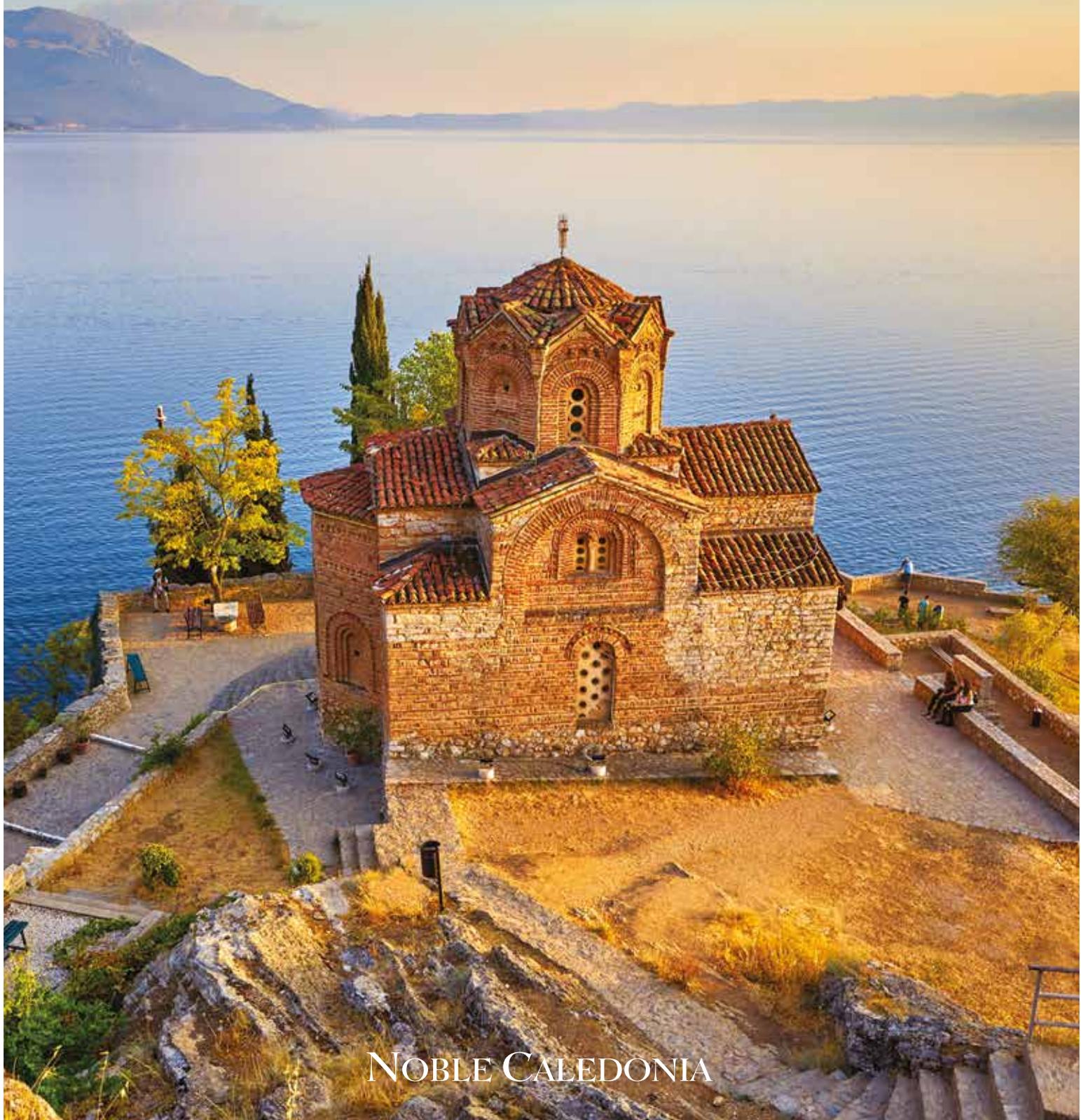


BEST OF THE BALKANS

An escorted tour visiting Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia & Bulgaria

19th to 30th June 2019



NOBLE CALEDONIA



St Jovan Bigorski Monastery, Macedonia



Fresco of the Last Supper, St Naum Monastery, Macedonia



Skanderbeg Square, Tirana, Albania



Despite its often turbulent past, cultural and natural wonders abound in the Balkans and the region offers so much for the genuine traveller. At the crossroads of east and west, and with a history forged over the centuries and influenced by so many, there are a wealth of fascinating cultural sites and natural world marvels to discover during this escorted tour of Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria. We will visit impressive cave monasteries and UNESCO World Heritage Sites, enjoy a cruise on Skadar Lake and stay by the shores of Lake Ohrid, one of Europe's greatest biological reserves and taste some of the region's wines. We also visit the bustling cities of Tirana, Skopje and Sofia and whilst driving between our destinations will witness some of the most beautiful scenery Europe has to offer with mountains that sweep down to lakes covered in rich vegetation. In addition to the guided tours, there will be some time at leisure for you to explore independently.



The Itinerary

Day 1 London to Budva, Montenegro. Fly by scheduled flight to Tivat. On arrival transfer to Budva and check in to the Hotel Budva for a two night stay. Enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel this evening.

Day 2 Lipa Cave & Plantaze Vineyards. Today we explore Lipa Cave, one of the largest cave monuments in Montenegro. Boasting a beautiful and wild cave system with 2.5 kilometres of passages and halls, it offers a unique experience of the underground world. Continue to Plantaze Vineyards, a leader in the production of grapes and wine in Montenegro, and famous for its Vranac variety. After a drive through the vineyard, we will visit the Sipcanik wine cellar, which was formerly an underground aircraft hangar of the Yugoslav Army until the 1990s. In 2007 it was reconstructed and converted into a wine storage facility. We will enjoy a wine tasting and a tasty lunch before returning to the hotel. Enjoy dinner in a local restaurant this evening.

Day 3 Skadar Lake National Park & Tirana, Albania. In the morning we depart Budva for a picturesque journey through the dramatic Balkan landscapes to the capital of Albania, Tirana. Entering Skadar Lake National Park, we will take a scenic cruise on the largest lake in the Balkans from Rijeke Crnojevica to Virpazar. Surrounded by dramatic karst mountains, the lake offers unparalleled vistas reflected in the lake's clear waters. Most of the lake is in Montenegro, with its tip reaching into Albania and it is one of the most important sanctuaries for wetland birds in Europe. Following lunch in a local restaurant we continue onwards, crossing the border into Albania and reaching Tirana in the early evening. Check into the MAK Tirana Hotel for a two night stay. Dinner in the hotel this evening.

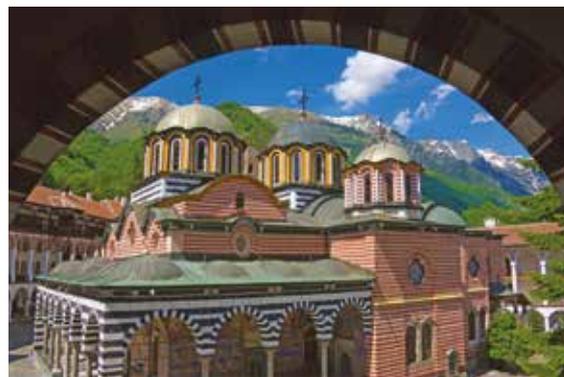
Day 4 Tirana. After breakfast we will explore Albania's capital, starting in Skanderbeg Square



Rijeka Crnojevica River near Lake Skadar, Montenegro



Lake Ohrid and the Old Town, Macedonia



Rila Monastery, Bulgaria



The 15th century Stone Bridge, Skopje, Macedonia

with a guided tour of the Albanian National Museum, home to many of the country's archaeological treasures. Our exploration of the city will continue on foot visiting the Blloku district, which is now home to many bars and restaurants but was a restricted area during the communist period. After lunch at a local restaurant the afternoon and evening will be at leisure to further explore this surprising city.

Day 5 Kalista, Struga & Ohrid, Macedonia.

Leaving Tirana we will take a scenic drive eastwards through Albania towards the Macedonian border. Arriving on the western shores of Lake Ohrid, visit the 13th century Kalista Cave Monastery before continuing to the bustling town of Struga. Enjoy lunch in a local restaurant followed by a guided walking tour. Continue to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Lake Ohrid and check in at the Park Lakeside Hotel for a two night stay. Enjoy dinner in a local restaurant this evening.

Day 6 Lake Ohrid & St Naum.

After breakfast at the hotel explore Ohrid Old Town on a walking tour, before taking lunch in a local restaurant. The lakeside town of Ohrid is one of the oldest human settlements in Europe whilst the lake hosts more than 200 endemic species and is one of the great European biological reserves. It was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. Board a local boat for a scenic cruise on the lake, visiting the famous Bay of Bones and the beautiful St Naum Monastery. This evening we will enjoy dinner and a music performance at a floating restaurant on the lake.

Day 7 Mavrovo National Park & Skopje. Leaving Ohrid we travel past Lake Debar and through the stunning scenery of the Radika River Gorge to the Mavrovo National Park, the largest protected area in the country which is famous for its mountain peaks and picturesque villages. Visit the St

Jovan Bigorski Monastery which was destroyed by Ottomans in the 16th century but restored by the Monk Ilarion around 1743. Famous for its intricately carved wooden iconostasis and situated on a steep slope surrounded by dense woodland, the monastery is not dissimilar to the cliff-top monasteries of Mount Athos in Greece. Continue through the National Park, passing Lake Mavrovo before stopping for lunch at a local restaurant. Explore the city of Tetovo in the afternoon before reaching Skopje, the capital of Macedonia. We will check in at the Marriott Hotel for a three night stay in the late afternoon. The rest of the day is free for independent exploration.

Day 8 Skopje.

With remnants of Greek, Roman and Ottoman history contrasting with modern architecture, Skopje offers up a vibrant metropolis buzzing with activities. On our morning tour we will take a cable car up high above the city to the Millennium Cross before exploring the vast Kale Fortress that dominates the city skyline. We will continue to the 15th century Stone Bridge and the Ottoman Old Bazaar before enjoying a refreshment stop with Turkish tea. The afternoon and evening are at leisure, allowing you the opportunity to further explore this fascinating city.

Day 9 Matka River Canyon.

Following breakfast at the hotel take a scenic transfer to the dramatic Matka Canyon, a mere 11 miles to the southwest of the city centre. A narrow canyon on the lower course of Treska River, with steep sided mountains on either side, it is a major centre for climbing and caving. We will visit the Sveta Bogorodica Monastery and St Andrew's Church before embarking a local boat and sailing through the canyon, exploring one of its caves. Enjoy a lunch in the canyon before returning to Skopje. Later this afternoon we will visit the award-winning Chateau Kamnik, located in the Vardar Valley to the east of the city. Tour the wine cellars and enjoy a wine tasting and dinner in the restaurant.

Day 10 Rila Monastery and Sofia, Bulgaria.

Leaving Skopje, we head east towards the Bulgarian border via Kriva Palanka, crossing the Osogovo Mountain, a local ski resort. Following a stop for lunch, we visit the 10th century Rila Monastery, the largest in Bulgaria, located in stunning scenery on the slopes of Riva Mountain. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the monastery was destroyed by fire in the beginning of the 19th century and was rebuilt between 1834 and 1862. Continue on to Bulgaria's capital Sofia, and check in at the Grand Hotel for a two night stay. Enjoy the evening at leisure.

Day 11 Sofia. This morning enjoy a walking tour of Sofia, including the National Museum of History and Archeological Museum, followed by time at leisure to enjoy lunch independently and explore the city at your own pace. Meet this evening for a farewell dinner in the hotel.

Day 12 Sofia to London. Following breakfast at the hotel transfer to the airport for your return scheduled flight to London. Arrive this afternoon.

PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

Twin: **£3395** Single: **£3995**

Group Size: We are restricting the group size to just twenty participants

PRICE INCLUDES: Economy class scheduled air travel • 11 nights hotel accommodation as described (or similar) on bed and breakfast basis • All meals (except lunch on days 8 & 11 and dinner on days 4, 7, 8 & 10) • Guided excursions as stated in the itinerary • All entrance fees • Noble Caledonia Tour Manager • English speaking local guides • Gratuities • Transfers • Airport taxes.

Not Included: Travel insurance, visa, lunch on days 8 & 11 and dinner on days 4, 7, 8 & 10.



NOBLE CALEDONIA

2 Chester Close, Belgravia, London, SW1X 7BE

+44 (0)20 7752 0000 | info@noble-caledonia.co.uk | www.noble-caledonia.co.uk



All special offers are subject to availability. Our current booking conditions apply to all reservations and are available on request.
Cover images: Front - Church of St. John at Kaneo, Lake Ohrid; Back - Vineyard, Montenegro