



Lake Ohrid, Macedonia

Albania and Macedonia: Cultural Crossroads on the Via Egnatia

10 – 21 September 2024



Jon Baines
tours



Kruja, Albania

Possessing pristine natural beauty, important archaeological sites and towns sited in stunning locations that have remained unchanged through the centuries, both Albania and Macedonia have begun to attract the attention of travellers, with good reason. They have been at the crossroads of culture, faith and trade for millennia and were connected by the Via Egnatia; an important Roman road built in the 2nd century BC to control Roman occupied territories.

Although inhabited for at least ten millennia, Albania has been one of Europe's 'undiscovered' countries. Under communist rule from the end of World War II until 1990, Albania became isolated within Europe, yet its strategic position

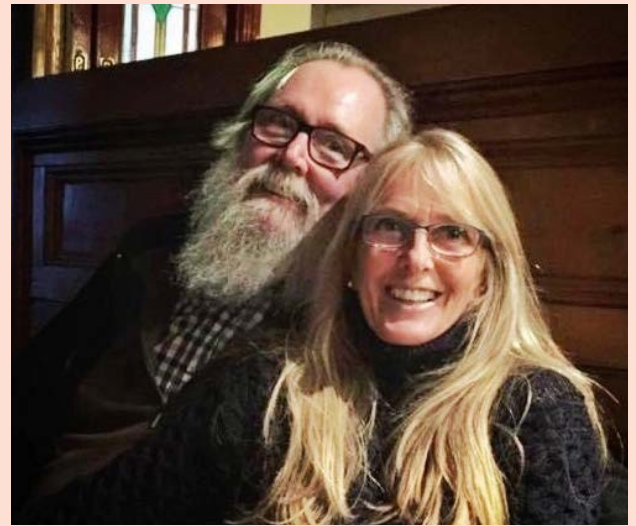
on the Adriatic Sea has attracted settlers and invaders since antiquity. Ancient Greeks founded colonies on its shore from the 7th century BC; the Romans made it a province, later becoming a Byzantine and Ottoman territory; and in the early 20th century, it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and under the domination of Italy and Germany.

Part Balkan, part Mediterranean and rich in Greek, Roman and Ottoman heritage, Macedonia has a fascinating past and a complex national identity. From hip cafes in Skopje to the shimmering expanse of Lake Ohrid, this is a land rich in culture and magnificent landscapes, with much to offer visitors

Tour Leader

The **Very Reverend Dr Richard Marsh** has a long association with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. He is the author of *Black Angels: The Art and Spirituality of Ethiopia*, *Prayers from the East* and co-authored *Millennium Challenges for Development and Faith Institutions*. Richard has travelled extensively and is an experienced tour leader, having led many successful tours to many destinations.

Richard is Dean of St Flannan's Cathedral, Clonfert and St Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert. His wife Ro is an experienced event manager, organising international conferences for networks of accountants in the US, China,



Latin America and Europe. They divide their time between Co Clare and their home on the Wild Atlantic Way in Co Mayo.

“Richard Marsh was an extraordinary leader. Not only was he an expert on places we visited; he has excellent humour. I would definitely go on another trip with him.”

Theodore Sullivan, Ethiopia: Historical and Contemporary, 7 – 21 February, 2017



Itinerary 10 – 21 September 2024

B = Breakfast **L** = Lunch **D** = Dinner

2 nights Tirana – 3 nights Shkodër – 3 nights Ohrid – 1 night Leskovik – 3 nights Gjirokastër



Day 1: Tirana, Albania (Tues, 10 Sept) **D**

- Pm:** Arrive in Tirana, the capital of Albania, and at leisure at the Greenhouse Hotel. Meet in the outdoor patio with the guide and tour leader for a tour briefing.
- Eve:** Welcome dinner at local restaurant in the middle of Tirana Park.

Day 2: Tirana (Wed, 11 Sept) **B D**

- Am:** Explore Tirana and gain an introduction to the country and its history. Starting in its historic heart, Skanderberg Square, visit the Archaeological Museum, which houses a collection of Albanian treasures from the country's pre-history and classical, medieval and Ottoman periods.
- Pm:** Continue to Bunkart2, a former top-secret nuclear bunker (now a museum) that reveals the history of a paranoid police state. Bunkhart was one of 175,000 bunkers built by the Hoxha regime.

Day 3: Tirana / Kruja / Shkodër **B L D**

(Thurs, 12 Sept)

- Am:** Depart Tirana and drive to the famous historical city of Kruja, once defended by Skanderbeg, the 15th-century hero of Albania. Explore Skanderbeg Square and the Ethnographic Museum and spend time in the old bazaar. Visit the Tekke of the Bektashi Order, the mystical liberal Sufi sect of Islam.
- Pm:** Take part in a tour of Mrizi I Zanave farm and learn how this former political prison was converted to a distinguished culinary destination before enjoying lunch at the farm. Arrive at Shkodër, the capital and cultural cradle of northern Albania, and check into your hotel.

Day 4: Shkodër (Fri, 13 Sept) **B D**

- Am:** Visit the village of Zogaj and meet with a group of young Albanians who have created a birdwatching centre, alongside other initiatives, to encourage eco-tourism in the country. Explore the beautiful lake and wetlands with its rich birdlife.

Day 5: Shkodër (Sat, 14 Sept) **B D**

- Am:** Shkodër is regarded as the traditional capital of northern Albania, known for its art, culture, religious diversity and turbulent history. The city's architecture has a great number of mosques and churches, reflecting Shkodër's diversity and tolerance. At the Marubi Museum of Photography see the first photographic collection in the Balkans. At the Fortress of Rozava hear a talk on the Veneto-Ottoman War. Make a private visit to a factory where Venetian masques for the Venice Carnival are made.

Day 6: Shkodër / Ohrid, Macedonia **B D**

(Sun, 15 Sept)

- Am:** Drive to Elbasani to see St Mary's Church and the King's Mosque. Brief walk on the

Via Egnatia and at Lin see the 6th century mosaics. The Via Egnatia was a significant Roman road built in the 2nd century BC, running through territory that is now part of modern Albania, North Macedonia, Greece and Turkey as a continuation of the Via Appia. Used by many from Julius Caesar to St Paul, it was a key Roman road connecting Rome and Constantinople.

Pm: Cross into Macedonia and check in to the hotel in the heart of Ohrid's beautiful old town, which nestles beside the expanse of spectacular Lake Ohrid.

Day 7: Ohrid, Macedonia (Mon, 16 Sept) B D

Am: Take a boat trip on the lake to the Bay of Bones Museum, a superbly reconstructed Bronze Age settlement built over the lake. Continue to the Monastery of St Naum, established in 905 by Naum of Ohrid.

Pm: Lunch by the monastery. Take a cruise on a beautiful, crystal-clear freshwater spring and lagoon. Continue back across Lake Ohrid and learn about the biodiversity around the lake, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979.

Day 8: Ohrid, Macedonia (Tues, 17 Sept) B D

Am: Take a tour of the town of Ohrid and learn about a rich history that includes Edward Lear, who visited in 1851 and captured the landscapes in a series of paintings.

Pm: At leisure by the lake.

Eve: Wine tasting of excellent local wines, followed by dinner.

Day 9: Ohrid / Korçë / Leskovik (Wed, 18 Sept) B D

Am: Cross the border back into Albania through the city of Pogradec. Take a coffee break at the gallery of a local artist.

Pm: Travel to the city of Korçë and visit the Museum of Medieval Art and the Church of Mborje, a jewel of medieval art. Option to visit the gallery of Life photographer and photographic pioneer, Gjon Mili. Drive through the mountainous region of Korçë, known during WWII for its resistance by

local partisans to the occupying military. Continue to the mountain village of Leskovik and visit its new restored gin distillery for a tasting of Albanian gin.

Eve: Dinner and overnight in Leskovik, known for its traditional music and wine.

Day 10: Leskovik / Gjirokastër (Thurs, 19 Sept) B L D

Am: Visit the geothermal springs at Bënja. Continue along the Vjosa River to visit the Byzantine Church of Saint Mary of Kosina, with panoramic views of the Vjosa Valley.

Pm: Arrive in the small city of Këlcyra at the entrance of the Këlcyra Gorge and enjoy lunch in a local restaurant. The location is famous as the site of the battle between King Philip of Macedonia and the Roman army. Meet up with the only remaining maker of handmade shoes in South Albania; this was once a flourishing trade but is now an almost vanished tradition. Visit a local cooper and rakia and cognac maker and sample his wares. Continue to Gjirokastër.

Eve: Meet with a noted local writer, who will join us for dinner to talk about Gjirokastër and its history.



The Blue Eye spring, Albania



The Venetian tower in Butrint, Albania

Day 11: Gjirokaštër (Fri, 20 Sept)

B D

Am: Drive to the World Heritage Site of Butrint, which has been called a 'Microcosm of Mediterranean History.' Butrint was an ancient Greek (and later Roman) city and the seat of an early Christian bishopric in Epirus. On a guided tour explore the ruins that feature the remains of many eras and cultures. From the Hellenistic period there are temples, the promenade and the 4th century BC theatre. From the Roman era are the public baths, gymnasium and fountains. From the Byzantine era we see chapels and the large Basilica of St Peter and St Paul, whilst the Venetians are represented by a watchtower and a small castle with commanding views over the Straits of Corfu.

Pm: Return via the Monastery of Mesopotamia and visit the natural wonder of the Blue Eye*, a clear blue spring that bubbles from a stunning, deep pool. Divers have descended to fifty metres, but it is still unclear what the actual depth of the karst hole is. *It is a 1 km walk to

the Blue Eye, but there is the option of hiring an electric scooter or a buggy.

Eve: Enjoy a farewell dinner in the evening.

Day 12: Gjirokaštër / Tirana (Sat, 21 Sept) **B**

Am: Return to Tirana for your onward flight (one transfer included) or stay on in Gjirokaštër, or extend in Corfu.

Extension in Corfu

Day 12: Gjirokaštër / Corfu (Sat, 21 Sept) **B**

Am: Transfer to Sarande, take the ferry to historic Corfu and transfer to the Bella Venezia Hotel. This elegant Venetian town is flanked by twin hills, each topped by a great fortress built to withstand Ottoman sieges. Wander its winding lanes, stopping at excellent restaurants, lively bars and fascinating shops, and marvel at majestic architecture, including no fewer than 39 churches. Explore at your leisure.

Pm: At leisure in Corfu.

Day 13: Corfu (Sun, 22 Sept) **B**

Am/Pm: At leisure in Corfu.

Day 14: Corfu (Mon, 23 Sept) **B**

Am: Depart Corfu.

All itineraries subject to change according to local conditions.

Corfu with the mountains of Albania behind it





An ancient oak tree containing a freshwater spring in Leskovik (top); The cooper and cognac maker in Këlcyra; Gin distillery in Leskovik (above)

The cost of the tour sharing a room is USD \$3,612

The cost of the tour with a room to yourself is USD \$4,710

The cost includes:

- 11 nights' accommodation with private facilities in medium grade and boutique accommodation
- Breakfast and lunch or dinner daily
- Tour leader and lecturer throughout (the Very Reverend Dr Richard Marsh)
- All tours and talks
- Admission fees where applicable
- Local English-speaking national guide
- All transport services
- Tips

The cost excludes:

- Meals not mentioned
- Flights
- Drinks not mentioned
- All personal extras (porterage, laundry etc)
- All optional excursions, tours and visits
- Travel insurance
- Visa, if required

Accommodation preferences subject to availability.

This tour requires reasonable physical fitness. Participants will need to walk across uneven and rough ground on archaeological sites as well as being able to comfortably manage a number of walks through towns and cities.

Katiut Bridge over the springs at Bënja



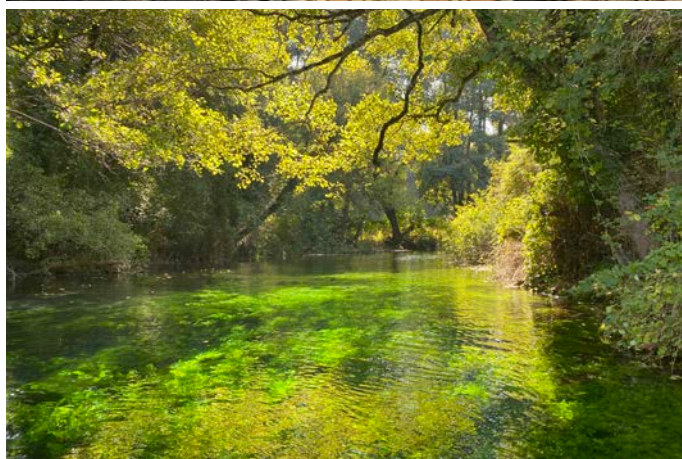
About Us

To travel with us is to dig below the surface, revealing the deeper destination. Of course, you will visit the great historical sites; marvel at the wonders of architecture and engineering; be moved by the riches of culture and art; and experience the most spectacular landscapes in the world. What we also do is make sure that you see the country as it is today, giving you privileged access that independent travel and other tour companies rarely get close to. We give you a variety of experiences, from the sublime to the humble, in the company of intelligent, curious, like-minded people. And while we can be worthy, we also make sure that you have a lot of fun.

All the flights and flight-inclusive holidays in this brochure are financially protected by the ATOL scheme. When you pay you will be supplied with an ATOL Certificate. Please ask for it and check to ensure that everything you booked (flights, hotels and other services) is listed on it. Please see our booking conditions for further information or for more information about financial protection and the ATOL Certificate go to:
www.atol.org.uk/ATOLCertificate

Jon Baines Tours (London)
Hyde Park House, 5 Manfred Road,
London, SW15 2RS
Tel: +44 (0) 207 223 9485 / 5618
Email: info@jonbainestours.co.uk
www.jonbainestours.co.uk

Jon Baines Tours (Melbourne)
PO Box 68, South Brunswick,
Victoria 3055
Tel: +61 (0) 3 9343 6367
Fax: +61 (0) 3 9012 4228
Email: info@jonbainestours.com.au
www.jonbainestours.com



A communist mural in Skanderberg Square, Tirana, Albania (top); Bay of Bones Museum, Lake Ohrid, Macedonia; Butrint Archaeological Park, Albania; Freshwater spring at St Naum, Macedonia (above)



Jon Baines
tours

