

SKOPJE: MIXTURE OF CULTURES AND ARCHITECTURE



In its 2,500 years of existence, Macedonia's welcoming capital city has had many different embodiments. All of them have left permanent traces on the city as is evidenced by Skopje's varied architecture and its mix of cultures. Yet in addition, Skopje is also a forward-looking city offering an abundance of modern amenities and attractions.

Skopje, the dynamic Macedonian capital, welcomes its visitors with sleek modern hotels on cobbled Ottoman streets, outstanding neoclassical houses as well as Yugoslav-era buildings, red-bricked Byzantine churches and rounded Turkish mosques, chic cafés, shopping malls and brightly-coloured office buildings.

The concentrated complexity of Skopje today attracts tourists offering a great variety of things to see and do, constantly reminding the visitors of the city's storied past. **Among the most popular sights is the Stone Bridge crossing the River Vardar, the Ottoman-era Old Bazaar (Stara Charshija), and the Kale Fortress walls.** In the sloping narrow streets of Stara Charshija the visitors can feel the spirit of the old city with its small shops, mosques with their ceramic tiled interiors, the outdoor bazaar and hamam originating in the Turkish times. A short climb up to the Kale Fortress is well rewarded; from the hilltop where Skopje's masters ruled for centuries the visitors can enjoy a spectacular view of the city and its surroundings.

The world's greatest cities boast at least one secluded natural escape. Skopje has two - **a long, tree-lined park along the river and the forested hills of Mount Vodno** which overlook the city from the southwest and offer excellent hiking and wilderness serenity. The summit of Mt. Vodno is also crowned with an enormous Millennium Cross that overlooks the city.

Macedonia's capital offers something to suit all modern tastes and appetites. It features well-established hotels, restaurants and cinemas, as well as shopping malls with all the latest fashion, and usually at lower prices than in Western countries. **The city is a major regional center for concerts, theatre performances, dance and sporting events,** all of which frequently feature well-known celebrities from abroad as well as the best artists from the neighboring countries. Also, it is one of the safest cities in Europe.

Situated on the banks of the River Vardar, a vital trade route, **Skopje has always been an important business center as well.** At the end of the 14th century, the city fell under the sway of the Ottoman Turks and they altered its profile with mosques and other buildings in the new Oriental style. Sadly, in 1963 a dreadful earthquake destroyed much of the city. However, Japanese architect Kenzo Tange won an international competition to redesign the city and Skopje was reborn in an imaginative, futuristic style. His creations, such as the National Theater with its sloping roof of concrete, have shaped Skopje's modern skyline ever since.

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