



**NORTHERN GREECE,  
MACEDONIA, BULGARIA  
& ROMANIA**  
**THE LAND OF THE THRACIANS**

**September 28 - October 13, 2024**  
**Led By Local Guides**

The focus of this tour will be the dramatic mountain scenery and exquisite jewel-like villages, farms, churches and monasteries of the four countries visited. This simple, agrarian way-of-life is a vestige of the culture that once dominated the continent but has virtually disappeared in Western Europe. Expect to be entertained by craft traditions, folk music and dance. The towns are equally impressive; most of the overnight stops are in medieval walled burghs built by Saxon settlers. Romania is noted for its vineyards and interesting cuisine, heavily influenced by Hungarian specialties. Continue on to Bulgaria, one of the smallest countries of the Old Continent but with a wealthy history in the Balkan region. From settlement on top of settlement Bulgaria is a repository of ancient sites from many civilizations that inhabited the region through millennia. Buffeted by Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman influences and dotted with beautiful lakes, threaded together by a network of rivers, Macedonia is a repository of history surrounded by beautiful scenery. In Northern Greece, you will discover grandiose archaeological sites, picturesquely labyrinthine villages, and the great city of Thessaloniki, famous for its dazzling Byzantine heritage, outshone only by that of Constantinople (Istanbul) itself.

Ihab Zaki  
Managing Director

Saturday, September 28

Arrival in Thessaloniki (GREECE)



Upon arrival in **Greece**, meet and transfer to *Imperial Palace Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner and overnight. (D)

*Note: Standard check-in time is 3:00 pm. If you arrive on September 27 or the early morning of September 28, an extra hotel night needs to be booked.*

Sunday, September 29

Thessaloniki



After breakfast, meet the local guide in the hotel lobby and begin the tour of **Thessaloniki**, founded in 315 BC by Cassander of Macedon, Thessaloniki's history spans over 2,300 years. An important metropolis in the Roman period, it was the second largest and wealthiest city of the Byzantine Empire. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to numerous notable Byzantine and Paleochristian monuments. We will begin with a visit to the **Arch of Galerius** in the lower town, built in 299 AD and dedicated to the victory of the Roman Emperor Galerius over the Sassanid Persians at the Battle of Satala. Visit **Agios Georgios** and **Agia Sofia**, whose interiors are preserved precious mosaics. Explore the **National Archaeological Museum**, one of the largest museums in Greece and the central museum of northern Greece and housing artifacts from the Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods, and the **Museum of Byzantine Art**, housing objects from the 2nd to the 20th century. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. (B,L,D)

Monday, September 30

Thessaloniki - Pella - Vergina - Kalambaka



Begin the day with a visit to the **ruins of Pella**, the ancient capital of Macedonia. It was founded by Archelaus I, and became the capital of the kingdom of Macedonia, which was home to the empire of Philip II and Alexander the Great. In 168 BC, after the defeat of the Macedonians by the Romans at Pydna, the city was sacked and stripped of most of its treasures. Head to the UNESCO site of **Vergina** to see the royal necropolis, believed to be the tomb of Philip II of Macedonia. The museum houses material found in the area and is considered one of

Greece's greatest archaeological collections. Transfer to *Meteora Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. (B,L,D)

Tuesday, October 01

Kalambaka - Bitola (MACEDONIA) - Ohrid



Begin the day with a drive to visit the UNESCO site of **Meteora**, which means, "suspended in the air" in Greek. The monasteries are built on rock pinnacles of deltaic origin, known as Meteora, which rise starkly over 400m above the Peneas valley and the small town of Kalambaka on the Thessalian plain. Continue the drive to **Macedonia**, and upon arrival at the border, we will meet our guide; then, we will begin our tour with a short visit to **Bitola**, conquered by the Turks in 1382; the city has since been renamed Monastir. Continue to the **City of Heraclea**, founded by Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, in the mid-fourth century BC. Among the most interesting relics are the **baths, colonnades, and amphitheater**. Stop at the remains of **two churches**, displaying colorful mosaics from the 5th century that depict geometric shapes, trees, birds, flowers, and animals. Upon arrival in **Ohrid**, transfer to *Royal View Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, & overnight. (B,L,D)

Wednesday, October 02

Ohrid - Tetovo - Skopje



After breakfast, begin the day with a drive to **Tetovo**, where we will visit the **Painted Mosque**, constructed in the 15th century, also known as the "Mosque Aladza." This jewel of Islamic Art was built in 1459 with donations from two noble Muslim women - Hurshida and Mensure, whose tomb is located in the garden. The mosque is presented as a cube, fully decorated inside and outside with floral and geometric motifs. It was rebuilt and expanded by Abdurrahman Pasha in 1833 and the frescoes and wooden interiors dating back to this period are all in excellent condition. Head to the capital city of **Skopje**, where we will explore the narrow streets of the **Old Bazaar**. The pedestrian walk is comprised of similar, one-floor structures that house shops containing jewels, carpets, clothes, books, etc. See the Mustafa Pasha Mosque (16th century) and the **Church of St. Spas**. Visit

the **Cathedral Kliment Ohridski**, the **Feudal Tower**, and the **memorial** dedicated to Mother Teresa. Transfer to *Premium Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Thursday, October 03**  
**Skopje - Rila (Bulgaria) - Sofia**



Enjoy breakfast and then head to **Bulgaria**. Upon arrival at the border, we will meet the guide and begin the tour with a visit to the magnificent **Rila Monastery**, the most important monument of the Orthodox faith in the Balkans (UNESCO). Rila's holy cloister was founded in the first half of the 10th century. Its history is related to St. Ivan of the Rila, a Bulgarian hermit who settled in the region and devoted his life to fasting and prayers. The monastery was initially situated near the cave where the saint dwelled. After passing away in 946, St. Ivan was buried in the cave where he found solitude. Throughout the centuries, Rila Monastery has always been Bulgaria's spiritual, educational, and cultural center. Continue to **Sofia**, and upon arrival, transfer to *Central Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Friday, October 04**  
**Sofia**



Begin the day with a city tour visiting the **Church of St. Sofia**, the **Church of St. George**, and the **Aleksandar Nevski Memorial Cathedral**. The latter was officially opened in 1912 to honor the 200,000 Russian warriors who died in the liberation war. Visit the **National Museum of History** and the **Boyana Church**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The small church is a unique example of medieval architecture in the Balkans. The **frescos** on its interior walls are of special interest, the oldest ones dating back to the 13th century. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Saturday, October 05**  
**Sofia - Koprivshtiza - Starosel - Plovdiv**



Begin the day with a drive to **Koprivshtiza**, one of the hotbeds of the April uprising in 1876 against the Ottoman occupation and begin with a visit to the **Historic City Center**, which features some of Bulgaria's most beautiful old houses. See the **Church of the Virgin** (Uspenie Bogirodichino) before heading to **Starosel**. Upon arrival, tour the **Thracian Temple Complex** in the Chetinyovata Mogila that was discovered in 2000—dating back to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> or the 4th century BC. It is the oldest royal Thracian complex with a mausoleum ever found. Stop at the **Kremikovtzi Monastery**, founded in the 14th century during the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander, which was destroyed in 1332 and rebuilt in 1493; then continue the drive to **Plovdiv** and, upon arrival, transfer to *Ramada Trimonzium Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Sunday, October 06**  
**Plovdiv (Bachkovo)**



Today we will head to the **Bachkovo Monastery**, founded in 1083 by the Byzantine military commander, Grigorij

Bakuriani. It is one of the largest and oldest Eastern Orthodox monasteries in Europe and is known for its unique combination of Byzantine, Georgian and Bulgarian styles. Head back to **Plovdiv**, a town built around seven hills, a feature that is a distinct part of the city's history. The beginning of its history dates back to 4,000 BC, making it one of the oldest cities in Europe. In the 4th century BC, it was conquered by Phillip of Macedonia. Visit the **Old Town** situated on Nebet Tepe hill to see the **Ethnographic Museum**, the **Roman Theater**, and the **Church of SS Kostantino and Elena**. See the **Roman Stadium** and the **Mosque** situated in the city center. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Monday, October 07**  
**Plovdiv - Kazanlak - Shipka - Tryavna**

Today head to **Kazanlak**, the capital of the Rouses valley. The surrounding region has been inhabited for thousands of years, with traces of civilization going back to 2000 BC. Visit the important **Thracian Tomb** (copy) from the 4th century BC situated near the ancient Thracian capital of Seuthopolis. Consisting of a vaulted brickwork "beehive" tomb, it contains, among other things, painted murals. Visit the **Church of The Nativity**, located near Shipka village. Continue to **Tryavna** to see the **Clock Tower**, located in the main square and a prominent town symbol. It was built in 1814 and is 21 m high. The old street of Tryavna lies on the other side of the 19th-century Bridge, where we can find many woodcarving workshops and souvenir shops. The shoemaker's shop and the workshop where national costumes are sewn, are located in this part of Tryavna. Art lovers should not miss visiting the art galleries in the town. Continue to **Tryavna** and transfer to *Kalina Palace Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Tuesday, October 08**  
**Tryavna - Veliko Tarnovo - Arbanassi - Rousse**



Today we will head to **Tzarevets Hill** in Veliko Tarnovo, a medieval stronghold that served as the Second Bulgarian Empire's primary fortress and strongest bulwark from 1185 to 1393. Continue to the **village of Arbanassi** to tour the well-preserved 17th-century **Kostantsaliev House** that has been converted into a museum. Visit the **Birth of Christ Church** is divided into a men's section (narthex), a woman's section (vestibule), and a **gallery** that encloses both. The narthex was once the original church and added murals on its walls in 1597. Continue the drive to Rousse and transfer to the *Hotel* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Wednesday, October 09**  
**Rousse - Curtea De Ages (Romania) - Sibiu**



Today we will drive to the border of **Romania**, where we will meet our guide. Once we cross, begin the city tour with a visit to **Curtea de Arges Monastery**: an interesting edifice in Romania whose beauty is surpassed only by the legends told from generation to generation about its construction and the human sacrifices made in the name of eternity. The legends tell of the pregnant woman

trapped inside the walls and the death of master Manole, who tried to fly with wooden wings. Continue to **Sibiu** and head to the **Historical Center** to see the 15th-century **Evangelical Church** and the **Gothic Renaissance**, and **Baroque houses**. Transfer to *Ramda Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Thursday, October 10**  
**Sibiu - Brasov - Bran**



Begin the day with a drive to **Brasov**, and upon arrival, head to visit one of Romania's most charming medieval towns. Founded by the Teutonic knights in 1211 on an ancient Dacian site and settled by the Saxons as one of the seven walled citadels. The city's location at the intersection of trade routes linking the Ottoman Empire and western Europe, together with certain tax exemptions, allowed Saxon merchants to obtain considerable wealth and exert a strong political influence in the region. Visit the **Schei quarter** along with the **Church of Sfantul Nicolae**, the **first Romanian School** from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the **Gothic Church of Biserica Neagră**. Explore **Dracula's Castle**, built in the 13th century by the Teutonic knight Dietrich. Narrow winding stairways lead through some 60 timbered rooms, many connected by underground passages. The castle overlooks the picturesque village of Bran, which offers an open-air ethnographic museum consisting of old local-style village houses complete with furniture, household objects, and costumes. Continue the drive to **Bran** and, upon arrival, transfer to *Ambient Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Friday, October 11**  
**Bran - Sinaia - Bucharest**



Begin the day with a drive to **Peles Castle**, the summer residence of King Carol I. Nestled in the picturesque town of Sinaia, it is a masterpiece of German Renaissance architecture and considered by many to be one of the most stunning castles in Europe. Commissioned by the king in 1873 and completed in 1883, it served as the royal family's summer residence until 1947. Continue the drive to **Bucharest** and transfer to *Golden Tulip Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Saturday, October 12**  
**Bucharest**



Begin the day with a tour of the capital, called the "Paris of the East" for its wide boulevards and its buildings in the "Belle Epoque" style. Visit the **Triumphal Arch**, the **Romanian University**, and the **Revolution Square**, the **University Square**, and the **Curtea Domneasca**. Explore the **Patriarchy** (spiritual center of the Romanian Orthodox Church) and the **Palace of Parliament**, considered the second largest building in the world after the Pentagon in Washington DC. Head to visit the **National Cotroceni Museum**, the oldest royal residence in Bucharest; today, it is the residence of the

president and a museum. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Sunday, October 13**  
**Bucharest - USA**



Enjoy breakfast in the morning and then transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

*"We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients".*



**Tour Cost (Land Only): \$5,995.00**

*Per person sharing in double occupancy*

**Single Supplement: \$695.00**

*Price based on group size minimum of 6 participants and maximum of 12 participants*

**Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: \*\*\*-\*\*\*\***



**Tour Includes:**

- Meeting and assistance on all arrival and departure days.
- Travel by modern & air-conditioned motor coach.
- Accommodation at Hotels mentioned or similar on bed and breakfast basis.
- Accompanying expert English-speaking local guides during all tours.
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: breakfast, L: lunch and D: dinner).
- Bottled mineral water on vehicle during touring.
- Entrance fees to all mentioned sites and museums.
- All activities described in the tour.
- All Porterage, Gratuities to guide, Drivers, and Porters (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

**Tour does not include:**

- International airfare USA-Thessaloniki / Bucharest-USA.
- Entry Visas (US citizens do not require visas).
- Beverages with or without meals.
- Camera or video fees at museums and sites.
- Any cost increase due to currency fluctuation.
- Any required pre arrival & pre departure PCR tests.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, phone calls, emails, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on scheduled flights/tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Travel protection insurance (Highly recommended).

**Trip Grade:**

**II Active:** Some hikes, slightly more demanding walks at or to sites, few elevations, comfortable but busy schedule and some long rides.

**Lodging Level:**

**\*\*\* Superior:** Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service, and comfort level acceptable to the western standards. (3 or 4 stars)

**\*\*\*\* Luxury:** Regular style- usually large- hotels, typical western standard with ample venues, and full amenities. (4 or 5 stars)

