



MEJDI TOURS

8-Day, 7-Night Jewish Heritage Tour to Macedonia August 19-26, 2018

ITINERARY

Day 1, Sunday, August 19, 2018: Arrival

- Arrive into Skopje.
- Take a taxi to the hotel.
- Check in and get some much needed rest or explore the city center on your own.

Hotel: Holiday Inn, Skopje

Day 2, Monday, August 20, 2018: Stobi, Veles, and Bitola

- Check out of the hotel after breakfast, meet the rest of your group and your guide. Then head southeast to the ancient city of Stobi. Once the biggest Roman city in the Balkans, the archaeological site contains traces from the Paeonians, Hellenic, Roman, and early Christian periods. The remains of two synagogues, built one above the other, was found at this site with the top one dating back to 3rd-4th century CE and the older synagogue dating back to the 2nd century CE.
- Continue to the Stobi Winery for a tour with an expert wine guide. Have a wine tasting with some appetizers, including an assortment of traditional Galichnik cheese. After the tour and tasting, be treat to lunch at the winery.
- Continue on to Bitola, known as Monastir during Ottoman rule. While Jews lived in Monastir since Roman times, Sephardic Jews settled in the city in great numbers following the Inquisition and maintained their distinctive lifestyle, religious practices, and Judeo-Spanish language known as Ladino. By the beginning of the 20th century, approximately 11,000 Jews lived in Bitola/Monastir. Emigration reduced the Jewish population of the city to just over 3,000 following World War I. Before World War II, the city had six synagogues and two kosher butchers. During WWII, Bulgaria, in alliance with Nazi Germany, occupied Macedonia in 1941. On March 11, 1943, Bulgarian authorities, in cooperation with the Nazis, rounded up and deported 3,276 of Bitola/Monastir's Jews to the Treblinka death camp.
- After checking into your hotel, head out for a late day walking tour of the city center to see old churches, mosques, and subtle signs of the city's former Jewish character along the pedestrian thoroughfare of Shirok Sokak Street (a.k.a. Maršal Tito Street). Dozens of Jewish businesses used to line this street. Get a unique opportunity to visit the former home of Sarah Aroeste's grandparents. See 24 Ruzveltova (Roosevelt) Street that used to house the left-wing Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair. Find the columns from the former Kahal Portugal Synagogue. Visit a statue to the fallen Jewish

partisan heroine Estreja (Mara) Ovadija, located where the Aragon Synagogue once stood.

- Have a musical evening with traditional Bitola songs, including few famous Ladino songs over dinner.

Hotel: Hotel Epinal, Bitola [B, wine, L, D]

Day 3, Tuesday, August 21, 2018: Bitola

- Begin the day with some service work at Bitola's Jewish cemetery to help in the efforts to maintain and preserve the site. A small museum dedicated to the Jewish community of Bitola is housed at the entrance of the cemetery. See the elaborate tomb of Avram Aroesti, a relative of Sarah Aroesti who died in 1939, and other graves.
- Return to the center of Bitola for lunch and time browse through the bazaar.
- At the NI Institute and Museum Bitola, see its photo gallery with a collection of images titled Jewish Ethnic Identity Bitola. In the archaeological wing, find an exhibit from a one of Bitola's synagogue including parts of a Torah scroll dating to the 15th century other religious articles. The museum also exhibits a partial list of the city's deported Jews, and photographs of partisans, including Jewish partisan leaders Estreja Ovadija and Josef Mordo Nachmijas.
- Then visit Heraclea Lyncestis, the best-preserved city from the Ancient Macedonian Empire, renowned for its elaborate mosaics, ancient theater and Roman baths. Heraclea was founded by Philip II of Macedon in the 4th century BCE and was a strategically important town during the Hellenistic period.
- Ambassador Dan Oryan, Israel's Ambassador to Macedonia will join the group for a pre-show dinner.
- Be the VIP special guests at a marque concert with Sarah Aroeste.

Hotel: Hotel Epinal, Bitola [B, L, D]

Day 4, Wednesday, August 22, 2018: Lake Region, Galichica National Park, Sveti Naum, and Ohrid

- Check out after breakfast and take a scenic drive along the outer edge of Pelister National Park, the shoreline of Lake Prespa, and through Galichica National Park to the Sveti Naum Macedonian Orthodox Monastery along the waters of Lake Ohrid. See iconostasis from the 18th century and frescoes from the 19th century. Stroll through beautiful gardens with free roaming peacocks.
- Have lunch at Ostrovo Restaurant at the Sveti Naum complex.
- After lunch, visit the Bay of Bones' Museum on Water in the village Peshtani, at the southeast coast of Lake Ohrid. Travel back in time in a reconstructed historical settlement, from Slavic to Roman times, all the way to Prehistory, at the end of Bronze Age and the beginning of Iron Age.

- Continue up the shoreline of Lake Ohrid to the town of Ohrid. Along the way, the guide shares the Jewish history of Ohrid that dates back to 1382.
- Ohrid is known as the City of 365 Churches (one for each day of the year!). Spend the afternoon and the next morning visiting churches such as Saint Jovan Kaneo, Saint Sophia, Church of Our Lady Perivlepta, and Sveti Kliment Ohridski, as well as Tsar Samuel's Fortress, the Roman Amphitheater, the Robevci House Museum, National Workshop For Handmade Paper, and the Icons Gallery.
- Have dinner at the hotel.

Hotel: Hotel City Palace, Ohrid [B, L, D]

Day 5, Thursday, August 23, 2018: Ohrid, Bigorski Monastery, and Mavrovo

- Check out of the hotel after breakfast and continue touring Ohrid.
- Have a traditional lunch complete with Ohrid trout at Kaj Kanevche.
- Take the scenic route to the mountain sport region of Mavrovo. Pass through the ethnically mixed seaside town of Struga, drive along the Albanian border and Lake Debar, to Mavrovo National Park.
- Along the way, stop at the Monastery of Saint Jovan Bigorski to see some of the finest examples of wood-carved iconostases.
- End the day at the relaxing Hotel Bistra Mavrovo and have dinner there.
- After dinner, have the option of watching the film *The Liberation of Skopje* (Osloboduvanje na Skopje). The film takes place during 1943 and '44, when the Nazis and their Bulgarian allies occupied the Macedonian city Skopje. Zoran (David Todsovski) is an observant boy who can scrap and thief with the best of them, but he also keeps a journal and has a sensitive, artistic side. In sequences that have a mildly surreal slant and a desaturated palette, he dreams of happy reunions with his father (Nebojsa Glogovac), a soldier in Tito's partisan army, and with Renata (Marija Lapadatovic), the redheaded girl he loves and whom he watched being led, with her family and dozens of other Jews, onto a freight train. Find the trailer at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu_uZ0YG_LE.

Hotel: Hotel Bistra Mavrovo [B, L, D]

Day 6, Friday, August 24, 2018: Mavrovo, Tetovo, and Skopje

- Weather permitting, ride the ski lift up Mount Mavrovo after breakfast to take in the region's natural beauty.
- Then check out of the hotel and continue to the town of Tetovo. During the first half of 2001, Tetovo was the center of a violent conflict between Macedonia's ethnic Albanian population that is concentrated in the western part of the country and the state security forces dominated by ethnic Macedonians. The August 2001 Ohrid Peace Agreement ended the short-lived ethnic Albanian insurgency and brought about improved minority rights.

- Have lunch at Restaurant Bakal in the nearby village of Brvenica.
- Visit Tetovo's Šarena Džamija ("The Painted Mosque") and Hamam along the Pena River and the Arabati Baba Teke, originally built in 1538. The Teke is considered the finest surviving Bektashi dervish monastery in Europe.
- Return to Skopje, check into the hotel, and meet with Edmond Ademi, Minister for Diaspora Affairs, for the Government of Macedonia. Minister Ademi will discuss the minority rights issues in Macedonia that led to the 2001 conflict, what came out of the Ohrid Peace Agreement, and subsequent political achievements and current goals of the ethnic Albanian political parties.
- Spend Friday evening at the Jewish community center of Skopje. Have Shabbat dinner with members of the local community. The Jewish population of Macedonia is currently between 200 and 250 people, nearly all of whom are located in Skopje.

Hotel: Holiday Inn, Skopje [B, L, D]

Day 7, Saturday, August 25, 2018: Skopje

- Begin the tour at the 6th-century CE Byzantine (and later, Ottoman) Kale fortress overlooking the city.
- Then spend the remainder of the morning wandering through Čaršija, Skopje's Ottoman Old Town. See the Mustafa Pasha's Mosque, the Čifte Amam former Turkish bathhouse, the large Bit Pazar market for vegetable and other goods, and the 14th century Sveti Spas Church which has magnificently carved 19th century iconostasis shines.
- Have lunch at Pivnica An, a traditional Macedonian restaurant in an old Ottoman inn.
- After lunch, get a VIP tour of Skopje's new multi-million dollar Holocaust Memorial Center with the Center's CEO Goran Sadikarijo. The museum highlights Jewish life in Macedonia before World War II and the fate of the 98% of the country's Jewish community who were killed in the Holocaust.
- Then cross the Stone Bridge over the Vadar River to Pela Square. This area was the center of a recent architectural transformation of the capital, completed with several national monuments.
- Stroll down Macedonia Street to see a memorial to Mother Teresa who was born in Skopje in 1910.
- Visit the Monopol Tobacco (today Imperial Tobacco) factory that served as a transit camp in the deportation of the Jews of Bulgarian occupied-Macedonia during World War II, on their way to Treblinka extermination camp. Approximately 7,000 Jews were held there.
- Have dinner at the hotel.

Hotel: Holiday Inn, Skopje [B, L, D]

Day 8, Sunday, August 26, 2018: Departure

- Check out after breakfast.
- Take a taxi to the airport on your own.