

instant

SKOPJE

inyourpocket

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Introducing Skopje

Skopje remains a virtually unknown city with a charming name and a host of good things to see and do. Still almost untouched by both travellers and travel writers alike, Macedonia's quirky little capital has, as you can see, just received the full In Your Pocket treatment. If we've been able to help improve or ease your trip to Skopje with the aid of this pdf guide, please help us by letting us know what you think of the guide. All praise, criticism, comments and corrections should be sent to skopje@inyourpocket.com.

Enjoy the city.

About this Instant guide

This small PDF guide has been written to aid the traveller to Skopje who doesn't need or want to carry an encyclopaedia-sized guidebook around in their pocket. A bold experiment in travel writing, the best bits of Skopje have been boiled down and condensed into one fun-sized read for the lightweight traveller.

The Skopje In Your Pocket guidebook

Skopje In Your Pocket is Skopje's leading English-language city guide. Published and distributed locally every six months, the full guide contains 52 pages of densely packed information about the city, including hotel, restaurant and bar reviews, information about transport and sights, day trips, city maps and more. Ask for your print copy (sold for 150den) at the reception desk or kiosks of all upmarket hotels in Skopje, selected embassies or in any of the city's main English-language bookshops.



Crime & Safety

Skopje is a safer place than many West European capitals, and violent crime is rare. Do keep your wits about as you would anywhere against pickpockets and bag-snatchers, and be careful who you hand your credit card to.

Electricity

Electricity in Macedonia is reliable, 200 volt and come out of standard European round pin sockets.

FYROM

While this country moves ahead, its name is unfortunately still stuck in a Yugoslav time-war. The ungainly abbreviation FYROM stands for the 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', which has been the provisional official name for the country since 1993. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Greece strongly protested against the use of what it considers Greek names and symbols by the fledgling state, even imposing an economic blockade on the republic until it changed its evil ways. Greece points out that much of the ancient region of Macedonia lies within Greek borders and taking that name implicitly stakes a claim on Greek-owned territory. It also protested against the use of the Vergina Sun symbol on the original flag design, and certain passages of the new constitution, both of which were addressed by Macedonia to lift the embargo. The naming issue remains a problem with Macedonia insisting on using the word and Greece requiring the opposite, but in practice many countries have already officially recognised the country as the 'Republic of Macedonia', though the UN sticks to FYROM. Although the topic is always good for heated discussion and much waving about of hands, in practice the locals on both sides of the border are pragmatic, and Greece is one of Macedonia's most important trading partners and investors. Interestingly, the national symbol remains the Yugoslav-era one (a rising sun with a red star), as the Macedonian national symbol is a yellow lion on a red background. The Albanians of Macedonia however have a black eagle on a red background, and as there's no compromise on a communal symbol, the red star remains.

Money

After ditching the Yugoslav dinar in 1992, Macedonia has used the denar (coded MKD, abbreviated as 'den' and subdivided in 100 deni) as its official currency. The currency is stable and, at time of writing, a euro is 61,41den, a pound is 91,24den and a dollar is 48,46den.

Smoking

Everyone in the Balkans was born smoking, and also here in Macedonia the habit is easy and cheap to sustain. There is hope - all restaurants and cafés now have non-smoking sections, and non-smoking rooms in hotels are beginning to appear.

Street names

Skopje's streets still reflect a hint of idealism with names such as Leninova and Partizanski Odredi (Partizan Battalions) remaining, though Marshall Tito street has been renamed to Makedonija. The word *ulica* for street usually is left away. Confusingly for foreigners, streets have both names and three-digit numbers, though sometimes small streets (like in the old bazaar area) only have a number to go by. Some addresses do not have a street number but are marked bb (*bez broj*, without number) - they are usually easily recognisable buildings.

Basic data

Population: 2,034,000 (2005)

Skopje population: 507,000

Territory: 25,300km²

Macedonia's longest river is the Vardar, 301 kilometers long, and it's highest peak is Golem Korab, at 2,753 meters above sea level, one of 16 mountains over 2000 metres high. There are 53 lakes, the largest being Lake Ohrid. Macedonia is bordered by Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia (partly Kosovo). The local time is GMT+1 (GMT+2 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Visas & Borders

Citizens from most European countries, New Zealand and the USA and a handful of others do not need a visa for stays up to generally 90 days. All others, including Canadians and Australians, need to apply for a visa in advance at one of Macedonia's embassies abroad. Check the current situation at www.mfa.gov.mk. Travellers to Macedonia can take a maximum of €2000 worth of cash into the country. Those insane enough to import alcohol or cigarettes into this drinkers' and smokers' paradise can take in 200 cigarettes and one litre of spirits or two litres of wine. For more information, see www.customs.gov.mk. When driving into Macedonia, change some cash at the border or at the first town to be able to pay the highway toll fees.

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ESSENTIAL CITY GUIDES

Instant Skopje

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Arriving by plane

Some 22 kilometres east of the city, Skopje Airport is small and easy to use. After disembarking and entering the main terminal building follow the right-hand queue to the misleading sign that says Foreign Residents. That's you. In the arrivals hall there's an exchange office (with worse rates than that in the arrivals hall) but not much else - you'll immediately be ushered outside where there's a clutch of car rental kiosks and a pack of grinning, gold-toothed taxi drivers. Fight a way through and walk 20 metres to the right to find the departures hall, which has two ATMs accepting all cards, a post office selling phone cards that also is an exchange office with good rates (open 06:00 - 22:30), and a kiosk selling plenty of booze but no useful things like mobile phone SIM cards - you'll have to go into town for those. **Getting to town** - There are no public buses running into Skopje from the airport, so unless you're being picked up (a few hotels include this service), have a bicycle, or can bribe your way onto one of the staff buses, you'll need to rent a car or use a taxi. If you're collecting a rental car from the airport you'll need 35den cash before you leave to pay for the highway toll; this isn't necessary if you take a taxi. You won't be ripped off just so long as you agree the price before you leave. The going rate for a ride into the centre of Skopje is currently €15-20, which can be paid either in euros or denars.

Arriving by train

Skopje's train station is a disgrace, and does the worst possible public relations job for the city imaginable. For the full horror story of what to expect inside, see *Trains*. We suggest you head straight to the friendly adjacent bus station for ATMs and luggage storage. For information on getting to the centre, see *Arriving by bus*.

Arriving by bus

Boasting a reasonably central location just east of the centre on the southern side of the river, Skopje's modern bus station is easy to use. For more information about the multitude of facilities at the bus station, see the *Long-distance buses* text. Get to town with private bus N°23, which runs along Bul. Kuzman Josifovski Pitu. Jump on, pay the driver 20den and away you go. Taxis can be found outside the main entrance; a ride into the centre will cost 50den, slightly more if you're travelling further. You can walk to the centre in 15-20 minutes.

Arriving by car

Driving in Skopje can be a little confusing for first-timers. Although major signs are written in both Cyrillic and Latin script, there are few visual hints to what might be the city centre and the system of one-way streets can be confusing. Getting a detailed map of where you need to go before you arrive is a good idea. Make sure you have some cash dinars when you enter Macedonia from abroad or rent a car from the airport, or you'll get turned away from the highway toll booths that don't accept foreign cash or plastic. Getting around Skopje is relatively easy; the city is compact enough to walk through and public transport, when necessary, is good.

Airport & Airlines

Skopje's small international airport (code SKP, tel. 314 83 00, www.airports.com.mk) is 22 kilometres east of the city, along the Belgrade/Athens highway. The airport has a dozen airlines flying to some 16 international destinations, and

Tourist information

Tourist Information Centre C-1, Old bazaar, tel. 311 68 54, info@skopjetourism.org, www.skopje-tourism.org. Brochures, maps, events information and sightseeing tips. The tourist information office is housed in the otherwise empty Shopping Mall. Most complex spanning the busy road between the old bazaar and the Daut Pasha bath house. ▶ Open 08:00 - 19:00, Sat 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun.



handles about 50,000 passengers a year, which is still just half the amount that passed through in 2000 right after the Kosovo crisis. No wonder the place looks worn. There's no public bus service to the airport, so if your hotel doesn't have a drop-off service getting there by taxi (€15-20, payable in denars or euros) is your only option. If you are renting a car, remember to take out some cash denars to pay the highway toll. When walking in, security staff insist on scanning every piece of luggage at the main entrance, even if nobody is watching the screen. You can change your denars into other currencies, gifts or booze in the main hall. After passing customs you enter the tiny departures area which has a tax free shop (a carton of Marlboro's is €12) and a bar. To remind you of what you're leaving behind, the baggage carts are pulled to the plane by a tractor. It's touching to see the airport fire brigade staff sitting ready for action in their fire engines while your plane taxis to the runway.

Trains

Trains in Macedonia are usually not the best way to get around, with buses providing faster, more frequent and equally cheap services. Using trains in Macedonia also means you'll have to use Skopje's horrible train station. The Skopje-Veles-Prilep-Bitola train is highly recommended for those who enjoy shunting around, as it passes through magnificent landscapes - first through the Vardar Gorge, and then through untouched nature.

Public transport

Skopje's public transport system is composed entirely of old buses which have colour-coded roofs. The ones with red roofs are state-owned JSP buses, while the white-roofed ones are the slightly cheaper private buses (ignore whatever colours are on the sides). Day and evening services run approximately 05:00 - 23:00 with a limited service throughout the night on all of the major routes. Tickets are based on a zone system, with the city centre as zone 1. A ride within zone 1 on a JSP bus will set you back 30den if bought on the bus or 25den if you buy the ticket in a kiosk. You can travel even cheaper by buying a 10-ride card for 225den. The price for the same trip in a private bus is 20den, with tickets sold only on the bus. There is no public transport information centre, though the kiosks at the end of the lines have the schedules posted. For more information see JSP's website at www.jsp.com.mk. **Useful bus routes** are bus N°20 from the train station past the bazaar to Sutka; bus N°22 from the train station to the west side of the centre; bus N°57 from the city centre to the bazaar; bus N°9 from behind the Ramstore mall to the bazaar; buses N°5, 15 and 24 along the main east-to-west streets; bus N°23 looping around the east part of the centre; bus N°19 from the main post office via the bazaar to Sutka.

Eating out in Skopje is generally good, cheap and varied, with a growing number of international restaurants.

Chinese

Shanghai B-1/2, Leni Nova 38, tel. 322 81 00, zhangwei814@hotmail.com. The kitsch interior with cheap furniture, Buddhist depictions and lanterns indicate you're in an authentic Chinese restaurant. The two chefs from Shanghai and South China can cook a variety of pork, chicken, seafood and vegetarian meals, and don't rely too heavily on MSG. A large table with rotating glass top allows for easy Chinese-style sharing of dishes. Chopsticks optional. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 12:00 - 24:00.

Fish

Kvarner A-1, Andon Dukov 27, tel. 309 07 52, www.skopskimerak.com.mk. The seaside is closer than you think - this Croatian restaurant inside the Skopski Merak hotel is the best place to eat fish in Skopje, flown in fresh daily. Seated in the smart interior you can order seafood risottos, and various fish dishes including seabass (at €42 per kilo); have the two-person 'symphony' dish for a mix of the catch of the day (2600den). For something else, there are also fish salads and home made pasta. Finish it all off with a Dalmatian 'rozata' (cream caramel) dessert. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 11:00 - 24:00.

Indian

Bombay A-1, Ilindenska 94, tel. 306 73 73, www.bombay.com.mk. Foreigners based in Kosovo are known to drive to Skopje just to get a taste of the food at Bombay - that's how good it is. Lugged down an alley off Ilindenska near the US embassy, it has an Indian in the kitchen, cooking up North Indian dishes including bhaji, pakora, tandoori chicken, thalis, korma and vindaloo curries. Visit on Thursdays and Sundays for good-value buffet meals. Service is attentive, and it's one of the only places in town that heats up plates before serving your food. The decoration is not too kitschy and the music is Bollywood. All veg meals are prepared with different utensils and completely separate from non-veg meals, making it acceptable for Hindus and Muslims. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00, Sun 12:00 - 18:00.

International

Den i Nok (Day & Night) Skupi 66, tel. 309 29 22, www.deninok.com.mk. Inside what looks like a warehouse, this large, swank restaurant serves a mix of cuisines in its spacious lobby-like interior. There's French onion soup and lamb flavoured with rosemary; Italian pasta and pizza and several Chinese and international dishes. Well out of town - worth popping by if you're marooned in the Alexander Palace hotel or on your way from Kosovo.

Buffet express

If you've just read the entire restaurant chapter of this guidebook and you still haven't been served, stay calm, collect your belongings and pop into this place, where the food is served piping hot and straight from metal containers.

DM (Domasna Mandza) A-2, Vasil Gorgov 23, tel. 322 03 32. Point, pay, eat. Delicious home cooking served lightning fast, and at rock bottom prices (from 50den). There's a selection of meats in sauce, potatoes, rice and vegetables. We highly recommend the stuffed eggplant. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 24:00. Closed Sun.

Burek

Burek, a flaky pastry containing cheese, spinach or meat, is the universal and ubiquitous Balkan snack that simply has to be tried when you're in the region. Variations on the burek theme can be found as far and wide as Israel, where they have the *burekas*, and even in Lithuania where they eat something not unlike burek that they call a *čeburekas*. In fact, burek is so popular in the Balkans that the biggest internet forum in the former republic of Serbia and Montenegro is called the Burek Forum. From the Turkish *bur*, meaning to twist, burek comes in all manner of shapes and sizes but are essentially a baked filo pastry snack filled with savoury fillings, usually flavoured minced beef, goats' cheese and/or spinach. Even in bakeries all over Skopje, the most popular outlet is the Zito Luks chain.

Zito Luks B-2, Makedonija bb. Wonderful name. A chain of bakeries (recognised by the name written in unintelligible lower case Cyrillic letters) serving excellent and cheap burek and other pastry delights since 1947. There's always one nearby. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00, Sun 07:00 - 20:00.

Marakana B-1, Gradski Park bb, tel. 322 32 26. A swanky restaurant for a slightly older crowd on top of the sports hall just west of the stadium, the food features good stuffed peppers and a speciality fish menu. Yet another Skopje restaurant with live music, Marakana also own the eponymous jazz club next door, and many of the people here use it as a pre-club venue. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Pivnica B-2, Maksim Gorki 1, tel. 322 11 73. Looking like a cross between a Czech beer hall and a supermarket, Pivnica has a wooden ceiling, seating on two levels and a counter with cheeses and strung-up legs of ham. The wood-fired oven turns out great pizzas though the Macedonian fish dishes are more authentic; try the lake Ohrid trout (2000den/kg). The walls are decorated with old photos of Skopje - look closely at the bird's-eye view of the main square and you'll see a double-decker London bus. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Poveke Ljubov (More Love) B-2, Bul. Partizanski Odredi 17, tel. 313 27 02, www.povekeljubov.com.mk. One of our favourites - a small, cosy bistro serving excellent meals. Huge salads, bread and meat dishes (200-280den) are all served fresh and with a smile. Find More Love amidst a clutch of bars diagonally opposite the Sveti Kliment Church. If you're wondering about the name - it's the sister of Love, a bar around the corner. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00.

Tvrđina Kale B/C-1, Skopje Fortress, tel. 312 90 49. On top of the fortress overlooking the river and the city beyond, the fortress restaurant serves up standard international food but is well worth looking up on a sunny day for drinks on the terrace. ▶ Open 08:00 - 22:00.

Uranija B-1, Gradski Park bb, tel. 312 10 14. One of Skopje's many identikit restaurants, this one being part of the tennis club inside Gradski Park and specialising in a mix of Macedonian and international dishes. Although there's plainly nothing wrong with the place it's not really worth a visit unless you're playing tennis on one of the courts here. For more information about that, see the Sports section of this guide. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Italian

Amatti B-2, Vasil Glavinov 3, tel. 312 44 65. A simple Italian restaurant that's popular with students for both the low prices. Under the low ceiling there's booth seating, Italian kitsch decoration, young clients and staff, and very decent pizza for eating in or taking out. Also in the Ramstor mall. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 07:00 - 01:00.

Dal Met Fu B-2, Ploshad Makedonija, tel. 323 95 84, www.dalmetfu.com.mk. The large and high-ceilinged Dal Met Fu restaurant overlooks the central square, and is perhaps the best meeting place in town. Inside, diners sit beneath huge spiky chandeliers (hopefully attached well) to eat good quality Italian and international food; the menu lists salads, pizzas, meat as well as sweet and hearty pancakes. You can kill your pizza like the locals do by drowning it in tomato sauce. Free wifi available. ▶ Open 08:30 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:30 - 01:00.

Toscana A-2, Ivo Lola Ribar 72, tel. 307 99 94. Believed by many to be the best Italian restaurant in Macedonia, Toscana is a small and exceedingly friendly place, bursting with delicious smells and decorated in a tasteful dark red style. There's a changing daily specials menu plus a standard range of quality dishes made homemade pasta. The Caesar salad is particular good, and there's a fine wine list too. At just seven tables, Toscana fills up pretty quick, so if you're planning on eating here (and you should) then it's critical to book a table in advance. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00.

Macedonian

Beerhouse An C-1, Bitpazarska, Kapan Han, tel. 321 21 11, www.pivnica.mk. Impeccable service and sumptuous surroundings with a magnificent summer terrace, although it brands itself as a beer house Beerhouse An is in actual fact a fine Macedonian restaurant. Superbly decorated with touches of the original walls left bare inside, weapons, plates and icons, the menu is stuffed with good things including 16 traditional daily specials, a great shopska salad, Serbian salad, pasha meatballs and stuffed vine leaves. There's a fairly respectable wine list too, and the beer comes courtesy of Skopsko and Dab. If you're only in town for a few hours, make sure you stick a visit here on your list of things to do. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00.

Communist

See also the listing for the Broz café.

Kaj Marshalot B-2, Guro Gakovik 8, tel. 322 38 29. Walt Disney meets Ostalgie in a classic Yugoslav lodge-style restaurant complete with Tito posters, Lenin busts, Tito posters, communist books and hapless student waiters dressed as red-scarfed Young Pioneers. There's live music, a menu that reads like any other in the country, and house special kebabs delivered to your table in industrial quantities and hung on a large device best described as a sort of kebab gallows. Popular with large groups, Kaj Marshalot is hardly a dining revolution, but it's bags of fun all the same. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00. Closed Mon.

Destan C-1, Ul. 106, nr. 4, tel. 312 73 24. A famed and authentic kebab shop on the first corner you see in the bazaar (street 106) coming from the bridge. Set on two floors, it's a modern and cleaner-than-average place with pictures of old Skopje gracing the walls. Get 5 pieces of kebab for 75den, 20 for 230den; they're best eaten with fresh bread and onions. ▶ Open 08:00 - 22:00. Closed Sun.

Jana A-1, Orce Nikolov 505/1, tel. 306 75 85. Clean tablecloths, dried flowers and large groups of chattering Macedonians are what you'll find here. Bordering on fusion food, the menu includes pages and pages of Macedonian dishes, an extensive wine list, plus a few variations on such old-time favourites as veal, octopus and pumpkin. Cheerful, chain-smoking waiters fuss around the bar like overweight Space Invaders, waiting to pounce the minute anything is required, and the whole set up is remarkable polished. Drop in during the weekend and you'll find live music in the form of soppy ballads, or better still drop in every morning and fill your face with a range of excellent value Macedonian and English breakfasts, served right up until a very reasonable 13:00. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Lira A-1, Nikola Tesla 11, tel. 306 17 26, contact@lira.net.mk. Near the US embassy, Lira is an unpretentious traditional restaurant, decorated rural-style with wooden beams, brick walls and tiled floors. Come here for a candle-lit dinner near the fireplace, accompanied by live string music every night. The food is good Macedonian home cooking. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00. [F]

Old House (Stara Kuka) C-2, Pajko Maalo 14, tel. 313 13 76. A traditional merchant's *konak* house from 1838 like many across the Balkans, this is where the locals drag foreigners to experience real Macedonian cooking. The pretty house has beautifully carved wooden ceilings and a pleasant sheltered garden. Dig into regional food including grilled meat, fish, fresh salads, stuffed peppers or courgettes, and sweet, sticky *baclava* pastry for dessert. For something local, try the *Tavche Gravche* - a bean dish with mint and peppers. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 09:00 - 01:00. [F] [B]

Sofra C-1, Bitpazarska, Kapan Han, tel. 321 29 23. Located inside Kapan Han's former sleeping quarters this superb restaurant is large enough for groups and yet still comfortably small for more intimate encounters. The walls are decorated with some really nice line drawings of the old bazaar and the menu reads like a dream. Fried *kashkaval* cheese, oysters in curry sauce, pasta, great steaks and even a special children's menu. In fact, kids are well catered for here, it being the only restaurant found in the city to be in possession of a high chair. The service is superb as well, making this place a highly recommended place to visit when walking around the old bazaar. ▶ Open 12:00 - 22:00. [F]

Vegetarian

Pastis B-2, Dame Gruiev bb, tel. 323 29 56. Pastis serves healthy 'green cuisine' and is one of the few vegetarian options in town... sort of. The vegetarian food is listed separately from the dishes with fish and chicken so you can decide how green you are today. The pleasant small restaurant is decked out in fresh eco-colours and has a little summer terrace. Near the TCC Plaza. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00. Closed Sun. [F]

Anja C-2, Kej 18 Noemvri bb, tel. 316 13 77. The best of all the riverside cafés. The music here is not too loud, the waiters are plump and friendly, there's a ginger cat making love to your legs, and there's a strict door policy keeping young riff-raff out. There's a lounge atmosphere with wicker chairs and white sofa seating spread around, while indoors the two-storey restaurant section does good pizzas and pancakes. In winter a heated tent covers the terrace.

Broz A-1, Crvena Voda 4. Unique in town; a Red Starbucks. Taking the coffee house culture into the realm of nostalgic absurdity, Broz is a bright and friendly Communist-themed café named after Josip Tito's original family name. Staff wear purple pioneer scarves and the walls are decorated with photos from the good old Yugoslav days and motifs from banknotes. The coffee isn't bad either - there are seven kinds, and sandwiches are served too. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00, Sun 10:00 - 24:00.

Deus B-1, Leninova 22, tel. 313 54 15. A quiet corner café with newspapers, coffee and other drinks. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 09:00 - 24:00, Sun 10:00 - 23:00.

Elite C-2, City Shopping Centre. A high-ceilinged café decorated with dozens of photos and pictures and the radio turned on loud, this may be the best place for ice-cream in Skopje, with daily fresh-made ice-cream creations going at 100-150den. Elite also serves sandwiches and a variety of drinks. On the ground floor of the complex. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Sat, Sun 08:00 - 01:00.

Fashion Café C-2, City Shopping Centre, tel. 312 10 21. The gaudy red plush seats appropriately placed between a few clothes shops on the second floor of the City Shopping Centre are a good place to rest during a buying spree. Although the radio is loud, we're spared the agony of having to watch that annoying Fashion TV channel usually played in cafés with this name. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00, Sat 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

Lezet Aia B-2, Nikola Trimpare 8a, tel. 322 50 03. A quirky Oriental-style den of a café. The cobbled-together building on a quiet residential street is dark, features quiet background music and has a fountain gurgling away in the front room. Occasionally there is live music to listen to, otherwise it's just the perfect place to hide away with a lover. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 09:00 - 01:00. Closed Sun. [F]

Li B-2, Ankarska 23, lok. 7, tel. 307 45 69, cafel@yahoo.com. Coffee, ice-cream and fruit salads are served at Li, a small, relaxed café with bamboo chairs and curtained-off windows. Try their speciality: cold coffee with ice, caramel and chocolate. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 24:00.

Ljubov B-2, Bul. Partizanski Odredi 5. An excellent little café in the sad concrete cluster diagonally opposite the St. Clement Cathedral. Named after that crazy little thing called love, Ljubov is quiet during the day but comes alive when DJs play, with rock music on Tuesdays, Latino on Wednesdays house on Thursdays and Fridays and a bit of everything on Saturdays. Only drinks are served, but next door is the wonderful *Poveke Ljubov* ('more love') bistro. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 09:00 - 01:00, Sun 11:00 - 24:00.

Magor Book Café B-2, Bul. Partizanski Odredi 21, Porta Bunjakovec building, tel. 312 10 27, magor@mt.net.mk. A small book café known for its poetry and book readings and fantastic little jazz concerts. Phone or email ahead for the programme. ▶ [F]

Mala Stanica B-2/3, Zeleznicka 18. South of the Ramstore mall but well worth a detour, this unpretentious alternative café shares a former railway warehouse with an art gallery and cultural centre. The two-level space is furnished with comfy wide garden chairs, and serves coffee and light snacks to a discerning international crowd. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 01:00.

Museum Café B-2, Mito Hadzivasilev Jasmin bb. Overlooking the Ramstore mall, a tiny art café has been inserted into the wall of the City Museum. It's long but not much wider than a table, and is crammed with contemporary art - and taking the sad state of the City Museum in account, it has more art on show than the whole of the rest of the building. A good place for coffee and cigarettes. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Sat 09:00 - 01:00, Sun 16:00 - 24:00.

New Age B-2, Kosta Sahov 9, tel. 311 75 59. Hidden down an unlikely dead-end street behind the Kuzman Josifovski Pitu student dormitory (street number 224), this wooden hut at the end of a small garden is Skopje's strangest café. The dimly lit warren of rooms seems fit for a hobbit, furnished with wobbly tables and cushions and with chess and other games to while away the ages. A tea-loving hobbit, that is, with 32 varieties of black tea, 15 green, 38 herbal and 23 fruit teas (all 70den). There's also hot choc (14 kinds, including Turkish *viagra*), milk shakes and salep, a Turkish drink with cinnamon. New Age has teacups and home-made tea-flavoured soap for sale, and is gay-friendly.

New York C-2, Kej 13 Noemvri bb. Horribly loud music, booth seating, a vague attempt at an Art Deco interior, blinds on the windows to create an exclusive effect (note this place is no good for people-watching) and an antique telephone mark New York out as an exceedingly post-modern venture aiming for the more aristocratic punter. Exotic coffees are available during the day, and there's karaoke Saturday nights too. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 09:00 - 01:00.

Old Time C-1, Bezisten, tel. 070 73 71 52. A delightfully peculiar café hidden away in the heart of the Old Bazaar, brimming with knickknacks, an old television set and loud Western music. Beverages are limited to tea, coffee, spirits and soft drinks, the former two being at the mercy of a hot water machine that was broken at the time of writing. Popular with grungy local teenagers, at the top of the rickety stairs find a further space dedicated to the art of bad graffiti and chilling out. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Pasha B-1/2, Naum N. Borce 61, tel. 075 77 77 72. Below the Mayday rock club there's a completely different scene - a bar decked out as an Ottoman harem, with carpets and cushions on the ground. Near Bul. Partizanski Odredi. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 01:00.

Play Café B-2, Makedonija 6, tel. 312 70 20. Near the end of the pedestrianised stretch of the street, Play Café has large windows and a pleasant interior from which to observe life traipsing by. ▶ Open 07:30 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 07:30 - 01:00.

Plaza de Toros C-2, Kej 13 Noemvri bb. Making the most of the high ceilings hereabouts this is yet another magnificent mezzanine tavern, with a nice wooden rustic feel, complimented by a wall lined with learned books. Popular with the local 30-something crowd, this is the place to be seen in (preferably by the window), chomping on a pizza and polishing off several cafes of bull's blood. The bovine theme is strong here, down to the bullhorn handles on the entrance.

Skopje's strict new opening hour licensing regime has forced many bars and clubs to shut down around midnight, taking much of the fun out of it, and placing the city well behind more party-minded capitals in the region. You'll see places starting to empty out before closing time, and at midnight the city is usually as lively as it was in 1958.

Bars

5th Element C-2, Kej 13 Noemvri, City Shopping Center, tel. 070 27 48 25. A rather kinky little bar/café, on the third floor of the City Shopping Centre. Every day there's a different party here, with love songs on Monday, a student night on Wednesday, Yugoslav retro music on Thursday and house and retro on Friday. It's named after the elements you see in each corner of the café: fire, water, earth and air. The fifth element, we were told, is love and can be found in the toilets. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00, Sat 09:00 - 01:00.

Alo Alo C-2, Kej 13 Noemvri, tel. 322 09 76. One of the better-looking café-bars along the Kej, usually filled with better-looking people. Window blinds keep the interior a surprise till you enter; inside there's a large screen for projections during the daily DJ parties, which usually feature smooth Cuban or Brazilian music styles. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Bar Celona B-2, Makedonija 27, tel. 070 27 60 71. A two-floor bar on corner of the pedestrianised street, Celona is a bright, pleasant place with DJ music every night. The usual selection includes Cuban, techno and retro music - everything a Catalan needs. ▶ Open 07:30 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 07:30 - 01:00.

Barista Trampolina B-2, Makedonija 29, tel. 311 35 23. A great little café bar in the pedestrianised zone with wacky decorations (plates on the walls, light bulbs above) and a logo nicked from Starbucks. Barista regularly features live music performances, notably by Kili who plays piano and Ana Kostovska who sings. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00. [F]

Bastion B-2, Pirinska 43. Pass the Ambassador hotel and you'll soon see the unmarked Bastion bar, run by the crew that brought you Barista. A bar with a welcoming neighbourhood feel to it, Bastion has lounge music and light jazz on the decks and Macedonian film posters on the walls. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00, Sun 10:00 - 24:00.

Ganza B-1, Gorgi Peskov 4, tel. 311 18 76. A better than average local beer bar with lots of rustic trimmings, strings of tobacco leaves on the walls, ethnic rugs and food if you're hungry. The latter is in fact well worth mentioning as the menu caters for vegetarians. True it's only in the form of grilled mushrooms, but you have to remember that this is the Balkans. Also, the refrigerator often carries a few bottles of the local Nikšičko beer, a fabulous and fruity 5% brew that knocks spots of the favoured beers of choice in the country, and completely impossible to say after a couple of litres of the stuff. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Insomnia C-2, Kej 13 Noemvri bb. Lots of designer chrome and angular furniture in one of the multitude of split-level bars sprinkled along the river, this one being nothing to write home about but pleasant enough for a drink or two if you're doing a crawl along the entire street. Purveyors of quality whiskey, note that fearsome-looking gentlemen operate a strict face-control policy here most evenings. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Laika B-1, M. Cokov bb. Once upon a time every other bar in Europe was like this one. With a carefree disregard for pub-chain trimmings, a happy-go-lucky bunch of mostly young student types pour into Laika every evening to sink large quantities of booze and listen to quirky music amid degenerate art and jumble sale furniture in their jumble sale clothes. One of the great treasures of Skopje that hopefully will stick around for a long time to come.

Living Room B-2, Makedonija 29, tel. 070 30 39 40. So trendy it hurts your eyes: a bright green and brown interior complemented with homey-looking lamps and sofas... a room made for living it up. You can do just that on Thursdays and Fridays when the DJs spin house, and Saturdays when it's retro music time. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00, Sun 09:00 - 24:00.

Mr. Jack B-2, Dimitrie Cupovski bb, tel. 323 19 99. Loud and fun - the way a whiskey bar should be. Head for one of the comfortable sofas, as the bar stools are only high enough for you to nibble the edge of the bar. Dedicated fans of the good selection of Scottish whiskey here may not notice that, however. DJs play on most nights, with the good vibes going on until everyone is kicked out on time. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Pasha B-2, Makedonija 41, tel. 312 09 46. Our favourite along Makedonija, Pasha is a tiny drawer of a café with the bar practically filling half the interior. With a classy brown look, it manages to squeeze DJ parties in on every Friday and Saturday. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Strip Café B-2, Dimitrie Cupovski 26, tel. 075 43 70 85. Lurking somewhere in the uncharted world between café and bar, Strip Café is a classic two-floor Skopje affair with a comic strip twist. Lining the walls are a series of brilliantly executed black and white murals inspired by the film Sin City, giving the place a cartoon ambience that sets off the disparate bunch of DJ aficionados who choose to frequent the place very nicely indeed. Petite to the point that you almost cuddle the place, the ground floor bar is fairly run of the mill, whereas the hardcore scene where the hippest of the hip hang out next to the decks (DJs perform on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights) is where the real action takes place. Positively inspired and well worth a visit. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Wacky bars

Piano Galerija A-1, Orce Nikolov 155, tel. 308 29 36. Skopje's quirkiest bar. Tiny and filled with artsy decorations that make you duck as you walk in, it has a few places to sit around a piano which is used daily for mini concerts. Owner Sasha Vucidolov has manned the bar here since 1984 and creates beautiful little paintings on cardboard squares when not pouring drinks - these are for sale for a small fee. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00, Sun 12:00 - 24:00. [F]

Piazza Liberta B-2, Dimitrie Cupovski bb, tel. 322 48 07. A mostly educated crowd gather here upstairs in the smoking saloon most evenings to chatter, watch a bit of sport, and throw peanut shells over their trousers. You get complimentary peanuts with every drink, and on a good night going to the toilet here is not unlike shuffling your way across a huge hamster cage. The bar is named after Sloboda (peace) Square, the pretty oval square that was here until the 1963 earthquake ruined nearly all surrounding buildings. Highly recommended. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00.

Van Gogh B-1, ul. M. Cokov bb, tel. 312 18 76. A Skopje institution that's been going for 20 years, Van Gogh is the quintessential good time bar featuring lots of quirky additions and a cheerful arty crowd. There's live music every Monday evening, salsa lessons on Wednesdays, Thursdays is Beerfest night with 20dn off every beer, Techno arrives on Fridays and Saturdays and Sundays are given over to hip-hop. So, if you drop in on a Tuesday you've got nobody to blame but yourself. Super. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 09:00 - 01:00.

Pubs

St Patrick C-2, Kej 13 Noemvri, tel. 322 04 31, www.irishpub.com.mk. Also known as simply the Irish Pub, St. Patrick's does a great job at looking exactly like what you expect it to look like, filled as it is with loud ex-pats, Victorian-style wooden panelling, bar stools and booth seating and beer signs. There's Kilkenney, Strongbow and Guinness (200den) and the usual range of bar food and steaks at 150-400den and hilariously lists Chicken Nazi Goring. The homesick can be reminded of what they ran away from with the full Irish breakfast. Bands play on Thursday to Saturday nights. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 01:00. [F]

Live music

Ludnica B-1, Georgi Peshkov 6. Likening itself to such legendary clubs as New York's CBGB's, Ludnica (Madhouse) is a low-budget affair with lots of tiny rooms full of scatter cushions, tables made from washing machine drums, old sofas and a refrigerator. As well as a drinking hole of some worth to those who aspire to this kind of living, the club is most famous as a live music venue, attracting the cream of Macedonia's underground bands and the occasional group from further away. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 01:00.

Marakana B-1, Gradski Park bb, tel. 322 32 26. A long thin venue with a large bar specialising in live music every night, mostly in the form of jazz and blues. The set-up at Marakana is rudimentary with mostly standing room only, a wooden floor to drop your cigarettes on, and a small stage. ▶ Open 21:00 - 03:00.

Clubs

Jukebox B-1, Orce Nikolov 99, tel. 322 72 94. The 1950s Belgian jukebox that gave this late night 40-something hangout its name hasn't twirled a disc in years, but it doesn't seem to bother the locals who pack the place to bursting at the weekends. Amidst the old upright piano and walls piled high with iconic photographs you can sit and get thoroughly inebriated with a range of local artists and professionals, take in a bit of cabaret and cough your lungs onto the table, cursing the inefficiency of the extractor fans. Somewhat strangely Juke Box doesn't serve coffee, which does make you wonder what the punters here are using to keep themselves awake. Pure speculation of course. ▶ Open 20:00 - 03:00.

Mayday B-1/2, Naum N. Borce 61, tel. 322 05 73. Come weekend nights, this place is crammed with people enjoying the ear-burstingly loud rock and metal music party nights. With no concessions made to house or techno, this is where the long-haired guys hang out. Downstairs, find the oriental Pasha café. Near Bul. Partizanski Odredi.

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Debar maalo

Debar maalo is the area around Orce Nikolov and Radnjanska (A/B-1), a tame-looking, semi-suburban district full of embassies and badly parked cars. Walk past most of the cafés and bars around here and you wouldn't think much at all. And then out of nowhere comes the weekend. What were during the week rather dismal-looking establishments, empty with the exception of the occasional waitress asleep on a table, suddenly transform themselves on Friday and Saturday nights into dens of hedonism and delicious delinquency. Stumble into any number of places here during the weekend and find battalions of teary-eyed 20-something Macedonian boys doing smoochie Balkan karaoke on the tables, usually conservative shop girls snogging anything they can find in a pair of trousers, and endless, endless, endless (and we mean endless) amounts of alcohol. Here are a couple of favourites. When in Skopje, do as the FYROMans do.

Kaj Pero B-1, Orce Nikolov 109, tel. 323 28 98. Popular with miscellaneous bohemians and other talented types throughout the week, come Friday night this small cellar bar ignites. Peer through the smoke and what you'll find in here is a claustrophobic space with a pot-bellied stove rumbling to the rhythms of what appears to be close on a million tipsy students. Swigging beer and giving each other bear hugs, this is the bonding session to end all bonding sessions.

Park B-1, Rade Konchar 3, tel. 323 76 35. Featuring some of the world's cheekiest barmaids and amiable waiters, Park positively thumps on Friday and Saturday nights. With holes in the tablecloths and Turkish coffee bubbling away on a tiny camping stove, large groups of young men and women come here to let their hair down and drink the night away with the help of a serious-looking synthesiser player and his sidekick crooning singer. As with all Macedonian get-togethers, the emphasis is on having a good time, and not a gram of animosity can be found in anyone here. A thoroughly enjoyable evening that can't come highly recommended enough. ▶ Open 07:30 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 07:30 - 01:00.

MCM B-1, Naum N. Borce 80. This dingy club looking like a strip club is actually just a normal dingy club. Adjacent to the city park, it has late opening hours and live music on Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday. The themed disco nights include Greek on Thursday, karaoke on Friday and house on Saturday. Good dingy fun. ▶ Open 21:00 - 04:00.

Process C-2, Kej 13 Noemvri, City Shopping Center, tel. 321 54 76, www.process.com.mk. A large modern club with regular guest DJs playing house to an exhilarated and sometimes very young crowd. ▶ Open 23:00 - 04:00, Fri, Sat 23:00 - 05:00. Closed Mon. Admission 100den.

Trend B-2, Nikola Vapcarov 2/4, tel. 313 24 25. Facing the main square, Trend is a club, bar, lounge and restaurant in one. It serves nicely priced food during the day including breakfast between 08:00 and 12:00 and hot meals from a photo menu (the shashliks look particularly good). The club starts up at 22:00 and closes at 04:00; one of the few places to go on beyond the midnight hour. Each Monday, Gjoko Tanevski plays live rock music, while other nights come themed. Happy hour is until 23:00. ▶ Open 08:00 - 04:00. [F]

Unlike many other Balkan capital cities such as Belgrade, Sofia and Zagreb which only grew important in the 19th century, Skopje is an ancient city, dating back 2000 years. It has seen plenty of action over the millennia: earthquakes, fires, floods and wars, and as a result has a reputation among travellers for being grey and dull. This is unfair, as there is a great deal to see in Skopje, if you are willing to poke around between the concrete. Most of Skopje's sights are in and around the Stara Carsija, the Old Town, which is the dense network of alleys below the Kale fortress. Across the Stone Bridge lies the modern centre, with its concentration of restaurants, bars and hotels.

Main sights

Kale Fortress B/C-1. People have been camping out on the strategically placed hill above what is now the bazaar area since before the bronze age. A town was first started here in the early Byzantine era (6th-7th century), the big blocks dragged here from Scupi, the nearby town that was destroyed in the 518AD earthquake. This was the great town of Justinia Prima, founded by emperor Justinian, the second city in the Byzantine empire and location of the archbishopric, the first independent church in Europe (which was later transferred to Ohrid). From the 14th to 20th centuries, the Ottomans used the fortress as a military barracks, expanding the number of towers to seventy - only three remain today. The 1963 earthquake flattened much of the fortress, including many of the walls, some of which are being rebuilt. Near the Mustafa Pasha mosque, the eastern gate (from 1446) to the fortress gives access to a highfield surrounded by the ruins of the walls, of which the 120-metre-long cyclopic wall is the oldest. There's not much to see except for the walls and the great views over central Skopje. ▶ Open 24hrs.

Makedonija Square B-2. Dramatically widened by the destruction of the massive neoclassical National Bank and Army House during the 1963 earthquake and now surrounded mostly by nondescript architecture, Makedonija Square feels a bit large and empty nowadays. The most remarkable building is the Risticeva Palata, crowned with the Skopsko beer ad, at the southern end. However, the focus of the pedestrianised square is still the stone bridge, and it's a pleasant place to hang out in good weather.

Stone Bridge C-2. Skopje's landmark construction is the old stone bridge spanning the river Vardar with 13 arches. The city was founded on the left bank of the Vardar river at the confluence with the Serava river after an earthquake destroyed nearby ancient Skupi in 518AD, and it's probable that a first bridge was built then, which in the late 15th century formed the foundation of the Stone Bridge. The current 214 metre-long structure was built by the Ottomans just after 1450. Floods, earthquakes and an endless line of local dignitaries (including the previous mayor) have changed the look of the bridge. The metal pedestrian paths that used to line the bridge were taken off in 1992, and currently the stone railing and watchtower are being rebuilt. The bridge is an important pedestrian link between the bazaar area and the modern part of town, and there are usually some makeshift stalls selling things like batteries and car accessories along it.

Museums

For the National Art gallery, see the Daut Pasha Hamam review in *Ottoman Skopje*.

City Museum B-3, Mito Hadzivasilev Jasmin bb, tel. 311 47 42. Located inside what's left of the old train station and worth popping inside for this fact alone, Skopje's decidedly lacklustre City Museum currently features two small collections on two floors. At ground level find a

hotchpotch of glass cases offering the briefest of insights into life in the city before WWII. Exhibits include costumes, photographs and personal possessions from a number of Macedonian minorities including Jews, Albanians, Gypsies, Serbs and Vlachs. Down the stairs find a few dimly lit cases showcasing some fine examples of ancient bits and bobs dug up in the vicinity. The pride of the museum is the 6000-year-old, 15cm-high clay "Adam from Govrevo" statue, which was discovered in 2000 and put on display here in later 2006. The statue is ranked among the world's top 10 Neolithic artefacts, as it is perhaps the earliest representation of a human figure - with ribs, spine, belly button and a regrettably chopped-off erection. With nothing marked in English and the aforementioned lack of light, it's highly recommended that visitors take a torch and a local along. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Sun 09:00 - 13:00. Closed Mon. Admission free.

Contemporary Art Museum B-1, Samoilova bb, tel. 311 77 34, www.msuskopje.org.mk. Housed inside a large, Polish-designed box, the fabulous Contemporary Art Museum, like so many good things in Skopje, owes its existence to the 1963 earthquake. Established the following year and opened in 1970, the 5,428 square metre interior is positively stuffed with fine examples of world art. The permanent collection features some 3,000 pieces by artists from over 60 countries, and includes painting, graphic art and sculpture by names such as Picasso, LeWitt and Hockney. ▶ Open 10:00 - 17:00, Sun 09:00 - 13:00. Admission free, special exhibitions 50den.

National Museum C-1, Curciska bb, tel. 311 60 44, www.musmk.org.mk. The large white building just below the Mustafa Pasha mosque houses the rambling and under-appreciated National Museum; find the main entrance is hidden in the courtyard. The ethnographic section houses a stunning collection of instruments and traditional costumes, arranged by the region of origin in Macedonia and surrounding territories. The women's bridal costumes are especially beautiful, some hung with dozens of coins symbolising the wealth of the family - and making the dresses weigh up to 40 kilograms. The coins are in themselves an indication of trade relations within the area - many are of Ottoman and Arabic origin, but there's also a coin from the USA on the Kriva Palanka region dress. Across the courtyard in the archaeological section you may have to ask them to switch on the lights of the endless rooms with pottery, jewellery, and statues. Interestingly, Macedonia's first stone age artefacts were dug up accidentally by soldiers digging trenches in World War I, and it's been good digging ever since - don't miss the peculiar clay fertility statue at the end and the unique 6th century terracotta icons - only ever found in Macedonia and Tunisia. Unfortunately many exhibits have been spirited off to Belgrade and Sofia over the years and not returned. Upstairs is the museum's best room, housing a priceless collection of icons, some dating back to the 11th century. The famous Bogorodica Pelaginitisa icon from 1422 was painted for the icon screen of Zrze monastery and depicts a playful Jesus in the hands of his mother, who is looking sad while pressing her lips to his cheek while looking at the viewer. Ask the friendly English-speaking curator for explanations. Opposite the courtyard stands the old Kursumli Han which holds the lapidarium, though the building is more interesting than the few statues on display. The museum is in a bad state, with old-fashioned exhibition techniques, bad lighting and buckets positioned to catch leaking rain water, but renovations are underway. There's a museum shop, with a city centre outlet inside the Bey's Tower. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Sat 09:00 - 15:00, Sun 09:00 - 13:00. Closed Mon. Admission 50den.

Churches

More information about the Macedonian Orthodox Church can be found at www.mpc.org.mk. Professional photographers should apply in advance at the secretary of the bishop of the relevant eparchy to get permission to take pictures of most church interiors - but you'll invariably need permission from the Ministry of Culture (see Officials, takes 5-7 days) first, after which the eparchy usually issues permits within a day or two (except for the particularly grumpy Debarsko Kicevska eparchy, so forget about taking photos in Ohrid churches).

Church of the Holy Saviour (Sveti Spas) C-1, Makarie Frckovski 8. This small church can easily be overlooked by the careless tourist as it huddles behind a massive wall with just the wooden bell tower sticking out. The courtyard has steps leading down to the tiny church which was built here in the early 19th century on the ruins of an earlier church which fell victim to the fire of 1689 - there are still some old frescoes visible. The current structure is most famous for its wood carvings however. The icon screen displays some of the best Macedonian carving craft around; made by Petre Filipovski Garkata and Marko and Makarie Frckovski between 1819 and 1824. The deep wood carving has biblical depictions as well as regional flora and fauna, and even has a little self portrait of the artists at work on the screen. Inside the compound there's also the grave of Macedonian revolutionary Goce Delcev (1872-1903), for whom there is a small museum too. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Mon.

Ottoman Skopje

Hundreds of years of Ottoman domination have left Skopje with a distinct oriental feel and look, and many monuments from the period remain. You are welcome to visit the mosques free of charge outside prayer times - ask around for the caretaker if the doors happen to be locked. To enter a mosque, you should take off your shoes outside and be modestly dressed - shorts and bare shoulders are not appropriate.

Bezisten C-1, Lebledziska bb. A feature found in all Ottoman bazaar areas, a bezisten is a gated part of the market that housed the shops selling silk, jewellery, spices and perfume. Skopje's mid-15th century bezisten was destroyed in the 1689 fire and was rebuilt in a modern style around 1900. The original building was a single space with 2.5m-thick walls and 12 arches supported by two massive pillars. The bezisten now has four gates and five tiny streets and is half empty, with some workshops and a friendly café.

Cifte Hamam (Contemporary Arts Centre) C-1, Kurciska bb, tel. 313 35 41, www.scca.org.mk. The mid-15th century Cifte or Double Hamam in the heart of the bazaar was in use as a bath house until 1915. Reconstructed after the 1963 earthquake, it now houses the Contemporary Art Gallery. The layout of the hamam is symmetrical, with the heating room at the centre and separate bathing areas for men and women, each with their own entrance at either ends of the building. There was a barber for the men, depilation for the ladies, and massage rooms, rooms for relaxing and steam rooms for both. Interestingly, Skopje's Jews used this bath house for ritual bathing too during Ottoman times; a marble pool was installed for them.

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Clock tower C-1, Ul. 156. Like every bazaar, Skopje has a clock tower that told traders when to close their shops a few times a day for Muslim prayers; strict working hours were enforced, allowing nobody take advantage and make money while the competition was out. Skopje's hexagonal tower was built between 1566 and 1573, half with sandstone and half with bricks, and suffered damage during both the 1669 fire and the 1963 earthquake. It had a clock mechanism from Szeged in Hungary, brought here as booty when the Turks went west.

Daut Pasha Hamam (National Art Gallery) C-1/2, Kruševska 1a, tel. 313 31 02. Skopje's extraordinary 15th-century Daut Pasha Hamam (bath house) holds the National Art Gallery - though the building is far more interesting than any of the art inside. Daut Pasha was the grand vezir of East Rumelia in the second half of the 15th century who according to legend built the hamam for his harem. The 13-domed building was designed for separate male and female bathing. The two large domes at the front covered the two dressing rooms and originally contained fountains. The remaining smaller domes covered individual bathing rooms. The building now houses a modest collection of modern art as well as a few paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries. The hamam sits somewhat forlorn next to the decrepit bridge building south of the bazaar. ▶ Admission 50den.

Kapan Han C-1, Bitpazarska. A beautiful building indeed, the 15th century Kapan Han is one of the three remaining medieval inns still standing in the old bazaar. Originally constructed as a hotel for visiting merchants, the ground floor was used as a stable and storeroom, with the upper floor given over to a series of rooms for the merchants to sleep in.

Kursumli Han C-1, Kurciska. The beautiful Kursumli Han is a bit tricky to get to but well worth visiting. Reached via the courtyard or parking lot of the National Museum, it is the best of the three surviving caravanserais, or inn complexes in Skopje. Called the 'lead inn' for the lead on its roof, it was built in 1550 by Mula Musledin Hodza, who was the son of Abdul Gani, a scientist at Sultan Selim II's court. Merchants arriving in Skopje with their goods and animals used the han as their base during market days. The first courtyard would have been for the merchants, with the goods and animals in the second courtyard (only visible from the first floor windows). The complex suffered during the fire and earthquake; left of the entrance are the remains of a hamam (bath house), while there are no traces left of the mosque next to the han. After serving time as a prison and an armoury, the han has now been restored and is home to the National Museum's statue collection. Admission free.

Mustafa Pasha Mosque C-1, Prohor Pcinski bb. Towering above the old bazaar area with its 16-metre-wide dome and thin 42-metre-high minaret, the elegant Mustafa Pasha Mosque was built in 1492 and incredibly survived all disasters that befell the city intact. Next to the mosque stands a *turbe* (mausoleum) holding Mustafa Pasha and one of his daughters. The mosque courtyard is filled with roses and offers great views of the bazaar.

Sultan Murat Mosque C-1, Ul. 156. A huge and quite simple structure with no dome but a normal roof, the Sultan Murat or Hunkar Mosque is Skopje's oldest, from 1436. It stands beside the clock tower on the hill just east of the bazaar on the location of Skopje's main monastery before the Ottoman takeover, St. George Gorga. The monastery's fortifications can still be seen around the hill. The three naves of the former church can be recognised in the mosque's simple interior. Outside the mosque are two mausoleums, or *turbes*. The sultan in Istanbul was responsible for its upkeep and donations were regularly made after fire and earthquake damage.