

Macedonia



Macedonia

The southernmost Slavic nation, Macedonia is rich in vineyards, forests, old villages and a wealth of Orthodox churches and monasteries. The gorgeous town of Ohrid on the lake of the same name is one of the crucibles of the Orthodox faith and Slavic culture, and Macedonia's tourism trump card. Centuries of Ottoman rule have also bestowed on it some wonderful mosques and shrines.

This small country is mostly made up of farming towns in the middle of broad fertile valleys, separated by forested ranges. The frescoes in dozens of monasteries and old churches illuminate this pastoral culture – the images of saints and angels follow strict Byzantine formulas, but the vines, goats and sheep in the margins are painted with detail and flair.

For people from the rest of old Yugoslavia, Macedonia reminds them a lot of the old days. Yugo hatchbacks buzz like motorised roller skates around streets with socialist titles such as Leninova and Maksim Gorki. Modern Macedonia is not without its problems – the local economy is still in the doldrums and there is a lingering ethnic divide between the Slavic, Orthodox Macedonians and the mostly Muslim ethnic Albanian minority. That said, visitors are greeted warmly in every part of the country and plied with hearty food and luscious drinks. Outside of Skopje, the cost of travel is low, and while public transport is a bit worn it stretches to nearly every corner of the country.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 25,713 sq km
- **Capital** Skopje
- **Currency** Macedonian Denar (MKD); €1 = 60.8MKD; US\$1=50.8MKD; UK£1 = 88.6MKD; A\$1 = 38.1MKD; ¥100 = 42.5MKD; NZ\$1 = 32.5MKD
- **Famous for** Lake Ohrid, old monasteries, name dispute with Greece
- **Key phrases** *Zdravo* (hello), *blagodaram/fala* (thanks), *molam* (please), *prijatno* (goodbye)
- **Official languages** Macedonian, Albanian
- **Population** 2 million
- **Telephone codes** country code ☎ 389; international access code ☎ 99
- **Visas** not needed for EU passport holders; some others do require one, see p261



HIGHLIGHTS

- The ancient holy town of **Ohrid** (p247) is rich in cultural treasures and is artfully positioned on a beautiful highland lake.
- The dinky little capital **Skopje** (p236) is an interesting mix of old bazaars, cool cafés and chunky communist influences.
- The highland wilderness of **Mavrovo National Park** (p245) is home to skiing, the splendid Sveti Jovan Bigorski Monastery and the wedding-festival village of Galičnik.
- Busy little **Bitola** (p252) is a great base for exploring the Roman ruins of Heraclea Lyncestis and the Treskavec Monastery at Prilep.
- **Pelister National Park** (p252) offers highland treks and the fine old Vlach village of Malovište.

ITINERARIES

- **One week** Spend two days in Skopje in the old-town bazaar and visit the enchanting Turkish baths-cum-art galleries, mosques and churches. Take a day trip to Tetovo and visit a Sufi monastery, the Painted Mosque and maybe the World's Smallest Museum at Džepčište. Then head to Ohrid and spend two days simply exploring. Next, aim for cosy little Bitola and make an excursion to the rare old village of Malovište.
- **Two weeks** Take an extra day in Skopje to visit Lake Matka. Hire a car and stay in a ski hotel in Mavrovo National Park. Visit the Sveti Jovan Bigorski Monastery on a stunning mountain ride to Ohrid. Go forth to the Sveti Naum Monastery and the village of Vevčani for an extra couple of days at Ohrid. Head down to Brajčino above Lake Prespa and explore one of Macedonia's prettiest villages. Stay in Bitola and visit both Pelister National Park and Prilep's Treskavec Monastery. Then take an excursion out to highland Berovo or to the Sveti Joachim Osogovski Monastery.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Macedonia's summers are hot and dry. Warm winds drift up from the Aegean into the Vardar Valley. The temperatures vary widely: summer temperatures can reach 40°C, while in winter it can drop as low as -30°C. The average annual temperatures are

HOW MUCH?

- **Dorm bed in Skopje** 936MKD
- **Loaf of bread** 15MKD
- **Souvenir icon** 1800MKD
- **Kebapci (kebabs)** 150MKD
- **Short taxi ride** 50MKD

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 55MKD
- **Litre of bottled water** 30MKD
- **Skopsko beer** 100MKD
- **Souvenir T-shirt** 450MKD
- **Street snack (burger)** 50MKD

above 10°C almost everywhere. Snow falls on all the mountainous areas from November to April, but in the higher mountains the snow can stay until the end of May, which makes it great for skiing.

The best time to enjoy Macedonia is between May and September. The busiest season is from mid-July to mid-August, when Macedonians take their holidays.

See Climate Charts p388.

HISTORY

Historical Macedonia is divided between the Republic of Macedonia, the Greek province of Macedonia and a corner of Bulgaria geographers call 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 point 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 the Romans.

Many Vlach villages lie along the route of the Roman Via Egnatia, a vital military



road and trade route which stretched from Durrësi in Albania to Bitola in Macedonia, and then down to Thessaloniki. 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 Samoil (r 980–1014), Macedonia was the centre of a powerful Bulgarian state. Samoil'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 (Gypsy) people arrived in the area after a long migration from northern India. After several defeats of Serbia by the Ottomans in the 14th and 15th centuries, the Balkans and therefore Macedonia became a part of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish administrators and small communities of Turkish peasants settled in the region, and over the centuries many of the local Albanians converted to

Islam. The Slavic Macedonians largely remained faithful to the Orthodox Church. As Ottoman power waned in the 18th century, the Greek Orthodox Church began to take over local Christian life, and many monasteries and churches changed their liturgy to Greek. The Macedonians resented this almost as much as Turkish rule.

In 1878 Russia defeated Turkey, and the Treaty of San Stefano ceded Macedonia to Bulgaria. 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. Macedonia was left as a predominantly Christian, Muslim-ruled region surrounded by Christian states competing to expand. The 'Macedonian Question' introduced a period of 40 years of rebellions, invasions and bloody reprisals.

In 1893, Macedonian nationalists formed the Vnatesno-Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija (VMRO), which in English means Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation, to fight for independence from Turkey. The struggle culminated in

the Ilinden (St Elijah's Day) 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, and Macedonia was unlucky enough to become a major battlefield – repeatedly. During the Second Balkan War, in 1913, Greece and Serbia ousted the Bulgarians and shared Macedonia. Montenegro was part of the anti-Turkish alliance, but it didn't occupy any part of Macedonia. These wars were pioneers of the worst of 20th-century warfare. The use of heavy artillery and trench warfare coincided with numerous massacres of civilians. After WWI, the region was granted to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and renamed Yugoslavia in 1929.

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. Although some VMRO elements supported Bulgarian occupation during WWII, many more joined Josip Broz Tito's partisans, and in 1943 it was agreed that postwar Macedonia would have full republican status within the 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 formed. After Kosovo, Macedonia was the most economically backward region of Yugoslavia, and depended on financial support from the wealthier republics.

On 8 September 1991, Macedonians went to a referendum on independence. Seventy-four per cent 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 republics, and relations with Serbia's leadership remained friendly.

Meanwhile, Greece withheld diplomatic recognition of Macedonia and demanded that the country find another name. The Greeks say that the term Macedonia implies territorial claims on northern Greece, but what really fuels their ire is the idea that 'others' are claiming the legacy of illustrious ancient Macedonia for themselves. At Greek insistence, Macedonia was forced to use the 'provisional' title the 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 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.

The discussions on the name issue went nowhere, and gradually more and more countries are dropping FYROM and recognising Republic of Macedonia as the title. Just after crossing the Greek border on the highway to Thessaloniki there's a billboard which says 'Welcome to the Real Macedonia'. The Greek disapproval of Macedonia's name is driven by a proud sense that historical Macedonia is Greek and can only ever be Greek, which makes the issue almost impossible to resolve. The Greek government still makes it difficult for Macedonians to get visas, though things are looking up on the trade front.

In the meantime, the country's ethnic Albanian minority was seeking better representation on political and cultural fronts, and tried to set up an Albanian-speaking university in Tetovo in 1995. Since Macedonia 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 Kiro Gligorov lost an eye in an assassination attempt and tensions increased.

At the end of the 1990s, an Albanian rebel group called the Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombetare (UÇK; National Liberation Army) claimed responsibility for a number of bombings. This escalated in February 2001 into armed conflict in western Macedonia

between security forces and the UČK. 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.

After the unfortunate death of Macedonian president Boris Trajkovski in a plane accident in Bosnia and Hercegovina in February 2004, the presidency was taken by former prime minister, Branko Crvenkovski, in elections in April the same year. Macedonia is keen to enter the EU, but the EU doesn't seem too anxious about it.

PEOPLE

According to 2004 estimates, the republic's 2,071,210 population is divided as follows: Macedonians of Slav ethnicity (66.6%); Albanians (22.7%); Turks (4%); Roma (2.2%); Serbs (2.1%); and others (2.4%). Relations between Macedonians and Albanians are problematic, in Skopje in particular. There are high schools in Skopje where relations between students from the two communities are so bad that the authorities came up with the following solution.

Every day, the school is divided into two. For example, if Macedonian students attend in the morning, the Albanians attend in the afternoon, with a one-hour period during the changeover, so that the students won't clash. Not only do the students change, but the entire teaching staff as well. In addition, the school itself changes name – a Macedonian name in the morning, and an Albanian name in the afternoon.

A big factor behind all this is the different growth rates behind the Macedonian and Albanian communities. Basically, the average Albanian family currently has twice as many kids as Macedonian ones. If this trend continues, the two communities will be roughly the same size in about 30 years. In the meantime Macedonians are moving out of majority Albanian towns, and vice versa. The other communities more or less try to stay out of all of this. The Turkish people generally live in big towns, descendants of the Ottoman administrators and traders. They seem to be aligned, at least in Macedonian eyes, with their Alba-

nian Muslim coreligionists. The Roma, who are mostly Muslim, get lumped in with the Albanians as well, but they seem to invariably live in the part of town with the fewest public services and don't have much of a say in anything.

Despite all of this, it is absolutely the case that every community is generous and hospitable. 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. Preaching to the wrong people on the idea of Greater Albania or a pure Macedonia for Macedonians wouldn't win you any friends.

RELIGION

Most Macedonians belong to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and most Albanians to Islam. There is also a smallish Catholic community – nearly all ethnic Albanian. Mother Theresa of Calcutta grew up as Agnes Bojaxhiu in a pious Albanian Catholic family in Skopje. Even if people aren't regular church or mosque attendees, they still generally identify with one or other religion. After an interminable tug-of-war between the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian Orthodox churches, the Macedonian Orthodox Church declared itself autocephalous (literally 'self-headed' or self-governing) in 1967. As often happens in Orthodox church politics, the other churches have resisted recognising the independence of the Macedonian church. Monastic life in the Macedonian Orthodox Church has been reviving since the end of communism, and roughly 70 monasteries and convents have been reoccupied.

ARTS Cinema

The most significant Macedonian film is *Before the Rain* (1995) directed by Milčo Mančevski. Visually stunning, 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 in Ohrid, and the Treskavec Monastery. Mančevski released *Dust* in 2001, an interesting account of 20th-century Ottoman Macedonia.

Dance

The most famous Macedonian folk dance is probably *Teškoto oro* (difficult dance). Music for this beautiful male dance is provided by the *tapan* (two-sided drum) and *zurla* (double-reed horn). Performed in traditional Macedonian costume, it is often included in festivals or concerts. Other dances include *Komitsko oro*, symbolising 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, danced throughout the Balkans.

The Ministry of Culture website at www.culture.in.mk has a comprehensive list of dates and venues for performances of modern and traditional dance.

Music

The oldest form of Macedonian folk music involves the *gajda* (bagpipes). This instrument is played solo or is accompanied by the *tapan*, each side of which is played with a different stick to obtain a different tone. These are often augmented by the *kaval* (flute) and/or *tambura* (small lute with two pairs of strings). In addition, Macedonia has inherited (from a long period of Turkish influence) the *zurla*, also accompanied by the *tapan*, and the *Čalgija* music form, involving clarinet, violin, *darabuk* (hour-glass-shaped drum) and *đoumbuš* (banjo-like instrument).

Bands playing these instruments may be heard and enjoyed at festivals such as the Balkan Festival of Folk Dances & Songs in Ohrid in mid-July (p249) or the Ilinden festival in Bitola in early August. Nearly all Macedonian traditional music is accompanied by dancing.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

Most of Macedonia's 25,713 sq km consists of a plateau between 600m and 900m above sea level. The Vardar River crosses the middle of the country, passing Skopje on its way to the Aegean Sea near Thessaloniki. Ohrid and Prespa lakes, in the southwest, drain into the Adriatic Sea via Albania. At a depth of 294m, Lake Ohrid is the deepest lake on the Balkan Peninsula. In the northwest, the Šar Planina marks the border with Kosovo. Mt Korab (Golem Korab; 2864m)

on the border with Albania is the country's highest peak.

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, while on the lower mountains beech and oak predominate.

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 bear, wild boar, wolf, fox, squirrel, chamois and deer. The lynx is found, although very rarely, in the mountains of western Macedonia, particularly on Šar Planina, while deer inhabit the region of Demir Kapija. Forest birds include the blackcap, grouse, black grouse, imperial eagle and forest owl.

The shepherd dog, *šar planinac*, from the Šar Planina, stands some 60cm tall and is a brave, fierce fighter in guarding and defending flocks from bears or wolf packs.

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. The lake is known for letnica trout, lake whitefish, gudgeon and roach, as well as certain species of snails of a genus older than 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; its offspring start the cycle anew.

National Parks

Macedonia's three national parks all protect mountain wilderness. They are: Pelister (near Bitola, p252), Galičica (between Lakes Ohrid and Prespa) and Mavrovo (between Ohrid and Tetovo, p245). Pelister and Galičica are both part of a broader nature protection zone around Lake Prespa, shared with adjacent areas in Albania and Greece. Being mountains, the three national parks are only really open for hiking during the warmer months, from April to October, though Mavrovo has a great little ski resort. All three are accessible by road (though not

really by public transport), and none require any tickets or permits from park officers. With this in mind, the onus is really on visitors to keep the parks as tidy and pristine as possible.

Environmental Issues

Soil erosion is a problem in areas where there has been clear felling on steep slopes, but UN reports suggest that the strain on farming land has eased with the fall in the rural population (down about 30 per cent since 1945).

FOOD & DRINK

If one word sums up Macedonian cuisine, it's *skara* (barbecue). Whether it's pork, chicken or lamb, there's a lot of *skara* served in the country. Balkan *burek* (cheese, spinach, potato or meat in filo pastry) and yogurt make for a cheap and delicious breakfast. Try it in a *burekdžinica* (*burek* shop). Taste the Macedonian *tavče gravče* (beans cooked in a skillet).

Other dishes to try are *pastrmajlija*, a bit like a pizza or a Turkish pide with meat and sometimes egg, *kebabci* (kebabs), *mešana salata* (mixed salad) and the *šopska salata* (mixed salad with grated white cheese). *Ajvar* is a sauce named from sweet red peppers available everywhere. Typical cheeses include the white *sirenje* and the yellow *kaskaval*. Italian food (eg pizza) is available just about everywhere.

Skopsko Pivo is the most popular local beer. It's strong and quite cheap. Big-brand European beers are also available. The national firewater is *rakija*, a strong distilled spirit made from grapes. *Mastika*, an ouzo-like spirit, is also popular. See the boxed text In Vino Veritas (p254) for details on Macedonia's impressive array of wines.

SKOPJE SKOPIJE

☎ 02 / pop 640,000

While not anyone's idea of an architectural gem, Skopje has enough urban buzz to fill a few days. What strikes you most about the city is the weighty communist paw in its design. Most of the city was rebuilt after an earthquake in 1960s' communist concrete style. In about 50 years or so pundits

SKOPJE IN TWO DAYS

Catch the morning sun crossing the 15th-century **Kamen Most** (p238) to the heart of Skopje's old town. Step into the old Turkish baths, **Daud Paša Baths** (p238) and **Čifte Amam** (p238), now art galleries. Wander around the old town, **Čaršija**, (p238) and lunch alfresco. Spend the afternoon visiting the **Sveti Spas** (p238) and **Skopje's mosques** (p239). Take in the street scene at **Dal Met Fu** (p241) or sample traditional fare at **Pivnica An** (p241).

On day two, head for **Lake Matka** (p243), outside Skopje, for hiking, climbing, or just plain relaxing by the smooth mirror of the lake. Have dinner in the restaurant at the **Sveti Pantelejmon Monastery** (p239) on the slopes of Mount Vodno overlooking the city.

may well be raving about this superb period ensemble of concrete apartment towers, vast avenues suitable for tank parades and weird space-age public buildings. To the current eye, though, it might seem a tad ugly. The locals do have a sense of humour about it all. One described the bunker-like National Theatre as just like the Sydney Opera House, only square.

During the day you can take in the view from the Trvdina Kale (the city fort) and wander around the old bazaar. Check out the small shops, and step into the beautiful old Turkish baths, now the city's art galleries. Skopje has a number of beautiful old mosques and churches you can spend a quiet moment in.

The city is divided into the mostly Albanian and Turkish north and the mostly Macedonian south by the Vardar River. The 15th-century Kamen Most (Stone Bridge) connects the two city centres.

ORIENTATION

Skopje's central zone is mostly a pedestrian area where you can stroll along the river and cross the Kamen Most which divides the old and new towns. South of the river is the Ploštad Makedonija (the city's main square) and north is Čaršija (the city's ancient Turkish bazaar). The Gradski Trgovki Centar is a complex of shops, clubs, bars and cafés along the southern side of the

INFORMATION		SLEEPING		ENTERTAINMENT	
Ajvar Internet.....	1 B2	Best Western Hotel Turist.....	26 B3	Children's Theatre.....	45 C1
British Embassy.....	2 A2	HI Ferijalen Soyuz na Makedonija.....	27 C3	Colosseum & Element Clubs.....	46 A1
Bulgarian Embassy.....	3 A2	Holiday Inn.....	28 C3	Concert Hall.....	47 B3
Café Astoria.....	4 A2	Hotel Ambassador.....	29 A2	Kino Kultura.....	48 B3
Canadian Embassy.....	5 A2	Hotel Arka.....	30 C1	Kino Milenium.....	(see 53)
City Hospital.....	6 B3	Hotel Centar.....	31 C3	La Fabrique.....	49 C2
Contact Café.....	(see 53)	Hotel Dal Met Fu.....	(see 37)	Macedonian National Theatre.....	(see 49)
Dutch Embassy.....	7 A2	Hotel Denis.....	32 C1	Process.....	(see 44)
Greek Embassy.....	8 A2	Hotel Jadran.....	33 B2	Stadium.....	50 A1
Ikon Bookstore.....	9 B3	Hotel Kanet.....	34 A1	Universal Hall.....	51 A2
Kultura Bookstore.....	10 B2	Hotel Santos.....	35 C1	SHOPPING	
Main Post Office.....	11 B2	Tim's Apartments.....	36 A1	Bitpazarska market.....	52 C1
Neuromedica Clinic.....	12 C3	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Bunjakovec Trgovski Centar.....	(see 4)
Telephone Centre.....	(see 11)	Cifte Amam.....	15 C2	Gradski Trgovski Centar.....	53 B2
Tourist Information Office.....	13 C2	City Art Gallery.....	(see 17)	Ikona.....	54 B3
World Press.....	14 B2	City Museum.....	16 B3	Ramstore Centar Mall (under construction).....	55 B3
		Daud Paša Baths.....	17 C2	TRANSPORT	
		Kuršumli An.....	18 C1	Budget Car Rentals.....	56 B3
		Museum of Contemporary Art.....	19 B1	Eurofly.....	(see 53)
		Museum of Macedonia.....	20 C1	International Bus Station 2.....	57 C3
		Mustafa Paša Mosque.....	21 C1	Kale Bus Station.....	58 B2
		Sultan Murat Mosque.....	22 C2	New Intercity Bus Station.....	59 D3
		EATING			
		Dal Met Fu Restaurant.....	37 B3		
		Destan.....	38 C2		
		Kapan An.....	39 C2		
		Pivnica An.....	40 C2		
		Um Zina.....	41 B2		
		Zlata Plat.....	42 A2		
		DRINKING			
		New Age Coffee & Tea House.....	43 A2		
		Sveti Dimitrija.....		St Patrick Irish Pub.....	
		Sveti Spas.....		24 C2	
		Trvdina Kale.....		25 B1	

Vardar. The train station and main bus stations are a 15-minute walk southeast of the stone bridge, and the domestic bus station is just north of the bridge.

Maps

Good maps published by Trimaks can be found at the **Kultura Bookstore** (Ploštad Make-

donija bb). The *New Skopje City Map* costs 200MKD.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Ikon Bookstore (☎ 3065 312, ul Luj Paster) This nifty little bookstore a few doors from the Kultura Kino off Maršal Tito has a good range of English-language novels.

STREET ADDRESSES

At the end of a number of addresses in this chapter, you'll notice the letters 'bb' instead of a street number. This shorthand, which stands for *bez broja* (without a number) is used by businesses or other non-residential institutions, indicating that it's an official place without a street number.

Kultura Bookstore (☎ 3235 8621 Plošad Makedonija bb) Good for maps and colour souvenir books on Macedonian culture and sights.

World Press Shop (☎ 3298 082; ul Vasil Glavinov 3) Best place in town for foreign newspapers and magazines.

Internet Access

Ajvar Internet (27th Mart bb; per hr 40MKD; ☎ 9am-10pm) Bare bones basement Internet café with handy central location.

Café Astoria (Bunjakovec Centar; Bul Partizanski Odredi 27A; per hr 100MKD; ☎ 9am-11pm) An atmospheric French-style café with old computers. Scanning, faxing and printing services are available.

Contact Café (2nd fl, Gradski Trgovski Centar; per hr 120MKD; ☎ 9am-10pm) More expensive but it is a smoke-free zone. Scanning, faxing, telephone and printing services are available.

Media

English-language newspapers and magazines can only be found in Skopje. See World Press Shop, above, for details.

Medical Services

City hospital (☎ 3130 111; ul 11 Oktomvri 53; ☎ 24hr)
Neuromedica private clinic (☎ 3133 313; ul 11 Oktomvri 25; ☎ 24hr)

Money

There are many private exchange offices scattered throughout the old and new towns where you can change your cash at a good rate. Skopje has plenty of ATMs, mainly in the city centre.

Post & Telephone

Main post office (☎ 3141 141; ul Orce Nikolov 1; ☎ 7am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-2.30pm Sun) Located 75m northwest of Plošad Makedonija, along the river.
Telephone centre (ul Orce Nikolov 1; ☎ 24hr) 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.

Tourist Information

Tourist information office (☎ 3116 854; Kruševska; ☎ officially 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) This neglected little office was open exactly once in the 20 or so times we walked past over two months. If open, they sell maps and can arrange rooms in private homes starting at around 1500MKD.

Travel Agencies

Eurofly (☎ 3136 619; fax 3136 320; 1st fl, Gradski Trgovski Centar) Of Skopje's abundance of travel agencies, the best and most practical for airline tickets is this modern travel agency, where ticket prices are listed boldly by the door in both euros and US dollars.

Go Macedonia (☎ 3232 273; www.gomacedonia.com.mk; Trgovski Centar Beverly Hills lok 32, ul Naroden Front 19) Lively 'alternative' travel agency offering hikes, bicycle tours, caving and other adventure sports, homestays and wine tours.

SIGHTS

As you cross the **Kamen Most**, its arch will bring you right into the old town or **Čaršija**. Just over the bridge on the left is **Sveti Dimitrij** (☎ 9am-6pm), a handsome, three-aisled Orthodox church built in 1886. The most notable feature is a lovely spiral staircase up to the pulpit. Across from the church is the **Daud Paša Baths** (1466), once the largest Turkish bath in the Balkans, and now home to the **City Art Gallery** (☎ 3133 102; Kruševska 1A; admission 100MKD; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun). The seven rooms housing mainly modern art are lit by the sun coming through the small star-shaped holes in the domed ceiling.

Another beautiful old bath, now a contemporary art gallery, is **Čirče Amam** (admission 50MKD; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), north of Daud Paša Baths. The second largest bath in Skopje, this building gives you a taste of the original baths with one room left unplastered, its walls showing exposed brickwork, stone arches and the clay waterpipes that used to heat the rooms.

Step out and wander around Čaršija's small shops and teahouses, and go north along Samoilova for the tiny but magnificent **Sveti Spas** (admission to church & tomb 100MKD; ☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Sun). The church was built below ground, since 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 by the master-craftsmen Makarije Frčkovski and the Filipovski brothers.

The church courtyard leads to a room with the **Tomb and Museum of Goce Delčev**, leader of VMRO and the national hero, killed by the Turks in 1903. The latter is a somewhat less-splendid experience than the church; however, the ticket gives you access to both.

The 1492 **Mustafa Paša Mosque** (Samoilova bb), beyond the church, has an earthquake-cracked dome and a shady garden with a fountain. Climb up to the ruins of **Tvrđina Kale** (city fort), across the street, for panoramic views of Skopje from the 11th-century Cyclopean wall. If you want more art, the **Museum of Contemporary Art** (☎ 3117 735; Samoilova bb; admission 100MKD; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun) is higher up the hill.

Back in Čaršija, beyond the mosque, is the white **Museum of Macedonia** (☎ 3116 044; Čurčiska 86; admission 50MKD; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun), which traces the region's civilisations over the centuries. One wing holds a permanent ethnographical exhibition (buy tickets here) with costumes and models of traditional houses, while the second wing covers the historical angle, from Neolithic times through the Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Turkish eras, ending with a rather comprehensive section on communist achievements. The highlight is the collection of icons and carved wooden iconostases. Some of the archaeological collection is gathering dust in the **Kuršumli An** (1550), an impressive old caravanserai or inn, where traders would stop off and rest during Ottoman times.

On the other side of the city, in the new town, the sights are less obvious, but pay attention to the bizarre architecture of the **main post office building** (ul Orce Nikolov 1; ☎ 7am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-2.30pm Sun) near Kamen Most. It's a futuristic, insect-like structure, apparently an abstract take on church architecture. Further down there's the slightly dull **City Museum** (☎ 3114 742; Mito Hadživasilev bb; admission free; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun), housed inside the old train station. Its **clock** is frozen at 5:17 on the morning of the great Skopje earthquake of 27 July 1963, which killed 1066 people and almost demolished the entire city.

For something completely different, there's **Šuto Orizari**, Europe's biggest Roma settlement, on the northern edge of the city (artfully situated between a cemetery and a prison). Commonly called Šutka, this

suburb of 40,000 is one of the few places in Europe where the Roma run their own local government. The local architecture is quite interesting, especially some of the more nouveau riche designs. The settlement sprang up here after the 1963 earthquake when the old Roma neighbourhood closer to the centre was destroyed. A taxi to Šutka from central Skopje costs about 100MKD. Non-Roma locals will think you're a bit weird to want to visit, but while poor it's quite safe. It's reminiscent of many towns in India – a bit scruffy, but vibrant and colourful. The bazaar in Šutka is renowned as the cheapest place in Skopje to buy clothes and simple household items.

Up on Mount Vodno the sweet, little, 12th-century **Sveti Pantelejmon Monastery** has a beautiful fresco of the Lamentation of Christ. The church is about a 20-minute taxi ride from the centre of Skopje. The **restaurant** (☎ 3081 255; meals 400MKD; ☎ 9am-11pm) outside the church serves traditional food – very good *burek* and brandy.

SLEEPING

Prices are relatively high in Skopje's inflated accommodation scene – partly because many of the overseas visitors are working to resolve the Kosovo Question, and have the benefit of expense accounts. The cheapest budget hotels are in the Čaršija district on the north side of the river.

Budget

Hotel Kapištec (☎ 3081 424; www.hotel-kapitec.com; ul Mile Pop Jordanov 3; s €25-35, d €32-50) A rambling, little B&B with a range of rooms – some of the cheaper ones are small and a bit frayed, but the double rooms are quite nice. The friendly owners live on site and are very helpful. Good breakfast too.

Hotel Bimbo (☎ 321 4517, 070 827 511; fax 321 7663; ul 29 Noemvri 63; s/d incl breakfast €35/50) What a fantastic name! This is a cheerful little family-run hotel with basic but spotless rooms, a nice lounge area on the 1st floor and a cosy breakfast room. It's in a handy part of town too – close to the centre but in a quiet residential area. Ul 29 Noemvri runs along the side of Skopje's 1960s-style Catholic church.

Pansion Brateks (☎ 3176 606, 070 243 232; ul Aco Karamanov 3; s/d 1920/3200MKD) Another good B&B with tidy, airy rooms. It's often full,

despite being a 20-minute walk from the centre. It's positioned in an upscale neighbourhood at the foot of Mt Vodno.

Hotel Ambasador (☎ 3215 510; fax 3121 383; ul Pirinska 36; s/d 2800/4340MKD) Next to the Russian Embassy, it has pleasant, simple rooms with breakfast. On the top of the building, a 'State of Liberty' wields its torch.

HI Ferijalen Soyuz na Makedonija (Ferijalen Dom; ☎ 3114 849; www.myfa.org.mk; ul Prolet 25; members s/d 935/1280MKD, nonmembers s/d 1280/1590MKD; ☎ 24hr Apr-mid-Oct) The rooms are clean and fairly comfortable, but otherwise this is a rather sterile version of a youth hostel. No communal areas, for example. Still, it's well positioned between the city centre and the bus and train stations, and all the taxi drivers know where it is. All prices include breakfast.

Hotel Kanet (☎ 3238 353; ul Jordan Hadžikonstantinov Džinot 20; s/d 2500/3700MKD) A bit like a hunting lodge in the heart of the city, this curious little wooden building sits on the edge of a park. It offer comfy rooms with TV and a buffet breakfast.

Hotel Santos (☎ 3226 963; ul Bitpazarska 69; s/d €20/25) This is the nicest of the cheap hotels in the Čaršija – newly refurbished rooms with TV and clean bathrooms. The managers don't speak English but budgeters can get by with sign language and an approximation of Macedonian and Albanian. It's set back from the corner of ul Bitpazarska and ul Evliya Čelebi. The hotel is very close to the luxury Hotel Arka, and a short walk from the Bitpazarska market. If you get a taxi to the Arka, walk into the Čaršija and you'll find yourself on ul Bitpazarska. The little alley leading to the Hotel Santos is next to a money exchange and telephone business on the corner of Bitpazarska and a street leading uphill called ul Evliya Čelebi.

Hotel Denis (☎ 3116 792; ul Evliya Čelebi 7; s/d €15/20) This little lodge has small, simple rooms, but it has the basics like cleanliness and hot water. It's uphill about 100m from the Hotel Santos – you pass the Children's Theatre and it's one block up on the left.

Midrange

Hotel Dal Met Fu (☎ 323 9584; www.dalmetfu.com.mk; Ploštad Makedonija; s €59-69, d €69-79, apt s €85-145, apt d €100-170; ☎) A bright and cheerful mini hotel (three rooms and three apartments) above the restaurant of the same name –

head up the marble stairs to reception. It has very nicely designed rooms with a fashionable edge, friendly staff, room service from the restaurant, and a location that is unbeatably central. For real sybarites, the biggest suite has a Jacuzzi.

Hotel Rose Diplomatique (☎ 3135 469; rosediplomatique.tripod.com; ul Roza Luksemburg 13; s €65-85, d €85-105) Boutique B&B has eight charming rooms, caring staff and a cute little garden. The décor has a gentle feminine touch (lots of frills and ornaments) plus necessities like hair dryers.

Hotel Residence (☎ 3081 528; fax 3084 816; ul Vasil Gjorgjov 32; s/d €55/70) This charming little boutique B&B has eight rooms of varying dimensions – rooms 205 and 203 are the pick of the bunch. It has a quiet location at the base of Mount Vodno. There's a very pleasant downstairs lounge cum bar cum breakfast room.

Hotel Centar (☎ 312 0430; pcentar@mt.net.mk; ul Kočo Račin bb; s/d €63/73; ☎) Tucked into the side of an indoor swimming pool complex, the peculiar setting belies a central location, tasteful lounge areas and handsomely appointed rooms. The rooms on the ground floor have kitchenettes. The exterior surroundings are distinctly bleak, but at least there's plenty of parking.

Tim's Apartments (☎ 323 7650; www.tims.com.mk; ul Orce Nikolov 120; r €69-98, ste €89-110) This handsome apartment-hotel has a range of rooms, one-bedroom apartments and two-bedroom 'residences' on a quiet street in an inner suburb. It's a good option for people staying long term or who have just moved to Skopje and are looking to rent a house or apartment. Several guests have remarked on the friendly service.

Hotel Jadran (☎ 3118 427; fax 3118 334; ul 27 Mart bb; s/d €40/75) This venerable Ottoman-style hotel has a great location in the centre of town, but more charm than comfort. There are some lovely wooden carvings, but the bathrooms are rather ancient.

Top End

Best Western Hotel Turist (☎ 3289 111; bestwestern@hotelturist.com.mk; ul Gjurro Strugar 11; s/d €120/150) Fab position in the city centre, right on Maršal Tito (the main entrance on a side street). The old Hotel Turist has been nicely renovated up to Best Western standards, plus we've had good reports on the service

here. Some of the rooms have balconies. The ground floor café is a nice place for a bite and a drink.

Holiday Inn (☎ 3292 929; www.holiday-inn.com/skopje; ul Vasil Adžilarski 2; r €120-250) Another conveniently located, business-class establishment, next to the Gradski Trgovski Centar on the south side of the Vardar. Free car parking, last renovated in 2000.

Hotel Karpoš (☎ 3088 388; www.hotelkarpos.com.mk; cnr ul Šekspirova & Partizanski Odredi; r €110-150, ste €170-200) This bright new business hotel a little out of the city centre offers spacious rooms and well-appointed bathrooms. Some of the rooms are studios with kitchenettes, and there are a couple of rooms with wheelchair access. The staff are switched on and attentive.

Hotel Arka (☎ 3230 603; www.hotel-arka.com.mk; ul Bitpazarska 90/2; s €88-107, d €118-138, ste €127-158) New upmarket hotel in an interesting location next to the Čaršija. There are great views from the 7th floor, which has a swimming pool and café-bar. The spacious rooms have all the mod cons you'd expect for the price.

EATING

The Čaršija has lots of cheap and quick *kebabčičis* (shops selling kebabs), cafés and *burek* eateries where you can grab a fast, filling meal for not very much.

Dal Met Fu Restaurant (☎ 3112 482; Ploštad Makedonija; mains 280MKD; ☎ 7.30am-midnight) A popular, glass-fronted restaurant with tables outside facing the main square, it serves good thin base pizza and al dente pasta.

Kapan An (Čaršija, behind Čifte Amam; meals 200MKD) This shady cobblestone courtyard contains a number of restaurants. Buy delicious *kebabci* with mouth-watering warm bread and enjoy al fresco dining.

Bombay Restaurant (☎ 3067 373; blvd Illindenska 94; meals 500-700MKD; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) This delightful Indian restaurant is good enough to attract regular diners from Kosovo. The menu is mostly north Indian with a few south Indian classics. A vegetarian *thali* (platter) costs 350MKD, suitably chilli-packed vindaloo 355MKD, plus raita, pickles, naan bread and basmati rice. The perfect antidote to pork *skara!* It's next to the city zoo, in a laneway off Illindenska.

Dva Elena (☎ 3082 383; ul Zagrebska 31; mains 300MKD; ☎ 10am-midnight) This is a traditional

Macedonian steakhouse with excellent, hearty grills, a big open fire on cold nights and a decent wine list. It's at the foot of Mount Vodno about a five-minute taxi ride from the city centre.

Um Zina (☎ 3128 345; ul 27 Mart 5; meals 400MKD; ☎ 9.30am-midnight Mon-Sat) The restaurant serves delicious Lebanese food in either a warm, cosy basement with lots of cushions and flowers or a cheerful outdoor area. It has belly dancers every Friday night. A huge shish kebab costs 250MKD, and there are several vegetarian options such as tabouleh (100MKD) and hummus (80MKD).

Pivnica An (☎ 3212 111; Čaršija; mains 270-300MKD; ☎ 9am-midnight) Excellent traditional eating plus beer, located in a restored Ottoman building in the old town, serving a wide range of Macedonian dishes in a relaxing atmosphere.

Destan (☎ 3127 324; Čaršija; kebabs 75-230MKD; ☎ 7am-11pm) A typical *kebabčiči* which serves kebabs with delicious spongy Turkish bread, tomato and cucumber.

Zlaten Plat (☎ 3228 100; cnr Leninova & Partizanska Odredi; meals around 600MKD; ☎ 11am-midnight) Not the best Chinese restaurant in the world, but it's reasonably good. Boiled dumplings cost 120MKD and sautéed chicken with peanuts 280MKD.

DRINKING

There are hundreds of bars and cafés to choose from. The riverside promenade of Key 13 Noemvri in front of the Gradski Trgovski Centar has about 20 cafés in a row, all trying to outdo each other with the funkier sounds and décor. Skopje's bars used to stay open phenomenally late, but in 2003 the government closed all girlie bars and enforced a 1am closing time for the rest – after which, the only option is a nightclub.

New Age Coffee and Tea House (☎ 3117 559; ul Kosta Sahov 9; ☎ 9am-midnight) Plush floor cushions indoors, chaise longues and peacocks in the garden, teas, beers or cocktails, the choice is yours in this bohemian hangout. A bit tricky to find, it's on a side-street off Ivo Robar Lola.

St Patrick Irish Pub (☎ 3220 431; Kej 13 Noemvri; mains 280MKD; ☎ 7.30am-midnight) As the place favoured by the expat community, this resembles Irish pubs around the world. Sip your Guinness while you munch on Irish

breakfasts from 7.30am onwards and meals such as beef in Guinness or Gaelic steak.

ENTERTAINMENT

Universal Hall (☎ 3224 158; ul Partizanski Odredi bb; tickets 100-200MKD) Classical and other music performances, as well as Skopje's jazz festival, take place here in October every year, plus classical and jazz concerts two or three times per week.

Macedonian National Theatre (☎ 3114 060; Key Dimitar Vlahov bb; tickets 100-400MKD) This stunningly chunky concrete behemoth on the north side of the Vardar is Macedonia's home of opera and ballet and also holds classical music recitals.

Children's Theatre (☎ 3222 619; ul Evliya Čelebi 4; tickets 100MKD) This cute little theatre in the Čaršija puts on excellent musicals, puppet shows and more for the little 'uns.

Colosseum (City Park; www.colosseumsummerclub.com) and **Element** (City Park; www.element.com.mk) in the city park are the places for summer outdoor clubbers and international DJs. Colosseum has cheap drinks and rooms for 3000 movers and shakers. Tickets to special events cost around 250MKD to 400MKD.

La Fabrique (☎ 3220 767; Kej Dimitar Vlahov) Downstairs, below the Macedonian National Theatre, the crowd in this place gets grooving to disco music after 10pm.

Kino Kultura (☎ 3236 578; ul Luj Paster 2; tickets 60-120MKD) Be entertained by some recent English-language movies. Tickets prices vary depending on the viewing time.

Kino Milenium (☎ 3111 111; Gradski Trgovski Centar; tickets 60-120MKD) A smaller cinema in the city's main shopping centre.

Process (Kej 13 Noemvri, www.process.com.mk) Often hosts touring DJs. It mainly plays house music but has hip hop and R&B nights as well. It's next to the St Patrick Irish Pub.

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

SHOPPING

The Čaršija teems with little shops selling souvenirs such as copper coffee pots, rugs, or animal skins. The two shopping centres, **Gradski Trgovski Centar** (ul 11 Oktomvri; ☎ 9am-7pm) and **Trgovski Centar Bunjakovec** (Bulevar Partizanski; ☎ 9am-7pm), stock anything your heart may desire: from clothes, to music (warning:

not entirely legal CDs are being sold in the basement level of the Gradski Trgovski Centar) to books. The **Trgovski Centar Beverly Hills** (☎ 9am-7pm) is a more upmarket shopping centre with lots of clothing boutiques, trendy cafés and jewellery stores. The new **Ramstore Centar**, next to the City Museum, wasn't open at the time of research but will apparently be an upscale mall. Some shops within the centres close for lunch, anywhere between 1pm and 3pm.

One excellent souvenir store is **Ikona** (☎ 3215 330; ul Luj Paster 19; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) which sells beautiful reproductions of Macedonian icons painted by artists schooled in the old techniques. They start from around 1250MKD up to 7500MKD or even 50,000MKD for more unusual pieces. Ikona also sells dolls, pottery, painted boxes and other souvenir items in traditional styles.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

A host of airlines serve Skopje's **Petrovec Airport** (information ☎ 02-3148 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 daily trains that connect Thessaloniki with Skopje.

Bus

Skopje's **New Intercity Bus Station** (Nova Avtobuska Stanica; ☎ 3166 254) is underneath the train station on bulevar Jane Sandanski. There is a comprehensive network to all Macedonian towns, and there are a dozen or so offices selling tickets to Serbia, Bulgaria, Croatia and Turkey as well. Most buses to Tetovo leave from the **Kale Bus Station**, just over the Kamen Most under the walls of the castle. You have to go to Tetovo to catch a direct bus to Tirana in Albania. There are no buses to Greece, as Macedonians find it very difficult to get Greek visas. There are two bus routes from Skopje to Ohrid: the 167km route through Tetovo takes about three hours, while the 261km route that goes via Veles and Bitola takes four hours. Book a seat to Ohrid the day before if you're travelling in high season (May to August). International buses usually leave from the main Intercity Bus Station or from the car park in front of the Holiday Inn.

The following buses depart daily from the New Intercity Bus Station:

Destination	Cost	Duration	Frequency
Berovo	350MKD	3hr	8 daily
Bitola	350MKD	2½hr	10 daily
Kriva Palanka	200MKD	2hr	12 daily
Kumanovo	100MKD	40min	28 daily
Mavrovo	170MKD	1½hr	6 daily
Ohrid	380MKD	3-4hr	15 daily
Prilep	270MKD	2hr	13 daily
Strumica	300MKD	2½	16 daily
Tetovo	100MKD	40min	21 daily

Train

Frequent trains shoot out of Skopje's ageing 'Zheleznicka Stanica'. For details on international trains, see p262). Domestic rail destinations include Bitola and Kičevo (in the west of the country), Veles (south of Skopje), Tabanovce (on the border with Serbia and Montenegro), and Gevgelija (on the Greek border north of Thessaloniki).

You will have to understand the Cyrillic alphabet to make any sense of timetables. The staff at the Information desk will be of limited use so come prepared with your phrasebook.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

There is no public transport to and from the airport. If you are flying to Skopje, try to arrange pick up through your hotel or hostel before you arrive, as you will otherwise be at the mercy of the airport taxi drivers who can charge anything between 1290MKD to 2200MKD. Getting to the airport from Skopje is a much more pleasant affair and will cost you around 660MKD. Avoid taxis that don't have the official 'taxi' sign.

Bus

Inner-suburban city buses in Skopje cost 15MKD to 30MKD per trip, depending on what kind of bus it is and whether you buy your ticket on board or in advance.

Car

Skopje is awash with car hire agencies, from the large ones (Hertz and Avis) to the smaller local companies. Prices generally start at around 2000MKD per day. Try **Budget Car Rental** (☎ 3290 222; Mito Hadzivasilev

Jasmin bb; ☎ 9am-5pm). The tourist office has a complete listing of car agencies in town.

Taxi

Skopje's **taxi system** is excellent, once you get beyond the taxis at the airport. All taxis have meters and drivers turn them on without prompting. The first few kilometres are 50MKD, and then 15MKD per kilometre.

LAKE MATKA ЕЗЕРО МАТКА

Only half an hour's drive away from busy Skopje, Lake Matka is a place of calm nature, where the steep Treška limestone canyon reflects in the green mirror of the lake. Matka means 'womb' in Macedonian, suggesting a link with the Virgin Mary. There is plenty to do for those who want action, with opportunities for hiking and rock climbing, or take a €10 boat ride and a peek at the caves and their dark life.

The lake is artificial, created by the damming of the River Treška, and there are restaurants along the dam, serving excellent fish and traditional Macedonian dishes. A cluster of interesting churches lies around the lake: Sveti Bogorodica below the wall, from where a steep path leads up to the churches of Sveti Spas, Sveti Trojica and Sveti Nedela – the latter about a 90-minute walk. There are caves along the path (which is very slippery after rain – wear hiking boots), where hermits once meditated and early Macedonian revolutionaries took refuge from the Turkish authorities. The church of Sveti Nikola is located just after the dam, across the bridge, and the church of Sveti Andrej lies further on. Sveti Andrej dates from 1389 and has important frescoes. Next door is the mountaineering hut **Matka** (☎ 3052 655; per bed 500MKD) where you can sleep and hire guides and basic rock climbing gear.

To get to Lake Matka take bus 60 (40 minutes, 50MKD), which leaves on the hour from bus stands along Skopje's Bulevar Partizanski Odredi.

WESTERN MACEDONIA

TETOVO TETOBO

☎ 044 / pop 53,000

Tetovo is the unofficial capital of the majority Albanian region of the country. In Albanian the city is called Tetova. Despite

its lovely setting on the slopes between the bulk of the Šar mountains and the verdant plains of the upper Vardar, it's a fairly workaday place without any great architectural merit, bar two stunning exceptions. These can be visited in an unhurried day trip from Skopje, which is only 30 to 40 minutes away by motorway. There is only one hotel on the main street, and at the time of research it was being renovated. Being overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian, it helps if you talk in Shqip (Albanian) or English first, rather than launching straight into Macedonian.

The city layout is fairly simple. Buses from Skopje turn off the motorway and head up the main drag, bulevar Maršal Tito. They come to a major intersection where they either turn left to go on towards Gostivar, or else they turn right, cruise past a Vero supermarket and then take another right to the bus station on ul Vasil Kidrič. Either way, if you want to head straight into town, get off here at this intersection and walk or catch a taxi uphill along bulevar Maršal Tito, which leads to the main square (about 800m away).

About halfway along on the left is Tetovo's interesting and substantial **market**, brimming with fresh groceries and merchandise. Once you get to the main square and marvel at the concrete blockiness of it all, turn right onto bulevar Ilindenska and after about 500m you cross the little Pena

River and the Šarena Djamija is unmissable on the right.

The **Šarena Djamija** (painted or coloured mosque) is one of the most beautiful Islamic buildings in the Balkans. Modest in scale, it was built in 1459 with money from two women, Mensure and Hurshida, who are buried in the mosque's grounds. The feminine touch is immediately apparent in the panels of delicately painted geometric murals on the outside.

About 2km from the city centre is Tetovo's other outstanding monument, the **Baba Arabati tekke**. A *tekke* is a monastery for dervishes belonging to an Islamic sect, the Bektashi, and this is the finest remaining *tekke* in Europe. Founded in 1538, most of the buildings date from the 18th century. The compound is surrounded by a handsome rough stone wall at the foot of the Šar Planina mountains, on the town's outskirts. A large Muslim cemetery lies in front of it. The complex has spacious gardens and is dotted with prayer halls, dining halls, traditional lodgings and a very handsome marble fountain inside a decorated wooden pavilion. The *tekke* has had a difficult recent history. In 1992 a group of Bektashi dervishes reoccupied the *tekke*, but in August 2002 armed members of a militant Sunni Muslim group invaded the compound and converted one of the buildings into a Sunni mosque. Some of the buildings were damaged in 2002, and are

slowly being repaired. Baba Tahir Emini, the head of the *tekke*, lives in corner of the compound near a fine old tower. Next to his quarters is a shrine containing the tombs of Bektashi holy men.

The easiest way to get there is by taxi. It takes about 15 minutes to walk back to the centre of town.

About 5km north of Tetovo in the village of Džepčište is the **Smallest Ethnological Museum in the World** (Najmal Etno Muzej na Svetot; ☎ 070 555 165; entry free but 50MKD donation appreciated; ☎ 10am-5pm). The museum is just 7.2 sq metres – enough for one visitor at a time – but packs in 1150 items, including a metre wide copper *sofra* (a large tray for serving food). The museum is located in one room of the home of the museum's founder, Simeon Zlatev-Mone, who has been building his collection for 30 years. His house is in the middle of Džepčište – the villagers assume anyone coming here is headed for the museum and will direct you to it. A taxi from Tetovo costs about 200MKD.

Getting There & Away BUS

There are 21 buses per day between Tetovo and Skopje (100MKD, 40 minutes), starting at 6am and finishing at 7pm. In Skopje, the buses that go direct to the Tetovo bus station leave from the old bus station at the foot of the Kale, just over the Kamen Most. These services are run by the **Polet bus company** (☎ 337 221; ul Ilindenska 266, Tetovo). The buses from the main bus station stop at Tetovo on the way to Gostivar, Debar, Ohrid and other points south. These stop briefly on Maršal Tito and then turn off towards Gostivar. So if you're coming here from Skopje to catch the bus to Albania, go to the old bus station under the Kale and save yourself a short taxi ride or a five-minute walk when you reach Tetovo. There are three daily buses to Ohrid (310MKD, 2½ hours), or you can take a bus to Struga (310MKD, five buses per day, last one at 6.20pm) and take a short bus ride to Ohrid from there. For Mavrovo National Park (140MKD, 1½ hours) or Sveti Jovan Bigorski Monastery (200MKD, 2½ hours) jump on a bus heading for Debar (7.20am, 8.50am, 10.50am, 3.05pm, 5.50pm).

The Polet bus company runs two buses per day from Tetovo via Struga to Tirana,

Albania (one way/return €15/25, seven to eight hours). The buses leave at 9am and 9pm, and drop passengers by Tirana's train station at 5pm and 5am respectively. Polet's head office is on ul Ilindenska, but you can also buy a ticket from its office at the **bus station** (☎ 334 194). In July and August there are additional services to Albania from Tetovo, catering to locals taking beach holidays there. Most of these go to Durrës.

POPOVA ŠAPKA ПОПОВА ШАПКА

Some 1800m up in the Šar Planina mountains and 18km by road from Tetovo, Popova Šapka could be Macedonia's secret weapon in the struggle for Europe's best undiscovered ski resort. Unfortunately, the resort has become a victim of regional conflicts, and the facilities are in poor shape. It is rather close to the frontier with Kosovo, and it also lies within the majority Albanian region of Western Macedonia. Ethnic Macedonians prefer to ski at Mavrovo. There used to be a cable car from Tetovo hoisting visitors 1km up to Popova Šapka, but it now closed and shows no immediate signs of reopening. Although the area around the resort was cleared of landmines after the end of the Kosovo War, there are still understandable fears of stray mines. This is a real shame, because the region would be ideal for hiking in summer. The top of Tito's Peak (Titov Vrv), at 2748m the highest mountain entirely within Macedonia, can be seen from the resort.

MAVROVO NATIONAL PARK МАВРОВО

Macedonia's biggest and oldest national park is also home to its biggest ski resort. Roughly halfway between Skopje and Ohrid, the park is quite difficult to get around on public transport but a cinch with your own wheels. Besides the 73,088 hectares of birch and pine forest, gorges, karst fields, waterfalls and alpine plain, the park contains Sveti Jovan Bigorski, Macedonia's most scenic monastery, and quite a few mountain villages including Galičnik with its famous July wedding festival.

Accommodation is mostly in the ski resort village of Mavrovo, on the southern side of Lake Mavrovo. Alas, public transport only goes directly to the village of Mavrovo Anovi on the *other* side of the lake. The lake

THE BEKTASHI ORDER

Bektashi Islam is quite different from mainstream Sunni Islam. It allows the consumption of alcohol, for example. It takes a more mystical approach, with emphasis on a spiritual relationship with Allah built through prayer and the contemplation of mystical poetry.

The word 'bektashi' means secret or mysterious. The order's founder, Haji Bektash Veli, was born in Iran in the 13th century. He wrote the cornerstone of the order's beliefs, the *Makalaat*, which lays out a four-stage path to enlightenment. In the first stage, dervishes learn the difference between right and wrong; in the second, they pray constantly; in the third, they come to understand God's love; and in the fourth, they arrive at an understanding of reality through self-effacement and the constant awareness of God. Haji Bektash died in central Turkey, where he is buried at the great *tekke* in the little town named after him, Hacibektaş. The order grew quite powerful in the 18th century. The Janissaries, the Christian boys taken in the Turkish army and made to convert to Islam, were followers and patrons of the Bektashi order. The order was suppressed in many countries during the 20th century. In its main base, in Turkey, the republican government under Ataturk harshly suppressed the order in the 1920s. In 1925 the headquarters shifted to Albania, where, in turn, the movement was crushed by the communists after WWII. It has undergone something of a revival in Albania since the early 1990s, but, as the tensions in Tetovo show, the order is facing a difficult comeback.

itself is artificial, and curiously enough has two overflows – the old one going west into the Radika River and down to the Adriatic Sea via the Black Drim, and the new one going north into the Vardar River and eventually to the Aegean Sea.

Sights

The **Zare Lazarevski ski centre** (www.zarelaz.com) based at Mavrovo village is Macedonia's biggest and most modern ski resort, and by all accounts the skiing is very good. As a brochure says 'The average snow cover is 70cm, which makes skiing possible, as well as other snow foolish games'. Which is a pretty good description for the snowboarding scene. There are a couple of cafés up on the ski fields, which lie between 1860m and 1255m above sea level. Ski hire costs 600MKD per day, a ski pass for the three chairlifts and eleven ski lifts costs 700MKD per day (or 3500MKD per week) and there's a ski school. The whole operation is run from the Hotel Bistra (see right).

Sveti Jovan Bigorski is a fully working monastery and is 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, ie 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 inside the church you can see what is supposedly the forearm of Sveti Jovan himself. The church also holds one of the three iconostases and chairs carved by Makarije Frčkovski and the Filipovski brothers, who also carved the iconostasis of Sveti Spas in Skopje. The monastery has **dormitories** (☎ 042 478 675; per person €4) where you can stay overnight, with self-catering facilities.

To get to the monastery, take either the Skopje-Ohrid bus going via Debar, or catch a bus to Tetovo and change to a Debar bus. Either way, ask to be let off at the turning point for the Sveti Jovan Bigorski Monastery (*manastir*).

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 – couples go into a lottery for a chance to be married here. 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 Bistra (☎ 042-489 002; www.bistra.com; 15 Mar-15 Nov s €45 d €60-70, 16 Nov-14 Mar s €65, d €90-110; Mavrovo) This sprawling resort hotel has comfortable rooms with satellite TV, a large restaurant, a bar (of course), plus swimming pool, fitness centre and sauna. The more expensive rooms have Jacuzzis. The Bistra also runs the Hotel Ski Škola and Hotel Mavrovski during the ski season, which have single rooms from €20 to €40 and doubles from €40 to €70. The rooms are a bit simpler but new and comfortable. These lodges are just down the hill from the Bistra, near the bottom of the chairlift. Staying at either gives you access to the Bistra's pool and other facilities free of charge. There's a nightclub at the Mavrovski.

Hotel Srna (☎ 042-388 083; www.hotelsrna.jb.net; std s/d €20/40, apt s/d €30/60; Mavrovo) This friendly little hotel is about 400m away from the chairlifts. The light, airy, standard rooms are spotless and the apartments (most with three beds) have balconies. Half board costs an extra €5 per person. The Srna has a cheerful bar and a restaurant with lots of antlers and pelts.

Hotel Makpetrol (☎ 042-489 022; hotelmavrovo@makpetrol.com.mk; s/d €36/60, ste €130; Mavrovo) Run by – guess what – a petrol company, this hotel's staff might benefit from some tickling but the facilities are quite good. The restaurant is cavernous and the rooms, though a tad socialist in character, are comfortable.

Getting There & Away

Buses don't go directly to Mavrovo but pass through the town of Mavrovo Anovi on the other side of the lake. The best thing to do to get from Mavrovo Anovi to Mavrovo would be to ring one of the hotels to send a car to come and pick you up, or if you feel brave you could get off at the dam wall where the Mavrovo road branches off and try to flag down a lift for the final couple of kilometres to Mavrovo. There are seven buses per day to Debar (120MKD), five per day to Tetovo (140MKD), and three to Skopje (180MKD).

SOUTHERN MACEDONIA

OHRID ОХРИД

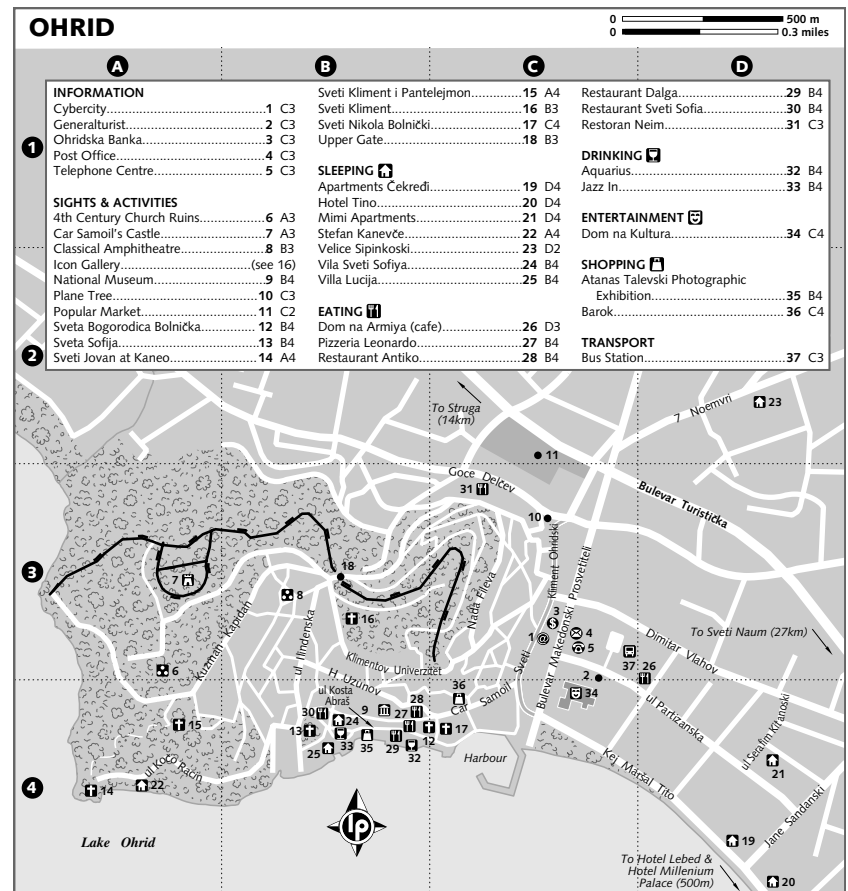
☎ 046 / pop 50,000

Ohrid is Macedonia's jewel, and the most popular town with visitors. Resting by the still waters of Lake Ohrid, the town has stunning Byzantine churches, small cobbled streets, art galleries, good budget accommodation and picturesque pebbly beaches to relax on. During the summer the town is packed with people and there are numerous festivals to entertain you. For quieter moments, Galičica National Park is

nearby, on the way to the marvellous monastery of Sveti Naum 20km south, towards the Albanian border.

Lake Ohrid, a natural tectonic lake shared with Albania, is one of the oldest in the world and, at 294m, the deepest in the Balkans. It might remind you of the sea with its vastness and sometimes stormy behaviour.

Under Byzantium, Ohrid became the episcopal centre of Macedonia. The first Slavic university was founded here in 893 by Bishop (Saint) Kliment of Ohrid, a disciple of the inventors of the first Slavic script, St Cyril and St Methodius. 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 Macedonia's modern nationhood.

Orientation

The Old Town of Ohrid is easy to get around on foot. The lake is to the south, and the picturesque Old Town rises from Sveti Kliment Ohridski street, the main pedestrian mall.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Cybercity (☎ 231 620; www.cybercity.com.mk; 3rd fl, ul Sveti Kliment Ohridski; per hr 60MKD) Cheap overseas calls at 15MKD per minute can also be made from here.

POST & TELEPHONE

Post office (Bulevar Makedonski Prosvetiteli). You can also change money here.

Telephone centre (Bulevar Makedonski Prosvetiteli; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon & 6-8pm Sun) Round the corner from the post office.

TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

There's no official tourist office, but travel agencies provide information and have assorted guided tours. The town's official website is www.ohrid.com.mk.

Generaltourist (☎ 261 071; fax 260 415; ul Partizanska 6) The best travel agent in town.

Jana Poposka (☎ 263 875) To hire a personal guide, try the voluble Jana who speaks good English and knows everything there is to know about Ohrid. She can usually be found at the church of Sveti Kliment.

Slavian Stefanovski (http://gradinar.freesevers.com) A local philosopher and guide who leads informative tours of the town and arranges accommodation. He doesn't demand a set fee but €10 is a fair price for a tour. His 'vegan hotel' at his apartment has space for two sleeping bags for €5 each. He's often found waiting for travellers at the bus station.

Sights

Most of Ohrid's churches charge an entry fee of around 100MKD; if not, it is customary to leave some money at the icons. Most of this money goes towards preserving these historical sites.

Start your walk from the lower gate of the town wall and the two small, 14th-century churches, of **Sveti Bogorodica Bolnička** and **Sveti Nikola Bolnički**. These two gems were originally hospital churches. In times of

plague people wanting to enter Ohrid were quarantined here for up to 40 days before being allowed into the town. The churches boast delicate frescoes. A great example of 19th-century Macedonian architecture is the 1827 **National Museum** (☎ 267 173; Car Samoil 62; adult/student 100/50MKD; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue-Sun). The museum collection is divided into the Robev Residence, which houses an archaeological display, and the Urania Residence which make for an interesting hour of exploring Macedonia's history.

Further up Car Samoil is the grandiose 11th-century church of **Sveta Sofija**, originally built as a cathedral. The frescoes are extremely well preserved thanks to having been whitewashed during the church's days as a mosque. An English-speaking guide is usually on hand.

Follow the signs for **Sveti Jovan at Kaneo** through the winding streets and this amazing little 13th-century church will appear before you on the cliffs above the lake. The unusual half-folded umbrella roof of the dome indicates that there was an Armenian influence in its design – this is a distinct feature of Armenian churches.

Go up through the park towards the newly built **Sveti Kliment i Pantelejmon**, standing next to the remains of Ohrid's oldest church of the same name. The foundations of the 5th-century basilica with their intricate mosaics are on display in front of the new church. The foundations of a **4th-century church** close by have been covered with a roof on pylons to show the original roofline. There are more mosaics here, usually covered with sand outside the summer months to help preserve them. One of the mosaics shows a swastika symbol – an old Indo-Aryan sun symbol long before the Nazis appropriated it.

Continue towards the **Upper Gate** (Gorna Porta) to the gorgeous, 13th-century **Sveti Kliment** (admission 100MKD; ☎ 9am-5pm), patterned inside with vividly restored frescoes of biblical scenes. Opposite this church is an **icon gallery** (☎ 9am-3pm). The emphatically restored, 10th-century **Car Samoil's Castle** (admission 30MKD; ☎ 9am-6.30pm), on the town's heights, looks more interesting from the outside than the interior suggests, but there are splendid views from the crenellated walls and towers.

Ohrid's **Classical Amphitheatre** was first built around the time of the birth of Christ, and wasn't fully uncovered until 1984. The amphitheatre was originally built for plays and oratory, but in the late Roman era the first 10 rows were pulled out and replaced with a wall, so the theatre could be used as an arena for bloodspots. Its original purpose has been restored and the amphitheatre is used for Summer Festival performances.

A gnarled, 900-year-old **plane tree**, which apparently used to house a café and a barber shop at different points of its long life, stands at the town's northern end. The medieval town wall isolates the Old Town from the surrounding valley.

Festivals & Events

The five-day **Balkan Festival of Folk Dances & Songs**, held at Ohrid in early July, draws folkloric groups from around the Balkans. The **Ohrid Summer Festival**, held from mid-July to mid-August, features classical concerts in the Church of Sveta Sofija, open-air theatre, and many other events. An international **poetry festival**, replete with food and drink in the streets, is held annually in nearby Struga on 25 and 26 August.

Ohrid hosts a **swimming marathon** each August, when swimmers race the 30km across Lake Ohrid from Sveti Naum to Ohrid.

Sleeping BUDGET

Villa Lucija (☎ 265 608; lucija@mtnet.mk; ul Kosta Abraš 29; s/d €15/25, apt €40) A fantastic place in the centre of the Old Town and near all the bars, its rooms are white, clean and spacious, balconies overlook the lake, and the patio is right on the water for a swim. Book early though, this place is popular.

Private rooms or apartments (per person €5-10) Your best bet in Ohrid, private rooms or apartments can be organised in advance either through Generaltourist (opposite) or other local agencies, or chances are someone will approach you at the bus station and offer you a room. Rooms in the Old Town are more expensive.

Stefan Kanevče Rooms (☎ 070-212 352, 234 813; apostolanet@yahoo.co.uk; ul Kočo Racin 47, Kaneo; per person €10) This spot is lakeside in Kaneo, the small settlement you can see west from the Church of Sveti Jovan. The rooms are in a 19th-century house with carved wooden

ceilings, generous hospitality and Macedonian home cooking. Be warned that it is a bit of a hike from the Old Town. Stefan also arranges rooms in other houses around Ohrid.

Mimi Apartments (☎ 250 103; mimioh@mail.com.mk; ul Strašo Pindur 2; incl breakfast 800MKD) Friendly Mimi Apostolov lets eight comfortable, heated rooms, each of which has a fridge and satellite TV.

Veliče Šipinkoski (☎ 070 854 651, 252 345; ul 7 Noemvri 120; s/d €7.50/15) There are five simple rooms at this house in a quiet neighbourhood about 250m from the market. Breakfast costs €3. Veliče is a friendly chap – you may well meet him at the bus station.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Apartments Čekređi (☎ 261 733, 070 570 717; Kej Maršal Tito 27; d/tr 1500/2700MKD) These roomy, immaculate and spacious quarters close to the lake are good for a stay of a few days, as you can self-cater.

Hotel Lebed (☎ 250 004; www.hotellebed.com.mk; Kej Maršal Tito bb; incl breakfasts €32-37, d €52-57) This friendly little eight-room hotel is about 1km from the town centre (a 50MKD taxi ride). The more expensive rooms have lake views. The rooms have relaxing wooden décor, phones, satellite TV, central heating and air-conditioning. Visa and MasterCard are accepted.

Hotel Tino (☎ 261 665; www.hotelтино.com.mk; Kej Maršal Tito 55; s/d €39/49) This mid-sized hotel by the lakeshore in the new part of town has a ground-floor restaurant serving Italian and Macedonian cuisines and quite nice rooms – the lakeside ones have little balconies. The rooms have satellite TV, phone and

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Vila Sveti Sofiya (☎ 254 370, www.vilasofiya.com; ul Kosta Abraš 64; s €35, d €60, suite €80-120) Tucked into the lower part of the old city just 50m from the Sveti Sofiya church, this bijou establishment hotel combines opulent traditional furnishings and old-world charm with the latest in bathroom design. The luxury suite is impossibly romantic, and the entire building is a wonderful example of an Ohrid mansion. For my money this is the best boutique hotel in Macedonia.

air-conditioning. Visa and Mastercard aren't accepted here – cash only.

Hotel Millenium Palace (☎ 263 361; www.milleniumpalace.com.mk; Kej Maršal Tito bb; s/d €49/66, ste €99) The exterior may not win prizes for classic beauty but the facilities within are very good – all mod cons such as satellite TV, minibar and very comfy beds. Plus, for exercise fanatics it has a small gym, sauna and an indoor swimming pool with a cocktail bar! The suites have terraces overlooking the lake. Accepts Visa, MasterCard and Diners cards.

Eating & Drinking

Restaurants, quick eats, cafés and bars are dotted all around Ohrid.

Restaurant Sveti Sofia (☎ 267 403; ul Car Samoil 88; meals around 500MKD; ☎ 10am-midnight) Classy bistro just uphill from the Sveti Sofia church, with a wide range of modern and traditional Macedonian dishes. The view from the terrace onto the ancient church is the very soul of Ohrid.

Restoran Neim (☎ 254 504; ul Goce Delčev 71; ☎ 9am-midnight) Check out the local characters at this working man's hangout about 100m west of the old plane tree, and try some delicious moussaka or *polneti piperki* (stuffed peppers).

Restaurant Antiko (☎ 265 523; ul Car Samoil 30; mains from 350MKD; ☎ 9am-midnight) This traditional place, located in an old Ohrid house, is one of the most popular restaurants in town, although it's rather pricey. Special warning: if you want to eat Macedonian specialities, you have to order them three hours in advance.

Pizzeria Leonardo (☎ 260 359; ul Car Samoil 31; ☎ 9am-midnight) For a pizza and half a litre of draught wine at around 250MKD, this cosy little spot is the place to be.

Restaurant Dalga (☎ 31 948; ul Kosta Abraš bb) Here you can enjoy glorious lake views along with some Californian trout at 800MKD per kilo.

Dom na Armija (☎ secret; ul Partizanka bb; ☎ 7am-6pm) For something different, the Army House is a classic communist café, remaining unchanged since Tito took his holidays at Ohrid, and serving coffee for only 10MKD. The waiters in ageing tuxedos refused to divulge the telephone number to this foreign spy, but subterfuge helped me get the opening hours.

Jazz Inn (ul Kosta Abraš 27; admission free; ☎ 10.30pm-2am) A vibrant, jazzy atmosphere, with live music on Thursdays and weekends, this must be the most popular place in town. Opens late and stays open until much later.

Aquarius (ul Kosta Abraš bb; ☎ 10am-midnight) A local radio station broadcasts from this groovy lakeside bar in summer. The lakeside terrace was the first of its kind, an idea picked up by adjacent bars. The bar features a big sound system and lots of cocktails.

Entertainment

Dom na Kultura (ul Grigor Prličev; admission 50-100MKD) Ohrid's movie theatre, Dom na Kultura, faces the lakeside park. Cultural events are also held here.

Shopping

Pick up some interesting woodcarvings at **Barok** (☎ 263 151; barokohrid@yahoo.com; ul Car Samoil 24; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm), or some fine prints of photographs of rural Macedonia by photographer **Atanas Talevski** (☎ 254 059; Kosta Abraš bb; ☎ 9am-9pm). Small prints cost 200MKD and large ones 900MKD.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Four airlines serve **Ohrid Airport** (information ☎ 252 820, www.airports.com.mk), which is 10km north of Ohrid. JAT flies to Belgrade via Skopje on Mondays and Fridays. A taxi to the airport costs 250MKD.

BUS

About 10 buses per day run between Ohrid and Skopje (380MKD, three hours, 167km), via Kičevo. Another four or five go via Bitola. The first route is shorter, faster, more scenic and cheaper, so try to take it. The last bus to Skopje leaves around 6.30pm. During the summer rush, it pays to book a seat the day before.

There are 10 buses per day travelling to Bitola (70MKD, 1¼ hours). Buses to Struga (70MKD, 14km) leave about every 15 minutes (5.30am to 8.30pm) from stand 1 at the **bus station** (☎ 262 490; ul Dimitar Vlahov). Enter through the back doors and pay the conductor (30MKD).

There are three buses per day to Belgrade (1500MKD, about 12 hours).

To go to Albania, catch a bus or boat to Sveti Naum Monastery, which is very

near the border crossing. In summer, there are six buses every day from Ohrid to Sveti Naum (120MKD, 29km), in winter, three daily. The bus continues on to the border post. From Albanian customs it's 6km to Pogradeci; taxis are waiting and should charge only €5 for the ride. A taxi from Ohrid to Sveti Naum costs €10/15 one way/return.

Around Ohrid

SVETI NAUM СВЕТИ НАУМ

The magnificent grounds of the Sveti Naum Monastery, close to the Albanian border 29km south of Ohrid, are a real treat. Standing just over the lake, the grounds are guarded by peacocks and hide the source of Lake Ohrid's water. The beautiful 17th-century **Church of Sveti Naum** rises on a hill above the lake, surrounded by the buildings of the Hotel Sveti Naum which has taken over the old monastery complex.

The original church of the Holy Archangels was built here in 900 by St Naum, and St Naum himself was buried here in 910. They say that you can still hear his heart beat if you put your ear on his tomb inside the chapel. The charming frescoes of the archangels inside the church are mostly 19th century, though fragments of 16th- and 17th-century work remain. You can probably find an English speaker on hand to act as a guide. There's no need to pay the guide, but do leave some money by the icons. The monastery grounds also offer a view of the Albanian town of Pogradeci across the lake. In the summer months you can take a half-hour boat trip from the monastery to bubbling springs that feed Lake Ohrid (100MKD per person).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Sveti Naum (☎ 046 283 244; www.hotel-stnaum.com.mk; r €35-60, ste €80) Standing at the heart of the monastery, this hotel has magical views, and excellent rooms with satellite TV, central heating and traditional styling. Book in advance during the popular summer months; prices drop at other times of the year. The hotel restaurant serves meals for about 600MKD per person.

Getting There & Away

Six buses per day run from Ohrid to Sveti Naum; it's 80MKD one way, payable on

the bus. Buses generally return 40 minutes after they set out – the last one leaves Sveti Naum at 7pm. The bus makes a stop at the Albanian border before turning back.

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.

VEVČANI ВЕВЧАНИ

Vevčani is a Christian village surrounded by Muslim villages 14km northwest of Struga. In the early 1990s, its residents saw how the new post-Yugoslav nationalisms were destroying the region and came up with their own solution – they declared independence. In 1991, 99 per cent of the villagers voted for an independent Republic of Vevčani, which now has its own flag, passports and currency. The push for independence began in 1987, when the government planned to tap Vevčani's springs and pipe water to Struga. The villagers built barricades to block the construction work, and after several weeks of violent protests the government backed off. After the independence vote in 1991 the villagers let it be known they had stockpiled weapons and again warned the government to leave them alone. The Macedonian government has studiously ignored the unilateral declaration of independence, but the tactic seems to have worked – the villagers of Vevčani have the respect of their Muslim neighbours and local relations are in good shape.

Vevčani is one of the region's prettiest villages, with some fine old houses and a splendid 19th-century church, Sveti Nikola. Many of the local men are builders and masons by trade. There's a good traditional restaurant called **Domakinska Kukja** (☎ 046-790 505; meals around 500MKD; ☎ noon-10pm Wed-Sun) near Sveti Nikola at the top of the village. The restaurant sells Vevčanian passports and currency.

The town also has a famous annual **festival** on January 13 and 14 – the Orthodox New Year's Eve. The festival culminates in a satirical carnival, where villagers dress up as politicians, policemen and other dubious characters and send up the lot.

From Vevčani it is possible to walk up to the old mountain village of **Gorno Belica** –

population, two. The village lies above the treeline on the high slopes of Jablanica mountain. The walking trails are marked.

A taxi from Ohrid and back with a two-hour wait costs about 1800MKD. There are minibuses to the village from Struga.

PELISTER NATIONAL PARK & LAKE PRESPA

Macedonia's oldest national park (it was proclaimed in 1948) 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 Molika pine (*Pinus peuce*).

There is a very small **ski resort** (with one ski run) on the northern side of the mountain near Bitola. The chairlift is next to the Hotel Molika. Besides the chairlift there is also one ski lift operating on weekends from December until the end of March – a day pass costs 300MKD. The resort used to be bigger in Yugoslav times, and it looks like more lifts and lodges will reopen here over the next few years.

The main cultural attraction inside 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 are one of the finest ensembles of traditional architecture in Macedonia. The little Shemnica River bumbles through the village, crossed by many quaint little bridges. The village lanes are made of rough cobble stones – sturdy footwear helps to save your ankles. The massive church of **Sveti Petka** at the top of the village (built in 1856) shows how wealthy the community had grown through cattle breeding. The interior is full of frescoes and over one hundred icons. About 2km from the village, in the middle of a dense beech forest, is the little church of **Sveti Ana**. It takes about 30 minutes to hike there – it's 400m higher in altitude. Hotels in Bitola can arrange transport to and from Malovište with one hour at the village for about 500MKD. Malovište is 4km off Highway E65 between Bitola and Resen – turn off at Kazani, take the first left and then another left through a tunnel under the highway.

Hotel Molika (☎ 047-229 406; www.hotelmolika.com.mk; s/d €28/44) is 12km from Bitola, high up in the Molika pine forests at an altitude of 1420m. This very pleasant resort hotel

has simple but comfortable rooms, a cheerful wood-panelled restaurant (meals around 700MKD), fresh highland air and tremendous views down the mountain to Bitola. A taxi from Bitola costs about 400MKD.

The eastern shore of **Lake Prespa** is a very pretty area of orchards and villages, between the Pelister mountain and the reedy shores of the lake. This used to be a popular holiday spot in the past, and the communist-era lakeside resorts are looking rather tired, the views over the lake are as magical as ever.

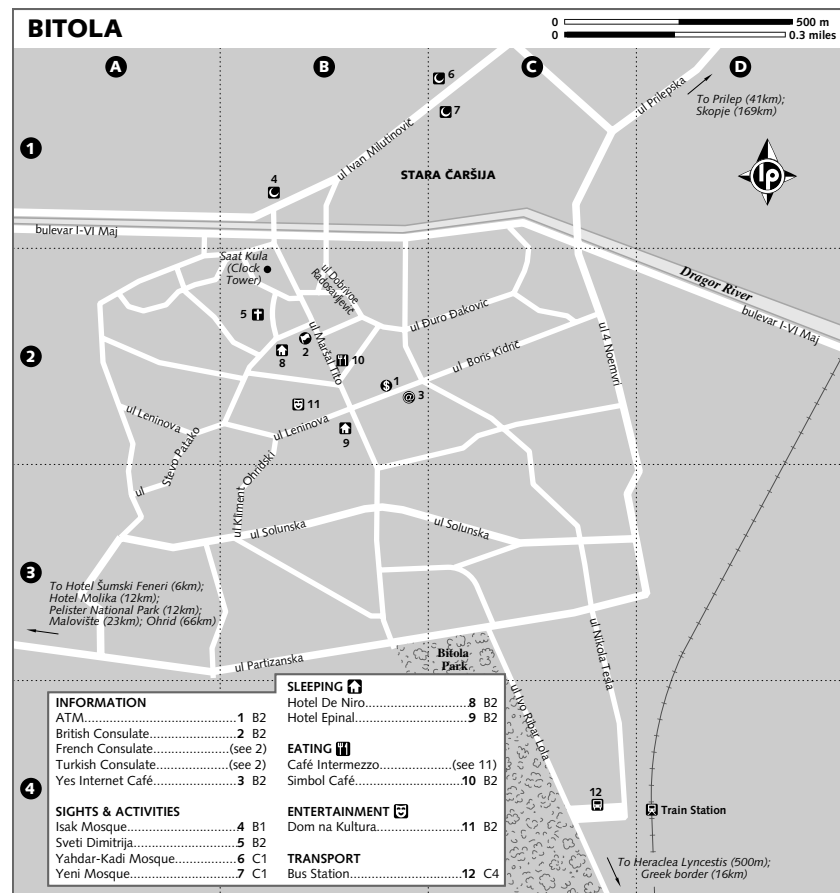
The village of **Kurbinovo** is as typical a Macedonian village as you could find, but the little church of **Sveti Gjorgji** about 1km uphill from the village is one of the country's cultural treasures. The church was thought to have been an 18th century construction for many years, until art historians took another look and realised its frescoes date back to 1191. The images on the 50 denar note come from the church's frescoes. You'll have to ask in the village for the custodian with the key to the church.

Just before the Greek border a road leads to the utterly captivating villages of **Ljubojno** and **Brajčino**. The villages share a lovely setting between wooded slopes and a wealth of old stone houses. Brajčino has six churches, while Ljubojno sits below the domes of **Sveti Petar i Pavle**. The area used to prosper from growing apples for the Greek market, but since the Greeks closed the border here trading has languished. Brajčino is the start of a 17km trek into Pelister National Park. The hike takes about six hours, with two natural springs on the way, up to a **mountain hut** (☎ 070 497 751) with 25 beds near Stone Lake (Golemo Ezero). There are buses to Brajčino from Resen at 6am, 9am, 11.30am, 2.30pm and 3.30pm, and about 10 buses in either direction every day between Ohrid and Bitola which stop in Resen.

BITOLA БИТОЛА

☎ 097 / pop 77,000

Bitola, sits on a 660m-high plateau between mountains 16km north of the Greek border. It was an important commercial centre in the late Ottoman era (when it was called Manastir), and it still has a substantial Turkish population. Its past prosperity has graced it with a fine collection of 19th-century buildings, interspersed with some



wildly inappropriate communist monoliths. The town has a vibrant arts scene and some decent hotels. It makes a good base for visiting Pelister National Park and Prilep.

One of the town's curiosities is its three consulates – Turkish, British and French. They are the last of 15 or so European consulates based here in the late 19th century. The Turkish consulate is still here because of the local Turkish minority; the British consulate is still here because they don't want to leave before the French do; and the French won't leave until the British pack up. All three share the same premises on ul Maršal Tito.

The **Ilinden festival**, the most important event of the year, takes place on 2 August,

when the Macedonians celebrate their uprising against the Ottomans with traditional food, music and general joy.

Information

There is no tourist office in town, but a good source of information online is www.bitola.de, in English, German and Macedonian – 'only in Bitola life can be discovered' it says. The **Yes Internet Café** (ul Boris Kidrič; per hr 40MKD; ☎ 7am-3am) in the centre of town is cheap, quick and serves drinks.

Sights

As you enter, you will notice the magnificent minarets of the 16th-century **Yeni Mosque**, **Isak Mosque** and **Yahdar-Kadi Mosque**

piercing the sky. Step in and take a look at these elegant stone buildings. The city's colourful **old bazaar**, Stara Čaršija, has about 6000 shops supporting 70-odd different crafts and trades. Relax in the cafés on the wide boulevards. Step into **Sveti Dimitri**, a large lavish space with exquisite frescoes, ornate lamps and a huge iconostasis. When the church was built in 1830 the Turkish authorities insisted on a plain exterior, so the builders concentrated on decorating the interior.

The ruins of **Heraclea Lyncestis** (admission 100MKD, photos 500MKD; ☞ 9am-3pm winter, to 5pm summer) lie 1km south of the bus and train stations. 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. From the 4th to 6th centuries AD it was an episcopal seat. It's a fairly small site that can be fully explored in about 30 minutes. Excavations of the site are continuing, but the Roman baths, portico and theatre are now visible. Other interesting attractions to see in Heraclea are the two early Christian basilicas and

the episcopal palace, which contains some splendid mosaics.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Šumski Feneri (☎ 293 030, 070 682 244; sfeneri@mt.net.mk; Trnovo village; s/d €30/45, apt €60) This charming hotel, run by the friendly Musulanov family, lies on the lower slopes of Mt Pelister, in the village of Trnovo 4km from Bitola. The hotel has four apartments which can each fit four people, an extraordinary number of potted plants and a large restaurant. Ljubmila Musulanov is happy to help guests with transport and tours of local sights such as Malovište. To get there head out on the Pelister National Park road. Coming from Ohrid you need to turn right towards Bitola and then take a quick turn right again up to the park – follow the signs to the Hotel Molika further up the mountain. A taxi from Bitola to the hotel should cost 200MKD.

Hotel De Niro (☎ 229 656; www.hotel-deniro.com; ul Kiril i Metodij 5; s/d €35/50, ste €80) This new little boutique hotel is in the street behind the Turkish, French and British consulates just off ul Maršal Tito, above a restaurant of the same name (Italian of course). All eight rooms are decorated with individual

IN VINO VERITAS

There are few countries as drenched in the culture of the grape as Macedonia. The country has 20,000 hectares of wine grapes. There are also vines trailing over gardens all across the country, and a huge number of households make their own wine. The Tikveš region around Kavadarci and Negotino is the heart of the wine industry, but, unfortunately, only a few wineries are open to the public for tastings and sales.

The two main varieties grown in Macedonia are Vranec, which makes a rich fruity red, and Smederevka, a light white with citrus notes. These varieties used to account for 80 per cent of all wine made, but recently there's been a switch towards French varieties including Merlot, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon. The giant of the industry is Tikveš, based in Kavadarci, which alone makes up about 60 per cent of the local wine market. Tikveš wines, such as its popular T'ga za Jug, are practically national icons – and quite moderately priced at around 400MKD per bottle. Skovin is a mid-sized winery close to Skopje, and its wines are popular in the capital. Fonko Wines is one of Macedonia's biggest premium wineries, producing Chardonnay, Smederevka, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Vranec and Cabernet Sauvignon. Its Alexander the Great range is quite expensive – around 1000MKD per bottle – but well worth the splurge. The following are a couple of premium wineries which can be visited:

Bovin Winery (☎ 043-365 322; Industriska zone 1440, Negotino) Macedonia's first private winery, established in 1998. Bovin has since won a clutch of awards and medals for its Pinot Noir and Vranec. It also makes a very good Merlot.

Čekorovi Winery (☎ 043-400 317; bulevar Edvard Kardaelj 11/10, Kavadarci) Boutique wines made by veteran winemaker Kiril Čekorov. Čekorov produces just two wines – a white Riesling and a red Vranec – in limited quantities from grapes grown in the heart of the Tikveš wine region.

flair – some in traditional Bitolan style, others with leather sofas and Jacuzzis. All have air-conditioning, cable TV and Internet connections.

Hotel Epinal (☎ 224 777; www.hotelepinal.com; ul Maršal Tito bb; s/d €65/100), in the centre of Bitola is a marginally revamped communist-era tower block. The casino, spa and restaurant are all fine but the rooms are small and poor value. The open-air café under a wrought-iron roof at the front of the hotel, on the other hand, is an excellent spot for a bite to eat, with pizzas and pasta dishes from 200MKD and steaks for around 600MKD.

Ul Maršal Tito is lined with cafés, restaurants and bars – one popular spot is the **Café Intermezzo** (☎ 225 115; Kej Domot na Kulturata; ☞ 9am-midnight), a wood-lined pub/café/restaurant on the ground level of the Dom na Kultura (House of Culture), opposite the Hotel Epinal. Another stylish place is the **Simbol Café** (☎ 203 750; ul Maršal Tito 65; ☞ 8am-midnight), with a modern twist on 19th-century design and up-to-date tunes.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 391 391; ul Nikola Tesla) and the **train station** (☎ 392 904; ul Nikola Tesla) are adjacent to each other, about 1km south of the town centre. There are 10 buses per day to Skopje between 5am and 5.25pm (2½ hours, 350MKD) via Prilep, and six trains daily. There are between 12 and 18 buses per day to Ohrid – the higher number being in summer (1¼ hours, 70MKD). To get to the Greek border, you must take a taxi from the bus station (350MKD to 450MKD), then look for a taxi on the Greek side to the nearest town, Florina.

TRESKAVEC MONASTERY

МАНАСТИР ТРЕСКАВЕЦ

This is the most magnificent – and perhaps the most remote – place in the country. Planted on the top of Mt Zlato 10km above the town of Prilep, you couldn't get a more breathtaking and dramatic setting. You will most certainly feel deliriously light-headed upon reaching the monastery when, after the two-hour climb, you breathe the fresh air at the top. The valley stretches out on all sides beneath you. The mountain itself is bare and the rock formations are like dinosaurs turned to stone mid-step, with a solitary tree grazed by the sweeping winds.

Prepare to be amazed by some of the most colourful and intricate frescoes to be found in Macedonia at the 14th-century **Sveti Bogorodica**, the monastery's spiritual heart. The incisions on the bare walls reveal yet more frescoes to be uncovered, like small windows into history. The church was built on the foundations of the original 6th-century basilica, and inside you can see some more Roman remains.

Inside the monastery you will be welcomed by the lovely Naumovski couple who will cook your dinner and let you sleep in the rooms for free; beds and blankets are provided. Leave a donation of 200MKD at the icons.

To get to the monastery, you must first get to Prilep. There are frequent buses from Ohrid, Bitola and Skopje, and four trains from Skopje go every day (300MKD, three hours). From Prilep, there are two ways of getting to the monastery: one is by 4WD up a muddy mountain track. Ask for directions to the new town cemetery where you will have to watch out for a small sign for *Manastir Sveti Bogorodica, Treskavec*. Head straight up. The second option is on foot, and is far more rewarding, because you get to see the fantastic scenery around you and experience the priceless sight of the monastery appearing above you. Take a taxi to Dabnica village outside Prilep to the north and head for the cobbled track leading you up Mt Zlato. If you cannot see the cobbled track straight away, ask the driver to point you in the right direction. Go up the road, and after you reach the water fountain, continue on the straight path.

At the end of your mountain excursion, check out **Markovi Kuli** (Marko's Towers) on the hill above Prilep. Archaeological findings show that the site dates back to the 3rd and 4th centuries BC, but most of the remains you will be able to see are from medieval times. This is another place from which to enjoy spectacular views.

EASTERN MACEDONIA

The eastern half of the country is not high on most visitors' priorities. The mountains are lower, the land is drier and the region

is strongly agricultural with scattered places of interest. Public transport out here is OK if you just want to go to and from Skopje, but trips between regional cities tend to test your patience. The easiest and least frustrating way to explore the region is by car. If you don't mind putting in a few hours behind the wheel dodging tractors and farm trucks, Eastern Macedonia has some wonderful monasteries and churches, some of the best preserved traditional villages and a couple of real oddities like a 4000-year-old astronomical observatory.

NORTHEASTERN MACEDONIA

If Orthodox churches and monasteries really ring your bell, then there are a couple of worthwhile detours off the main highway to Sofia in Bulgaria. **Kumanovo** is Macedonia's third biggest city, but it is a rather dull, dusty regional commercial centre. Like most of eastern Macedonia's towns, its historic quarter was thoroughly damaged by the wars of the early 20th century. Some maps show a monastery about 20km west of Kumanovo, near the village of **Matejče** on the eastern slopes of the Skopska Crna Gora mountains. The villages in the vicinity are ethnic Albanian, and the monastery of **Sveti Spas** (built in the 14th century by the Serbian Emperor Dusan the Mighty) was heavily vandalised by UČK militants in 2001. The monastery has been partially repaired, but visiting here was a salutary lesson in stumbling into the embers of ethnic conflict. Asking for directions to the monastery in Matejče led me being directed to the local mosque instead, which had been sprayed with gunfire and had its minaret blown in half. On the way back to Kumanovo I was stopped and questioned by bullying policemen for 30 minutes – not a particularly pleasant experience.

Northeast of Kumanovo is the village of Staro Nagoričane. It lies 4km north of the E871 Kumanovo-Sofia highway – turn off at the sign for Prohor Pčinški, take a left at the T-intersection and then the first right. The village lies on a broad rolling plain, and is fairly undistinguished except for the handsome church of **Sveti Gjorgi**, a 14th-century construction on top of an earlier shrine. The rich frescoes date from 1318. Ask at the police station next to the church and they'll help track down the custodian who

has the key. The church is in the centre of Staro Nagoričane, about 1km off the main road (look for a sharp left turn to get on the road into the village – it's easy to miss). To reach the **Kokino megalithic observatory** on the peak of Taticev Kamen, get back onto the main road, head north for 5km and take a right to the village of Dragomance. This minor road heads northeast for 15km past the hamlet of Stepanče. Just after Stepanče, look for a small sign on the left at the crest of a hill. This leads uphill for a couple of hundred metres, and then it's a stiff climb up to the observatory on top of the volcanic ridge.

The site was confirmed as an observatory in 2002. It is believed to have been built around 1815 BC to measure the movements of the sun and moon. To the uninformed eye there isn't much to see, but the marks and niches in the rocks were finely calibrated to mark the winter and summer solstice, the vernal and autumnal equinox and the four main positions of the moon over a year. Some of the markings indicate the optimal time for harvesting different crops.

Back on the E871 the road continues through rolling pasture lands, past low volcanic outcroppings and down into fertile valleys. The roads starts to climb as you approach Kriva Palanka. The town straggles along the Kriva River for several kilometres. Evidently the local economy is in a slump, and while the townsfolk are friendly there is very little in the way of places to stay or eat. At the far (upriver) end of town a sign points south to the monastery of **Sveti Joakim Osogovski**, one of the largest in Macedonia. The monastery is tucked away in a wooded valley high above the town. There's a semi-derelict hotel at the turn-off. It's a twisty, five-minute drive or a 30-minute walk from the turn-off. It is possible to stay at the monastery in either the old monk's quarters (300MKD for a simple double) or in a new pilgrims' lodge (600MKD). Make a booking by calling during the day on ☎ 031-375 063. If you don't speak Macedonian, it is worth getting someone to call for you.

The complex has two churches and several impressive monastic buildings. Parts of the smaller Sveti Bodorodica church date from the monastery's founding in the

12th century. The larger, multidomed Sveti Joakim Osogovski church dates from the mid-19th century. The 12 cupolae on the roof represent the Twelve Apostles. The frescoes around the main door and on the inside of the cupolae mostly date from the 1850s. The monastery's main festival is on Sveti Joakim Osogovski's feast day, 29 August. Other buildings in the complex include a bell tower with a charnel house in its base, a three-storey dormitory and a guardhouse.

The ancient mining town of **Kratovo** lies in an old volcanic crater 18km south of the E871 highway. The town has been a source of iron ore for millennia. Kratovo is known for its stone towers, built as the town's defence system. The turn-off to Kratovo is just after the Stracin Pass. After you cross the Kriva River a rough road (4WD recommended) leads off on the right to the bizarre rock formations called the **kukla** (stone dolls), pinnacles of rocks set in a deeply eroded ravine.

Further south of Kratovo near the village of Lesnovo is another fine monastery, **Sveti Gavril Lesnovski**. It is the third monastery in Macedonia to sport an iconostasis carved by the Filipovski brothers and Makarije Frckovski, who also created the masterpieces at Sveti Spas in Skopje and Sveti Jovan Bigorski in Mavrovo National Park. The 14th-century church also has some fine frescoes.

BEROVO БЕРОВО

☎ 033 / pop 7,000

This quiet farming town is tucked into the rolling, pine-forested highlands by the Bulgarian border. In communist times this little mountain town (altitude 850m) was a minor, all-seasons holiday resort. It has no epic attractions, but it's an easy-going retreat from Skopje's summer heat and there are some superb examples of traditional architecture in the town and in nearby hamlets and villages. The town itself is very pleasant – residential districts on either side of the little Bregalnica River overlook pastures, fields and public buildings in the middle.

SIGHTS

The **Sveti Arhangel Mihail** convent isn't the biggest complex in Macedonia, but it is one

of the prettiest. It's at the far end of town from Skopje, next to the Hotel Manastir. The most obvious feature is its charming octagonal belltower, set on a square stone base. The convent was built in the 19th century and was at the forefront of education in Macedonia in that era. At its height in the early 20th century, 60 nuns lived here. Enter through the fine wooden gate and the peaceful atmosphere strike you immediately. The wooden and stone convent quarters surround an inner garden and a small but elegant main chapel with a large wooden portico. At the time of research there were five nuns in residence; they have a sideline in painting icons according to the old techniques.

Otherwise the main attractions are either a tour of nearby villages such as Rusinovo, a centre for traditional weaving, or a short drive (or longish walk) 4km up the valley to the artificial Lake Ratevo, surrounded by pine and beech forests.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Manastir (☎ 472 28; fax 472 283; ul Kiril i Metodij; s €20, d €30-40, ste €60) This lovely, traditional-style hotel has modern comfy rooms with minibars, couches and snazzy bathrooms. Some face onto the little monastery, others overlook the town. The restaurant on the ground floor is very more-ish (mains around 250MKD to 300MKD and the best chips in Macedonia) and has outdoor seating. The local *belo cirenje* (white cheese) is particularly good.

Loven Dom (☎ 470 454; r €25, full board €32) The name means 'hunting lodge' but thankfully taxidermy is not in evidence. The lodge has four rooms (two apartments and two stand-alone rooms, all the same price) above a large dining hall. The rooms are quite decent, fairly simple but comfortable. The main attraction is the spacious grounds, backing onto a forest. The lodge has an outdoor restaurant in summer.

About 4km out of town at Lake Ratevo is the **Malesevo Recreation Centre** (☎ 471 212; www.malesevo.com.mk; cabin 1240MKD). The main building is looking rundown, but the cabins down by the lakeshore are pretty good, if simple. Next to the cabins is a popular local restaurant with grills from around 350MKD, outdoor seating and lots of inexpensive wines and beers.

GETTING THERE AND AWAY

Skopje is 161km away. The bus station is in the centre of town – there are eight buses per day to Skopje, from 4.30am to 6pm (four hours, 350MKD). If you have a car, there's a very pretty 47km drive to Strumica through highland forests and down a dramatic escarpment.

SOUTHEASTERN MACEDONIA

The town of Strumica is about as interesting as my hometown of Seymour in central Victoria, Australia – in short, not very interesting at all, unless perhaps you're shopping for tractors. There are, however, two lovely little churches in nearby villages. The hamlet of Vodoča, 5km west of Strumica is home to the monastery of **Sveti Leonthius**, which has been demolished and rebuilt several times in its 1000-year history. There are some restored pilgrims' quarters next to the church. Three kilometres further on, the village of Veljusa is home to the monastery of **Sveti Bogorodica-Elеusa**, which dates back to 1080. The floor of the church shows some of the mosaic from the original construction.

South of Strumica is the third and least interesting of Macedonia's big lakes, **Lake Dojran**, which straddles the Greek border. The lake is in poor shape ecologically because too much water has been diverted for irrigation, and the water level has dropped several metres in the last 20 years. The main attraction here is a casino built to extract money from Greek gamblers. There is a small border crossing into Greece.

MACEDONIA DIRECTORY**ACCOMMODATION**

The listings of accommodation are given in order of preference. Skopje's hotels are relatively expensive but there are some alternatives, such as private-room agencies. Skopje's convenient HI hostel is open throughout the year. Beds are also available at student dormitories in Skopje in summer. Prices in more expensive hotels are usually quoted in euros. The accommodation in Ohrid is generally good and affordable, with plenty of budget and midrange

PRACTICALITIES

- The press is varied with *Nova Makedonija*, *Vest*, and *Dnevnik* among the most popular of half-a-dozen daily Macedonian-language newspapers. Most newspapers are closely aligned to major political parties. *Forum* is an influential bi-weekly news magazine, also in Macedonian. The two main Albanian-language newspapers are *Fakti* and *Flaka*. There are also newspapers in Roma and Turkish.
- There are six Macedonian-language TV stations, A1 being the most credible for news reporting. There are also two Albanian-language TV channels. There are dozens of local radio stations, two of the more popular being City Radio and Radio Uno.
- Macedonia uses standard European electricity (220V to 240V/50Hz to 60Hz).
- The system used for measurements and weights is metric.
- Macedonia uses the PAL video system.

options. Booking early is recommended for visits during the summer high season, Orthodox Christmas (7 January) and Orthodox Easter.

ACTIVITIES

The Mavrovo ski resort in the national park of the same name is Macedonia's premier resort, with a lot of new ski runs and lifts constructed in recent years. There is also skiing at Popova Šapka (1845m), on the southern slopes of Šar Planina west of Tetovo. However, because Popova Šapka is in the 'Albanian' part of the country and it is close to the Kosovo border, the resort has languished during the last 15 years and the facilities are distinctly dated. There is also a very small ski centre (one chairlift) in Pelister National Park.

Hiking is spectacular in any of the three national parks (Galičica and Pelister in the south, and Mavrovo) or at Lake Matka near Skopje, which offers climbing and sailing. For a dose of pure Balkan machismo, hunting is also quite popular.

One excellent resource for mountain climbing and alpine trekking is the website of the **Korab Mountain Club** (www.korab.org.mk/indexen.html), Macedonia's most active mountaineering club. The website contains details on tackling 14 mountain routes in Macedonia and other useful info (including, gulp, rescue-service numbers).

BOOKS

Lonely Planet's *Eastern Europe phrasebook* will help you with the language.

A decent background book is *Who Are the Macedonians?*, a political and cultural history by Hugh Poulton. Rebecca West's *Black Lamb & Grey Falcon*, a between-the-wars Balkan travelogue, makes a brief mention of Macedonia. A recent study is *The New Macedonian Question* edited by James Pettifer – a collection of academic essays discussing this complex issue.

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. Post offices open from 6.30am to 4pm and banks from 7am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

CUSTOMS

Customs checks are generally cursory, though travellers with private cars may attract more attention at land borders. You may bring one litre of alcohol and 200 cigarettes in with you, and the maximum amount of currency that can be brought into the country without having to declare it is €10,000. You can take MKD freely back over the border with you, but there is not much point in doing so because it cannot be exchanged into any currency outside of Macedonia.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Macedonia is a safe and easygoing country in general. The usual cautions apply – pickpockets and other dodgy types tend to hang out at train and bus stations, and some taxi drivers will try to charge exorbitant fees if you're just arrived by bus, train or plane.

Tread carefully if you go to villages which saw fighting during the ethnic disturbances of recent years. These lie in a belt along the frontier with Kosovo, from Tetovo to Kumanovo.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Few public buildings or streets have facilities for wheelchairs, but some newer buildings and some of the most expensive hotels provide wheelchair ramps. 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 on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website at www.mfr.gov.mk. Macedonian embassies include the following:

Albania (☎ 04-233 036; makambas@albn.net; rruga Lek Dukagjini, Vila 2, Tirana)

Australia (☎ 02-6249 8000; macedonian.embassy@netspeed.com.au; Perpetual Bldg, Suite 2:05, 10 Rudd St, Canberra ACT 2601)

Bulgaria (☎ 02-870 1560; tomdak@bgnet.bg; ul Frederic Joliot-Curie 17, Block 2, 1st Flr, Suite 1, Sofia 1113)

Canada (☎ 613-234 3882; www3.sympatico.ca/emb.macedonia.ottawa; 130 Albert St, Suite 1006, Ottawa ON, K1P 5G4)

France (☎ 331-45 77 10 50; ambassade@fr.oleane.com; 5 Rue de la Faisanderie, 75116 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-890 6950; jpopovski@t-online.de; Koenigsallee 2, 14193 Berlin)

Greece Athens (☎ 1-674 9585; lormak@teledomenet.gr; Marathonoudromou 13, Psychico, 154 52 Athens) Thessaloniki (☎ 31-027 7347; dkpsolun@mfa.gov.mk; Tsimiski 42, Thessaloniki)

Netherlands (☎ 070-427 44 64; repmak@wanadoo.nl; Laan van Meerdevoort 50-C, 2517AM The Hague)

Serbia and Montenegro (☎ 011-328 49 24; macemb@eunet.yu; Gospodar Jevremova 34, 11000 Belgrade)

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

USA (☎ 202-337 3063; www.macedonianembassy.org; 1101 30th St NW, Suite 302, Washington DC, 20007)

**Embassies & Consulates in
Macedonia
SKOPJE**

Albania (☎ 02-614 636; ambshqip@mt.net.mk; ul HT Karpoš 94a)

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

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

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

France (☎ 02-3118 749; www.ambafrance-mk.org; ul Salvador Aljende 73)

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

Greece (☎ 02-3219 260; grfyrom@unet.com.mk; ul Borka Taleski 6)

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

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

UK (☎ 02-3299 299; beskopje@mt.net.mk; ul Dimitrie Čupovski 26)

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

BITOLA

France (☎ 047-223 192; fax 047-223 594; ul Maršal Tito 42)

UK (☎/fax 047-228 765; ul Maršal Tito 42)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There are a good few festivals in Macedonia, especially in the summer time. July brings open-air evening concerts, opera and theatre to both Ohrid and Skopje. There is also a fun Balkan Festival of Folk Dances & Songs in Ohrid in early July (see p249).

One festival that all Macedonians rave about is the Galičnik village's wedding festival (p246). Skopje's autumn days are brightened up with the flickering screens of the international film festival and the warm sounds of Skopje Jazz Festival in October.

HOLIDAYS

New Year 1 and 2 January

Orthodox Christmas 7 January

International Women's Day 8 March

Orthodox Easter Week March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Sts Cyril and Methodius Day 24 May

Ilinden or Day of the 1903 Rebellion 2 August

Republic Day 8 September

1941 Partisan Day 11 October

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.exploringmacedonia.com The official tourism portal. This well-organised site has a good depth of information on things to do, see, eat and drink in Macedonia.

faq.macedonia.org A comprehensive portal with information on everything from travel to embassy addresses to sports and cuisine.

www.skopjeonline.com.mk Nifty, up-to-date site with lots of info on cultural happenings in the capital, plus nightclub listings, city bus schedules and lots more.

www.culture.in.mk A useful resource on the cultural life of Macedonia, including information on music, film and performing arts festivals.

LANGUAGE

Macedonia's two official languages are Macedonian and Albanian. Macedonian, a South Slavic language, is spoken by the majority of the population. It is divided into two large groups, the western and eastern Macedonian dialects. The Macedonian literary language is based on the central dialects of Veles, Prilep and Bitola. Its script is Cyrillic, but you will see advertisements or place names in Latin script. There are certain grammatical similarities between Macedonian and Bulgarian, such as the omission of cases, and speakers of Bulgarian, Serbian or Croatian should easily understand Macedonian. Russian speakers should also be able to get by without too much difficulty. For others, we recommend a good phrasebook, such as Lonely Planet's *Eastern Europe phrasebook*.

The first alphabet for Slavic languages was the Glagolitic script developed by two Thessaloniki brothers, St Cyril and St Methodius, in the 9th century. One of their disciples modified this alphabet with the Greek alphabet, and gradually the medieval Cyrillic alphabet emerged from this fusion.

Despite the use of Latin script on road signs and some shop names, the Cyrillic alphabet is still predominant and street names are printed in Cyrillic script only, so it is a good idea to learn the Cyrillic alphabet before you travel to the country.

For a quick introduction to some useful Macedonian words and phrases, see the Language chapter, p417.

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 is nonconvertible outside Macedonia. Restaurants, hotels and some shops will accept payment in euros (usually) and US dollars (sometimes); prices are often quoted in these currencies.

Where prices are quoted in denars, we've given denars, but hotels that quote rates in euros are therefore given in euros.

Small, private exchange offices throughout central Skopje and Ohrid exchange cash for a rate that is only slightly better than that which you can get at the banks. ATMs can be found in all of the major towns and tourist centres (Skopje, Ohrid, Bitola, Tetovo, etc) but not in out-of-the-way places like Mavrovo and Berovo. Travellers cheques are a real hassle to change and we advise against relying on them, except as a form of emergency back-up money.

POST

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

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Ohrid Lake 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. Do try to resist ordering one and opt for Californian trout instead, which is just as tasty.

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 of the larger kiosks also sell the 100-unit cards. You can make cheap international phone call at Internet cafés for around 15MKD per minute for all countries.

Macedonia has a digital mobile phone network (Mobimak); mobile numbers are

preceded by ☎ 070. Your provider may have a global-roaming agreement with Macedonia's domestic network. Check before you leave home.

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

TOURIST INFORMATION

Macedonia's tourist information office is in Skopje but it may not be very useful.

VISAS

Citizens of EU countries, Iceland, New Zealand, 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. Australians can buy a visa on arrival at Petrovets airport (800MKD), but not at any land border – so if you're travelling overland you need to get one from a Macedonian embassy. Canadians and South Africans should get a visa in advance. Visa fees vary for different countries, but are mostly around US\$30 for a single-entry visa and US\$60 for a multiple-entry visa. The regulations have changed quite a bit in the past few years – check www.mfr.gov.mk for the latest alterations. Note that if you need a visa to enter Macedonia and you intend to visit Kosovo and then return to Macedonia, you will need a Macedonian multiple-entry visa. There is no Macedonian embassy, consulate or visa-issuing office in Kosovo.

TRANSPORT IN MACEDONIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section covers travel options to and from the other countries in this book. For information on getting to Macedonia from, say, Greece or Bulgaria, see the Transport chapter at the end of this book (p399).

Air

Macedonia has two international airports. **Petrovec** (pronounced 'petrovets'; ☎ 02-3148 651), 21km from Skopje is the main one, while the little **Ohrid** (☎ 046-252 820) airport is between Ohrid and Struga. The website www.airports.com.mk has comprehensive information on both, from arrival and departure

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance ☎ 94
- Police ☎ 92
- Highway & roadside assistance ☎ 987

times to weather conditions. There is no departure tax. There are currency exchange offices and desks to book hotels and car hire at Petrovec.

AIRLINES FLYING TO/FROM MACEDONIA WITHIN WESTERN BALKANS

Adria Airways (airline code JP; ☎ 02-117 009; www.adria.si; hub Ljubljana)

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

JAT (airline code JU; ☎ 02-3116 532; www.jat.com; hub Belgrade)

Macedonian Airlines (MAT; airline code IN; ☎ 02-3292 333; www.mat.com.mk; hub Skopje)

Land

Macedonia shares land borders with Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, and Serbia and Montenegro and one UN-monitored territory – Kosovo. This section covers getting to and from the other countries in this region. Access to/from all neighbouring states is 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/Tushëmishti, 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. None of the crossings present any problems, though Kafa San/Qafa e Thanës tends to be the busiest and therefore the slowest. There are no buses from Skopje to Albania, but there are buses from Tetovo which also pick up passengers in Struga. See the Tetovo section (p243) for details.

Serbia & Montenegro

Visas are not necessary for travel to Kosovo (though this may change if/when Kosovo becomes independent) and it is quite easy to get there; the main border crossing at Blace is just a 20-minute trip north from Skopje. There is another crossing point close by at Jazince, used by vehicles coming from Tetovo.

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. There are several buses every day to Prizren and Prishtina and Belgrade from both Tetovo and Skopje.

BUS

Most international buses leave from Skopje's Intercity Bus Station, though a few leave from in front of the Holiday Inn on Kej 13 Noemvri. Buses travel to Belgrade (1350MKD, six hours, four daily) and Zagreb (1900MKD, 15 hours, daily).

Buses between Skopje and Prishtina, the capital of Kosovo, are fairly frequent. To/from Albania you can travel from Tetovo to Tirana by bus (900MKD, six to seven hours, two daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There are several major highway border crossings into Macedonia from neighbouring countries. You will need a Green Card endorsed for Macedonia to bring a car into the country.

TRAIN

There are four trains daily between Skopje and Belgrade via Niš (1209MKD, nine hours). Sleepers are available. One daily Belgrade train continues on to Zagreb (2050MKD, 17 hours) and Ljubljana (2690MKD, 20 hours). You can find timetables for international routes on the Macedonian Railways (Makedonski Zheleznici) website (www.mz.com.mk/patnichki/timetable.htm), and on the Euro Railways website (www.eurorailways.com).

GETTING AROUND

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 fairly mountainous country.

Bus

The bus network is well developed in Macedonia, with frequent services from Skopje to all major centres. The domestic bus fleet is a motley collection of ageing rattlers and slightly newer coaches – generally speaking it's fairly dilapidated and can be quite uncomfortable in the hotter months. It is a good idea to book in advance when

travelling to Ohrid in the busy summer season. Some bus companies levy a fee of about 10MKD to store bags in the luggage compartments.

Car & Motorcycle

AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATIONS

AMSM (Avto Moto Soyuz na Makedonija) (☎ 02-318 1181; www.art.com.mk; ul Ivo Ribar Lola 51, Skopje) offers road assistance, towing services and information to members (in German and English as well as Macedonian), and has offices all over the country.

DRIVING LICENCE

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

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Petrol stations are easily found on the tollways and in major towns, but apart from on the tollways they often aren't open after dark. Unleaded and regular petrol are widely available, and cost about 60MKD per litre, while diesel costs around 44MKD per litre. Spare parts are mostly only available in Skopje and to a lesser extent in Bitola, Tetovo and Kumanovo.

HIRE

Skopje is full of car hire agencies, from the large ones (Hertz, Avis, Sixt) to dozens of local companies, though the choices in Ohrid and Bitola are limited. Tourist brochures give comprehensive lists. A smallish sedan like a Ford Focus costs about €40 a day, including insurance. The rates in Skopje are such good value that quite a few people holidaying in Greece make a detour here to hire a car. As a result, car hire agencies tend to be pleasantly surprised if you tell them you're going to be touring Macedonia instead. 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

Car hire 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 CONDITIONS

Major roads and highways are generally safe and in good condition. Local driving habits are fairly civilised, except for the usual minority of hot-blooded idiots. Secondary rural roads are often in poor condition and used by livestock, tractors and horse-drawn carts. Minor mountain roads require particular care, as they can be very narrow and poorly marked and can become very tricky in bad weather. Seek local advice before tackling the drive to a mountain road to an isolated village such as Galičnik. Signage in rural areas is wildly variable – sometimes it's very good, other times you have no idea where one village begins and another ends.

ROAD RULES

Driving is on the right 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 and a first-aid kit. Between 15 November and 15 March, cars must carry snow chains. Motorcyclists and the passenger 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 per cent.

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 anywhere. A half-hour trip, from Skopje to Lake Matka for example, should cost around 350MKD.

Train

Macedonia has a small but interesting network of domestic destinations, but the trains are in a similar condition to public buses – not so good. There's a timetable (at the time of writing in Macedonian only,

though an English section is under construction) on the Macedonian Railways (Makedonski Zheleznici) website at www.mz.com.mk/patnichki/timetable.htm. The most useful one for travellers is the scenic, four-hour, four-times-daily service from Skopje to Bitola via Prilep. Other destina-

tions from Skopje are: via Tetovo to Kičevo (two hours) in western Macedonia; to Veles, in the centre of the country; via Kumanovo to Tabanovce on the Serbian border; and to Gevgelija on the Greek border. The most you'll pay for a domestic ticket is 370MKD for a return to Bitola.