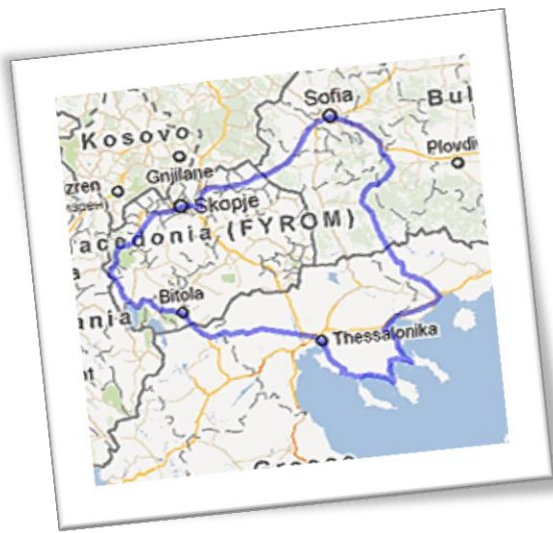


BYZANTINE JOURNEY

Balkan Countries: Greece, Bulgaria, Skopje



DAY 1: "The Halkidiki Experience" (Greece)

Arrival to Thessaloniki. Drive to Halkidiki with a stop at Petralona Cave and Olynthos site. Petralona is bejeweled with stalagmites and stalactites and it is located at the foot of Katsika (Goat) mountain. The "oldest citizen of Europe" was found in the Petralona cave. A skull of Archanthropus aged of about 700.000 years old. Our next stop will be at Olynthos, an archeological site. It is an ancient city of Halkidiki which was originally inhabited by the Macedonians. This site is quite interesting due to its placement on two rounded hills. The excavations found show mosaic floors, which are one of the oldest in Greece. Overnight at Halkidiki.



DAY 2: "The Holly Mountain" (Greece)

We will aboard the Athos Cruise, a 3 hr cruise along the self-governed monastic state known as Agion Oros. It is a Holy Mountain where the presence of females is forbidden. This 'Holy community' with 20 Eastern Orthodox monasteries and capital of Karyes is considered a World Heritage Site. We will later drive to Kavala and have a short City tour. The city has been founded by people from Thassos during the 6th century BC. Kavala has been earlier known as Neapolis or "new city". It is a port city structured amphitheatrically at the Kavala Bay, where Apostle Paul first came to Greece. We will visit the Roman Aqueduct and the ruins of the Acropolis. Overnight in Kavala.



DAY 3: "The Unbound Bible"

We will first visit Philippi where Paul preached his first evangelical sermon and baptized the first Christians on European soil. We will view the baptismal site where Lydia surrendered her life to Christ and then visit a tomb dating from the Roman period that is thought to have served as a prison for Paul. We will then see the famous Acropolis, the Market Place, Basilica, and the Theatre. We will then drive to Bansko with a stop at Rojen monastery. A monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God, the biggest medieval monastery in the Pirin Mountains, built by the Melnik ruler despot Slav during the 12th or 13th c. Overnight in Bansko.



DAY 4: "Rila Monastery" (Bulgaria)

Bansko will be our first region of observation. There are several legends about who founded Bansko. The archeological traces of the inhabitants in the Razlog Valley in general date to the early periods of the Roman Empire. The town now has become an international center for winter and summer tourism. We will visit Rila monastery and drive to Sofia. The monastery also known as Monastery of Saint Ivan of Rila was founded by *Ivan Rilski* (John of Rila) in the 10th century as a colony for hermits. It is the largest and most famous Eastern Orthodox monastery in Bulgaria. Then we will explore the Bulgarian capital by visiting significant sites. Overnight in Sofia.



DAY 5: "Culture and Nature" (Bulgaria - Skopje)

We will first drive to Skopje through Kokino and Kuklici. Kokino is an important, well preserved archeological site from the Bronze Age as well as an ancient well organized and structured megalithic observatory. We will have a short stop at Kuklici site, a natural wonder created by erosion, wind and climate influence, known as "The Stone Dolls". We will spend the afternoon visiting Byzantine monasteries around Skopje. Overnight in Skopje.





DAY 6: "The Skopje Capital" (Skopje)

We will have an City tour of Skopje city, the capital and the largest and most diverse city of the country, which is located on the upper course of the Vardar River. Skopje has been occupied by many different people since its foundation. The origin of the city is evident by several Byzantine churches, monasteries, Scupi and the Aqueduct. However, the greatest mark on Skopje was the Ottoman. We will visit the church of Holly Salvation, Mustapha Pasha Mosque, old bazaar, Turkish baths and many more. We will then drive to Mavrovo towards the National Park. Overnight in Mavrovo.



DAY 7: "Balkan Jerusalem" (Skopje)

We will first drive to Ohrid but we'll make a short stop at Saint Nikola church built from fine processed stones and fresco-paint by an unknown artist. The creation of an artificial lake in the area created a flood around the church which now makes it a fascinating sight. We will proceed towards the national park, passing the Bigorski monastery. The monastery church is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. According to the monastery's 1833 chronicle, it was built in 1020 by Ivan I Debranin, known for its best preserved wooden iconostasis in Skopje. Later we will pass through the valley of Radika and Crm Drim river lakes. Last but not least, we will have a short City tour of Ohrid, the city of 365 churches located at the eastern shore of Lake Ohrid. It is the 7th biggest city of Albania. Overnight in Ohrid.



DAY 8: "The City of Consuls" (Skopje – Greece)

We will first drive to Bitola and have a short sightseeing of the Clock tower, Yeni and Isak pasha mosque, and old bazaar. Bitola has been known since the Ottoman period as "the city of the consuls", since many European countries have consulates there. We will then visit Heraclea Lynkestis archeological site which was a city of ancient Macedon kingdom founded by Phillip II. The Romans had divided the Macedon area into 4 regions and Hercules Lynkestis was the fourth region. The region was considered as an important stop on "Via Egnatia". We will end the day by passing through Albanian – Greek boarder and drive to Edessa. We will have a Panoramic City tour and visit the waterfalls. Overnight in Edessa.



DAY 9: "Through the Gardens of Macedonia" (Greece)

Our first destination will be Pella. Pella city was founded by king Aechelaus as capital of his kingdom replacing the older palace-city of Aigai. We will visit the archeological site with mosaic floors, parts of the palace, the agora and parts of the fortification walls. We will then continue to Veria with optional stop next to Naoussa at the School of Aristotle and then visit Vergina, the archeological sight of Aigai, one of the most important villages in Greece. Here, we will visit the Royal tombs and admire the world famous gold findings. The city of Aigai was the first ancient capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia. We will then proceed towards Thessaloniki. Overnight in Thessaloniki.



DAY 10: "The pearl of Macedonia" (Greece)

We will begin the day by a morning City tour of Thessaloniki. It is a city of 2320 years of age, named after the wife of Kassandros, founder of the city and step-sister of Alexander the Great. Contemporary Thessaloniki is a modern city of about 1.500.000 inhabitants. It is the second largest city in Greece, a crossroad between East and West, North and South. Thessaloniki is a coastal city, rich in Byzantine churches, museums as well as numerous other important historical monuments. The city's most attractive places are: Archaeological and byzantine museum, White Tower, St. Demetrius cathedral, the Galerius Arch, Rotonda and the old city's glorious walls, called, 'Kastrá'. Free time will be given to explore the city on your own. Overnight in Thessaloniki.

DAY 11:

Free time will be given for last minute shopping and exploration of Thessaloniki.
Departure

CATEGORY:	HISTORICAL, ARCHEOLOGICAL & CULTURAL TRAILS
DURATION:	11 days / 10 overnights
INCLUDED:	accommodation on BB, bus transportation, local guides, entrances fees, all taxes
PRICE:	Please contact: info@melitours.gr

The tour can be generally rearranged depending on your needs. Arrival and departure are flexibly amended and the duration can also be shortened or extended. More services can be added.