



CASTLE TRAILS OF NORTHERN GREECE

The history of fortification techniques in Greece is lost in the mist of time. The Neolithic Age brought on organized defense methods to protect it from enemies. Evidence now shows the ruins of the prehistoric acropolis of Diminio in Thessaly. The emergence of the city-state brought up the development of building walls to protect the entire city and the development of a large tower network was constructed for control over the countryside. Certain situations occurred in history that involved the need for new fortifications such as the barbarian invasions and later the great wars to create these massive protective walls. The Byzantine walls of Thessaloniki were almost unconquerable and for 1000 turbulent years the city was attacked only three times. In the 13th century, Franks and Venetian conquerors erected new fortifications to protect their possessions in Greece from Ottoman invasions, as well as against local uprisings. The use of new warfare methods and weapons brought about an improvement in the construction of fortifications, which by the 16th century were designed by specialized engineers. These protective walls were once related to legends and tradition but now they are represented as strong symbols of security and strength. These walls are now used for staging cultural events that create an atmosphere filled with memories of historic times with kings, knights and fair ladies and mixed with Modern Greek culture.



DAY 1: KAVALA

Arrival and drive to Kavala. Sightseeing of Anaktroupoli and Tower of Apollonia, City Tour Kavala. Overnight in Kavala. Kavala, one of Greece's beautiful towns is known for its castle which represents the history of Kavala throughout the years. The castle was built in 1425 AD by the Turks and it is located in such an ideal place where it overlooks the harbor. In ancient history, the Greek temple of the goddess Athena once stood in the exact same spot. The castle is built in such a unique way that it forms part of the Byzantine wall, which is surprisingly well preserved. The wall suffered earthquake damage in 926BC but was restored to its full glory and was once again renovated in 1600AD. Today you can still see the ancient blocks from the original structure.

The castle at Phillippi The ruined castle lays on a hill over the archaeological site of Philippi. It was used as a lookout post in post-Byzantine times. Anyone on top of Mt. Pangaion, which towers over the plain of Philippi, has an impressive view that startles everyone with its astonishing natural sight.

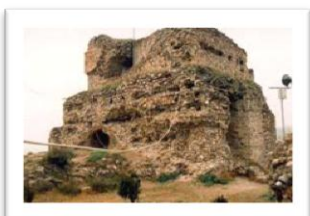
Anaktoroupoli at Nea Peramos This castle is situated on the headland of Vrasidas at Nea Peramos. It was used as a watchtower of the local port. Only parts of the walls have actually survived throughout the years.

The tower at Apollonia Those travelling on road along the coast from Nea Peramos to Loutra Eleftheron are able to see this tower. The fortress was built to guide ships and watch over the area.



DAY 2: DRAMA

Visit Kavala castle, drive to Drama. Sightseeing Drama and visit of the citadele. Drive to Serres. Overnight in Serres. The main reason why the castles of Drama were built is because it monitored movements from the interior of Drama towards the Nestos creek. It was a place for protecting local people during times of barbarian attacks. Leaving behind the National Road for Kavala some 4 km out of Drama and heading for Paranesti, the first stop on the route is the historical town of Adriani, which lies 11 km from Drama. Near the village evidence of a human presence from ancient times has been uncovered among the ruins of the first castle-citadel built in the area at the location known as Ai-Yanni. South of the village stands the wooden roofed three-aisled basilica of Agios Nikolaos built in 1884 by local Greeks at a time when the economy was developing its trade in tobacco. Today the area is recognized for its exceptional local wines and tsipouro. Many vineyards are open to the public giving the opportunity for organized tours to experience the production areas, to taste the sampled wines and understand the production process. It is noted that many of these wines have been awarded prizes that are internationally known.



DAY 3: SERRES

Sightseeing Serres and visit at the Orestes Tower. Drive and sightseeing of Dion. Drive to Olympic riviera. Overnight. One of the most remarkable monuments of Serbian rule in Macedonia can be found high up on the south-western section of Serres' acropolis. Serres Castle was the stronghold of Byzantine emperors during their campaigns against neighboring people. In 1018, its walls and other fortifications were strengthened and improved by the Emperor of Byzantium. The acropolis was rebuilt in 1208, and between then and the city's occupation by the Turks in 1383, various improvements were made to the city's fortifications by the commanders and lords of the city. Visitors to the acropolis of Serres can enjoy a panoramic view of the city and the fertile plain surrounding it from the walls that were once so fiercely fought over.



DAY 4: PLATAMONAS, METEORA, IOANNINA

Visit of Platamonas castle, drive to Kalampaka. Visit Meteora monasteries (1-2 depends of available time). Drive to Ioannina. Overnight in Ioannina. The castle of Platamon is a fortress-town of the middle Byzantine period (10th century A.D.). It lies at the south-east foot of mount Olympus, at a strategic position which controls the route leading from Macedonia to Thessaly and South Greece. Excavations conducted in 1995 brought to light the traces of a Hellenistic fortification, dated to the 4th century B.C. This confirms the suggestion that the site of the castle was occupied by the ancient city of Herakleion, "the first city of Macedonia..." after the Tempe valley, according to an ancient literary source dated to 360 B.C. Habitation on the site continued until the 4th century A.D. The Byzantine wall was restored by the Franks after 1204 and again by the Byzantines in the 14th century. At the end of the 14th century the fortress was captured by the Turks and was again rebuilt but its inhabitants continued to be Christians. In the Second World War (1941) it was bombed by the German army.



DAY 5: IOANNINA

Sightseeing of Ioannina and visit at castle of Ali Pasha. Drive to Kastoria.

The castle of Ioannina was built in 528 B. C. in the frames of Emperor Iustinianus's plan for the fortification of the Byzantine state. It is the oldest Byzantine castle, which was the biggest administrative center of the entire Greece during Ali Pasha's era. The Greek letters were developed in the Castle, where Ali Pasha lived his big love with dame-Vasiliki, where he also fell in love with Kira-Frosini (dame-Frosini), his son's mistress. The great teachers of the Nation taught in the Castle and the big chieftains studied the art of war. This castle of historical importance is constituted by four sections: the exterior grounds, the NW citadel with Aslan Pasha Mosque, the SE citadel with Its Cale and Kastropoliteia, the old city of Ioannina. The area inside its walls is about 200 acres, the perimeter is 2.000 metres and its width is 10 m. There are a lot of buildings that you will admire in the Castle, such as: Soufari Serai, The Cookshops, Voimoundos Tower.



DAY 6: KASTORIA, DISPILIO, VEROIA

Sightseeing of Kastoria, visit Dispilio (archaeological site containing remains of a Neolithic lakeshore settlement that occupied an artificial island). Drive to Veroia. Overnight in Veroia.

Kastoria "the city of Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches" and the capital of the production of furs. The city is built on the shores of a lovely lake with its 76 Byzantine churches, special architecture, its narrow lanes, and imperial mansions. Dispilio – the prehistoric settlement situated on the southern shore of Kastoria Lake. It is one of the most important and oldest of its kind in Europe where the excavations unearthed a number of most significant findings. Kastoria is built on the shores of a lovely lake with its 76 Byzantine churches, special architecture, its narrow lanes, and imperial mansions. The city of Aigai, the ancient first capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia, was discovered in the 19th century near Vergina, in northern Greece. The most important remains are the monumental palace, lavishly decorated with mosaics and painted stuccoes, and the burial ground with more than 300 tumuli, some of which date from the 11th century B.C. One of the royal tombs in the Great Tumulus is identified as that of Philip II, who conquered all the Greek cities, paving the way for his son Alexander and the expansion of the Hellenistic world.



DAY 7: VERGINA, THESSALONIKI

Visit archeological sight of Vergina (Aigai - the ancient first capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia). Drive to Thessaloniki. Overnight in Thessaoniki. Sightseeing of Thessaloniki. The castles and the walls of Thessaloniki were created in ancient times, as it was necessary to fortify the city. It is believed that walls date back to the founding of the city. The castles took their final form during the time of Theodosius the Great (379-395). The Acropolis of Thessaloniki was created in ancient times on the city's highest point. It was the second level of fortification and was meant to offer shelter to the city population in case of any attacks. There, the castles were tall and the towers were thick. The current construction was possibly built in the Palaiologan period (14th c.). Of the seven towers in the fortress, the middle one that flanks the entrance was constructed by the Turks in 1431. It was erected immediately after the fall of the city (1430) and was named Yedi Kule, as the whole fortress came to be known. Until 1989, Eptapyrgio was used as a prison. In recent years, the fortress underwent many repairs, restorations and changes, while new spaces were created for museums and other cultural events.

DAY 8: Free time and departure

CATEGORY: HISTORICAL, ARCHEOLOGICAL & CULTURAL TRAILS

DURATION: 8 days / 7 overnights

INCLUDED: Accommodation on HB, lunches at selected traditional restaurants, bus transportation, local guides, all winery tours, wine tasting instruction and wine tasting, brochures on the Regional wines, complimentary bottle of wine, 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

