

## SOUL OF THE BALKANS

18 June 2027 - 12 July 2027

**Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$23,450**

**Tour Duration: 25 days**

**Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$4,990**



### OVERVIEW

This unique journey takes us to a fascinating corner of Europe that is steeped in ancient and recent history – the Balkans. Our 25-day itinerary reveals the many natural and architectural treasures of Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania. Croatia’s beautiful Dalmatian Coast is where our journey begins, with a Travel Directors’ exclusive week-long cruise from Dubrovnik to Split. Our small, private cruise ship allows us to moor in the shallow waters right at the heart of the beautiful islands along the coast. We then head north to the amazing bridge town of Mostar before embarking on our journey to Sarajevo, a city with a formidable history. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand here in 1914 triggered the World War I. Crossing the magnificent Dinaric Alps, we then enter Montenegro before heading to Kosovo, which since 2008 has been recognised as an independent country. That is, except for Serbia, which still regards Kosovo as a United Nations-governed entity within its borders. Moving further south, we enter Macedonia and the Ottoman city of Skopje, before heading to stunning Lake Ohrid. We then cross into mysterious and little-visited Albania, the only country in Europe without a McDonald’s outlet! Soul of the Balkans takes us through a region rich in history, culture, natural beauty, reconciliation and hope. Explore one of the last hidden gems of Europe before the advent of mass tourism!

Price based on twin-share lower deck aboard MS Amorena: Upgrade to Main Deck: \$650pp twin share

**Tour Fitness Level: Moderate**

## SOUL OF THE BALKANS

18 June 2027 - 12 July 2027

### TOUR MAP



## SOUL OF THE BALKANS

18 June 2027 - 12 July 2027

### ITINERARY

#### 18/06/2027 Australia - Dubai

Check-in at your chosen Australian airport for the flight to Dubai.

#### 19/06/2027 Dubai - Frankfurt - Dubrovnik - Board MS Amorena (D)

Depart Dubai, Emirates EK 45, 08.25

Arrive Frankfurt 13.15

Depart Frankfurt Croatia Airlines OU 419, 18.50

Arrive Dubrovnik 20.35

On arrival we transfer to our cruise ship, MS Amorena. With just 18 cabins, Amorena is the perfect size for visiting the small ports and coastal towns of the Adriatic.

#### 20/06/2027 Dubrovnik (BLD)

Dubrovnik is now a UNESCO World Heritage site, and this morning we begin to explore this stunning city. Lord Byron famously described Dubrovnik as the 'Pearl of the Adriatic'. A magnificent medieval wall encloses marble streets and baroque buildings that exude a pearly light in the Adriatic sun. The main pedestrian thoroughfare, Placa, is a maze of cafés and shops, and has outstanding monuments at either end. Churches, monasteries and museums ornamented with finely carved stone, recall an eventful history and a vibrant artistic tradition.

#### 21/06/2027 Dubrovnik - Mljet (BLD)

We set sail from Dubrovnik and by early afternoon arrive at the island of Mljet. We enjoy a delightful walk to the two lakes, a stunningly beautiful part of the island. In fact, no less than half of the island is designated a national park. This lushly forested paradise also attracted such residents as Ulysses and St Paul!

#### 22/06/2027 Mljet - Korcula (BLD)

Today we sail to one of the greenest islands in the Adriatic, Korcula. With numerous tiny and secluded bays, Korcula is rich in art and culture. It is a typical medieval walled Dalmatian town, with its cluster of red rooftops and round defensive towers. It is also reputed to be the birthplace of the great explorer, Marco Polo, in 1254.

#### 23/06/2027 Korcula - Vis (BLD)

Vis is the most westerly of the larger Croatian islands. A British base during World War II, the island was closed to tourism after 1945 and reopened only in 1990 after Croatia declared its independence. As a result, Vis is largely unspoiled by mass tourism. More significantly, it was the island where Marshall Tito directed his partisans from a secret cave in which he worked and slept. Today we have the chance to view these living quarters.

#### 24/06/2027 Vis - Hvar (BLD)

Today we arrive at the island of Hvar, recently voted one of the ten most beautiful islands in the world and known as the Croatian Madeira because of its lush

## SOUL OF THE BALKANS

18 June 2027 - 12 July 2027

vegetation and mild climate. A walk along the waterfront promenade and through the Old Town reveals a wealth of medieval and Renaissance buildings.

### 25/06/2027 Hvar - Split (BLD)

This morning we set sail for Split, stopping en route in small bays for some swimming, time permitting. Early in the afternoon we arrive in Split, the second-largest city in Croatia and a UNESCO World Heritage site. At the historical centre, and within walking distance of the port, is the huge palace of the Emperor Diocletian. Dating from the end of the third century AD, it was one of the last palaces of the Roman Empire.

### 26/06/2027 Split - Trogir - Split (BLD)

This morning we disembark from MS Amorena and visit the nearby town of Trogir, with its serpentine medieval streets and imposing Kamerlengo Fortress. On our return we start to explore the old city of Split, beginning with the warren of medieval buildings that is contained within the walls of Diocletian's Palace. We then continue along the beautifully restored promenade as we make our way to the open-air marketplace.

### Heritage Hotel Santa Lucia

Split

### 27/06/2027 Split - Mostar (BLD)

After breakfast we drive to Medjugorje, the town famous for its apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Since the first appearance in 1981, millions of people from all over the world have been spiritually strengthened and renewed after a visit to Medjugorje. Countless non-believers and the physically afflicted

have returned home converted or healed. After lunch we depart for nearby Mostar. The beautiful Stari Most (Old Bridge) is the icon that gives Mostar ('Keeper of the Bridge') its name. On 9 November 1993, during the Bosnian War, the bridge lay in ruins. It was rebuilt and reopened on 22 July 2004 and today is a symbol of reconciliation, hope and a new era for the region. Flanking the great bridge is the old cobbled Ottoman Quarter with its 16th-century mosques and old Turkish houses.

### Hotel Bristol

Mostar

### 28/06/2027 Mostar - Sarajevo (BLD)

This morning we drive through the beautiful mountainous scenery of the Dinaric Alps before entering a lush green valley with the city of Sarajevo at its heart. Sarajevo has an amazing religious diversity as Islam, Judaism, Orthodoxy and Catholicism have co-existed here for centuries. It has a long and formidable history: on 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie of Austria-Hungary were assassinated here, in one of the most bizarre attacks in history. It sparked the outbreak of World War I and four years later Bosnia became part of Yugoslavia. From 1992 to 1996, the city was under siege - the longest in the history of modern warfare. Today Sarajevo has been totally rebuilt and its inhabitants look forward to a peaceful and prosperous future. Today we begin a walking tour to discover all of Sarajevo's hidden marvels.

### Hotel Europe

Sarajevo

## SOUL OF THE BALKANS

18 June 2027 - 12 July 2027

### 29/06/2027 Sarajevo (BLD)

This morning we visit the Olympic Stadium built for the 1984 winter games, which was used as a massive cemetery during the siege of the '90s. We then explore the Butmir Tunnel Museum beneath the airport that was used to bring food and supplies to Sarajevo when Serbs shut off the United Nations' airlift and the one remaining road. The Bosnian Army also used it to move soldiers and guns. This afternoon there free time to explore Bascarsija, the pedestrian street.

### 30/06/2027 Sarajevo - Kolasin (BLD)

The scenery is breathtaking as we drive from the Sarajevo valley up to the mountains. We continue to pass spectacular peaks as we cross the border into Montenegro and on to the mountain village of Kolasin.

### Hotel Bianca

Kolasin

### 01/07/2027 Kolasin (BLD)

Kolasin lies at the foot of Bjelasica and Biogradska Gora mountains. Using 4WDs, we start climbing by an amazing road into the very heart of the mountains as we spend the day exploring the immensely beautiful Biogradska National Park. This is one of the oldest national parks in the world and perhaps provides the clue as to why Montenegro is the best-kept secret in Europe. It is a wonderfully-unspoilt area of natural beauty and is a fantastic place to unwind.

### 02/07/2027 Kolasin (BLD)

Following the mighty Tara River we head north and into the largest forest of black pine in Europe. We

then descend through a narrow corridor into the second deepest canyon in the world, the Tara River Gorge. Here, in the Montenegrin Colorado, waterfalls tumble through forests and into the river. On our arrival in the small town of Splaviste, we switch transportation and head down river in rafts that take us on an exhilarating journey through the National Park Durmitor. Today truly encapsulates Travel Directors' theme of 'Unexplored Europe'.

### 03/07/2027 Kolasin - Skopje (BLD)

Shortly after leaving Kolasin we cross the border into Kosovo. After lunch in Pristina, we drive into Macedonia and continue to the capital Skopje, birthplace of Mother Teresa.

### Skopje Marriott Hotel

Skopje

### 04/07/2027 Skopje (BLD)

Macedonia's friendly capital, Skopje, is 2,500 years old and has had many different incarnations. All of them, from Roman to Byzantine and Ottoman to Yugoslav, have left indelible marks on the city as evidenced by the varied architecture and mix of cultures. A walk through the meandering narrow streets of the Old Town evokes the spirit and atmosphere of the past. Today we explore the city and, after lunch, visit the beautiful Byzantine monastery of Panteleimon.

### 05/07/2027 Skopje - Bitola - Ohrid (BLD)

Leaving Skopje behind we continue on to Bitola, Macedonia's second city. Here we enjoy lunch and take a walking tour before continuing our drive to Ohrid. After checking into our hotel we enjoy a cruise on beautiful Lake Ohrid.

## SOUL OF THE BALKANS

18 June 2027 - 12 July 2027

### Hotel Royal View

Ohrid

#### 06/07/2027 Ohrid (BLD)

Ohrid is a kingdom of light and water; a maze of ancient ruins from Macedonia's earlier settlements. It is a sublime lakeside city that for many represents the culmination of the Macedonian experience. Thought to be among the oldest human settlements in Europe, and with a lake that is three million years old, Ohrid is truly worthy of its UNESCO World Heritage listing and is often described as Macedonia's 'crown jewel'. Today we explore this extraordinary city.

#### 07/07/2027 Ohrid - Elbasan - Berat (BLD)

This morning we leave Ohrid and cross the Albanian border where we soon descend onto a vast fertile plain and onto the town of Elbasan. Dominated by the Neokastron (new castle) Elbasan is a beautiful Ottoman metropolis and after lunch in the castle itself we head onto the UNESCO town of Berat. 'The town of a thousand windows' is a truly magical treat. Perhaps one of the great highlights of the tour, this cobblestoned warren of whitewashed walls and tiled roofs, set amidst rugged mountains and flanked by the Osumi River, is a kaleidoscope of a great Ottoman past. Even our hotel tonight is a fantastic Ottoman mansion that is right in the heart of the old city.

### Hotel Mangalemi

Berat

#### 08/07/2027 Berat - Durres - Tirana (BLD)

Leaving Berat, we head to Durres on the Adriatic Sea. Founded in 627 BC, ancient Durres is today Albania's

vital port city. It is also home to the most amazing amphitheatre in the world. It was discovered by a cat called Bianca who fell into the amphitheatre in 1960. The owner of Bianca went in search of his beloved cat and discovered the 2nd century AD marvel. After lunch we head to the nearby capital, Tirana.

### Tirana Marriott Hotel

Tirana

#### 09/07/2027 Tirana (BLD)

Albania is slowly emerging from being the most isolated country in Europe, if not the world. The brutal dictatorship of Enver Hoxha came to a violent end in the early 1990s and today Albania remains the only country in Europe without a McDonald's! Tirana is a lovely city of parks and striking architecture with a vibrant population forging a new relationship with Europe. Today we explore the city and take a cable car to the top of Dajti Mountain for superb views of the city.

#### 10/07/2027 Tirana - Kruje - Tirana (BLD)

Today we travel to Kruje, a medieval town located northwest of Tirana which was the capital of the first autonomous Albanian state in the Middle Ages. We will enjoy a tour of the city including the Kruje Castle before returning to Tirana for our final night.

#### 11/07/2027 Tirana - Dubai (B)

Mid morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Dubai.

**Depart Tirana Emirates EK 2479, 14.35**

**Arrive Dubai 21.50**

## SOUL OF THE BALKANS

18 June 2027 - 12 July 2027

12/07/2027 Dubai - Australia

Connect with the flight to our chosen Australian city.