



Sacred Art Pilgrimage

From Byzantium to the Home of Saint Paul

Paleochristian Sacred Art, Architecture, History

September 10-21, 2024

Cliff Monasteries of The Meteora, Greece

in conjunction with Orthodox Tours

Sofia, Bulgaria

Tuesday, September 10, 2024

Hosted Meal: Welcome Dinner
Arrival to Sofia (SOF) & transfer to Hotel Central Park

Wednesday, September 11, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

St. Sofia Church

You will begin your adventure with a full day of sightseeing in Sofia starting with a visit to its most ancient church dating to the **4th century** and its early, well-preserved Christian underground necropolis.

Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky

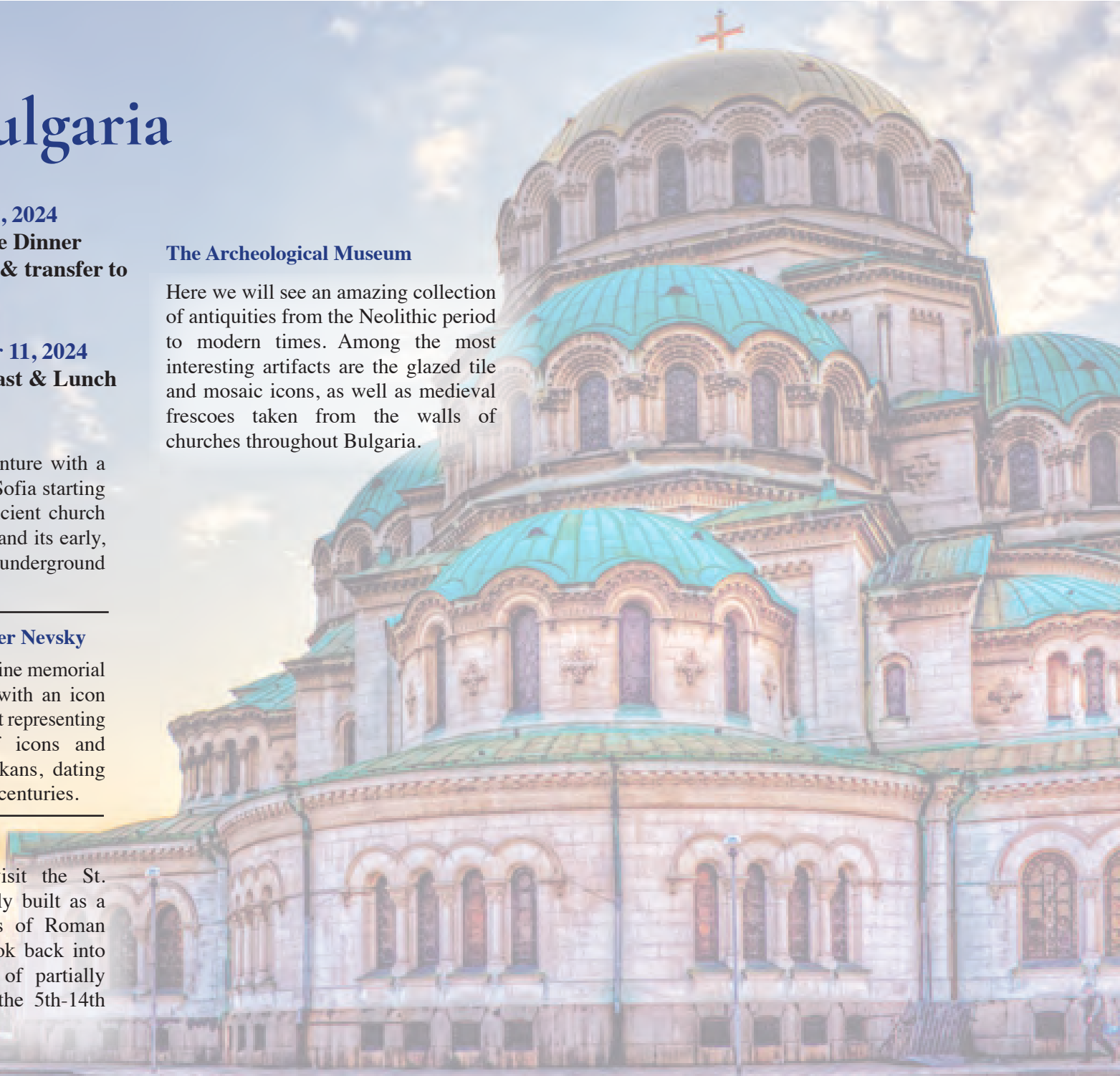
Next stop - the Neo-Byzantine memorial built in the 19th century with an icon gallery in the Cathedral crypt representing the largest collection of icons and sacred images in the Balkans, dating from the 6th through 19th centuries.

St. George Rotunda

After lunch you will visit the St. George Rotunda, originally built as a part of the Roman baths of Roman Serdica where we can look back into history with five layers of partially preserved frescoes from the 5th-14th centuries.

The Archeological Museum

Here we will see an amazing collection of antiquities from the Neolithic period to modern times. Among the most interesting artifacts are the glazed tile and mosaic icons, as well as medieval frescoes taken from the walls of churches throughout Bulgaria.



Sofia, Bulgaria

Thursday, September 12, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

The Monastery of St. George (Kremikovtsi)

Remarkable for its frescoes from 1493, this monastery houses the most precious medieval sacred Byzantine art of Bulgaria. The frescoes demonstrate a high standard of spiritual and iconographic knowledge.

National Museum of Bulgaria

A former Soviet era building that is filled with countless treasures, including the famous Thracian Gold hoards, along with many precious Roman, Early Christian and Medieval Bulgarian artifacts.

Boyana Church (UNESCO)

This World Heritage Site dates from the 10th century and while a small church, its frescoes from 1259 are the best preserved and most artistically valuable in all of Bulgaria.

Zemen Monastery

After lunch we will enjoy a leisurely one hour south trip to visit the Zemen monastery, dedicated to St. John the Theologian, built between the 9th and 10th centuries. Its preserved frescoes date to the 14th century.

Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Friday, September 13, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

The Red Church

Today we are headed two hours south to the second largest city in Bulgaria – Plovdiv, once known as Philippopolis. We'll stop at the Red Church nicknamed for the red Roman bricks that make up its structure. The architecture is early Byzantine Christian, from late 5th-6th century. Some arches of this structure preserve rare 6th century frescoes.

Bachkovo Monastery

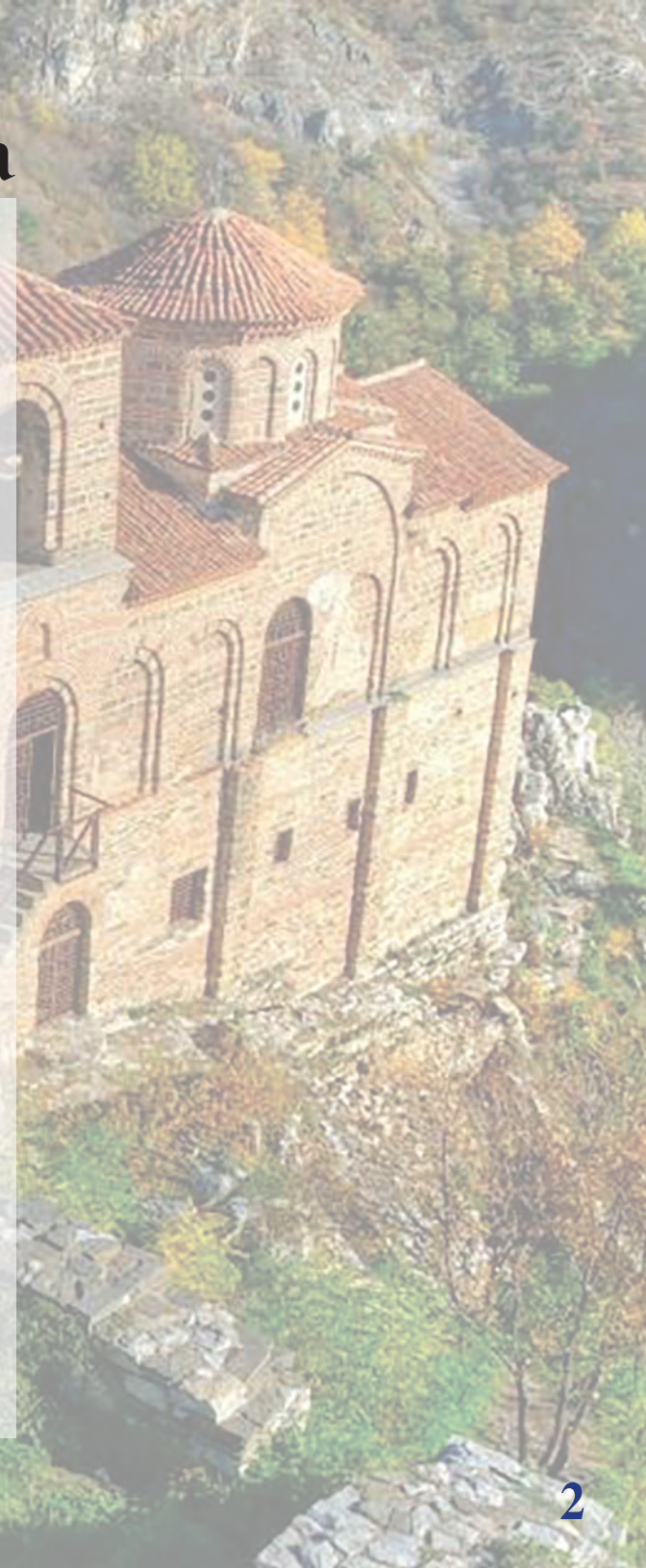
We will enjoy lunch and local wines at a winery stop, followed by a leisurely drive to Bachkovo monastery, the second largest monastery in Bulgaria, treasured for its ossuary, church & 11th-14th century frescoes.

Assumption of the Mother of God Church, famous for its miracle working icon of the Holy Virgin.

Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis

The next stop is the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis, the ruins and floor mosaics were only discovered in the 20th century and in recent years converted to a wonderful museum with digital interactive exhibits.

Tonight you will be treated to a traditional meal in a Bulgarian folk-style restaurant.



Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Saturday, September 14, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast

Walking Tour of Plovdiv

Today, we will spend the whole day exploring Plovdiv, the first Bulgarian city chosen to become the European Capital of Culture (2019).

In the morning, we'll explore the cobbled streets and admire the silence and tranquility of this historic town, heading to the **Icon Gallery** that boasts a collection of icons from the 15th-19th centuries, from Southern Bulgaria.

Plovdiv Archeological Museum

Later we will visit Plovdiv's Archaeological Museum, where we'll see exquisite artifacts like the rare Roman/Thracian ceremonial helmet, mosaics from the only Synagogue in Bulgaria from the 3rd century, and a 4th century Christian Roman tomb with stunning biblical murals depicting the miracles of Jesus Christ.

The tomb was removed from its original location in parts and reassembled in the museum setting.



Thessaloniki's Rich Paleochristian History & the Footsteps of Saint Paul

Sunday, September 15, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

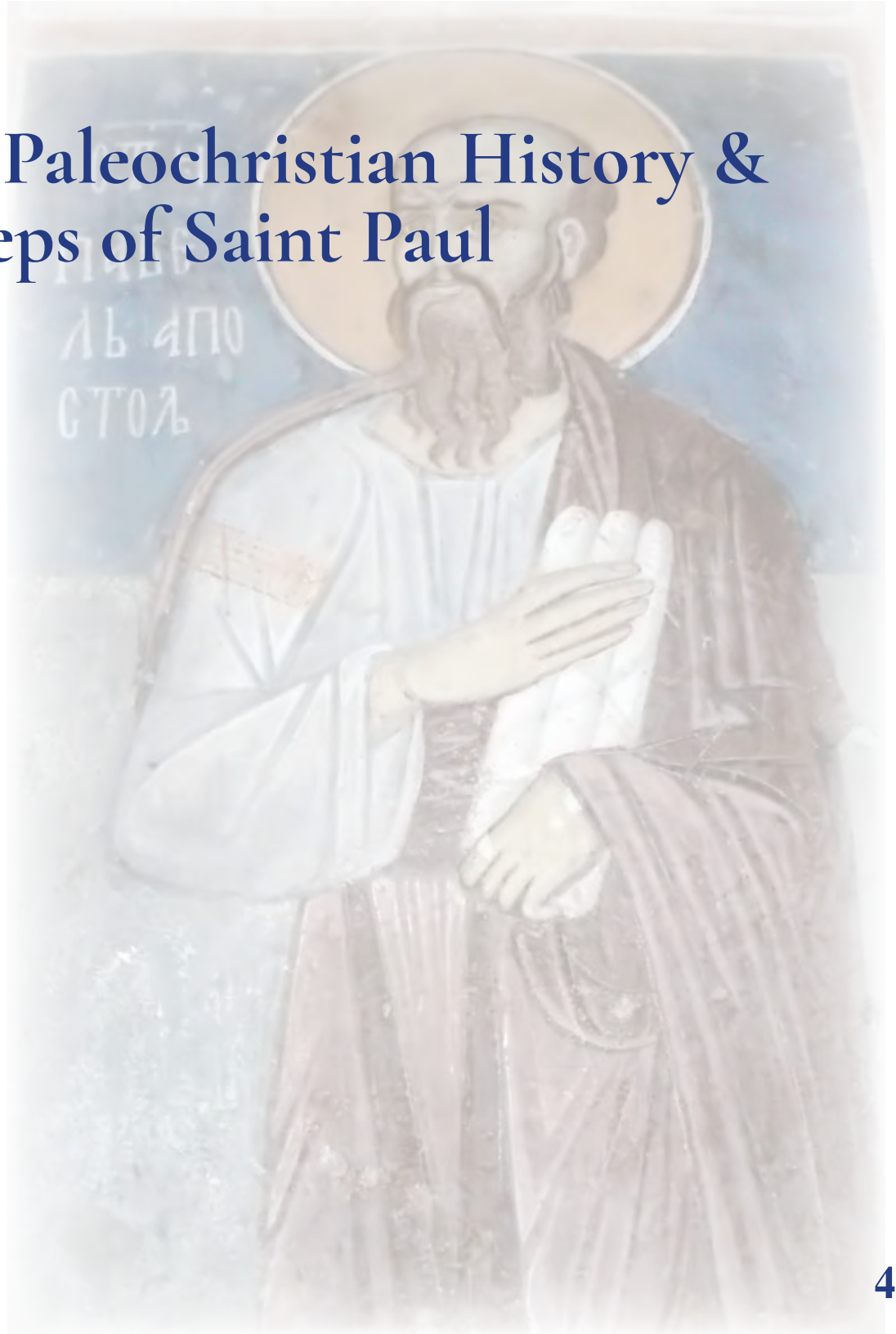
The paleochristian monuments of Thessaloniki reveal a continuous artistic exchange with the greatest cultural centers of the Roman & Constantinopolitan eras. Over the course of the next several days, we will see monuments that have outstanding universal value as the first of their kind in early Christian art in the Byzantine Empire. We will visit numerous UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece.

Ancient City of Serres

On the journey from Plovdiv to Thessaloniki, we will first stop in Serres, an ancient city known from antiquity for its wonderful Byzantine Basilica from 1124, dedicated to Saints Theodoroi (Saints Theodore of Amasea & Theodore Stratylates).

We will visit the Archeological Museum in Serres which once functioned as an Ottoman “bedesten” - an enclosed and covered market. As the Archeological museum, it contains many important pieces from excavations, but most notably features a marble icon of Christ and a 12th century mosaic of St Andrew the Apostle, both transferred from the Old Cathedral in Serres.

In the late afternoon, we will enjoy a boat ride on the Bay of Thessaloniki before dinner.



Ancient Thessaloniki

Monday, September 16, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast

Basilica of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki (UNESCO), heavenly patron of the city.

Its foundation is 7th century and the undercroft incorporates earlier Roman elements. This basilica is famous for six mosaic panels dated to the beginning of Byzantine Iconoclasm in 730. These mosaics depict St. Demetrius with the founders or “ktetors,” officials responsible for the restoration of the church.

Basilica Church of Acheiropoietos (not made by human hands) UNESCO

In Byzantine times, this church was known as the **Panagia Theotokos**, as it is dedicated to Mary. It is named after a miraculous acheiropoietos ("not made by hands") icon of Panagia Hodegetria that was once housed there. This church is among the earliest in Thessaloniki, dating to the late 5th century.

The Rotonda of Thessaloniki (UNESCO)

This is the most important Roman monument in the city from 306, designed as the grave for the Roman tetrarch Galerius. In the 4th century, the Rotonda was converted into an Orthodox Church by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine I and adorned with splendid mosaics and frescoes.

St. “Hagia” Sophia (UNESCO)

Built in the early 7th century on the site of a previous church, this massive, beautifully domed church is adorned with precious mosaics from the 9th century. The dome mosaic represents the Ascension with the inscription from Acts 1:11, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" The dome is ringed by figures of the Twelve Apostles, Mary and two angels.

Church of Panagia Chalkeon (UNESCO)

In the afternoon we will visit this 11th century church to see well-preserved Byzantine architecture, a testimony to the importance of Thessaloniki in the development of paleochristian and Byzantine monuments. The fresco of Christ’s Ascension instead of the Pantocrator in the main dome is an interesting departure from traditional Byzantine iconography.

Church of Panteleimon (UNESCO)

We will mke a stop to see the tetrastyle (cross in a square) Byzantine Church of St. Panteleimon. Panteleimon was a healer called an “anargyroi” - one who did not take payment (or silver) for healing services.

Archeological Museum of Thessaloniki

We end this day with one of the finest museums in all of Greece.



More UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Thessaloniki, Greece

Tuesday, September 17, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast

We'll continue exploring the paleo-Christian Byzantine monuments of Thessaloniki beginning with the fortifications of the upper city.

Vlatadon Monastery (UNESCO) was a stauropegion - a monastery attached to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. It is now the only Byzantine monastery in Thessaloniki still functioning and one of the 15 Paleochristian Byzantine Monuments of Thessaloniki.

Church of Hosios David (UNESCO)

From here we start our descent to the lower city, stopping first in this church dedicated to the local dendrite saint (tree dwelling saint similar to the stylite saints).

According to tradition, the church was founded in the 5th century by Theodora, daughter of Emperor Maximianus. She reportedly founded the church as a bathhouse and concealed its mosaic to dispel her mother's suspicions of her conversion to Christianity. The mosaic was likely concealed during the period of the iconoclastic controversy and was said to have been discovered in the 9th century during an earthquake when an oxhide ceiling fell and revealed the mosaic before a monk.

Church of the Prophet Elijah (UNESCO)

This 14th century "cross in a square" church contains fragments of the original fine Palaiologan frescoes that influenced artistic development of Serbian frescoes.

Church of St. Catherine (UNESCO)

Believed to be a 14th century church of the Palaiologan period, but its exact year of original construction remains unknown. The sacred art was preserved in fragments, as it was turned into a mosque during the Ottoman period.

Church of the Holy Apostles (UNESCO)

The interior decoration consists of rich mosaics on the upper levels, inspired by Constantinopolitan models. These are

particularly important as they are some of the last vestiges of Byzantium. Frescoes complete the decoration on the lower levels of the main church, as well as on the narthex and one of the chapels.

Church of St. Nicholas Orphanos (UNESCO)

Frescoes here are an example of the Thessalonican school at the height of the "Palaiologan Renaissance" likely decorated by the renowned Byzantine iconographers Michael Astrapas and Eutybios, who were active at the end of the 13th and early 14th centuries.

Byzantine Museum of Thessaloniki, is our last stop, known for its extensive collection of Byzantine Antiquities.



Pella, Vergina & Kastoria, Greece

Wednesday, September 18, 2024
Hosted Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Archeological Museum at Pella

We leave Thessaloniki and divert our attention to the ancient history of Greece.

First, we will visit the archeological site of Pella, the capital of Ancient Macedonia. Although the remains are rather humble, it is most known for the pebble mosaics. You can still see the grid of the ancient street. The life of the ancient capital is illustrated by the finds exhibited at the local archeological museum.

Royal Tombs at Vergina (UNESCO)

About an hour's drive from Pella is the complex of Royal Tombs in Vergina, which were discovered undisturbed. The museum of the Tombs presents some of the most fascinating and unusual sites in all of Greece, if not in all of Europe.

In the afternoon we will take you to the ancient city of Kastoria.

Thursday, September 19, 2024
Hosted Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Byzantine Museum of Kastoria

Kastoria is a quaint and very well-known destination for lovers of Byzantine Art & Architecture. We will start with the fascinating Byzantine museum of Kastoria which houses a small but incredible collection of Byzantine icons.

We will continue with a walking tour of Kastoria, visiting Medieval monuments of several dozen Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches and chapels in this lovely town.

Panagia Koumbelidiki

Among the most interesting is the Panagia Koumbelidiki, a small triconch church dating to the 10th century, which has become the emblem of Kastoria.

Churches of St. Nicholas Kasnitzis & The Unmercenary Healers

Both churches were painted by incredibly gifted iconographers at the end of the 12th century.

Church of St. Stephen

One of the oldest and most beautiful in Kastoria, St. Stephen's frescoes date from the 12th-13th centuries, likely even the 9th-10th centuries, making them incredibly rare.

Monastery of Panagia Mavriotissa

For a break, we will reconnect with the area's scenic nature, as we travel to the Monastery of Panagia Mavriotissa, which may have existed on the site ca. 1000. The exterior of the church was frescoed in 1260's, and the interior of the church has frescoes from mid 16th century.

Tonight we will stay in Kalambaka. En-route, time permitting, will be a short stop at the Church of St. George in Omorfoklessia, famous for its highly unusual carved wooden statue of St. George, which is of great size and venerable antiquity.

The Cliffs of Meteora & Home of Saint Paul

Friday, September 20, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Cliff Monasteries & Convents of The Meteora

This morning we will explore one of the most beautiful and holy places in Greece, the Meteora. The monasteries and convents sit on top of huge rock formations almost like birds' nests. There are six functioning communities in Meteora. While it would be difficult to visit them all, we will visit the most important ones and make accommodations for accessibility.

NOTE: please be cautioned that some of the cliff monasteries are reachable only by very long and steep stairs.

Monastery of St. Stephen

The Monastery of St. Stephen is quite accessible as it is located on the same level as the adjacent parking lot, therefore suitable for everyone, including anyone with mobility concerns.

We will overnight in Kalambaka at the foot of the Meteora cliffs.

Saturday, September 21, 2024

Hosted Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Veria - Home of the Apostle Paul

This morning we will transfer to the town of Veria (Berea in ancient times) known as one of the places where Apostle Paul preached the Good News (Acts 17:11).

Old Cathedral of Veria

Built at the end of the 11th century, the Old Cathedral of Veria is a magnificent Byzantine Basilica and one of the greatest temples of the middle Byzantine period. The frescoes of the interior are multilayered but all high quality, and date to the 12th-14th centuries. Restoration of the monument was completed in 2016 and the sacred basilica can be enjoyed in all its splendor.

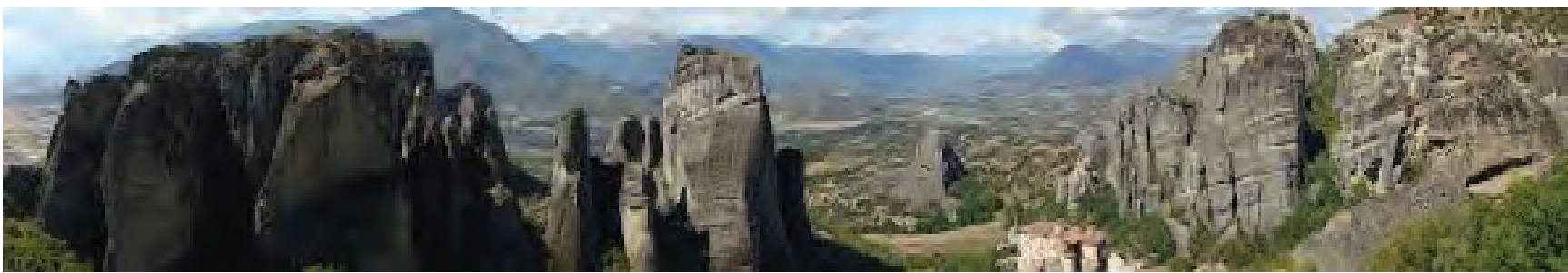
Church of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

One of the most famous Byzantine monuments of the early 14th century in Greece, this church was built in 1315 and decorated with exquisite sacred images by the iconographer Georgios Kallergis. Although not as well preserved, the frescoes are highly refined.

Byzantine Museum of Veria

The last visit in Veria, and ultimately during our trip, will be at the Byzantine Museum of Veria. This newer museum, housed in a former mill, contains a significant collection of Byzantine Antiquities beginning with the earliest Christian tombs and mosaics and ending with very fine Post-Byzantine icons. The icon collection is one of the largest in all of Greece.

Farewell dinner.



Price

\$3,300 Per Person (*Shared Accommodations*)

\$3,700 Per Person (*Private Accommodations*)

FULLY GUIDED TOUR INCLUDES:

• Hotels - 12 Nights

- 3 nights in Sophia - Hotel Central Park (4*) - centralparkhotel.bg
- 2 nights in Plovdiv - Grand Hotel (4*) - grandhotelplovdiv.bg
- 4 nights in Thessaloniki - Imperial Plus Smart Urban Hotel (4*) - Imperialhospitality.gr
- 2 nights in Kastoria - Limneon Resort & Spa (5*) - limneon.com/en
- 1 night in Larissa - Larissa Imperial (5*) - larissaimperial.com

• Meals (22 Meals = 12 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 7 dinners)

• Ground Transportation

 - Private tour bus (40+ seats with A/C) & group transfers

• All Admissions

 to museums & sites according to the program schedule

• Guides

- Professional English speaking local guide for 5 days in Bulgaria
- Professional English speaking local tour guides in Greece
- English speaking Byzantist Escort during the entire tour
- US Iconographer for iconographic education program

• Whisper sets

 along the way

• All VAT & local taxes

REGISTER BY:

June 10, 2024

DEPOSIT:

A \$500 nonrefundable deposit reserves your place. *Space is limited.*

MAIL PAYMENT TO:

Palomnik, LLC
613 Campus Drive
Vestal, NY 13850

To pay by credit card, domestic or international bank wires, please contact Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky directly. Returned checks subject to \$25 fee.

ARRANGE AIRFARE:

to Sophia, Bulgaria (SOF) & from Thessaloniki, Greece (SKG)

TOUR DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- Personal health/accident insurance (**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**)
- Airfare
- Private transportation if traveling separately from the group, or individual changes from the group's itinerary
- Porterage
- Beverages during meals
- Photo/video fees (if applicable)
- Anything not specifically listed as included
- Tips to bus drivers and tour guide.

For Bus Drivers: \$3/person/day

For Tour Guides: \$10/day

Terms & Conditions

REGISTRATION & PAYMENT DEADLINE: JUNE 10, 2024

The full amount is due June 10, 2024. Failure to pay in full by June 10, 2024 may lead to the cancellation of your participation, with no refund of any previously committed funds.

CANCELLATION POLICY: If you need to cancel after you signed up, penalty is:

- 25% of the tour cost, 91 to 61 days prior to the departure
- 50% of the tour cost, 61 to 31 days prior to the departure
- 100% of the tour cost 31 or fewer days prior to the departure

All cancellations must be in writing and sent directly to agent/coordinator - Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky, and must be received for reimbursement by the dates shown in the cancellation schedule.

Should cancellation or alteration of the program occur due to COVID and associated emergencies, civil disturbances, acts of terrorism, war, natural disaster, and other events of force majeure or acts of God (including threat or fear of same), refunds will be made only to the extent that they are recoverable, and that such cancellation or alteration may result in the total loss of funds paid by participants. It is assumed each participant has reviewed the same with respect to their own comfort level of risk and personal safety. A decision to withdraw from the trip for these reasons or any others will be bound by the same terms of cancellation.

ALTERATIONS TO ITINERARY:

Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky reserves the right to alter, modify or withdraw the itinerary if air schedules and/or events beyond his control deem it necessary. In the event it becomes necessary for the comfort or well-being of the travelers to alter or modify the itinerary or arrangements, such alterations may be made without penalty to the tour operator and are not grounds for cancellation with refund. Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky assumes no responsibility over any consequences as a result of any participant deviating from the group tour. Because of the difference in language and customs, it is expected that the traveler will follow the directions of the Tour Director at all times. Tour Director reserves the right to restrict a person's participation in the group's activities, including exclusion from the group, when, in the opinion of the Tour Director, such action is necessary.

REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

- A passport with validity for at least six months beyond end of stay

IT IS STRONGLY SUGGESTED THAT YOU:

- Obtain insurance covering medical needs and coverage of personal property and all COVID associated emergencies
- Be aware that financial coverage for all emergency medical and other emergency needs (including those related to COVID hospitalization, treatment, or quarantine) will be your sole responsibility. We will provide all possible logistical and personal assistance, but the financial aspect is your responsibility.
- Act in a manner consistent with the surrounding environment, and follow local protocols established due to COVID pandemic
- Make arrangements to have access to sufficient funds to cover personal needs and unexpected events
- Be aware that the places that we will be visiting may not have the same amenities to which you are accustomed. Medical facilities in some areas may be limited.

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