houses. A traditional Turkish coffee is a must! There'll be free time to wander the old bazaar, before heading back to Sarajevo (total driving distance 260km – 5hrs). Overnight: Sarajevo **B/D**

Day 6, Tuesday 7th September SARAJEVO – TRAVNIK – JAJCE – PLITVICE LAKES, CROATIA

Depart Sarajevo early in the morning for Travnik, approximately 90 kilometres northwest of Sarajevo. After a scenic drive through the Bosnian countryside, we'll arrive in Travnik, a charming town with a rich history. We'll visit the 15th-century fortress in Travnik, which offers panoramic views of the town and the surrounding area. We'll continue our journey to Jajce, a picturesque town known for its waterfall and medieval watermills. We'll visit the Pliva Waterfall, where the Pliva River plunges into the Vrbas River, creating a natural spectacle. Passports will be required again upon crossing the border into Croatia, with our final destination the Plitvice Lakes. Overnight: Plitvice Lakes. **B/D**

Day 7, Wednesday 8th September PLITVICE LAKES – ZAGREB

The Plitvice Lakes are Croatia's oldest and largest national park, and a UNESCO World Heritage site. It's an area of exceptional natural beauty, with cascades and waterfalls formed by 16 different lakes. We will visit some popular routes that showcase the park's most striking scenery. In the afternoon, we'll continue to Zagreb, arriving late. Overnight: Zagreb. **B/D**

Day 8, Thursday 9th September ZAGREB

Zagreb is a charming city with an Austro-Hungarian heritage evident throughout the city, from its architecture to its cuisine. Today we'll explore Zagreb on foot, covering 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. There will be some free time in the afternoon to stroll at leisure. Overnight: Zagreb **B/D**

Day 9, Friday 10th September ZAGREB – LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

Today we'll drive approx (2.5hrs) to Ljubljana. Surrounded by rolling hills and the ice-capped Alps, Ljubljana is a tranquil European capital. After we check into the hotel, we'll stroll the narrow streets of Old City and medieval Ljubljana Castle on the hill. We'll explore the town square, which is home to the Baroque fountain of the three rivers of Carniola, Preseren Square, and the landmark Tromos-tovje (triple bridges). Overnight: Ljubljana **B/D**



Day 10, Saturday 11th September DAYTRIP TO BLED

Slovenia is known for its natural beauty, and today we'll visit the picturesque town of Bled, set on a lake with crystal-clear waters. On arrival, we'll take a traditional wooden pletna boat across the clear waters to the island, home to the 15th-century Church of the Assumption, said to stand on the site of an ancient Slavic temple dedicated to the goddess Živa. Next, we'll explore Bled Castle, Slovenia's oldest castle, dating back over a thousand years and dramatically perched on a cliff above the lake, remarkably well preserved thanks to its commanding position. Returning to Ljubljana in the early afternoon, you'll have some free time before dinner. Overnight: Ljubljana **B/D**

**Day 11, Sunday 12th September LJUBLJANA – RIJEKA – ZADAR, CROATIA**

On our way to Zadar (410km – 6hrs), we'll visit Rijeka, a vibrant port city on Croatia's Adriatic coast, known for its history, diverse culture, and lovely coastal setting. Strolling around Rijeka takes you through its compact centre, from the lively Korzo promenade to historic landmarks shaped by Roman, Austro-Hungarian, and maritime influences. We'll continue to Zadar and arrive for dinner. Overnight: Zadar **B/D**

Day 12, Monday 13th September ZADAR – TROGIR – SPLIT

Zadar is an intriguing city with historic Roman ruins, defensive walls, medieval churches, cosmopolitan cafes, and quality museums, all located on a small peninsula. It is home to one of Croatia's most recognisable churches: St. Donat's, a 9th-century church. Along the foreshore, there is a sea organ where ocean waves create a unique melody. After exploring Zadar, we'll depart for Trogir, which dates back to the Greek period. We'll have lunch in Trogir and visit the Kamerlengo Fortress and St. Laurentius Cathedral, with its Baroque architecture. We'll continue on to Split (Zadar to Split is 160km – 2.5 hours). Overnight: Split **B/L**

**Day 13, Tuesday 14th September SPLIT**

Sitting on Croatia's Dalmatian coast, the port city of Split, Croatia's second-largest, has striking architecture, hidden courtyards, and an elegant promenade that stretches along the harbour. The old city is located on the premises of a Roman Palace built in the early 4th century by the emperor Diocletian, and is one of the most enigmatic Roman ruins in the world. The Diocletian Palace and the imposing 8th-century St. Domnius Cathedral, regarded as the oldest Catholic cathedral in the world, remain in their original form. There'll be free time to explore the old city and stroll the Riva seafront promenade with its bustling markets and cafes before dinner. Overnight: Split **B/D**

Day 14, Wednesday 15th September DAYTRIP TO HVAR

Today we'll take the ferry to the stylish Adriatic island of Hvar. In addition to its beaches and harbour, Hvar is well known for its oldest European theatre, beautiful Renaissance squares and churches, Gothic buildings, wine, and olive trees. Spend the day walking around the island, or take a light trek to the fortress. Shop the cobble-stoned streets and have lunch by the sea. Return to Split by ferry late in the afternoon. Overnight: Split **B/D**

**Day 15, Thursday 16th September SPLIT – MALI STON – DUBROVNIK**

Your morning is free to explore Split according to your interests. At around midday, we'll leave for Mali Ston – about a two-hour drive south. Enjoy a (late-ish) delicious lunch at a local waterfront restaurant featuring fresh seafood and traditional Croatian dishes. Then, we'll explore Mali Ston's Old Town, walk along the old walls, and cross the peninsula to Ston. (If you prefer not to join this walk, you can continue exploring the lovely old town independently.) Late in the afternoon, we'll drive to Dubrovnik, and dinner is at your leisure tonight. Overnight: Dubrovnik **B/L**

Day 16, Friday 17th September DUBROVNIK

Today, we will explore one of Europe's great cities – Dubrovnik. One of the best ways to feel the soul of this city is to walk along its majestic defensive walls, which span almost 2 kilometres. The view over the old town and the glimmering Adriatic Sea is blissful from the top. We visit some of the forts and feel the atmosphere of those times, built in the 13th century and 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 old city's main street, called Stradun or Placa, is the city's 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 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, home to its 14th-century pharmacy, and the Rector's Palace. You'll have some free time in the afternoon to explore – take the cable car or shop. Overnight: Dubrovnik **B/L/D**

**Day 17, Saturday 18th September DUBROVNIK – KOTOR – BUDVA, MONTENEGRO**

Leaving Dubrovnik, we head to Kotor, a dramatic, fjord-like bay in Montenegro, surrounded by steep mountains that rise straight from the water. A massive stone fortification known as the 'Great Wall of Europe' snakes its way up the steep cliffs. After visiting the core sights and a break for lunch, we'll continue to the iconic Budva Riviera. Its history spans over 2500 years, and the town reached its height under Venetian rule, when the Venetians built defensive walls encircling the old town. Its Square of Churches features three shrines representing various historical epochs and religions. Overnight: Budva **B/D**

**Day 18, Sunday 19th September BUDVA – VIRPAZAR – TIRANA, ALBANIA**

Our journey continues to Skadar Lake, which stretches around the mountains and also borders Montenegro and Albania (200 km, about 5 hours). It's the largest lake in southern Europe, known for its unspoiled nature. Virpazar, a small fishing village, is the gateway to Skadar Lake National Park and features a historic fortress and panoramic views. We'll explore the wetlands by boat to take in the beautiful scenery. We'll continue on to Albania, known as "the land between the crescent and the cross". Albania was a no-man's land for tourists until only a few years ago. Driving through Northern Albania, we'll stop in its oldest historical city, Shkodra. The massive ruins of Illyrian Rozafa Castle are perched on a hill offering sweeping views over the Drina and Buna rivers. Our final destination is Tirana. Overnight: Tirana **B/D**

Day 19, Monday 20th September DAYTRIP TO DURRES & KRUJA

A short drive from Tirana, Durres is one of Albania's oldest cities and once a key stop on the Via Egnatia linking Rome and Greece. We'll see remnants of its past, including sections of the Byzantine wall, a Venetian tower, and the Baths of Trajan. We'll continue to Kruja, sitting like an oasis in an almost forgotten semi-desert mountainous area. Several times in history, the city served as the last bastion in battles against the Ottomans. The town is associated with the Albanian hero Prince Skanderbeg because, after his death, it came under Ottoman rule for 400 years. You'll see this in the appearance of its old town and the old Turkish bazaar, one of Albania's largest folk art markets. Walking through, we'll see artisans at work, including rugmakers, weavers and felt makers, who make the "qeleshe", a traditional Albanian hat made of white felt. Over lunch, local folk dancers will perform traditional Albanian music and dances that tell legendary stories, often linked to Skanderbeg. Return to Tirana for a free evening. Overnight: Tirana **B/L**

Day 20, Tuesday 21st September TIRANA – ELBASAN – OHRID, NORTH MACEDONIA

This morning, we'll take a walking tour of Tirana, the lively, colourful capital. With a mix of Ottoman, Italian, and communist-era history, it's now filled with cafés, parks, and buzzing streets. The largest and most important square in Tirana is, of course, named after the revered Prince Skanderbeg. We'll try our hand at Albanian cuisine with a cooking class for lunch, where you can expect simple home-style dishes. In the afternoon, we'll drive to Ohrid, with a stop en route at the historic city of Elbasan. We'll arrive in the early evening, and dinner is at your leisure. Overnight: Ohrid **B/L**

Day 21, Wednesday 22nd September OHRID

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 local favourite for relaxation. Along with Baikal and Tanganyika, it is one of the oldest lakes in the world (around 5 million years old). It also holds historic significance, and we'll visit St. Perivlepta and St. Sofia Churches, as well as the newly reconstructed Samuil Fortress, which offers excellent views of the citadel walls and old town. Overnight: Ohrid **B/D**

Day 22, Thursday 23rd September OHRID – SKOPJE

Today we'll visit the Matka Gorge, where the Treska River winds through steep cliffs, a favourite escape for locals. (195km – 4hrs). We'll enjoy a boat ride through the canyon before continuing to Skopje, a city shaped by both Christianity and Islam. In the city centre, Macedonia Square is a lively meeting place, home to the well-known "Mother of Macedonia" fountain. We'll visit the Mother Teresa Memorial House, then walk across the Ottoman Stone Bridge into the Old Bazaar, with its mosques, hammams, and caravanserais. Here, we'll visit the Church of the Holy Ascension, the oldest church in Skopje, and the imposing Kale Fortress overlooking the city. Our day concludes with a visit to the Holocaust Memorial Centre, a difficult, but important part of the country's history. Overnight: Skopje **B/D**

Day 23, Friday 24th September DAYTRIP TO PRISHTINA & PRIZREN, KOSOVO

Today is a long but rewarding day trip (approx. 350km, 5 hours round trip). First, we'll visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Gračanica Monastery, with its stunning architecture and frescoes that reflect the rich history of the Serbian Orthodox Church. We'll continue to Prishtina, Kosovo's capital. We'll visit its key sites on foot, including the Newborn Monument, a symbol of Kosovo's independence, the Mother Teresa Square, the National Library, and the Imperial Mosque. Next, we'll head to Prizren, often considered the cultural capital of Kosovo. There'll be free time to wander the cobbled streets of the old town, lined with shops and cafes, and immerse yourself in the town's rich history and atmosphere. It's a great place to pick up local handicrafts or enjoy a sweet treat from a local bakery. We'll return to Skopje, arriving in time for dinner. Overnight: Skopje **B/D**

Day 24, Saturday 25th September SKOPJE – NIS – BELGRADE, SERBIA

Niš is one of the oldest cities in the Balkans, and the birthplace of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great. Leaving Skopje, the drive is 450 km (approx. 6 hours). Niš has a lively, slightly chaotic centre. We'll walk through King Milan Square by the river, then head to Kopitareva Street, or "Tinker's Alley" a historic artisan street that's now the city's main spot for cafés, bars, and restaurants. Across the Nišava River, we'll visit Niš Fortress, an 18th-century complex with preserved walls, gates, a Turkish bath, and ancient ruins. From here, it's a couple of hours' drive to Belgrade. Overnight: Belgrade **B/D**

Day 25, Sunday 26th September DAYTRIP TO NOVI SAD

About an hour's drive from Belgrade, Novi Sad is sometimes called 'Serbian Athens' due to its focus on education and the arts. It features the striking Roman Catholic Church of St Mary and an ornate Town Hall. Just beyond the city, Petrovaradin Fortress rises above the Danube – once the largest fortress in Europe in the 17th century. It's also famous for its upside-down clock; the short hand of the clock points to the minutes, and the large one to the hours. It was designed this way so fishermen on the Danube could easily tell the time from far away, even in fog or low light. Returning to Belgrade, we'll meet for our farewell dinner and the end of our journey through the Balkans. Overnight: Belgrade **B/D**

Day 26, Monday 27th September DEPARTURE

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight home or onwards in Europe. **B**

Our **16-day Bulgaria and Romania tour** is the ideal extension to your travels in the region. For more details and to view the itinerary [click here](#).





Accommodation

Our hotels are carefully chosen to capture the local atmosphere and set you up in an ideal location. You can expect accommodation that comprises a mix of standard hotels, boutique-style hotels, and smaller, independently owned establishments. Below are some of the hotels on this tour. Final hotels may change, and a complete list will be shared with you.

Hotel Jezero, Plitvice
www.np-plitvicka-jezera.hr

Hotel Bracera, Budva
www.hotelbracera.me

Hotel Solun, Skopje
www.hotelsolun.mk

Art Hotel, Split
www.arthotel.hr/en/

Why Blue Dot?

Travel is more than just moving from one place to another; it is an opportunity to explore this vast planet, connect with its people and marvel at its beauty. We have established a group of loyal, like-minded travellers who share this feeling and have taken multiple tours with us. With Blue Dot, you'll experience

- Thoughtfully designed itineraries with unique experiences
- Small, inclusive groups with a maximum of 16 travellers
- The support of both an Australian tour leader* and experienced local guides
- Programs designed to meet the needs of mature-age travellers
- Hands on, personalised service including customised flight bookings
- Tipping included in your tour cost

*Australian leaders accompany groups with more than 10 travellers.

Blue Dot welcomes solo travellers

In fact, over half of our clients are solo travellers. We understand it can be daunting to travel on your own, and we'll ensure your travel is safe, inclusive and enjoyable. You can confidently join our groups, knowing that we bring solo travellers together to share the camaraderie of an unforgettable adventure.

Enquiries and bookings

A \$500 deposit is required to secure your booking.

For more information:

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