

BALKAN EXPLORER



DAY 1 VENICE

Arrivals day in Venice where you will be met and transferred to the San Clemente Palace Kempinski for a two-night stay, a five-star luxury urban resort on a private island, just minutes from Piazza San Marco via regular complimentary boat. Offering impressive views of Venice Lagoon, the 900-year-old property features a 12th century chapel and expansive stately gardens and courtyards.

This evening we will enjoy a welcome reception and dinner, giving you the opportunity to meet your fellow travellers.

DAY 2 VENICE

Venice is a truly captivating city of romance; its unrivalled beauty takes away the breath of first time visitors and regulars alike. Today we will have the opportunity to take a walking tour around the highlights of this spectacular city.

Walk through the winding lanes beside the Grand Canal to St Mark's Square, which for 1,000 years was the heart of Venetian life. We also see St Mark's Basilica and stroll through the Rialto Market.

DAY 3 VENICE & TRIESTE

This morning, we transfer by boat from the hotel directly to Santa Lucia station on the Grand Canal. Here our private train, the Golden Eagle Danube Express, is ready to receive us. Mid-morning our private train will thread its way out of Santa Lucia station onto the 3-mile causeway over the Venice Lagoon and on to our first stop at the Italian port city of Trieste, for an afternoon tour where we visit Miramare Castle. We also stop at the vast Piazza Unita d'Italia, the main town square.

DAY 4 POSTOJNA & LJUBLJANA

Today we visit Postojna caves as we ride an underground train deep into the cave and tour the network of magnificent halls, a myriad of cave formations and mysterious animals.

After the visit to the caves we return to Ljubljana which is the delightful capital city of Slovenia offering a combination of ancient architecture and youthful culture. Our afternoon walking tour of Ljubljana's Old Town includes a visit to Preseren Square, the Three Bridges, Dragon Bridge and Plecnik Market.

DAY 5 SARAJEVO & MOSTAR

We arrive early in the morning in Sarajevo, the captivating capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A unique fusion of East and West, the city is home to elegant mosques, slender minarets, a bustling ancient bazaar, and the evocative old Turkish quarter.

Today, you'll have the choice between two guided tours: a walking orientation of Sarajevo's charming Old Town or a deeper exploration with a visit to the Tunnel Museum.

For those interested in Sarajevo's recent and tragic history, the Tunnel Museum tour offers a moving insight into the city's resilience during the Balkan War. Sarajevo endured the longest siege of any capital in modern warfare, and its scars remain visible in buildings still marked by conflict. At the Tunnel Museum—located beneath the airport—you'll learn how this lifeline kept the city connected during the 1992–1996 siege. Led by a local guide who lived through the war, this unforgettable experience offers a powerful, first-hand account of the hardships and heroism of Sarajevo's citizens during those harrowing years.

Following Sarajevo, this afternoon we travel onto the historic city of Mostar by coach, the crossroads of many civilizations, cultures and three religions. Mostar was one of the most important cities of the Ottoman Empire. The town's renowned stone arch bridge linking the Christian and Muslim areas was re-built in the summer of 2004. We also visit Turkish House and the mosque before walking through the narrow, bazaar streets, where you can shop for traditional souvenirs and handicrafts.



DAY 6 TIMISOARA

Today is a day to sit back, relax, and enjoy one of the most captivating stretches of our journey. As we depart Bosnia aboard our elegant train, we meander through the scenic landscapes of Croatia, cross the mighty Danube into Serbia, and glide into Hungary before reaching Romania and our destination—Timisoara.

Often referred to as “Little Vienna,” Timisoara is a vibrant city in western Romania, shaped by centuries of diverse cultural influences. Once a Roman crossroads, it was ruled by the Tatars and later transformed by the Habsburg Empire in the 18th century into a thriving centre of industry. The arrival of German-speaking Swabians left a distinctive architectural legacy that still graces the city today—grand boulevards, elegant façades, and open, leafy squares.

Nestled along the Bega River, Timisoara boasts a mild climate and a lively cultural scene, with flourishing arts, music, and theatre. Arriving in the early evening, we take to the river for a gentle boat ride, enjoying a panoramic view of the city before disembarking for dinner at a local restaurant, offering a warm taste of Romanian hospitality.

DAY 7 TIMISOARA & BELGRADE

After a restful night on board, we begin our day with a private tram tour through Timisoara, offering a unique perspective of the city's handsome architecture and historic landmarks. A guided walking tour then takes us deeper into its atmospheric streets, charming piazzas, and storied past.

We return to the train in time for lunch and begin our journey southward, bound for the Serbian capital, Belgrade. Nestled at the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers, Belgrade, capital of Serbia, is one of oldest and most fascinating cities in Europe. With its turbulent past it became also a city of contrasts from Communist-era buildings to Orthodox churches, from old Celtic fortresses to the ruins as a result of the Balkans wars.

We spend an afternoon here and our city tour includes the “Blue Train” – the private train of Josip Tito, the President of the former Yugoslavia. Also featured on the touring programme in Belgrade is the Town Hall Building, Republic Square and Knez Mihajlova Street and an optional visit to the Belgrade ‘Kalemegdan’ Fortress.

DAY 8 SKOPJE

Today we arrive in the little visited Skopje and discover a city where the Ottoman influences are still strong. Explore the narrow streets of the Old Town with tiny shops and mosques with ceramic-tiled interiors. Meander through the Old Bazaar area, brimming with things to buy, and cross the 15th-century Stone Bridge which links the bazaar to the modern town. We have lunch in one of Skopje's oldest restaurants.

DAY 9 SOFIA & PLOVDIV

The site of Bulgaria's modern capital, at the foot of Mt Vitosha, Sofia was first occupied by the Thracian tribe of Serdi. On our morning tour we will visit sections of the Roman wall, admire the ancient church of St George, the golden domed Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and the Turkish Bashi Mosque.

We enjoy lunch on the train as we travel to Plovdiv. The second largest city in Bulgaria after Sofia, 'The City of Seven Hills' is one of the oldest cities in Europe with more than 200 known archaeological sites. We spend the afternoon here exploring the Roman Forum and Amphitheatre. We'll visit the charming Old Town including its medieval walls and Ottoman baths.



DAYS 10 & 11 ISTANBUL

On Day 10, we arrive in Istanbul—the legendary city that straddles two continents—and check in for a two-night stay at the luxurious five-star Four Seasons Hotel. As the final stop on our journey, Istanbul offers a captivating conclusion where East meets West and ancient history blends seamlessly with modern life.

We'll explore the city's iconic landmarks, starting with the awe-inspiring Hagia Sophia. Built in the 6th century under Emperor Justinian, it was once one of the grandest basilicas of the Christian world. After the Ottoman conquest, it was transformed into a mosque, and today it stands as one of the most magnificent Grand Mosques in the world—an enduring symbol of Istanbul's layered history.

In the evening, we descend into the atmospheric world of Istanbul's ancient cisterns. We'll visit one of these remarkable underground structures—the Basilica Cistern being the most famous—followed by dinner in a beautifully restored cistern-turned-restaurant, offering a unique and memorable dining experience.

The following day includes a visit to the Sultan Ahmet Mosque, also known as the Blue Mosque—a masterpiece of classical Ottoman architecture. We'll admire its six elegant minarets and 260 windows that flood the interior with light, highlighting the grandeur of its vast central dome.

Also on the itinerary is a scenic cruise along the legendary Bosphorus, offering breathtaking views of the city's skyline from the water, as well as a visit to the vibrant Spice Bazaar, where the air is rich with the scent of exotic spices and the charm of traditional market life.

On the final evening, enjoy a Farewell Dinner at the hotel.

DAY 12 ISTANBUL

Following breakfast, you will be transferred to the airport for onward departures. There is also an option to extend your stay in Istanbul for additional nights to explore more of this fascinating city.