

2014

KOSOVO ALBANIA MACEDONIA

25 August through 4 September

AdventureWeek
WESTERN BALKANS



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AdventureWeek WESTERN BALKANS

Welcome to AdventureWeek Western Balkans!

The sites and experiences described within this brochure have been proudly hand-picked by operators on the ground in Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia. It has taken months of preparation to share these places with you. The collaboration between these Southeastern European countries to present this trans-border journey is unmatched in my experience. What lies before you with AdventureWeek is a very personal itinerary that does exactly what the ATTA expects from destinations by offering an alternative to mass tourism that features the natural and cultural capital riches of the region. The well-situated Western Balkans carries the unparalleled history many diverse civilizations have called “home” for eons, where “community” takes on special meaning, and where adventure activities flourish.

I look forward to traveling with you in one of Europe’s top emerging adventure travel destinations.



Christopher Doyle
Executive Director, Europe
Adventure Travel Trade Association



KOSOVO

MONDAY, 25 AUG.

Arrive Prishtina / Novoberd, Kosovo

Depending on when you arrive on the first day, you'll be taken to a day room to freshen up from your travels or stretch your legs by meandering through Prishtina's renovated central pedestrian area — a vibrant window into the modernity of Kosovo and its people. Alone or with a guide, you'll have the option of visiting makeshift memorials honoring those lost in the recent conflict, the tomb of the Turkish Empire's Sultan Murat or the extensive local bazaar.

The AdventureWeek welcome reception takes place in late afternoon at the Ethnographic Museum — dating from the 18th century, the museum is housed in the only original building left standing in the old bazaar area of the city. Your first Balkan dinner will give you a sense of the rich diversity of flavors you'll be experiencing throughout the week.

Stay in Prishtina for the night at the locally-owned four-star Hotel Sirius or travel to a small village in Novoberd to wake up in a rural house, enjoying breakfast over views of a 13th century castle and hills that are home to wild boars.



Courtesy catun.net

KOSOVO

TUESDAY, 26 AUG.

Prishtina / Novoberd / Junik, Kosovo

Those of you who wake up in Prishtina will quickly understand why over one million macchiatos are sold daily in Kosovo! After coffee and breakfast, you'll join the rest of the group in Novoberd, an area referred to as the "green lung of Kosovo." You'll be welcomed by one of the first certified guides in Kosovo, known as a fountain of history and tradition. You can choose to explore the area by bike or hike to the highest peak in Kosovo, Gjeravica, at 2,658 meters (8,720 feet).

A light lunch featuring local specialties awaits you in Gracanica village, where you will witness the respect and peace of a Serbian minority community among Albanians and come to better understand the complexity of the situation. After lunch, you'll move on to Junik, a small town in western Kosovo near the Albanian border.

In Junik you'll be sleeping in a traditional 18th-century Albanian tower house, known as a Kulla. Some of you will spend the night in a traditional guest room called an "oda", where accommodations are on the floor in the same room with others. You'll have comfortable bedding and enjoy being part of this old tradition.

See the What to Expect on page 17 for more information about the oda.



Courtesy catun.net

Courtesy catun.net

KOSOVO & ALBANIA

WEDNESDAY, 27 AUG.

Junik / Gjakova, Kosovo

You'll wake up in Junik to either a day of road biking to Decani Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, or a specially-prepared breakfast outdoors and a morning hike. The cyclists and hikers will meet at Decani Monastery for a tea ceremony.

From the monastery you'll head to the town of Gjakova, famous for its wooden Big Bazaar (Çarshija e Madhe). After many of the buildings were destroyed during the recent conflict, the local population invested as much as possible to restore its spirit. Visit a coffee shop or a woodworking shop; the local craftsmen are renowned for their intricate tables, chests and very valuable cradles, which just fifty years ago were worth as much as a ram.

Meet with Kosovar ground suppliers this afternoon during **MARKETPLACE** at Carshia e Jupave Hotel and Restaurant. Our hosts will organize a light cocktail meet-up and then you'll be rewarded for establishing great new business relationships with dinner at the hotel. You'll stay overnight at Carshia e Jupave Hotel.

THURSDAY, 28 AUG.

Gjakova / Prizren, Kosovo Tirana & Petrela Castle, Albania

You'll enjoy a short city walk in Gjakova before moving on to Prizren, one of the most important cities for the Albanian population. A compelling exhibit at the League of Prizren explains the significance of the political situation. Options for your time in Prizren include learning to make traditional silver filigree or explore more attractions of the city on the banks of a river, backed by towering green mountains.

You'll cross the border into Albania today, moving through high mountain and lake areas before arriving at Lake Ulez (River Mat) for kayaking or hiking in this dramatic landscape. You'll arrive in late afternoon at Kotoni and Padam Boutique Hotels in Tirana, the capital of Albania. Dinner with a mountain view is at Petrela, a castle with a high turret perched on a rocky outcropping.



ALBANIA

FRIDAY, 29 AUG.

Llogara National Park, Albania

En route to the southern part of the country, your first stop is in the port city of Vlorë, where the Albanian declaration of independence was proclaimed on November 28, 1912. Charter boats will take you to the ex-military “ghost town” island of Sazani. Very few international travelers get permission to visit Sazani and the Cold War era underground Soviet Union submarine base that served a pivotal role leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

After a few hours by the Adriatic Sea, you’ll be taken to the mountains of Albania’s spectacular national park, Llogara.

Meet your potential new Albanian partners during **MARKETPLACE** this evening at the Sofo Hotel and make sure you are hungry for dinner. The owner, Sofo himself, hosts a stand-out traditional Albanian spread.

SATURDAY, 30 AUG.

Butrint National Park, Albania

One of Europe’s most scenic (and windy) places is Butrint National Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) on the Albanian Riviera just across from the Greek island of Corfu. Occupied since the 9th century B.C., Butrint served as an important port from Hellenistic to Ottoman times. Legend hints that Butrint was founded by Trojan exiles and the city is full of archaeological sites. Optional activities include horseback-riding around Butrint, shipwreck diving or an off-road jeep ride to Gjirokastra, your next stop.

Gjirokastra’s old town is noted by UNESCO as a “rare example of a well-preserved Ottoman town.” Known as the City of Stone (you’ll quickly understand why during a city tour), Gjirokastra

is situated in a valley between the Gjerë Mountains and the Drin River. Dinner is in a traditional restaurant and your accommodation is a local guest house.



ALBANIA & MACEDONIA

Courtesy AlbaRafting - www.albrafting.org

SUNDAY, 31 AUG.

River Vjosa / Permet & Pogradec, Albania Lake Ohrid, Macedonia

It wouldn't be right to leave Albania without experiencing the River Vjosa. Choose to go whitewater rafting on this class III river or hike alongside it to bathe in natural thermal baths. You'll leave Albania on the scenic road between Permet and Pogradec. The distance isn't long, but the old road takes you up into the mountains and then back down to river valleys, so be prepared for a few hours on this windy road.

Lake Ohrid forms the border between Albania and Macedonia. In Pogradec, your Macedonian hosts will meet you with bikes and offer you the chance to pedal your way to the Monastery of St. Naum on the Macedonian shore of the lake (a distance of about 10 kilometers). Vans will also offer transport for non-cyclers. The monastery complex dates back to 905 A.D. but the namesake hotel, where you'll be spending the night, is much more modern. Drinks and appetizers are on the patio of St. Naum's to watch the sunset. Your first Macedonian meal is at Restaurant Ostrovo on the banks of the River Crn Drim.



MONDAY, 1 SEPT.

Ohrid / Galicica National Park / Lake Prespa / Heraclea / Dihovo, Macedonia

Early risers have the option to prepare local pastries, named *gomleze* and *koman*, over an open fire. When everyone's up, you'll transfer by boat to Ohrid, one of Europe's oldest inhabited cities. You'll understand why UNESCO World Heritage Site Ohrid is often referred to as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans" on a tour of the old town.

Between Lake Ohrid and Lake Prespa lies Galicica National Park. Choose to paraglide over the park or bike or hike to viewpoints within the park, home to 800 species of flora including many endemics. You'll convene for your adventures on the shores of Lake Prespa at the family-run Lakeview Hotel for drinks and appetizers.

You'll visit the ancient city of Heraclea Lyncestis on your way to the village of Dihovo, declared by Lonely Planet as one of Europe's "50 Truly Unforgettable Places". You'll celebrate village life with local beer, wine and food before retiring at either Villa Dihovo, Vila Ilinden 1903 or Sumski Feneri Hotel.



Courtesy ExploringMacedonia.com

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MACEDONIA

TUESDAY, 2 SEPT.

Dihovo / Prilep / Krushevo / Mavrovo National Park, Macedonia

After breakfast, you'll transfer to nearby Prilep for a variety of optional activities centered around the mountaintop Treskavec Monastery. Whether you choose to hike, paraglide or rock-climb around the area, you'll get to take in a tour of the monastery led by Father Kalist. Listen to an Orthodox monk spin tales of the history of the site that was once a temple for Apollo.

Located at 1,350 meters (4,429 feet), Krushevo is the highest town in Macedonia. You'll arrive in time for a short hike to a mountainside lunch featuring local wild game sausages. After lunch, the walking city tour includes visiting the town's last wooden barrel shop and a shop specializing in *lokum* (Turkish Delight).

The day ends in Mavrovo National Park, home to Macedonia's highest peaks. In the village of Janche you'll attend a cooking class, eat dinner and see a presentation on local foods, wild edible collecting and eco-friendly building techniques. Overnight at Hotel Tutto in Janche or Hotel Kalin in Lazaropole.

WEDNESDAY, 3 SEPT.

Mavrovo National Park / Skopje, Macedonia

You'll have several options for exploring Mavrovo National Park — by horse, by bike, on foot or in an off-road vehicle. Learn about the daily life of Macedonian shepherds and their traditional cheese making. You'll have an early lunch at the Hotel Neda in Galichnik village.

You'll arrive in Macedonia's capital, Skopje, in the afternoon and learn how you can best offer Macedonia to your clients when you meet with local operators at **MARKETPLACE**, held in the old bazaar. The networking will spill over into a local wine tasting afterward.

The details of your farewell dinner are a secret and if you're not exhausted, you'll be invited to a walking and drinking tour of the Old Bazaar, led by some of the most memorable local tourism personalities. Overnight at the Hotel Solun.



MACEDONIA

THURSDAY, 4 SEPT.

Depart Skopje, Macedonia

Once your flight reservations are confirmed, you'll know if you have time for a half-day or full-day tour before departing from Alexander the Great International Airport in Skopje. Optional activities include:

Kokino Megalithic Observatory: A 4000 year old astronomical observatory.

Matka Canyon: A stunning gorge located 20 minutes outside of Skopje.

Ancient Town of Stobi: Located on the Via Egnatia, Stobi was a cultural, political and religious crossroads.

Skopje City Tour: Discover the Skopje 2014 project, which seeks to give the capitol a new, classical appeal.

Tetovo: Visit the Arabati Baba Teke, the finest surviving Bektashi monastery in Europe.

Macedonia from Above: Weather-dependent, fly above Macedonia from a hot air balloon or small sport plane.

Tikves Wine Region: Tour a handful of Macedonia's 80 small wineries and taste wine made with endemic grape varieties.

GET READY!

PACKING LIST

ATTA's brand recommendations are in parentheses next to each item:

- ☐ Comfortable, durable walking shoes (see examples from KEEN and Teva)
- ☐ Several pairs of non-cotton hiking & cycling socks (with liners if you prefer)
- ☐ Water and windproof shell, preferably made of Gore-Tex or other breathable/waterproof material (see shells at Columbia, ExOfficio, Eddie Bauer, or Marmot)
- ☐ Fleece or 'soft shell' jacket (see jackets at Columbia, ExOfficio, Eddie Bauer, or Marmot)
- ☐ Trekking pants, ideally wind- and/or water-resistant (see various pants at Columbia, ExOfficio, Eddie Bauer, or Marmot)
- ☐ Clothing appropriate for cycling
- ☐ Biking helmet, only if you prefer to wear your personal one
- ☐ At least one warm and a couple of light sweaters
- ☐ Flashlight or headlamp
- ☐ Sun hat
- ☐ Sun block
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Lip balm
- ☐ Swimsuit (and flip flops)
- ☐ Binoculars
- ☐ Camera (and lenses, batteries, chargers, etc.)
- ☐ A small daypack to carry some personal items during excursions (see a variety of packs at Eagle Creek, at Columbia, Eddie Bauer, Osprey, or Marmot)

- ☐ Water bottle(s) or hydration systems (see Liberty Bottleworks, or hydration packs at Eagle Creek, Columbia, Eddie Bauer, Osprey, or Marmot)
- ☐ Toiletries
- ☐ Medications for 15 days (If you wear a medical alert bracelet, please alert Gergana Nikolova at gerganan@gmail.com)
- ☐ Motion sickness medication if necessary for car and boat rides
- ☐ Devices, chargers and necessary adaptors
- ☐ Portable recharging equipment for your devices (see various options at Goal Zero)
- ☐ Copy of passport or picture of your passport (it is recommended to place a copy of your passport identification/issue-expire page and your photo inside each piece of luggage you will have with you)
- ☐ If you need a hairdryer at your accommodation please contact Gergana Nikolova at gerganan@gmail.com.
- ☐ Mosquito/tick repellent



WHAT TO EXPECT

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

VISA REQUIREMENTS: There are no special visa requirements in the three countries for most of the countries from Europe and North America.

PASSPORT REQUIRED: At the monasteries in Kosovo, your passport is the only document that gives you permission to enter. At each border crossing and at most of the accommodations, you will be required to present your passport.

WEATHER: The weather in the Balkans has four seasons and during your trip you will get to experience the end of the summer. While usually at that time of the year the weather is dry with warm temperatures during the day, the evenings can get chilly, and up in the mountains, even cold. This year, the weather has been a bit moody and temperatures haven't been as high as usual so it is better to be prepared for changing weather and possible rain. Minimum temperature: around 10°C (50°F). Maximum temperature: around 35°C (95°F).

HEALTH CONCERNS: There is the possibility of encountering disease-carrying ticks in the area. Prevent ticks from becoming attached to your skin by wearing appropriate clothing (long pants and closed footwear), especially while hiking. Inspect your body daily and remove attached ticks as soon as possible.

ELECTRICITY: Electricity in the Balkans is 220v 50Hz and the plugs are European two pin round; please bring along adaptors with you, if necessary.

TIME ZONE: The time zone for the three countries is the same, Central European Time (CET), which is one hour ahead of GMT.

CURRENCY: Kosovo is the only one among the three countries to use Euro (as of early July 2014, at a 1:1.36 ratio with the US dollar). Once you land in Prishtina, Kosovo, you may use the ATM to take out cash to have on hand for various needs or purchases. You may also use one of the exchange bureaus to exchange your currency. We recommend you take out around \$100US – you can use the Euro later in the trip and change it to the local Albanian Lek (ALL; \$1 = 103 lek) or Macedonian Denar (MKD; \$1 = 45 denars). If you need more, ATMs will be available throughout the trip. Credit cards are also widely accepted throughout the Balkans in bigger stores and restaurants but not always at small craft shops and gift shops.

INTERNET: Internet will be available at all accommodations in the big cities for free; please, be aware that at times, we will be staying at remote locally-owned guest houses and Internet may not be available on site, or if available, the speed might be too low to handle a large group.

WATER: Tap water is drinkable at most places.

SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR: In Kosovo, you'll have the opportunity to sleep in a traditional room called an "oda", which was historically used by men for gathering for strategy meetings. These very special accommodations will be on the floor in a shared room. You'll be provided with pillows and blankets and assured a comfortable night's sleep. Regular beds are also available if you don't think you can participate in this tradition.

WHAT TO EXPECT

MORE CONSIDERATIONS

SHARING A ROOM: At some of the locally-owned, family-run accommodations you may need to share a room with one of your trip mates. In the Balkans, you will be treated like family at every stop, and sharing these unique accommodations with your colleagues and new friends often adds great dimension to the experience of the trip.

BRING A SWIMSUIT: There will be several opportunities to get wet during the week. Whether you decide to go kayaking or just take a dip in the thermal springs or jump in the waters of the Vjosa river or the warm sea, make sure you pack a swimsuit.

TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES: When entering private homes and even small family-run hotels, you are expected to remove your shoes. Your guides will try to remind you of this practice whenever it is applicable.

LONG DAYS: Especially in Albania during the middle section of our trip, the distances between our stops will be quite long, so expect these days to start earlier and end later than the ones at the beginning and end of the week. We will make sure the transport time between our memorable experiences is very comfortable and well appointed with fresh snacks and cold beverages. You may also want to load up your iPhone/pod with music selections if your transport mates are open to your DJ'ing.

MILITARY HISTORY SITES: In western Albania, you'll visit two military history sites that are not yet open to the public. We've arranged special approval from the Ministry of Defense and your group is invited to be among the first guided groups to explore these sites. Your feedback on these tours is greatly appreciated as it might encourage Albania to open these sites up as non-traditional tourism attractions.



Courtesy Marjan Lazarevski

AdventureWeek Western Balkans

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Albania 
A New Mediterranean Love



AdventureWeek WESTERN BALKANS



Western Balkans
Geotourism MapGuide
A National Geographic Destination



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