

### By Anonymous traveler (2023)

Our journey began with an exciting arrival in Greece, where we were warmly welcomed and immediately immersed in the rich cultural heritage of this enchanting country. After settling into our comfortable accommodations, we eagerly headed out for a delightful dinner showcasing the mouthwatering flavors of Greek cuisine.



The following morning, our adventurous exploration of the captivating city of Thessaloniki commenced with a scrumptious breakfast that provided us the energy needed for an eventful day ahead. Our first stop was the awe-inspiring Arch of Galerius, a magnificent testament to the city's Roman past. From there, we proceeded to visit the splendid Agios Georgios and Agia Sofia, two iconic religious sites that captivated our senses with their intricate architectural details.

A well-deserved lunch followed our morning adventures, allowing us to savor a delectable array of Greek delicacies. Energized and eager to continue our cultural expedition, we then visited the National Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Byzantine Art, both of which offered fascinating insights into Greece's rich history and artistic achievements.

As the evening approached, our appetites were once again satisfied with a delightful dinner that showcased the flavorsome diversity of Greek cuisine. With grateful hearts and minds full of incredible memories, we retired to our comfortable lodgings for a restful overnight stay.

Another day of exploration dawned, and we fueled ourselves with a hearty breakfast before setting off to admire the ancient ruins of Pella. Walking amidst the remnants of this once-thriving city, we marveled at the ingenuity and creativity of the ancient Greeks. Next on our schedule was a visit to the renowned royal necropolis in Vergina, where we were transported back in time as we explored the final resting place of ancient Macedonian royalty. The intricate artifacts and grandeur of this historical site left an indelible impression on us. With the day winding down, we found ourselves returning to our lodgings for a well-deserved dinner and another rejuvenating overnight stay.

Our adventure continued with an early start as we embarked on a picturesque drive to the remarkable UNESCO site of Meteora. The towering monasteries perched atop dramatic rocky pillars left us awestruck, showcasing the mystical beauty of this unique location.

Upon reaching the border, we met our knowledgeable guide, who accompanied us on a fascinating tour of the captivating city of Bitola. Here, we explored the ancient city of Heraclea, marveled at the remnants of baths, colonnades, and an amphitheater, and discovered the remains of two churches that whispered tales of the past. As the golden hues of evening painted the sky, we arrived in the enchanting city of Ohrid. A delightful dinner awaited us, followed by a tranquil overnight stay overlooking the serene waters of Lake Ohrid.



Fueling ourselves with a satisfying breakfast, we embarked on a scenic drive to Tetovo, where we marveled at the vibrantly adorned Painted Mosque, a true testament to the beauty of Islamic artistry. Continuing our journey, we then arrived in Skopje, immersing ourselves in the vibrant ambiance of the charming Old Bazaar. The Mustafa Pasha Mosque and the Church of St. Spas enchanted us with their architectural splendor.

Our exploration of Skopje continued as we visited the majestic Cathedral Kliment Ohridski, the historic Feudal Tower, and the touching memorial dedicated to the inspiring humanitarian, Mother Teresa. The day concluded with a delightful dinner and another comfortable overnight stay.

After a satisfying breakfast, we crossed the border into Bulgaria, where we were greeted by our knowledgeable guide. Our first stop was the magnificent Rila Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that mesmerized us with its intricate artwork and spiritual aura. Continuing our journey, we arrived in Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria, where we were treated to a delectable dinner. The vibrant cityscape and the rich cultural heritage of Sofia set the stage for an unforgettable overnight stay.

Exploring Sofia commenced in full swing as we visited the magnificent Church of St. Sofia, steeped in history, and adorned with beautiful frescoes. The Church of St. George and the Aleksandar Nevski Memorial Cathedral were equally captivating, their architectural splendor leaving us in awe. A visit to the National Museum of History provided us with a comprehensive understanding of Bulgaria's rich heritage, while the Boyana Church's intricate frescoes transported us back in time. The day ended with a delightful dinner, and a good night sleep.

We embarked on a scenic drive to Koprivshtiza, a hidden gem in Bulgaria. The town's Historic City Center charmed us with its well-preserved architecture and rich history. We couldn't resist visiting the iconic Church of the Virgin (Uspenie Bogirodichino) with its stunning frescoes. After soaking up the atmosphere in Koprivshtiza, we continued our journey to Starosel. Upon arrival, we eagerly explored the Thracian Temple Complex, an archaeological site showcasing the ancient Thracian civilization's religious beliefs and practices. The site left us in awe of its grandeur and historical significance. En route to Plovdiv, we made a delightful stop at the Kremikovtzi Monastery, immersing ourselves in its

spiritual ambiance. Finally, we reached Plovdiv, where we enjoyed a lovely dinner and settled in for the night.

We began our day heading to the Bachkovo Monastery, a spiritual sanctuary nestled in nature's embrace. The monastery's intricate murals and remarkable architecture were truly captivating. Returning to Plovdiv, we explored the Old Town, a charming district adorned with colorful houses and cobblestone streets. In Plovdiv, we visited the Ethnographic Museum, offering insights into Bulgaria's



rich cultural heritage. Our exploration continued with a visit to the Roman Theater, a remarkable relic from ancient times. We also admired the Church of SS Kostantino and Elena, the Roman Stadium, and the Mosque as we soaked in the diverse cultural influences of Plovdiv. A delicious dinner awaited us as we settled in for another restful night.

Our adventure led us to Kazanlak, where we marveled at the Thracian Tomb and its intricately painted frescoes. The nearby Church of The Nativity also captured our attention with its unique architecture and serene atmosphere. Continuing our journey, we arrived in Tryavna, a picturesque town renowned for its clock tower and vibrant art galleries. We indulged in the town's creative spirit before retiring for dinner and a rejuvenating overnight stay.

Tzarevets Hill in Veliko Tarnovo beckoned us with its historical significance and panoramic views. We immersed ourselves in the area's fascinating past as we toured the Kostantsaliev House, experiencing the architectural marvels of the medieval era. The Birth of Christ Church added yet another layer of wonder to our visit.

Driving on to Rousse, we admired the scenic beauty of the village of Arbanassi. Exploring its cultural gems, we delighted in the historical allure and grandeur. Finally, we settled down for a satisfying dinner and a peaceful overnight stay in Rousse.

Crossing the border into Romania, we were welcomed by our knowledgeable guide. Our city tour began with a visit to the Curtea de Arges Monastery, a magnificent example of Romanian architecture and religious devotion. Moving on to Sibiu, we explored the Historical Center, taking in the quaint 15th-century Evangelical Church and the striking Gothic Renaissance and Baroque houses. The evening concluded with a delectable dinner and a cozy overnight stay.

Our drive led us to Brasov, a medieval town that exuded charm at every corner. We ventured into the Schei quarter and marveled at the beauty of the Church of Sfantul Nicolae, which had witnessed centuries of history. The first Romanian School from the 15th century and the Gothic Church of Biserica Neagră added further depth to our exploration. Of course, no trip to the region would be complete without a visit to Dracula's Castle in Bran, a highlight that left us spellbound. A satisfying dinner and a restful overnight stay awaited us.

To begin the day, we visited Peles Castle, a fairytale-like residence nestled in the Carpathian Mountains. The castle's opulent interiors and scenic gardens transported us to another era. Continuing our journey to Bucharest, we soaked up the vibrant atmosphere of the "Paris of the East." We explored iconic landmarks such as the Triumphal Arch, Romanian University, and Revolution Square, immersing ourselves in the city's rich history. Notably, we also visited the Patriarchy, the spiritual center of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the Palace of Parliament, a monumental feat of architecture. As the day drew to a close, we enjoyed a delightful dinner and settled in for a final overnight stay.

The next morning, the vibrant capital city of Romania and often referred to as the "Paris of the East". The city's historical charm and rich cultural heritage made for an unforgettable trip. Allow me to share the highlights of my day exploring this captivating destination. Our day began with a guided tour of the city, where we were immersed in the grandeur of Bucharest's architectural wonders. We started at the Triumphal Arch, a magnificent structure reminiscent of its Parisian counterpart, symbolizing Romania's independence. The intricate details and imposing presence of the arch left us in awe.

Continuing our journey, we visited the Romanian University, a prestigious institution that has played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's intellectual landscape. The sprawling campus showcased a harmonious blend of traditional and modern architectural styles, reflecting a commitment to education and progress.

Next, we made our way to Revolution Square, a place brimming with history and significance. This iconic square was the site of the Romanian Revolution in 1989 that led to the fall of communism. Standing in the midst of the vibrant atmosphere, we couldn't help but appreciate the immense courage and resilience of the Romanian people.

Adjacent to Revolution Square is University Square, a hub of activity nestled in the heart of Bucharest. It offered a glimpse into the city's bustling energy, with its picturesque streets filled with cafes, shops, and vibrant street performers. It was the perfect spot to soak in the local vibes and savor the unique charm of Bucharest.

After breakfast, we were transferred to the airport to catch our international flight back to the United States. As we embarked on our journey homeward, we carried with us cherished memories and the captivating landscapes and cultures we had been privileged to experience.



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