



THE BALKANS 15N/16D

TOUR SUMMARY

Embark on an unforgettable 16-day journey through the heart of the Balkans, uncovering a rich tapestry of **UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, **national heritage landmarks**, and vibrant **arts and crafts traditions** across seven captivating countries. Begin in **Romania**, exploring the elegant castles of Sinaia, the medieval charm of Braşov and Sighişoara, and the artisan hubs of Sibiu. Cross into **Bulgaria** to visit the historic towns of Veliko Tarnovo and Plovdiv, the iconic **Rila Monastery**, and experience traditional woodcarving and embroidery. Continue to **North Macedonia**, where Skopje's Ottoman bazaars and **Lake Ohrid's 365 churches** offer a glimpse into spiritual and cultural life.

In **Albania**, discover the timeless stone cities of **Berat and Gjirokastra**, and the ancient ruins of **Butrint**, before traveling along the Riviera into **Montenegro** to explore **Kotor's walled Old Town** and its maritime legacy. Journey into **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, where the legendary **Stari Most Bridge** in Mostar stands as a symbol of resilience and heritage, and end in **Croatia** with the stunning Adriatic jewel of **Dubrovnik**—a living museum of medieval splendour, coral jewellery, and Konavle folk traditions. This immersive cultural tour offers a rare opportunity to experience the Balkans through its architecture, storytelling, and the hands of its artisans.

Best Time to Visit: May to Mid-June/ September to Early-October

Note: While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, this itinerary is intended as a guide and may include unintentional errors or be subject to adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances.



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Detailed Itinerary.

DAY 1: Arrival in Bucharest – Romania's Grand Capital of History & Architecture

Welcome to **Bucharest**, Romania's dynamic capital blending **Belle Époque elegance**, Communist grandeur, and a blossoming arts scene. After your airport transfer and check-in, begin your exploration with a guided visit to the **Palace of the Parliament**—the world's heaviest and second-largest administrative building, a staggering feat of modern history and architecture.

Later, take a **walking tour through Bucharest's Old Town (Lipscani District)**, known for its **cobblestone streets, local handicrafts, antique shops, and artisan boutiques**. Admire restored 19th-century buildings, cozy book cafés, and hidden Orthodox chapels nestled amid the buzz.

In the evening, enjoy a **traditional Romanian dinner**, featuring dishes like sarmale (stuffed cabbage rolls), mămăligă (polenta), and papanasi (cheese doughnuts), accompanied by local wine or plum brandy (țuică).

Dinner & Overnight in Bucharest



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DAY 2: Bucharest – Museums, Markets & Village Traditions

Deep Dive into Romanian Heritage

Spend your morning at the **National Museum of the Romanian Peasant** or the **National Art Museum** (housed in the former Royal Palace), both offering a rich introduction to **folk crafts, textiles, icons, and royal collections**.

Then visit the **Dimitrie Gusti National Village Museum**—an open-air complex showcasing authentic homes, windmills, and churches from rural Romania. It's perfect for understanding Romania's **regional architectural diversity and craft traditions**.

Later, stroll through **Calea Victoriei**, one of Bucharest's most elegant boulevards, lined with neoclassical buildings, luxury boutiques, and artisan shops.

Optional experiences:

- Attend a **Romanian folk music performance**
- Join a **craft or embroidery workshop**
- Explore **Obor Market**, one of the oldest and liveliest local food and spice markets

Dinner & Overnight in Bucharest



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DAY 3: Sinaia & Braşov – Castles, Carpathians, and Craft Traditions

After breakfast, journey into the scenic **Carpathian Mountains** for a stop in the elegant alpine town of **Sinaia**. Your main highlight here is a guided tour of **Peleş Castle**, one of Romania's most magnificent **national heritage monuments**. Nestled amid forested hills, this 19th-century **neo-Renaissance castle** stuns with its stained glass, carved woodwork, and ornate halls—a true fairy-tale residence of Romanian royalty.

Continue to **Braşov**, the heart of Transylvania, where cobbled streets, **medieval Saxon architecture**, and vibrant artisan life await. Explore **Braşov's Old Town**, visit the iconic **Black Church**—the largest Gothic church in Romania—and stroll down **Rope Street**, one of the narrowest lanes in Europe.

Wrap up the day browsing local markets for **hand-carved woodcraft souvenirs**, **embroidered Transylvanian textiles**, and traditional **Romanian ceramics**—perfect mementos of your cultural journey.

Dinner & Overnight in Braşov



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DAY 4: Bran Castle & Sighișoara – Legends and Living Traditions (UNESCO)

Start your day with a visit to the legendary **Bran Castle**, famously associated with the Dracula myth and perched dramatically in the Carpathian Mountains. Tour its medieval rooms and corridors while uncovering the real and fictional history behind this iconic fortress.

Continue your cultural journey to **Sighișoara**, one of the best-preserved **UNESCO-listed medieval citadels** in Europe. Walk through cobbled lanes lined with colourful buildings, clock towers, and centuries-old churches. Immerse yourself in the town's artisanal spirit by watching local craftspeople **carve traditional wooden toys** or **paint intricate Easter eggs**, preserving Transylvanian folk art.

Dinner & Overnight in Sighișoara



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DAY 5: Sibiu – Romania's Crafts Capital and Open-Air Folk Museum

Spend the day exploring **Sibiu**, a cultural gem renowned for its well-preserved medieval architecture and vibrant artisan community. Begin with a visit to the **ASTRA Museum of Folk Civilization**, Romania's premier **open-air museum** and **national heritage site**, showcasing traditional rural life through historic houses, workshops, and authentic crafts from across the country.

Return to Sibiu's charming **Old Town**, where narrow streets lead you to meet skilled **leatherworkers, potters, and woodcarvers** practicing time-honoured crafts. This immersive experience offers a unique opportunity to purchase exquisite handmade souvenirs directly from the artisans.

Dinner & Overnight in Sibiu



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DAY 6: Cross into Bulgaria – Veliko Tarnovo's Royal Past & Folk Crafts

This morning, cross the majestic **Danube River**, entering **Bulgaria**, a country rich in medieval heritage and folk traditions. Your first stop is the historic hilltop town of **Veliko Tarnovo**, once the capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire.

Tour the imposing **Tsarevets Fortress**, a symbol of Bulgaria's royal past, with panoramic views over the Yantra River. Then wander down **Samovodska Charshia**, a lively street where traditional crafts come alive—browse artisan shops and watch demonstrations of **wood carving, copperwork, and embroidery**. You'll even have the chance to try your hand at a **Bulgarian folk craft workshop**, guided by a local master.

Dinner & Overnight in Veliko Tarnovo



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DAY 7: Etar Open-Air Museum & Plovdiv – Crafts and Ancient Civilizations (UNESCO)

Begin your day with a visit to the enchanting **Etar Ethnographic Open-Air Museum**, nestled in the Balkan Mountains. This living museum recreates a 19th-century Bulgarian village, where you'll watch artisans practice traditional crafts like **wood carving, pottery, weaving**, and copper-smithing—perfect for cultural travellers and heritage enthusiasts.

Continue your journey to **Plovdiv**, one of Europe's oldest continuously inhabited cities and a **UNESCO Creative City of Culture**. In the afternoon, stroll through the charming **Old Town**, with its cobbled streets, colourful 19th-century houses, and well-preserved **Roman Theatre**. Discover the spiritual side of Bulgarian art at a local icon painting gallery or workshop.

Dinner & Overnight in Plovdiv



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DAY 8: Rila Monastery (UNESCO) & Sofia – Sacred Sites and Capital Culture

Depart Plovdiv for a **scenic mountain drive** to the awe-inspiring **Rila Monastery**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Bulgaria's most sacred spiritual landmark. Nestled in the Rila Mountains, this 10th-century Eastern Orthodox monastery is famed for its **vibrant frescoes**, **wooden carvings**, and peaceful cloisters.

In the afternoon, arrive in **Sofia**, Bulgaria's eclectic capital. Explore highlights such as the majestic **Alexander Nevsky Cathedral**, one of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in the world, and delve into the country's rich heritage at the **National History Museum**, home to Thracian gold treasures and medieval artefacts.

Dinner & Overnight in Sofia



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DAY 9: Into North Macedonia – Skopje’s Heritage and Handicrafts

Depart Bulgaria and journey westward as you cross the border into **North Macedonia**, arriving in the vibrant capital city of **Skopje**. Begin with a panoramic visit to the **Skopje Fortress (Kale)**, offering sweeping views over the Vardar River and insight into the city’s layered history from Roman to Ottoman times.

Wander through the atmospheric **Old Bazaar**, one of the oldest and largest marketplaces in the Balkans, where East meets West. Discover traditional crafts as you browse stalls of **hand-hammered copperware**, **delicate filigree jewellery**, and colourful textiles—perfect keepsakes of your cultural adventure.

Conclude the day at the **Memorial House of Mother Teresa**, a moving tribute to Skopje’s most famous native and Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Dinner & Overnight in Skopje



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DAY 10: Lake Ohrid (UNESCO) – Spiritual Serenity & Artisan Traditions

Journey to the jewel of North Macedonia—**Lake Ohrid**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site celebrated for its crystal-clear waters and rich spiritual heritage. Explore this ancient lakeside town known as the “Jerusalem of the Balkans,” once home to **365 churches**, one for each day of the year.

Stroll through Ohrid’s cobbled streets and picturesque harbour, stopping by artisan shops in the lakeside crafts village. Visit a **traditional paper-making workshop** that still uses a 2,000-year-old technique, and watch how **handmade paper** is created from tree bark and natural fibres.

End the day at the stunning **Saint Naum Monastery**, dramatically set on a rocky outcrop over the lake. Marvel at its frescoes, peacocks, and serene atmosphere—one of the region’s most beloved spiritual sites.

Dinner & Overnight in Ohrid



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DAY 11: Into Albania – Berat, the City of a Thousand Windows (UNESCO)

Cross the border into **Albania** via a scenic mountain route, taking in panoramic views of lakes, valleys, and rugged terrain as you descend into one of the country's cultural gems—**Berat**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Often called the “**City of a Thousand Windows**” for its white Ottoman-era houses stacked on the hillside, Berat is a living museum of Albanian architecture and heritage. Explore the historic **Mangalem and Gorica quarters**, then visit the **Onufri Icon Museum**, housed in the 18th-century Church of the Dormition, showcasing the luminous Byzantine-inspired icons of Albania's master painter, Onufri.

In the afternoon, engage with local artisans in **embroidery studios**, where you can witness traditional techniques passed down through generations.

Dinner & Overnight in Berat



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DAY 12: Gjirokastrë & Butrint (UNESCO) – Stone Cities and Ancient Civilizations

Travel deeper into southern Albania and arrive in **Gjirokastrë**, a striking **UNESCO World Heritage Site** known as the "Stone City." Wander its steep cobbled streets lined with Ottoman-era mansions and explore the imposing hilltop **Gjirokastrë Castle**, which offers sweeping views of the Drino Valley. Learn about the town's layered past, including its role as the birthplace of communist leader **Enver Hoxha**.

Continue toward the Ionian coast to visit the **Butrint Archaeological Park**, another **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. This ancient city, once Greek, Roman, and Byzantine, is now a lushly overgrown open-air museum filled with temples, theatres, and mosaics surrounded by wetlands.

En route, enjoy a **local olive oil tasting** and stop at a **stone-carving workshop**, where master artisans keep traditional techniques alive.

Dinner & Overnight in Sarandë



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DAY 13: Into Montenegro – Kotor Bay & Old Town Charm (UNESCO)

Depart Albania via a scenic drive along the **Albanian Riviera**, passing dramatic coastal cliffs and turquoise waters. Cross into **Montenegro**, a country of fjord-like bays and fortified towns, and arrive in the spectacular **Bay of Kotor**—a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Wander the cobblestone lanes of **Kotor's medieval Old Town**, encircled by Venetian walls and watched over by soaring limestone peaks. Explore its **Maritime Museum**, which chronicles the town's seafaring history and pirate tales. Pause to admire the **cathedral of Saint Tryphon** and browse local artisan shops.

Discover **hand-painted ceramics, lacework**, and other traditional Montenegrin crafts in family-run ateliers tucked into the stone alleys.

Dinner & Overnight in Kotor



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DAY 14: Into Bosnia & Herzegovina – Mostar's Living Heritage (UNESCO)

Embark on a picturesque journey through the **Dinaric Alps** and into **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, arriving in the enchanting town of **Mostar**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** renowned for its rich blend of Ottoman and Balkan cultures.

Marvel at the breathtaking **Stari Most (Old Bridge)**, gracefully arching over the emerald Neretva River—a symbol of resilience and unity. Explore **Mostar's Old Bazaar (Bazar Kujundžiluk)**, where artisans sell intricate **copperware**, **filigree jewelry**, and colorful **handwoven wool rugs** in centuries-old storefronts.

Enjoy a hands-on experience with a **local craftsman** in a traditional workshop, where time-honoured techniques are used to forge, shape, and engrave metal by hand.

Dinner & Overnight in Mostar



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DAY 15: Dubrovnik, Croatia – Walled Wonders & Artisan Heritage (UNESCO)

Cross into **Croatia** and arrive in the stunning coastal gem of **Dubrovnik**, famously known as the “**Pearl of the Adriatic**” and recognized as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Enter the perfectly preserved **Old Town**, encircled by monumental stone ramparts that offer panoramic views of the Adriatic Sea.

Walk atop the **city walls**, soaking in the views of terracotta rooftops and baroque architecture. Visit the elegant **Rector’s Palace**, once the seat of power in the Republic of Ragusa, and explore the **Franciscan Monastery**, home to one of Europe’s oldest pharmacies.

Stroll down **Stradun**, the main promenade, and shop for exquisite **local embroidery**, **handmade coral jewellery**, and traditional **Konavle folk costumes**, crafted using age-old techniques passed down through generations.

Dinner & Overnight in Dubrovnik



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DAY 16: Departure from Dubrovnik or Optional extension to Belgrade - Serbia

After breakfast, enjoy some **free time for last-minute souvenir shopping** or a relaxing stroll along the Adriatic coast. Unwind on the beach, sip a final Croatian coffee, or explore any corners of **Dubrovnik Old Town** you may have missed. Possible extension to Belgrade in Serbia.

Later, transfer to **Dubrovnik Airport** for your onward journey.

TOUR ENDS

TRAVEL OPTION PLUS



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