

Balkan Glacial lakes & Mountains tour



Highlights

Greece

- ✓ Visit the Corfu old town, famous for its Venetian style and narrow alleys
- ✓ Trek across Greek alpine landscapes and reach the Drakolimni glacial lake at 2000m.
- ✓ Cross Vikos Gorge, one of the deepest in the world
- ✓ Visit iconic Meteora, a geological phenomenon
- ✓ Explore one of the most important bird breeding areas in Europe, Kerkini lake, by boat, accompanied by a specialist

Bulgaria

- ✓ Wine tasting in Melnik
- ✓ Impressive alpine panoramas in the Pirin Mountains
- ✓ Relax in the natural thermal springs and baths high in the mountains
- ✓ Loop hike the 7 Rila lakes
- ✓ Visit the capital city of Bulgaria, Sofia

Romania

- ✓ Meet the city of Bucharest, a Balkan gem
- ✓ Drive on the Transfagarasan Highway known as "the Road to the Clouds"
- ✓ Explore the Southern Carpathians and the impressive Fagaras mountains
- ✓ Climb the highest peak of Romania, Moldoveanu Peak
- ✓ Walk around the medieval Brasov, with gothic, baroque and renaissance architecture



Balkan Glacial lakes and Mountains tour is a collaboration between three local agents from the chosen countries. We take you straight in the heart of four national parks in the Balkan peninsula and the highest peak of the Transylvanian Alps. This amazing two-week adventure is focused on the geological and natural wealth that Greece, Bulgaria and Romania can offer. We cross high mountains over 2000m and deep gorges, we visit glacial lakes, sitting high up on impressive alpine landscapes, we bathe in natural hot springs and breathe in the historical aura of important European centers.

Full Itinerary

While we aim to follow the itinerary as it's printed below, a degree of flexibility is necessary. This is in order to accommodate weather interference and unexpected opportunities!

Day 1: Arrival Day

Meet at our accommodation in Corfu Town. You can enjoy a free day in the old Venetian town which is characterized as an UNESCO Heritage. After dinner we can enjoy an optional night walk in the old town!

Day 2: Transfer to Zagoria – Walk from Papigko bridge to Kleidonias bridge along the Voidomatis river and its crystal transparent waters

After breakfast we ride the ferry across to mainland Greece where our mini-bus awaits to transfer us to the mountainous region of Zagoria. Once there, we stop at Papigko bridge and we start to follow on foot the path that goes along the banks of the Voidomatis river. We enjoy a very relaxing and walk through the plane forest that spreads in the area and creates a magical atmosphere. The land which we cross today has had human presence for the past 20,000 years. Evidence of human presence can be found in several caves from before the last ice age and can also be found in abandoned churches of the mid-17th century and stone bridges of the 19th century. Transfer to Mikro Papigko by mini-bus– check in the guesthouse(s)

Length: 6-9 km (3.5 - 5.5 miles)	Total Ascent: 120 - 150m	Min. Elevation: 400m
Approx. Walking Time: 2.5 - 3.5 hours	Total Descent: 130 - 500 m	Max. Elevation: 450 - 770m



Day 3: Walk from Mikro Papigko up to the famous Drakolimni glacial lake

Today we will climb high up in Tymfi mountain. We will walk through the alpine grasslands all the way up to the most famous glacial lake of Greece – Drakolimni - the Dragon Lake. From the altitude of 2050m we will start descending back to Mikro Papigko village discovering beautiful vistas.

Length: 17.5 km (10.8 miles)	Total Ascent: 1353 m	Min. Elevation: 973 m
Approx. Walking Time: 6 – 6.5 hours	Total Descent: 1486 m	Max. Elevation: 2050 m

Day 4: Walk from Monodendri to Vikos village via Vikos gorge

The crossing of Vikos gorge is one of the most esteemed hikes in Greece. It is an unspoiled sanctuary with a great diversity of flora and fauna. In the heart of the gorge is the source of the Voidomatis which is the cleanest river in Europe. This is a trek on the floor of the gorge, crossing dry riverbeds, passing next to bear caves engulfed by the dense foliage. Vikos gorge has been a central feature of life in the region for the past 40,000 years and stays untouched to this very day.

Length: 13 km (8 miles)	Total Ascent: 520 m	Min. Elevation: 485 m
Approx. Walking Time: 5.5–6 hours	Total Descent: 800 m	Max. Elevation: 1080 m

Day 5: Drive to Meteora and visit one of the iconic monasteries hanging on the top of the vertical rock formations. Next stop, Kerkini Lake at the Greek / Bulgarian borders

After breakfast, it will be time to leave behind the beautiful Zagoria and change scenery. This is a driving day with our private mini bus from north-west Greece to the northern borders with Bulgaria. We will make an important stop at the impressive Meteora, visiting one of the famous monasteries and having a short walk to stretch our legs. We will, then, head north towards Kerkini Lake where we arrive in the evening.



Day 6: Morning activity in Lake Kerkini and then drive to Melnik in Bulgaria

A morning full of activities awaits us in Kerkini Lake. We will drive at the northern harbor of the lake where a boat will await to pick us up and take us on a journey through the lake. With us, a specialist will offer his knowledge about the significant bird life that the lake attracts, the natural environment that surrounds us and he will reveal the lake's various secrets based on our interests. After our boat ride, we will enjoy a short walk along the lake's banks, gaining another perspective of this beautiful site. We will enjoy our lunch in one of the villages and then, we will start driving to Melnik in the mountains which separate Greece and Bulgaria. Once we reach the Rozhen monastery we will enjoy a short walk across the fairyland sandstone formations all the way to Melnik where we can visit Kordopulova house museum where we will have the chance to enjoy wine tasting locally produced. Check in at our hotel.

Length: 6.5 km (3.5miles)	Total Ascent: 30 m	Min. Elevation: 450 m
Approx. Walking Time: 1.5 h	Total Descent: 170 m	Max. Elevation: 590 m

Day 7: Trek the Banderitsa cirque and bathe at the hot thermal springs of Banya village

After breakfast, we drive to the beginning of our walk at Vihren hut situated in the foothills of the highest peak of the Pirin mountains - Vihren, 2914 m. the third highest of the Balkans and its impressive 400 m tall marble North Wall. Banderitsa cirque is a loop walk visiting a group of 16 glacial lakes, around a picturesque valley which hosts some of the oldest Bosnian and Macedonian pine trees in the mountain with approx. age of over 1300 years. On the way to our accommodation, as a final touch, we will relax at Banya village to enjoy its numerous hot thermal springs and baths.

Length: 4 – 7 km (2.5 – 4.5 miles)	Total Ascent: 450–500 m	Min. Elevation: 1950 m
Approx. Walking Time: 4.5 – 5.5 hours	Total Descent: 500 m	Max. Elevation: 2230 m



Day 8: Climbing Polezhan, at 2851m of the UNESCO's Pirin National Park.

The view from the top is simply stunning – one can see over 13 glacial lakes, including Popovo, the second largest and deepest mountain lake in Bulgaria. In order to get there, we will start our day with a chairlift ascent to Bezbog hut at 2240m where our trek starts towards one of the most impressive alpine panoramas in Bulgaria. After our descent from the national park's mountains, we will head to Sapareva Banya spa resort, famous for the hottest thermal springs in Europe, where our nights' accommodation is located.

Length: 7 km (4.5 miles)	Total Ascent: 650 m	Min. Elevation: 2240 m
Approx. Walking Time: 5 – 5.5 hours	Total Descent: 650 m	Max. Elevation: 2851 m

Day 9: Explore Rila National Park via the picturesque Seven Rila Lakes cirque

Rila National Park is one of the largest in Europe, famous for its rich biodiversity and over 170 lakes with glacial origin. The day will start with a chairlift ascent to the beginning of our loop walk in the 7 Rila Lakes area. As we descent on the 'Dry Ridge', we will enter Skakavitsa Nature reserve, declared as a protected area to preserve the ancient woods. Once there, keep an eye for a 75m high waterfall, the tallest of these mountains. At the end of our trek, our mini bus will transfer us to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. An evening stroll through the historic city before dinner is the best way to finish a magical day.

Length: 11 km (7 miles)	Total Ascent: 600m	Min. Elevation: 1500m
Approx. Walking Time: 5 hours	Total Descent: 1200 m	Max. Elevation: 2650 m

Day 10: Transfer from Sofia to Bucharest with cultural stops on the way

Today we are heading to Romania. On the way we will visit some very interesting sites. At Karlukovo karst region we will enter Prohodna cave known as "The God's Eyes" cave. The next activity is a sightseeing stroll at Veliko Tarnovo city where we can have lunch. If there is still a desire for more exploration, UNESCO's Ivanovo monastery can offer us a short visit opportunity before we reach Bucharest where we will spend the night.



Day 11: Bucharest City tour and transfer to Balea lake in Fagaras mountains

This morning we wake up in "Little Paris". Bucharest is known for its wide, tree-lined boulevards and glorious Belle Époque buildings. We will venture on few hours' city tour in Romania's largest city and capital, where we include the Palace of the Parliament, the heaviest building in the world! We then drive to the emblematic Balea Lake which located in the heart of Fagaras Mountains. To get there we will follow the Transfagarasan Highway known as 'the Road to the Sky', 'the Road to the Clouds' or 'A spectacular Monument to Earth-Moving Megalomania!'

Day 12: Trek from Balea Lake Chalet to Podragu Chalet on the Fagaras Mountains

This day includes medium to hard trekking on the main ridge of Fagaras mountains. Walking high up on the Southern Carpathian Mountains with magnificent views to Capra and Podragu Glacial Lakes, we continuously gain altitude reaching up to 2136m and Podragu Chalet, a mountain hut to accommodate us in the heart of the Transylvanian Alps.

*Consult the 'Preparing for the Trip' section for further information about Day 12 & 13

Length: 15 - 18 km (9.5 – 11.3 miles)	Total Ascent: 1100 m	Min. Elevation: 2044 m
Approx. Walking Time: 5 – 6 hours	Total Descent: 1000 m	Max. Elevation: 2136 m

Day 13: Podragu Chalet - Moldoveanu Peak and return to mountain hut

This is the day we climb the highest peak of Romania! Moldoveanu Peak (2545m) is towering the relatively isolated and inaccessible 70-kilometre-long Fagaras Mountain range and today's goal is to stand on its top. Bonus of the day: reaching the Vistea Mare Peak, the third highest peak of Romania. Descend back to the mountain hut for a last sleep on the high mountains.

Length: 16 - 18 km (10 – 11.3 miles)	Total Ascent: 500 m	Min. Elevation: 2136 m
Approx. Walking Time: 6 – 7 hours	Total Descent: 500 m	Max. Elevation: 2545 m



Day 14: We walk down to Victoria town and then drive to Brasov

Today we go down to Victoria town following the trail on the beautiful Podragu glacial valley. We drive to Brasov where tonight, fringed by the peaks of the Southern Carpathian Mountains, we enjoy a City tour by night in the middle of Gothic, baroque and renaissance architecture. Brasov and its medieval ambiance, is the perfect setting for our farewell dinner.

Length: 15 - 18 km (9.5 – 11.3 miles)	Total Ascent: negligible	Min. Elevation: 600 m
Approx. Walking Time: 5 – 6 hours	Total Descent: 1400 m	Max. Elevation: 2136 m

Day 15: Departure Day

Our two weeks adventure is ending today. After breakfast a mini bus will transfer us to the Otopeni airport in Bucharest. The time to start will be determined by the departures of the individuals. It is of high importance to communicate us your departure details on the Booking form.

Important Information

Please, do not book your flight arrangements until you have received a Guarantee to Go email, which will be delivered no later than 60 days prior to the start of the tour.

Joining the Tour

The joining place is at Konstantinoupolis Hotel in Corfu town. Please inform us via email of the details of your arrival in Greece (airline, flight number, time of arrival).

Best entry/exit airports

Corfu airport is the best airport of arrival. It is located only 10 minutes by car from the center which is accessible by taxi and regular bus rides.

Departure airport is the Otopeni airport in Bucharest. Please inform us via email of the details of your departure from Bucharest (airline, flight number, time of departure).



Accommodation

Greece

- ✓ 1 night at a 3* hotel in Corfu town
- ✓ 3 nights in one or more traditional stone guesthouses at Mikro Papigo village
- ✓ 1 night at a hotel in Chrysochorafa village at Kerkini lake next to Greek-Bulgarian borders

The rooms at the traditional guesthouse(s) are en-suite rooms, consisting of one bedroom and one toilet/shower facility per room. They have been completely renovated according to the famous local architecture. We might need to use more than one guesthouse in the region.

The Hotel in Kerkini Lake has en-suite rooms, consisting of one bedroom and one toilet/shower facility per room. We might need to use more than one hotel in the region.

Bulgaria

- ✓ 1 night in Melnik
- ✓ 1 night in Bansko at a 4* hotel Green Life Resort - accommodation in double / twin rooms on HB basis
- ✓ 1 night at Villas Park, Sapareva Banya
- ✓ 1 night at 3* hotel Sofia Place in the capital city of Bulgaria

Romania

- ✓ 1 night in Bucharest at a 4* hotel
- ✓ 1 night at Balea Lake Chalet at a 3* hotel
- ✓ 2 nights at Podragu Mountain hut - Accommodation at chalet in a room with 12-20 beds: toilets on the hall, cold water, no showers available. It is a basic mountain hut.
- ✓ 1 night at a 3* hotel in Brasov

Single Supplement

This holiday is priced on a 2-person-sharing basis. If you are travelling by yourself and do not request single room occupancy, we will pair you up with another single traveler of the same sex in the room. Depending on availability, you can ask and book a Single Supplement at the extra price of £180. Get in touch for more details.



Meals

- ✓ 14 **Breakfasts** are included
- ✓ **Lunches** will be picnics, or tavern stops depending on the route each day and the weather. Lunches are not included except **3 picnic lunches in Romania which are included.**
- ✓ Three locally produced **dinners** are included, one for each country.
- ✓ All the rest of the **evening meals** will be at local taverns and mountain huts. Those dinners are not included

Transfers

- ✓ All transfers, as mentioned in the itinerary, are included.
- ✓ Please get in touch with us for any questions you might have regarding your arrival/departure details and the Joining place.

*** Although it's highly unlikely, there is always a chance of bad weather creating delays on ferry crossings. In the unfortunate event that there are no ferries on the arrival/departure day, any extra cost regarding transfer and/or accommodation is the responsibility of the customer as it is something beyond our control.

Connect with the rest of the group prior to departure

If you are interested in meeting/coordinate with others who have booked on your upcoming trip, why not request to participate in a WhatsApp group? If you would like to do this, please tell us on the Booking Form we will send you to fill in!

Budgeting for the Trip

Food

Lunch £: 8.00 - 12.00

Dinner £: 12.00 - 16.00

Drink

Bottle of Beer: £ 3.50

Glass of Wine: £ 2.00

Water: £ 0.90

*Please note that the above prices are general indications.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Cash can be drawn from ATMs from all types of cards in most areas in Greece, including the islands. Some remote areas and villages might not have an ATM facility, so it's always good to move around with some cash on you.

Credit Card Acceptance: Major credit cards are widely accepted by stores in Greece. Smaller cafes and shops may not accept credit cards so ensure you carry enough cash to cover small purchases.

Local Currency: Euro

Where to Exchange: We recommend that you change any currency into Euros prior to arrival. Bureau de Change are generally only found in major cities and large airports



Bulgaria specifically

ATM Availability: Cash can be drawn from ATMs from all types of cards in most areas in Bulgaria. Expect limited change facilities on trek and in small villages.

Credit Card Acceptance: Major credit cards are widely accepted by stores and in hotels and restaurants in Bulgaria. Smaller cafes and shops may not accept credit cards so ensure you carry enough cash to cover small purchases.

Local Currency: Lev (BGN)

Where to Exchange: We recommend that you change any currency into Lev (BGN) prior to arrival. Bureau de Change is generally only found in major cities and large airports.

Visa Information

Visas are not required for European, UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking the tour that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday.

Dietary Requirements

In order to be able to accommodate your needs or preferences in the best possible way, we ask you to inform us about your dietary requirements.

On booking, you will receive a quick and simple form where you can add the necessary information.

Medical Condition

In order to be able to take care of you in the best possible way, we ask you to inform us about any medical condition you may have. This information will be kept under the strictest confidentiality.

On booking, you will receive a quick and simple form where you can add the necessary information.

Preparing for the Trip

Greece

Total Trekking Length up to: 45 km

Total Ascent: approx. 2050 m

Total Descent: approx. 2800 m

Min. Elevation: 400 m

Max. Elevation: 2050 m

Total Approximate Walking Time: 16 h



Bulgaria

Total Trekking Length up to: 35 km
Total Ascent: approx. 2000 m
Total Descent: approx. 2500
Min. Elevation: 420 m
Max. Elevation: 2851m
Total Approximate Walking Time: 20 h

Romania

Total Trekking Length up to: approx. 50 km.
Total Ascent: approx. 1600 m
Total Descent: approx. 2900 m
Min. Elevation: 800 m
Max. Elevation: 2544 m
Total Approximate Walking Time: 18 h

Climate:

Greece has predominantly hot, dry summers. Temperatures reach into the mid-thirties from June to August. May, September and October can be less predictable and may have some rain and cooler evenings. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable. Pindos mountain range, where Zagoria are located, are the dominant mountain range of the area and the villages that we will visit are located at high elevation. This means that we need to be prepared for warm days and chilly nights, long sunny spells and passing rain.

In Romania, up into the mountains the weather is changeable, so we might have 4 seasons in one day of hike. The hike is taking place up to 2000 m, the accommodation the same, so we need to be prepared for chilly nights. During the day, the temperature could be between 5-20 degrees Celsius.

Clothing: Weather is changeable in the mountains or at the coast and it can become cool, especially at night, so bring a warmer jacket/fleece. A water and windproof coat is essential at all times in case of the odd shower or quickly changing mountain weather. Also take a warm hat. Whilst walking you may prefer to wear shorts but carry lightweight long trousers for narrow footpaths where thorny vegetation may scratch bare legs. Also, carry a long-sleeved shirt for protection against the sun, and a sunhat. Don't forget your swimming costume.

You have to prepare a backpack for day 12 and day 13, while we are staying at Podragu Chalet (no luggage transfer possible from Balea Lake to Podragu mountain hut – you leave the main luggage in the bus on day 11, on the arrival day at Balea Lake).

A sleeping bag is compulsory for Podragu Mountain hut (day 12 and 13).

Equipment: Take a towel for swimming, a water bottle, sunglasses, torch and sun cream. You may find trekking poles useful for certain sections of the trek. Take binoculars if you have an interest in bird watching. You will need a sleeping liner or a lightweight sleeping bag for the one night at the mountain hut and your own towel for washing/showering.

Footwear: Well broken-in walking boots are essential for the tour but additionally bring comfortable shoes for relaxing in and for the evenings. Once in Romania, it is compulsory to wear waterproof hiking boots and clothes, warm clothes, hat, gloves, sunglasses.

Luggage: On tour bring one main piece of luggage (preferably backpack) and a daypack.



General Information

Time Difference to GMT: +2 hours

Electric Supply & Plugs: 2 Pin Round

Greece travel FAQs

Is tipping customary?

Tipping is considered optional in Greece. Tipping extra for good service is a personal choice; please act according to the level of satisfaction for the food or service received.

What is the internet access like?

Internet access is good in Greece and internet cafes are easily found in most cities and major towns. Wi-Fi connection is available in most places.

Can I use my mobile/cell phone while on tour?

Mobile phone coverage is generally very good on mainland Greece, but less so on some of Greece's more remote islands or mountains. Ensure global roaming is activated before you arrive and contact with your provider to check possible charges.

What are the toilets like?

Western-style, flushable toilets are the standard in Greece. Expect to pay a small fee when using public toilets in some parts of Greece. Please make sure that you use the bins provided to deposit any toilet paper (it should not be flushed).

Can I drink the tap water on tour?

Drinking water from taps in Greece is considered safe, unless otherwise marked (tap water may not be of drinkable quality on some of Greece's small and remote islands or places).

Bulgaria travel FAQs

Is tipping customary?

Tipping at meals and in hotels is normal practice. It is customary to give your guide and/or driver a tip if you have received good service. The amount is entirely at your discretion, although an amount of £15 for your guide and £5 for your driver per person is reasonable.

What is the internet access like?

Internet access is very good in Bulgaria and internet cafes are easily found in most cities and major towns. Free Wi-Fi connection is available in most places.

Can I use my mobile/cell phone while on tour?

Mobile phone coverage is generally very good in Bulgaria, evening the mountains, except in but less so on some of Greece's more remote islands or mountains. Ensure global roaming is activated before you arrive and contact with your provider to check possible charges.



What are the toilets like?

Western-style, flushable toilets are the standard in Bulgaria. Expect to pay a small fee when using public toilets in some parts of Bulgaria.

Can I drink the tap water on tour?

Drinking water from taps and public water fountains in the mountains in Bulgaria is considered safe, unless otherwise marked.

Romania travel FAQs

Is tipping customary?

Tipping is considered optional in Romania. Tipping extra for good service is a personal choice; please act according to the level of satisfaction for the food or service received.

What is the internet access like?

Internet access is very good in Romania (Romania's internet infrastructure is highly developed and competitive) and internet cafes are easily found in most cities and major towns. Wi-Fi connection is available in most places (except at the Podragu mountain hut).

Can I use my mobile/cell phone while on tour?

Mobile phone coverage is generally very good except on the Podragu mountain hut area. Ensure global roaming is activated before you arrive and contact with your provider to check possible charges.

What are the toilets like?

Western-style, flushable toilets are the standard in Romania. Expect to pay a small fee when using public toilets in some parts of Romania.

Can I drink the tap water on tour?

Drinking water from taps in Romania is considered safe, unless otherwise marked. Up into the mountains we have springs with fresh water, also.