



Balkans Explorer

Including Adriatic Cruise

 **Tour Length:** 28 Days
 **Tour Departs:** 18 August 2027

There are so many spectacular sights to see as we journey through the region. Visiting the Balkan States of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Serbia, Croatia and also Romania. These lesser visited countries will have you in awe of the beauty in the countryside, learning more about history and admiring the architecture of bygone eras. We visit many UNESCO World Heritage sites en route to Dubrovnik, where we join our ship and spend a week sailing the Adriatic, enjoying the crystal clear, warm water and calm currents. We finish in Croatia's capital of Zagreb before heading home. A truly fascinating tour with some magnificent scenery!

Highlights

- Serbia
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Montenegro
- Croatia

Tour Costs Per Person

Per Person Share Twin/Double Room

\$26,550

Per Person Single Room

\$37,050

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Adriatic Cruise

7 Nights

We board our ship "MS San Spirito" in Dubrovnik and spend 7 nights sailing to Slano, Mljet National Park, Korčula, Biševo, Vis Island, Hvar Island, Trogir and Split. Enjoy laying back and unpacking once while we admire the scenery from the luxury small group ship.

Cruise Inclusions

- Supreme category ship in a cabin with private facilities, A/C & TV
- Professional English-speaking Cruise Manager throughout
- Complimentary Wi-Fi on board
- Sumptuous cuisine – breakfast daily, 6 x lunches, welcome dinner & captain's dinner. Beverages available for purchase
- Some included shore excursions



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Tour Costs

Inclusions

- Economy Class Air Travel ex Auckland (upgrade to Business Class available at additional cost)
- Prepaid government, airport, security, port taxes and charges
- Superior Grade hotel accommodation
- Accommodation in ocean view staterooms on the Croatia Cruise
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary
- Sightseeing and entrance fees as indicated in the itinerary
- English speaking local hosts and guides as appropriate
- Baggage handling of 1 suitcase per person – where possible
- Tips to local guides, coach drivers, cruise staff
- Escorted by Maher Tours Leader

Exclusions

- Any meals and sightseeing tours not specifically mentioned in the itinerary
- Travel insurance – advice and assistance supplied
- Items of a personal nature such as room service, laundry, drinks, telephone charges etc

Booking Conditions

- Initial Deposit due at time of booking:
NZD\$3,000 per person
- Second Deposit due Thursday 18 February 2027
NZD\$3,000 per person
- Final Payment Balance
Due Friday 04 June 2027
- This tour is not suitable for those that require wheelchair assistance or mobility assistance. A good level of health and fitness required

To register for this tour please contact us at 0800 500 518 or tours@mahertours.co.nz

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Tour Itinerary

28 Days

Day 1 | Home – Dubai

WEDNESDAY 18 AUGUST

Late this afternoon, we report to the airport and join the flight to Dubai.

Day 2 | Dubai

THURSDAY 19 AUGUST (D)

We arrive in Dubai early this morning and after clearing Customs and Immigration formalities, we are met and transferred to our hotel for an overnight stay. There is time to rest up after the flight until mid-afternoon when we visit the Museum of the Future. One of Dubai's most famous landmarks, the museum takes pride of place along the city's superhighway, Sheikh Zayed Road. Founded by the Dubai Future Foundation and launched on 22 February 2022, the museum explores how society could evolve in the coming decades using science and technology. Termed a 'living museum', it incorporates elements of traditional exhibitions, immersive theatre and themed attractions, so visitors can look beyond the present and towards the future's limitless possibilities. Visitors have the chance to engage with this game-changing technology. Each floor of the museum is designed like an expansive, interactive movie set, brought to life by expert storytellers, technologists and visionary artists. There is time for exploration before we return to the hotel for dinner this evening.

Day 3 | Dubai - Belgrade

FRIDAY 20 AUGUST (B,D)

An early start this morning as we transfer back to Dubai Airport in time to report for our morning flight to Belgrade. We arrive just before lunch and have the afternoon at leisure to explore Serbia's capital city. We have a 3 night stay here.

Day 4 | Belgrade

SATURDAY 21 AUGUST (B,D)

Today we enjoy a sightseeing tour of Belgrade. We will visit the Museum of Yugoslavia which is dedicated to the former leader of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito. We drive past the Red Star stadium on the way to the temple for the city's Patron Saint Sava. Continuing onto Slavija Square, Republic Square, Serbian National Parliament, White Palace and Saint Marks church. We take a wander down Knez Mihailo Street which is the main pedestrian and shopping area. We visit to the Orthodox Cathedral Church of Saint Michael the Archangel and learn about the "Question Mark" tavern, before seeing Kalemegdan Park and the Belgrade Fortress.

Day 5 | Sremski Karlovci & Novi Sad

SUNDAY 22 AUGUST (B,L)

Today we take a field trip further afield to Vojvodina. Enjoy the scenery as we head through the wine region to the "Serbian Holy Land", home to 17 orthodox monasteries. We have the opportunity to stop at Krusedol where you can purchase wine and rakija made by the monks.

We can't visit the wine region without sampling the local wines, so we do that before enjoying lunch along the banks of the Danube River. We continue to Novi Sad admiring the key landmarks and enjoy a visit to Petrovaradin which is known as Danube's Gibraltar. The first fortification of this city was built around 5,000 years ago and is where we can stop and admire the panoramic views of the river and the city. We return to Belgrade in the late afternoon.

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Day 6 | Timisoara & Sibiu sightseeing

MONDAY 23 AUGUST (B,D)

Today we leave Serbia and head to Romania. Our sightseeing tour will take us to Timisoara before settling in Sibiu for an overnight stay. Timisoara was the first European city to have electric street lighting and is known today for its vibrant cultural scene and distinctive architecture. We will check out Unirii square to admire the medieval buildings including the Catholic Cathedral of Saint George. We'll see Liberty and Victoria Squares with the Romanian National Opera and National theatre as well as the gothic 15th century Huniade Castle. Heading through to Sibiu which was once the largest and wealthiest of seven fortified towns established by German settlers in the 12th century. Before heading to our hotel, we will see the Brukenthal National Museum, the council tower, the Bridge of Lies, Stairs Passage and the Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Day 7 | Sighisoara & Medieval Brasov

TUESDAY 24 AUGUST (B,D)

After breakfast we head to Sighisoara in Transylvania. This is the birthplace of Vlad III, also known as Vlad the Impaler or Vlad Dracula. His birthplace is marked with a placard "Casa Vlad Dracul". We visit the castle tomorrow and learn more of the history and legends of Vlad. Today, we visit the Church of the Dominican Monastery, the clock tower, Saint Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, the Tailors tower, Covered Stairway and other important sights. Then, it is onto Brasov for our overnight stay, the 13th Century town is one of seven walled citadels founded by the Teutonic Knights. We explore the main square and Casa Sfatului before heading down the narrow streets to the Biserica Neagra (Black Church) which is a gothic style cathedral. We also visit the only original city gate from Medieval times left standing. Catherine's gate. Brasov is home to medieval towers, baroque buildings, churches and charming cafes along Piata Sfatului.

Day 8 | Dracula's castle – Bucharest

WEDNESDAY 25 AUGUST (B,D)

Bran Castle has been home to legends about the modern-day Count Dracula. Bram Stoker took inspiration for this character from dark legends of the Carpathian Mountains where Vlad the Impaler was once held prisoner. This was a former residence of the Romanian Royal Castle. After learning about the legends, we head to Sinaia and Peles Castle constructed during the Neo-Renaissance era. Featuring elaborate turrets, panoramic mountains views with the interior boasting stained glass windows and intricate sculptures. We spend three nights in Bucharest.

Day 9 | Bucharest sightseeing

THURSDAY 26 AUGUST (B,L)

Romania's capital city is well known for its tree lined boulevards, Belle Epoque buildings and a reputation of lavish living. Combining French, Byzantine and communist architecture in its buildings. We will view the Piata Unirii and view the Palace of the Parliament. In the medieval Old Town, we have the Old Princely Court, Stavropoleos Monastery, Lipscani Street and the National Museum of Romanian History. As we wander down Calea Victoriei Avenue, be sure to admire the French style buildings while we learn about the communist rule in Romania at Revolution Square. Enjoy the afternoon at leisure.

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Day 10 | Bucharest - Veliko Tarnovo

FRIDAY 27 AUGUST (B,D)

Saying “La revedere” to Romania as we head to Bulgaria. We visit the Rock-Hewn churches of Ivanovo which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These were carved by hermits in the 12th century and showcases 14th century murals created by Bulgarian artist. After a photo stop in Arbanski, a small village with an open-air museum dating back to Ottoman times, we head onto the Second Bulgarian Empires Capital, Veliko Tarnovo. After a stroll through the cobblestone streets learning about the city’s history under Turkish rule and its architectural masterpieces and craftsmen’s guild, we head to the hotel for an overnight stay.

Day 11 | Veliko Tarnovo – Plovdiv – Sofia

SATURDAY 28 AUGUST (B,L)

We visit another museum this morning on our way to Sofia. This is an open-air museum and features water powered installations and houses with workshops showing architecture and the way of life as well as the economy of central Bulgaria during the national revival. Heading onto Plovdiv we visit the architectural complex, the ancient Theatre of Philippopolis built in the 2nd century with perfect acoustics where various cultural events are still held. We also visit the Roman Stadium and churches of Saint Constantine and Helena. We finish the tour in Kapana which is the creative heart of the city with shops, restaurants and galleries before heading to Sofia for our 2-night stay.

Day 12 | Sofia Sightseeing & Rila Monastery

SUNDAY 29 AUGUST (B,D)

Today we enjoy a guided tour of Sofia which is one of Eastern Europe’s most vibrant capitals, well known for its mix of communist style architecture, Ottoman mosques and onion domed churches. Some popular landmarks are the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Church of Saint Nicholas the miracle maker, Ivan Vazov National Theatre, Church of Saint George, banya Bashi Mosque, Sofia Synagogue, National Palace of Culture and Largo. In the afternoon, we visit Rila Monastery, the largest and most famous Eastern Orthodox monastery in Bulgaria.

Day 13 | Sofia – Nis – Zlatibor

MONDAY 30 AUGUST (B,D)

Today we complete our sightseeing circuit and head back to Belgrade. Enroute, we stop in Nis, Serbia, the birthplace of legendary Roman Emperor Constantine the Great. On our sightseeing trip we see the Mediana and Skull tower made with nearly 1,000 human skulls. We also visit Nis Fortress before enjoying some free time – be sure to visit Tinkers Alley, the city’s old market. We continue on to the mountainous region of Zlatibor, where we spend two nights.

Day 14 | Zlatibor

TUESDAY 31 AUGUST (B,D)

Today we visit Drvengrad (the Wooden Town), also known as Küstendorf and Mecavnik. It is a rustic and picturesque village built entirely of wood. It was constructed by Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica as a set for his film “Life is a Miracle” from 2003 to 2004 but has since evolved into a cultural and tourist attraction. Drvengrad is a blend of Serbian heritage, art, and architecture, reflecting Kusturica’s distinctive style and passion for preserving traditional values. We then head into Tara National Park where we board the ‘Nostalgia’ train. This runs along the narrow-gauge heritage railway Sargan Eight. Sit back as we pass through tunnels, viaducts and catch glimpses of the mountain scenery. This train was originally part of the railway from Belgrade to Sarajevo in the early 20th century which is why it is known as the Nostalgia train, as it is like taking a trip back in time. We return to Zlatibor in the afternoon.

Day 15 | Zlatibor – Sarajevo

WEDNESDAY 01 SEPTEMBER (B,L)

Today we cross the border into Bosnia and Herzegovina. We venture to Visegrad, where we enjoy a photo stop and lunch, before heading to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. Our sightseeing tour of the city will take us to visit landmarks such as the Vijećnica (City Hall), Bascarsija (downtown area) the Gazi Husrev-bey mosque and the Latin Bridge where the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated, sparking the first world war. We will also visit the historic sights of the Orthodox church, Sahat Tower and Europe's first public bathroom. Time permitting, we will also visit the Bezistan market complex the Ferhadiya pedestrian zone and the Sarajevo Synagogue.

Day 16 | Sarajevo - Mostar - Trebinje

THURSDAY 02 SEPTEMBER (B,D)

Today we travel to one of the most beautiful cities on the Balkan peninsula, Mostar. On our walking tour, we will see the iconic Old Bridge which is a UNESCO protected landmark and one of the most photographed sights in the country. We will also visit the crooked Bridge and Tabharna which is the old tanner's quarter. Enjoy some free time for lunch on the Neretva River bank while enjoying the bridge views. We continue onto Blagaj to enjoy views of the monastery built by dervish Sari Satluk beneath the cliffs on the shores of the emerald-green river Buna. We spend the night in the picturesque town of Trebinje. We see the Arslanagica Bridge and walk to 'Poets Square' where we can relax under 115-year-old trees.

Day 17 | Trebinje – Bay of Kotor - Dubrovnik

FRIDAY 03 SEPTEMBER (B,L)

We depart this morning and head to the Bay of Kotor in Montenegro. Enroute, we stop at the beautiful Perast known for baroque architecture. From here we enjoy a boat ride along the bay to Our Lady of the Rocks, an island with a church adorned with paintings and artefacts. When we arrive in Kotor, we enjoy a walking tour of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. We will visit some cultural landmarks, churches and enjoy lunch before continuing our journey to Dubrovnik for our overnight stay.

Day 18 | Dubrovnik - Join Cruise

SATURDAY 04 SEPTEMBER (B)

The morning is at leisure until we transfer to the port, where embarkation begins at 2pm. There is time to settle into our cabins before we enjoy an early evening walking tour of Dubrovnik. Walk through Stradun – both a street and a square, the most famous place inside the town walls, enlisted as UNESCO's World Heritage site, where our guide will show us the most interesting sights of Dubrovnik and visit the Franciscan Monastery with its Pharmacy. There is time to dine, prior to returning to our ship later this evening.

Day 19 | Dubrovnik – Slano

SUNDAY 05 SEPTEMBER (B,L,D)

Early in the morning enjoy the magic scenery as the ship cruises around Dubrovnik city walls to continue to one of the Elaphiti islands for a swim stop. Afternoon arrival in Slano, a peaceful fishermen's village and our gateway to Ston. Situated on Peljesac peninsula and once fortified, this small village is famous for its oysters, and we will get the opportunity to sample this delicacy on our tour today. We return to our ship and enjoy a welcome dinner on board this evening.

Day 20 | Slano – Mljet Nat. Park - Korčula

MONDAY 06 SEPTEMBER (B,L)

In the morning, we head north to the Island of Mljet. We join our Cruise Manager for a stroll to the famous salt lakes in the Mljet National Park. Continue our cruise towards Korčula island, best known as a birthplace of Marco Polo. Afternoon arrival in Korčula followed by a guided walking tour of this enchanting town surrounded by walls, which is one of the best-preserved medieval cities in the Mediterranean. Overnight in Korčula where you can enjoy a gourmet experience at the multiple restaurants and bars.

Day 21 | Korčula – Hvar

TUESDAY 07 SEPTEMBER (B,L)

You'll want to be out on deck while the ship sails through the Pakleni Islands on its way to Hvar. The captain will anchor in one of the breathtaking, hidden bays for a swim stop before continuing to the sunny island renowned for its world-class dining and nightlife, most notably in Hvar Town. A visit to a family-run winery for a tasting will be enjoyed before anchoring in its harbour. From there, you'll have free time, perhaps taking in the panoramic view from Spanjola Fortress and sightseeing in the historic centre.

Day 22 | Hvar – Blue Cave - Vis Island

WEDNESDAY 08 SEPTEMBER (B,L)

Today we cruise to the famous Blue Cave on Bisevo Island. If weather and sea conditions cooperate, an optional boat tour will bring you to witness it illuminated in a mesmerizing blue glow. (Please note that entry to the Blue Cave is subject to weather and sea conditions and therefore the entry fee of approx. EUR30pp is payable on the day). Afterward, enjoy a swim stop followed by arrival at unspoiled Vis. It's often called the "Mediterranean as it once was," as the furthest island from the Croatian mainland, with limited tourist development, having served as a military base for many years. Perhaps relax on a picturesque beach, explore the archaeological museum, and enjoy dining in a waterfront cafe. A wine and olive oil presentation, with samples, will be hosted on board.

Day 23 | Vis – Trogir / Split

THURSDAY 09 SEPTEMBER (B,L,D)

The ship will begin its return to the mainland, with a swim stop in crystal-clear blue waters along the way. After anchoring near the medieval Old Town of Trogir, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, you can choose to stay and join our local guide for a sightseeing tour or hop on the bus to nearby Split. Once here, you can explore its UNESCO-listed historic center, which includes the vast Diocletian Palace, home to some of the world's best-preserved Roman architecture, including the 4th-century AD St. Dominus Cathedral. You'll return in time to prepare for this evening's Captain Dinner, hosted on the ship.

Day 24 | Trogir – Krka Nat. Park - Sibenik

FRIDAY 10 SEPTEMBER (B,L)

Sailing to historic Sibenik, our final destination, we will stop along the way to enjoy the last swim stop of the cruise in one of the secluded bays or inlets. Lunch will be served before travelling from Sibenik to visit Krka National Park, home to the turquoise Krka River, magnificent waterfalls like Skradinski Buk with 17 cascades in total, and abundant flora and fauna. We return to Sibenik with time to explore landmarks like the UNESCO-listed St. James Cathedral, the 14th-century Prince's Palaces, multiple fortresses, and the Sibenik City Museum.

Day 25 | Sibenik – Zagreb

SATURDAY 11 SEPTEMBER (B,D)

This morning it is time for an early onboard breakfast, before saying goodbye to the crew and some of our new friends made on the ship. We board our coach and head to Zagreb. We arrive in time for an afternoon city tour before we enjoy one final dinner together this evening.

Day 26 | Zagreb - Dubai

SUNDAY 12 SEPTEMBER (B,D)

Time to say our farewells to Croatia as we transfer to the airport for our flight to Dubai. We arrive in Dubai this evening where we will overnight in the Airport hotel.

Day 27 | Dubai - Auckland

MONDAY 13 SEPTEMBER (B)

Time for the last leg of our journey on our flight home.

Day 28 | Arrive Auckland

TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER

Our flight touches down mid-morning.

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