

Historic Villages of the Adriatic, 18 days Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania

May 16-June 2 and
August 29-September 15, 2022



Hvar Island, Croatia

Slovenia

Day 1 May 16/Aug 29 Arrival Ljubljana, Slovenia / Lake Bled, Hotel Lovec on the lakeshore in the center of the little town. Met on arrival and transfer 20-30 min to Lake Bled. (Ljubljana airport is closer to Lake Bled than to town itself).

Day 2 May 17/Aug 30 Bled (B, L) Hotel Lovec 4*

The sequence of activities is subject to change depending on various factors including weather, crowds and traffic.

Morning tour of Lake Bled: visit the fairy tale Bled Castle and the medieval city perched on a high cliff 100 m above the lake. Ride in a traditional Pletna boat to St. Mary's Church on Bled Island in the middle of the Lake.

Enjoy a cable car ride to Mt Vogel where we enjoy outstanding views and a light lunch of barley soup and strudel in an alpine hut.

Afterwards, a scenic 30 min drive to Bohinj Valley. Lake Bohinj lies in Triglav National Park. At a length of 4100m, width 1200m and 45m at its deepest point, Bohinj is the largest and deepest lake in Slovenia. It lies wedged in a glacial valley of the Julian Alps, surrounded on all sides by soaring mountain backdrops and lovely little villages.

We shall visit a remote village in Upper Bohinj Valley. Here group members can select from two options. One option is to visit an 18th century museum and the cheese making museum called Museum of Alpine Dairy Farming in village Stara Fužina (hours are unpredictable). This museum is located in a former village cheese making facility from 1883, where cheese was produced until as late as 1967. On display at the museum is the original cheese making shop along with original cheese making tools, cheese vats and accessories, as well as objects used by the shepherds in their work in the mountain pastures. We also see a wooden interior of a shepherd's hut from the Zajamniki settlement, dating from 1849.

Option two is a pleasant walk partially through the woods and partially through the village which starts close to the cheese factory. You will circle around Village Stara Fuzina and back to the cheese factory. The walk takes about 1 hour.

Return to the Lake Bled town. Rest of afternoon/evening is at leisure.

Day 3 May 18/Aug 31 Ljubljana-Portoroz/Piran (B) - Hotel Piran

We shall depart by 830 am this morning for the one hour drive to Ljubljana. On arrival we enjoy a walking tour (about 1.5 hour) of the pedestrian only city center and a cable ride up to the Castle.

Ljubljana is a beautiful capital with eye-candy architecture at every turn and a pleasant relaxed atmosphere, making it a joy to walk about. The city architecture is a mix of styles. Despite the appearance of large buildings, especially at the city's edge, Ljubljana's historic centre remains intact. Although the oldest architecture has been preserved from the Roman period, Ljubljana's downtown outline is the Middle Ages. After the 1511 earthquake it was rebuilt in the Baroque style following Italian, particularly Venetian, models. After the quake in 1895, it was once again rebuilt, this time in the Vienna Secession style, which today is juxtaposed against the earlier Baroque style buildings that remain. The symbol of the city is the Ljubljana Dragon. It is depicted on the top of the tower of the Ljubljana Castle in the Ljubljana coat-of-arms and on the Ljubljana River crossing Dragon Bridge (Zmajski Most).

You will enjoy lunch here on your own. There are many cafes and restaurants to choose from all in the pedestrian zone.

Afterwards, we drive approx 1 hour to Postojna to visit the famous cave. You will board an electric train for a 10 minute ride and then about 1 hour guided walk inside the cave. Wear non-skid shoes and warm layers of clothing. The constant temperature in the caves ranges from 8 to 10° C.

Postojna Cave is a network of 20 kilometres of passages, galleries and chambers into which experienced guides have accompanied more than 31 million visitors in the last 200 years. It is the largest cave in the "classic karst" and the most visited show cave in Europe. In 1872 railway lines were laid in the cave; electricity arrived in 1884. The electric lighting allows you to admire the size and splendor of the underground world, where the geological past is recorded in a unique manner. You will be dazzled by a wealth of speleothems: calcite formations, stalactites and stalagmites abounding in a variety of shapes, colors and age.

We culminate the day with a 30 minute drive to the small coastal town Piran. Unlike Portoroz, a modern coastal resort (looks like Nice), Piran is a medieval pirate town with typical atmosphere of stony buildings and narrow streets. Many options for dining here either in the tiny town square or along the seaside.

Do walk 3-5 minutes on the seaside promenade at the edge of the old town before dark to enjoy a sunset beverage and/or dinner. This evening enjoy the lively atmosphere around the main square. The cafes and the ice cream vendor are popular and remain open late in the summer.

Croatia

Day 4 May 19/Sep 1 Villages of Istria: Motovun- Višnjan - Groznjan- Buje-Porec (B) / GH Palazzo

We will start the morning with a guided walking tour of Piran, a quaint old town with lots of character, wonderful architecture and a place where you will see local residents meeting at the town square for coffees and children playing.

We'll depart Piran at about noon. The drive today crosses Istra Peninsula. Along the way we visit local villages all located on the top of the hills (like in Provence, France); a few are turned into artist colonies with lots of galleries and small craft shops. The drive without stops would be only 2 hours, but we will enjoy a full leisurely day.

We start our day by crossing the border from Slovenia into Croatia, leaving the coast to explore picturesque old villages of Istria inland. We visit the villages of Motovun, Visnjan, Groznjan and Buje, before returning to the coast.

With its elegant system of towers, walls, gates and piazzas, the hilltop village of Motovun is a striking example of Venetian colonial architecture. Perched on a hill some 227m above sea level, Motovun is the most attractive town in the Istria interior. Sightseeing in Motovun is a trip into the past when the town was part of the Venetian empire. Reminders of the former Venetian rulers are everywhere: 14th century stone lions (Venice's symbol) stand sentry over the town gates and coats of arms adorn the buildings. Architect Andrea Palladio designed the late-Renaissance town church of St. Stephen. Francesco Bonazzo contributed the marble statues of St. Stephen and St. Laurence, and an unknown 17th-century Venetian produced the painting of the Last Supper behind the church's altar. Other sightseeing highlights include the Renaissance Municipal Palace, the largest secular building in Istria from that period. Notice also the water cisterns of the town in the town square with pipes that date from the 14th and 15th centuries.

On arrival in Motovun, we shall stop for light lunch at one of the cafes (pay direct) before proceeding on our guided walking tour: Passing along the cobblestone street at the foot of the hill, you will see the Gothic chapel of St. Anthony the Abbot (Sv. Anton) from the 15th century. This street leads you to the town gate decorated with a relief of the Venetian lion from 1517 with the town's pride hiding behind it - the old town square. Partly surrounded by town walls built in the 13th and 14th century the square is adorned by a 27 meter high bell-tower, 18th century Municipal loggia, water-well and the Parish church of SS. Quiricus and Julita (Sv. Kvirik i Julita) dating from the 19th century. From the water-well, as if on the palm of your hand, there is an all-embracing view of the landscape reaching the sea - over the fields, vineyards and scattered small houses of the nearby villages.

Optionally, take a walk around the town walls of Motovun, if you like. The sweeping view takes in the vineyards that produce Motovun's fine Terrain and Malvasija wine and the forests that hide Istria's prized white and black truffles.

Inhabitants of Višnjan are known as very diligent people. They cherish their fields, vineyards and cattle as their greatest treasure. They have succeeded in preserving their autochthonism and therefore they can offer a rich variety of traditional

Istrian dishes, quality wines from renowned wine-makers, olive oil and many other traditional and ecological products, which you can savor in the pleasant ambience of a wine cellar, traditional inn, restaurant or agri-tourism.

Groznjan, an ancient town in northwestern Istria, fifteen km from the sea, takes great pride in its wealth of tradition, cultural heritage and natural beauty, all of which is ennobled by art. Today, numerous cultural and historical landmarks serve as backdrops for cultural manifestations and entertainment. Here, one can attend frequent concerts of classical music, a jazz festival, the painting manifestation Ex Tempore, and numerous exhibitions at the municipal gallery and approximately twenty private galleries and studios. Have a walk around the area or just enjoy magnificent landscapes and views in the quiet atmosphere.

The Buje Region stretches from the River Mirna to the river Dragonja, which also marks the borderline with the Republic of Slovenia. This is an area with wavelike hills covered with vineyards, olive groves and fields sprinkled with oak, cerris and pine woods and Mediterranean meadows with wild thyme and fir trees and a karst belt full of interesting geological phenomena. Today, the entire region of Buje is the most famous wine-growing part of Istria with numerous wine cellars and farmhouses.

Our journey for the day will culminate in Porec, one of the oldest cities in Croatia. It is a pretty little place set on a small promontory and cut into an ordered mesh of streets that dates from its time as a Roman encampment. The ancient Decumanus still runs straight through the center and the Roman forum. The Romans conquered the region in the 2nd century BC and made Porec an important administrative center from which they were able to control land from the Lim Fjord to the Mirna River. Porec's street plan was laid out by the Romans, who divided the town into rectangular parcels marked by the longitudinal Decumanus and the latitudinal Cardo.

Day 5 May 20/Sep 2 Porec –Rovinj – Pula - Pazin - Opatija (B) / Hotel Bristol

This morning we embark on a city tour of Porec. Visit the famous Basilica (UNESCO) and streets Cardo & Decumanus.

We then depart to Rovinj. Originally an island, Rovinj was first mentioned in the 7th century as Ruvignio, but it is believed that the town emerged at least several centuries earlier, possibly between the 3rd and 5th centuries. It was settled by Slavs in the 7th century and began to develop a strong fishing and maritime industry. We enjoy a walking tour of Rovinj. This beautiful fishing port is in fact mostly Italian speaking. Shops line the narrow streets of the old town selling everything from local Istrian wines and grappa to the region's tasty olive oil and truffles. Above the old town stands the largest gothic church in Istria, the Basilica of Santa Euphemia. This is a culmination of a number of earlier churches, remains of which are still evident. The first, the Oratory of St. Maur (who is said to have lived in a house on this site), is in scattered pieces on the north side of the basilica, a secret place of worship dating from a time when Christianity was still a clandestine religion.

Continue on the local road passing through small villages to enjoy local sites along the way to Pula, the biggest town in Istria. The town of Pula developed out of a hill-fort named Pola and is of Illyrian origin. The Romans restored and expanded the system of the Illyrian hill-forts, and the top of the hill, on which the capitol rose, together with several public institutions and temples, had its own fortification system. The first tourist excursions to Pula were recorded at the beginning of the 19th century. We will drive through the town center, dotted with Roman ruins. The most impressive of which are the spectacular Roman Amphitheater Arena and the 1st century Triumphal Arch of Sergius. Artists and architects from Michelangelo to Robert Adam studied and sketched this exceptionally well-preserved monument. Also noteworthy is the mid 1st century Hercules Gate. It is the town's oldest gate. Named after Hercules, the town patron, it's decorated with a relief showing Hercules' head and club. In the centre of town is the Roman Forum containing the Temple of Augustus.

Next, a short, beautiful drive Onward to Pazin (40 km/50 min) with a short tour here to see highlights including the Pazin Fortress and Castle, the Cave, the Parish Church of St. Nicholas and Diocesan Seminary.

Returning to the coast, we head to Opatija, the oldest established and still one of the most popular Croatian resorts town, in the best tradition of seaside magnificence. A Rijeka businessman built the first villa here in 1844, and after a visit by the trendsetting wife of the Austrian Emperor, the town was promoted as a handy health resort for aristocratic Austrians.

This evening is independent. Enjoy a walk on the seaside promenade; soak up the ambience while enjoying drinks and a meal at one of the many terrace cafes.

Day 6 May 21/Sep 3 Opatija to Plitvice Lakes (UNESCO) (B, D) / Hotel Degenija 3* (best available in this area)

Drive to Plitvice Lakes - about 3 hrs. The first part of our drive will follow the coast. We pass through Rijeka, one of the busiest towns, a harbor and shipyard on the Croatian coast, then we go around Kvarner Bay - the largest bay in Croatia, before leaving the coast to turn into the country side by going over the mountain range of Velebit.

We reach the Plitvice Lakes, where sixteen lakes, each at different levels, join each other in a series of cascading waterfalls. Surrounded by dense woods, the region (on UNESCO's List of World Natural Heritage sites) is a natural phenomenon of rare and unique beauty.

We will enjoy a walk through the National Park of Plitvice Lakes. Wooded paths follow the succession of lakes and waterfalls where streams burst out of rocks. The colors of the pools are reminiscent of Lake Louise in the Canadian Rockies. There is an opportunity to buy lunch in the park (pay directly).

Our hotel, a bit rustic/best available, is the closest to the entrance of the Plitvice Lakes National Park.

Day 7 May 22/Sep 4 Drive Plitvice - Zadar - Šibenik – Trogir-Split (B) - Hotel Slavija

We start with a drive to Zadar (approx 3 hrs), the ancient capital of Dalmatia and a typical Venetian old town. This large town has a historic center crowded on to a tapered thumb of land, jutting north into the Adriatic. The town has a variety of architectures and styles, where lone Corinthian columns stand alongside Romanesque churches. Zadar was part of Italy until 1947, and, though fast diminishing, you will find the Italian influence still strong and Italian widely spoken, particularly amongst the older people. The city has much of the vibrancy of an Italian coastal town.

In Zadar we visit the Archaeological Museum, which has a neatly displayed collection of Roman relics, pre-Christian, Roman and medieval finds from nearby Nin, as well as fragments of sculpture from most of the local churches. We will also see the Roman Forum from the 2nd century BC, the 9th century pre-Romanesque church of St Donatus, as well as St Elias church.

Next is Šibenik (approx 1 hr drive) located in an area of several hundred inlets that are spread out to the open blue sea, forming many channels, bays of rare beauty. Especially lovely are the inlets posted in front to the open sea, with their picturesque rocky cliffs and deep abbrasions. Šibenik and its beautiful surroundings occupy a unique place. In its district, the renowned beauties of the Dalmatian coast are further enriched by the most indented coastline with exuberant stony landscapes. The river Krka has forced its way through a dramatic canyon that, from its source to its end, possesses wonderful waterfalls. In the town itself, located on the shore stand its pride - the Cathedral of St. Jacob, which for its beauty made its way to UNESCO Heritage List. The building of the church started in 1402, though plans on its construction had already begun in 1298. The church is built in the Gothic style and a multitude of very famous Venetian and local craftsman worked on it.

Our last visit today will be to the medieval town of Trogir, a suburb of Split, (approx 30 min drive) which has changed little over the years, and is today one of the most beautiful towns on this coast. Life revolves around Narodni Trg, a creamy-white square flanked by the Cathedral, Communal Palace and Loggia. We will see the Venetian Cathedral of St Lovro, (UNESCO) built from the 13th to 15th centuries on the Place of Ivana Pavla, one of the finest architectural works in Croatia.

Continue to Split; arrival will be approx 6 pm. Lots of choices for dinner here in old town and along the waterfront. Our lovely hotel is just inside the gate and right next to the Palace. It also has excellent cuisine. The shops stay open until 8 pm.

Day 8 May 23/Sep 5 Split-Hvar-Korčula (B) / Hotel Fabris

In the morning, we will load your luggage onto our vehicle to be transported to Korčula, as we enjoy a day of cruising the beautiful waters of the Adriatic.

Beginning at 9 am, a short guided walking tour around the old part of Split, a very vibrant city. We will see its famous Theater house, visit the local market and walk around the brand new sea front "Riva." At the heart of all of this, hemmed in by sprawling estates and a modern harbor, lies Diocesan' Palace, one of the most outstanding samples of classical architecture in the world. The Roman Emperor Diocletian spent his declining years in an enormous palace that he had built near his birthplace, Espalatos, in Dalmatia. With the passing centuries the original architecture of the palace has been altered, but the people of the city, later called Spalato, and then Split, were able to use the structure of the palace, damaging it as little as possible, under Byzantine, Venetian and Austro-Hungarian rule. Thus, a harmonious city came into being within the Roman walls. We will see the peri style of the palace, Diocletian's mausoleum, Jupiter's temple, the colonnades along the streets, Early Croatian churches, Romanesque houses, the gates of Andrija Buvina and architectural works by Juraj Dalmatinac which all have remained in a good state.

Boat to Hvar

We'll depart on the 11:30 am high-speed catamaran for a one hour ride to the Island of Hvar. Even by Dalmatian standards Hvar's history seems unusually 'dense'. Originally a Greek colony, the island has been the temporary property of different rulers like Hungary, Genoa, Bosnia and Dubrovnik, and like the rest of Dalmatia, it only achieved a period of relative peace and stability under the Venetians. Its harbor is now alive, with a constant hum of activity, with a creamy-brown piazza in the middle, flanked by the Venetian Arsenal, and culminating in the skeletal campanile of Hvar's Cathedral.

Upon arrival, we enjoy a walking tour of Hvar. We will first go through the narrow streets to the 15th Century Franciscan Monastery followed by the visit to the Renaissance Cloister. The old Rectory houses today a collection of lace, manuscripts, and books. The church also contains remarkable collection of paintings. We visit later the St Stephen's Cathedral and the Arsenal, a thick walled fortress overlooking the harbor, where Europe's oldest community theater which opened in 1612.

The rest of the afternoon independent to stroll about and enjoy lunch on your own at one of the many restaurants facing the harbor or discover the ones along the narrow alley lanes up the hill. Old town of Hvar is very compact.

At 5:10 pm, we board the catamaran for a one hour, 20 minute ride to the island of Korčula. Your luggage will be at the hotel upon your arrival. We arrive at 6:30 pm. Evening independent. Enjoy dinner at your hotel on the sea or walk into old town.

Day 9 May 24/Sep 6 Korčula –Dubrovnik (B) / Hotel Zagreb

In the morning, a pleasant one hour tour of Korčula old town. Like all the old towns you have visited thus far, the pedestrian-only area has stone paths and narrow winding streets; old churches and pleasant main squares. In my opinion, as charming as these old towns are, after a few, they do seem to look alike. To give you a broader experience of the island of Korčula, we

shall visit one and maybe two different towns on the island (time permitting). After the tour of old town we will go to Zrnovo (five minute drive), a small village of old Cypresses, terraced vineyards, stone houses. Next we will go to Pupnat, the oldest settlement on the island, dating to Illyrian times. It has well preserved village architecture.

We culminate our time on Korčula with a visit to Lombarda, a little fishing village. There is a nice café on the waterfront for a quick lunch or coffee and snacks (pay on your own).

Afterwards, we drive 10 minutes to Dominče and take the 2:10 pm ferry for a 20 minute ride to Orebić, on the Pelješac Peninsula. It is a lovely drive through the charming peninsula, stopping for wine tasting at one or maybe two wineries (depending on our time and group energy). We arrive at the old town of Ston, a quick look and onward to the oyster farm for demo and tasting. A 1.5 hour drive brings us to Dubrovnik, arriving approx 630-700 pm. Transfer to hotel for check-in.

Hotel Zagreb is an historic residence surrounded by a magnificent garden. Located in the heart of the pedestrian parkway in Lapad area, it began operating as a hotel in 1932. The hotel is a 7-8 minute drive to historic old town and a five minute walk to a sandy/pebble beach. The excellent restaurant overlooks the garden and offers a diverse menu. The kitchen staff are happy to cater to individual specific dietary preferences.

Day 10 May 25/Sep 7 Dubrovnik / Hotel Zagreb

This morning you will meet your guide in the hotel lobby at 9 am and drive about ten minutes from your hotel to the historic old town for an approximately two hour walking tour. The tour includes visiting the Franciscan Monastery, housing one of the world's oldest pharmacies, the old harbor, St Laurence Fortress, the Sponza and Rector's Palaces and other points of interest in this best preserved European walled city.

The rest of the day is independent. Lunch and dinner on your own. There are so many wonderful restaurant options from simple pizza and pasta dishes, to Croatian fresh seafood meals at outdoor cafes as well as formal white cloth elegant establishments. Each has its own old world charm and ambiance. You can return to hotel whenever you wish. Either let the driver know when he drops you off what time you wish to be picked up, or for the ultimate flexibility, taxis are abundant.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Day 11 May 26/Sep 8 Dubrovnik-Sarajevo / (B) Hotel Astra Old Town

Depart at 9 am for our drive to Sarajevo (4 hrs), capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We can make a brief stop for bathroom and coffee/tea if needed. Our plan is to arrive at the Sarajevo Hotel by at least 2:30 pm. **The Balkans Explorer group members will be arriving this day between 2- 3 pm.** You will all be traveling together for the rest of our tour.

After check in, a short bit of free time and lunch on your own.

In the late afternoon/early evening (approximately 4 pm) we walk ½ block into the old Turkish quarters for a brief guided walking tour of the pedestrian Baščaršija historic zone. We will have a local guide here as required by law.

This charming town will take you instantly back to Ottoman times. For more than 400 years mosques, orthodox churches, roman-catholic churches and synagogues have stood together. We will visit the oldest Ottoman mosque and the main Catholic and main Orthodox churches. We will also see the place where Austro-Hungarian prince Franc Josef was assassinated (believed to be the cause of WWI). We will stroll through the old quarters and the authentic Turkish “carsija.”

Afterwards, we go to the 16th century Ottoman Latin Bridge, which crosses the shallow Miljacka River to connect the old town with the Skenderija neighborhood. It is the city's oldest. But as 16th-century bridges go, the structure itself isn't what stands out. On one end of this bridge in 1914, the heir to Hapsburg throne was assassinated by an 18-year-old Serbian, sparking World War I and leading to the extinction of two great empires, the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman. A modest museum at the northern end of the bridge tells the story of how Gavrip Princip happened to see Archduke Franz Ferdinand's motorcade after other would-be assassins failed to kill him.

We culminate the tour with a visit to the Žuta Tabija, or the Yellow Fortress. It looms above the city from Jekovac Cliff on the eastern end of the old town, offering a fantastic view and a spectacular place to see the sunset.

Afterwards, you are free to browse and have dinner in Old Town. The shops are open until at least 8 pm.

Your guide will direct you to one of the recommended traditional casual restaurants for dinner or you may choose to explore and find one on your own (pay direct). There are so many options for meals here. You can try traditional Bosnian food in many “cevapdzinica” all around old bazaar and typical local deserts in its oriental sweets shops and cafes.

Day 12 May 27/Sep 9 Sarajevo (B) - Hotel Astra Old Town

This morning we start with a visit to the War Tunnel (the tunnel of hope) - the tunnel that connected the Sarajevo Airport with the suburb of the town beneath the occupied territory. During the Siege of Sarajevo during Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995, the Sarajevo Tunnel was constructed by the besieged citizens of Sarajevo in order to link the city of Sarajevo, which

was entirely cut-off by Serbian forces, with the Bosnian-held territory on the other end of the supposedly neutral area at the Sarajevo Airport controlled by the United Nations. The tunnel linked the Sarajevo neighborhoods of Dobrinja and Butmir.

Beginning in January 1993, the Sarajevo Tunnel was dug by Bosnian volunteers working in 8-hour shifts. The Sarajevo tunnel was completed in mid-1993, which allowed food and humanitarian aid to come into the city, and people to get out. The tunnel was one of the major ways of bypassing the international arms embargo and providing the city defenders with weaponry. The tunnel was 1.5 metres (4.9 ft) in height and about 1m in width, and ran for approximately 960 metres (3,150 ft) in length. During the time it was used, it is estimated that 20 million tons of food entered the city and 1 million people passed through it.

The tunnel was most famously used to transport the former Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović in his wheelchair that was run on the railway of the tunnel. The 20 metres (66 ft) of tunnel that are left today now form part of a museum in Sarajevo, open daily until 4 pm.



The house in which the tunnel's northern entrance was hidden is now a museum.

The tunnel was ingeniously dug in a wide L-shape in order to prevent the Serb forces from caving it in with shells, since the tunnel exit points could not remain a secret for too long. From 1993 to 1995 the tunnel further developed by putting in a mineshaft-like railway, drainage pumps and digging out crossing points where people coming from two different sides could pass by each other as the tunnel was not wide enough to do that everywhere. It is less known that the Bosnian forces began working on a second, bigger tunnel towards the end of the war, but it was never completed or utilized as the war ended in December of 1995.

Afterwards, a stop at the nearby 16th century Roman Bridge, built using actual Roman stones.

From here we enjoy time at Vrelo Bosne, a green park at the source of the River Bosne, 12 km southwest of the city. The approach to the park down a long alley of tall trees is spectacular. Fancy houses from the Austro-Hungarian period line the alley, offering a peek into the luxuries of the past. The park itself is a network of paths and bridges over bubbling streams and waterfalls and still pools reflecting the leafy surroundings. It's filled with shade and perfect for a warm summer's day. The park has outdoor cafés, picnic sites and horse and carriage rides. There are a few good restaurants with nice views near the lakes for lunch (pay direct). Enjoy some leisure time here.

This afternoon we visit the museums in Old Town: National Museum, History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Afterwards, we take a 14 minute cable car ride from Old Town to the top of Trebevic Mountain, enjoying amazing views. Experience a wonderful walk of 900 meters through the forest ending in front of the Hotel Pino Nature. Have a coffee break if you like (pay direct) and go back to the cable car. Return to the hotel.

[Day 13 May 28/Sep 10 Sarajevo - Mostar \(B\) – Villa Fortuna](#)

This morning we enjoy a two hour drive through the canyon of River Neretva to Mostar.

Picturesque and charming Mostar seems straight out of a fairytale storybook. The historic town, spanning a deep valley of the Neretva River, developed in the 15th and 16th century as an Ottoman frontier town and during the Austro-Hungarian period in the 19th and 20th centuries. Mostar has long been known for its old Turkish houses and Old Bridge, Stari Most, after which it is named. The pedestrian only bridge is in the heart of town and links the villages on each side of the river.



Mostar, Bosnia

Mostar means bridge-keeper. The old Turkish bridge once was the only means uniting the city over the emerald waters of the Neretva River. The original bridge was wooden, built at the beginning of the 15th century, and it was a very important link between the two parts of Herzegovina, not only strategically but also in respect of trade linking the sea to the interior. This soon brought the urgent need to replace the old unsafe wooden chain bridge with a new one to meet the growing requirements. The construction began in 1557 and continued for nine years. The bridge is the masterpiece of Hajrudin, a pupil of the renowned architect, Sinan. The year of the completion was 1566. Tall and white, with its graceful arch, it appears to be cut from the single huge stone slab. It is 13.5 feet wide and 60ft high and its stone arch is slightly less than 90ft long.

In the 1990 conflict, however, most of the historic town and the Old Bridge were destroyed. The Old Bridge was recently rebuilt and many of the edifices in the Old Town have been restored or rebuilt with the contribution of an international scientific committee established by UNESCO. The Old Bridge area, with its pre-Ottoman, eastern Ottoman, Mediterranean and western European architectural features is an outstanding example of a multicultural urban settlement. The reconstructed Old Bridge and Old City of Mostar is a symbol of reconciliation, international cooperation and of the coexistence of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious communities.

A walking tour of Mostar includes a visit to the ancient city dating to the 16th/17th centuries, inside a traditional house of this period and visit to the recently rebuilt Mostar Bridge, the emblem of the city. We will have ample time to wander leisurely and enjoy the lively atmosphere of the old bazaar.

Montenegro



Budva, Montenegro

Day 14 May 29/Sep 11 Mostar- Medzugarje - Počitelj -Kotor (B) / Hotel Astoria (inside the city walls)

Depart at 9 am, we drive about 45 minutes to Medzugarje located in the Herzegovina region of Bosnia and Hergovina (former Yugoslavia). Through the years there have been claims that the Virgin Mary has appeared here with messages to believers.

Afterwards, we stop at the picturesque village of Počitelj, a UNESCO heritage site, perched on a hillside above the river, 30 km south of Mostar. It is supposed that the fortified town and its attendant settlements were built by Bosnia's King Stjepan Tvrtko in 1383. The walled town evolved over the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and the surviving stone-built parts can be seen in two stages of evolution: medieval, and Ottoman. You will walk on narrow cobbled streets and climb the stone stairs to visit the Fort, 16th century mosque of Sisman Ibrahim-Pasha, Madrassa (Muslim religious high school) with its original copper domes, the hamam (Turkish baths), the striking Sahat-Kula (clock tower). All the sites within the village are connected by stairs that wind in all directions thru a maze of medieval houses with distinctive round chimneys atop roofs clad with irregular shaped stone slabs, and gardens where walnuts, figs, kiwi and pomegranates grow in abundance.

Besides its stunning oriental architecture and Ottoman feel, since 1964 Počitelj has hosted the International Art Colony. The Association of Visual Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is the owner and founder of the Art Colony, organizes working colonies throughout the year. The artists are housed in a structure called the Gavrankapetanović House, a complex of one large and two smaller buildings built during the 16th and 17th centuries, destroyed in 1993 and restored in 2003.

You may enjoy a brief stop after the walking tour for coffee/refreshments at the café (pay directly) if you like.

We continue now driving along the Adriatic Coast crossing into Montenegro and stop in the town of Perast for a short boat ride on the Boka Bay to the tiny island with "The Church of Our Lady of the Rocks." We will enjoy a brief tour of the stunning church, dedicated to mariners.

Upon arrival in Kotor, hotel check in and lunch on your own. Kotor old town is once again a pedestrian only zone and there are many charming terrace cafes throughout the old town.

Afternoon a walking tour of Kotor UNESCO site (about 2 hr). This museum town was inhabited even at the times of the Illyrians and Romans. However, our walk through the city will take us back to medieval times, as most of the monuments we can observe now are from the 14th to 18th centuries. In the Middle Ages, this natural harbor was an important artistic and commercial center with its own famous schools of masonry and iconography. Strong walls surround the city, a renaissance tower stands on the main square, and there are numerous churches and lovely houses still remaining. We will see the Cathedral of St. Tryphon, St. Luka Church, St. Mihail Church, and many more. A large number of the monuments (including four Romanesque churches and the town walls) were seriously damaged by the 1979 earthquake. The town has been restored largely with UNESCO's help.

Day 15 May 30/Sep 12 Kotor- Njegusi - Cetinje (the old capital)-Budva (B) / Hotel Budva

We drive approx 2 hrs to the old Njegusi village in the mountains, birthplace of Njegoš, ruler of the country in the second half of the 19th century. He was also the head of the Orthodox Church and a leading poet and writer whose achievements are still taught in the schools of Serbia and Montenegro. This drive is exceptional!!!! Just up into the mountains directly from the coast with the full view of the whole Boka Bay from the top. A brief stop to soak up the ambiance and enjoy a prosciutto and cheese tasting snack at one of the local restaurants.

Continue drive (approx 1 hr) to Cetinje, once the capital of Montenegro, passing by Mount of Lovcen, where we can spot the impressive Mausoleum of Peter II Petrovi - Njegoš, decorated with a statue done by the famous Croatian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic. This is an absolute pride of the people of Montenegro. The town was founded in 1482, when Ivan Crnojevi, the last ruler of the medieval country of Zeta, built here a palace for himself as well as a church. Cetinje stayed the heart and soul of Montenegro all the way up to WW1. In Cetinje we will visit the royal palace of King Nikola II, the last King of Montenegro. The palace contains both a beautiful small museum as well as the Monastery of St. Petar.

Afterwards we return to the coast driving to Budva - bit more then 1 h. Budva is one of the oldest inhabited places in the area, known since Illyrian times. The town of Budva we see now is medieval and is definitely the most attractive place on the Riviera. Budva has a fortified old part of the town with the typical architecture of narrow streets and stone buildings placed around the main cathedral. This area is now used as a gathering place, containing many shops and taverns. Budva also has several attractive beaches including the main town beach at the end of the marina promenade.

Budva is the perfect culmination of our tour of the most gorgeous historic towns of the stunning Adriatic coastline. Though those of you continuing will see several more incredible towns along the Adriatic in Albania.

We will arrive approx 3 pm. Check in to the hotel at the entrance to old town. We will have a brief walk in old town (20-30 min). Budva old town is small and compact, easy to get oriented Rest of day independent. You can also enjoy a leisurely walk along the Marina, passing a variety of patio restaurants, ending at the town beach. There are many restaurants in the old town as well as along the marina promenade. This is a very small town and fun to explore independently.

Albania

Day 16 May 31/Sep 13 Budva - Shkodra- Kruja - Tirana (B, L, D) - Hotel Opera

We depart at 8 am driving along the Adriatic Coast crossing the border into Albania, (approx 2 hr drive to border crossing).

Our Albania driver/guide will meet us at the Murriqan/Sukobin border crossing for a twenty minute drive to the Albanian shores of Shkodra Lake, the largest lake in the Balkans. We will have a brief stop for refreshments at one of the casual

lakeside restaurants.

Shkodra has been the most important town of northern Albania for over 2,000 years and the Illyrian capital in the 3rd century BC. Once part of the Venetian empire, Italian influence is evident everywhere in Shkodra.



Berat, Albania

After our refreshments, we visit Rozafa Castle, from where a spectacular panoramic view can be admired all around. This is a place where you can truly feel the supremacy the Illyrians would have felt against enemies standing in front of such an imposing fortress. It is an uphill walk on cobblestone and the walk around is all on cobblestone. Shoes should have not only good support but also good traction as the cobblestones are slippery.

From here it's a 45 minute drive to Kruja, a small town perched high on the face of a hill. Kruja was the center of the Albanian resistance against the Ottoman Turks under the leadership of Albania's national hero Scanderbeg. We will enjoy lunch at a traditional restaurant near the fortress/castle and bazaar. Afterwards, visit the fortress of Kruja, the Scanderbeg Museum, Ethnographic Museum and browse the old bazaar full of local handicrafts. This is the best traditional bazaar on our tour.

Continue drive to Tirana (45 minutes). We will arrive at approx 630-7 pm. Check-in to hotel and time to refresh before dinner at a traditional restaurant. **The Albania group members arrive today.**

Day 17 Jun 1/Sep 14 Tirana – (B, L) – Hotel Opera

(A stop at a currency exchange office will occur at a convenient point this morning.)

We pass by Skanderbeg Square and visit the National Historic Museum for a quick introduction of the history of Albania. NOTE: the Et'hem Bey Mosque is closed for renovations.

Next, we go to the National Art Museum, a true gem even for people not normally so interested in art. Halls 3-5 showcase a brilliant collection of socialist realism art offering insight into the communist era mindset. Much of this art is quite humorous. There are also exhibits (Halls 1-2) of the different periods of Albania's history including works that predate socialist realism.

We continue to the area of Tirana called Blloku ("The Block"), a vibrant upmarket neighborhood filled with cafes, galleries, trendy shops and nightclubs. The Block is the location of former Communist dictator Enver Hoxha's vila. During the time of his rule, the area was reserved for government officials and the public was not permitted to enter.

We'll have lunch here at Restaurant Vila Ferdinand and then visit the Bunk'Art Bunker, a concrete structure of 2,680 square meters, built during the communist dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. It was designed to accommodate the nomenclature in case of a nuclear attack. Now it is an exhibition gallery of historic and modern art.

Next is a visit to the Pyramid (mausoleum of the late communist leader Enver Hoxha, designed by his daughter). Additionally, you will see the Enver Hoxha's house.

We'll have a break at a coffee bar from the communist period, where they prepare traditional liquors of that time.

Enjoy some free time strolling around. Please note: The Block has narrow and uneven sidewalks. There are spaces for trees to grow which have not been planted. Driveways, steps and ramps often block pedestrian paths. People with limited mobility and balance may have difficulty getting around.

Day 18 Jun 2/Sep 15 Tirana - Depart

Transfer to the airport for flight home.

OR: Continue on our Albania – Macedonia-Kosovo-Serbia tour!

PRICE: \$4755 based on a minimum of 6 people ; \$5165 based on a minimum of 4 people, Single room \$630

Extra night in Bled: \$95 per person twin share; \$TBA single room **Arrival transfer if not on day 1:** \$TBA per car

Includes: accommodation as listed or similar (based on availability) with breakfast.

Bled: Hotel Lovec, 4* <http://www.lovechotel.com/en/>

Piran: Hotel Piran 4* <http://www.hotel-piran.si/en/>

Porec: GH Palazzo 4* <http://grand-hotel-palazzo.porec.hotels-istria.net/en/>

Opatija: Hotel Bristol 4* <http://www.hotel-bristol.hr/>

Plitvice: Hotel Degenija 3* <https://www.hotel-degenija.com/>

OR Lyra Hotel if open in September <https://hotelplitvice.com/en/hotel>

Split: Hotel Slavija, 4*superior room with terrace <http://www.hotelslavija.hr/>

Korčula: Hotel Fabris 3* <https://thefabris.com/>

Dubrovnik: Hotel Zagreb 4* <http://hotelzagreb-dubrovnik.com/>

Sarajevo: Hotel Astra Old Town 4* <https://www.notahoteli.com/astraoldtown>

Mostar: Villa Fortuna 4* in old town, <http://www.villafortuna.ba/index.php/en/>

Kotor: Hotel Astoria 4* <http://astoriamontenegro.com/astoria-boutique-hotel-kotor/>

Budva: Hotel Budva 4* <https://www.hotel-budva.me/index.php/en/>

Tirana: Hotel Opera, 4* boutique, steps from Skanderbeg Square where the National Historic Museum and National Theatre of Opera and Ballet are located. <http://www.hotelopera.al/>

Arrival/departure transfers on tour dates (additional cost on other days)

Accompanying guides (2 separate guides): one from Bled-Montenegro/Albania border + local guides (places with local guides subject to change depending on the guide license: Korčula, Njegusi Village and Cetinje; Sarajevo and Mostar); one from Albania border to Tirana, Albania.

Join in walking tour in Dubrovnik; (for group size 8 and above it will be a separate driver and guide for each section & private tour in Dubrovnik).

Daily breakfast, oyster and wine tastings on the Pelješac Peninsula, lunch in Kruja, lunch or dinner in Albania as listed.

Bottled water during sightseeing, 1 litre per day per person

Transport by ac mini-van or larger depending on group size—there will be more seats than people.

Monument entrance fees, tickets for catamaran Split-Hvar, Hvar- Korčula and ferry Korčula-Orebić.

Does Not Include: international flight, travel insurance, tips, personal expenses such as laundry, phone calls, drinks.

NOTES: We are mostly driving on local or mountain roads, passing through villages and truly seeing the countryside. We generally depart after breakfast at about 9 am and spend the day leisurely driving along with many stops to see sites and have refreshments/bathroom breaks. We arrive at the destination approx 5-6 PM. Dinner, when included, will be approx 7 pm.

The old towns and fort/castle complexes all require walking on cobblestones. These are slippery, worn from centuries of walking on them. Wear shoes with good traction.