



**Sephardic  
Balkans**  
JEWISH HERITAGE TRIPS



**Jewish Heritage Tour of Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Greece**

**A JCCNS Travel Experience**

**September 10—20, 2024**

**Travel program organized by Sephardic Balkans LLC and Dr. Joseph Benatov of the University of Pennsylvania**

**ITINERARY AT A GLANCE:**

Sofia – 3 nights, Crystal Palace Boutique Hotel 4\*

Skopje – 1 night, Skopje Marriott Hotel 5\*

Thessaloniki – 2 nights, Hotel MonAsty, Autograph Collection by Marriott 5\*

Trikala – 1 night, Ananti Resort & Spa 5\* & Aeton Melathron Hotel 4\*

Athens – 2 nights, Capital Center Hotel 5\*

For information and registration, please contact:

Sara Ewing (JCCNS Adult Program Director): [sewing@jccns.com](mailto:sewing@jccns.com) or 857-285-7913

Diane Knopf (Group Leader): [dmillknopf@gmail.com](mailto:dmillknopf@gmail.com) or 617-694-8587

For travel insurance, please contact:

Joseph Benatov at Sephardic Balkans: [benatov@gmail.com](mailto:benatov@gmail.com) or 267-970-1817

## Itinerary

### **DAY 1, TUESDAY, SEPT 10: DEPARTURE FROM LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Overnight flight to Sofia, Bulgaria (via Frankfurt).

### **DAY 2, WEDNESDAY, SEPT 11: SOFIA**

Your tour leader and private bus will meet you at Sofia Airport and take you to your centrally located hotel. After some time to relax, you'll have an initial orientation around downtown Sofia. We'll end the day with a festive welcome dinner. **Crystal Palace Boutique Hotel 4\*. Dinner.**

### **DAY 3, THURSDAY, SEPT 12: PLOVDIV**

Our morning drive through the Thracian Valley will take us toward Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second-largest city. Europe's oldest city combines layers of its Thracian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Bulgarian Revival past. As we walk the cobbled streets of the Old Town, we'll see some of the most impressive examples of opulent nineteenth century vernacular architecture, a second-century Roman theater and stadium, and a 14<sup>th</sup> century mosque. Plovdiv's promenade has lovely cafes and restaurants and is a popular destination for afternoon and evening walks. We'll also learn about Plovdiv's vibrant Jewish community, walk through the historic Jewish neighborhood, and visit the city's lovely synagogue – the only other active one in Bulgaria. Plovdiv is also home to a spectacular Roman archaeological complex – the newly excavated 4<sup>th</sup>-century CE Bishop's Basilica. Late afternoon return to Sofia. **Crystal Palace Boutique Hotel 4\*. Breakfast and lunch.**

### **DAY 4, FRIDAY, SEPT 13: SOFIA**

Sofia's center affords the unique opportunity to walk down a real "yellow brick road," paved in 1907 with Austro-Hungarian cobblestone. Important landmarks include the imposing Alexander Nevski Cathedral, the Russian Church, the National Theater and city garden, Parliament, the Royal Palace, the fourth-century Roman Rotunda and newly excavated Roman ruins, and the 1950s socialist administrative complex. In addition to the synagogue, we'll also visit the city's Jewish memorials and admire traditional Sephardi handiwork by the women of "Manos Bendichas" (Blessed Hands). Free time in the afternoon for shopping or strolling through the city on your own. Kabbalat Shabbat dinner. You will also have the option of attending Kabbalat Shabbat services at the Sofia Synagogue. **Crystal Palace Boutique Hotel 4\*. Breakfast and dinner.**

### **DAY 5, SATURDAY, SEPT 14: KYUSTENDIL—SKOPJE (NORTH MACEDONIA)**

Today we head west toward Kyustendil. In 1943, this small Bulgarian town was home to just 980 Jews, but what a vibrant and energetic community it was! Kyustendil Jews were at the epicenter of the breathtaking series of events of March 1943, which ultimately led to the last-minute cancellation of government orders to deport Bulgarian Jews. The most crucial figure in that story was the Kyustendil-born vice-chairman of Parliament Dimitar Peshev (a non-Jew). At the newly built Peshev Museum we'll learn more about Peshev's moral stamina, for which Israel's Yad Vashem bestowed him the Righteous Among the Nations title. We will then leave Bulgaria and cross into North Macedonia, arriving in the nation's capital, Skopje. We will visit the new Holocaust Memorial Center, which opened its doors in 2011, and learn about the tragic fate of North Macedonia's Jews. Explore the rejuvenated Skopje downtown area where Ottoman past and modern times blend harmoniously. Skopje boasts the Kale Fortress, the renowned Old Bazaar and Stone Bridge, the Double Hamam, the Clock Tower and more. **Skopje Marriott Hotel 5\*. Breakfast and lunch.**

#### **DAY 6, SUNDAY, SEPT 15: STOBI—VERGINA—THESSALONIKI (GREECE)**

After a morning visit of the Bet Yaakov Synagogue and Jewish community center, your drive through North Macedonia takes you past Stobi, an archaeological complex where remains of a synagogue from the Roman period were discovered. Once we cross the border into Greece, we continue toward Vergina (Aigai) – one of the country’s most spectacular archaeological sites! We’ll explore the Royal Tombs of the ancient Macedonian kings, including the tomb of Philip II. From Vergina we head on to beautiful Thessaloniki (Salonika). Greece’s second largest city and port has a long and rich history. Of specific interest to us is the arrival of some 20, 000 Jews from Spain at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, inaugurating a period of vibrant religious and cultural Sephardic activity. **Hotel MonAsty, Autograph Collection by Marriott 5\*. Breakfast and lunch.**

#### **DAY 7, MONDAY, SEPT 16: THESSALONIKI**

We have a busy day to explore – by bus and on foot – much of what Jewish Thessaloniki has to offer. Salonika’s thriving Sephardic culture, at its creative peak in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, earned the city the monikers “Madre de Israel” (“Mother in Israel”) and “Jerusalem of the Balkans.” By the early 1920s, the majority of the population was Jewish, and roughly 50,000 Jews lived here when the Germans arrived in 1941. We’ll visit Salonika’s two synagogues – Monastirioton (1920s) and Yad Lazikaron (1984) – the Jewish community center, and the Jewish museum, located in a historic building. We’ll also explore the Upper City and its lavish Jewish villas, the new monument commemorating the destroyed Jewish cemetery, and we will end our tour at the Byzantine Walls, from where you can enjoy fabulous views of the bay. **Hotel MonAsty, Autograph Collection by Marriott 5\*. Breakfast and dinner.**

#### **DAY 8, TUESDAY, SEPT 17: METEORA—TRIKALA**

Today you head to the spectacular monasteries of Meteora, perched atop precipitous rock formations, suspended between earth and sky. Enjoy some truly breathtaking views. Explore the priceless, exquisite specimens of Byzantine art kept at the monasteries. Meteora is included on the UNESCO World Heritage List for its natural and cultural significance. In the afternoon you’ll continue to nearby Trikala, stopping at the Romaniote Kal Yavanim Synagogue, located in the heart of the historic Jewish neighborhood. We will also visit the Jewish cemetery and the newly unveiled Holocaust memorial dedicated to the 139 Trikala Jews who perished during the Holocaust. One of the architectural landmarks of city is the 16<sup>th</sup> century Osman Shah Mosque, the work of the noted Mimar Sinan. You’ll also have some free time in the late afternoon to enjoy your hotel’s spa & pool. **Ananti Resport and Spa 5\*. Breakfast and lunch.**

#### **DAY 9, WEDNESDAY, SEPT 18: DELPHI—ATHENS**

As we drive south through central Greece, you will reach the picturesque area of Mount Parnassus. Nestled in its slopes is the spectacular archaeological site of Delphi, included on the UNESCO list of World Heritage. Known as the Earth’s navel, ancient Greeks considered Delphi the spiritual center of the world. The complex includes the Temple of Apollo, the Ancient Stadium, a treasury, the Altar of the Chians, the Sibyl Rock, and the Delphi Theater, which affords panoramic views of the whole site and the surrounding natural scenery. Continue to Athens, your final destination for the day. **Capital Center Hotel 5\*. Breakfast.**

#### **DAY 10, THURSDAY, SEPT 19: ATHENS**

Start your morning with a visit of the Jewish museum. Your Jewish city tour of Athens continues with the Beth Shalom Sephardic Synagogue (1935) as well as the Romaniote Etz Hayim Synagogue (1904), also known as the “Ioannina Synagogue.” You will then visit the Holocaust Memorial. As you explore downtown Athens, enjoy the picturesque historic Plaka neighborhood with its charming narrow streets, cafes, galleries, and restaurants. Stroll through the Monastiraki and Psiri areas, the former home of Athens’ Jewish quarter. You will end your half-day city tour at the Acropolis and the Parthenon. Free time in the afternoon for shopping and exploring more of Athens on your own. We’ll end the day with a special farewell dinner. **Capital Center Hotel 5\*. Breakfast and dinner.**

**DAY 11, FRIDAY, SEPT 20: ATHENS AIRPORT**

Free time in the morning to enjoy more of central Athens. Departure airport transfer. **Breakfast.**

**PRICING:**

**JCCNS MEMBERS**

\$4,630 (Double occupancy, includes land and air)

Single upgrade \$795

**NON-MEMBERS**

\$4,830 (Double occupancy, includes land and air)

Single upgrade \$795

Please contact Sara Ewing at [sewing@jccns.com](mailto:sewing@jccns.com) or Diane Knopf at [dmillknopf@gmail.com](mailto:dmillknopf@gmail.com) for land-only pricing. To reserve your spot you must fill out the online registration form and make a \$500 deposit by February 16.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:**

\$300 per person is non-refundable. The rest of your payments are subject to the following cancellation terms: Up to May 20 – full refund; Up to July 15 – refund 50% of paid amount. After July 15 – no refund. We recommend travel insurance.

**PRICE INCLUDES:**

- Special economy-class group air rates on Lufthansa – checked luggage limit is 50 lbs.
- Accommodations at luxury 5\* and 4\* centrally located hotels
- Ground transportation in full-sized, airconditioned motor coach with bathroom
- Porterage – one piece per person
- Airport transfers
- Daily breakfast, four lunches, and four dinners
- Comprehensive sightseeing entrance fees
- Experienced English-speaking Tour Director from arrival to departure
- Local guides throughout the trip with specialized knowledge on local Jewish history
- Complimentary bottled water on the bus
- Pre-trip orientation meeting with Dr. Joseph Benatov, who will speak about the region’s Jewish history with the group in advance of trip

**PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE:**

- Group tips. We will be collecting \$150 per person for tips for your tour leader, local guides, and driver.

**Travel insurance information:** Sephardic Balkans LLC will issue your policy through our group account with Travel Guard or Travel Insured International. Please contact Joseph Benatov: [benatov@gmail.com](mailto:benatov@gmail.com) or 267-970-1817.

**Please note:** It is important to have your travel insurance issued within two weeks of your first deposit so that you’re covered for pre-existing medical conditions.

***By booking this reservation and making payment for this tour arranged by the JCCNS, you agree that the inclusions, exclusions, and cancellation penalties listed here shall apply.***

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