

AVALON River Cruise

Balkan Discovery 25April-04May 2018



Day by Day

1. ARRIVE IN BUDAPEST, HUNGARY.

Welcome to Budapest, Hungary's lively capital spanning the banks of the Danube. The remainder of the day is free to start exploring Eastern Europe's most cosmopolitan metropolis.

2. BUDAPEST.

Whether you're seeing the sights, shopping for handcrafted embroidery or Herend porcelain, or basking in the coffee house culture over a rich cream cake in the renowned Gerbeaud Cafe, Budapest's unique energy is positively palatable. On your included GUIDED TOUR of the city, see Heroes' Square as well as the massive hilltop castle complex with its remarkable Fishermen's Bastion and 11th-century Matthias Church, the coronation spot of several Hungarian monarchs. Be sure to take note of the city's eight bridges-many famous sights in and of themselves-which connect ancient Buda on the right bank with Pest on the left. You may even want to walk across Chain Bridge, built in 1849 and a symbol of Budapest. This afternoon is free. Perhaps visit St. Stephen's Basilica for marvellous city views from its viewing platform, or stroll along Vaci utca, the main shopping street. (B)

3. BUDAPEST (EMBARKATION).

This morning you can explore this vibrant city at your own pace. Shop at the Great Market Hall and purchase paprika or embroidery at one of its 180 vendor stalls, or wander around the Royal Palace grounds. This afternoon, board your river cruise vessel and meet your crew at a welcome reception. (B,D)

4. MOHACS. EXCURSION TO PECS.

This morning, enjoy some leisurely cruising before arriving in Mohacs, the last stop in Hungary. After lunch, an included excursion takes you to Pecs. Established by the Romans in the 2nd century, this was a flourishing and important town for Christianity by the 4th century. These early Christians left behind many underground burial chambers with memorial chapels above ground. With a Local Guide, visit the UNDERGROUND TOMBS-now part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site-many of which have splendidly decorated murals with Christian themes. Later, enjoy an ORGAN CONCERT. Pecs is also a rich showcase of Turkish architecture and home to Turkish mosques, striking churches, and an enjoyable atmosphere around its restaurants and cafes. (B,L,D)

5. BELGRADE, SERBIA.

One of the oldest cities in Europe, the capital of Serbia is situated at the confluence of the Danube and Sava Rivers. A LOCAL GUIDE will be proud to show you its main sights, including St. Sava, the world's largest orthodox church. Also visit the city's principal landmark, KALEMEGDAN FORTRESS, which showcases the history of Belgrade. Built in stages between the 1st and 18th centuries, the fortress witnessed many battles and observed the courage of those trying to defend the city from conquerors. The surrounding park is the most beautiful and largest park in Belgrade. In your free time, be sure to check out the city's lively pedestrian area and charming outdoor cafes. (B,L,D)

6. EXCURSION TO LEPENSKI VIR-IRON GATES.

This morning, dock at Donji Milanovac, where a short drive takes you to the impressive LEPENSKI VIR EXHIBITION CENTRE, which houses area archaeological artefacts and from where you have unique views of the Danube Gorge. Return to your ship before lunch, then cruise what must surely be the most spectacular scenery of the dramatic IRON GATES gorge, a narrow and formerly very dangerous passage dividing Europe's Alps in the northwest from the Carpathians in the southeast and forming a natural border between Serbia and Romania. (B,L,D)

7. CETATE, ROMANIA-VIDIN, BULGARIA. EXCURSION TO BELOGRADCHIK.

This morning, stop in Cetate, an old Danubian grain shipping port that is now a cultural centre. The owner will explain the concept of this fascinating venture before you have a chance to see for yourself and to TASTE some of the locally made products. Then, on to Vidin, an important Danube port in north-western Bulgaria. Its medieval FORTRESS, Baba Vidin, is the town's primary landmark. It served as Vidin's main defensive installation during the Middle Ages and is the only entirely preserved medieval fortress in the country. It is now a fortress museum and has been restored to its former appearance. In nearby Belogradchik, view the eclectic group of ROCK FORMATIONS on the western slopes of the Balkan Mountains. Sculpted by natural elements for more than 200 million years and with a variety of sizes and shapes, the Belogradchik Rocks are spectacular! (B,L,D)

8. ROUSSE-EXCURSION TO VELIKO TARNOVO & ARBANASSI.

A comfortable ride from the river port of Rousse is the ancient Bulgarian capital of Veliko Tarnovo. Situated on three hills surrounding the Yantra River, the city was a natural fortress with ancient stone houses clinging to the steep slopes. One of the oldest towns in Bulgaria (dating back to 4300 BC), the oldest part is Tsarevets Hill, home of the ROYAL FORTRESS, and the Patriarch's Church. With your LOCAL GUIDE, discover this town that played an important role in Bulgaria's history. Next, journey to Arbanassi, founded in the 15th century, and best known for its Bulgarian Revival architecture and ETHNOGRAPHICAL MUSEUM, a 400-year-old house preserved as a museum. Visit the CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY, one of the town's oldest churches, and see its outstanding collection of

frescoes. Return to your ship in Rousse, Bulgaria's largest inland port. If you don't wish to participate in the full-day excursion, stay on board and relax or join a GUIDED TOUR of Rousse. (B,L,D)

9. **OLTENITA, ROMANIA (DISEMBARKATION)- BUCHAREST.**

After breakfast say goodbye to your crew. Bucharest, Romania's lively capital, is only a short drive from Oltenita. Its wide, tree-lined boulevards and Arc de Triomphe- built in 1922 to honour the bravery of Romanian soldiers who fought in WWI-have gained it the name "Paris of the East." Much recent history has taken place in the city. During the INCLUDED TOUR this afternoon, see the main sights including Royal Palace Square, the scene of riots in 1989, which led to the collapse of the communist dictatorship. In your free time, discover this interesting city even further. Stroll down Calea Victoriei, "Victory Avenue," Bucharest's most historic and alluring street. Initially built in 1692, today it is lined with shops, museums, churches, restaurants, cafes, and fine houses. (B)

10. **BUCHAREST.**

Your holiday ends with breakfast this morning. (B)

You may add Transylvania to your holiday : guided 2-day excursion to Transylvania, visit Dracula's Bran Castle, the city of Brasov and Peles Castle in Sinaia. Available post-cruise package.

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