

GoBalkans
b2b incoming cultural tourism



Discover the Balkans with us

BALKANS

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Dear Colleague,

with this book you can share the same passion which has led us to explore the Balkans in recent years. We would like this book to be a valuable tool for those using our organization to enable their trip to be not just a mere combination of tourist services (although selected with care and professionalism) but a deep and indelible experience.

*Emilia Kalaydjieva
General Manager*

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The company

GoBalkans is a Bulgarian tour operator born from the experience of the Kalya Group which has been working in the Balkans since 2003. Thanks to its high quality product and professional staff GoBalkans is a leader in cultural trips to the Balkans

Mission

To develop a partnership with tour operators and travel agencies

Partnership

Based on the enhancement of your image and brand during the tour

Professionalism

Experience in individual and group tours
Knowledge of the territory, the local culture and customs
Staff based on university researchers
Skills to develop all kinds of tourism products

Quality

Assistance and flexibility during pre-sales
International level of incoming services
Professionalism of our staff



Unesco heritage sites

Bulgaria

- *Nessebar*
- *Boyana Church (Sofia)*
- *Madara Rider*
- *Rila Monastery*
- *Ivanovo Monastery*
- *Thracian Tomb (Kazanlak)*
- *Thracian Tomb (Sveshtari)*
- *Pirin National Park*
- *Srebarna Nature Reserve*

Macedonia

- *Ohrid region*

Albania

- *Butrint*
- *Berat*
- *Gjirokastra*

Serbia

- *Felix Romuliana*
- *Sopoćani Monastery*
- *Studenica Monastery*

Kosovo

- *Dečani Monastery*
- *Peć Monastery*
- *Church of the Virgin of Leviša (Prizren)*
- *Gračanica Monastery*

Montenegro

- *Bay of Kotor*
- *Durmitor National Park*

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- *Višegrad Bridge*
- *Mostar*

Romania

- *Moldavia Monasteries*
- *Orastie Mountains Dacian Fortresses*
- *Sighișoara*
- *Horezu Monastery*
- *Transylvania Villages - Fortified Churches*
- *Maramureș Wooden Churches*
- *Danube Delta*

Northern Greece

- *Vergina*
- *Corfu Old Town*
- *Salonika*
- *Meteora*
- *Mount Athos*

Croatia

- *Episcopal Complex (Poreč)*
- *Traù-Trogir*
- *Palace of Diocletian (Split)*

Slovenia

- *Alps Prehistoric Pile dwellings*
- *Škocjan Caves*
- *Heritage of Mercury*



Some tours:

BALKAN MOSAIC ***(15 days)***

1st day LJUBLJANA

Visit “Bela Ljubjana”, the nickname given to this city after it was entirely rebuilt in the 16th century following the massive earthquake of 1511.

2nd day LJUBLJANA – BLEED – ZAGREB (260 km)

Departure to visit the Lake Bled in the Julian Alps and the castle located on a cliff with nice view of the town and we embark on a boat ride to Slovenia’s only island. Visit the Žiće Carthusian Monastery. Departure for Croatia.

3rd day ZAGREB – PLITVICE LAKES (150 km)

Visit Zagreb: named “the city with a million hearts”, for the million inhabitants that it shelters. Departure to Plitvice. Visiting one of the worlds most Beautiful National Park - Plitvice Lakes.

4th day PLITVICE – TROGIR – SPLIT (270 km)

Departure for Split. Visit of the medieval town of Trogir, the main square Narodni Trg, visit the Cathedral, Communal Palace and Loggia. Visit of Zadar, the ancient capital of Dalmatia. Departure to Split and visit the city.

5th day SPLIT – MOSTAR – SARAJEVO (300 km)

Departure for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Visit Mostar: visit the historic town of Mostar, spanning a deep valley of the Neretva River.

6th day SARAJEVO

Full day touring in Sarajevo: walk along the Baščaršija, Sarajevo’s exotic old town dating from the mid-15th century. Beginning in Sebilj Square the tour highlights important historic sites.

7th day SARAJEVO – DUBROVNIK (260 km)

Departure for Croatia. Visit Dubrovnik: The ‘Pearl of the Adriatic’, situated on the Dalmatian coast, became an important Mediterranean sea power from the 13th century onwards.

8th day DUBROVNIK – KOTOR – KOLASIN (250 km)

Departure for Montenegro. Visit Kotor, which is located in the

Bay of Kotor. Visit the city of Cetinje, the old capital, the Cetinje Monastery and the Royal Palace. Visit the Moraca Monastery - the most important monastery in Montenegro.

9th day KOLASIN – DECANI – PEC – PRISTINA (250 km)

Departure for Kosovo. Visit the Monastery of Decani, founded in 1327 by St. Stephen Uros III. Visit the Monastery of Pec. Situated at the throat of Rugovo, a few kilometers from the town of Pech.

10th day PRISTINA – STUDENICA – BITOLA – OHRID (330 km)

Visit the Monastery of Gracanica, an outstanding example of Byzantine architecture and a unique combination of edges, faces, windows and domes. Visit the Kosovo Polje. Departure for Macedonia. Visit the Roman city of Stobi situated along the “Via Axia”. Short visit of Bitola.

11th day OHRID

Visit of the old centre of Ohrid. It is the most beautiful cities of Macedonia and one of the most fascinating of the Balkan Peninsula.

12th day OHRID – TETOVO – SKOPJE (190 km)

Visit the Mosque of Tetovo: the Painted Mosque built in the 17th century. Visit the Monastery of St. Panteleimon located on a hill overlooking the city of Skopje. Visit the Macedonian capital.

13th day SKOPJE – NIS – BELGARDE (440 km)

Departure for Serbia. Visit the city of Niš: the largest city of southern Serbia. Visit the Concentration camp of Nis. Visit the Manasija Monastery, near Despotovac.

14th day BELGRADE

Visit Belgrade. Belgrade (Beograd) is the capital of Serbia, and has a population of around 1.6 million. It is situated in South-Eastern Europe, on the Balkan Peninsula, at the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers.

15th day BELGRADE – DEPARTURE

Breakfast. Transfer to the airport and departure.

DISCOVER BULGARIA ***(12 days)***

1st day SOFIA

City tour of Sofia: Church of St. Sofia, Church of St. George, Aleksandar Nevski Memorial Cathedral: the wonderful building rises gloriously in the centre of the town.

2nd day SOFIA – ZEMEN – RILA – BANSKO (250 km)

Departure for Zemen Monastery located 76 km from Sofia on the River Struma. Departure for the magnificent Rila Monastery. Overnight in Bansko.

3rd day BANSKO – PLOVDIV (170 km)

Visit the house-museum Velianovata kashta. Departure for Plovdiv. Along the way, stop for visiting one important wineries for Bulgaria. Arrival in Plovdiv - Bulgaria’s second most important city, preserves the undying values of its six millennial long history.

4th day PLOVDIV – BACHKOVO – PLOVDIV (50 km)

Departure for Bachkovo Monastery: the second for importance after Rila Monastery. Return to Plovdiv. Visit the old town situated on “Nebet Tepe” hill which includes: the Ethnographic Museum, the Church of S.S. Kostantino and Elena, the roman Theatre.

5th day PLOVDIV – KOPRIVSHTIZA – KAZANLAK (200 km)

Departure for Starosel. Visit the Thracian Temple Complex. Departure for Koprivshtiza, one of the Bulgarian towns that have the best preserved architectural heritage. Continuing to Kazanlak.

6th day KAZANLAK – KARANOVO – NESSEBAR (250 km)

Visit Kazanlak - the capital of the Rouses valley. Visit the important Thracian Burial. Departure for visit Bulgaria’s newest archaeological complex in the village of Karanovo, consisting of a tomb of an Ancient Thrace aristocrat and displaying a uniquely preserved Thracian chariot has been opened in 2010. Arrival in Nessebar.

7th day NESSEBAR – VARNA (100 km)

Visit Nessebar - founded more than 3 000 years ago by the Thracians, Nessebar is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful cities of the entire Black Sea.

8th day VARNA – MADARA – SVESTARI – RUSSE (250 km)

Departure for the Petrified Forest: in a barren plateau several strange stone cylinders high over 5 mt wide and over 3 high emerge. Visit the Madara Rider: is an early medieval large rock relief. Stop for visiting the monument “Creators of the Bulgarian State” in the town of Shumen. Visit the Sveshtarska Thracian Royal Tomb. Continue to Russe - the pearl of the Danube.

9th day RUSSE – IVANOVO – VELIKO TARNOVO (100 km)

Breakfast. Departure for Ivanovo and visit the rock monastery “St. Archangel Michael”. Transfer to Arbanassi to visit the medieval church of “Nativity”, famous with its magnificent interior murals and the house-museum Kostanzaliev.

10th day VELIKO TARNOVO – TROYAN - SOFIA (260 km)

Visit Veliko Turnovo, the medieval capital of Bulgaria. Visit the centre: Tzarevez Architectural and Museum Reserve and Assenova Mahalà district. Departure to Troyan Monastery, considered the most famous works of the great Bulgarian painter Zahari Zograf.

11th day SOFIA

Visit the National Museum of History and the Boyana Church. short excursion close to Sofia for visiting Monastery of Kremikovtzi, which was founded in the 14th century during the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander.

12th day SOFIA – DEPARTURE

Breakfast. Transfer to the airport and departure.

DISCOVER ROMANIA

(12 days)

1st day BUCHAREST

Arrival to Bucharest. Visit the capital, called “The Paris of the East” for its large boulevards, its buildings in “Belle Epoque” style, the Triumphal Arch, the Romanian University, the Square of Revolution, the University Square and the “Curtea Domneasca”.

2nd day BUCHAREST – SIBIU (275 km)

Departure for Sibiu. Visit the Monastery of Cozia, considered as a masterpiece of the Romanian architecture. Arrival in Sibiu, visit the historical center rich in evidences of Saxon period (15th century).

3rd day SIBIU – HUNEDOARA – CLUJ NAPOCA (340 km)

Departure for Alba Iulia, visit the fortress. In Hunedoara, visit the medieval Castle of Corvino, also known as the Castle of Hunyadi, in Gothic style with Renaissance reworks, built by the Hungarian King Mathias Corvins.

4th day CLUJ NAPOCA – BAIJA MARE (310 km)

Visit Cluj Napoca: the Square of the Liberty with its beautiful house, the Catholic church of “Saint Michael”, the native place of Matei Corvin (outside the town) and the Gothic church of “Sfintu Mihail”

5th day B. MARE – MARAMURES – G. HUMORULUI (310 km)

Visit the church of “Surdesti”: the largest wooden building in Europe. Departure for Bucovina. Visit the beautiful churches of “Barsana”, “Rozavlea” and “Bogdan Voda”. Arrival in Bucovina, the region famous for its Monasteries. Overnight in Gura Humorului.

6th day MONASTERIES OF BUCOVINA

Daily tour with guide of the Monasteries of Bucovina: “Moldovița” Monastery surrounded by the defence system and the Monastery of “Sucevița” famous for its fresco “The Ladder of Virtues” and its massive walls. Visit the village of Marginea, where numerous objects of black pottery from the Bronze age were found. Nowadays these findings are hand reproduced by a local laboratory. Visit the Monastery of “Voroneț” from 1488.

7th day G. HUMORULUI – SIGHISOARA (300 km)

Departure to visit the Monastery of Agapia. Continue for the town of Sighisoara, through the Capratian Mountains, following the Bicaz Gorge and the shores of the Red Lake. Arrival in Sighisoara, birth-place of Vlad Tepes, known as Count Dracula.

8th day SIGHISOARA – BRAN – BRASOV (180 km)

Visit the medieval citadel of Sighisoara considered the best preserved in Romania and famous for the Clock Tower from 13th century, and the magnificent Cathedral with the typical towers of the Corporations. Continue to Brasov, one of the most charming medieval towns of Romania. Visit the Castle of Bran, known as the Castle of Dracula, one of the most picturesque Romanian buildings.

9th day POIANA BRASOV – SINAIA – TULCEA (410 km)

Breakfast. Departure for Sinaia and visit the Pelesh Castle: the summer residence of King Charles I. Departure for the Black sea coast. Near the village of Dobrogea across the Danube by ferry and continue to Tulcea, by bus, to visit the Museum of Delta.

10th day TULCEA – DANUBIE DELTA – CONSTANTA (130 km)

Breakfast. Daily boat excursion to the protected area of the Danube Delta. This area, the youngest of Europe, is a true great natural laboratory. Continue to Constanta.

11th day CONSTANTA – BUCHAREST (230 km)

Breakfast. Visit the Roman villa, famous for its beautiful mosaics, the Museum of History and the Archaeological museum located in Ovidiu Square. Departure for Bucharest. Visit the National Cotroceni Museum, the oldest royal residence in Bucharest, now used as museum and residence of the President.

12th day BUCHAREST – DEPARTURE

Breakfast. Transfert to the airport and departure.

NORTHERN GREECE AND ALBANIA

(14 days)

1st day SALONIKA

Arrival in Salonika. Dinner and overnight stay

2nd day SALONIKA

Breakfast. Visit Salonika (UNESCO) which was one of the most valuable center during the Byzantine Empire. In the afternoon visit the Archaeological Museum.

3rd day SALONIKA – PELLA – KALAMBAKA (280 km)

Breakfast. Departure for Pella and visit the ruins of the old Macedonian capital. Founded by King Archelao I became the capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia and the seat of the Empire of Alexander the Great. Departure for Vergina (UNESCO). Arrival in Kastoria.

4th day KALAMBAKA – METEORA – IOANNINA (120 km)

Breakfast. Visit the Monasteries of Meteora (UNESCO) considered one of the most suggestive places by Orthodox Religion. Arrival in Ioannina.

5th day IOANNINA – DODONI – SARANDA (140 km)

Breakfast. Visit the city of Ioannina. Departure for the archaeological site of Dodoni. Famous for its oracle and the ancient theater, Dodoni lies in a large valley surrounded by high mountains, not far from the town of Ioannina. Departure for Albania. Arrival in Saranda.

6th day SARANDA – BUTRINTI – VALONA (180 km)

Breakfast. Visit the archaeological site of Butrinti (UNESCO). Built in the VI century BC, the city of Butrinti was famous for its imposing defensive system. Continue to the Castle of Porto Palermo. Arrival in Valona.

7th day VALONA – DURAZZO – TIRANA (180 km)

Breakfast. Departure for Durres. Visit the Archaeological Museum and the Roman theater considered the biggest in the Balkans. Arrival in Tirana. Visit the capital.

8th day TIRANA – BERAT – APPOLONIA – FIER (220 km)

Breakfast. Departure for the Monastery of Ardenica. Visit the town of Berat known as the “City of thousand windows”. Visit the archaeological site of Appolonia.

9th day FIER – GJIROKASTRA – IOANNINA (200 km)

Breakfast. Departure for the ancient town of Gjirokastra. Included on the Unesco list, the city center is rich in well preserved Ottoman buildings. Visit the famous spring “Blue Eye”. Arrival in Ioannina.

10th day IOANNINA – KASTORIA – SALONIKA (360 km)

Breakfast. Departure for Kastoria. Founded by Justinian I, the town is famous for its numerous Byzantine churches rich in frescoes painted between the X and XVIII centuries. Arrival in Salonika.

11th day SALONIKA – PORT PANAGIAS – KAVALA (260 km)

Breakfast. Departure for the port of Ormos Panagias. Mini-cruise around the peninsula of Mount Athos. The navigation offers a wonderful view of 8 monasteries, Lunch in Ornos Panagia. Arrival in Kavala by bus.

12th day KAVALA – ISLAND OF THASSOS – KAVALA

Breakfast. Excursion to the island of Thassos. Thank to its natural heritage, this island is one of the most fashionable places in Greece.

13th day KAVALA – PHILIPPI – SALONIKA (190 km)

Breakfast. Visit Kavala and the archaeological site of Philippi and the church of St. Lidia. Visit the archaeological site of Amfipoli Return to Salonika.

14th day SALONIKA – DEPARTURE

Breakfast. Transfert to the airport and departure.

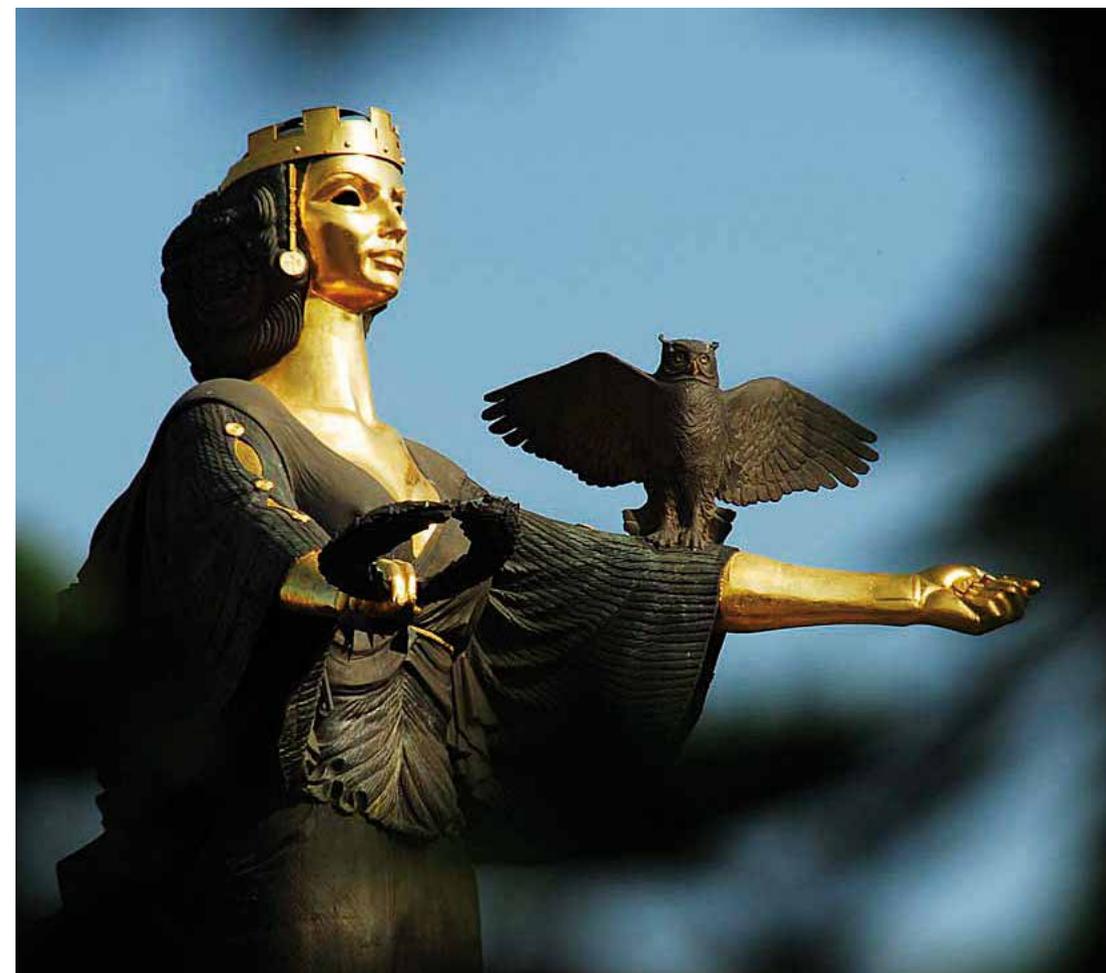
Following, with our texts and photos,
we'll show you the most important places in Bulgaria, Macedonia,
Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Romania, Northern Greece, Croatia and Slovenia.

These priceless cultural and natural treasures are still little known to most tourists,
but this will be the key to a really successful business idea!

We will be with you as reliable and loyal partners!



Bulgaria



Bulgaria

There are a huge variety of landscapes in Bulgaria, which form mountains, hills and plains. The Northern part of Bulgaria, about one quarter of the whole territory, is a hilly area. In this region, close to the Black Sea, there is the Dobrudja valley. In the southern part is the mountain chain of the Stara Planina, which divides the country in two equal parts, from east (Black Sea) to west (Serbia). A few kilometers in the south-western part of the valley of Thrace, there are the mountains of Sredna Gora. The southern part of the country is characterized by three mountain massifs: the Rila, which includes the highest peak of the country (Musala) and the mountain chains of the Pirin and Rhodopes. Bulgaria boasts more than 500 rivers; the most important is the Danube which forms the northern border between Bulgaria and Romania. Another important river is the Iskar which rises in the Rila massif and flows into the Danube. There are more than 300 lakes and with the numerous swamps located on the coast of the Black Sea, offer a perfect shelter for migratory birds.

History: Bulgaria is one of the oldest countries in Europe. The country was founded in 681 BC. According to the archaeological finds, the first settlers were Thracians. The remains of this period, such as the tombs in Kazanlak or the gold objects that can be seen in the country's museums, give us clear proof of this sophis-

ticated civilization. Between the VII and VI centuries BC the ancient Greeks started the colonization of the Black Sea coast. The Romans (I century BC) divided Thrace into three provinces: Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia. The following four centuries were characterized by the development of large cities, the construction of important military roads and the foundation of new settlements. From the IV century AD the whole Balkan Peninsula was occupied by the Byzantines. From the V to VI century, Slav tribes settled in the Balkan peninsula and merged with the existing peoples. During the second half of the VI century, the region near the Danube delta was overrun by Proto-Bulgarians who came from central Asia. During the VII century three kingdoms were founded in Eastern Europe and each of them was named "Bulgaria". The first was the Great Bulgaria of Khan Kubrat, located between Russia and the south-eastern part of Ukraine which disappeared soon after the death of its founder. The second kingdom was founded by Kubrat's son, Kotrag, between the River Volga and its tributary Kama. The capital was Bolgar (now Kazan) and the kingdom existed, as a separate country until the XIII century. The third kingdom was founded by Khan Asparuh, the third son of Kubrat. At the beginning, the Bulgarians were allies of the Slavs, until the year 680 when Bulgaria was founded. Over



Etar: Architectural and Ethnographic Complex

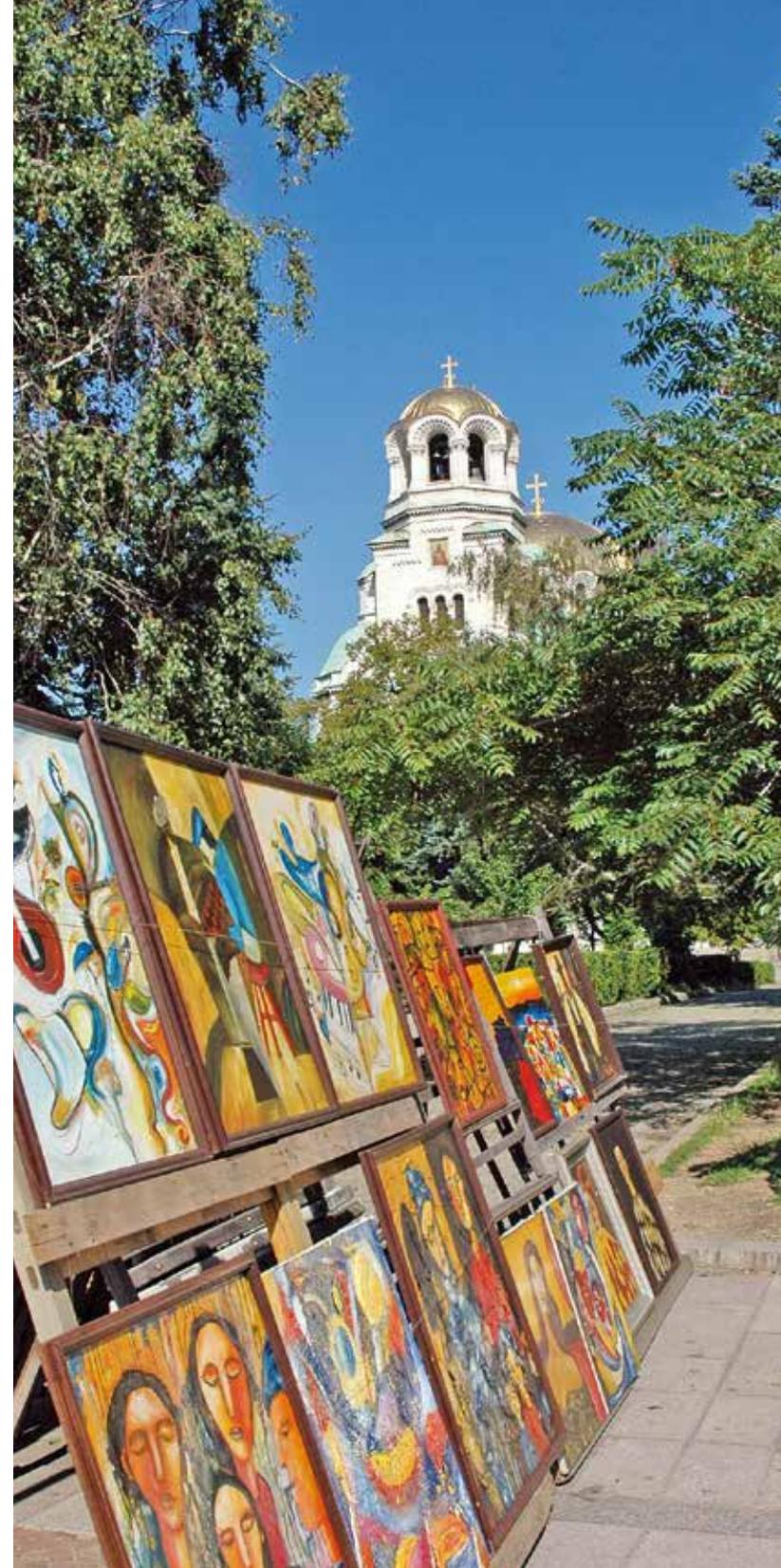
the years the Proto-Bulgarian aristocracy merged with the Slavs and the rest of the Thracian communities. In the IX century the official language of the country was Slav and the Cyrillic script was applied throughout the Balkans. The First Bulgarian Empire existed from 681 until 1018 (during this period Bulgaria accepted the Christian religion as the official religion in 865), when

Emperor Vasilii II invaded Bulgaria and made it a province of the Byzantine Empire. The second Bulgarian Kingdom (1185-1396) was born in Veliko Tarnovo after the revolt against Byzantine rule. In a few years Bulgaria became the most powerful empire in the Balkans under the rule of Ivan Asen (1218-1241). In 1396 Ottoman rule began and continued for almost five cen-

turies. The Bulgarian aristocracy and administrative structure were destroyed and the National Church fell under the control of Constantinople. Hundreds of Bulgarians were deported to Asia and were sold as slaves; a lot of churches and monasteries were burnt and people who had refused to accept Islam were often killed. In the XIX century, this situation favored the birth of the new period of the Bulgarian National Revival. The Orthodox Religion and the sense of Bulgarian cultural heritage became stronger in sections of the population, particularly in the commercial classes, which started to be rich and closer, for commercial relations, to Western Europe, so in April 1876 riots broke out and a large part of the country was involved in the first uprising. In a few days the Turks repressed the riots, due the disorganization of the rebels. The balance of the uprising was terrible: over 30,000 Bulgarians were killed and 58 villages were destroyed. These and other atrocities led to many protests throughout Europe and was one of the reasons that led Russia to declare war on Turkey. The Treaty of St. Stefan (March 1878) gave Bulgaria 60% of the territory of the Balkan peninsula, but with the following Treaty of Berlin (July 1878) Bulgarian borders were redrawn. In September 1908 the independence of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire was declared. During the First War (1912), Bulgaria's borders expanded to the south and included the Aegean Sea and a large part of Macedonia, but with the

defeat in the Second Balkan War (1913), the country obtained its present borders. In October 1915 Bulgaria was an ally of the Central powers. In September 1939, Bulgaria declared its neutrality in the conflict. But in 1941, when Germany decided to invade Greece, the Bulgarian government allowed German troops to cross the country in order to avoid a German invasion. In September 1944 the National Front, dominated by the Communists, took power. The members of the previous government were arrested or executed. The National Front won the 1945 elections. In November 1989, the Central committee of the Communist Party forced Todor Zhivkov, prime-minister from 1962, to resign and decided to change its name to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). The BSP won the first free elections. Bulgaria was the first country in the Soviet block which returned ex-communists to power. One year later the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) took control of the country. This caused a long period of political instability until June 2001 when the newly formed National movement Simeon II, led by the last king of Bulgaria, surprisingly won the elections. Although Simeon did not participate in the elections, he became prime-minister. He claimed that he didn't want the return of the monarchy. In his words his only aim was the fast modernization of the country through the implementation of the project called "the 800 days program". Bulgaria became a European Union member in 2007.

*Sofia: Aleksandar Nevski Cathedral
Sinagogue
St. Petka Church*



Sofia

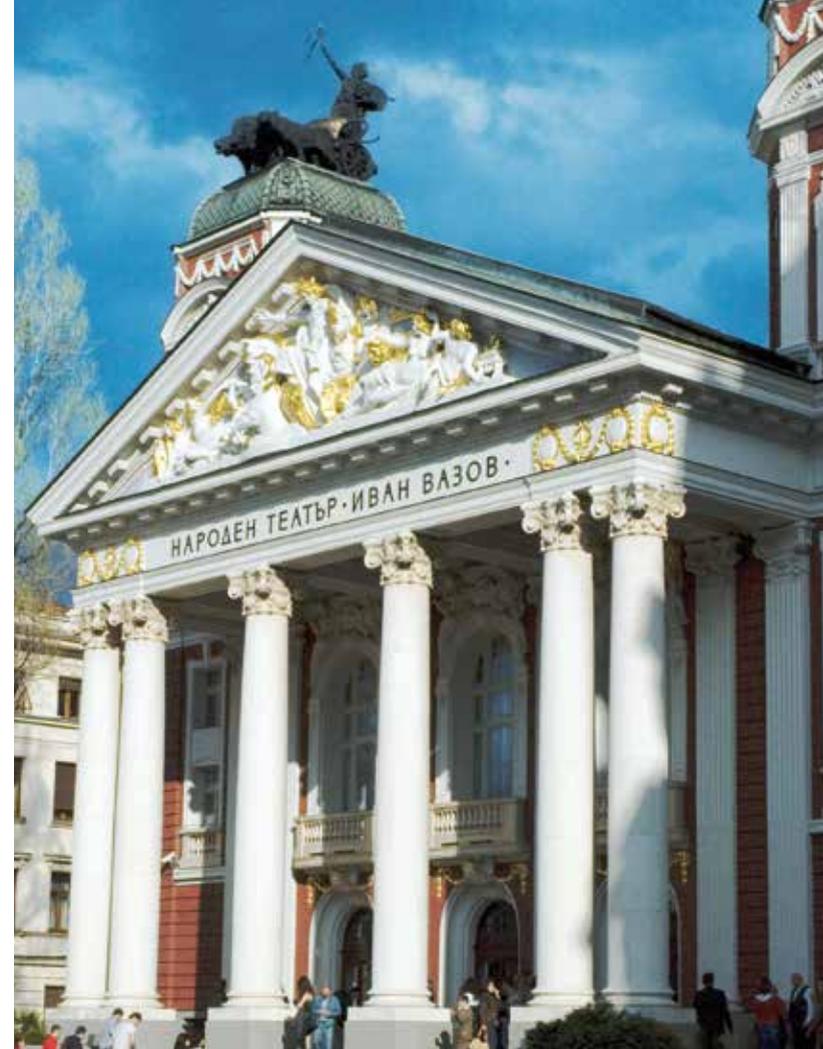
The capital is located on a large plateau on the northern slope of Mount Vitosha. A modern and dynamic city, Sofia has reached the standard of living of the biggest cities of Europe. Along the downtown boulevards (the most famous is boulevard Vitosha) there are restaurants, cafes and shops which sell the most famous brands. From the urban point of view, the city extends for a few kilometers, but the most interesting area can be easily visited on foot.

History: the first parts of future towns were created by the Thracian tribe called the “Serdi”. From them comes the first name of the city: Serdika. In 29 BC it was conquered by the Romans. In 809, it became part of the First Bulgarian Empire, with the name of Sredets and two centuries later it was conquered by the Byzantines. With the Turks (1382), its urban structure was quickly transformed. The churches were abandoned or replaced by mosques and Turkish baths; covered markets (Bezisten) and new Ottomans buildings were built. Sofia became one of the largest industrial and commercial centers of the Balkans. In the early XX century it assumed the appearance of a large western metropolis. After WWII, the town was involved in another period of great urban transformation and several parts of the old city center were demolished to make way for impressive Soviet-style buildings.

Plovdiv

Plovdiv is the second city for size and economic importance in Bulgaria. The town, crossed by the River Mariza, spreads over an area that includes six hills: Djambaz Tepe, Taxim Tepe, Nebet Tepe, Sahat Tepe, Bunardzhika Tepe and Djendem. The city offers the visitor a picture of a modern cosmopolitan city. Walking along the streets of the center it’s easy to meet artists, entrepreneurs and ordinary people from around the world. From the architectural point of view, the city center, one of the most interesting in the country, is able to offer in 1 kilometer, Roman ruins, a Mosque from the XVII century, noble palaces of the early XX century and wonderful houses in the style of the “Bulgarian Baroque” in the old Nebet Tepe district.

History: the Thracians established a settlement called Evmolpias, near the Djambaz Tepe, Taxim Tepe and Tepe Heaven hills. In 342 BC it was conquered by Philip II of Macedonia and renamed Philippopoli. In the following centuries the city was occupied by Celtic tribes. In the I century BC with the Romans, it became the major economic, cultural and political center of the Latin Thrace (the Romans changed the name to Trimontium). With the fall of the Roman Empire (395 AD) the city was under Byzantium. In subsequent centuries the town was attacked and devastated several times by tribes of Goths and Huns and then the Emperor Jus-



Sofia: Theatre of Drama "Ivan Vazov"

tinian (527-565) ordered the construction of a new defensive system. Trimontium quickly became the main Byzantine stronghold to protect the northern borders of the Empire. At the end of the VI century, the area was populated by Slavs and in 812 it became a part of the First Bulgarian Empire headed by Khan Krum. In 1385 the long Ottoman rule began. Located in a mar-



Plovdiv: old quarter

ginal position of the Empire, the city, called Phillipe by the Turks, gradually lost its strategic role. The city was liberated on January 17, 1878 during the Russo-Turkish War. The Treaty of Berlin in 1878 declared the city as the capital of Eastern Rumelia. In September 1885 the Unification of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was declared in the city.

Varna

Varna is the third largest city of Bulgaria after Sofia and Plovdiv. However, in the summer it becomes the queen of the country in terms of tourist flow. It's located in the middle of a bay, between lakes Varna and Beloslav, which define its boundaries. The old town is developed around a long pedestrian street overlooked by old houses and modern buildings. There are numerous narrow streets that reach small squares or the wonderful park near the beach.

History: during the VI century BC settlers and farmers from the city of Miletus founded the Greek city of Odessos. In the I century BC the town was conquered by Marcus Lucullus. With the Romans, Odessos quickly became the most important administrative center on the Black Sea coast. After the barbarian invasions it fell under Byzantine control. In the XIII century it was annexed to the kingdom of the Bulgarian King Kaloyan. The town was conquered by the Turks in 1391 and, over the centuries, gained an oriental character: several new mosques, "Konak" (Ottoman houses) and Turkish baths were built, and it was strictly forbidden to build new churches. It's economic development started due to the Sofia-Varna railway line opened in 1897. The city became the main port on the Bulgarian Black Sea and a famous tourist center full of exquisite buildings and clubs for entertainment and relaxation.

Nessebar

This city is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful and rich in history of the entire Black Sea coast. Situated on a small peninsula, it is famous for its ancient churches. In the Middle Ages there were over 40, but now those that deserve a visit number about a dozen. There are also traditional wooden buildings dating from the XVII to late XIX centuries. Along the historical route there are many shops selling souvenirs and local products, and it is easy to see impromptu exhibition of paintings and icons in the summer. Since 1983, it has been included in the Unesco list. The churches:

Church of Christ Pantocrator (XIII century)

Church of St. John the Baptist (X-XI centuries)

Church of the Holy Ascension of Christ (1609)

Church of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel (XIII-XIV centuries)

Church of "St. Paraskeva" (XI-XIII centuries)

Church of Saint Stephan (X century)

Church of Santa Sofia (V century)

Church of St. Todor (XX century)

Church of St. John Aliturghetos (XIV century)

History: the first organized settlement was Thracian. In the VI century BC the Greeks founded the city-state of Messambria. Protected by powerful fortifications, the city was enriched with a large amphitheater and numerous places dedicated to the worship of Gods. The



Nessebar: Byzantine Church



Varna

port was connected with the others on the Aegean Sea and Mediterranean. In the I century, after a long siege, the city surrendered to the Roman legions. From the IX century it was conquered by the Byzantines and then the Bulgarians. During the reign of the Bulgarian Tsar Alexander the town reached its highest political and cultural development: over 40 churches were built in

the peninsular and Nessebar expanded its control for many kilometers in the hinterland. The Ottoman rule was a long period of economic and cultural decline for the town: during the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), Nessebar was little more than a poor fishing village. In the XX century it underwent numerous changes and expansion, but retained the old center.

Veliko Tarnovo

Veliko Tarnovo is certainly one of the most interesting Bulgarian towns. The city center is spread over several levels on three hills: Tsarevets, Trapezitsa and Sveta Gora, which following the River Yantra, form a unique landscape characterized by narrow rocky gorges, old fields and the remains of the impregnable fortresses of the old Bulgarian Court. The town is also rich in numerous buildings from the XIX century.

History: the first traces of settlement date back to 5,000 years ago. In the Roman times the village was completely abandoned. After the barbarian invasions (VIII century) a great Slav-Bulgarian settlement was founded on the ruins and in the following centuries was heavily populated. In 1187, the great uprising against the Byzantine was the beginning of the dynasty of the Assen and Veliko Tarnovo became the capital of the restored Bulgarian state. The following two centuries were the town's golden period. In 1393, it was conquered and almost completely destroyed by the Turks. Only during the XVIII century, it was restored to its role as a major economic and cultural center of the region. In 1879 it hosted the Assembly that adopted the first Constitution of the country and elected Prince Alexander of Battenberg as Prince of Bulgaria. In 1885, in Veliko Tarnovo, the union between the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was declared.

Kazanlak

Located in a plain a few kilometers south of the Balkan Mountains, it's the main town of the Valley of Roses. The economic activities related to the roses, are nowadays the most important part of the local economy.

History: the first organized settlement was Thracians. Between the V and IV centuries BC, Seuthopolis was elected as capital of the Thracian state of Ordissi. In the XIX century the city became world famous for the production of rose oil. After the liberation in 1878, the town fell into a great economic crisis, caused by the loss of the Turkish market. This situation was resolved only through the modernization of traditional activities associated with the intensive cultivation of roses.

The Tomb of the Princess was discovered in 1944 by a group of soldiers who were digging some air raid shelters. Following the customs of the time, (III and IV centuries BC) it has three rooms:

- the antechamber containing the large objects used by the king in the new life;
- the corridor or dromos, decorated on both sides with battle scenes. Some frescoes depict armed soldiers on horseback followed by their slaves;
- the circular burial chamber decorated with scenes depicting a festive banquet. The king and his wife are seated at the table and some men and women are bringing them gifts and objects to use in the afterlife.



Veliko Tarnovo



Koprivshiza

Koprivshiza

Surrounded by mountains covered by dense forests and fields, Koprivshiza, with its old houses, is one of the main architectural heritage areas of Bulgaria.

History: founded in the XIV century, the city reached its zenith in the XIX century. In these years, it was

enriched with beautiful wooden houses decorated with frescoes and inlaid wood. After the uprising in April 1876, thanks to the rich merchants who paid the Turks, it was spared from the massacres and destruction that occurred in other areas of the country.

Backovo Monastery

This monastery located in the picturesque valley of the River Chepelare is the second for importance in Bulgaria. Founded in 1083, it was rebuilt and enlarged during the XVII and XIX centuries. The complex is known with its original architectural form and its series of frescoes which cover the walls of the monastery and the three churches: the Church of the Ossuary, the Church of the Assumption (1604) and that of St. Nicholas (1840). The oldest paintings are those of the Church of the Ossuary dating to the XI century. Inside the Church of St. Nicholas, there are some of the early works of the master Zachary Zograf considered one the most famous artists of the Bulgarian Revival. The monastery keeps precious medieval manuscripts, collections of antique jewelry and several icons, including the famous Holy Mary painted in Georgia in the XIV century.

Troyan Monastery

The monastery dates from the XVI century but nothing has remained of the original building. The current complex was built in the XIX century and it is best known thanks to the works that Zachary Zograf depicted in the monastic church in 1835. The artist used more unusual and bold political designs on the themes of his paintings. During the Ottoman rule he painted, in a strong nationalist Bulgarian style, numerous figures of saints of the Slav tradition. From this time, in the dining room, a fresco depicts, with completely secular colors, the monastic brotherhood members and some guests of the monastery. During the Bulgarian Revival, the monastery housed great literary figures and the patriot Vasil Levski who founded a revolutionary committee. The monastery is famous for its miraculous icon of the Holy Mary, brought from Mount Athos in the late XVII century.

Rila Monastery

Founded in the X century by Ivan Rilski, the complex was almost immediately destroyed and abandoned by the monks. It was rebuilt in 1355, a few kilometers south the old building. For some centuries the Rila Monastery was a powerful feudal entity controlling many villages, administrating estates and houses. During the XV century, despite the guarantees and privileges provided by the Sultan, it was attacked and destroyed. In 1469, the relics of Ivan Rilski were returned from Veliko Turnovo to Rila: this was the beginning of the new reconstruction. The current complex dates from the XIX century after the fire in 1833 had destroyed the church and the residences of the monks; only the fortress tower was spared. Its reconstruction involved the entire country and the most important Bulgarian artists. The frescoes of the Church of the



Rila Monastery



Troyan Monastery



Backovo Monastery

Virgin Mary were painted between the 1840 and 1848 by several great masters such as Ivan Nikolov, Costa Valiov, Zachary Zograf and Dimitar Mollerov. The common theme of the murals is the triumph of good over evil. From the figurative point

of view the altar is extremely complex, due to its 36 sacred images representing the Old Testament, the apostles and some martyrs. The museum contains a great quantity of gold and silver objects, some weapons and ancient relics. The absolute

masterpiece is the cross by monk Rafail, which contains hundreds of biblical scenes each of them three-dimensional and the size of a rice grain. The construction of this cross took the monk about 12 years. Rila is included on the Unesco list.

Boyana Church

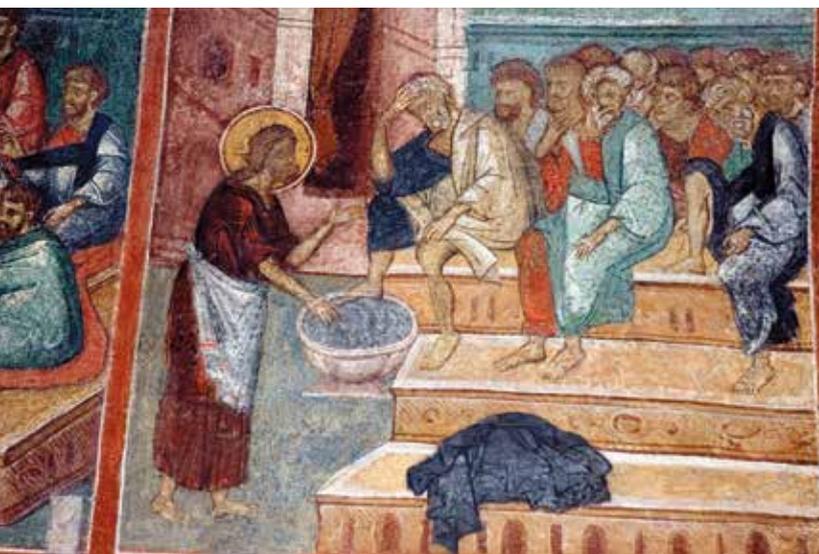
The building dates from the X century, but was transformed twice: three century later and in the second half of the XIX century. What makes it one of the most interesting buildings in the country is the series of murals using a painting technique which seems a century in advance of the Assisi cycle considered the beginning of the Italian Renaissance. During the Middle Ages images had to follow a standard range of colors, often far from reality, while those of Boyana depict actual images taken from the daily life of the population, as well as King Asen and his wife Irina, depicted in a surprisingly natural way. Another interesting painting is the image of the great King Kaloyan, who holds a model of the monastic church. Thanks to the extraordinary complexity of these paintings and their very high artistic level, this church is included on the Unesco list.

Arbanassy Church

It was built in 1632 in the village of Arbanassy. Founded in the XV century by Albanian refugees, Arbanassy quickly became the favorite place of the wealthy merchants and wealthy families of the nearby Veliko Tarnovo: more than 1.000 houses were built. Today it's considered as an open-air museum characterized by narrow cobblestone streets and ancient houses surrounded by high stone walls. The church has a rectangular form and externally looks like an old country house. The interior is rich in artistic and historical meaning. The long corridor painted with geometric patterns and the chapel of St. John the Baptist covered with paintings depicting religious subjects, contain more than 3,500 illustrations and a magnificent gilt iconostasis. To note the internal structure of the church designed to clearly separate the men's section from the women's section.

Shipka Church

At the southern foot of the Stara Planina Mountains, the Shipka Church is dedicated to the Russian and Bulgarian soldiers who died for the liberation of Bulgaria in the Russo-Turkish War. The church, in the Russian style of the XVII century was officially opened on 28 September 1902 to record the 25th anniversary of the Battles of Shipka Pass. The church's bell tower is 53 meters high and its 17 bells were cast from the cartridges collected after the famous battles. 34 marble plates built into the walls of the church, display the names of the Russian regiments and Bulgarian volunteers. The remains of the dead are laid in 17 stone sarcophagi in the church's crypt. The iconostasis is richly decorated with gilded wood-carvings and has high artistic value. The icons were given by Russian monks from the Monastery of St. Pantaleimon on Mount Athos.



Shipka: The Nativity Church

Madara Horseman

The most famous historical landmark of the Schumen region. In the rock wall, unknown artists carved an ancient bas-relief depicting a knight with long hair wearing a pleated dress and a belt at the waist. The left hand holds the reins while the right hand holds a spear, used to kill a lion lying at his feet. Behind him and the horse, there is a dog running. We still don't know the exact origin of this figure. On the wall three inscriptions are engraved in Greek, referring to the period of Khan Tervel (705), of Khan Kormisos (756 AD) and finally of Khan Omurtag (814 AD). For many researchers the relief had Thracian origins, and therefore dates from before the foundation of the First Bulgarian Empire. For others, the picture shows Khan Krum: the Bulgarian king struggling against the Byzantine emperor, symbolized by the lion. It's included on the Unesco list.

Thracian Treasures

Although the Thracians weren't able to develop a written script, they reached a high level in hand-crafted objects, in gold production and in frescoes, as shown by artifacts and graves found in the country. One of the best examples of Thracian gold production is the Panagyurishte treasure exhibited in the National History Museum in Sofia. Discovered in 1949, it consists of a phial, an amphora and seven rhytons with a total weight of more than 6 kg of 24-karat gold. The objects are richly and skilfully decorated with scenes of Thracian myths, customs and life. The treasure dates from the IV-III centuries BC, and is thought to have been used as a royal ceremonial set by King Seuthes III. Another Thracian treasure located in the National History Museum is that of Rogozen. Discovered in 1985, it consists of 165 receptacles in silver with golden gilt. Total weight is 20 kg.

Thracian tombs

The Thracians considered the king as a God and believed that after his death he would be resurrected and would return to his people. His body had to be kept in a special, secure place hence the tomb had to be protected against looters and had to contain jewelry, weapons and everything that the king needed for his return. To allow that, the doors of the rooms could be opened from inside to allow the king to leave the tomb. Thracian tombs are present in every region of Bulgaria, but one of the most famous areas is the so called "Valley of the Thracian Kings," located near Kazanlak, that contains several nice tombs dating from the V-III centuries BC. One of them contained a gold mask weighing 690 grams perhaps depicting King Teres. It's made entirely of pure gold, while the other gold masks of the same period are just laminated with the precious metal.



Kazanlak: Thracian tomb

Karanovo

In 2008 near the village of Karanovo not far from the town of Stara Zagora, a tomb containing a well preserved chariot dating to between the I and III centuries AD was dis-

covered in the middle of a hill. The old chariot, richly adorned with images of silver-plate from Thracian mythology made in bronze, probably belonged to a wealthy Thracian

aristocratic. The grave site displays the remains of the chariot, four intact wheels along with the remains of his two horses and a dog, in their original location.

Rose Valley

The Rose Valley is a narrow plateau located between Kazanlak and Karlovo. In this region of 2,600 hectares, there are almost all the 36,000 Bulgarian rose producers. The valley's climate, characterized by mild winters and long springs with low rainfall and high humidity in the morning, allows the roses to contain a high percentage of oil of a unique and valuable fragrance. Traditionally the cultivation of roses dates back almost five centuries, when the Turks planted the first plants of the "rose oil" in this valley. Some argue that its presence comes from the soldiers of Alexander the Great, who brought some plants back from Persia. The Damascena rose has a high branching stem, curved spines and small flowers in numerous groups. The flower color ranges from pink to light red. The bush can be 3 meters high, but for industrial use it's less than 1 meter.

Rose Oil

In European markets Bulgarian rose oil appeared in the late XVII century to satisfy the needs of the manufacturers of perfumes. Initially, oil was produced in small workshops, where the artisans used copper vessels with pipes cooled with water, through which the condensed oil slowly drops. Only in the XIX century, thanks to rising global demand for Bulgarian rose oil this family-business has become one of the main sectors of the country. Now in Bulgaria about 3,000 tons of rose oil are produced every year, corresponding to 70% of rose essence used in cosmetics annually. The main markets are France, USA, Germany and Japan. During the flowering period, in the morning, each petal is collected by hand and carefully deposited in baskets to avoid losing its characteristics. The production of 1 liter of oil needs 4 tons of petals. For one drop of oil 200 roses are used!

Rose Festivals

From mid-May until the first week of June, the Rose Valley is visited by tourists from all over the world attracted by the numerous festivals organized in the villages during the weekends. The events which attract the most visitors are the Festival of the Rose at Karlovo and the International Folklore Festival of Kazanlak celebrated for the first time in 1903. During these days, in the early morning, in the rose fields the visitors can see boys and girls dressed in traditional costumes collecting rose petals and dancing traditional dances. Both Kazanlak and Karlovo festivals also include ritual rose-picking in the rose fields, where visitors are invited to take part in this ancient ritual. In the main square, the most important part of the festival is a parade of colorful floats followed by people wearing traditional costumes, dancing to the rhythm of Bulgarian folk music.



Macedonia



Macedonia

Macedonia has a mainly mountainous territory shaped like an ellipse. Although Macedonia is a small country, it has a very complex mountain system that includes both alpine characteristics and the rounded shapes typical of the Balkan Mountains. There are three main rivers: the Vardar, the Crni Drim and the Strumitsa. Natural lakes cover about 2% of the whole territory.

History: Macedonia is a historical region originating from ancient times. The Macedonian kingdom reached its zenith under Philip II (336 BC) and his son Alexander III (356-323 BC). After the dissolution of Alexander the Great's Empire, Macedonia fell under the Romans. By the VI century the region was populated by Slav tribes which later converted to Christianity under St. Cyril and St. Methodius and their disciples St. Clement and St. Naum. In the IX century the region was annexed to the Bulgarian Empire. At the end of the X century King Samuil founded what historians consider the first kingdom of Macedonia. Samuel's reign ended in 1014 with the Belasica defeat, close to the present-day town of Strumica in the south-east of the country, by the Byzantine Emperor Vasilij I. In the following three centuries, Macedonia was ruled by the Byzantines, Bulgarians and Serbs. Ottoman occupation began in 1494. This period deeply influenced the architecture of the country with rich Mosques and Ottomans build-

ings. However, the Turkish presence was never accepted by the population and this generated the revolutionary movements that characterized Macedonian history from the XV to the XIX centuries. With the end of the Russo-Turkish War, most of the Macedonian territory came under Bulgaria, but a few months later returned to the Turks. In 1903, the Macedonian revolutionary committees organized the Ilinden Uprising suppressed by the Turks after only 10 days. In 1919, the country was annexed to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, renamed as Yugoslavia in 1929. After the end of WWII, Macedonia became a member of the Yugoslav Federation. In September 1991 a referendum expressed the independence of the country and in November the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia was enacted. The new republic was not immediately recognized by the international community due to the opposition of Greece over the use of the name "Macedonia" which also identifies a Greek region and the adoption of the flag with the "Vergina Sun" with 16 rays, symbol of Alexander's dynasty. In 1993, the UN assigned the new republic the provisional name of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In 1995 the Parliament decided to change the Macedonian flag, to the present one with the sun with 8 rays which represents "the new sun of Liberty".

*Ohrid: Samuil fortress
St. Naum Monastery
Bitola*



Skopje

Skopje

The capital spreads over a wide valley on the slope of Mount Vodno. The River Vardar divides the town in two parts: the Muslim neighborhood in the north and the orthodox district in the south. The urban center located in the southern part consists of modern buildings in socialist-style built after the earthquake of 1963. The Muslim area, known as “charshija”, is rich in old Ottoman buildings and is certainly the most interesting part of the capital.

History: during the IV century BC, the Slavs founded the first organized settlement. Skupi appears with the Romans. The town was destroyed by the earthquake in 518. The following Byzantine rule represented a long period of decadency and disorder, from which the city was reconstituted only thanks to the arrival of the Slav tribes. Under the Ottoman Empire (1392), the city continued to flourish, becoming the main center of Macedonia. With the end of Ottoman rule, many old buildings in the southern part of the city were demolished to make way for new imposing neoclassical buildings. Today, the only witnesses of this period are the Hotel Bristol (1923), located near the old railway station and some palaces which overlook Makedonija Square; on 26 July 1963, an earthquake of 9 degrees on the Mercalli scale destroyed almost 80% of the buildings, causing over 1,000 deaths and over 3,000 injured.

Ohrid

Developed around the castle hill on the shore of Lake Ohrid is a city where modernity is clearly separated from history and tradition, creating two very different contexts. Within the old walls there are the historical buildings such as the well preserved medieval churches, the Roman theatre from the Hellenic period, Samuil’s fortress and the traditional houses. Outside the old town is the other Ohrid, a modern city crossed by long boulevards defining the residential and commercial areas.

History: Ohrid was mentioned as Lychinisos (Sun City) in Greek texts. In 150 BC, the region was conquered by the Romans. At the end of the X century it was the capital of the Kingdom of Samuil, who built the fortress and the defensive walls. In the XI century, the town became the seat of the important Archbishopric of Ohrid which was the only medieval institution with autonomy and privileges during the Ottoman period. Ancient texts document the arrival of the Turks in 1408. The town was quickly enriched with mosques, Turkish baths, Ottoman buildings and Koranic schools. During the Byzantine period there were over 300 churches in Ohrid, which had fallen to 33 in the XVII century. In the early XX century, the economic crisis caused a massive exodus to the USA: in a few years, more than 30% of the population had left Ohrid.

*Ohrid: St. Kaneo Church
typical house*



Bitola

Located on the plain of Pelagonija, Bitola is a rich, modern city, where the new blends with the old. The pedestrian area (called Shirok Sokak which means large street) is characterized by neoclassical buildings and old houses in bright colors. The city center is also rich in old mosques and Ottomans buildings.

History: its history is interwoven with that of Heraclea Lyncestis, founded by Philip II in the IV century BC and conquered by the Romans in 148 BC. During the Middle Ages it was disputed by the Bulgarians and Serbs. During Ottoman rule, the town, called Monastir by the Turks, became one of the most important towns in the Empire and from 1878 to 1913 it was home to 12 foreign consulates. The economic crisis which characterized the first part of the XX century, caused large-scale emigration of people to Bulgaria and America. This trend only ended in the postwar period.

St. Panteleymon Monastery

Built in 1164, it's considered the most important monastery in the country and an absolute novelty in the art of the Middle Ages in the Balkans. Inside the church there are several frescoes perfectly preserved, which show an amazing ability and technique, similar to those of Bojana church in Bulgaria, more than a century earlier than the Assisi cycle. Looking at the paintings the attention that the artist has placed on the psychological aspects of the subjects and the details of the Gospel accounts is immediately obvious. Among these, the most important feature depicts the Raising of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, the Transfiguration and the Passion. Outside, the church follows the Byzantine style: external walls are brick and stone blocks, the structure is shaped like a cross with the great octagonal dome in the center surrounded by four smaller ones.

St. Naum Monastery

Located on the southern part of Lake Ohrid, this monastery is one of the most famous in the country. The original structure dates from the X century, but the building was rebuilt and changed in the XVI and XVII centuries. The Byzantine-style church, dedicated to the Archangels Gabriel and Michael has guarded the remains of St. Naum, the founder of the monastery for many years. Following the religious rules of the time, the church is divided into narthex and naos, whose walls are completely covered with well preserved frescoes (unfortunately the frescoes from the time of St. Naum are lost). Among the works of art preserved in the monastery, two in particular stand out: the beautiful iconostasis of carved wood and collections of icons dating back to the XVIII century, considered among the most valuable in the Balkan Peninsula.

St. Osogovski Monastery

The monastery was built during the XII century by Joakim of Osogovo probably on the ruins of a previous religious building. In the XVII century, the original complex was almost entirely destroyed by the Turks and now, from the medieval period, only a small XIV century church, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, remains. The church is famous for its miraculous spring. The monastery includes another church, this time dedicated to St. Joachim Osogovski, which is much more recent. It was built in 1845 by Andreja Damjanov, the greatest architect of XIX century Macedonia. This building, much bigger than the medieval church, has a structure with three aisles and a facade supported by a frescoed porch. The upper part of the construction enriched with several small domes is very interesting. All the frescoes were executed by Dimitar Papradishki and Petar Nikolov.

*Osogovski Monastery
St. Panteleymon Monastery*



St. Bigorski Monastery

The monastery dedicated to St. John the Baptist was founded in the XI century, but the present structure dates from the XVIII century. Later it was renovated and enlarged several times. From the artistic standpoint the most interesting aspect of the monastic church is the splendid iconostasis. Considered a masterpiece, it was the work of master craftsmen from the nearby villages of Gari and Galicnik in the Mavrovo mountains. Carved around 1830, it contains over 500 human figures and about 200 animals. The complex preserves the icon of St. John the Baptist (X century) enriched by a silver coating in 1885. According to tradition, the icon first appeared in the exact place where the monastery had to be built, it disappeared in the XVI century when the Turks destroyed the complex and reappeared when the monastery reconstruction was completed.

Kalysta Church

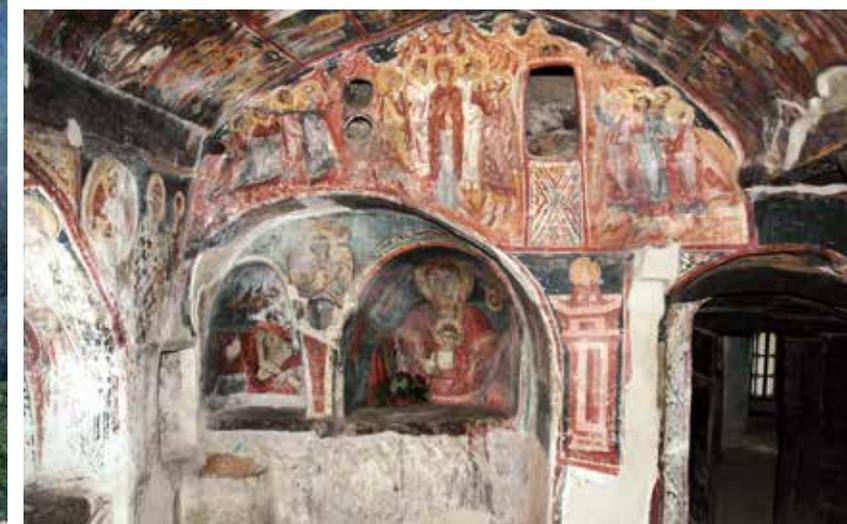
Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, it was built in the XV century in a cave in the side of a cliff, about 15 meters above the shore of Lake Ohrid. Today, it is easily accessible thanks to the staircase of a modern building housing the dwellings of the nuns. Inside the church are some charming rooms entirely covered with well-preserved frescoes, where in the past religious services were held. Paintings depict images taken from Christian traditions, among which stand out the birth of Jesus, the Crucifixion, the Annunciation and the Deesis that depicts Christ on the throne and the Holy Mary and St. John the Baptist who are praying for mankind. Among the saints to note are St. Petka, St. Clement of Ohrid, St. Barbara and St. Nedelija. Next to the main entrance of the chapel, a small wooden staircase leads to the old cells of the monks, carved into the rock.

St. George's Church

The church is located in the village of Staro Nagoricane not far from the town of Kumanovo. Built in 1313 by King Milutin on the foundations of an XI century church, the building has an elongated base inscribed in a cross. The exterior walls, in stone blocks and brick, support the roof characterized by the large octagonal dome surrounded by four smaller ones. The interior is covered by well-preserved medieval paintings depicting images of saints and scenes from the life of Christ. Realized by Eftihij and Mihajlo (considered two of the most important painters of that time) these frescoes have many similarities to those of the Gračanica Monastery in present-day Kosovo. Inside, there is the original iconostasis completely frescoed and decorated with marble columns. As tradition demanded at the time, the bell tower is located in the garden a few meters from the church.

St. Spas's Church

The church was built near the Skopje's charshija between the XVIII and XIX centuries, on the remains of a building dating back to the XVI century. Externally it offers the visitor a picture of a modest, almost anonymous building, while inside it contains one of the most beautiful and valuable iconostasis of the Balkans. This masterpiece by the brothers Marko and Petar Filipovski and Makarije Frckovski, was executed between 1819 and 1824. Made entirely of inlaid wood, it shows cycles of images taken from the Holy Bible and the Gospels. To note on the right side of the iconostasis, the three authors represented in three small carved figures. Another valuable work is the bishop's throne of inlaid wood. Since 1964 in the courtyard of the church, near the bell tower, there is the sarcophagus containing the body of national hero Gotze Delcev.



St. Sophia Cathedral

Located in Ohrid, it's one of the greatest Byzantine churches of the XI century. In the XV century, the Turks turned it into a mosque,

hence the frescoes were covered with lime. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire it was converted into a Christian church. In the postwar pe-

riod, many medieval frescoes were discovered under the lime. These portray patriarchs, saints and scenes from the Old and New Testament.

Heraclea

Heraclea was founded by Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, in the mid-IV century BC. During the Hellenic period the city was the major economic and cultural center of the southern part of Macedonia. With the arrival of the Romans in the II century BC, Heraclea further strengthened its role, becoming an important military garrison on the “Via Egnatia” (148 BC) which linked the Adriatic Sea to Constantinople. Some of the most interesting ruins of the archaeological sites are from this period: the baths, the colonnade and the amphitheater, which was able to accommodate over 3,000 spectators. The structure also includes the rooms for the gladiators, cages for animals and a semi-circular area for musicians. The colonnade was a part of a public building, perhaps used as a library or school. The baths included some rooms with cold water, the boilers and the central hall with hot water. From the Christian period, when the city became a bishopric, are the remains of the “small” and the “great” basilicas both paved with beautiful mosaics (V century) depicting geometric shapes, trees, birds, flowers and animals. Other mosaics cover the floor of the bishop’s residence. The decline and end of Heraclea Lyncestis were determined by the barbarian invasions of the IV and V centuries and the earthquakes that devastated the entire Vardar region in 518.

Stobi

The first settlement was established in ancient times. The town was first mentioned in 197 BC by Livius. With the Romans, thanks to its strategic position near the junction of the Erigón and Axiós rivers, Stobi became an important economic center and the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Emperor Theodosius I stayed in Stobi in 388. Sacked by the Barbarians in 479, it was destroyed by the earthquake in 518. Up to now, about 15 hectares (excavation work began in 1924) of ancient settlement have been unearthed, but researchers believe that most of the buildings are still to be discovered. The site preserves basilicas (V century), the baths (VI century) with a large room and a swimming pool in marble, some domus (IV-V centuries) paved with splendid mosaics, the Episcopal palace located just outside the Episcopal Church and the baptistery still entirely paved with mosaics. The city walls were built in the III century: today their remains are a part over 400 meters long. The theater, built between the II and III centuries, was equipped with over 7,000 seats divided into five sections. At the end of the III century it was home of many gladiator fights, but in the next century its decline began and what had once been the largest building in the town became construction material for other buildings: several of its blocks of marble were found in several domus, gates and roads.

*Stobi archaeological site
Tetovo: Painted Mosque*



Tetovo Mosque

The Painted Mosque, also known as Sarena Dzamija, was built in 1459 thanks to the donations from two muslim noblewomen named Hurshida and Mensure, whose octagonal tomb is in the garden of the complex. The mosque, a masterpiece of Ottoman art, is shaped like a cube, fully decorated both inside and outside with floral and geometric designs which incorporate elements of Ottoman baroque and neoclassical styles. The well preserved frescoes and wooden decor date back to 1833 when the building was renovated and enlarged by the Ottoman governor Abdurahman Pasha. Not far from the mosque, the old center of Tetovo offers other significant Islamic buildings. Among these the Turkish Hamman (baths), the Saat (clock) Mosque and the Arabat Baba teke (monastery of the Islamic sect of Bektsi) from the XVIII century are the most interesting.

Albania



Albania

Albania is mostly hilly and mountainous and only a few areas close to the Adriatic and Ionian coasts are plains. In the northern region the Dinaric Alps mark the national borders, while close to Macedonia there is the the Shar Planina chain. The central part of the country is characterized by uplands with moderate elevations (300-900 meters) and only a few points above 1,500 meters. The three biggest lakes, Scutari, Ohrid and Prespa, are on the borders with Montenegro (north) and Macedonia (south).

History: the Illyrians were the first people who founded organized settlements in Albania. This population, especially in the southern area, developed relationships with the Greek colonies such as Epidamnus (627 BC) and Apollonia (600 BC). With the defeat of King Perseus in the “Third Illyrian War”, the territory became a Roman province. The Romans, with the establishment of new coastal towns, latinized the population. Julius Caesar was educated in a school in Dyrrhachium (Durrës), while Augustus studied in the city-state of Apollonia. With the fall of Rome (395 AD), Albania fell under Byzantium. In the Middle Ages the region was controlled by Bulgaria (IX and XII centuries), Venice (X and XIII, centuries), Byzantium (X and XIII centuries) and Serbia (XIII century). Under the Prince of Kruja Castriot Scanderbeg, the tribes of Epirus and

Albania opposed the Ottoman attempts of conquest for 25 years and only after the death of the prince (1468) did Albania fell into Turkish hands (1478). The Ottoman rule lasted until 1912 and caused the mass conversion to Islam and the emigration of Christians to Egypt, Greece and Italy. During the First Balkan War, the country was conquered by Serbia and Greece. Only the coast of Vlora was not occupied, so here Ismail Qemali declared independence of Albania in November 1912. In 1928, Ahmet Zog was elected president and later he proclaimed himself as King Zog I. Zog gradually eliminated slavery, forbade the use of veils, and created the basis for transforming the Albanian feudal system, controlled by local Muslims, into a nation. In April 1939 Albania was invaded by the Italian army and Zog was forced to flee to Greece. In 1944, the Communist Party led by Enver Hoxha, a great admirer of Stalin, took control of the country. In the following years, Hoxha interrupted all of political and economic relationships with Belgrade, Moscow and then with Beijing: Albania was totally isolated. Since the death of the dictator in 1985, a timid political and economic opening has began. In 1990-91 with the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the multiparty system was introduced. Albania joined NATO and applied for membership of the European Union.



Tirana

The capital is situated on a fertile plain crossed by the River Ishem. The city's heart developed around some futuristic buildings, which include offices, shops, commercial centers, restaurants and numerous cafes. From the architectural point of view, Skanderbeg Square is the most important place in Tirana. Here there are all of the main historical buildings of the town and the interesting Natural History Museum.

History: the town was born in 1614, during the period of Suleiman Pasha, who built a mosque, a bazaar and the Turkish bath. From the XVIII to the middle of the XIX centuries, the city underwent a great architectural development: the beautiful Ethem Bey Mosque located in Skanderbeg Square dates from this period. In 1920 Tirana became the capital. Radical changes to the city center began immediately. In 1923 two famous Italian architects designed the new city's heart: the old Ottoman buildings were demolished and substituted by wide boulevards, large squares and new palaces in neoclassical style. In the first years of Enver Hoxha's dictatorship the city's appearance changed again following a new development plan (1952-56) based on the Soviet-style. In recent years, the young mayor Edi Rama has decided to paint the facades of the imposing buildings built during the Communist-time with an impressive combination of pastel colors.

Berat

Berat presents an urban structure characterized by numerous elegant houses on a steep slope of the Tomori-rocky hill which rises behind the town. Without following a fixed order, these white buildings seem to be one above the other, creating a unique combination of a thousand windows. Berat is therefore known as the "City of thousand windows". On the castle hill, there is the old fortress with the old Christian Quarter and some well preserved Byzantine style churches.

History: the first traces of settlements are the remains of a Greek fortress from the VI century BC. In the II century BC, the town was conquered by the Romans. Under the Byzantines it became a major center on the Empire's border. The city has suffered many invasions by the barbarians tribes who occupied the Balkans between the VI and VII centuries. In the IX century it became part of the First Bulgarian Empire with the name of "Beligrad" (White City), from which the present name Berat comes. From the middle of the XV century until 1912, except for a few breaks, it was controlled by the Turks. Its inhabitants were deeply involved in the national renaissance and it was a safe haven for the extremists of the League of Prizren. Here in November 1944 a provisional government of the country led by the Communist Party was proclaimed, which was the starting point of the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha.



Berat

Krujë

Krujë is the hometown of the hero George Castriota Skenderbeg. The city's name comes from the Krua, which means "source", due to the abundance of running water that comes from the slopes of the mountains where the village stands.

History: the Illyrians founded a village in the III century BC. From the Krujë fortress, Skenderbeg became the symbol of the Albanian separatists, but after his death the Turks took the town; the castle was destroyed and its inhabitants were massacred.

Durres

Durres is the oldest city in Albania and one of the most important economic centers. Its number of residents is second only to that of Tirana. City life has always been connected with the sea and the port. The most interesting site in the town is the Roman Amphitheater (II century BC) considered one of the largest and most important Roman buildings in the Balkans. Its diameter is more than 120 meters and it was able to hold 15,000 spectators.

History: it was founded by the Greeks with the name Epidamnos (627 BC). Conquered by the Romans in 229 BC, it became the capital of the Roman province of Epirus and obtained the Status of “Free city”. Dyr-rachium was an important naval base and the starting point of the “Via Egnatia”, the military road that connected Brindisi, Salonika and Constantinople. Under the Byzantine Empire, the town continued to be the main crossroads between Byzantium and Western Europe. The Republic of Venice took control of the region from 1392 to 1501 and the city became the capital of the so-called “Albania Veneta.” With the Turks a long period of decline began. In 1927 an earthquake damaged the old center, which was reconstructed and enlarged during the Enver Hoxha regime. With the fall of Communism in 1990, Durres became the symbol of the Albanian migration to Italy on the Adriatic coast.

Gjirokastra

Gjirokastra is the largest city in southern Albania (34,000 inhabitants). The name, of Greek origin, means “fortress of silver” a reference to the castle that has always dominated the city. Since 2005, the town has been in the Unesco list, thanks to its old buildings (early XIX century) which depict a unique architectural structure, both refined and homogeneous, dominated by the elegant Ottoman architecture. Local tradition required numerous large windows and grey and iridescent colored roofs assembled following a particular construction technique based on the use of cleverly overlapping stone slabs. For this reason, Gjirokastra is often called the “city of stone.”

History: the current town was founded in Byzantine times, almost certainly in the XII century. It was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1416 to 1912 (with a few interruptions). During the Balkan Wars 1912-13, the whole region was occupied twice by Greece that forced the annexation of the city, due to the linguistic and ethnic composition of the majority of its inhabitants (nowaday it hosts the largest Greek community in the country). The peace treaty and the subsequent Protocol of Florence assigned the city to the new Albanian state. In the postwar period, Gjirokastra, hometown of Enver Hoxha, became one of the main cities in the country and an important industrial and commercial center.



*Kruje
Gjirokastra*

Scutari

The town is located between Lake Scutari and the Drina, Buna and Kir rivers. From a historical standpoint, the town offers the medieval castle situated on the city hill, and the so called “lead mosque”.

History: the Illyrians founded the city of “Scodrinon”: the name impressed on coins from 230 BC. With the Romans (168 BC), the city retained its economic and political importance. In the early Middle Ages it was the first city, controlled by the Slavs and then the Bulgarians. In 1396 the city was sold to the Republic of Venice, which began the reconstruction of the castle and the city center. In 1479, it was conquered by the Ottomans. In the XIX century, thanks to strong economic growth, the bazaar of the city included more than 2,500 shops and several workshops specialized in producing clothing, fabrics, leather, tobacco, guns and silver filigree jewellery.

Butrint

Butrint was an ancient city in Northern Epirus whose origins are connected to Virgilian mythology. The earliest archaeological remains date from the X century BC and are located on a peninsula surrounded by lakes and rivers. It quickly developed thanks to its strategic position in front the Straits of Corfu. During the Roman period it was inhabited by the veterans of imperial legions who built palaces, baths, villas and a great theater. In the III century an earthquake destroyed much of the city, which was restored and became a bishopric in the following century. Despite the new fortifications built by Justinian, the city was conquered and sacked by the Ostrogoths. During the Bulgarian Empire it was the main port on the Ionian Sea. The town was disputed by the Byzantines, Angevins and the Republic of Venice which purchased the whole area around the Corfu Channel from the Angevins in 1386. The following years were a period of great decline due to the bradyseism caused by the excessive quantity of water in the land, that made the area unhealthy. After the end of the Venetian Republic, Butrint passed, with the Treaty of Campo Formio (1797), under French control. Two years later it was occupied by the Ottoman governor Ali Pasha Tepelena. Butrint became part of the Albanian state in 1912. After the fall of Communism, the archaeological site was included in the Unesco list.

Apollonia

The town was founded in 588 BC by Greek colonists from Corfu and Corinth. It was called Apollonia in honor of Apollo, the God of art and beauty. Aristotle speaks about it in his writings: this Greek colony is a perfect example of an “oligarchy”. From the beginning, Apollonia was an important port and with Dyrrachium (Durres), the one preferred by ships coming from the other side of the Adriatic Sea. With the Romans (229 BC) the town registered a rapid development and in the mid II century AD reached more than 55,000 inhabitants. In 148 AD, it became part of the Roman province of Macedonia. During these years, thanks to its status as a “free city”, it became a center for culture and art able to attract people from all over the Empire. In the III century AD an earthquake devastated the region and changed the direction of the River Vjosa. Apollonia’s port filled with earth and the surrounding areas were affected by several outbreaks of malaria. People moved from the city to the more attractive Vlora. In later centuries, the city was reduced to a village which hosted a small Christian community. In the XIII century, a monastery and the church dedicated to the Holy Mary were built on the hill of the city. The archaeological site preserves the facade of Artemide’s temple with 5 Corinthian columns, the ruins of some public buildings, the roman theater and the large necropolis.

*Byllis archaeological site
Berat
Saranda*



Apollonia



Byllis

Founded by the Illyrians in the V century BC, Byllis quickly became one of the largest centers of Western Illyria. The city, surrounded by high walls, included the agorà, the theater, a large stadium and many other public buildings, which looked onto a grid of streets. The city structure was inspired by Greek models. Located on the road that connected Apollonia to Antigonea in the direction of Epirus, it became a Roman colony under Emperor Augustus with the name of Colonia Julia Augustea. The Romans, gradually transformed the town: the walls were rebuilt and the Illyrian buildings were destroyed to make way for new palaces and christian churches. In these years, numerous crafts associated with the production of ceramic objects developed. Between the V and VI centuries the town was destroyed by the barbarians and later by the Slavs. Byllis was definitively abandoned in the VIII century AD. Considered one of most important European archaeological sites, it preserves the ruins of numerous public and private buildings such as the “Bishops complex” (V century) that includes the basilica, the baptistery and the Bishop’s Palace, the amphitheater able to accommodate 7,500 spectators and the “Winery”, which was a two floor complex (2,000 m²) used as a private cellar by the bishop. A well preserved part of the old city walls and 6 gates of the defensive system remain.

Porto Palermo

Porto Palermo is also known as the castle of the famous Ali Pasha Tepelena, located on a small peninsula in Porto Palermo bay (in antiquity called “Obzor Beach”). It was built in the XVII century by Ali Pasha in honor of his wife Vasiliki. Researchers believe that on the peninsula there was a fortress from the early IV century BC. The building has a triangular shape characterized by the interior divided into several spaces illuminated by the central corridor. It preserves the room of Ali Pasha and his wife, the guard rooms and the kitchen. To note on the doors some Italian words written by Italian soldiers during WWII. A stone staircase leads to the terrace which covers the entire castle.

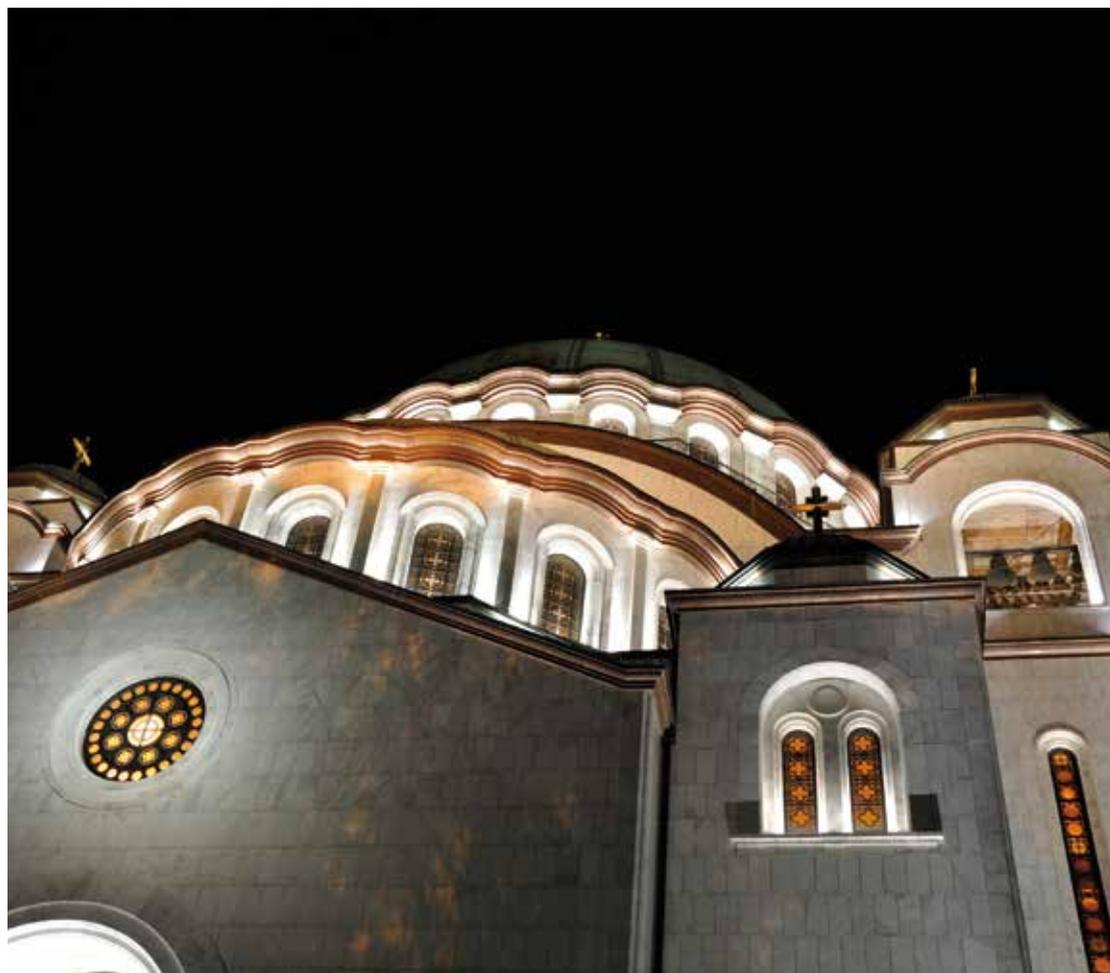
Blue Eye

Located near the village of Delvina, along the Saranda-Gjirokastra road, it’s the largest of the 18 springs which form the River Bistrica that flows 25 km into the Ionian Sea, just outside Saranda. The water springing out from the ground in a wooden area on the slopes of Mount Vasto (Mali Gjere), has a flow of 6 m³/sec and a temperature of about 13°C. Its depth is unknown: a few years ago some divers tried to investigate the spring, but after reaching a depth of 45 meters had to return to the surface due to the high water pressure.



Blue Eye

Serbia



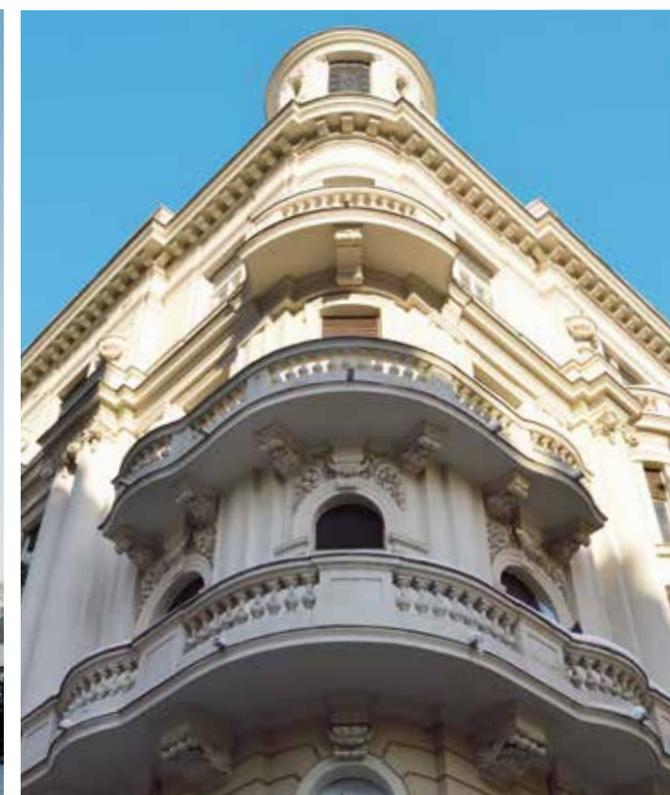
Serbia

Serbia is mainly mountainous, only its northern part, about one quarter of the whole territory, is a plain (Vojvodina). The central and southern parts of the country are characterized by the River Morava, the Dinars Alps and the western Balkans chain. Serbia boasts more than 70 rivers 50 km long; the most important are the Danube and its tributary Sava.

History: in the II millennium BC, the region was inhabited by the Illyrians. In the X century BC, the Greek colonization of the southern region began. The Romans enlarged the town of Greek origin and founded new ones such as Sirmium e Felix Romuliana (IV century AD). The provinces of Pannonia Inferior, Mesia Superior, Dacia Ripense and Mediterran Dacia, which form the present Serbia, were the birthplaces of 16 Roman Emperors. With the invasion of the region by Slav tribes (VI century AD) the following centuries were characterized by the presence of numerous independent tribes each one led by a so called župan. During these years the region was divided into the Raška kingdom in the eastern part of the country and Zeta which covered the central part and the Adriatic coast. In 1166, Stefan Nemanja, veliki (great) župan of the Raška kingdom, united the whole region in a single state. The following two centuries, thanks to the Nemanjić dynasty, were the country's golden period

that reached its zenith with King Milutin and his son Stefan Dečani (XIV century). Serbia became one of the most important European Empires and its territory expanded to the Niš region. Rasko, Stefan Nemanja's youngest son and future St. Sava, founded the Serbian Church. In June 1389 in Kosovo Polije, the Christian army of Prince Lazar, composed of Serbians, Bosnians and Bulgarians, was defeated by Sultan Murat I. A few years later, the Turkish army invaded the Balkans as far as the Austrian border. Although the Turk garrison left Belgrade in 1867, Serbia obtained independence thanks to the uprisings organized by Đorđe Petrović Karađorđe in 1804 and by Miloš Obrenović in 1815. In 1882, the Kingdom of Serbia was declared. In 1918, the Karađorđević dynasty took control of the new Kingdom of the Serbians, Croats and Slovenians. A period characterized by serious popular riots followed, and King Alexander I was forced to dissolve political parties and to rename the country as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. From the end of WWII to 1992, when Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence, the country's history is related to that of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia founded by Josip Broz (Tito). In 1992 Serbia and Montenegro founded the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which existed until June 2006.

*Belgrade: Parliament
St. Sava Church*



Belgrade

The capital is located at the confluence of the Sava with the Danube. A modern and dynamic city, Belgrade has reached the standard of living of the largest European cities. Along the pedestrian zone “Knez Mihailova” there are restaurants, cafes and shops which sell the most famous brands. For lovers of nightlife the town offers nightclubs, piano bars and night cruises on the Danube. From the architectural standpoint, it’s characterized by buildings in Neoclassicist, Art Nouveau and Neo-Renaissance styles. The oldest building is the Kalamegdan fortress on the north bank of the Danube.

History: the Romans built a fortress on the ruins of the Celtic settlement of Singidunum (III century BC), to accomodate the IV Flavian Legion. The fortress quickly became a city, which was renamed Beli Grad (white town) by the Byzantine in the IX century. In the Middle Ages, the fortified area of Kalamegdan was the only inhabited zone of the town. Between the XII and XIV centuries, the old roman walls were reinforced and enlarged, and the despot Stefan Lazarević (XIV century) ordered the renovation of the royal palace and the construction of the church of the Mother of God within the defensive walls. During the period before the Ottoman rule, which began in 1456, Belgrade was fought over by the Hungarians and Serbians. The Turks left the city in 1867.

Niš

Niš is the third largest city in Serbia after Belgrade and Novi Sad and thanks to its textile, mechanical and electronic industries is one of the most important economic centers of the country. From a historical and architectural standpoint, the center only offers the XV century Turkish fortress, while in its neighborhood there is the Mediana archaeological site which preserves the ruins of a large Roman villa and its baths.

History: the Greeks related Niš to the town of Nysa of the young Dionisio. With the Romans (75 BC), and its strategic position on one of the most important roads to Constantinople, it became the main commercial and military center of Dardania. The first mention of the town was with the name of Naissus in 180 AD. Near the town there was the famous battle of Naissus where Claudius’ legions killed 50,000 Goths in 268 AD. A period of great architectural growth followed: the wonderful Mediana villa which hosted the Roman emperors who visited Dardania, dates from these years. In 443 Naissus was destroyed by the barbarians led by Attila. Rebuilt by the Emperor Justinian, it was conquered by the Slav tribes in the VII century and by the Bulgarians, Hungarians and Byzantines between the IX and XI centuries. In the XV century Turkish rule began. During WWII, the town was the seat of the nazi concentration camp known as the “Red Star”.

*Novi Sad
Sremski Karlovci*



Novi Sad

The main town in the autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Although in the postwar period many of its buildings were demolished to make way for new buildings, it preserves the fascination of the Hungarian towns. On the north bank of the Danube there is the Petrovaradin fortress (XVII century), one of the biggest military complex in Europe.

History: the first organized settlement was a Celtic fortress. Devastated by the Hun tribes in the V century, the fortress was rebuilt by the Byzantines. The present town was founded in the XVII century by the Serbian merchants who escaped from southern Serbia after the Turkish invasion. In the uprising of 1848 the town was almost destroyed by the Hungarian artillery holed up inside the Petrovaradin fortress. Under the Yugoslav Federation, Novi Sad became an important industrial center and seat of the main national oil refineries.

Ravanica Monastery

Built by Prince Lazar I Hebeljanovic (the hero of the famous Kosovo Polje battle) between 1370 and 1380. During the following years it became a famous cultural and religious center. Thanks to St. Lazar's tomb located inside the monastic church, it has been visited by thousands of faithful from the Balkans. During the Ottoman rule, the monastery was destroyed twice and the monks were killed. The present building dates from 1717 when the narthex was added. During WWI and WWII it was damaged again and a part of its treasure was stolen. Today, the complex includes a part of the walls, the monk's residences and the church of the Ascention of Christ, considered the oldest masterpiece of the Moravian art school. The church preserves frescoes depicting scenes from Christ's life and the portrait of Prince St. Lazar with his wife Milica and their children.

Manasija Monastery

Founded by Prince Lazar's son Stefan Lazarevis in 1407. The complex was surrounded by imposing walls and 11 towers to defend the monastic art school famous in Serbia for its precious manuscripts in Greek and Slav. During the Ottoman time, the monastery was abandoned by the monks; a large part of the building collapsed and many medieval frescoes were lost. Among those that remained the Death of the Virgin, the portrait of Lazarevis and the Passion of Christ are the most precious. The monastery includes the ancient walls, the square towers and the church of the Holy Trinity considered a perfect example of the Moravian style. During the Middle Ages Serbian architecture was mainly characterized by three art schools: Raška in southern Serbia, Morava in the central regions and Macedonia in the present Macedonia Republic and Kosovo.

Sopocani Monastery

The monastery was built by King Stefan Uroš I in 1260. Located near the spring of the River Raška, it preserves the medieval church of the Holy Trinity. The three-nave building follows the architectural rules of the Western Romanesque churches. In the first half of the XIV century King Dusan restored and enlarged the church adding two chapels, the narthex and the bell tower. In 1689 it was almost destroyed by the Turks and the monks escaped to Kosovo taking with them the relics of King Stefan. In the subsequent two centuries the monastery was uninhabited and the roof of the church collapsed. Fortunately almost all its frescoes from the XIII century were saved and now inside the church there are numerous frescoes considered among the most important paintings of the Serbian Middle Ages. The series of murals which cover the narthex and naos show a

painting technique which seems a century in advance of the Assisi cycle considered the beginning of the Italian Renaissance. The frescoes of the dome are lost, but probably their arrangement respected the Byzantine rules: the center of the dome is dominated by the image of Christ Pantocrator while the drum is depicted with images of saints and prophets. Of particular interest are the frescoes depicting Sava II (1263), the Sleep of the Virgin, Stefan Nemanjia's death and scenes from the life of Christ. Thanks to the extraordinary complexity of these paintings and their very high artistic level, Sopocani Monastery is included on the Unesco list. As well as the architecture, the monastery is an important historic place for the tombs of Stefan Prvoventani's wife (1255) and of King Stefan Uroš I (1277) preserved inside the monastic church.



*Manasija Monastery
Studenica Monastery*

Zica Monastery

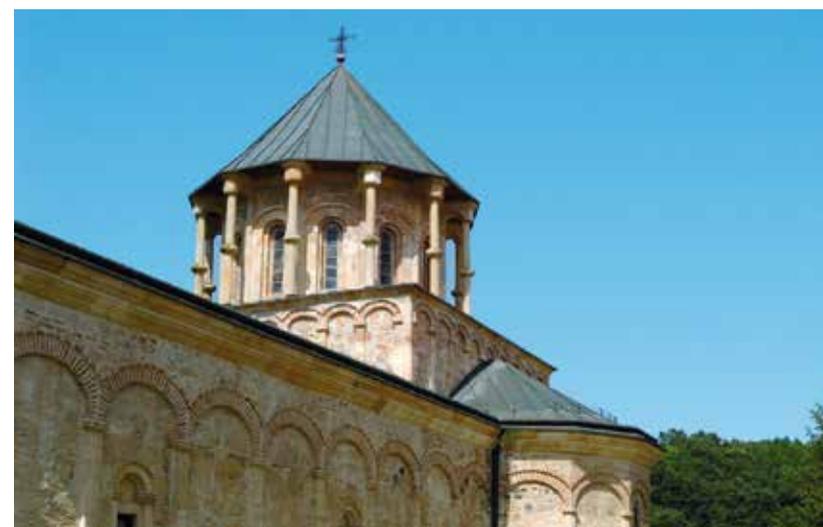
Founded by King Stefan Prvovenčani in the early XIII century, it was destroyed by fire and abandoned by the monks a few years later. It was rebuilt by King Milutin (1282-1321) at the end of the XIII century. During the St. Sava period the monastery became the seat of the first Serbian archbishopric and the cultural and legislative center of Serbia. The monastic church, dedicated to the Assention of Christ, respects the rules of the Raška art school: a single nave which holds up the central octagonal dome. Its red colour follows the tradition of the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos (Greece) which inspired Serbian medieval religious art. Externally the church has windows and the portal in Romanesque style, while the interior is totally covered with frescoes in Byzantine style by artists from Costantino-ple. According to tradition, these painters were chosen personally by St. Sava. Unfortunately from the XIII century only the image of the Crucifixion of Jesus and from the life of St. Stefan remain. The frescoes depicting the Apostles Peter and Paul and the Death of the Holy Virgin date back to the XIV century. The inscriptions in Serbian on some walls show the great influence of the Nemanjić dynasty on the Serbian Church during the Middle Ages. Since the end of WWII the complex has housed a community of nuns.

Studenica Monastery

Built by King Stefan Nemanja in the XII century, the monastery is included in the Unesco list from 1986. The complex, the largest in Serbia, consists of the walls and towers and three medieval churches which, from the architectural point of view, follow the rules of the Raška school, combining the Romanesque style in the monumental portals and the windows decorated with sculptures, with the Byzantine style in the frescoes. The church of the Holy Virgin, the largest and most important, was built in 1196 when the founder of the monastery abdicated in favour of his son Stefan Prvovenčani and joined the other son, Rasko, at the Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos. The church is in the form of a Greek cross with the facade which recalls the Romanesque style of the Dalmatian churches. Inside, the most important frescoes are the Crucifixion of Jesus, the Judgement and the portrait of Queen Anna, wife of King Stefan Nemanja, from the XIII and XIV centuries. The Royal church was built by King Milutin in the XIII century and enlarged adding the narthex by King Radoslav in 1235. The third church is dedicated to St. Nicholas. What makes the monastery one of the most important places in the country, are the tombs of the Nemanjić kings: Stefan Nemanja (1199) with his wife, Stefan Prvovenčani (1227) and Stefan Radoslav.



Studenica Monastery



Novo Hopovo Monastery



Zica Monastery

Novo Hopovo Monastery

The exact date of the construction of the monastery is not defined, but experts believe that it was founded in the XV century. The present monastic church, dedicated to St. Panteleimon, was built in the XVIII century on the ruins of the church of St. Nicholas destroyed by

an earthquake. The building is one of the best examples of the Moraca school in the region. Inside, there are numerous original frescoes among them the most important depicting images from Christ's life. The iconostasis, in Baroque style, was executed in 1776.

Felix Romuliana

In the early III century AD, it was a small village located on the edge of the Roman Empire. Between the III century and the beginning of the IV century, thanks to the numerous hot water springs in the region, the place was chosen by the Emperor Galerio as the seat of his retirement. In a few years the old village was enriched with public buildings becoming a town. New imposing walls with 20 octagonal towers surrounded the center which was divided into two parts: the northern part which included the royal palace and the private buildings and the southern area with the baths, the temple dedicated to Jupiter and Hercules and other sacred buildings. The royal palace was intended to recall Diocletian's palace in Split. Some bricks of the walls with the frieze of the V legion of Macedonia have been found, while the name "Felix Romuliana" is engraved on a transom discovered in 1984. The epithet "Felix" means glory and eternity, hence the name Felix Romuliana proves its status as a sacred town. After Galerio's death the town gradually lost its importance: the noble families moved out and the legion was replaced by a garrison. Felix Romuliana was destroyed by the barbarians in the V century. On a hill, near the old town, there are two large tombs with their mausoleums which probably contained the remains of Galerio and his mother. The town is included on the Unesco list.

Viminacium

The first organized settlement was a Roman fortress "castro" which housed the VII legion Claudia in the I century AD. During the invasion of Dacia (101-106), the Emperor Trajan established its headquarters here. With Adriano (117-138) the town was elected as a "municipium" and with Gordiano III (239) it became the Colony Viminacum and the main town of northern Mesia: it had a few hundred thousand citizens and coined bronze money. Viminacim was famous around the Empire for its craftsmen who produced jewelry using several materials, such as gold, silver, bronze and iron, enriched with colored stones. The town was destroyed by the Huns in 440. The archaeological site includes the ruins of some public buildings. The "Roman baths", built in the I century AD and used until the IV century, preserve some tanks for hot and cool water and some traces of frescoes and mosaics. The "Pretoria gate": the northern gate of the fortress was able to accommodate two legions. The most interesting place in the site is the "mausoleum" from the III century. This stone building includes the crypt with three christian frescoed tombs (IV century) and the temple. For some researchers, the temple was used to cremate the body of the Emperor Ostiliano (251 AD) who spent his last years here. A few meters from the temple there are the remains of men and women who died of the plague.

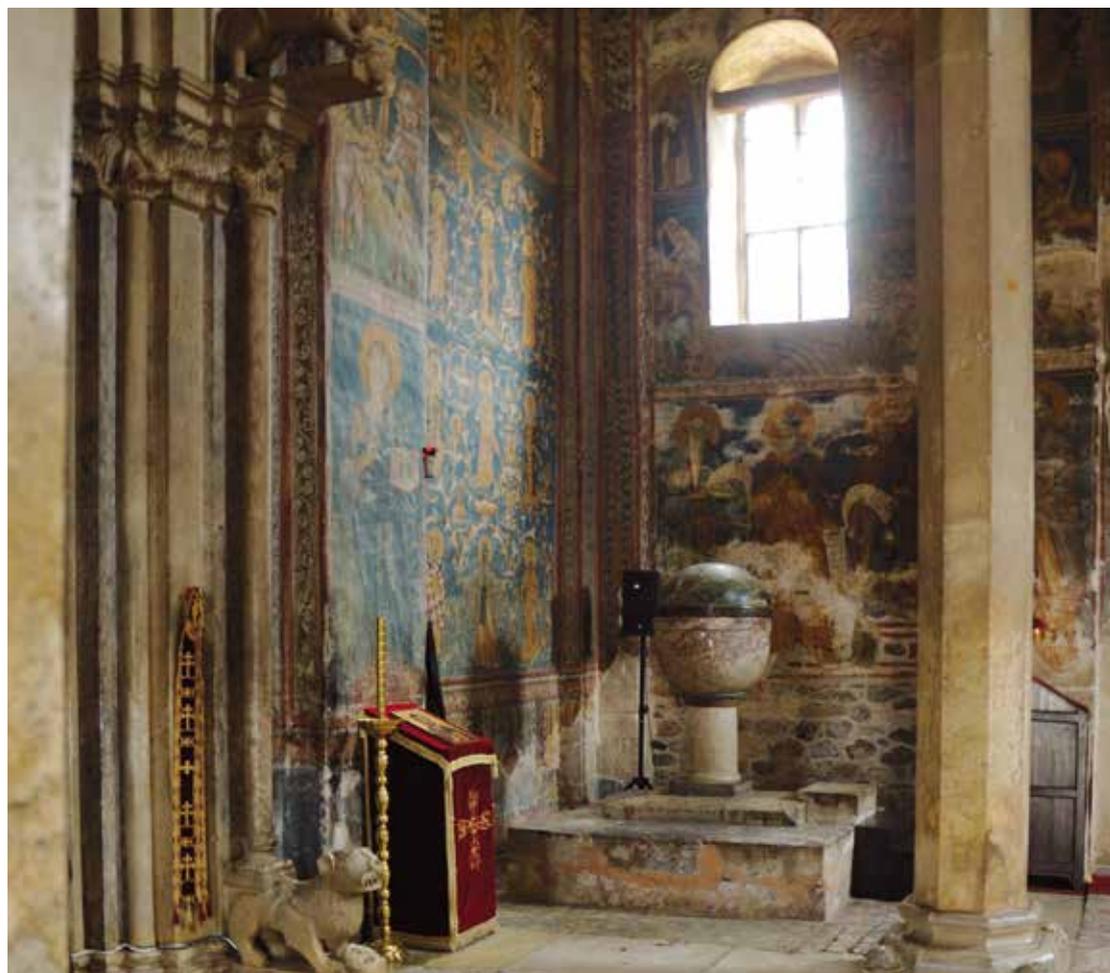
*Belgrade: Kalamegdan
Viminacium archaeological site*



Sirminium

During the Roman Times it was a bishopric and one of the most important towns in the Empire. It was the hometown of six Roman Emperors such as Claudius Gothicus who spent his life here (213-270 AD). Thanks to its strategic position on the so called "Militaris road" which connected Italy to the Balkans, it became the richest and the most beautiful city in Illyria and the main military center of Pannonia. Its two bridges on the River Sava were famous throughout the Empire. The city included the royal palace, the baths, the temples, the necropolis, public and private buildings and the hippodrome. Notwithstanding its imposing walls, it was sacked by the Huns, Goths and Gepids in the IV and V centuries and destroyed in 582 AD. Unfortunately the old ruins are a few meters under the present Sremska Mitrovica and only a part of the hippodrome and the royal palace have been discovered.

Kosovo



Kosovo

Kosovo is mostly mountainous. The Metohija and Kosovo Polije plains, cover the central part of the country, while the northern and the southern areas are characterized by the Kapaonik chain near the border with Serbia and the mountains of Shar Planina and Gjeravica.

History: in the Middle Ages, the Nemanjić dynasty elected Pristina and Prizren as the capitals of the Serbian Empire. It was a period of economic and political growth for Kosovo favored by its position on the main commercial road between the Adriatic Sea and the Balkans and the gold and silver mines of the village of Novo Brdo famous throughout the Empire. In the months following the battle of Kosovo Polije, the Turks invaded Serbia and a few years later all the Balkans. The people of Kosovo freely converted to Islam (often due to the lower taxes paid by Muslims) and at the end of the XVI century 60% of the citizens of Pristina and Prizren were Muslims. During the military campaign of Gen. Piccolomini (1689), the Christian population rose up against the Turks. In a few months the Austrian troops helped by the local population conquered the area from Belgrade to Skopje. The following spring the Ottoman counter-offensive and the death of Piccolomini forced the Austrian troops to retreat and thousands of citizens had to move to Vojvodina and Hungary. They were replaced by people from Albania.

In the XIX century the League of Prizren was founded. At the beginning, thanks to its orientation in favor of Islam, the league had the support of the Sultan, but when it was clear that its purpose was the uniting of the Albanians into a single state, the league's leader was killed and more than 4,000 members were jailed. With the Treaty of Berlin the period of "ethnic cleansing" began. The first was carried out by the Turks who forced 400,000 Serbians to leave the country between 1876 and 1912. The second was when Kosovo returned to Serbian control at the end of the Balkan wars (1913). The Serbian troops burnt the Albanians villages and more than 20,000 Albanians were killed. The third was in 1918 as revenge against the Albanians allied with the Bulgarians during WWI. In a few years more than 700,000 Serbians moved to the country and 300 new villages were built. The years following the fall of Communism were characterized by the continuing discrimination against the Albanian population which led to the conflict between UGK guerrillas and the troops of Milosevic in 1999. The balance of the clashes was terrible: 12,000 dead, 120,000 houses and hundreds of churches and mosques were destroyed. The same year UN resolution n. 1244 put Kosovo under an international protectorate. In February 2008, Kosovo declared independence, recognized by 65 countries.



Pristina

The capital is spread over a large highland in the central part of the country. Pristina offers a picture of a dynamic place characterized by modern buildings. The city center covers several square kilometers, but all the interesting places are found near the Parliament.

History: in the II century AD, Trajan built the city of Ulpiana near where the Serbian Kings founded the present Pristina in the Middle Ages. With the Turks, the town maintained its strategic role and became the economic center of the region: its bazaar hosted more than 300 shops and the textiles and ceramics produced by local artisans were famous all over the Empire. In 1912, Pristina was populated by the Serbians who decimated the Albanians. In the postwar period, much of old city was demolished to make way for the impressive Socialist-style palaces. In the Yugoslav Wars it was attacked by Nato air forces.

Prizren

Prizren is certainly the most interesting city in Kosovo. The old town, developed on the River Bistrica, preserves many Ottoman mosques and buildings and the church of Our Lady Ljeviska, a masterpiece of Serbian medieval art.

History: in historical times the first settlement was the Roman town of Theranda. Conquered by King Stefan Prvovenčani in the XII century, it was the capital of the Serbian Empire. From the architectural standpoint, the XIII and XIV centuries were the city's golden period, whose best expression is the Church of Our Lady Ljeviska built by King Milutin. With the Turks Prizren became an administrative center and controlled the territory from Niš to Elbasan. In the XIX century it was the seat of the League of Prizren. Fortunately it was spared the architectural destruction that occurred in other cities in the Balkans in the postwar period.

Kosovo Polije

Gezimestan is the place where the battle of Kosovo Polije took place in June 1389. It's a sacred place for the Serbians, and for this reason the Communist authorities built a tower in honor of the Christian soldiers killed in the battle. The Christian army included 25,000 Serbians, Bosnians and Bulgarians divided into three regiments led by Prince Lazar, his son-in-law Vuk Branković and the Bosnian duke Vlatko Vuković. The Turk army led by Sultan Murat I had more than 50,000 soldiers. At the beginning the battle seemed to be in favor of the Christians; the Lazar cavalry annihilated the wings of the Turk infantry and was almost able to surround the enemy. Only the new troops from Pristina and the tiredness of the Christian soldiers allowed the Sultan to win the battle. All the 150 noble horsemen and Prince Lazar died. During the battle the Serbian Milos Obilić killed the Sultan with a trick.

Prizren: Mosque



Decani Monastery

It was founded by Stefan Uros III, son of King Milutin, in 1327. According to tradition it was built in the place indicated by St. Sava, between the towns of Pec and Prizren. Its construction involved the most famous artists and artisans of Serbian Empire. With the Turks a period of great decline for the monastery began. In the following centuries it was sacked and destroyed several times. In 1389 it was sacked by the Turks, during the Russo-Turkish War it was burnt and its monks were killed and in WWII its treasure was stolen by the Bulgarian troops. Fortunately the relics of St. Stefan Decani never left the monastery. The complex includes the bell tower, the refectory, the abbot's house, the residences of the monks and the Church of the Ascension of Christ, whose internal walls are covered with frescoes considered a masterpiece of medieval religious art.

Pec Monastery

The monastery, near the town of Pec, is famous for its 4 churches, which form a single construction built by the most important Serbian Patriarchs and Archbishops of the XIII and XIV centuries. The oldest is the Church of the Holy Apostles built by Arsenie I. Linked to its north wall, is the Church of St. Demetrius from 1324, while the most recent are those dedicated to the Holy Virgin and St. Nicholas on the south side. These were built by the Archbishop Danilo II (1345). In WWII the churches were spared from the fire which destroyed the other parts of the monastery. Among the many medieval frescoes, some from the XVII century, the most interesting are those in the central dome and the monumental Deesis in the church of the Holy Apostles. Painted by unknown painters, they are considered among the most valuable frescoes of the Serbian Middle Ages.

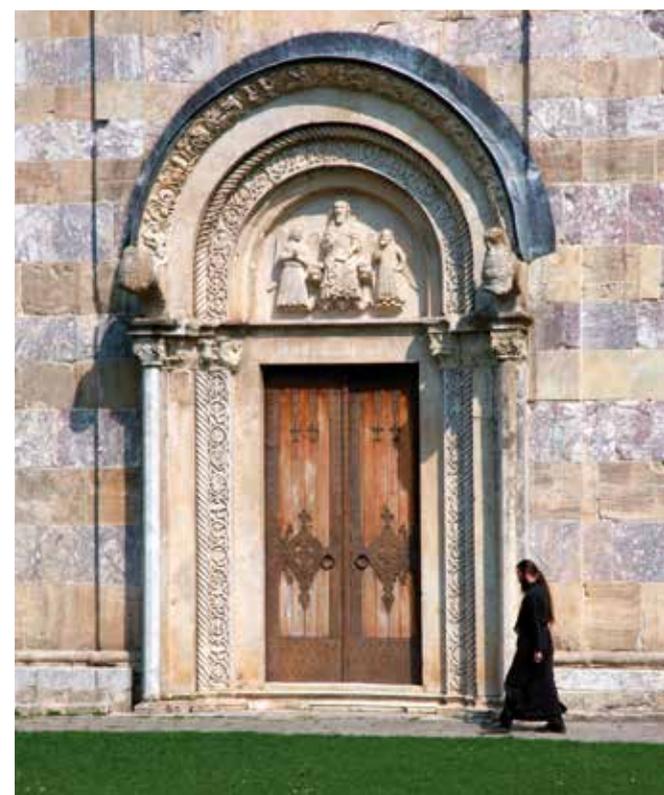
Gracanica Monastery

The construction of the monastery started with King Uros II (Milutin) in 1318 and ended with the Archbishop Danilo in 1322. The complex was built on the ruins of the archbishopric of Bishop Lipljan elected by St. Sava. In 1379, its bell tower and the library were destroyed by fire and the narthex was damaged. In the mid XVI century the monastery was renovated: the narthex was reinforced, the large porch was closed and important new frescoes were painted. In the following years the roof was covered with lead plate. From the architectural point of view the church, dedicated to the Holy Virgin, is a wonderful example of Byzantine art and a perfect mix of arches, domes and windows. Its frescoes were executed by different groups of painters through the years, such as the famous Michael and Eutihije who painted the church of St. George in Macedonia.

*Gracanica Monastery
Decani Monastery*



Pec Monastery



Montenegro



Montenegro

Montenegro is mainly mountainous. Its complex mountain system includes the Dinaric Alps close to the border with Serbia and Albania and the last ramifications of the Karst which form the mountains of Garač and Njegoš towards the Adriatic coast. Near the Bay of Kotor there is Mount Lovćen, considered a sacred place by the Montenegrins. The main plateau extends near the capital and the confluence of the Lovćen and Orjen rivers in the Bay of Kotor. Considered as the only fjord in Southern Europe, the Bay of Kotor, thanks to its morphology, is a perfect and impregnable port disputed by all the populations who have lived in the Balkans over the course of the centuries. Since 1979 the Bay of Kotor is a Unesco's heritage site.

History: until the early Middle Ages, Montenegrin history coincides with that of Serbia. In medieval times this region was called Doclea and evangelized by Benedictine monks and although it was under the administration of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Catholicism was the main religion in the coastal cities. In 1166, Doclea was annexed to the Serbian kingdom (Raška) led by Stefan Nemanja. The Nemanjić dynasty always tried to convert the population to the Serbian Orthodox Church, but was never successful. With the end of the Serbian Empire, the region (known as the Principality of Zeta) fell under the control of the Albanian Balsic

family until the death of Balsa III in 1421. The following years saw the rise to power of the Crnojevic family. In 1482, Ivan Crnojevic moved his court from Zabliak on Lake Scutari due to the Turkish invasion, to the slopes of Mount Lovcen where he founded the town of Cetinje. Historians consider this event as the end of the Principality of Zeta and the beginning of the history of Montenegro. During the Ottoman times, the Republic of Venice ruled the coastal region and the area between the Bay of Kotor and Budva, while the Turks controlled the hinterland. Relationships between the Turks and Montenegrins were good until the XVII century, when new taxes and limits on Christianity imposed by Constantinople aroused the reaction of the population. Cetinje was the center of the revolutionaries led by the Vladikas, also called the princes-bishops for their religious and political functions. Thanks to the numerous victories over the Turks, the Vladikas increased their political and spritual power quickly becoming the kings of the highlands near Cetinje. In 1697 Vladika Danilo I Petrovic established the hereditary theocracy during his dynasty; the title was transmitted from uncle to nephew due to the celibacy of the Vladikas. It was the birth of the first Montenegrin state. Among the Valdikas the most famous was Peter II Petrovic Njegos who reorganized the state administration and



Bay of Kotor

established the Senate. Composed of 16 members led by the Vladika, the Senate exercised power and judicial functions. After his death, the title passed to his nephew Danilo who became the first Prince of Montenegro. In 1858, Danilo obtained independence from the Turks and gained international recognition for the new state. In 1918, Montenegro was annexed to Serbia,

which formed the kingdom of the Serbians, Croats and Slovenes. Thanks to the support of the Yugoslav Federation, the postwar period was characterized by a great economic and social growth for the Socialist Republic of Montenegro. After the end of Tito's rule and the short-lived Federation with Serbia (1992-2006), a referendum established independence of the country.

Podgorica

The capital is on a plateau crossed by 6 rivers: the Morača, the Ribnica, the Zeta, the Sitnica, the Mareza and the Cijevna. The modern town is characterized by imposing socialist-style buildings. Podgorica was almost totally destroyed in WWII, hence only a few ruins of the Nemanja's fortress remain.

History: the Greeks mentioned a poor village located at the mouth of the Morača e Ribnica rivers. The Slavs renamed the village Ribnica. The hometown of King Stefan Nemanja, it quickly became one of the most important political centers of the Zeta kingdom. The Nemanjić built a fortress to defend the city, which was enlarged and reinforced by the Ottomans a few centuries later. During WWI, the town was invaded by the Austrian troops. In the postwar period, Podgorica was the capital of the Socialist Republic of Montenegro and became the center of the country's heavy industry.

Cetinje

Located on the slopes of Mont Lovćen, Cetinje has the main historical and architectural heritage of the XIX century. The old center offers palaces belonging to the Njegoš dynasty, the monastery built by the Vladika Danilo in 1701 and buildings in neoclassical style which hosted the foreign embassies in the last century.

History: the city was founded by Ivan Crnojević who built his palace and a monastery in 1482. In 1838, Petar II Petrović Njegoš built the so called "Biljarda", as the new residence for his dynasty. Cetinje never had defensive walls and maintained the size of a rural village until the end of the XIX century, when it became capital of the state. In 1912, there were 12 foreign embassies in the city and a theater, hospital and the first hotel. The annexation of Montenegro by the Yugoslav Federation was the beginning a period of deep decline for Cetinje.

Kotor

Kotor, the town that gives its name to the famous bay, is the most visited place in Montenegro. Within the Venetian walls, the city, rich in public buildings from the XVIII century, is a wonderful example of mediterranean style. The Ducal Palace, Napoleon's Theater, the "Arsenal", the Venetian palaces and numerous churches (among which the famous Cathedral of Tryphon) overlook the narrow streets and small squares of the center. Thanks to its architectural heritage, Kotor is included on the list of Unesco heritage sites.

History: the town was mentioned by the Romans in 168 AD with the name of Ascrivium. In the VI century it was populated by Slav tribes. In the XI century, after the sack by the Saracens Kotor was annexed to the Nemanja Kingdom. In the XIII century it became an important bishopric of Dominican and Franciscan monks. In the following century under the administration of Venice, a



St. Stefan

period of great cultural and architectural development began. Kotor had a high degree of autonomy from Venice which allowed the citizens to elect the town's Senate, the Rector as chief of local administration and justice, and the Captain as tax

and public finance manager. Between 1572 and 1667, the town was afflicted by the plague and almost destroyed by two earthquakes. With the end of Venetian rule (1797) Kotor was administered by the French and then by the Russians until the

Congress of Vienna, when the region was annexed to Austria. After WWI, the town and much of present-day Montenegro became a part of the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In WWII Kotor was controlled by the Italian Governorship in Zara.

Moraca Monastery

The monastery was founded by Stefan, son of King Vukan Nemanjić and grandson of Stefan Nemanja in 1252. The complex, located on the right bank of the River Moraca, includes the churches of the Assumption of St. Mary and of St. Nicholas. The church of the Assumption, rich in frescoes dating back to the XIII and XVIII centuries is certainly the most interesting. The frescoes depicting the prophet Elia's life and the birth of St. John the Baptist are the oldest, while the Genealogy of Christ in the narthex and the Final Judgement in the naos are from XVIII century. In 1616 the master Djurdje Mitrofanic from the Hilandar Monastery (Mount Athos) frescoed the facade of the church and founded an art school in the monastery which quickly became famous throughout the Balkans. Today, the monastery preserves some valuable icons from that period.

Ostrog Monastery

Founded by Bishop Basil in the XVII century on a rock wall a few tens of meters above the ground, it was rebuilt in the XX century after that the original complex was almost destroyed by fire. Only two chapels were spared. The most famous one is the chapel of the Presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God which preserves the relics of St. Basil. The other chapel is dedicated to the Holy Cross. To note is the ability of master Radul to depict the subjects following the irregularities of the rock walls. Near the chapels there are the old monk's cells used until the last century. The Turks tried to conquer the monastery to destroy the relics of St. Basil, but were always repelled by the Montenegrins. Only for a short period in 1853, due to the continued attacks, the relics were transferred to Cetinje. In 1941 it held the gold reserves of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Durmitur Park

The park includes the areas of the massive of Durmitur and the River Tara. It's famous all over the Balkans for its canyon considered the second deepest in the world after that of Colorado (USA), and the Lake Biogradsko Jezero. It preserves one of the most important European natural heritage sites. It has been on the Unesco list since 1980.

Lake Scutari

The lake is in a large valley a few kilometers south of Podgorica. Its water comes from 4 tributaries and more than 50 springs. Thanks to its dense swamps which form the perfect habitat for 40 types of fish and 270 species of birds, the Montenegrin area (34 km²) was declared a National Park in 1983. 500 Montenegrin and Albanian fishermen produce annually 1 milion tons of carp and eels from the lake.

Ostrog Monastery

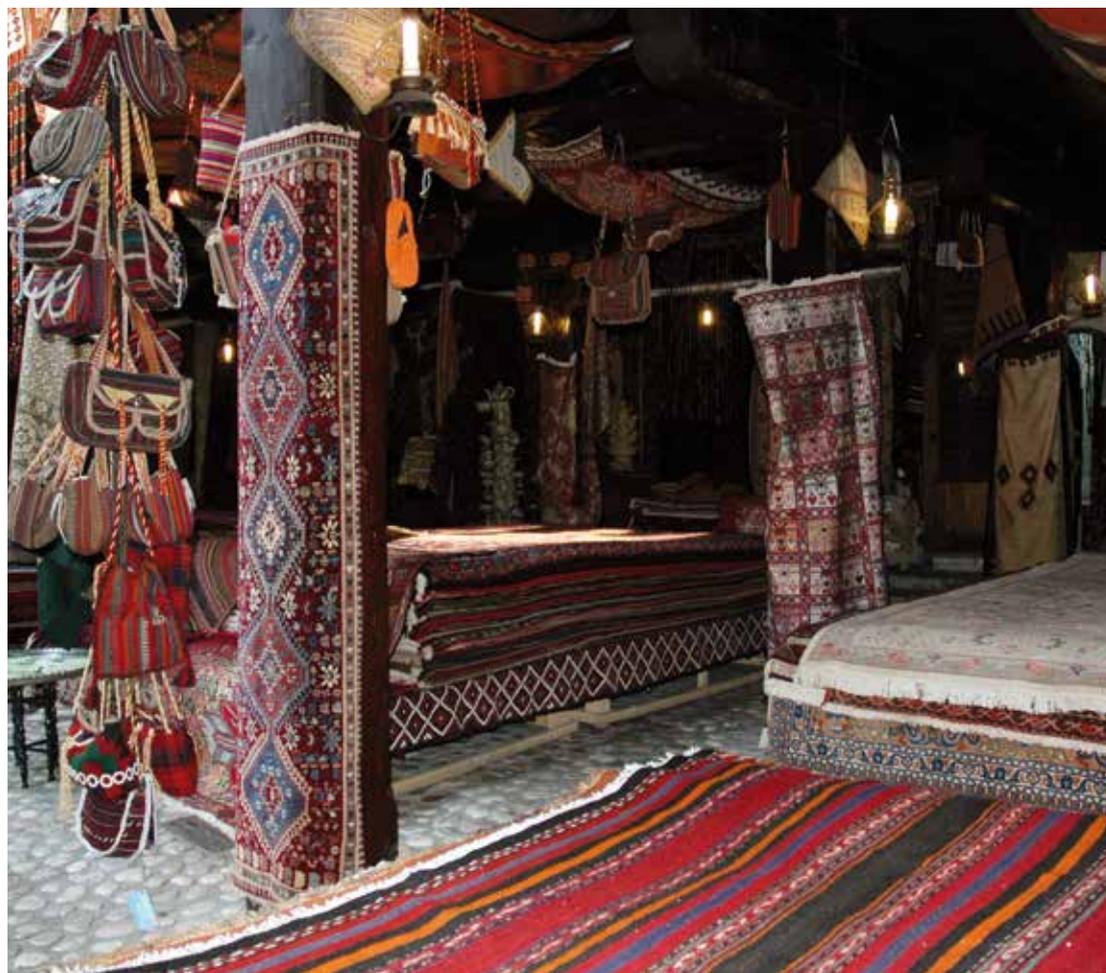


Budva

Budva is on a small peninsula surrounded by old Venetian walls. The city center is rich in beautiful churches and ancient buildings in mediterranean style from the XVIII century. For lovers of shopping Budva offers numerous shops whose range covers the most famous brands and traditional Montenegrin articles and objects.

History: the Greeks founded a colony called Butua in the IV century BC. Despite its massive Roman walls during the Diocletian reign the town was sacked by the Saracens twice. From the IX century to the end of the XI, it was the the Bishopric of Doclea. With the Nemanjić dynasty it became the most important military port in Dalmatia. From 1442 to 1797 it was under Venetian administration. The town was destroyed by pirates in 1571 and damaged by two earthquakes in 1667 and in April 1979, when a large part of the venetian fortress collapsed.

Bosnia and Herzegovina



Bosnia and Herzegovina

The country has two mostly mountainous regions: Bosnia which occupies the central-northern areas (about four fifths of the whole territory) and Herzegovina which occupies the rest of the country. Bosnia's mountains are covered with thick forests and the rivers flow toward Serbia. Among them are the Drina and Bosna which flow into the Sava. Herzegovina's mountains are instead of karstic nature and recall those of Montenegro. The most important River is the Nerevda which flows into the Adriatic Sea. The country has a coastline of 20 kilometers.

History: after the fall of the Roman Empire the regions of the Dinaric Alps were populated by Slav tribes called the Zepe (VII century). During the X century, these tribes accepted Christianity, but with King Kulin (1180-1204) became Bogomils. In the following years, the strong tensions caused by the Bogomils led to the disintegration of the kingdom allowing the conquest by Hungary in 1254. The Hungarians divided the territory into Upper Bosnia and Lower Bosnia. In 1377 Stevan Tvrtko took control of the region as far the Adriatic coast becoming King of Bosnia, Dalmatia and Croatia. With Tvrtko's death the kingdom ended rapidly: Dalmatia fell under the control of Venice, while Bosnia was invaded by the Turks who killed the last Bosnian King Stefan Tomašević in 1463. Ottoman rule was a

period characterized by a violent persecution of Christians both by the Turks and Bogomils. The territory was divided into sanjak (districts) each one administered by the Turkish authorities (Vali) and by the noble Bogomils (Bey) who had absolute power over the population. The Treaty of St. Stefan annexed the whole region to the Austrian Empire until WWI. Thanks to the Yugoslav Federation the postwar era was characterized by great economic and cultural growth which reached its zenith with the Sarajevo's Winter Olympic Games in 1984. Although there was stiff opposition from the Serbian-Bosnian people, a referendum voted for independence from Serbia in January 1992. Two months later the Serbian community of Bosnia founded the Serbian Republic of Bosnia. After a few days the Serbian troops began to take control of the strategic points of the country. Only Sarajevo and Mostar remained under the control of the Bosnian troops. Both these cities were under siege during the following years. The numerous atrocities, such as those carried out in the village of Kravica (1992) and in the village of Srebrenica (1995), led the USA to force the belligerents to end the war. In November 1995, the situation was normalized by the Treaty of Dayton (Ohio). In 1996, the Muslim Izetbegović was elected as president of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Mostar

Sarajevo

The capital lies in the broad valley of the River Miljacka surrounded by mounts Ozren, Bjelasnica, Igman and Trebenic. A modern and dynamic city, Sarajevo has reached the standard of living of the largest European cities. From the architectural standpoint, the town is divided into the Christian area characterized by the presence of buildings dating from Austrian times to the postwar period and the Muslim district which preserves the Baščaršija (the Turkish market), the famous library and numerous old mosques and Ottoman buildings. For lovers of shopping the center offers antique and oriental goods shops etc.

History: Sarajevo was founded by the Ottoman governor Isa-beg Ishakovic in 1461. In 1699 the town was conquered by Eugene of Savoy during the Austrian-Turkish War and many of the Ottoman buildings from the XVI century were destroyed. The Treaty of Berlin assigned Sarajevo to the Austrians who quickly changed the city's appearance. In June 1914 the town was the scene of the killing of Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife. During the Yugoslav Wars (1992-1996), the town was besieged by the Yugoslav Army and the Bosnian-Serb forces. The balance of the siege was terrible: over 12,000 deaths, the Library was burned and more than 35,000 buildings were destroyed, among which the Gazi Husrev Beg Mosque from the XVI century.

Mostar

Located on the banks of the River Neretva, Mostar is the fourth city by population of Bosnia and Herzegovina and one of the most famous places in the Balkans. Despite the heavy bombing by the Croatian troops during the Yugoslav wars, the city preserves a large historical heritage dating back to the Ottoman period.

History: the town, founded in the XV century, became the capital of the sanjak of Herzegovina. The name "Mostar" comes from the old stone bridge "Stari Most" built between 1557 and 1566 by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. The bridge and its towers Tara and Halebija were designed by the architect Mimar Hayruddin, who was a student of the most famous Turkish architect Mimar Sinan. In 1992 during the invasion by the Yugoslav army, the old cathedral, the bishop's palace and all the mosques were damaged. A few months later the town returned under the control of Croat-Bosnian troops. In May 1993, after the war had extended to involve the Croatian and Muslim Bosnians, the Croatian troops almost destroyed the old Turkish district, and bombed the famous bridge on the River Neretva in the following November. The war ended in 1994. In the subsequent two years the town was divided by a military border into Croatian and Muslim areas. In 2004 the reconstruction of the bridge was completed. Today, it's included on the Unesco list.



*Višegrad Bridge
Sarajevo*

Višegrad Bridge

The bridge was built by the visir Mehmed Paşa Sokolović (1505-1579). When he was ten Mehmed had to leave his village, near Višegrad, due to the so called "blood tax" which imposed Christian families to give their best children to the Ottoman Empire. Thanks to his military abilities, he reached the rank of Colonel in the regiment of the Janissaries and entered the royal court. After marriage to the Sultan's niece, he came back to Bosnia with the title of Paşa. The bridge was designed by the Turkish architect Sinan. According to Ottoman tradition, it was used (like the Kamen bridge in Skopje), until the XIX century by the Turkish authorities to display the severed heads and to impale those sentenced to death. The Višegrad Bridge inspired Ivo Andrić to write the book *Na Drini Cuprija*, for which he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1961.

Romania



Romania

The territory is almost equally divided between mountains, hills and plains. The center of the country is characterized by the presence of the Transylvanian Plateau (the largest tableland in Romania) surrounded by the great arc of the Carpathians which extend over 1,000 kilometers from west to north and reach heights of more than 2,500 meters. Beyond the Carpathian foothills and tablelands, the plains spread south and west. Romania's lowest land is the Danube Delta considered the perfect habitat for numerous species of plant and migratory birds.

History: in 440 BC, Herodotus called the tribe of Getae the branch of the Thracians who inhabited Dacia. The Dacian Kingdom, corresponding to a large part of present-day Rumania, reached its zenith with King Burebista (82-44 BC). Dacia was conquered by the Roman Emperor Trajan in two campaigns from 101 to 106 AD and turned into a Roman province. Dacia was abandoned by the Romans around the end of the III century. In the subsequent five centuries the region was ruled by the Huns, the Gepids and the Avars. In the Middle Ages, Dacia was divided into three distinct principalities: Wallachia, which was the birthplace of Prince Vlad III the Impaler, also known as Vlad Dracula (1448), Moldavia (famous for its monasteries) and Transylvania which became a part of the Hungarian

Kingdom. From the XVI century the Romanian lands fell under the control of the Turks. In the XVII and XVIII centuries, Transylvania, a large area of Wallachia and the north-western part of Moldavia were annexed into the Austrian Empire. In 1878 the Treaty of Berlin recognized Romania as an independent state, but its present-day borders were established only at the end of WWI. Romania entered WWII in June 1941, declaring war on the Soviet Union in order to recover the regions of Bessarabia, and the northern Bukovina area invaded by the Red Army the year before. At the end of WWII, thanks to the Russians troops still stationed in the country, the Communists took control of the country and forced King Michael I into exile (1947). In the postwar era, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was the first national leader followed by the infamous dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu from 1967. It is estimated that more than 2 millions people were direct victims of the Communist repression in Romania. The Romanian Revolution of 1989 brought the Communist regime to an end. Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena were accused of genocide and executed in December, 1989. Free elections were held in May, 1990. The following ten years were a period of political instability. In many cities public demonstrations degenerated into violence. Romania joined the European Union in January 2007.

Peles Castle



Bucharest

The capital lies on the banks of the River Dâmbovia in the southeast of the country. From the architectural standpoint, the city center is a mix of socialist and neo-classical style buildings thanks to which Bucharest was called the “Little Paris” in the period between the two World Wars.

History: in historical times, the first settlement was established by the Geto-Dacian tribes in early 70 BC. The village became a military citadel during the rule of the famous Wallachian prince Vlad III the Impaler (XV century). In the following two centuries it was administered by the Turks, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russians. Thanks to its strategic position on the main trade route between Eastern and Western Europe, it was elected capital in 1862. A period of great urban growth characterized the first part of the XX century. Unfortunately many of these buildings were lost during WWII, when the Allied bombing and the earthquake of 1940 destroyed almost all of the city center. The destruction of the historic heritage continued in the Communist period when the old part of the city was demolished and replaced with massive Socialist-style buildings. In these years, whole quarters were razed to the ground by Ceaușescu to make way for the new Parliament building. This complex is considered the largest building in the world after the Pentagon in the USA.

Sibiu

Sibiu is certainly one of the most interesting Romanian towns. The city center, covering a low hill, offers the visitor a picture of a historical place rich in medieval buildings and ancient churches. In the lower part of the city there is the oldest church dating back to 1386.

History: the Saxons (settlers of German origin) founded a fortified village in the XII century. During the following centuries Hungarian kings granted the Saxons numerous rights and benefits in exchange for their help in defending the lands against the attacks of the Tartars and Turks. In the XIV century, it became an important commercial center and the most important ethnic German city in Transylvania. Despite the fact that in the postwar period most of the city’s ethnic Germans emigrated to Germany, Sibiu still has the most numerous German community in Rumania. In 1860 the city became a bishopric. It’s still regarded as the third most important center of the Rumanian Orthodox Church. The first part of the XX century was characterized by a great growth in the city’s facilities such as the electric lighting system, the electric tram and the cinema house. After the fall of Communism, Sibiu was the second city of the country after Timisoara to rise against the Ceaușescu dictatorship. The town, also had the nickname of “Little Vienna” and was elected as European Cultural Capital in 2007.



*Biertan
Brasov*

Brasov

Brasov, the second most important town in Romania, is situated in a large tableland surrounded by the Carpathian mountains. The city center is characterized by some streets and squares overlooked by old buildings which recall the Hungarian style. From the architectural point of view it’s one of the finest in Romania.

History: the first documentary evidence of the town under the name of Corona (crown) dates back to 1235. At that time the town was inhabited by the Saxons. In the subsequent years the town became one of the most important markets in Transylvania, located on the strategic crossroads of Moldavia and Wallachia. In 1689 it was almost destroyed by fire and the Holy Mary Church, blackened by the fire, became the famous “Black Church”. In the postwar period local economic activities have attracted thousand of workers from the rest of the country.

Bran Castle

Perched atop a rocky peak a few kilometers from Brasov. Commonly known as “Dracula’s Castle”, it was built in the XIII century on the ruins of a wooden castle destroyed by the Mongols in the previous century. During the XV century, it was used against invading Turks and later became a customs post on the mountain pass between the Transylvanian and Wallachian regions. From 1920 to 1948, it became the Royal Residence. Inside it’s rich in art and furniture collected by Queen Marie. During this period the old structure was renovated and transformed into a summer residence with the addition of the park, the fountains and the terraces. It has 4 towers: the Powder Tower is the oldest, the Observation Tower and the Eastern Tower from the XV century and the Gate Tower from the XVII century. The architecture is a mix of Gothic and Renaissance styles.

Peles Castle

The castle is in the Sinaia region, not far from the town of Brasov. Considered one of the most beautiful castles in Europe, it was built as a Royal Summer Residence by King Carol I of Romania, who died here in 1914. The construction of the building involved artists and craftsmen from all over Europe, between 1873 and 1883. The castle comprises more than 160 rooms decorated with chandeliers in Murano glass, fine wood and gold carvings and walls covered with leather. The architects used the German Renaissance style, but there are numerous elements which recall the Italian Renaissance, Gothic and Rococo styles. The castle was the first building to have central heating and a lift. The complex includes other buildings such as the Guard’s Chambers, the Economat, the Hunting House, the Electrical Power Plant and the Pelesor or “Little Peles”.

Bucovina Monasteries

Located in the northern part of the country, the Bucovina region is famous around the world for its Painted Monasteries. Built in the XIV and XV centuries, in most cases as family burial places of princes and high nobles, they are characterized by the exterior walls fully decorated with frescoes depicting portraits of saints and prophets and scenes from the life of the Holy Virgin and Jesus Christ. The purpose of the painters (most of whom still unknown) was to tell the story of the Holy Bible and the lives of the most important Orthodox saints known to the villagers by the use of images. Some of these monasteries have been included on Unesco’s list since 1993. Even now in some monasteries the monks beat a long beam with a mallet instead of using bells to call people to prayer. It’s a tradition dating back to the Turkish period, when the ringing of bells was forbidden.



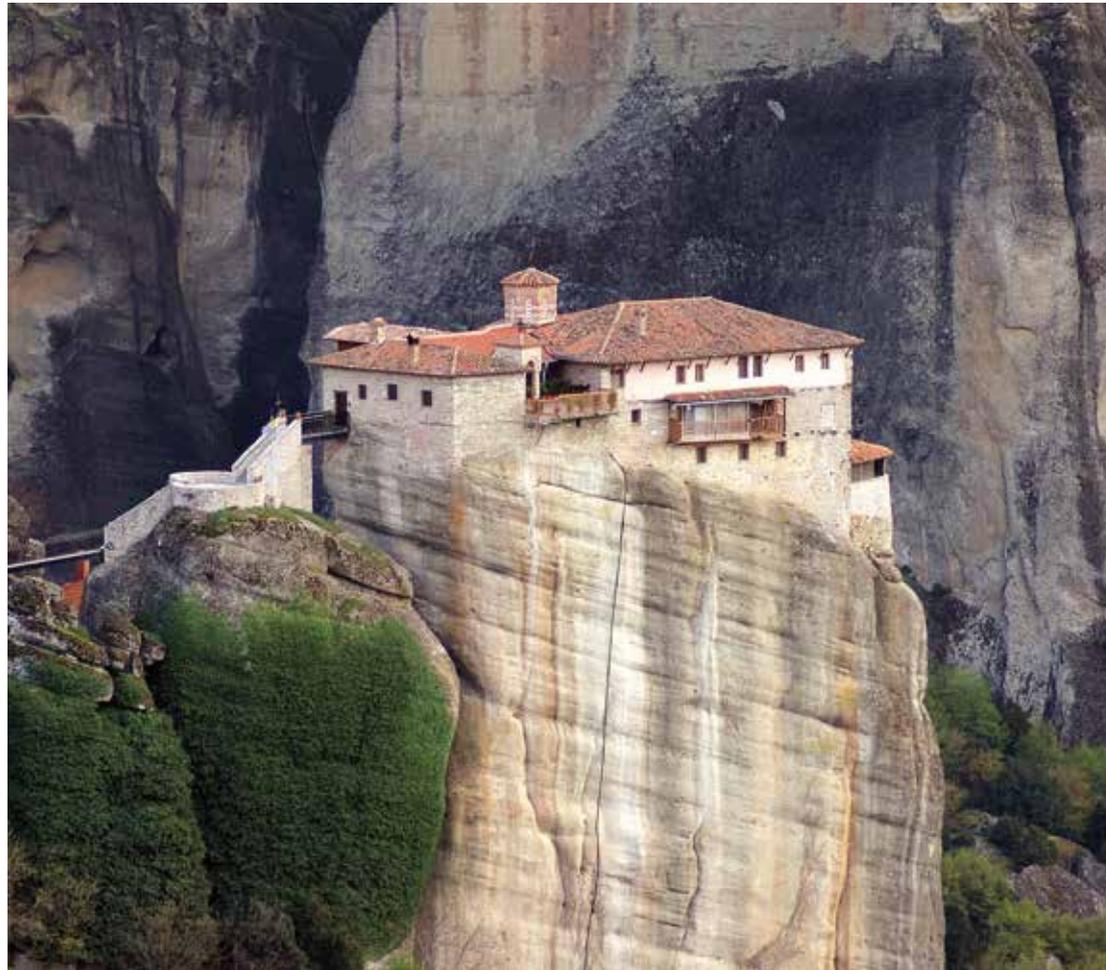
Sighisoara

Sighisoara

Sighisoara is one of the most important architectural heritage areas in Romania. Walking along the town’s hilly streets the visitor can admire a city center rich in medieval buildings and churches and the famous city symbol, the Clock Tower. Today it hosts the History Museum. The old city center is considered as a “Heritage of Humanity” and is included on the Unesco list.

History: Sighisoara’s citadel was built by the Transylvanian Saxons on the ruins of a Roman castrum in the XII century. It was one of the seven walled towns populated by the Saxons in this region and the birthplace of Vlad Dracula, also known as Vlad Tepes. The city’s golden period were the XV and XVI centuries when its craftsmen and tradesmen financed the construction of the defensive walls, the public buildings and the famous Clock Tower (1556), also known as the Council tower, to defend the main city gate.

Northern Greece



Northern Greece

Northern Greece, about half of the whole territory, includes the regions of Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus and Thessaly. More than 80% of the territory is mountainous. Close to the border with Bulgaria there is the Rodopi chain, while in the central part of the region, not far from the fertile plain of Axios (Vardar), is Mount Olympus, the highest peak in the country. The most important river is the Aliacmone, which rises on Mount Pindo and flows into the Aegean Sea.

History: there are numerous traces of Paleolithic man throughout the region. The first organized settlements date back to the Bronze Age. In this period the Minoan civilization (2,800-1,500 BC) and the Mycenaean civilization (1,500-1,200 BC) appeared. After the birth of the city-state, there were the dictatorships of the VI and V centuries followed by a period of Athenian supremacy over Greece. In 404 BC, with its defeat in the Peloponnesian War, Athens lost the control of the country to the Macedonian Kingdom, which reached its zenith with Filippo II and his son Alexander the Great. In 146 BC, Greece became a Roman protectorate. The Roman rule was a period of great cultural, economic and demographic growth. In the V century AD, the whole region was sacked by the barbarians. In 1453, the fall of Constantinople was the beginning of the Ottoman period. The independence of Greece from the Ottoman

Empire was declared in 1821, but the Turks left the country only after defeat in the Navarino battle by the Western Powers. In 1832, with the support of France, England and Russia, Otto of Bavaria was elected as the first King of modern Greece. In 1862 he was deposed by a coup d'état. The following kings were the Danish George I who conquered Thessaly and part of Epirus, his son Constantine and George II. At the end of WWI the Greek troops invaded Turkey as far as Ankara. In 1921, the Turkish army led by Gen. Ataturk, regained the whole area. The Greeks who lived in Turkey were deported or killed. The following years were characterized by great economic development: roads, railways and the Corinth Canal were built and Pireus became one of the most important ports in the Mediterranean. In 1928 a coup d'état declared a Republic. The so called "period of the generals" began with Gen. Ioannis Metaxas in 1933. The postwar era was characterized by a great economic crisis and political instability, which led to the Papadopoulos dictatorship based on terror; thousands of Greeks were imprisoned and tortured and the population was under strict police control. In 1973 Papadopoulos was overthrown by Ioannidis. Karamanlis come back to Greece and won the political elections in 1974 and 1977. Greece became a European Union member in 1981.

Philippi archaeological site



Salonika

Salonika (Thessaloniki) is an important industrial and cultural center and the second largest city. A modern, dynamic center, Thessaloniki, despite the heavy allied bombing during WWII, has a rich architectural heritage from the Byzantine period, declared by Unesco as a World Heritage site in 1988. The old city has also known for its Roman and Ottoman buildings.

History: the city was founded by King Cassander of Macedonia in 315 BC. During Roman times it became the most important center in the region. In the I century the Apostle Paul established a Christian church here and wrote two famous letters to the Christian community of the city, known as the Epistles to the Thessalonians. In the following centuries, Thessaloniki became the second largest city of the Byzantine Empire after Constantinople. The population started to increase and new churches and public buildings were built. Thessaloniki was the hometown of the famous brothers Cyril and Methodium (IX century), the inventors of the Cyrillic alphabet. With the Turks (1430), its urban structure was quickly transformed: the churches were abandoned or replaced by mosques and Turkish baths. The famous White Tower was built in these years. In 1917, a fire burnt down most of the old city center. During WWII most of its Jewish community was deported to nazi concentration camps.

Mount Athos

Lying on the eastern peninsula of Halkidiki, Mount Athos (2033 m) is the most sacred place for the Orthodox Church. Spiritually, it's under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The territory, about 350 km², is densely forested and has the status of an independent monastic republic. From the administrative standpoint it's divided into 20 areas each one represented by its holy monastery. Of the 20 monasteries, 17 are predominantly ethnic Greek and the other 3 are the Serbian Monastery of Hilandar founded by King Stefan Nemanja and his son Rastko (the future St. Sava) in 1198, the Bulgarian Monastery of Zografou founded by three monks from Ohrid (they may have been disciples of St. Naum and St. Clemente) in the IX century and the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon built between the XVIII and XIX centuries. Today, the monasteries host about 1,500 monks and are visited by more than 30,000 people every year. Only males are allowed entrance on to the Holy Mount and need a special entrance permit valid for a limited period (usually 4 days at most). Monks feel that the presence of women alters the social dynamics of the community and therefore slows their path towards spiritual enlightenment. Karyes is the chief town of the independent republic. Here there is the seat of the Greek Governor, a small hospital, other public buildings and some shops.



Meteora

Meteora is a complex of Orthodox monasteries considered as second for importance only to Mount Athos. All of the monasteries are perched on high sandstone rock pillars located close to Kalambaka. The monasteries can be reached with stairs cut into the rock or large nets used to haul up both goods and people. The

first monastery was founded by Atanasio from Mount Athos in 1334, but for many researchers, a monastery has existed in the area since the XII century. In the following centuries more than 20 monasteries were built, but most of them were destroyed by the Turks. Today only 6 monasteries remain. It's a Unesco heritage site.

Pella

Founded by King Archelao I, Pella was the hometown of Philip II and his son Alexander the Great, and the second capital of the Macedonian Kingdom. At that time it was a maritime town with a port connected to the Aegean Sea by a long canal. In 168 BC it was conquered and sacked by the Roman legions; its treasures were transported to Rome. In the following centuries the town gradually lost its political and economic importance until it became a rural village. The interesting archaeological site preserves the ruins of the Royal palace and the Agora (the commercial city center). The local Museum and the external area display some well preserved mosaics from the IV century BC. Among them the most famous depicts Dionysius riding a panther, a Deer hunt and the battle of the Amazons. To note the terracotta pipes located under the streets for the distribution of fresh water.

Vergina

Agai, the present-day Vergina, was the first capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia. During the IV century, Pella became the administrative and economic centre of the kingdom, but Agai kept its role as the sacred city and the place where the Macedonian kings were buried. Philip II was assassinated here and his son Alexander was proclaimed king. Its golden period ended between the II and V centuries AD when the population left the town and Vergina turned into a small village. The archaeological site preserves the remains of the royal palace, the theatre from the IV century BC and the temple dedicated to the goddess Eukleia. However, what makes it one of the most important archaeological sites in the world is its necropolis which includes the royal tombs from the VI to V centuries BC. Among these the tombs of Philip II and his mother Euridike have been identified. Vergina is on the Unesco list.

Philippi

The town was founded by Philip II to defend the local gold mines and the important road which connected Amphipolis to Neapolis. During Roman times, the town obtained the status of a colony. After St. Paul founded the first European Christian Church here (according to the New Testament he visited the town several times between 49 to 58 AD) Philippi was enriched with churches and basilicas. The town was besieged by the Ostrogoths in the V century AD and totally destroyed by the earthquake in the VII century. Rebuilt by the Byzantines it was definitely abandoned a few centuries later. The archaeological site includes a section of the “Via Egnatia” which crossed the town, the Roman forum, some temples, the episcopal palace and some Christian basilicas and churches from the IV, V and VI centuries. In the center there is a structure traditionally identified as St. Paul’s Prison.

*Philippi archaeological site
Pella archaeological site*



Corfu

The island of Corfu is one of the richest in history and is a natural heritage site in the Mediterranean. The old town of Kerkyra with its traditional high stone buildings enriched with wooden attics and surrounded by stone staircases and small gardens, form a perfect mix of Venetian style and Byzantine art. It’s included on the Unesco list.

History: the Greeks founded the first settlements in the VIII century BC. In the II century BC Roman rule began. During the Byzantine Period it was sacked by the Huns, Ostrogoths and Bulgarians. The island was conquered by the Normans in 1081. In 1386, Corfu fell under the control of Venice which made the island its main olive supplier. The cultivation of olive trees became the base of the local economy in the following centuries. After the fall of Venice (1797) it was administered by the French and English. In 1863, it was annexed to Greece.

Croatia



Croatia

Croatia covers a geographically diverse area. Along the Hungarian border there are plains and hills. The part near Zagreb is the most developed industrially, while Slavonija and Baranja are agricultural areas. A few kilometers south towards the sea there is a hilly and mountainous area. The Adriatic coastline, about 1,700 km long, is divided into Istria and Dalmatia separated from the hinterland by high mountains. The country has more than 1200 islands and islets.

History: during the first millenium BC the area was inhabited by the Illyrians. With the Romans (168 BC) the region was divided into Dalmatia and Upper and Lower Pannonia, which covered much of the current northern Croatia. The Romans founded the cities of Jadera (Zadar), Parentium (Poreč), Polensium (Pula) and Spalato (Split). Dalmatia was the birthplace of the Roman Emperors Diocletian and Theodosius. When the Roman Empire was divided into the Western and Eastern Empires, the territories of the current Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina belonged to the Western Roman Empire, while present-day Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia were a part of the Byzantine Empire. During the VII century the Slav tribes had begun to settle in Pannonia and Dalmatia. The Christianisation of the Croat rulers encouraged cultural ties with Rome that recognised King Tomislav as King of Pan-

nonia and Dalmatia in the X century. At the end of the XI century Hungary's King Ladislav invaded Pannonia, while Dalmatia remained under Byzantine control. During the following years the Dalmatian cities warred with each other and Venice again took advantage of the confusion to conquer the coastline from Zadar to Dubrovnik (XV century). The cities in the interior fell one after another to the Turkish troops and only a small area around Zagreb, Karlovac and Varaždin remained under Habsburg control. The Adriatic coast was threatened by the Turks but never captured. With the Treaty of Sremski Karlovci (1699), the Turks renounced all claims on Croatia. At the beginning of the XIX century, Dalmatia was occupied by the Austrians and then by Napoleon. After the revolution of 1848, Croatia and Slavonia were placed under Hungarian administration, while Dalmatia remained under Austrian control. At the end of WWI the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established. In the postwar period Croatia became one of six republics of the Yugoslav Federation. The months following Croatia's declaration of independence (June 1991) were characterized by heavy clashes between the Croatians and Serbian troops which led to the Yugoslav Wars. The Dayton Accord (1995) recognised Croatia's traditional borders and provided for the return of Eastern Slavonia.



Plitvice

Plitvice

The Plitvice National Park is one of Croatia's sites under Unesco protection. What makes it the most famous natural attraction in Croatia are its 16 lakes connected one to another by a series of waterfalls. The Park is the habitat for deer, bears, wolves and many bird species.

Trau

Situated on two small islands connected one to the other by a bridge and to the shore by a swing bridge, it's famous for its buildings in Venetian style. To note the church of St. Lorenzo (XII century) and the Camerlengo castle (XV century). It's on the Unesco list.

Zagreb

The capital lies on the southern slopes of Mount Medvenica and the River Sava, offering the visitor a picture of both the ancient and modern. The city center, divided into Gornji grad (high city) and Donji grad (low city), forms a medieval urban complex of churches and noble palaces. The town is also rich in green spaces and pedestrian areas where it's easy to see artists and bands all year round.

History: the city's history began in 1094 when the Hungarian King Ladislaus chose it as a bishopric. In the XVI century, Zagreb became the political center and the capital of Croatia and Slavonia. From the architectural standpoint, the town received its current layout between the earthquake of 1880 and the outbreak of WWI. In the first half of the XX century, the city expanded and new neighbourhoods were created. During the Yugoslav Wars, it was targeted by the Serb artillery.

Split

Split is a maritime city of Greek origin (VI century BC) whose life has always been related to Diocletian's Palace built in 293 AD by the Roman Emperor as his retirement palace. The opulent complex covers an area 38,000 square meters located directly on the shore. At times, it housed over 9,000 people. After the Romans abandoned the site, it remained empty for several centuries. Since the VII century the palace has been occupied by the population who transferred their homes and businesses inside its walls. Today a large part of the old palace is well preserved, such as some city gates and the main street (cardo), Diocletian's mausoleum (now the Cathedral of St. Domnius), three temples, the subterranean portions of the palace etc. It's considered one of the most famous and complete architectural and cultural features on the Croatian Adriatic coast and since 1979 is under Unesco protection.

Dubrovnik

It's certainly one of the most beautiful and rich in history of the Croatian towns. Situated on a rocky peninsula, it's famous for its imposing walls and defensive towers built between the XIV and the XVII centuries when the town was rebuilt after an earthquake. From the architectural standpoint a large paved stone street divides the center in two parts characterized by narrow streets, long stone steps and squares overlooked by Venetian palaces.

History: there are two different theories about the birth of Ragusa, the present Dubrovnik. The traditional theory is that it was founded in the VII century AD by people who escaped from the Slavs, while for others it was established by Greek sailors. In the Middle Ages it was controlled by Byzantium and later by Venice. During the XIV century it became a Republic. Thanks to its efforts against Venice, which was Turkey's rival for the control of the



Dubrovnik



Adriatic, it had a high degree of autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. For centuries, its alliance with Ancona avoided Venetian control of the Adriatic. Its power gradually decreased after the XVII century, due to the earthquake which destroyed

the town, and the economic crisis caused by the loss of the maritime trade. In 1808 Napoleon conquered the town and abolished the Republic. With the Congress of Vienna (1815) the region was annexed to the Habsburg Empire that establi-

shed the Kingdom of Dalmatia. After WWI it was incorporated into the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. In 1991 the Yugoslav People Army besieged it for 7 months, damaging 56% of the buildings. It's included on the Unesco list.

Slovenia



Slovenia

Slovenia is one of the smallest countries in Europe. Its territory, however, is able to offer the visitor a huge variety of landscapes which form mountains, hills, plains and coasts. The Western and Northern parts of Slovenia are mountainous. In this region, close to Italy and Austria, there is the Julian Alps chain, which includes the highest peak in the country (Triglav), while in the eastern part of the country, towards the border with Croatia and Hungary, is the lowland of Pannonia. More than half of the Slovenian territory is covered by woods. The Adriatic coastline stretches about 43 km from the town of Trieste (Italy) to the Croatian border.

History: the region has been inhabited since 250,000 years ago. At the beginning of the III century BC the Celts started the colonization of the area and established the kingdom known as Regnum Noricum. The Romans (II century BC) built important roads and founded numerous new cities such as Emona, the present-day Ljubljana and Celeia, the present-day Celje. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the whole region was populated by Slav tribes who founded the Duchy of Carantania (later Carinthia) in the VII century. In the IX century these populations converted to Christianity and from the XI century, the region was enriched with many monasteries which became increasingly impor-

tant for the development of culture, education and art. In this period the whole region was threatened by the Bavarians, Franks, Magyars and Venetians who conquered the coastal towns. Between the end of the XIII century and the end of WWI, with the exception of the short-lived Illyrian province established by Napoleon in 1809, most of the current Slovenia was dominated by the Habsburgs. With Queen Maria Theresa a period of economic and cultural changes began: new public facilities were built and a new state administration was established. At the end of WWI, with the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, Western Slovenia was annexed to Italy, Northern Carinthia to Austria and the rest of the country became a part of the new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). After WWII, Slovenia regained the territory from Piran to Bovec from the Italians, but lost Trieste and part of the town of Gorizia which is still divided between Italy and Slovenia. In the postwar period the country became one of the six Yugoslav Republics under the leadership of Tito. Tito's death (1985) and the events of 1989 which saw the collapse of Communist regimes, led to independence, declared on 25 June 1991. The following days saw the so called "ten-day war" between Slovenian and Serbian troops. Slovenia joined NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007.

Otočec Castle



Ljubljana

The capital's center, located on the northern slope of the castle hill, developed around the famous Triple Bridge built in 1932. From the architectural standpoint, the town forms a unique mix of Baroque, Secessionist and Art Nouveau styles.

History: the first town in the area was the Roman Emona from the I century AD. In the V century the town was destroyed by the barbarians. Like most parts of present-day Slovenia, it was ruled by the Habsburgs from the XIII century to the end of WWI. The city center was destroyed by the earthquakes in the XVI and the XIX centuries. The present-day city's appearance is the consequence of the rebuilding of the XVII and XX centuries. Thanks to the Ljubljana–Vienna–Trieste railway line opened in 1857, the city quickly became an important economic center. In the postwar period Ljubljana was the capital of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia.

Bled Castle

Bled is a medieval castle perched on a steep cliff rising 130 metres above Lake Bled in the northern part of the country. Considered the oldest castle in Slovenia, it was first mentioned in the XI century when the German King Henry II gave the Bled estate to Bishop Albuin of Brixen. The castle passed to the Habsburgs in 1278. In the following centuries the structure of the castle, arranged around the lower and upper courtyards, was improved with new towers and walls and buildings in the Baroque style. Its most interesting part is the chapel consecrated to the Bishops St. Albuin and St. Ingenium built in the XVI century and renovated two centuries later. The last renovations date back to the postwar era when the castle roof collapsed in a fire. What makes the castle one of the most visited places in Slovenia is not only its architecture but also the wonderful view of the lake and the Julian Alps.

Predjana Castle

According to some medieval texts a castle in Gothic style with the German name Luegg existed in the XIII century. Despite its position, almost totally located under a high natural rock arch which makes it impregnable, the castle was conquered and destroyed after a long siege. It was rebuilt in Renaissance style at the end of the XVI century. In the following centuries it changed hands several times between Austrian and German noble families until the postwar period when it was nationalized by the Yugoslav authorities and turned into a public museum. The present-day appearance of the complex dates back to the reconstruction of the XVI century. The visitor can see the noble's living quarters, the chapel, the dungeons and the passage which leads to a secret refuge in a rocky hollow. Here there is also the entrance to the legendary tunnel of Erazem known as the "robber baron".

*Predjana Castle
Postojna caves*



Postojna caves

The Postojna Caves are the most famous tourist attraction in Slovenia and one of the world's largest karst monuments. A part of the caves has been known by the locals since the XIII century. In 1819 the caves were enlarged and opened to the public after the visit by Archduke Ferdinand I, the first Emperor of Austria. The caves, created by the Pivka River, include more than 20 km of passages, galleries and magnificent halls rich in beautiful stalagmites and stalactites which offer visitors a unique picture of the underground world. At the end of the XIX century electric lighting and the first cave train for tourists were added. Today the caves have a double track railway in the first part of the route while the deeper area has to be visited on foot. So far its 5 km of caves open to the public have been visited by 34 million people from all over the world. The average temperature is between 8°C and 10°C.

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