

## Preparing for Your Journey: The Balkans Explorer

### Currency Exchange Rates as of November 2018

Please note these are bank rates given on the web; not rates buying the currencies.  
 The price fluctuates daily.

	<u>Currency</u>	<u>US\$ 1 to...</u>
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Convertible Mark	1.60 KM
Montenegro	Euro	.88 EUR
Albania	Lek	110.13 LEK
Macedonia	Denar	54.38 MKD
Kosovo: Ethnic Albanians (S. areas)	Euro	.88 EUR
Ethnic Serbs (N. areas)	Euro (some accept Serbian Dinar)	
Serbia	Serbian Dinar	104.39 RSD

You can only get KM when in Bosnia & Herzegovina. ATMs are mostly in larger cities. In Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia ATMs are plentiful and easy to find, as are exchange kiosks. You should check with your bank if they charge fees for ATM use in foreign countries. In Albania your driver/guide will take you to a bank when you cross into Albania to buy some Albanian Lek. Kosovo uses Euros so buy enough in Montenegro, as you don't have much time in Kosovo and ATMs not as easy to find. Serbia's dinar is different from Macedonia's denar.

In the shops only the local currency is accepted - EURO could be accepted in some restaurants.

**Credit cards:** Use of credit cards is becoming more common in Montenegro; not so readily accepted in Albania, Macedonia, and Kosovo. Major credit and debit cards are accepted in most international hotels. Smaller businesses often only accept cash. Credit cards are also accepted in some places in Bosnia & Herzegovina, but not in smaller restaurants and shops. Bottom line: Everyone prefers cash.

**Meal Cost:** you can enjoy a nice casual lunch for approx 12-15 Euro; dinner 15-20 Euro. In Sarajevo: Meals are relatively inexpensive. The Turkish bazaar has the least expensive eateries with local cuisine. Mostar tends to be a bit more trendy and \$\$, but pizza, followed by pasta tends to be the least expensive everywhere, approx \$8. If you like fish--as I do-- I suggest the fresh trout in Mostar. It is also available in Ohrid. In Montenegro and Croatia, meals will be a tad more here, closer to prices in Western Europe. But there are many styles of restaurants from casual to more formal service. The meals in Albania and Macedonia are very inexpensive. Especially Macedonia. I love salads so I had gigantic ones every day for \$3 to \$4. With your guide's help, you can ask and they will be happy to accommodate any requests to include extra veggies or other items in your salad.

**Tipping:** Tipping is not a common occurrence, but it always accepted and appreciated. The tip to leave is often a lot less than in Western countries. Giving tips in local currency is preferred, but if you don't have enough at the end of the tour Euros or dollars are acceptable.

- Guides \$5-6 per day, per person, and a driver, if separate, \$3 daily per person.
- If you are given exemplary service in a restaurant, 10% is a good tip.

**Weather:** Mostly sunny and comfortable with sea breezes; can be chilly in evenings and chilly in the mountain areas. Some rain may occur in Kosovo or Serbia.

**What to Pack:** All regions are very casual, so you do not need any formal clothes. Common dress is: Sunglasses, sunscreen, light tops, long sleeve shirt to layer, long pants/skirts/dresses, light jacket or sweater, rain jacket or umbrella. Again, layers, for the mountain areas. Comfortable walking shoes are important.

Appropriate clothes to enter to the Orthodox Monasteries - covered knees, shoulders and head to enter into the mosque - and sometimes you are requested to take off your shoes (so temple socks). Women may want to bring a sarong - big scarf - that you can tie it around your shorts, shoulders or head while entering churches or mosques; or just a lightweight scarf to cover your head.

Flashlights can be handy (even in some churches to see the frescos better).

**Misc:**

- Carry a bit of toilet paper and wet tissues with you from the hotels - restrooms are something that the Balkans are not proud of. Sometimes you will have to pay to use a public restroom so have a bit of local change on you.
- Please be aware that in the Balkans, people smoke a lot and everywhere! We do request non-smoking rooms and try to avoid restaurants where smoke is excessively heavy.
- Some Albanians will say prices with an extra zero. They are not trying to charge you 10 times the going rate; they are merely using the old currency. The accurate price is in the new currency and can be found on a written sign or posting.
- Albanian currency, LEK, is a “closed currency.” The currency is not freely available outside the country of origin. You must exchange your foreign currency upon arrival, as there are import restrictions. You should also spend your remaining LEK before leaving Albania, as there are also restrictions on taking it with you. Give all remaining currency as part of your tips.
- Keep your money exchange receipts so you can prove that you exchanged your money through an official channel. You may not need to use the receipts, but it’s good to keep handy.

**Electrical:** All of the countries use European electrical plugs (with two pins) and it is 240 Volts.