

BEST OF THE BALKANS

Classic Flex Tour | 21 Days | Physical Level 1

Zagreb – Bihac – Sarajevo – Mostar – Budva – Dubrovnik – Split – Zadar – Opatija – Ljubljana – Zagreb

Journey through a land of rugged mountains, turquoise lakes, ancient cities and sun-drenched Adriatic shores, from Sarajevo and Mostar to Montenegro and Dubrovnik. Along the way, savour local flavours, discover enduring traditions and experience the spectacular landscapes that make the Balkans so unforgettable.

- Wander Croatia's Plitvice Lakes
- Marvel at Mostar's iconic Old Bridge
- Explore Dubrovnik's ancient streets
- Enjoy a Dalmatian cooking class in Split
- Hunt for truffles in Groznjan

TOUR MAP



BEST OF THE BALKANS TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Most meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with IATA

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

CLASSIC FLEX TOURS:

Classic Flex tours let you see the iconic sites and signature experiences of each destination on an excellent-value, fully escorted group tour, with a little more freedom to do things your own way. Your international flights, accommodation, transportation, touring and most meals are all arranged, so you can travel with complete peace of mind. Where it works best for the destination, personal time is woven into the itinerary, giving you the chance to explore independently, seek out a local restaurant, or simply relax at your own pace. Throughout, your National Escort's unparalleled knowledge will bring each destination to life and turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

PHYSICAL LEVEL 1:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights. 'Best of the Balkans' is rated 1 on the physical level scale. A reasonable level of fitness is required but it's more about spending time on your feet rather than covering large distances. You'll be getting on and off coaches and ferries, walking around the sights and climbing some steps.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for both short and extended periods of time
- Sightseeing at nearly all the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing several steps, often without handrails

Of course, our National Escorts will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of our tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 21 days in duration including return international flights, or 18 days in duration based on 'Land Only'. Join the tour on Day 2 in Zagreb and end the tour on Day 19 in Zagreb.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only', the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour, or when booking pre/post night accommodation with Wendy Wu Tours.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Days 1-2: Fly to Zagreb Meals: D

Fly to the Croatian capital of Zagreb. On arrival, you will be met in the arrivals hall. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer to your hotel.

Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.



Destination Information

Zagreb – Croatia's capital is a charming city of grand Austro-Hungarian architecture, leafy parks and lively squares. Divided between the historic Upper and Lower Towns, Zagreb is home to colourful streets, historic churches and bustling cafés.

Day 3: Discover Zagreb Meals: B

Begin your Balkan adventure with a guided tour of Zagreb. Explore the historic Upper Town, elegant squares and cultural landmarks while discovering the fascinating story of Croatia's capital.

This afternoon, enjoy Flex time for independent explorations before experiencing Croatian traditions with a lively folklore show and interactive workshop.



Destination Information

Upper Town – Perched on the hill above the city, Zagreb's historic Upper Town, or Gornji Grad, developed from the medieval settlements of Gradec and Kaptol. Its cobbled streets lead to St Mark's Square, home to the distinctive St Mark's Church with its colourful tiled roof. Nearby, the Stone Gate, Lotrščak Tower and historic Baroque buildings offer a glimpse into Zagreb's medieval past.

Day 4: Plitvice Lakes Meals: B, L, D

Leave Zagreb behind and travel approximately 2 hours to the spectacular Plitvice Lakes National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Wander among its turquoise lakes, lush forests and cascading waterfalls, discovering one of Croatia's most beautiful natural landscapes.

After lunch, cross into Bosnia & Herzegovina arriving in the town of Bihać this afternoon.



Destination Information

Plitvice Lakes National Park – Croatia's oldest and largest national park is renowned for its 16 turquoise lakes, linked by a series of cascading waterfalls and surrounded by dense woodland. Formed by natural travertine barriers over thousands of years, the lakes create a spectacular landscape of clear water, waterfalls and wooden walkways

Bihac – Set on the banks of the Una River, Bihać is one of north-west Bosnia and Herzegovina's oldest towns, with a history stretching back to the 13th century.

Day 5: Jajce

Meals: B, L, D

Travel to Sarajevo today, a journey of approximately five hours through the beautiful Bosnian countryside. Along the way, stop in the historic town of Jajce, to discover its medieval heritage and admire its spectacular waterfall, before continuing to Bosnia & Herzegovina's capital.

On arrival in Sarajevo, enjoy dinner and settle into the city for the evening.



Destination Information

Jajce – Set among wooded hills in central Bosnia and Herzegovina, the historic town of Jajce is famous for its spectacular Pliva Waterfall, where the Pliva River plunges around 17 metres into the Vrbas River. Above the town stands the remains of its medieval fortress, while the historic centre is home to the Catacombs and the Church of St Mary. Jajce was also the birthplace of modern Yugoslavia, hosting the second session of the Anti-Fascist Council in 1943.

Sarajevo – Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital is a city where Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and modern influences meet. At its heart is Baščaršija, the historic Ottoman quarter, where narrow streets lead to the 16th-century Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque and the famous Sebilj fountain. The city is also known for Latin Bridge, near the site where Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in 1914, an event that helped trigger the First World War.

Day 6: Sarajevo

Meals: B, D

Explore Sarajevo on a guided tour, discovering its fascinating blend of Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and modern influences. Visit the Tunnel of Hope, a powerful symbol of the city's resilience during the Siege of Sarajevo, before continuing to Mostar.



Destination Information

Tunnel of Hope – Built during the Siege of Sarajevo, the Tunnel of Hope was a 800-metre passage dug beneath the airport runway between 1993 and 1995. It provided a vital link between the besieged city and the outside world, allowing food, medicine and supplies to enter while people could escape the fighting.

Mostar – Set along the Neretva River, Mostar is one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's most striking historic cities. Its famous Stari Most, or Old Bridge, was built in the 16th century by the Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan and spans the river with its elegant stone arch. Destroyed during the 1990s conflict, the bridge was carefully rebuilt and reopened in 2004.

Day 7: Mostar — Meals: B, D

Discover the enchanting city of Mostar, centered around its iconic Old Bridge. Explore the historic streets, visit a traditional mosque and step inside a Turkish house to gain an insight into traditional Bosnian life.

Later, experience one of the country's most cherished rituals with a traditional Bosnian coffee tasting in an authentic Turkish coffee house. Enjoy a free afternoon to explore Mostar at your own pace.



Destination Information

Old Bridge – Built in 1566 during the Ottoman period, the elegant stone bridge stretches 30 metres across the river and rises around 24 metres above the water. Destroyed in 1993 during the conflict, it was rebuilt using original techniques and reopened in 2004, becoming a powerful symbol of Mostar's history and resilience.

Bosnian Coffee – An important part of daily life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnian coffee is traditionally prepared in a small copper pot known as a džezva and served with a glass of water and a cube of sugar. Similar to Turkish coffee, it is finely ground and unfiltered, leaving a layer of coffee grounds at the bottom of the cup.

Day 8: Trebinje — Meals: B, D

Leave Bosnia & Herzegovina behind and travel towards Montenegro.

Stop in the charming town of Trebinje before continuing to the Adriatic coast and the beautiful resort town of Budva. You will be travelling for approximately 4 hours today.



Destination Information

Trebinje – Trebinje is a charming town known for its Mediterranean feel, stone buildings and tree-lined streets. The historic centre is home to the Arslanagić Bridge, a graceful 16th-century Ottoman bridge spanning the Trebišnjica River, while the nearby Tvrdoš Monastery is renowned for its wine production.

Budva – Budva is one of Montenegro's oldest settlements, with a history dating back more than 2,500 years. Its historic Old Town sits within well-preserved medieval walls, with narrow cobbled streets leading to ancient churches, small squares and the citadel. Beyond the walls, a beautiful coastline of beaches and clear blue waters makes Budva one of Montenegro's most popular seaside destinations.

Day 9: Budva

Meals: B, D

Discover Budva on a guided tour, exploring its atmospheric medieval Old Town, ancient walls and beautiful Adriatic setting.

Later, visit a renowned winery, explore its cellars and enjoy a wine-paired dinner as you discover the traditions behind Montenegro's celebrated wines.



Destination Information

Montenegrin Wine – Montenegro has a long winemaking tradition, with vineyards stretching across the country's fertile valleys and rugged hills. The country is best known for Vranac, a rich red grape variety widely considered Montenegro's signature wine. The Crmnica Valley, near Lake Skadar, is one of the country's historic wine-growing regions, where small family vineyards continue traditional methods of production.

Day 10: Lake Skadar

Meals: B

Today, immerse yourself in the spectacular natural beauty of Lake Skadar National Park, home to the largest lake in the Balkans.

Cruise across the tranquil waters, surrounded by dramatic mountains, wetlands and abundant birdlife. Return to Budva for an evening at leisure.



Destination Information

Lake Skadar National Park – Stretching across the border between Montenegro and Albania, Lake Skadar is the largest lake in Southern Europe and one of the region's most important wetlands.

Day 11: Kotor Meals: B, D



Travel along Montenegro's breathtaking Adriatic coast to Kotor, a UNESCO-listed medieval town surrounded by dramatic mountains. Explore its historic streets before boarding a boat across the Bay of Kotor.

Visit the picturesque island of Our Lady of the Rocks before driving approximately 3 hours to Dubrovnik, the Pearl of the Adriatic.

Destination Information

Kotor – Set at the head of the dramatic Bay of Kotor, this UNESCO-listed town is surrounded by steep limestone mountains and shimmering Adriatic waters. Its beautifully preserved medieval Old Town is enclosed by ancient walls, with narrow cobbled streets leading to the 12th-century St Tryphon's Cathedral.

Our Lady of the Rocks – Our Lady of the Rocks is a small artificial island built around a 15th-century church. According to local tradition, the island was created by fishermen who laid rocks in the bay after finding an image of the Virgin Mary on a nearby rock. The church was rebuilt in the 17th century and its interior is decorated with Baroque paintings, votive silver plaques and intricate artwork.

Dubrovnik – Known as the 'Pearl of the Adriatic', Dubrovnik's medieval Old Town is enclosed by imposing stone walls overlooking the sea. Inside, the marble-paved Stradun leads past elegant palaces, churches and squares, while the city walls offer spectacular views across the terracotta rooftops and Adriatic coastline.

Day 12: Dubrovnik Meals: B



Explore Dubrovnik on a guided tour, discovering its ancient streets and historic landmarks, enclosed by impressive medieval walls. This afternoon, enjoy Flex time to explore at your own pace. Wander along the limestone streets, explore the city walls or relax at a waterside café overlooking the Adriatic.

Destination Information

Adriatic Sea – Stretching between Italy and the Balkan Peninsula, the Adriatic Sea covers around 138,600 square kilometres and reaches a maximum depth of approximately 1,233 metres.

Day 13: Neretva Valley Meals: B, L, D



Leave Dubrovnik and journey into the lush Neretva Valley. Visit the Neretva Agro-Ethno Park and enjoy a traditional welcome drink before boarding a local boat.

Cruise through the valley's tranquil canals and waterways towards Lake Kuti, surrounded by unspoiled landscapes. Enjoy lunch featuring local specialities before continuing along the Dalmatian coastline to Split, a journey of approximately 2 hours.

Destination Information

Neretva Agro-Ethno Park – Set in the fertile Neretva Valley near Mostar, this traditional farm offers an insight into the rural life and agricultural heritage of Herzegovina.

Split – Croatia's second-largest city grew around the 1,700-year-old Diocletian's Palace, built by the Roman emperor Diocletian as his retirement residence. Today, the palace forms the heart of the city, with ancient columns, stone courtyards and Roman cellars woven into the streets of the Old Town. Beyond the palace, the lively Riva waterfront and nearby Marjan Hill gives spectacular views over the Adriatic Sea.

Day 14: Split Meals: B, L



Discover Split on a guided tour, exploring its remarkable historic centre and Roman heritage, including the extraordinary legacy of Diocletian's Palace.

Later, get hands-on with Dalmatian cuisine during a cooking workshop. Harvest fresh ingredients from the botanical gardens, learn traditional techniques and prepare authentic local dishes before sitting down to enjoy your creations together, accompanied by regional specialities and wine.

Destination Information

Diocletian's Palace – Built around AD 300 as the retirement residence of Roman Emperor Diocletian, this vast complex forms the historic heart of Split. Covering around 30,000 square metres, the palace features four monumental gates, ancient columns and the impressive Peristyle courtyard.

Day 15: Zadar Meals: B, D

Travel 2 hours north to Zadar today, along the Dalmatian coast, stopping for a tasting of locally produced cured meats, cheeses and wines while discovering traditional Croatian food and hospitality.

Upon arrival in Zadar, enjoy a guided tour of its historic centre, where Roman, Venetian and modern influences meet.



Destination Information

Zadar – Zadar has a history spanning more than 3,000 years, with Roman ruins, medieval churches and Venetian architecture found throughout its historic centre. The Old Town is home to the Roman Forum and the 9th-century Church of St Donatus, while the waterfront features the unique Sea Organ, which creates music as waves pass through its stone pipes.

Day 16: Opatija Meals: B, D

Continue 3 hours north to the elegant seaside resort of Opatija, once a favoured retreat of European aristocracy.

Enjoy time at leisure before discovering its grand villas, gardens and beautiful waterfront promenade on a guided tour.



Destination Information

Opatija – Opatija became a popular holiday destination for the Austro-Hungarian aristocracy in the 19th century, earning a reputation as the 'Vienna by the Sea'. The famous Lungomare promenade stretches along the coast, passing grand villas and offering views across the Kvarner Gulf.

Day 17: Istrian Peninsula Meals: B, L

Venture into the heart of the Istrian Peninsula, beginning with a visit to the charming hilltop artists' village of Grožnjan. Continue into the countryside for a truffle-hunting experience, discovering one of Istria's most prized culinary treasures before enjoying a lunch of local specialities. Later, visit a distillery in Buzet to discover the traditions behind regional spirits and sample local creations before returning to Opatija.



Destination Information

Grožnjan – Once an important Venetian settlement, Grožnjan village was revived by artists in the 1960s and is now home to numerous galleries, studios and cultural events. Its hilltop position also offers beautiful views across the surrounding vineyards and rolling Istrian landscape.

Day 18: Ljubljana

Meals: B, D

Leave the Adriatic behind and travel 2 hours to Ljubljana, Slovenia's picturesque capital. Enjoy an orientation tour through its charming Old Town, taking in the riverside atmosphere and distinctive architecture.

After free time for lunch, continue to Zagreb. This evening, gather for a farewell dinner and celebrate an unforgettable journey through the Balkans.



Destination Information

Ljubljana – Slovenia's charming capital is centred around the Ljubljanica River, with elegant bridges, colourful Baroque buildings and leafy squares lining its banks. Dominating the city from a wooded hill is Ljubljana Castle, a medieval fortress with views across the rooftops and surrounding Alps. The historic centre is also home to Prešeren Square, the Triple Bridge and the lively Central Market.

Days 19-21: Fly to New Zealand

Meals: B

Transfer to Zagreb Airport for your onward flight, taking with you memories of spectacular landscapes, fascinating history and vibrant cultures. You will arrive back in New Zealand two days later.

BEST OF THE BALKANS TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Croatia & Slovenia:
New Zealand passport holders are currently permitted entry to Croatia and Slovenia without a visa for stays of up to 90 days in any 180-day period, as both countries are part of the Schengen area.

On your first entry to the Schengen area you will be registered in the EU's Entry/Exit System (EES), which records your fingerprints and photograph, often at a self-service booth before border control. There is no cost and nothing to complete in advance, but it may increase waiting times. Your EES registration remains valid for three years.

As this tour leaves and re-enters the Schengen area by road, expect EES checks and possible queues at the land borders between Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro.

The EU's European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) has not yet started. Once it does, New Zealand passport holders will need to apply online before travel – your travel consultant will advise you if this applies to your departure.

Bosnia & Herzegovina:
New Zealand passport holders are currently permitted entry to Bosnia & Herzegovina without a visa for stays of up to 90 days in any 180-day period.

Montenegro:
New Zealand passport holders are currently permitted entry to Montenegro without a visa for stays of up to 90 days.

Time spent in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro does not count towards your Schengen 90-day allowance.

Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back in New Zealand.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate; Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa.

If you hold a passport from another country, please contact us for guidance.

INSURANCE:

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

EATING IN THE BALKANS:

Balkan cuisine reflects a rich mix of Mediterranean, Ottoman, Central European and Slavic influences, with each country having its own regional specialities. Fresh vegetables, bread, yoghurt, cheese, herbs and grilled meats feature heavily, while dishes often make use of paprika, garlic and mild spices. Common dishes include ćevapi (small grilled meat sausages), burek (filled pastry), shopska salad, moussaka and sarma (stuffed cabbage or vine leaves). Pork, chicken and lamb are widely available, alongside plenty of fresh fish and seafood in coastal areas. Breakfasts are generally simple, with bread, cheese, cured meats, eggs, yoghurt and pastries commonly served. Tea and coffee are readily available, with strong Turkish-style coffee particularly popular throughout the region, with Bosnia also famed for its coffee.

Vegetarian alternatives are available, particularly in larger towns and cities, although choices can be more limited in rural areas. Most meals will include fresh salads, vegetables, bread or potatoes alongside the main dish. Balkan cuisine is often hearty, with grilled meat and dairy products featuring prominently. If you have any food allergies or other dietary preferences, please let us know at time of booking. Your guide will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met, however, no guarantees can be made. Meal times may occasionally be altered due to sightseeing, travel arrangements or other local circumstances.

Alcohol is widely consumed across much of the Balkans, with beer, wine and locally produced spirits particularly popular. Rakija, a strong fruit brandy, is a traditional drink found throughout the region and may be offered as an aperitif or after a meal. Coffee is an important part of daily life, and you will often see locals enjoying a leisurely coffee in cafés. Tap water is generally safe to drink in most destinations, although bottled water is widely available if preferred.

DEVELOPMENT AND WHAT TO EXPECT:

Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Slovenia are well-established destinations with a wide range of modern hotels, restaurants and tourist facilities. As with any region, standards and facilities can vary between destinations, particularly between larger cities and smaller towns or rural areas.

You may encounter historic buildings, cobbled streets, uneven pavements, winding or mountainous roads and older infrastructure, particularly when visiting historic sites or travelling through rural areas. These are part of the character of the region, but may also mean that journeys take longer or that access is more challenging in some locations. Our suppliers work to local safety requirements and we take your wellbeing seriously throughout your tour.

The countries of the former Yugoslavia have a rich and complex history, and each has its own distinct identity, culture and recent experience. The effects of political and economic change can still be seen in the landscape, architecture and memorials, alongside newer hotels, restaurants and developments. English is widely spoken in tourist areas, although you may find it less commonly spoken in smaller towns and rural communities.

Travelling through the region can sometimes involve a different pace or style from what you may be accustomed to in New Zealand. Road conditions, traffic, local events or other unforeseen circumstances may occasionally cause delays, and service can vary from place to place. We encourage you to approach these experiences with an open mind and enjoy the opportunity to discover the character and diversity of each destination.

ACCOMMODATION:

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family-run guesthouse in a smaller town. Hotels are generally rated as local three-star superior to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between New Zealand and the Balkans. All group tour hotels have private bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone.

If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

TIPPING POLICY:

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and the Balkans are no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience, Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your National Escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed to local guides and drivers throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognise that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

GROUP SIZE:

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a National Escort. On Classic Flex Tours, there will be no more than 28 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu Tours groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 10 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

TRANSPORT:

Road conditions across the Balkans are generally good, particularly on major routes between the main cities. However, rural roads can be narrower, uneven or less well maintained, and roadworks may occasionally cause delays. Traffic and weather conditions can also affect journey times, particularly during winter. Your National Escort will keep you informed of any changes.

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used throughout the tour.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

Wendy Wu does not give specific health advice, but we do recommend you see your doctor at least six weeks prior to travel for advice and to allow time for any necessary vaccinations. Please remember to take your itinerary with you. Safe travel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.safetravel.govt.nz

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available.

Up until the day you travel, it is vital you keep up to date and familiarised with the entry requirements as these can change at short notice. You are personally responsible for completing any entry forms, conducting any covid tests (if necessary), etc and adhering to countries' specific entry requirements. You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up-to-date information about your destination on the same website.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

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