

# NORTHERN GREECE & ALBANIA

A MOSAIC OF CIVILISATIONS & CULTURES



Gjirokastra, Albania

## OVERVIEW

Following in the footsteps of Conquerors and long-lost Empires, this new 18-day tour explores the diverse and breathtaking landscapes of Northern Greece, Corfu and Albania, tracing parts of the “Via Egnatia” – the Roman road which connected the Adriatic to Constantinople.

We begin our tour in Thessaloniki, from where we enjoy the coastal city of Kavala, Acropolis of Amphipolis and Mount Olympus, with soaring panoramic views of the Aegean. In the town of Ioannina we enter the age of Alexander the Great, visiting his birthplace Pella and Dodona, home to the oldest Hellenistic Oracle in Greece.

Cosmopolitan Corfu will then enchant us with its ancient ruins, before we journey into Albania, staying in the “Silver City” of Gjirokastra. On our final leg, Korca and Berat immerse us in centuries-old Citadels and Ottoman houses, followed by Tirana – the capital of Albania – a tapestry of civilisation, blending Ottoman, Italian and Balkan culture.

Led by Ben Churcher, this tour threads together the narratives of ancient civilisations with the dynamic heritage of this region.



## TOUR LEADER

**Ben Churcher** is an archaeologist with a strong interest in history, primarily of the Muslim world. Ben is also the Field Director at the University of Sydney’s archaeological excavations at Pella in Jordan.

## TOUR DATES

**April 2-19, 2026** | 18 Days

## TOUR PRICE

**\$15,780** per person, twin share  
**\$2,890** single supplement

## TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

## GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **16** in group

## ITINERARY

Thessaloniki (4 nights), Ioannina (2 nights), Corfu (3 nights), Gjirokastra (2 nights), Korca (2 nights), Berat (2 nights), Tirana (2 nights)

## INCLUSIONS

**17** nights’ accommodation in centrally located 4 and 5-star hotels. All breakfasts, 4 lunches and 8 dinners. Services of an expert tour leader and tour manager throughout. All ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.

## DETAILED ITINERARY



### Start & Finish

The tour starts at 3.00pm on Thursday 2 April, at Electra Palace Hotel, Thessaloniki, Greece.

The tour ends after breakfast on Sunday 19 April, with an individual transfer to Tirana Airport.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D.

### Thursday 2 April

#### Arrive Thessaloniki

The tour commences with a transfer from the airport to our hotel in Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece. Once settled, we will embark on a leisurely walking tour of the city before enjoying a welcome dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Thessaloniki (D)

### Friday 3 April

#### Multicultural Thessaloniki

Named after Alexander the Great's sister, Thessalonike, in 315BC, Thessaloniki was once an important metropolis in the Roman period before growing in stature to become one of the wealthiest cities of the Byzantine Empire. The architectural and heritage sites still reflect its vibrant historical past, and this morning we explore its numerous monuments, beginning with a tour of Thessaloniki's glorious Acropolis, which houses the unique Heptapyrgion, a Byzantine and Ottoman-era fortress. From here, we continue down our ancient path, with a wander through the stoas and baths of the Forum Romanum, finishing with the church of St Dimitros, which is a standing testament to the city's Paleo-Christian legacy. After lunch, we visit the Archaeological Museum, which contains a large and unique collection of ancient artefacts, before enjoying an evening at leisure. Overnight Thessaloniki (B, L)

### Saturday 4 April

#### The Kingdoms of Thrace & Macedon

Departing Thessaloniki this morning, we head north to the charming hillside town of Kavala, whose various names- Neapolis in antiquity and Christoupolis in the Early Middle Ages in honour of the Apostle Paul who visited on his first journey to Europe- are a testament to its rich history. Strategically situated along the Via Egnatia, the city flourished and played an important role in the Ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman eras. As we journey through Macedonia, we visit the town of Amphipolis and enter the world of the famous Athenian general, Thucydides. Once the main power base of the Athenians in Thrace,

## TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

### Spellbinding Meteora

Marvel at the breathtaking, spiritual "columns in the sky" – the scenic monastery complex of Meteora, nestled among the mountains of Thessaly.

### Kings and Saints

Glimpse the wonders of Alexander the Great's Kingdom of Macedon in ancient Aigai and walk in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul in Thessaloniki.

### The Grandeur of Corfu

Lose yourself in the labyrinthine alleyways Corfu's Old Town, and explore its impressive Venetian forts, Byzantine churches and elegant Palaces.

### Breathtaking Butrint

Visit Butrint, one of Albania's most stunning ancient cities and best-kept secrets, perched atop a forested peninsula along the famed Via Egnatia, and featuring remarkably preserved archaeological sites.

### Medieval Splendour of Korca

Immerse yourself in the Medieval architecture and beauty that is Korca, often called 'Albania's Little Paris' due to its tree-lined boulevards, cobblestoned alleys, majestic cathedrals and tapestry of culture.

**Dion, Greece**



Amphipolis was the site of the ‘Battle of Amphipolis’ between the Spartans and Athenians during the famous Peloponnesian Wars in 422 BC. After time for lunch, we admire one of the most important archaeological sites in all of Greece – Philippi – known as a “Rome in miniature”, blending Macedonian, Roman and Early Christian history. We return to Thessaloniki where the evening is at leisure. Overnight Thessaloniki (B)

**Sunday 5 April**

**Mount Olympus & Dion**

Looming above the border between Thessaly and Macedonia, Mount Olympus is not only a soaring, majestic summit- it is grounded in the great myths and legends of Ancient Greece as the home of the Gods (and from where all thunderbolts are launched). This morning is a pilgrimage to the Gods, as we enjoy a walk through the untamed natural beauty of Enipeas Gorge, a ravine full of waterfalls, deep natural pools and picturesque wooden bridges. Following our stroll, we explore the archaeological site of Dion at the foot of Mount Olympus. Taking its name from the preserved Macedonian sanctuary dedicated to Zeus (“Dios” meaning “of Zeus”), this was a holy site and is still punctuated with ancient statues and the traces of religious complexes. Legend also claims this is the site where Orpheus died and was buried. We return to our hotel where the evening is at leisure. Overnight Thessaloniki (B)

**Royal Larnax of King Philip II  
Vergina, Greece**



**Monday 6 April**

**Birthplace of Alexander the Great**

Along the Via Egnatia is Pella, founded at the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E., becoming the capital of the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon, and famous for being the birthplace of Phillip II of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great. The remains of ancient Pella, which was a rich and flourishing city before being sacked by the Romans in 168 BC, can still be admired and will be our first stop this morning. Before Pella’s rise in stature, the original capital city of Macedon was Aigai, now known as Vergina. Aigai has witnessed the rise and fall of Kings - with the gentle slopes of Aigai’s theatre being the scene of the violent assassination of Phillip II, and where his son Alexander the Great was proclaimed king in 336 BC. We will have time to admire the royal tombs belonging to Alexander the Great’s parents – Eurydice and Phillip, with the stunning golden artefacts offering an insight into the lavish funeral customs of the ancient world. We continue on to the atmospheric city of Ioannina where dinner will be in a local restaurant. Overnight Ioannina (B, D)

**Tuesday 7 April**

**Pilgrimage to the Oracle of Dodoni**

Situated on the shores of Lake Pamvotida, Ioannina - the capital of Epirus - is framed by an impressive mountain range and famed for its rich tapestry of Christian, Islamic

**Dodoni Oracle, Greece**



and Jewish influences. Today we take a step back in time with a visit to Ioannina's archaeological museum, touring its halls and central corridor, where the history of the civilisations of Epirus unfold. This will be followed by a traditional lunch in picturesque Metsovo. The fame of the Dodoni Oracle, our next stop, stretches right back through the ages, and onto the pages of ancient poets: "And there upon its border is built a city, Dodona; and Zeus loved it and appointed it to be his oracle...from them men of earth carry away all kinds of prophecy, and comes bringing gifts with good omens." While its powers of prophecy may have faded, we will nevertheless enjoy walking in the footsteps of the ancients, who once travelled great distances to consult the priests and priestesses in the sacred oak grove at the Dodoni Oracle - the oldest in all of Greece. We return to our hotel where the evening is at leisure. Overnight Ioannina (B, L)

**Wednesday 8 April**  
**Cosmopolitan Corfu**

Departing Ioannina this morning we make our way to Igoumenitsa, where we board the ferry to the cosmopolitan island of Corfu, surrounded by crystal-clear sea and teeming with natural beauty. Upon our arrival, we have time to wander through the labyrinth-like alleyways of the Old Town, its landscape dominated by the Venetian Fortress and smaller forts which defended the island from Ottoman sieges throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. The afternoon is devoted to marvelling at the city's Byzantine and Venetian architecture, its towers, churches and neoclassical buildings forging the many cultural influences that make Corfu's Old Town a World Heritage Site. This evening we enjoy dinner together in a local restaurant. Overnight Corfu (B, D)

**Thursday 9 April**  
**Ancient Corfu**

We begin our first day on Corfu with a visit to the archaeological museum, which houses an impressive collection featuring Bronze statues from the Archaic to the Roman era. Here we will also view Funeral offerings from the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic eras, and most famous- the Gorgon-Medusa pediment from the great temple of Artemis, the earliest example of Greek sculpture carved entirely in stone. Afterwards, we pay a visit to the Neo-Classical "Mon Repos" Palace, originally a 17th century summer residence for the British Lord High Commissioner of the United States of the Ionian Islands, with its impressive collection of antiquities. There will be time to enjoy the Palace, which features a stunning garden, built upon the ruins of the ancient city of Palaeiopolis, adding a layer of antiquity to its historical importance. The rest of the afternoon and evening is at leisure to enjoy the island. Overnight Corfu (B)



**Corfu Palace, Greece**

**Limni Beach  
Corfu, Greece**



**Butrint, Albania**



**Friday 10 April  
Achilleion by Night**

Today is devoted to independent enjoyment and further exploration of the island, with free time to enjoy the beaches, shop or simply relax at the hotel. In the afternoon, we visit the Achilleion palace for a tour by twilight. Built as a refuge for Empress Elisabeth (Sisi) of Austria in 1890, the palace's architecture is a rendering of grandeur and opulence, with the neoclassical design evoking the mythical palace of Phaeacia and the hero Achilles, for whom the palace is named, and who features strongly in the palace's carvings and mosaics. Situated on top of a peak, with scenic views over the surrounding green hills looking beyond to the Ionian sea, a visit to this unique property in the soft evening light makes for an unforgettable experience. Overnight Corfu (B, D)

**Saturday 11 April  
Cultural Landscape of Butrint**

Departing Corfu this morning for the Albanian leg of our tour, we catch the ferry across to the charming coastal town of Sarande. There will be time to soak up the sublime atmosphere and enjoy an independent lunch at the beautiful beaches of Ksamil, known as the Maldives of Albania. In the early afternoon, we visit the exceptional UNESCO World Heritage Listed Butrint, one of the most beautiful archaeological sites in Albania. According to legend, Butrint, or Buthrotum as it was known in ancient times, was founded by Aeneas and the survivors of Troy, with Virgil describing it as Troy in miniature. Situated on a small peninsula connecting the cobalt blue Straits of Corfu and Lake Butrint, the site is a spectacular blend of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman elements drawn from the rise and fall of the empires which dominated the ages, from antiquity to the medieval period. Here, we will tour the sprawling archaeological delights of the site - its extraordinary standing ruins and well-preserved historic buildings. We continue to the hillside town of Gjirokastra this afternoon, where we will enjoy dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Gjirokastra (B, D)

**Sunday 12 April  
The Silver City**

With its slate-roofed houses, limestone and shale paved streets, and the castle carved from rock hewn from the surrounding mountains, the magical hillside town of Gjirokastra is known as the Silver City, and has its roots in the 12th century. This morning we explore the impressive Gjirokastra castle, perched atop the highest mountain looming above the silver-toned city, its lofty stone arches and tombs offering breathtaking views over the Old Bazaar and the Ottoman houses on the hillside. After our visit we continue to the archaeological park of Antigonea, one of the largest ancient Illyrian cities in Albania, named after



Permet, Albania



Voskopoja, Albania

Antigonea, the Queen of Pyrrhus of Epirus in the 3rd century BC – from whom we have the term “Pyrrhic victory” after the loss of his army in defeating the Romans during the Pyrrhic War. Scattered among oak trees and bushes, and set against the stunning backdrop of the mountains, we will trace the remains of houses and workshops, the Acropolis, and the Agora. We return to Gjirokastra where the evening is at leisure. Overnight Gjirokastra (B)

### **Monday 13 April** **Bronze Age Albania**

Today we journey down of the most spectacular roads of Albania, following the crystal clear waters of the Vjosa River. Situated in a valley beside this pristine river is Permet, formerly a 15th century Ottoman town, and known as the ‘City of Roses’. Here, we will stop to enjoy some traditional local produce, part of the “Slow Food Movement” and farm-to-table eating for which the region is renowned. Continuing through the river valleys and forested mountain ranges, we will explore the 13th-century Kamenica Tumulus, a Bronze Age archaeological site featuring 200 circular Tumuli, or burial grounds, dating back to the Bronze Age and earlier. In the afternoon, we arrive in Korca, a medieval city perched on a plateau framed by soaring mountains. After checking in to our hotel, we will enjoy dinner together in a local restaurant. Overnight Korca (B, D)

### **Tuesday 14 April** **Medieval Splendour**

With its idyllic tree-lined boulevards, cobblestoned alleys, imposing churches and cathedrals, and pretty European villas, Korca is steeped in culture, known as ‘Albania’s Little Paris’ as well as ‘The City of Serenades’ after the tradition of love ballads men used to belt out from the balconies and courtyards within. Our first stop today is the National Museum of Medieval Art, a museum of immeasurable historical significance, which hosts a stunning display of Byzantine and Orthodox wooden and metal iconography. We then explore the charming village of Voskopoja which dates back to at least the 14th century. Voskopoja was once one of the largest cities outside Constantinople, and the most important trading, cultural and religious centre in the Balkans throughout the 16th and 18th centuries, boasting twenty-six Orthodox churches with richly decorated with Byzantine frescoes, as well as the only printing house in the Balkans. Here we will have a chance to admire the numerous domed and elaborately decorated medieval churches and basilicas before enjoying a traditional lunch. On our return to Korca the evening is at leisure. Overnight Korca (B, L)

### **Wednesday 15 April** **‘A City of a Thousand Windows’**

Departing Korca this morning, we follow the Shkumbin River to visit the ancient stone tombs of Selca, built by the Illyrians, whose territory spanned modern-day Albania,

## Berat, Albania



Montenegro, parts of Croatia and Bosnia. Resting on the right bank of the river, 1040 metres above sea level, these tombs house the remnants of the city of Pelion, along with its accompanying Necropolis. The Iron Age city flourished under the Illyrian tribe of Enchele and was later occupied in the Roman period, being strategically situated on the Via Egnatia. Continuing to the elegant city of Berat in the afternoon we explore this Illyrian settlement turned Byzantine frontier town, known as the 'City of a Thousand Windows'. In this charming UNESCO-listed town, we explore the historic highlights, such as the citadel, the 13th century castle, and its traditional stone and alabaster houses. We will also admire the ecclesiastical art in the Onufri National Iconographic Museum, which safeguards a splendid collection of religious icons and artefacts. In the evening we enjoy dinner in a traditional restaurant. Overnight Berat (B, D)

### Thursday 16 April Layers of History

We continue our exploration of the Illyrian and Roman world with a visit to the ancient city of Bylis, the 'City of Mosaics' founded by the Illyrian tribe of the Bylliones, ruled by the Macedonians and then conquered and developed by the Romans. If the stones of this city could talk, we would hear stories of conflict, victory, prosperity and devastation, and this morning, we explore the city and wander through its impressive Amphitheatre before continuing to the ancient city of Apollonia. Also situated on the Via Egnatia, Apollonia was one of the most important cities in Roman times, renowned for its school of oratory. It was so esteemed that Julius Caesar sent his nephew - Octavian - the future Emperor Augustus, here for his studies - in fact he was in Apollonia when news reached him of Caesar's assassination, heralding his destiny. This afternoon, we will tour the ruins and extensive collection of artefacts now displayed in the Archaeological Museum, housed in a beautiful Medieval Monastery, before returning to our hotel in Berat, where the evening is at leisure. Overnight Berat (B)

### Friday 17 April 'The Admirable City'

This morning we visit Durrës, founded in 627 BC by Greeks from Corfu and Corinth - one of the oldest towns in Albania. One of the gateways between East and West, at the crossroad between Greeks, Illyrians, Romans, Byzantines, Slavs, Normans, Venetians, Albanians, Turks and Europeans, it is considered to be the most ancient and historic centre of Albania, and known to Greek and Roman authors as 'the Admirable City', for its temples, statues and other impressive monuments. We will have time to explore parts of the city, such as its majestic temples, statues, and Amphitheatre, after which we continue on to Tirana, Albania's capital city. Nestled in the heart of the Balkans, Tirana uniquely blends Ottoman and communist era relics and combines its rich



## Apollonia, Albania

## HOTELS

Hotels have been selected principally for their central location. All hotels are excellent four-star standard.

### **Thessaloniki, Electra Palace**

(4 nights)

[electrahotels.gr](http://electrahotels.gr)

### **Ioannina, The Lake Hotel**

(2 nights)

[thelakehotel.gr](http://thelakehotel.gr)

### **Corfu, Dirani Corfu Palace**

(3 nights)

[divanicorfulpalace.com](http://divanicorfulpalace.com)

### **Gjirokaster, Hotel Argjiro**

(2 nights)

[hotel-argjiro.al](http://hotel-argjiro.al)

### **Korca, Hani Pazarit Boutique Hotel**

(2 nights)

[hanipazarit.com](http://hanipazarit.com)

### **Berat, Hotel Onufri**

(2 nights)

[hotelonufri.com](http://hotelonufri.com)

### **Tirana, Hotel Plaza**

(2 nights)

[plazatirana.com](http://plazatirana.com)

## WEATHER

April is Spring in Albania and northern Greece, therefore a lovely time to visit, with warm but not-too-hot weather. On the coast temperatures will be a comfortable 18 – 28°C during the day and in the mountains the temperatures are usually a few degrees cooler.

## FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

### **Grade Three**

This tour is among our most physically demanding, with multiple two night stopovers. You will need to be able to comfortably participate in up to five to seven hours of physical activity per day. See our website for full details: [academytravel.com](http://academytravel.com)



history with a vibrant contemporary culture. Here, we enjoy a walking tour of the city, admiring the iconic Et'hem Bey Mosque and hearing epic tales of Ottoman sieges at Kruje Castle. The rest of the evening is at leisure. Overnight Tirana (B)

### **Saturday 18 April**

#### **Remnants of Resistance**

Built around 1190, the elliptical Castle of Kruja, perched on a hill above the city, remains one of the most significant monuments in northern Albania and a symbol of its national identity and tumultuous history. Serving as the headquarters of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, Albania's national hero, it was instrumental in the defence against Ottoman occupation, and we begin our day with a visit to this historic stronghold. We then head down into the city to enjoy Kruja's Old Bazaar, a lively place which dates back to the 11th century, and is full of beautiful souvenirs, carpets woven in traditional geometric designs, and handmade jewellery. Following lunch in historic Kruja we return to the more recent relics of war and visit the Bunk'Art 2, a unique shelter built in the city centre in the 1980s to shelter elite police and interior ministry staff in the event of a nuclear attack, which remains as a testament to Albania's communist history. This evening, we will enjoy a farewell dinner together at a local restaurant. Overnight Tirana (B, L, D)

### **Sunday 19 April**

#### **Departure**

Our tour ends after breakfast, please refer to your individual booking for departure information. (B)



## ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Lucy Yeates** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

[lucy@academytravel.com.au](mailto:lucy@academytravel.com.au)