

Macedonia Македонија

Mountainous Macedonia still has an air of mystery to it. Simultaneously ancient and brand new, it's struggling to find its place in the postcommunist world. Black-clad Orthodox monks are just as much a part of this renewal as the hordes of teenagers, bedecked in the latest Italian fashions, sipping coffee in the stylish bars of the capital.

For outdoors types it's a paradise. Its extensive wilderness allows ample opportunities for hikers, mountain climbers and skiers.

Its ancient ruins will fascinate anyone with even a smidgen of interest in history and its wealth of art ranges from doe-eyed Byzantine icons to square-jawed socialist-realist statues.

In short, for a little place it's crammed with something for just about everyone.

Quite apart from Macedonia's spectacular peaks, lakes and rivers, it's the hospitality of the people of this most southern of Slavic nations that will make your visit truly memorable.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 25,713 sq km
- **Capital** Skopje
- **Currency** Macedonian Denar (MKD);
€1 = 64.10MKD; US\$1 = 50.50MKD;
UK£1 = 94.70MKD; A\$1 = 37.95MKD;
¥100 = 42.90MKD; NZ\$1 = 32.50MKD
- **Famous for** Alexander the Great, Mother Teresa (born in Skopje), Lake Ohrid
- **Official Languages** Macedonian, Albanian
- **Phrases** *zdravo* (hello); *blagodaram/fala* (thanks); *molam* (please); *do gledanje* (goodbye)
- **Population** 2,050,554
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 389; international access code ☎ 00
- **Visas** not needed for citizens of the EU, USA and New Zealand; most others do require one, see p490





HIGHLIGHTS

- Combine history, culture, natural beauty and groovy bars by the lake at spectacular **Ohrid** (p481)
- Get a whiff of Ottoman grandeur at stylish **Bitola** (p485), with a national park on its doorstep and the nicest urban space in Macedonia
- Whet your appetite for this ancient land with Macedonia's capital **Skopje** (p474), which dishes up great cuisine, buzzy bars and historic sites
- Follow in the footsteps of hermits, monks and revolutionaries via the mountainous paths around beautiful **Lake Matka** (p480)

ITINERARIES

- **Three days** Spend a day exploring the sights of Skopje. Then get a bus to Ohrid and spend two days poking about the churches and lazing around and in the glorious lake.
- **One week** As above, but take an extra day in Skopje to visit Lake Matka. From Ohrid visit the Sveti Naum monastery for a day of ancient frescoes, posing peacocks and

boating on the lake. Head on to Bitola to stroll about the Heraclea Lyncestis ruins, before staking out a spot on the fashion runway that masquerades as the main street. If you're not ruined out, see the ancient city of Stobi on returning to Skopje.

HOW MUCH?

- **Cup of coffee** 70MKD
- **Loaf of bread** 20MKD
- **Souvenir icon** 186MKD
- **Six pieces of kebapci (meat rolls)** 90MKD
- **Short taxi ride** 50MKD

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 60MKD
- **Litre of bottled water** 20MKD
- **Skopje beer** 80MKD
- **Souvenir T-shirt** 450MKD
- **Street snack (burger)** 60MKD

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Temperatures vary widely: summer temperatures can reach 40°C, while in winter it can drop as low as minus 30°C. The average annual temperatures are above 10°C almost everywhere. Summers are hot and dry, while in winter the snow falls in the mountains from November to April.

The best time to enjoy Macedonia is between May and September, and the peak tourist season is from mid-July to mid-August, when locals take their holidays.

HISTORY

Early History

Historical and geographical Macedonia is divided between the Republic of Macedonia, the Greek province of Macedonia and a corner of Bulgaria called Pirin Macedonia. The largest portion of the historic Macedonia region is now Greek territory, a point that Greeks are always quick to make when disputing Macedonia's use of the name, as they invariably do. In any case, the region was the homeland of Alexander the Great, who sallied forth to conquer the ancient world in the 4th century BC. Rarely independent, the territory of the Republic of Macedonia has often been a staging post for invaders. Roman rule was entrenched after the conquest of Macedonia in 168 BC, and over the next 500 years the ancestors of the Vlach people developed a Latin dialect. Today's Vlach community speak a language called Aromanian, which, as the names suggests, is related to Romanian and Latin. Many Vlach villages lie along the route of the Roman Via Egnatia, a vital military road and trade route that stretched from Durrës in Albania to Istanbul (Constantinople) in Turkey. When the Roman Empire was divided in the 4th century AD, this region came under the Eastern Roman Empire, ruled from Constantinople. Slavs started settling in the area in the 7th century AD, and not long after adopted the Christian faith of earlier residents.

In the 9th century the region was conquered by Car Simeon (r 893–927) and later, under Car Samoel (r 980–1014), Macedonia was the centre of a powerful Bulgarian state. Samoel's defeat by Byzantium in 1014 ushered in a long period when Macedonia passed back and forth between Byzantium, Bulgaria and Serbia. Around this time the first Roma (also known as Gypsy) people arrived in the area after a long migration from northern India.

After the crushing defeat of Serbia by the Ottomans in 1389, Macedonia became part of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottomans divided civil life according to religious affiliation, in what was called the *millet* system. The Greek Orthodox Church was given much power over the Macedonian Christians, causing great resentment.

In 1878 Russia defeated Turkey, and Macedonia was ceded to Bulgaria by the Treaty of San Stefano. The Western powers, fearing the creation of a powerful Russian satellite in the heart of the Balkans, forced Bulgaria to return Macedonia to Ottoman rule.

Nationalism

In 1893 Macedonian nationalists formed the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) to fight for independence from Turkey, culminating in the Ilinden uprising of August 1903, which was brutally suppressed in October of the same year. Although the nationalist leader Goce Delčev died before the revolt, he has become the symbol of Macedonian nationalism.

The First Balkan War of 1912 saw Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro fighting together against Turkey. During the Second Balkan War in 1913, Greece and Serbia ousted the Bulgarians and carved up Macedonia. Frustrated by this, VMRO continued the struggle against the new rulers, and in response the interwar government in Belgrade banned the Macedonian language and the name Macedonia. Though some VMRO elements supported Bulgarian occupation during WWII, many more joined Josip Broz Tito's partisans, and in 1943 it was agreed that post-war Macedonia would have full republic status in a future Yugoslavia. Tito led the communist resistance to German occupation in WWII and later became prime minister, then president, of Yugoslavia.

The end of WWII brought Macedonians hope of unifying their peoples. This was encouraged by the Greek Communist Party and Bulgaria's recognition of its Macedonian minorities. However the Stalin-Tito split of 1948, and the end of the Greek civil war in 1949, put an end to such hopes. Nonetheless, the first Macedonian grammar was published in 1952 and an independent Macedonian Orthodox Church was reinstated.

Over the subsequent 40 years Yugoslavia prospered by comparison with other Eastern

European states, with citizens free to travel and worship as they wished. The country was also open as a tourist destination.

Independence

On 8 September 1991 Macedonians held a referendum on independence. Seventy-four percent voted in favour and in January 1992 the country declared its full independence from the former Yugoslavia. Macedonian leader Kiro Gligorov artfully negotiated the only peaceful withdrawal of the Yugoslav army from any of the former republics.

Greece withheld diplomatic recognition of Macedonia and demanded that the country find another name, worried that it implied territorial claims over Aegean Macedonia, which they had obtained in the 1913 carve-up. At Greek insistence, Macedonia was forced to use the 'provisional' title Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in order to be admitted to the UN in April 1993. When the USA (following six EU countries) recognised FYROM in February 1994, Greece declared an economic embargo against Macedonia and closed the Aegean Macedonian port of Thessaloniki to trade. The embargo was lifted in November 1995 after Macedonia changed its flag and agreed to discuss its name with Greece. To date, there's been no resolution of this thorny issue. Increasingly the name Macedonia is being used internationally, despite Greek intransigence.

Meanwhile, the country's ethnic Albanian minority was seeking better representation on the political and cultural fronts, and tried to set up an Albanian-speaking university in Tetovo in 1995. Since Macedonian was the only official language according to the country's constitution, the authorities declared the university illegal and tried to close it down. Soon after, President Gligorov lost an eye in an assassination attempt and tensions increased.

Over the following years, an Albanian rebel group called the National Liberation Army was formed and claimed responsibility for a number of bombings. This escalated in February 2001 into armed conflict in western Macedonia. Hostilities did not last long, however. With the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in August 2001, the Macedonian government agreed to greater political participation for the Albanian minority, official recognition of the

Albanian language, as well as an increase in the number of ethnic Albanian police officers throughout the country.

Macedonia became an official candidate for EU membership in December 2005 and has been steadily progressing towards that goal. Stumbling blocks may be the name issue with Greece and increasing European concerns about enlargement. Macedonia also hopes to join NATO before the end of the decade.

At the time of writing Macedonia has found itself caught between European justice and a possible NATO partner, in a case where a German man was allegedly detained by Macedonian officials when entering the country before being handed over to America's CIA, kidnapped and flown to Afghanistan for interrogation. There is some concern that Macedonia's non-cooperation with European investigators may prove a stumbling block to EU membership.

PEOPLE

There's a reason why the French call a mixed salad a *salade macédoine*. It's hard to imagine a place where ethnicity is such a confused topic. Bulgarians think that Macedonians are really Bulgarians, some Serbs think they're actually Serbs. Greeks think they're anything but Macedonian – a name they consider they own the rights to, even though it's well documented that the Ancient Greeks despised the ancient Macedonians.

As for the Macedonians themselves? One thing they're sure of is that they're Macedonian. Most will accept that they're of Slavic origin, although some will argue black and blue that they're Slavised descendants of the ancient Macedonian people.

Like much of the Balkans, ethnicity rather than nationhood defines people's identities. Local Albanians and Turks are never referred to (or refer to themselves) as Macedonian, even if their families have lived in the area for several generations.

According to the 2002 census the total population of just over two million is made up of Macedonians of Slav ethnicity (64%), Albanians (25.2%), Turks (3.9%), Roma (2.7%), Serbs (1.8%), and others such as Vlachs, Bosniaks and Bulgarians (2.4%).

Relations between Albanians and Macedonians can be problematic. Other predominately Islamic ethnic groups tend to get lumped in with the Albanians – except the Roma who are

so economically deprived and socially stigmatised as to be an underclass all on their own.

Despite all this, it is absolutely the case that all communities are generous and hospitable, and if the topic of community relations comes up, most people will say they get along just fine with everyone and it's the politicians who stir up trouble for their own benefit. Just be aware that it is a sensitive topic.

RELIGION

Most Macedonians belong to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and most Albanians, Turks and Roma to Islam. There is also a smallish Catholic community, nearly all ethnically Albanian, whose most famous daughter was Mother Teresa. The once-sizable Jewish community was deported en masse for the death camps at Treblinka and Auschwitz during WWII.

ARTS Cinema

The most significant Macedonian film is *Before the Rain* (1995), directed by Milčo Mančevski. Visually stunning, with a great cast and a haunting soundtrack, the film is a manifold take on the tensions between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Filmed partly in London and partly in Macedonia, you will be able to spot the Sveti Jovan at Kaneo church and the Treskavec monastery. Mančevski also released *Dust* in 2001, starring Joseph Fiennes and David Wenham. It's a Western linking the American frontier and the badlands of wild Macedonia at the turn of the 20th century.

MUSIC

The oldest form of Macedonian folk music involves the *gajda* (bagpipes). This instrument is played solo or is accompanied by the *tapan* (two-sided drum), each side of which is played with a different stick to obtain a different tone. These are often augmented by *kaval* (flute) and/or *tambura* (small lute with two pairs of strings). Macedonia has also inherited (from a long period of Turkish influence) the *zurla* (double-reed horn), and the *Čalgija* music form. Bands playing folk music may be heard and enjoyed at festivals such as the Balkan Festival of Folk Dances & Songs in Ohrid in early July, or the Ilinden Festival in Bitola in early August.

Roma bands are another musical treat in Macedonia. One of the most popular Roma

singers, the velvety-voiced Esma Redžepova, is from Skopje.

Young Macedonians generally prefer to listen to their own pop music over English-language artists, although hip-hop and metal have their fans. Macedonian pop tends to be of the Eurovision style – upbeat synth-heavy numbers with a vaguely gypsy feel.

Dance

The most famous Macedonian folk dance is probably *teškoto oro* (difficult dance). Music for this beautiful male dance is provided by the *tapan* and *zurla*. Performed in traditional Macedonian costume, it is often included in festivals or concerts.

Other dances include *komitsko oro*, which symbolises the struggle of Macedonian freedom fighters against the Turks, and *Tresenica*, a women's dance from the Mavrovo region. The *oro* is similar to the *kolo*, a circle dance that is danced throughout the Balkans.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

Most of Macedonia's 25,713 sq km consists of a plateau between 600m and 900m above sea level, hemmed in by high mountains on its western borders – 16 of which are higher than 2000m. Golem Korab (2864m), on the border with Albania, is the country's highest peak. The Vardar River crosses the middle of the country, passing Skopje on its way to the Aegean Sea near Thessaloniki. Lakes Ohrid and Prespa drain into the Adriatic via Albania.

Wildlife

Macedonia belongs to the eastern Mediterranean and Euro-Siberian vegetation region and is home to a large number of plant species in a relatively small geographical area. The high mountains are dominated by pines, with beech and oak on the lower slopes.

Macedonia is a boundary area between two different zoological zones – the high mountain region and the low Mediterranean valley region. The fauna of the forests is abundant and includes bears, wild boar, wolves, foxes, squirrels, chamois and deer. The lynx is found, although very rarely, in the mountains of western Macedonia. Forest birds include the blackcap, grouse, black grouse, imperial eagle and forest owl.

The famous shepherd dog (*šarplaninec*), from the Šar Planina mountains, stands some 60cm tall and is a fierce fighter in defending flocks from bears or wolf packs. Don't mess with them.

Lakes Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran are separate fauna zones, a result of territorial and temporal isolation. Lake Ohrid's fauna is a relic of an earlier era – including the endangered letnica trout (also known as Lake Ohrid trout on English-language menus, and *koran* in Albania) and a genus of snail dating back 30 million years. It is also home to the mysterious European eel, which comes to Lake Ohrid from the distant Sargasso Sea to live for up to 10 years. It makes the trip back to the Sargasso Sea to breed, then dies and its offspring start the cycle anew.

National Parks

Macedonia's three national parks protect 205,235 hectares of mountain wilderness – 8.07% of the country. They are Pelister (p485), Galičica (between Lakes Ohrid and Prespa) and Mavrovo (p480). Additionally, Lake Ohrid is on the World Heritage List. Pelister and Galičica are both part of a broader nature protection zone around Lake Prespa, shared with adjacent areas in Albania and Greece. Being mountainous, hiking is only possible during the warmer months. Mavrovo and Pelister both have ski runs. All three are accessible by road (though not really by public transport), and none require any permits from park officers. The onus is on visitors to keep the parks as pristine as possible.

Environmental Issues

Lake Ohrid's unique trout, known locally as letnica has nearly been fished to extinction, and yet it is still served (illegally) at restaurants throughout the country. Other problems include illegal logging, hunting and dumping of waste. Nonbiodegradable litter is a major eyesore, particularly in the west of the country. Try to refuse unnecessary plastic carrier bags in shops.

FOOD & DRINK

If one word sums up Macedonian cuisine, it's *skara* (barbecue). Pork, chicken or lamb – Macedonians are mad on meat. Vegetarians shouldn't get overly excited by all the stuffed vegetables and vine leaves on the

menu – they're delicious, but they'll probably be stuffed with meat. Stuffed meat is also popular, in which case it'll be filled with cheese.

Don't order the Lake Ohrid trout – it's an endangered species, not to mention horribly expensive. Even the most expensive restaurants (pecopani) tend to have cheap options on the menu, especially salads or pasta. Balkan *burek* (cheese, spinach, potato or meat in filo pastry) or *kebapci* (kebabs) make for a cheap snack. Italian food is available just about everywhere, and should give vegetarians a welcome relief from salads.

The terms café and bar are interchangeable as they both tend to serve coffee and alcohol. Don't expect to find any food at a café. The national firewater is *rakija*, a strong distilled spirit popular throughout the Balkans. A particularly Macedonian variety is the ouzo-like *mastika*.

Macedonia produces excellent wine which is exported throughout the region. The two main varieties grown are Vranec, a rich fruity red, and Smederevka, a light white with citrus notes.

SKOPJE СКОПЈЕ

☎ 02 / pop 507,000

Skopje fits many of the stereotypes of a contemporary Eastern European city. Communist-era housing blocks dominate the skyline, public buildings are chunky behemoths, and there's a certain greyness and griminess that pervades. However, scratch the surface and a different Skopje reveals itself. Delicate minarets rise above the cobbled lanes of the Čaršija (Turkish bazaar), where Orthodox churches sit alongside copper-domed bathhouses and historic Ottoman trading inns.

The Vardar is no sluggish stream. It rages between the old and new halves of the city – a fitting symbol of the Muslim and Orthodox divide – spanned by the elegant arches of the Kamen Most (Stone Bridge). On the south side, stylish bars and cafés buzz with a fashion-conscious young crowd, undisturbed by the English stag-partiers currently plaguing other European capitals. Foodies won't be disappointed by the traditional cuisine on offer in a number of atmospheric little eateries, nor the selection of excellent local

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wines. Likewise, history buffs and art-lovers will find their palates well served.

ORIENTATION

Skopje is centred around the large square Plošad Makedonija on the south bank of the Vardar River. The train and bus station is a 15-minute walk southeast. Mount Vodno,

with its giant illuminated cross, rises to the south.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Tabernakul (☎ 3115 329; Dimitrie Čupovski 4) In the back right-hand corner you'll find a small collection of Macedonian books in English as well as other English-language titles.

SKOPJE IN TWO DAYS

Cross Kamen Most to spend the day exploring the Čaršija, taking in the **Museum of Macedonia** (right), the converted Turkish bathhouses, churches, mosques and the castle before stopping for a bite at **Pivnica An** (p478). On day two head for **Lake Matka** (p480) outside Skopje for hiking, climbing or just plain relaxing by the smooth mirror of the lake. Spend the afternoon café-hopping around the new town, finishing up at **Kaj Maršalot** (p478) for an unforgettable dinner.

Internet Access

Contact Café (☎ 3298 023; 1st fl, Gradski Trgovski Centar; per hr 120MKD; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sat, 3-10pm Sun) This is the best, fastest and most central of the numerous internet cafés around town.

Laundry

Drycleaning Nino (☎ 3222 446; Ivo Ribar Lola 59; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) Washing and drying per pair underwear/socks 10MKD, per T-shirt 50MKD.

Medical Services

City Hospital (☎ 3130 111; Ul 11 Oktomvri 53;

☎ 24hr)

Neuromedica Private Clinic (☎ 3133 313; Ul 11 Oktomvri 25; ☎ 24hr)

Money

Skopje has numerous ATMs and many private exchange offices scattered throughout the city centre where you can change your cash at a good rate.

Post & Telephone

Main post office (☎ 3141 141; Ul Dame Gruiev bb; ☎ 7am-5.30pm) Located 75m northwest of Plošad Makedonija, along the river.

Telephone centre (☎ 3141 141; Ul Dame Gruiev bb; ☎ 7am-10pm) Inside the main post office. You can also phone from kiosks (newsagents) with private telephones. The price of your call is displayed digitally as you speak.

Travel Agencies

Frama (☎ 3115 124; www.frama.com.mk; 1st fl Gradski Trgovski Centar) Flight prices are listed in euro on a board by the door of this large central agency with an English-speaking staff.

Go Macedonia Alternative Travel (☎ 3071 265; www.gomacedonia.com; Ul Ankarska 29a) The best

agency for off-the-beaten-track tours of any sort, including eco- and village-tourism, hiking, biking, caving, wining and dining.

SIGHTS

From **Plošad Makedonija** the 15th-century **Kamen Most** spans the river and leads to the **Čaršija**, the historic Ottoman quarter, dominated by mosques and populated mainly by Albanian Muslims. Not far from the bridge is the cute 19th-century church of **Sveti Dimitrij** (☎ 3232 919; ☎ 6am-10pm).

Across from it is the **Daut Pašin Amam** (1466), once the largest Turkish bathhouse in the Balkans, and now home to the **National Gallery** (☎ 3133 102; Kruševska 1A; adult/concession 50/20MKD, free Sun; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, to 9pm Apr-Sep). Housing some excellent modern art and a small collection of icons dating back to the 14th century, the building is lit by star-shaped holes in the brickwork of the beautiful copper-clad domes.

Nearby, the **Čifte Amam** (☎ 3227 986; Bitpazarska bb; admission 50MKD, free Sun; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, to 9pm Apr-Sep) another beautiful old bathhouse, is now used for temporary exhibitions.

Just up the hill the **Museum of Macedonia** (☎ 3116 044; Čurčiška bb; admission 50MKD; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun) is a fascinating place to while away a few hours. Reflecting the depth of culture in this ancient land, the earliest exhibits date back 7500 years to the Neolithic period. Keep your eyes open for a phallus-spouted drinking vessel that set the standard for joke shops for millennia.

Beyond the museum, the exquisite 1492 **Mustafa Paša Mosque** (Samoilova bb) has a shady

garden with a fountain and an earthquake-cracked dome. The ruins of the **Kale**, across the street from the mosque, has panoramic views of Skopje from the 11th century Cyclopean wall.

The tiny monastery **Sveti Spas** (admission 100MKD; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) was built below ground level because during Ottoman times it was illegal for a church to be taller than a mosque. It boasts an iconostasis 10m wide and 6m high, beautifully carved in the early 19th century. Look for the carvers' miniature self-portrait in the left side of the carving. Across the cloister is a room with the **Tomb and Museum of Goce Delčev**, independence campaigner and national hero, killed by the Ottomans in 1903.

Back on the south side of the bridge, a hefty bronze commemorates the **liberation of Skopje** by the partisans, with chisel-jawed men, scary mommas in headscarves and heroic children, all sporting serious weaponry.

The crazy insect-like building across the boulevard is the city's **main post office** (opposite). It was designed during the Yugoslav era to be an abstract take on church architecture. Enter from the river side to check out the socialist murals in the large circular main hall.

The massive modern church of **Sveti Kliment Ohridski** (☎ 3237 218; Bul Sveti Kliment Ohridski bb) does a good impersonation of a mosque, with its large interlocking domes and freestanding bell tower.

South of the centre, the only interesting thing about the **City Museum** (☎ 3114 742; MH Jasmin Mito Hadivasilev bb; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) is its partly-ruined exterior. The clock is frozen at 5.17 on the morning of the tragic Skopje earthquake of 27 July 1963, which killed 1066 people and almost demolished the city. On the left is Tito's message of support to the shattered citizens. Go around to the back for a strange mix of decaying shops and bars amid abandoned railway carriages and artillery.

A 2.5m bronze **statue of Mother Teresa** stands sentinel at the entrance to a small square, not far from the now-demolished house where she was raised. Her simple **Memorial Room** (☎ 070-704 894; Ul Maršal Tito; admission free; ☎ 1-4pm) is in the base of an 18th-century feudal tower. A superb socialist relief fronts the Army House to the right of the tower.

For a great view of the city, take the 20-minute taxi ride up Mount Vodno to the

Sveti Pantelejmon monastery (☎ 3081 255; ☎ 9am-11pm) with its sweet little 12th-century church and excellent traditional restaurant (meals 400MKD).

SLEEPING

Skopje's hotels are geared towards visitors from charge-account land – business travellers and those from organisations trying to resolve the mess in neighbouring Kosovo. Hence there's no shortage of pricey establishments, but cheaper options for tourists are more limited.

Budget

Hotel Santos (☎ 3226 963; Ul Bitpazarska 69; s/d €20/25) With refurbished rooms complete with TV sets and clean bathrooms, this is the nicest of the cheap hotels among the evocative cobbled laneways of the Čaršija. It's set back from Bitpazarska in its own little laneway near the corner of Ulica Evlija Čelebi.

Hotel 903ta (☎ 3211 345; Ul Nikola Trimpare 9; s/d €30/50) This little family-owned hotel, right in the midst of a lively neighbourhood, offers two spacious apartments with leather couches, two rooms with their own bathroom and two that share. It's clean and comfortable and very newly renovated.

Hotel Kanet (☎ 3238 353; www.hotelkanet.com.mk; Ul Jordan Hadžikonstantinov Džinot 20; s/d €45/60; (P) ☎) The varnished wood and park-side setting is more redolent of a mountain cabin than an inner-city hotel. The rooms are spotless and comfy, and the large covered terrace is a great spot to soak up the park vibe.

Midrange

Hotel Dal Met Fu (☎ 3239 584; www.dalmetfu.com.mk; Plošad Makedonija; s €59-69, d €69-79, apt s €85-145, apt d €100-170; (P) ☎) Positioned on the main square, this bright and cheerful minihotel (three rooms and three apartments) is above the overrated restaurant of the same name. It has nicely designed rooms with a fashionable edge, friendly staff and a location that is unbeatably central.

Hotel Rose Diplomatie (☎ 3135 469; rosediplo matique.tripod.com; Ul Roza Luksemburg 13; s €65-85, d €85-105) This boutique B&B has eight charming rooms, caring staff and a cute garden. The décor has a gentle feminine touch (lots of frills and ornaments) and breakfast includes delicious homemade jams on a well-laden buffet table.

STREET ADDRESSES

Finding your way around can be confusing. All of the street signs are in Cyrillic and many addresses are listed as bb, which stands for *bez broja* (without a number). Following independence a number of street names were officially changed, but nobody got around to changing the signs and the locals tend to stick to the old ones anyway. In this book we've followed their lead using Ulica Maršal Tito rather than Ulica Makedonija, and Bulevar Ivo Ribar Lola instead of the long-winded Bulevar Mitropolit Teodosie Gologanov.

Tim's Apartments (☎ 3237 650; www.tims.com.mk; Ul Orce Nikolov 120; s/d €69/89, ste €86-128; 🏠) This handsome apartment-hotel has a range of rooms, self-catering apartments and two-bedroom 'residences' on a quiet street in an inner suburb.

Skopski Merak (☎ 3090 755; Ul Andon Dukov 27; s/d €70/100; 🏠 🍷) Situated above a popular fish restaurant, this snug family-run hotel has 15 spotless rooms and a separate apartment nearby. In winter there's an open fire lit in the central atrium.

Top End

Hotel Stone Bridge (☎ 3244 900; www.stonebridge-hotel.com; Kej Dimitar Vlahov 1; s €129-189, d €149-229, ste €299-549; 🏠 🍷 🍷 🍷) From the beautiful white marble Turkish bath to the lavishly upholstered furniture, you can tell that these newcomers take luxury seriously. Visiting royalty or rappers would feel quite at home among all the gilt in the Apartment Sultan. Ordinary mortals will find the standard rooms luxurious and the location is perfect.

Holiday Inn (☎ 3292 929; www.holiday-inn.com/skopje; Ul Vasil Adzilarski 2; s €224-251, d €238-285, ste €317-500; 🏠 🍷 🍷 🍷) A conveniently located business-class establishment next to the Gradski Trgovski Centar on the south side of the Vardar, this is the only hotel in Skopje to have a specially designed wheelchair-accessible room.

EATING

There are a surprising number of great eating options in Skopje. The Čaršija is littered with affordable *kebabci* places and bakeries, and you can find fresh produce at its large open market. Also check out the impressive new supermarket in the Ramstore (opposite).

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Restaurant Kaj Maršalot (Bul Sveti Kliment Ohridski bb; mains 100-500MKD) A life-size cardboard cutout of Tito cheerily raises his glass as you enter this bizarre socialist-themed restaurant where, according to the advertising, 'proletarians as well as the capitalists feel the equality of the transition'. Among the communist posters and busts, our leading English-speaking revolutionaries Bob Marley and John Lennon smile down benignly, exhorting us simultaneously to 'Get Up Stand Up' and 'Let It Be'. Surely 'imagine no possessions' would be a more appropriate slogan for the latter, especially given that McCartney was responsible for the laid-back lyric they've chosen. There's no such confusion with the food, which is wonderfully authentic Macedonian fare. Order a bottle of excellent local wine along with a mixed platter of yummy breaded olives, vine leaves stuffed with mince and the supersharp local 'yellow' cheese.

Destan (Bunjakovec Centar, Bul Partizanski Odredi; 6 pieces of kebaps 90MKD) Situated at the back of the shopping centre on the ground floor, Destan serves *kebaps* (barbequed meat rolls) with delicious grilled Turkish bread, raw onion and hot peppers.

Harmonija (☎ 2460 985; Bul Jane Sandanski 37; mains 100-250MKD; 🍷 8am-12pm Sun-Fri, 8am-1am Sat) This hard-to-find restaurant provides a full menu of fantastic vegetarian food including a wonderful macrobiotic platter. It's located in the Skopjanka mall, a motley collection of run-down shops a block east of the station, on the left past the first street. The restaurant's yellow sign points down a set of stairs that juts out into the footpath next to a florist.

Pivnica An (☎ 3212 111; Kapan An, Čaršija; mains 170-400MKD) Marvellous Macedonian food and a great atmosphere, located in a historic Ottoman trading inn.

Dalma (☎ 070-260 410; Ul Petar Poparsov 22; mains 160-450MKD) Offers beautiful Mediterranean cuisine in the most stylish of surroundings.

Momir (☎ 3211 011; Bul Ivo Ribar Lola 79; mains 450MKD) This is a great fish restaurant where you can try specialities such as squid stuffed with yellow cheese and ham.

Vodnica (☎ 3232 877; Bul Ivo Ribar Lola 69; mains 300-650MKD) The food is excellent in this upmarket Italian eatery, which takes its name from the waterwheel in its romantic garden.

DRINKING

Skopje has a lively enough bar-café scene to suit any taste. Explore around the Gradski Trgovski Centar and neighbouring riverside promenade, where there are dozens of establishments ranging from stylish cocktail bars to the ubiquitous Irish boozier.

Lezet (☎ 3225 003; Ul Nikola Hremare bb) The soft lighting, chilled music and harem furnishings

seem to encourage couples to pair up in the cosy corners of this groovy bar.

New Age Coffee & Tea House (☎ 3117 559; Kosta Šahov 9) This bohemian hipster haunt is like a farmhouse, with dogs and roosters roaming around the yard out front. It's rumoured that aside from the generally alternative clientele, this is also a gay and lesbian hangout.

Blue Café Urban Bar (☎ 3123 355; Ul Veljko Vlahović 42/3; 🍷) A truly stylish, modern bar with fab cocktails and a large selection of special coffees and teas.

Café Deus (☎ 3135 415; Ul Leninova 22) Cosy, smoky and atmospheric, Deus does a good impersonation of a Parisian café, with dark wood furnishings and little tables adorned with roses.

Trend (☎ 3132 425; Ul Nikola Vapcarov 2/4) The name says it all. This combination restaurant, café and cocktail bar with a nightclub downstairs is the current place to be seen.

ENTERTAINMENT

For up-to-date info on clubs and special events, check out www.skopjeclubbing.com.mk.

Universal Hall (☎ 3224 158; Bul Partizanski Odredi bb; tickets 100-200MKD) The home to classical and other music performances, as well as Skopje's jazz festival in October every year.

Children's Theatre (☎ 3290 111; Ul Evliya Čelebi 4; tickets €1) This cute little theatre in the Čaršija puts on musicals and puppet shows for the little 'uns.

Kino Kultura (☎ 3236 578; Ul Luj Paster 2; tickets 60-120MKD) Screens recent English-language movies.

Café Duomo (☎ 3127 300; Bul Ivo Ribar Lola 67; 🍷 10pm-4am Sun-Thu, 10pm-5am Fri & Sat) Dance the night away in this upmarket late-night bar, which hosts live music and cabaret.

Colosseum (City Park; www.colosseumsummerclub.com; special events 250-400MKD) and **Element** (City Park; www.element.com.mk) in the city park are the places for summer outdoor clubbers and international DJs.

SHOPPING

The Čaršija teems with little shops that sell souvenirs such as copper coffee pots and rugs. The two main shopping malls, **Gradski Trgovski Centar** (Plošad Makedonija; 🍷 9am-7pm; 🏠) and the flash new **Ramstore** (MH Jasmin Mito Hadivasilev bb; 🍷 10am-10pm; 🏠), are full of fashion kids cruising the boutiques, bars and cafés. The former has a small souvenir kiosk just inside

the carpark end, but you'll find more interesting memorabilia at the stall selling socialist medals near the opposite entrance. Check out **Ikona** (☎ 3224 403) on the ground floor of Ramstore for beautiful hand-painted icons.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

A host of airlines serve Skopje's **Petrovec airport** (☎ 3148 333; www.airports.com.mk), 21km east of the city.

It may be cheaper to fly into Thessaloniki in northern Greece; try to coordinate the flight times with the two to three daily trains that connect Thessaloniki with Skopje.

Bus

Skopje's **New Intercity Bus Station** (Nova Avtobuska Stanica; ☎ 3236 254) is underneath the train station on bul Jane Sandanski. There is a comprehensive network to all Macedonian towns, with at least 13 buses daily to Prilep (320MKD, 2¼ hours, 139km), seven to Bitola (350MKD, 2½ hours, 185km), 21 to Tetovo (100MKD, 40 minutes, 42km), three to Mavrovi Anovi (270MKD, 1½ hours, 88km), 10 to Ohrid via Kičevo (380MKD, three hours, 167km) and four to Ohrid via Bitola (380MKD, four hours, 261km).

International buses either leave from here or from International Bus Station 2, along from the Holiday Inn on Kej 13 Noemvri, where there are offices for several private lines. To catch a direct bus to Tirana in Albania you will first need to head to Tetovo.

Train

Skopje's ageing **train station** (☎ 3234 255; Bul Jane Sandanski) serves both domestic and international routes. For details on international trains, see p491. The most useful domestic route for tourists goes through Veles and on to Prilep and Bitola (four trains daily, some at ghastly hours). A little Cyrillic will be useful to make sense of the timetables, so come prepared with your phrasebook.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

There is no public transport from the airport. Airport taxi drivers can charge between 1290MKD and 2200MKD, though the fare shouldn't be more than 700MKD. It's best to arrange a taxi through your hotel before you arrive, although even then be aware that some

hotels may try to bump up the price. Only use taxis that have the official 'taxi' sign.

Bus

Skopje is easily explored on foot and taxis are cheap, so chances are you won't need to brave the bus system. Inner-suburban city buses in Skopje cost between 15MKD and 30MKD per trip.

Car

Skopje is awash with car-rental agencies, from the large ones to small local companies. Rental prices generally start at around €35 per day. Try **Avis** (☎ 3222 046; lower ground, Ramstore; 🕒 9am-5pm). Parking is a cultural experience of its own – people park anywhere, including the strip in the middle of the road.

Taxi

Skopje's taxis are cheap and excellent, once you get past the shysters at the airport. All official taxis have meters, which are turned on without prompting. The first few kilometres are a flat 50MKD, and then it's 15MKD per kilometre. Watch out for the unofficial drivers who hang around the train-bus station. They'll try to load your bags into their boot before you notice they don't have a taxi sign, and then overcharge you for an unmetered trip.

AROUND SKOPJE

Lake Matka ЕЗЕРО МАТКА

Only half an hour's drive from Skopje, Matka is a place of calm cool nature, where the steep canyon reflects in the lake's green mirrored surface. For centuries the area has been a retreat from society, attracting hermits, monks and early Macedonian revolutionaries. Now the lake, created by the damming of the Treška River, is a magnet for day-trippers and action-seekers, with opportunities for kayaking, hiking, rock climbing and caving.

The lakeside path starts at the end of the road. Follow it to see the 14th-century **Sveti Andrea monastery**, with its impressive frescoes. Next door is the very basic **Matka Mountain Hut** (☎ 3052 655; beds €7), where in summer you can spend the night or hire guides. The staff operate a small boat across the lake where it is a 15-minute climb to Matka's most beautiful church, **Sveti Šiševo**. You will need to bang on the metal to get the boat to collect you, but let them know your return time in advance.

WORTH A TRIP

Wandering around the ruins of ancient **Stobi** in its pleasant rural setting, it's easy to get whisked away to a world of swords, sandals and rustling togas. The ghosts of roads lead you to the theatre, basilica, palaces, villas and a synagogue. While the site dates back to the Macedonian kingdom of the 4th century BC, most of the remains are Roman or Byzantine. Elaborate mosaics are uncovered from their protective sand from April to September. Prepare to pay 200MKD for entry, although the gate is often unstaffed. To get there take Hwy E75 to the southeast and you'll see it signposted, just after the Prilep turnoff, 25km southeast of Veles.

If you are stranded, it's a long and difficult three-hour hike from here to Skopje, via Mt Vodno.

Back along the road is the peaceful **Monastery of Sveta Bogorodica** (🕒 10am-noon & 5-7pm Tue & Thu, all day Sat & Sun). From here the hardy can follow a steep path for 90 minutes to the little churches of **Sv Spas**, **Trojica** and **Nedala**. Just below the monastery, **Manastirski Peštera** (☎ 3352 512; mains 170-700MKD) is an atmospheric restaurant serving all manner of game, built into the hillside in a dimly lit cave.

A taxi to Lake Matka shouldn't cost more than 350MKD, or you can take your chances on bus 60 (50MKD, 40 minutes), which leaves somewhat erratically from Bulevar Partizanski Odredi.

WESTERN MACEDONIA

MAVROVO NATIONAL PARK

МАВРОВО НАЦИОНАЛНИ ПАРК

☎ 042

Along with the country's best skiing facilities, Mavrovo National Park offers 73,088 hectares of birch and pine forest, lake, karst fields, waterfalls and alpine plain to be explored. It contains cultural treasures and quite a few mountain villages, including Galičnik with its famous July wedding festival. Accommodation is mostly in the ski village of Mavrovo on the southern side of the lake and public transport is limited, but in all but the depths of winter it's a cinch to get around with your own wheels.

Sights & Activities

The **Zare Lazarevski ski centre** (☎ 042-489 002; www.zarelaz.com; Mavrovo village; ski pass per day 850MKD, ski hire 600MKD) is Macedonia's biggest and most modern ski resort, and by all accounts the skiing is very good, lasting from 15 November until as late as the middle of April. Compared with other European resorts it's dirt cheap, but it doesn't offer a huge amount of après-ski activity. The ski lifts operate all year (200MKD for nonskiers) and in summer you can hire mountain bikes for €10. The whole operation is run from the Hotel Bistra (see below).

Sveti Jovan Bigorski (☎ 042-478 675; bigorski@mt.net.mk; admission free) is a fully working monastery and one of the most popular with visitors in Macedonia. It was first established in 1020 on the spot where the icon of Sveti Jovan Bigorski (St John the Forerunner, eg St John the Baptist) appeared, and has been rebuilt many times over the centuries. The miraculous icon kept reappearing and the monastery kept being 'resurrected'. The present day structures date from the 18th and 19th centuries, and houses one of the three iconostases carved by Makarije Frčkovski and the Filipovski brothers, who also carved the one in Sveti Spas in Skopje. The monastery has dormitories (€5 to €15) with self-catering facilities where you can stay overnight, as well as a little shop selling painted icons and Mastika, the aniseed-flavoured *rakija* made by the monks.

The old Vlach village of **Galičnik** lies deep within the park, about 17km from Mavrovo. The road to Galičnik from Mavrovo is often snowed-in as late as May and closes as early as November. The village hosts a very popular wedding festival in the middle of July. The bridal costumes weigh up to 30kg! The festival is rich in traditions, with lots of dances, folk music...and a few tears.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Srna (☎ 042-388 083; www.hotelsrna.cjb.net; Mavrovo village; s/d/tr €42/60/75; 📍) A friendly little hotel, 400m from the chairlifts, Srna has spotless airy rooms (some with balconies), a cheerful bar and a restaurant with lots of antlers and pelts. Half-board costs an extra €5 per person.

Hotel Bistra (☎ 042-489 027; www.bistra.com; Mavrovo village; 15 Apr-15 Nov s €45-65, d €75-100, 16 Nov-14 Apr s €90-115, d €120-160; 📍 📍) This sprawling resort hotel has comfortable rooms with satellite TV,

a large restaurant with an open fire, a bar (of course), plus a swimming pool, fitness centre and sauna. The more expensive rooms have Jacuzzis. The Bistra also runs the nearby Hotel Ski Škola and Hotel Mavrovski, which offer simpler rooms at a cheaper price, while still having access to the main hotel's facilities.

Getting There & Away

Buses don't go directly to Mavrovo village but pass through the town of Mavrovo Anovi on the other side of the lake. There are seven buses a day to Debar (120MKD, 46km), five to Tetovo (140MKD, 45km), and three to Skopje (270MKD, 1½ to 2½ hours depending on conditions, 88km). For Sveti Jovan Bigorski take the bus to Debar and ask to be let off at the turnoff to the monastery. From here it is a steep 500m climb to the complex.

SOUTHERN MACEDONIA

OHRID ОХРИД

☎ 046 / pop 55,700

The highlight of any trip to Macedonia, Ohrid is a place of dramatic beauty, steeped in history and culture. The crystalline waters of the lake and plentiful budget accommodation make it a magnet for summer holidaymakers, turning this sleepy little place, with its evocative cobbled laneways peppered with picturesque churches, into a vibrant party town.

For Orthodox Macedonians it is the spiritual heart of their country and a focus of nationalistic pride. It was here that Sts Clement and Naum in the 9th century founded the first Slavic university. Later Ohrid was the capital of the 10th-century kingdom of Tsar Samoil, with its bishop an independent Patriarch. The revival of the archbishopric of Ohrid in 1958, and its independence from the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1967, were important steps on the road to modern nationhood.

However its history goes back much further than that. The tectonic lake itself is one of the oldest in the world and at 294m is the deepest in the Balkans. The area has been settled for 8000 years, while the town was first mentioned under the Greek name Lychnidos, before being conquered by the Ancient Macedonians in the 4th century BC. Under the Romans it became a stopping point on the Via Egnatia, which ran

accommodation on offer, right in the centre of the Old Town. Villa Lucija's rooms are clean and spacious, balconies overlook the lake, and the patio is right on the water for a swim.

Apartments Kosta (☎ 267 243; vilakosta@gmail.com; Ul Car Samoil 26; s/d/tr/q €15/25/30/45) The Kostas have gone all out to provide little extra comforts for their budget guests, including slippers, hairdryers, good quality linen, free tea- and coffee-making facilities and use of the family's laundry facilities and BBQ.

Argiroski Apartments (☎ 262 844; Kej Maršal Tito bb; apt €20-25) This modern block is set back from the main lakeside road, down a drive where it seems that all the neighbours have rooms to rent. Sleeping three to four people at a squeeze, the apartments are sparkling and new with self-catering facilities.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Riviera (☎ 268 735; hotelriviera@mt.com.mk; Kej Maršal Tito 4; s/d €31/48, ste €60-79; 🍷) Step back into 1970s Yugoslavia. The dated décor and crazy antique collection in the lobby are part of this place's love-it-or-hate-it charm. The three lakeside suites are wonderful for the price, sleeping up to four people.

Vila Sveta Sofija (☎ 254 368; www.vilasofija.com; Ul Kosta Abraš 64; s/d €35/60, ste €80-120; 🍷) Tucked into the lower part of the old town, this converted Ottoman house combines opulent traditional furnishings and old-world charm with space-age bathroom design. The luxury suite is impossibly romantic and the food is wonderful. This is the best boutique hotel in Macedonia.

Hotel Millenium Palace (☎ 263 361; www.milleniumpalace.com.mk; Kej Maršal Tito bb; s/d €49/66, ste €99-124; 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷) It's amazing to think that this uber-'80s monstrosity was built this millennium. Once you get past the aesthetics, the facilities within are very good – comfy beds, all mod cons, a small gym, sauna and an indoor swimming pool with a cocktail bar. The suites have terraces overlooking the lake.

Eating & Drinking

Ohrid has a great selection of cafés and bars, many of which host live music. The quality of its restaurants is rather less impressive.

Restoran Sveta Sofija (☎ 267 403; Ul Car Samoil 88; mains 160-690MKD) This classy bistro serves a wide range of Macedonian dishes. The view from the terrace onto the ancient church is the very soul of Ohrid, made all the more evocative on the weekend when the folk band plays.

Restaurant Antiko (☎ 265 523; Ul Car Samoil 30; mains from 350MKD) Built into the ancient city gate, this is the best place for traditional Macedonian food. Beware – it is rather pricey and local specialities need to be ordered up to three hours in advance.

Terrazza Aquarius (☎ 252 625; Ul Kosta Abraš 30) In winter it's a cosy bar, but in summer this large lakeside terrace becomes party central, with its weekend hours extending until 3am. Expect a big sound system, guest DJs and lots of cocktails.

Mezzoforte (Ul Car Samoil 8) A groovy young crowd populates this stylish Old Town bar, with vaulted brick ceilings, comfy sofas and chilled music.

Duck Café (☎ 256 818; Kej Maršal Tito 12) This large booze barn hosts some great live bands from Thursday to Saturday, playing everything from jazz to rock and blues.

Entertainment

Ohrid's movie theatre and concert hall, **Dom Na Kultura** (Ul Grigor Prlićev; admission 50-100MKD), faces the lakeside park.

Shopping

Antik Jewellers (☎ 250 999; Ul Kosta Abraš 13) Ohrid Pearls have been crafted by local families since the secret of fashioning pearl-like jewellery from fish bones was brought to Ohrid by Russian artisans fleeing the revolution. Unlike the cheaper versions to be found in every second shop on Ul Car Samoil, these are the real deal.

Atanas Talevski (☎ 254 059; Ul Kosta Abraš 19) A wonderful photographer, whose intimate studies of elderly villagers are astoundingly good. With small prints only costing 200MKD, they make brilliant gifts for art-minded friends.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Ohrid airport (OHD; ☎ 252 820; www.airports.com.mk) is served from only a handful of European cities – Skopje (Macedonian), Belgrade (JAT), Ljubljana (Adria), Zurich (Helvetic and Macedonian) and Vienna (Macedonian). A taxi to the airport, 7km north of Ohrid, costs 250MKD.

BUS

Buses to Struga (14km) leave roughly every 15 minutes (5am to 9pm) from stand 1 at

the **bus station** (☎ 262 490; Ul Dimitar Vlahov). Enter through the back doors and pay the conductor (30MKD).

About 10 buses a day run between Ohrid and Skopje via Kičevo (380MKD, three hours, 167km). Another four go via Bitola (380MKD, four hours, 261km). The first route is shorter, faster and more scenic, so try to take it. There are at least six buses a day travelling to Bitola (170MKD, 1½ hours, 71km). Three of these continue on to Belgrade (1500MKD, about 12 hours, 692km).

For Albania, catch a Sveti Naum bus to the border crossing (80MKD, 50 minutes, 29km, four daily). From Albanian customs it's 6km to Pogradec; taxis are waiting and should charge only €5 for the ride.

CAR

There's a branch of **Hertz** (☎ 261 237; Bul Turistička bb; 🕒 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) in Ohrid.

AROUND OHRID

Sveti Naum СВЕТИ НАУМ

The magnificent grounds of the Sveti Naum monastery, near the Albanian border 29km south of Ohrid, are a real treat. The grounds are patrolled by peacocks and contain the source of Lake Ohrid's water. The beautiful 17th-century **Church of Sveti Naum** (admission 100MKD) rises on a hill above the lake, surrounded by the buildings of the Hotel Sveti Naum, which has taken over the historic monastery complex.

The original church of the Holy Archangels was built in 900 by St Naum, and the saint himself is buried here. They say that you can still hear his heartbeat if you put your ear on his tomb inside the chapel. The monastery grounds also offer a view of the Albanian town of Pogradec across the lake. In the summer months you can take a half-hour boat trip from the monastery to the bubbling springs that feed Lake Ohrid (€1 to €5 per person depending on party size).

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Sveti Naum (☎ 046-283 080; www.hotel-stnaum.com.mk; s €44-50, d €70-80, apt €100-120; 🍷) Standing at the heart of the monastery, this lovely hotel has magical views, excellent rooms with satellite TV, phone, central heating and traditional stylings. The hotel restaurant serves traditional Macedonian food (120MKD to 600MKD).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Four buses a day run from Ohrid to Sveti Naum (80MKD, 50 minutes, 29km, four daily). The bus continues on to the Albanian border before heading back. A taxi will get you there in 35 minutes and set you back €10.

In summer you can also come by boat but it only leaves when a group of about five to eight people is present; ask about times at the wharf or at the travel agencies in town. The fare is about 150/200MKD one way/return.

BITOLA & PELISTER NATIONAL PARK БИТОЛА И ПЕЛИСТЕР НАЦИОНАЛНИ ПАРК

☎ 047

Easily the most handsome and quite possibly the friendliest city in Macedonia, chilly Bitola sits on a 660m-high plateau at the foot of Mt Pelister, just north of the Greek border. Named Manastir under Ottoman rule, it surpassed even Skopje as the most important city in the region, with its prestigious military academy attracting the likes of a young Kemal Atatürk, the father of modern Turkey. Its past prosperity has graced it with a fine central promenade, Ulica Maršal Tito, which is lined with 19th-century buildings including the three remaining consulates – Turkish, British and French. In winter the temperatures can reach minus 30°C, but this doesn't stop the locals strutting their stuff up and the down this street or hanging out in its stylish bars and cafés.

Information

The local info source is the newly opened **Turist Info Center** (☎ 241 641; Sterjo Georgiev 1; 🕒 Mon-Fri 9am-4pm). For internet access we recommend **Internet Caffe Mouse** (☎ 047-241 194; Ul Maršal Tito; per hr 30MKD).

Sights & Activities

Clustered around the Dragor River, the magnificent minarets of three **16th-century mosques** pierce the sky. North of the river the city's colourful **old bazaar** has about 6000 shops to explore. On the south side **Sveti Dimitri** (Ul 11 Oktomvri) boasts a large lavish interior with exquisite frescoes, ornate lamps, a huge iconostasis and storm clouds covering the ceiling.

As you wander down Ulica Maršal Tito and into the park you'll notice the number of well-tended socialist-realist **statues** of square-jawed partisans. Tito's bust is rarely without fresh

flowers, but more surprising is the bronze Partisan memorial erected in Goce Delčev square as recently as 2004.

Follow the signs in the park to the fascinating ruins of **Heraclea Lyncestis** (admission 100MKD, photos 500MKD; ☎ 9am-3pm Nov-Apr, 9am-5pm May-Oct). Founded in the 4th century BC by Philip II of Macedon, Heraclea was conquered by the Romans two centuries later and became an important stage on the Via Egnatia, the Roman road that connected ports on the Adriatic with Byzantium. Excavations only started in 1936 and are continuing as money allows, but the well-preserved theatre, baths, portico, two early Christian basilicas and the episcopal palace are now visible. The site's 1300 sq metres of mosaics are protected by sand (and often buried by snow) in the winter, but they are uncovered from 1 May to 15 October every year.

Pelister National Park, only 10km from Bitola, covers 12,500 hectares of pine forest and the great granite dome of **Mt Pelister** (2601m). The park protects some 88 species of trees, included the rare five-leafed Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*). There is a small **ski slope** (day pass 300MKD), which usually operates from the beginning of December until early March. In summer you can hike to the crystal-clear lakes on top of the mountain, enjoying the views over Lake Prespa to the west.

On the edge of the park is the rugged old Vlach village of **Malovište**. The village has been slowly losing its population for decades, but its collection of two-storey stone houses is one of the finest ensembles of traditional architecture in Macedonia. A little river bubbles through the village, crossed by many quaint little bridges. The lanes are made of rough cobblestones – sturdy footwear will help save your ankles. The massive church of **Sveti Petka** (built in 1856) shows how wealthy the community had grown through cattle breeding. The interior is full of frescoes and over 100 icons. About 2km from the village, in the middle of a dense beech forest, is the little church of **Sveta Ana**. It takes about 30 minutes to hike there – it's 400m higher in altitude. Tradition has it that an acorn taken from the tree here will bring you luck in love. Hotels in Bitola can arrange transport to/from Malovište, with one hour at the village, for about 500MKD. Malovište is 4km off Hwy E65 between Bitola and Resen – turn off at Kazani, take the first left and then another left through a tunnel under the highway.

The **Iinden Festival**, the most important event of the year, takes place on 2 August, and celebrates the uprising against the Ottomans with traditional food, music and general joy.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation in the centre of Bitola is limited and overpriced. Better deals can be found in the villages on the road through Pelister National Park, even allowing for the cost of taxis to the centre.

Hotel Šumski Feneri (☎ 047-293 030; sfeneri@mt.net.mk; Trnovo village; s/d/tr €25/40/50, apt €60; 📍) This charming family-owned hotel lies on the lower slopes of Mt Pelister in the village of Trnovo, 9km from the centre of Bitola (200MKD by taxi) and 6km to the ski-field chairlifts. It has four apartments, which can fit four people, an extraordinary number of potted plants and a large restaurant filled with unintentionally hilarious art. Naomi Campbell and Joseph Fiennes have both stayed here. To get there take the Pelister National Park road up the mountain towards Molika.

Hotel Molika (☎ 047-229 406; www.hotelmolika.com.mk; Molika, Pelister National Park; s/d €32/46; 📍 🚰 🚿) Located at the foot of the chairlifts 1420m up Mt Pelister but only 15km from Bitola, this 56-room mountain lodge also offers full or half-board to weary skiers and hikers. The furnishings are faded but the rooms are fine, with great views from the balconies at the front.

Hotel De Niro (☎ 047-229 656; www.hotel-deniro.com; Ul Kiril i Metodij 5; s/d €35/50, ste €80; 📍 🚰 🚿) The location is perfect for this new little hotel, around the corner from the consulates on Maršal Tito and above a popular Italian restaurant of the same name. The rooms are very clean but small, especially the single – where your shower looks out at the factory next door via an upper-torso-revealing piece of unfrosted glass.

Hotel Epinal (☎ 047-224 777; www.hotelepinal.com; Ul Maršal Tito bb; s 675-84, d €120-140; 📍 🚰 🚿) The only large hotel in the centre of Bitola, Epinal has some great facilities – such as an excellent swimming pool and gym – but the rooms are overpriced. Use of the air-conditioning will set you back an extra €10 per person. The open-air café under a wrought-iron roof at the front of the hotel, on the other hand, is an excellent spot for traditional Macedonian fare, especially fish (mains 300MKD to 900MKD).

WORTH A TRIP

The remote and magnificent **Treskavec Monastery**, 10km to the north of Prilep on the top of rocky Mt Zlato, can only be reached by a two-hour climb or by 4WD up a muddy mountain track, weather permitting. Take a taxi to Dabnica village and ask the driver to point you at the cobbled track leading up the mountain. Go up the road, and after you reach the water fountain, continue on the straight path. The monastery itself was rebuilt in the early 1990s after it was destroyed by a fire, and forms a sort of pentagon with a courtyard and 14-century church at its centre, decorated with fine frescoes. Built on what was an ancient town, the site once housed a temple to Apollo and Artemis. The monastery's guardians will welcome you, cook you dinner and let you sleep in the rooms for free. Beds and blankets are provided. Leave some money at the icons; how much is up to you, but we recommend at least 200MKD per person.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 047-391 391; Ul Nikola Tesla) and **train station** (☎ 047-392 904; Ul Nikola Tesla) are adjacent to each other, about 1km south of the town centre. There are seven buses daily to Skopje between 5am and 4.30pm (350MKD, 2½ hours, 185km), which also stop in Prilep (110MKD, 30 minutes, 46km). The train follows a similar route but takes four hours to reach its destination (four daily). There are at least six buses to Ohrid, with more services in summer (170MKD, 1½ hours, 71km).

To get to the Greek border, take a taxi from the bus station (€6, 15 minutes, 15km) and then order a taxi on the Greek side to the nearest town, Florina (€12, 15 minutes, 17km). From here it will take about three hours by bus and a little longer by train to reach Thessaloniki.

There's a branch of **Hertz** (☎ 047-237 087; Ul Kliment Ohridski 2; per day from €40) in town.

MACEDONIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

City hotels are expensive, as they tend to cater to business and government travellers. In areas where locals take their holidays, accommodation is generally good and affordable, with plenty of private options. In Skopje you'll be lucky to find a midrange single for less than €60 per night, whereas in Ohrid there are plenty under €40. Booking early is recommended for visits during the summer season, Orthodox Christmas (7 January) and Orthodox Easter.

ACTIVITIES

There is great skiing at Mavrovo (p481), along with less-developed facilities at Pelister (opposite) and Popova Šapka (1845m), 18km west of Tetovo near the border with Kosovo. Hiking is

spectacular in any of the three national parks (Galičica, Pelister and Mavrovo) and at Lake Matka (p480) near Skopje. Unsurprisingly, Macedonia has a great tradition of mountaineering. The **Macedonian Mountaineering Sports Federation** (☎ 02-3165 540; spsm@mt.net.mk) can put you in touch with guides throughout the county for alpine hikes, rock- or ice-climbing, as well as hiring tents, cooking equipment and providing maps and details of mountain huts.

BOOKS

Lonely Planet's *Eastern Europe Phrasebook* will help you with the language. A decent background book is *Who Are the Macedonians?* by Hugh Poulton, a very readable political and cultural history. Also addressing the issue of Macedonian identity is Will Myer's *People Of The Storm God: Travels In Macedonia*. A *Hitchhiker's Guide to Macedonia...and my soul*, by Carol Maria Cho, is a laugh-out-loud funny journal, if a little self-indulgent in parts.

BUSINESS HOURS

Businesses tend to stay open late in Macedonia. Travellers will generally find them open from 8am to 8pm weekdays and 8am to 2pm on Saturday. In smaller centres they may close for lunch from around 1pm, and reopen at 4pm. Post offices open from 7am to 5.30pm and banks from 7am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Restaurants, bars and cafés tend to open at 9am and close at midnight, extending to 1am on Friday and Saturday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

In general, Macedonia is a safe and easygoing country. Watch out for pickpockets in crowded areas, and taxi drivers charging exorbitant fares from the airport. A more specific annoyance can be the persistence

of young beggars, particularly around the riverfront and square in Skopje, and at traffic lights. While they are unlikely to hurt you, it can be quite intimidating to have half a dozen rug rats hanging off every pocket for 15 minutes at a time, getting progressively more aggressive. Keep your hands firmly on your valuables and walk quickly into the nearest café or store if you're unable to shake them.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Wheelchair accessibility in Macedonia is almost nonexistent. Few public buildings or hotels have ramps and only the very expensive Holiday Inn in Skopje has a specifically designed wheelchair-accessible room. There is no disabled access on public transport.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Macedonian Embassies & Consulates

A full list of Macedonian embassies abroad and embassies and consulates in Macedonia can be found at www.mfa.gov.mk.

Albania (☎ 04-233 036; makambas@albnet.net; cnr Rr Skënderbej & Rr e Kavajës, Tirana)

Australia (☎ 0612-6249 8000; info@macedonianemb.org.au; Perpetual Bldg, Ste 2:05, 10 Rudd St, Canberra ACT 2601)

Bulgaria (☎ 02-870 1560; todmak@bgnet.bg; Ul Frederic Joliot-Curie 17, Block 2, fl 1, Ste 1, Sofia 1113)

Canada (☎ 613-234 3882; www.3.sympatico.ca/emb.macedonia.ottawa; 130 Albert St, Ste 1006, Ottawa ON, K1P 5G4)

France (☎ 01 45 77 10 50; ambassade@fr.oleane.com; 5 Rue de la Faisanderie, 75116 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-890 69 50; makedonische.botschaft@t-online.de; Koenigsallee 2, 14193 Berlin)

Greece Athens (☎ 210 674 9585; lormak@teledomenet.gr; Marathonoudromou 13, P Psychico, 154 52); Thessaloniki

(☎ 2310 277 347; dkpsolun@mfa.com.mk; Tsimiski 43)

Kosovo (☎ 038-247 462; fax 247 463; Ul 24 Maj 121, Prishtina)

Netherlands (☎ 0704-27 22 64; repmak@wanadoo.nl; Laan van Meerdevoort 50-C, 2517Am Den Haag)

Serbia & Montenegro Belgrade (☎ 011-328 4924; macemb@eunet.yu; Gospodar Jevremova 34, 11000);

Podgorica (☎ 081-667 415; mkgkpodgorica@cg.yu; Hercegovacka 49/3, 81000)

UK (☎ 020 7976 0535; www.macedonianembassy.org.uk; Suites 2.1 & 2.2, Buckingham Court, 75-83 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6PE)

USA (☎ 202-667-0501; www.macedonianembassy.org; 2129 Wyoming Ave, Washington DC, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Macedonia

All of the following are located in Skopje unless indicated otherwise:

Albania (☎ 02-2614 636; ambshqip@mt.net.mk; Ul Tiro Karpos 94a)

Australia (☎ 02-3061 114; austcon@mt.net.mk; Ul Londonska 11b)

Bulgaria (☎ 02-3229 444; bgemb@mol.com.mk; Ul Ivo Ribar Lola 40)

Canada (☎ 02-3225 630; honcon@unet.com.mk; Bul Partizanska Odredi 17a)

Croatia (☎ 02-3127 350; velhrskp@mpt.com.mk; Ul Ivo Ribar Lola 44)

France (☎ 02-3244 300; www.ambafrance-mk.org; Ul Salvador Aljende 73); Bitola (☎ 047-223 192;

fax 047-223 594; Ul Maršal Tito 42)

Germany (☎ 02-3093 900; dt.boskop@mol.com.mk; Ul Lerinska 59)

Greece (☎ 02-3219 260; grfyrom@unet.com.mk; Ul Borka Taleski 6); Bitola (☎ 047-238 310; fax 047-220 310; Ul Tomaki Dimitrovski 43)

Netherlands (☎ 02-3129 319; www.nlembassy.org.mk; Ul Leninova 69-71)

Serbia (☎ 02-3129 298; yuamb@unet.com.mk; Ul Pitu Guli 8)

UK (☎ 02-3299 299; beskopje@mt.net.mk; Ul Salvador Aljende 73); Bitola (☎ /fax 047-228 765; Ul Maršal Tito 42)

USA (☎ 02-3116 180; skopje.usembassy.gov; Bul Ilinden bb)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There are a good few festivals in Macedonia, especially in the summertime. July brings open-air evening concerts, opera and theatre to both Ohrid and Skopje. There is also a fun folklore festival in Ohrid in early July (see p483). Summer sees the International Swimming Marathon on Lake Ohrid.

One festival that all Macedonians rave about is the Galičnik wedding festival (see p481), held on the second weekend in July. Skopje's autumn days are brightened up with the flickering screens of the international film festival and the warm sounds of the **Skopje Jazz Festival** (www.skopjejazzfest.com.mk) in October.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

For a country that is quick to lay claim to the legacy of Alexander the Great (whose great love was fellow soldier-boy Hephaestion), acceptance of gays and lesbians is shamefully lacking. Homosexuality was decriminalised in Macedonia in 1996, but there is little social acceptance. Any scene that may exist is so underground it's completely inaccessible to tourists, not to mention many locals.

HOLIDAYS

New Year 1 & 2 January

Orthodox Christmas 7 January

International Women's Day 8 March

Orthodox Easter Week March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Sts Cyril & Methodius Day 24 May

Ilinden or Day of the 1903 Rebellion 2 August

Republic Day 8 September

Partisan Day 11 October

INTERNET ACCESS

Bring your laptop – Macedonia's on its way to being the world's first completely wireless country.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Culture – Republic of Macedonia (www.culture.in.mk)

Exploring Macedonia (www.exploringmacedonia.com)

Macedonia FAQ (faq.macedonia.org)

Skopje Online (www.skopjeonline.com.mk)

LANGUAGE

Macedonia's two official languages are Macedonian and Albanian. Macedonian, a South Slavic language, is spoken by most of the population. There are some grammatical similarities between Macedonian and Bulgarian, such as the omission of case. Speakers of Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian and, to a lesser extent, Russian should get by without too much difficulty. For others, we recommend a good phrasebook, such as Lonely Planet's *Eastern Europe Phrasebook*.

Macedonian uses the Cyrillic alphabet, based on the Glagolitic script, which originated in Macedonia and spread across the eastern Slavic world. Though Latin script appears on road signs and some shop names, the Cyrillic alphabet is predominant and street names are printed in Cyrillic only, so it's a good idea to learn the alphabet before travelling to the country. For a quick introduction to useful Macedonian and Albanian words and phrases, see the Language chapter, p944.

MONEY

Macedonian denar (MKD) notes come in denominations of 10, 50, 100, 500, 1000 and 5000, and there are coins of one, two and five denar. The denar isn't convertible outside Macedonia. Restaurants, hotels and some shops will accept payment in euro (usually) and US dollars (sometimes). In this book we've used whatever currency the prices were

listed in, which is usually euro for hotels and denar for other transactions.

Small private exchange offices throughout central Skopje and Ohrid exchange cash for a rate that is only slightly better than at banks. ATMs can be found in all of the major towns and tourist centres but not in out-of-the-way places. Travellers cheques are a real hassle to change and we advise against relying on them, except as a form of emergency back-up money. Credit cards are widely accepted, but don't take it for granted, even at a hotel or restaurant. Diners Club is surprisingly popular.

POST

Mail services to/from Macedonia are efficient and reasonably fast, although sending money or valuables through normal post is not recommended as they may mysteriously disappear. Letters to the USA cost 38MKD, to Australia 40MKD and to Europe 35MKD. There are poste-restante services at major post offices.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Lake Ohrid trout is almost extinct, and in 2004 the government issued a seven-year ban on catching it. Despite this, many restaurants still offer it, thereby encouraging illegal trout fishing. Don't order it.

Although in the majority of larger towns and cities dress is tight, colourful and revealing among women and men, do dress modestly when visiting a church, monastery or mosque.

TELEPHONE & FAX

A long-distance call costs less at main post offices than in hotels. Drop the initial zero in the city codes when calling Macedonia from abroad. Buy phonecards in units of 100 (200MKD), 200 (300MKD), 500 (650MKD) or 1000 (1250MKD) from post offices. Some larger kiosks also sell the 100-unit cards. You can often make cheap international calls at internet cafés for around 15MKD per minute.

Macedonia has a digital mobile phone network (MobiMak); mobile numbers are preceded by ☎070. Some providers may have

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance ☎ 194
- Police ☎ 192
- Highway & Roadside Assistance ☎ 15555

global-roaming agreements with Macedonia's domestic network, so check before departing.

Fax services are available at the main post offices in Skopje and Ohrid.

VISAS

Citizens of EU countries, Argentina, Barbados, Bosnia, Botswana, Croatia, Cuba, Iceland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Maldives, Norway, Switzerland and the USA don't need visas for Macedonia and are allowed to stay for up to three months. Visas are required for most others and cost €20 to €50 depending on where you apply for it and whether it is single- or multiple-entry. Even though some visas can be obtained at the airport for some nationalities, it is much safer to apply in advance. The regulations change quite frequently – check www.mfa.gov.mk for the latest information.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women travellers should feel no particular concern about travel in Macedonia. Other than possible cursory interest from men, travel is hassle-free and easy.

TRANSPORT IN MACEDONIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Macedonia has two international airports, Skopje's **Petrovec airport** (SKP; ☎ 02-3148 333; www.airports.com.mk) and the much smaller **Ohrid airport** (OHD; ☎ 046-252 820; www.airports.com.mk). There is no departure tax.

AIRLINES

Adria Airways (code JP; ☎ 02-3117 009; www.adria.si; Ljubljana)

Air France (code AF; no local office; www.airfrance.com; Prague)

Croatia Airlines (code OU; ☎ 02-3115 858; www.croatiaairlines.hr; Zagreb)

Czech Airlines (code OK; ☎ 02-3290 572; www.czechairlines.com; Prague)

JAT Airways (code JU; ☎ 02-3118 306; www.jat.com; Belgrade)

Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 02-3216 120; www.lufthansa.com; Ljubljana)

Malév Hungarian Airlines (code MA; ☎ 02-3111 214; www.malev.hu; Budapest)

Land

Macedonia shares land borders with Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia and the UN-monitored territory of Kosovo. Access to/from all neighbouring states is generally trouble-free and unrestricted.

BORDER CROSSINGS

Albania

There are four border crossings with Albania – the two main ones are on either side of Lake Ohrid (Kafa San/Qafa e Thanës, 12km southwest of Struga, and Sveti Naum/Tushemishti, 29km south of Ohrid). There are two smaller ones at Blato, 5km northwest of Debar, and at Stenje on the western shore of Lake Prespa.

Bulgaria

The main crossings are just east of Kriva Palanka (between Sofia and Skopje), east of Delčevo (26km west of Blagoevgrad) and at Novo Selo (between Petrič and Strumica).

Greece

There are crossings at Gevgelija (between Skopje and Thessaloniki), Dojran (just east of Gevgelija) and Medžitlija. To get to this crossing, take a taxi from the Bitola bus station (€6, 15 minutes, 15km) and then order a taxi on the Greek side to the nearest town, Florina (€12, 15 minutes, 17km).

Kosovo

The main border crossing at Blace is just a 20-minute trip north from Skopje. There is another crossing point close by at Jazine, used by vehicles coming from Tetovo.

Serbia

The main crossing point into Serbia is Tabanovce, either on the motorway or by train. There's a much smaller crossing point at Pelince about 25km northeast of Tabanovce.

BUS

From Skopje buses travel to Belgrade (1350MKD, six hours, 431km, 16 daily), Prishtina (300MKD, 1½ hours, 87km, six daily), Sofia (640MKD, six hours, 222km, six daily) and further-flung Eastern European centres such as Sarajevo, Zagreb and Ljubljana. Many of these routes pass through smaller centres, including Ohrid and Bitola.

To/from Albania you can travel from Tetovo via Struga to Tirana by bus (900MKD, six to

seven hours, two daily on Monday, Wednesday and Friday). From Ohrid you can catch a Sveti Naum bus to the border (80MKD, 50 minutes, 29km, four daily) and cross on foot.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

None of the border crossings should pose any particular problems. You will need a Green Card endorsed for Macedonia to bring a car into the country. For further information on driving around Macedonia see below.

TRAIN

Trains from Skopje head to Belgrade via Niš (1209MKD, nine hours, two daily), Prishtina (€4, 2½ hours, two daily), Podgorica via Niš (2000MKD, 17½ hours, daily), Zagreb (2050MKD, 18 hours, daily) and Ljubljana (2690MKD, 20½ hours, daily). Sleepers are available. You can find timetables for international routes on the website of **Macedonian Railways** (www.mz.com.mk/patnicki/timetable.htm).

GETTING AROUND Air

It is possible to fly between Skopje and Ohrid on MAT (see p484) but buses are definitely the best and cheapest option.

Bicycle

Cycling around Macedonia is becoming more popular. The country offers generally good road conditions and relatively light traffic – though beginners should be warned it is a mountainous country.

Bus

The bus network is well developed in Macedonia, with frequent services from Skopje to all major centres in safe and fairly comfortable coaches. It's a good idea to buy a ticket from the station a day or two in advance when travelling to Ohrid in the busy summer season. For further information see the Getting There & Away section of each destination chapter.

Car & Motorcycle DRIVING LICENCE

Usually your country's driving licence will suffice, but it is a good idea to have an International Driving Permit as well.

HIRE

Skopje is full of rental-car agencies, from the large ones (Hertz, Avis, Sixt) to dozens of

local companies. The choices in Ohrid and Bitola are more limited. Tourist brochures give comprehensive lists. A smallish sedan like a Ford Focus costs about €40 a day, including insurance. You need to present your passport, driving licence and a credit card. You normally need to have held a full driving licence for one year.

INSURANCE

Rental agencies provide insurance for around €15 to €25 a day, depending on the type of car, with a nonwaivable excess of €1000 to €2500. Green Card insurance is accepted, and third-party insurance is compulsory.

ROAD RULES

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road. Speed limits for cars and motorcycles are 120km/h on motorways, 80km/h on the open road and 50km/h to 60km/h in towns. Speeding fines start from around 1500MKD. It is compulsory to wear a seat belt and to have the headlights on (dipped) at all times for both cars and motorcycles. It is also compulsory to carry a replacement set of bulbs, two warning triangles, a first-aid kit, and between 15 November and 15 March cars must carry snow chains. Motorcyclists and their passengers must wear helmets. Macedonia has a relatively high death toll from accidents and the busy traffic police are vigilant on speeding, drink driving and headlights in particular. Fines are issued on-the-spot. The legal blood-alcohol limit is 0.05%.

Taxi

Taxis are a snappy way of getting to out-of-the-way monasteries and other sights if buses aren't convenient. Macedonian taxis are very cheap by European standards – Skopje has some of the cheapest capital-city taxis. A half-hour trip, from Skopje to Lake Matka for example, should cost around 350MKD.

Train

Macedonia has a limited network of domestic destinations reachable by train. Possibly the only one of any real interest is the four-hour, three-times-daily service to Bitola via Prilep from Skopje. The most you'll pay for a domestic ticket is 370MKD for a return to Bitola. Timetables are available on the website of **Macedonian Railways** (www.mz.com.mk/patnicki/timetable.htm).

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