

EUROPE · HISTORY · SACRED SITES · HIKING · MOUNTAINS · WINE



North Macedonia

Lake Ohrid's Byzantine churches look out over some of Europe's clearest water, and Skopje sets an Ottoman bazaar beside a startling crowd of modern statues. Add monastery-dotted national parks, Matka Canyon and Tikveš wine country, and North Macedonia is one of the Balkans' best-value trips for lakes and mountains.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for North Macedonia and entry requirements (visas, passport validity).
Last updated by FCDO 13 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Skopje	 CURRENCY Macedonian denar (MKD) £1 ≈ MKD 71.91	 LANGUAGE Macedonian, Albanian	 BEST TIME May–Jun, Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£130 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 3h direct ~£70–£250 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

North Macedonia is a small, mountainous, landlocked country where Byzantine, Ottoman and Yugoslav layers sit close together. Ohrid is the emotional centre: an old town of churches and frescoes above a lake that is among Europe's oldest, shared with Albania and protected by UNESCO. Skopje, the capital, offers a sprawling Ottoman bazaar beside the bombastic Skopje 2014 statues and facades. A first trip usually links the two, about three hours apart by bus, adding Matka Canyon near Skopje, Mavrovo National Park, Bitola and Heraclea in the south, or the Tikveš vineyards. It slots easily into a wider Balkan route with Albania, Kosovo or Greece.

Prices are among the lowest in Europe: a grilled-meat feast with local wine or rakija costs little, and private rooms in Ohrid are cheap outside high summer. July and August bring crowds of holidaymakers from across the Balkans to the lake, with nightlife and packed beaches; spring and September are calmer and better for hiking in Galičica or Pelister. Skopje has a lively café culture and a growing food scene. It suits independent travellers on a budget, hikers and history lovers. People are often surprised by the quality of the wine, the warmth of hosts and how quickly mountains replace towns.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

HISTORY

Ohrid Old Town

Ohrid's hillside old town is crowned by Tsar Samuel's Fortress, and the 13th-century Church of St John at Kaneo perches above the water. Boats run along the shore to the springs and monastery of St Naum near the Albanian border.
- 2

HISTORY

Skopje Old Bazaar

One of the largest old bazaars in the Balkans, the Čaršija is a maze of craftsmen's lanes, Ottoman mosques, hammams turned galleries and caravanserais, reached across the 15th-century Stone Bridge and overlooked by Kale fortress.

3

NATURE

Matka Canyon

Just outside Skopje, the dammed Treska River winds between sheer limestone walls. Hire a kayak or take a boat to Vrelo Cave, and visit the 14th-century Monastery of St Andrew by the water.

4

NATURE

Mavrovo National Park

The country's largest national park mixes beech forest, ski slopes and Lake Mavrovo, where a half-submerged church emerges as the water drops. Nearby, Sveti Jovan Bigorski monastery has a famously intricate carved iconostasis.

5

HISTORY

Heraclea Lyncestis

On Bitola's southern edge, this city founded by Philip II of Macedon flourished under Rome and into the early Christian era. Its theatre and baths impress, but the stars are the vivid mosaic floors of its basilicas.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Skopje

≈ 530,000 people

The capital mixes Ottoman Čaršija lanes, the Stone Bridge and Kale fortress with the giant statues of the Skopje 2014 project; Matka Canyon is half an hour away.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Kumanovo

≈ 75,000 people

An ethnically mixed northern town with few sights of its own, but the nearest base for the Bronze Age Kokino observatory and the frescoed church at Staro Nagoričane.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Bitola

≈ 69,000 people

The elegant 'city of consuls' has a café-lined pedestrian street, Širok Sokak, Ottoman mosques and a clock tower, with Heraclea Lyncestis and Pelister National Park on its doorstep.

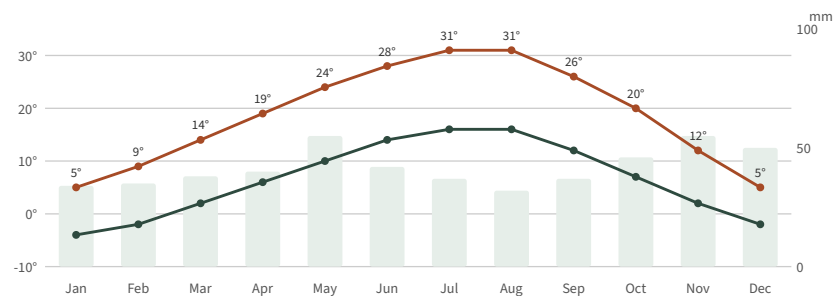
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to North Macedonia

Best time: **May–Jun, Sep.**

**Average climate in Skopje**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan	Vevčani Carnival Held on 13–14 January for the Orthodox New Year, this village carnival near Struga fills the streets with satirical masked figures, music and mischief aimed at politicians.
Jul–Aug	Ohrid Summer Festival Since 1961, mid-July to late August has brought classical concerts, opera, theatre and dance to Ohrid, many staged in the ancient theatre and the Church of St Sophia.
Oct	Skopje Jazz Festival A respected October festival that has brought international jazz and improvised-music names to Skopje's stages since the early 1980s.

How much does North Macedonia cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ MKD 2,157 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £65 per person / day ≈ MKD 4,674 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £130 per person / day ≈ MKD 9,348 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Tavče gravče

Large white beans baked with onion, dried red pepper and paprika in a clay dish until thick and smoky — the unofficial national dish.

Ajvar

A relish of roasted red peppers, sometimes with aubergine, made in huge batches every autumn; spread it on bread with salty white sirenje cheese.

Pastrmajlija

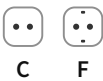
A boat-shaped flatbread from Štip topped with cubes of salted meat — traditionally mutton, now usually pork — and often an egg, baked in a wood-fired oven.

Getting around

Buses are the backbone, with frequent services from Skopje's central station to Ohrid, Bitola and most towns; the Skopje–Ohrid run takes about three hours. Trains are slow and sparse. Taxis are cheap and metered in Skopje, and hiring a car makes sense for Mavrovo, Galičica and remote monasteries. Ohrid's airport handles seasonal international flights.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter

DIALLING CODE

+389

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **194**

Police: **192**

Roadside assistance: **196**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC+1 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Round up or leave about 10% in restaurants and cafés; taxi drivers appreciate rounding up, and tour guides a small extra.

ETIQUETTE

Locals usually just say 'Macedonia'; steer clear of the name dispute with Greece and of ethnic politics. Cover shoulders and knees in churches and mosques, and expect hosts to insist on another rakija.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Skopje International Airport (SKP), Skopje; Ohrid St. Paul the Apostle Airport (OHD), Ohrid

Visas & entry for North Macedonia

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit North Macedonia for up to 3 months without a visa.

If you plan to stay for longer, contact the Macedonian Embassy.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Rabies

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in North Macedonia

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 23 Oct 2026	Macedonian Revolutionary Struggle Day
Tue 8 Dec 2026	Saint Clement of Ohrid Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day

Thu 7 Jan 2027	Christmas Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Mon 3 May 2027	Easter Monday
Mon 24 May 2027	Saints Cyril and Methodius Day
Mon 2 Aug 2027	Republic Day
Wed 8 Sep 2027	Independence Day
Mon 11 Oct 2027	National Uprising Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Macedonian

ENGLISH	MACEDONIAN	SAY IT
Hello	Здраво	<i>ZDRAH-voh</i>
Thank you	Благодарам	<i>blah-GOH-dah-rahm</i>
Please	Ве молам	<i>veh MOH-lahm</i>
Excuse me	Извинете	<i>eez-VEE-neh-teh</i>
How much is this?	Колку чини ова?	<i>KOL-koo CHEE-nee OH-vah</i>

Know before you go

Book Ohrid rooms early for July and August, or visit in June or September for warm swimming water, lower prices and far fewer crowds.

Carry denars for buses, markets and bakeries. Cards are widely accepted in Skopje and Ohrid, but cash rules in villages and at monasteries.

Buy bus tickets at the station counter before boarding, and check return times in person — online timetables are often incomplete or out of date.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.