

Balkans Explorer

Including Adriatic Cruise

Tour Length: 28 Days

Tour Departs: 15 September 2027

Discover a captivating corner of Europe, where centuries of history, fascinating cultures, breathtaking landscapes and charming medieval towns combine to create a truly unforgettable journey. From the fairytale castles of Transylvania and the grand capitals of Eastern Europe to the sparkling turquoise waters and idyllic islands of Croatia's Dalmatian Coast, this wonderful tour showcases the very best of the Balkans.

Highlights

- Explore the fairytale castles of Transylvania, including magnificent Peles Castle and legendary Dracula's Castle.
- Wander the charming medieval towns of Brasov, Sighisoara and Sibiu.Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Visit Bulgaria's magnificent UNESCO-listed Rila Monastery, nestled in the picturesque Rila Mountains.
- Discover Serbia's lively capital, Belgrade, and enjoy a wine tasting in charming Sremski Karlovci.
- Experience a nostalgic journey aboard the scenic Šargan Eight Railway through Serbia's beautiful mountain landscapes.
- Explore Dubrovnik, the magnificent 'Pearl of the Adriatic', including a walk along its spectacular medieval city walls.
- Discover Zagreb, Croatia's charming capital, with its elegant architecture and historic Old Town.

Tour Costs Per Person

Per Person Share Twin/Double Room

$26,900

Per Person Single Room

$37,550



Adriatic Cruise

7 Nights

Experience the beauty of Croatia's spectacular Dalmatian Coast aboard the elegant MS Contessa, a deluxe superior small cruise ship, fully refurbished in 2026. Accommodating just 36 guests in 18 well-appointed cabins, this intimate vessel offers a relaxed and personalised cruising experience, perfectly suited to exploring the Adriatic's picturesque islands and charming coastal towns. Each comfortable cabin features a private ensuite, air conditioning and modern amenities, while the inviting onboard facilities include a spacious sundeck with loungers and a jacuzzi, an elegant restaurant and bar.

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





Call us now to find out more about this tour

0800 500 518

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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 (as at 01/09/2026)
- 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 (subject to minimum numbers)

Exclusions

- Any meals and sightseeing tours not specifically mentioned in the itinerary
- Travel insurance – advice and assistance offered
- 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

Tour Itinerary

28 Days

Day 1 | Home – Dubai

WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

We commence the tour with an overnight flight to Dubai

Day 2 | Dubai

THURSDAY 16 SEPTEMBER (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 – Bucharest - Brasov

FRIDAY 17 SEPTEMBER (D)

An early start this morning as we transfer back to Dubai Airport in time to report for our morning flight to Bucharest, Romania. We arrive just before mid-afternoon and transfer through to Brasov (approx. 3hr drive), arriving in time for dinner. We spend two-nights here.

Day 4 | Brasov – Peles Castle & Dracula's Castle

SATURDAY 18 SEPTEMBER (B)

Today we travel to Sinaia, nestled in the picturesque Carpathian Mountains, where we enjoy a visit to the magnificent Peles Castle. Renowned for its fairytale architecture and lavish interiors, this former royal residence is one of Romania's most impressive landmarks. We then continue to the legendary Bran Castle, often associated with the Dracula legend, where we enjoy time to explore at our own pace. Returning to Brasov, we discover the charm of its beautifully preserved medieval centre on a guided walking tour, taking in historic highlights including the imposing Black Church and Catherine's Gate, a reminder of the city's fortified past.

Day 5 | Brasov – Sighisoara - Sibiu

SUNDAY 19 SEPTEMBER (B,D)

We continue our journey to the enchanting medieval town of Sighisoara, a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its colourful buildings, cobbled streets and remarkably preserved historic centre. During our sightseeing tour, we visit the Church of the Dominican Monastery and discover notable landmarks including the iconic Clock Tower, Saint Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, the Tailors' Tower and the historic Covered Stairway. Enjoy some free time to soak up the atmosphere of this charming town before travelling onwards to Sibiu, one of Transylvania's most picturesque cities. Here, we explore the beautifully preserved old town, taking in highlights such as the Council Tower, the legendary Bridge of Lies, the atmospheric Stairs Passage and the impressive Orthodox Cathedral. This evening, we enjoy dinner at our hotel in Sibiu.

Day 6 | Sibiu – Cisnadie - Bucharest

MONDAY 20 SEPTEMBER (B,D)

This morning, we travel to the nearby town of Cisnadie, where we enjoy a tour of this charming Transylvanian settlement, known for its Saxon heritage and historic architecture. We then continue to the renowned Brukenthal National Museum, home to an impressive collection of European art and cultural treasures, offering a fascinating glimpse into the region's rich artistic heritage. Following some free time for lunch, we depart for Romania's vibrant capital, Bucharest. We check in to our hotel for a 2-night stay, before meeting for dinner later this evening.

Day 7 | Bucharest

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER (B,L)

Today we discover the highlights of Bucharest, Romania's vibrant capital, a city where grand boulevards, elegant architecture and a fascinating history come together. Our sightseeing tour takes us through Unirii Square and past the imposing Palace of Parliament, one of the largest administrative buildings in the world, where we enjoy an exterior view of this remarkable landmark. We also explore the atmospheric Old Town, with its charming, cobbled streets, historic buildings and lively cafés. Following lunch at a local restaurant, the remainder of the afternoon is at leisure to relax or continue exploring Bucharest at your own pace.

Day 8 | Bucharest – Veliko Tarnovo – Arbanassi - Sofia

WEDNESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER (B,L)

Today we travel into Bulgaria, making our way to the historic city of Veliko Tarnovo, once the capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire. Dramatically situated amongst rolling hills and overlooking the winding Yantra River, this picturesque city is renowned for its medieval heritage and charming architecture. We enjoy a sightseeing tour before some free time to explore, followed by lunch at a local restaurant. Continuing onwards, we stop at the traditional village of Arbanassi, known for its beautifully preserved stone houses and rich cultural heritage, where we pause for a photo opportunity. Later, we journey to Sofia, Bulgaria's capital, where we check into our hotel for a 3-night stay.

Day 9 | Sofia - Plovdiv

THURSDAY 23 SEPTEMBER (B)

Today we journey to Plovdiv, one of Europe's oldest continuously inhabited cities, renowned for its rich history, colourful architecture and vibrant cultural atmosphere. During our sightseeing tour, we explore the charming Old Town, where cobbled streets wind past beautifully preserved Bulgarian Revival houses and fascinating reminders of the city's Roman past, including its impressive ancient theatre. Following our tour, enjoy some free time for lunch and to wander at your own pace, perhaps browsing the local shops or relaxing in one of the inviting cafés. Later this afternoon, we return to Sofia.

Day 10 | Sofia – Rila Monastery

FRIDAY 24 SEPTEMBER (B)

This morning, we journey into the scenic Rila Mountains to visit the magnificent Rila Monastery, Bulgaria's most celebrated religious landmark and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Nestled amongst forested mountain slopes, this remarkable monastery is renowned for its striking architecture, colourful frescoes and peaceful courtyards. We enjoy time to explore the monastery grounds and admire the beauty and history of this important spiritual centre. Returning to Sofia, we embark on an afternoon sightseeing tour of Bulgaria's fascinating capital, discovering its blend of ancient history, grand architecture and cultural influences. The evening is at leisure to relax or explore the city at your own pace.

Day 11 | Sofia – Nis - Belgrade

SATURDAY 25 SEPTEMBER (B,L,D)

Today we travel into Serbia, stopping in the historic city of Niš, one of the oldest cities in the Balkans and a place steeped in fascinating history. During a brief orientation tour, we discover some of the city's notable landmarks, viewing (from outside) the ancient Roman archaeological site of Mediana, the poignant Skull Tower, the imposing Niš Fortress and the traditional Old Market, each offering a glimpse into the region's rich and sometimes turbulent past. Following lunch, we continue our journey to Belgrade, Serbia's vibrant capital, where we check into our hotel before enjoying dinner this evening.

Day 12 | Belgrade

SUNDAY 26 SEPTEMBER (B,D)

Today we discover the fascinating city of Belgrade, Serbia's lively capital, where centuries of history and diverse cultural influences have shaped its unique character. Our comprehensive sightseeing tour includes a visit to the Museum of Yugoslavia, offering an insight into the country's intriguing past, and the beautiful Orthodox Cathedral Church of Saint Michael the Archangel, renowned for its elegant architecture and religious significance. We also take in some of Belgrade's most notable landmarks, including the expansive Kalemegdan Park and historic Belgrade Fortress, dramatically positioned overlooking the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers. The afternoon is at leisure to explore further at your own pace, perhaps wandering the bustling pedestrian streets or relaxing at a local café. This evening, we enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 13 | Belgrade – Novi Sad – Sremski Karlovci - Zlatibor

MONDAY 27 SEPTEMBER (B,L,D)

Today we journey north into the picturesque Vojvodina region, travelling through rolling vineyards and the historic area often referred to as the 'Serbian Holy Land', renowned for its centuries-old monasteries and winemaking traditions. Our first stop is Novi Sad, Serbia's charming second-largest city, where we enjoy a sightseeing tour and take in the impressive Petrovaradin Fortress from the outside, overlooking the Danube River. Following some free time for lunch, we continue to Krušedol, where there is an opportunity to purchase locally produced wine and rakija, a traditional fruit brandy made by the monks. We then visit the delightful town of Sremski Karlovci, celebrated for its elegant Baroque architecture and long winemaking heritage. Here, we enjoy a sightseeing tour and a tasting of local wines before continuing south to the scenic mountain resort of Zlatibor, where we enjoy dinner and overnight accommodation.

Day 14 | Zlatibor – Mokra Gora – Visegrad - Sarajevo

TUESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER (B)

This morning, we travel to the charming mountain village of Mokra Gora, where we enjoy some free time to explore at our own pace and soak up the peaceful surroundings. A highlight of our day is a memorable journey aboard the nostalgic Šargan Eight Railway, affectionately known as the 'Nostalgia' train, which winds its way through the spectacular mountain scenery of western Serbia, near Tara National Park. We then cross the border into Bosnia and Herzegovina, continuing to the historic town of Višegrad, beautifully situated on the banks of the Drina River. Here, we enjoy lunch and a walking tour, with an opportunity to admire the town's famous UNESCO-listed Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge, before some free time to explore and take photographs. Later, we continue through the picturesque Bosnian countryside to Sarajevo, the country's fascinating capital, where we check into our hotel for our 2-night stay.

Day 15 | Sarajevo

WEDNESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER (B)

Today we discover Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina's fascinating capital, a city where East meets West and centuries of history have created a remarkable blend of cultures, religions and traditions. During our sightseeing tour, we explore the atmospheric Old Town, including the bustling Baščaršija bazaar, where narrow cobbled streets are lined with traditional shops, cafés and artisan workshops. We discover the city's rich Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian heritage, taking in notable landmarks such as the historic Latin Bridge, associated with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, an event that helped trigger the First World War. With its striking architecture, poignant history and welcoming atmosphere, Sarajevo offers a fascinating insight into the heart of the Balkans.

Day 16 | Sarajevo – Blagaj – Mostar - Dubrovnik

THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER (B,D)

Today we journey through the beautiful landscapes of Bosnia and Herzegovina, stopping at the picturesque village of Blagaj, renowned for its stunning natural setting where the turquoise Buna River emerges from beneath towering limestone cliffs. We pause for a photo opportunity before continuing to the historic city of Mostar, famous for its iconic Stari Most (Old Bridge), which gracefully arches over the emerald waters of the Neretva River. Following lunch, we enjoy a sightseeing tour of Mostar's atmospheric Old Town, where cobbled streets, traditional markets and Ottoman architecture reflect the city's rich cultural heritage. Later, we cross the border into Croatia and continue to the magnificent coastal city of Dubrovnik, often referred to as the 'Pearl of the Adriatic', where we check into our hotel. We meet for dinner this evening.

Day 17 | Dubrovnik

FRIDAY 01 OCTOBER (B)

Today is yours to enjoy at leisure in the beautiful city of Dubrovnik. Perhaps wander through the charming, cobbled streets of the UNESCO-listed Old Town, stroll along the impressive medieval city walls or simply relax at a waterfront café and soak up the atmosphere of this stunning Adriatic destination. Alternatively, you may wish to join an optional excursion to neighbouring Montenegro, visiting the picturesque town of Kotor, nestled at the foot of dramatic mountains beside the sparkling waters of the Bay of Kotor. Here, discover a maze of narrow streets, historic squares and beautiful Venetian architecture within its UNESCO-listed Old Town. A wonderful opportunity to experience another of the Adriatic's most captivating destinations. Optional excursion at additional cost and lengthy border crossings are to be expected.

Day 18 | Dubrovnik - Join Cruise

SATURDAY 02 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning, we discover Dubrovnik from a different perspective as we take a memorable walk along its magnificent medieval city walls. Encircling the UNESCO-listed Old Town, these impressive fortifications offer spectacular panoramic views across the terracotta rooftops, historic buildings and sparkling blue waters of the Adriatic Sea. Enjoy the opportunity to appreciate the city's remarkable setting and centuries-old architecture from above before some free time to explore the charming Old Town at your own pace. Perhaps browse the boutiques, wander the narrow cobbled streets or relax at a café overlooking one of the picturesque squares. Later, we transfer to the cruise port, ready to embark on the next chapter of our journey. We board our lovely ship, the MS Contessa, mid-afternoon.

Day 19 | Dubrovnik – Slano

SUNDAY 03 OCTOBER (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 dinner on board this evening.

Day 20 | Slano – Mljet Nat. Park - Korčula

MONDAY 04 OCTOBER (B,L)

This morning, we cruise north along Croatia's spectacular Dalmatian Coast towards the beautiful island of Mljet, renowned for its lush forests, unspoilt landscapes and tranquil turquoise waters. Here, there is an opportunity to explore Mljet National Park, home to two stunning saltwater lakes surrounded by picturesque woodland. We then continue to the enchanting island of Korčula, traditionally believed to be the birthplace of the famous explorer Marco Polo. On arrival, we enjoy a guided walking tour through the town's charming medieval streets, laid out in a distinctive fishbone pattern, discovering its fascinating history, Venetian architecture and centuries-old traditions. This evening is at leisure to soak up the atmosphere of Korčula, perhaps wandering its winding laneways or enjoying dinner at one of the many inviting waterfront restaurants.

Day 21 | Korčula – Hvar

TUESDAY 05 OCTOBER (B,L)

Today we cruise towards the beautiful island of Hvar, the longest island in the Adriatic, renowned for its sun-drenched landscapes, fragrant lavender fields and sparkling turquoise waters. Enjoy a leisurely lunch onboard and a refreshing swim stop along the way before arriving in the lively harbour town of Hvar this afternoon. Here, we join a guided walking tour through its charming historic centre, discovering elegant Venetian architecture, the impressive Renaissance Cathedral and the historic Arsenal, home to one of Europe's oldest public theatres. The evening is yours to explore this cosmopolitan island town at leisure, perhaps strolling along the picturesque waterfront, wandering through its atmospheric laneways or enjoying dinner at one of the many inviting restaurants overlooking the harbour.

Day 22 | Hvar – Blue Cave - Vis Island

WEDNESDAY 06 OCTOBER (B,L)

Early this morning, we cruise towards the small island of Biševo, home to the spectacular Blue Cave, one of the Adriatic's most remarkable natural wonders. Here, sunlight filtering through an underwater opening illuminates the cave with an extraordinary blue glow, creating a truly magical sight. We then continue to the captivating island of Vis, once an important Yugoslav naval base that remained closed to foreign visitors for decades. This long period of isolation has helped preserve the island's unspoilt landscapes, traditional villages and authentic charm. We discover Vis's fascinating military history on a unique excursion aboard Land Rover Defenders, exploring remnants of its strategic past and enjoying the island's beautiful scenery.

Please note: Entry to the Blue Cave is subject to weather and sea conditions, as high tides or rough seas may prevent access. The captain will advise on accessibility on the morning of our scheduled visit.

Day 23 | Vis – Brac

THURSDAY 07 OCTOBER (B,L,D)

This morning, we cruise towards the beautiful island of Brač, enjoying the spectacular scenery of Croatia's Dalmatian Coast along the way. We pause for a refreshing swim in one of the island's pristine, sheltered bays, where crystal-clear turquoise waters provide the perfect setting to relax and unwind. Following a leisurely lunch onboard, we arrive in the charming harbour town of Milna, renowned for its traditional stone houses, picturesque waterfront and relaxed Mediterranean atmosphere. A highlight of this delightful town is its beautiful 18th-century Baroque church, dating from 1783, which overlooks the harbour and houses an impressive collection of Venetian paintings. Enjoy time to soak up the charm of this peaceful island destination.

Day 24 | Brac – Split - Trogir

FRIDAY 08 OCTOBER (B,L)

Today we continue cruising along Croatia's beautiful Dalmatian Coast towards the historic town of Trogir, enjoying lunch onboard and a refreshing swim stop in the sparkling Adriatic waters along the way. On arrival, we enjoy a short orientation walk through Trogir's UNESCO World Heritage-listed Old Town, often referred to as a 'mini-Dubrovnik' for its impressive medieval walls, charming, cobbled streets and beautifully preserved architecture. This afternoon, we transfer to the vibrant coastal city of Split, where ancient history blends seamlessly with modern Mediterranean life. During our guided walking tour, we explore the remarkable Diocletian's Palace, built in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries and now forming the heart of Split's historic centre. Discover fascinating reminders of the city's Roman past, alongside elegant Gothic and Renaissance architecture, including Jupiter's Temple and the impressive Peristyle Square. This evening is at leisure to wander Split's lively waterfront promenade, browse the charming laneways or enjoy dinner at one of the many inviting local restaurants. Later, we return to Trogir.

Day 25 | Trogir – Zagreb

SATURDAY 09 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning, we farewell the beautiful Dalmatian Coast and meet our coach at the port for our journey inland to Zagreb, Croatia's charming capital. Travelling through the picturesque Croatian countryside, we make our way to this vibrant city, renowned for its elegant Austro-Hungarian architecture, historic squares and lively café culture. This afternoon, we enjoy a sightseeing tour of Zagreb, discovering the character of its medieval Upper Town and bustling Lower Town. Along the way, we take in the city's historic landmarks, attractive streets and grand architecture, gaining an insight into the rich history and culture of Croatia's capital. Tonight, we enjoy our final dinner together.

Day 26 | Zagreb - Dubai

SUNDAY 10 OCTOBER (B)

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

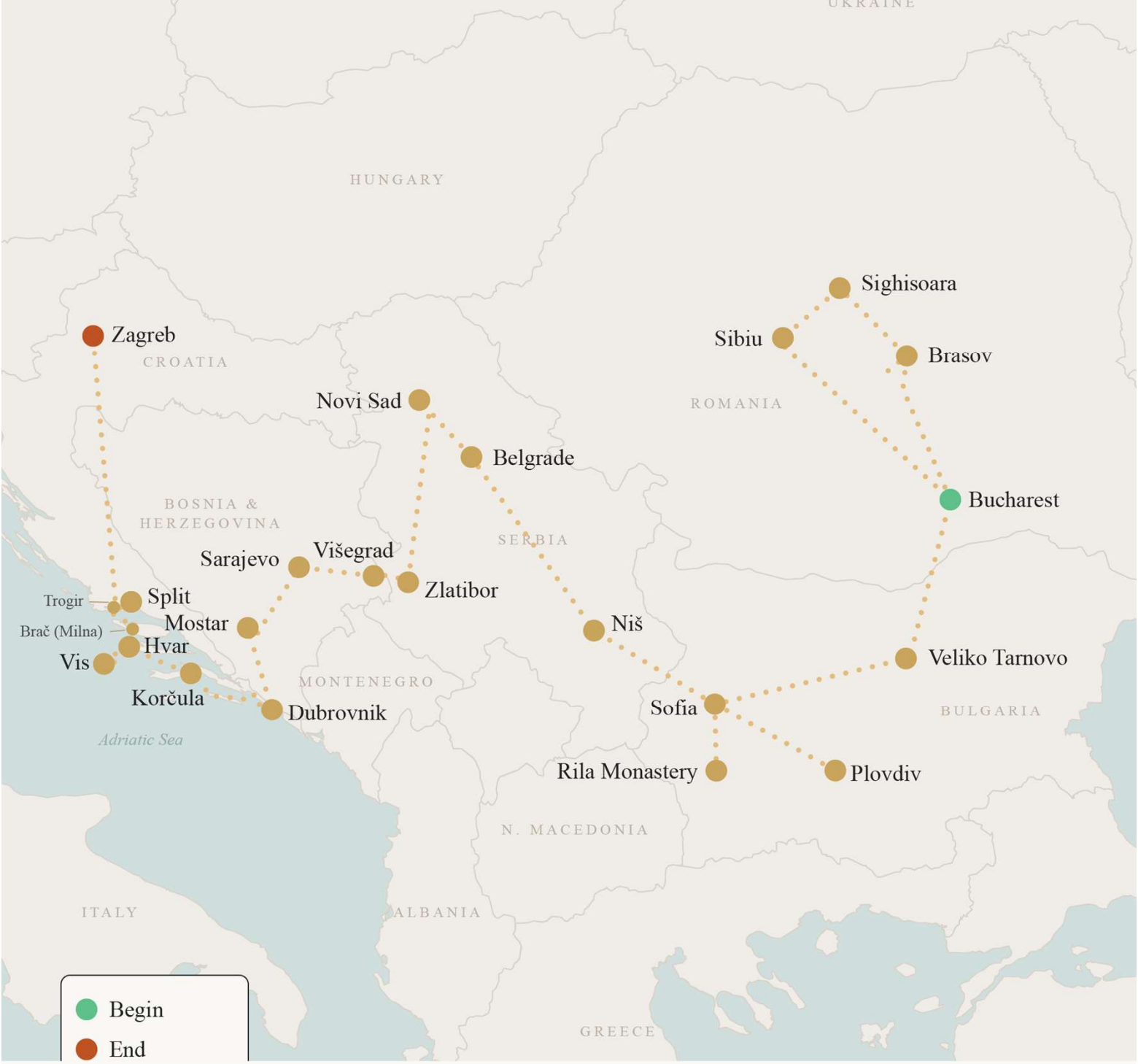
MONDAY 11 OCTOBER

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

Day 28 | Arrive Auckland

TUESDAY 12 OCTOBER

Our flight touches down mid-morning.



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