

Thessaloniki – Istanbul

During its existence of nearly a thousand years, the Byzantine Empire, the repository of culture, science and technology of the ancient Greeks and Romans, was able to achieve harmony between the legacy and Christianity and gave birth to a brilliant civilization of rare longevity that marked the history of Europe and the Middle East. We invite you to find traces of cultural and architectural treasures of the Byzantine Empire and discover some of its magnificent past. The two most important cities of the Byzantine Empire at the borders of Eastern Europe, allow visitors to trace their history and to access their culture due to their remains. Visiting Constantinople (Istanbul) in Turkey and Thessaloniki in Greece, it is discovering an important and exceptional page of Eastern European history and returning to the milestones in the history of Christianity.

01 First day

Arrival at Makedonia Airport of Thessaloniki and transfer to the hotel.
A first walk through the city will allow you to familiarize yourself with the city and enjoy the waterfront.

02 Second day

Guided tour of the city by bus and on foot. Thessaloniki is the second important city after Constantinople in the Byzantine Empire. The visit to the White Tower and the Museum of Byzantine Culture are important steps in discovering the history of the city. But there are also Byzantine churches which are the living witnesses of the Byzantine ecclesiastical art. We will visit the White Tower, Thessaloniki's symbolic monument, a relic of the Ottoman Empire, which allows the visitor with its permanent exhibition to learn about the history of the city before finding the traces by means of a promenade. We will visit the remains of the complex palace of the Roman Emperor Galerius (III and IV century AD) covering an area of 150,000 square meters. The dimension of the complex shows the growth and importance of the city in Roman times. We will find the Triumph Arch of Galerius (305 AD), built to celebrate the victory of the Emperor Galerius over the Persians. The Rotonda, one of the oldest buildings of the city, was also part of the complex. Built in Roman times, it was a church in the Christian era and a mosque during the Ottoman era. Aristotle street and square extend into the sea and form one of the most beautiful architectural lines of the city. It focuses on business and intense leisure. The character of this axis is brought about by the French architect Ernest Hebrard, who was entrusted with the plans of the city after the devastating fire the historic center in 1917. A few steps away from the Aristotle street you walk through the colorful markets of Modianou or Kapani that will awaken all your senses. We will visit the ancient agora dated to the founding of the city (III century BC). It was the social, religious and commercial center until the fourth century of our era. Excavations have surfaced the agora, the mint, the Odeon and part of the baths. We will visit the church of Saint Dimitris, patron saint of the city (IV century), whose relics are preserved in the church. This church, originally built on the site of the martyrdom, became during the VII th century a basilica with five naves of the Hellenistic type. Visit the crypt of the church, where you will discover the remains of a early Christian churches. In the evening We will walk around the Ladadika

neighbourhood. This area next to the port, created by the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, has functioned as a place of wholesale and retail until the early eighties. After being ranked as an architectural site in the late eighties, many buildings have been restored and Ladadika has become a major leisure area of the city.

03 Third day

Our walk will begin with a visit to the old town, Ano Poli (uptown). This agglomeration, classified because of historic and architectural interest, has preserved many examples of traditional Macedonian architecture. This area covers the top of the walled city which DATES back to the birth of the city in 315 BC. The different phases of the wall construction are related to Macedonian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman history. Located at the northeastern end of the acropolis of Thessaloniki we will discover Heptapyrgion, also known as Turkish Yedi Kule, a Byzantine and Ottoman fortress converted into a prison in the 1890s.

From the walls we can enjoy a panoramic view of the city, the harbor and the Thermaic Gulf. We can complete the panoramic view of the city from the Vlatadon monastery. In its church which dates from the fourteenth century we can admire the unique wall paintings of Byzantine art. At Ano Poli we will also visit the church of Agios Nikolaos Orfanos (Saint Nicolas the Orphan), which dates from the early 14th century and is decorated with murals of the great painters of the Christian Orthodox art. Still in Ano Poli we will find the church Osios David dating back to the late fifth century. It is a monument of architectural and historical value unique because it is the precursor of the cross-shaped church with a dome. This church is also known for its interior decoration, which consist of mosaics and murals. We will visit the Museum of Byzantine Culture, elected European museum in 2005, and certainly the largest of its kind, devoted to the Byzantine history and culture. In this 3000 square meters of exhibition we will discover all the facets of Byzantine culture and art. We will visit the church of St. Sophia, the most important early Christian building in Greece. Here we can admire the remarkable mosaics made at the time of the construction of the church (the Virgin on the throne holding the Christ in her arms and the ascension of Christ).

04 Fourth day

Departure for Philippi and Kavala Philippi is a two hours' drive from Thessaloniki and 17 km from Kavala. Philippos is a city in eastern Macedonia, founded by Philip II in 356 BC and abandoned in the fourteenth century after the Ottoman conquest.

Important stop on the Via Egnatia but yet it remained a small city. However Philippi occupies a privileged place in history because of two major events: the victory of Caesar's heir under its walls in October 42 BC, and especially the visit of the apostle Paul. It is at Philippos that he preached for the first time on European soil and where he baptized Lydia. He stayed there four times. The passage from St. Paul made this site a place of Christian history. We can admire an exceptional archeological site where we will find the remains of the Via Egnatia (which linked Rome to Constantinople via Thessaloniki), the Ancient Agora, the ancient theater, and the prison of Saint Paul and the ruins of the Basilica of Paul, one of the oldest Christian places of worship. We will walk in the city of Kavala where we will spend the night.

05 Fifth day

Departure for Istanbul. Arrival in the afternoon. We will walk in the city. Discover Taksim Square and the pedestrian street Istiklal Caddesi (Independence Street), privileged places for the inhabitants of Istanbul to stroll around.

06 Sixth day

We will ride by bus to check out the places. The Turkish city recognized by its two names, Istanbul or Constantinople, has one foot in Europe and one in Asia, one foot in the past and in history and one in modern times. We will discover the Bosphorus which separates Asia from Europe and unites the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea. We will cross the Golden Horn, a natural harbor, a wonderful place of inspiration for the writer Pierre Loti, which separates the two European parts of the city. We will follow the Byzantine walls of the city, one of the most complex defensive systems and most sophisticated that ever existed. This walk will take us to the first hill of ancient Byzantium, the historic center of old Istanbul which blends Constantinople, the Christian Byzantium and the Ottoman Istanbul. (Walking tour). We will visit St. Sophia, a masterpiece of Byzantine art, built in the sixth century and the Mecca of Christianity for more than eight centuries. We will walk on the Hippodrome and visit the impressive water cistern that supplied the palace, built in 532 by the Emperor Justinian. Two steps away, you can visit the Grand Bazaar, a maze of 60 alleys and of 4000 colorful shops where you learn to haggle.

07 Seventh day

We will visit the Church of St. Savior in Chora where we can admire the mosaics, considered among the most beautiful of the Byzantine art. Istanbul is also the capital of the Ottoman Empire. By discovering the traces of this empire, we will discover the Dolmabahce Palace, the last residence of the sultans from 1856 to 1918. Built in the Turkish Renaissance style (half-European half-Eastern architecture) the Dolmabahce Palace has 6 hammams, 43 lounges and 285 rooms in three sections: the government, the reception and the harem, surrounded by a 600 meters long quay. We will offer a cruise on the Bosphorus. Strait along the sea between Asia and Europe, which CONNECTS the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. We will have the opportunity to admire the unique architecture of wooden houses along the shore and enjoy a unique perspective of the city.

08 Eight Day

We will visit the Topkapi Palace, the official residence of the Ottoman sultan from 1465 to 1853. The palace was built on the site of the acropolis of ancient Byzantium. It overlooks the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus and the Marmara Sea. The palace is a huge complex consisting of a set of low-rise buildings, arranged around courtyards and connected by galleries and passages. Buildings do not exceed two floors. They are dotted with trees, gardens and fountains. We will admire among others the harem, the Imperial Council, the tower of justice, the audience room, the ablution and fountains room, the kitchens and the mosque from the terrace. Some buildings host large collections of porcelain, clothing, armor, manuscripts and a display of the treasure of Ottoman jewellery. We will then have the opportunity to enter the Blue Mosque, one of the most beautiful mosques built by Sultan Hamet in the seventeenth century. Istanbul is still the centre of the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate which is

heir to the traditions of the Christian Church of the East from the Byzantine period through the Ottoman and modern Turkish period. During this visit you will be told its adventures. To end the day let yourself be guided by the smell of curry, cinnamon, thyme and thousands of other perfumes of the Orient, brought about by the Egyptian bazaar from 1663.

09 Ninth day

Enjoy your FREE time before your departure from Istanbul Ataturk Airport.