



North Macedonia

A small, mountainous Balkan country of deep ancient lakes, frescoed Byzantine churches, Ottoman bazaars and beans baked slowly in clay dishes.

North Macedonia is a landlocked country in the middle of the Balkan peninsula. Its heart is the valley of the Vardar river, which runs from the north-west past Skopje and on to Greece and the Aegean Sea. Mountains frame the country on every side, and three large lakes lie on its southern borders: Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran. Lake Ohrid is one of the oldest and deepest lakes in Europe.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Skopje

POPULATION

About 1.8 million (2021 census)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Macedonian. Since 2019 Albanian is also official at state level

CURRENCY

Macedonian denar (MKD)

AREA

About 25,400 km²

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary republic

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Korab, 2,764 m, on the border with Albania

LONGEST RIVER

The Vardar, 388 km long, of which 76 km are in Greece

NEIGHBOURS

Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, Greece and Bulgaria. The country is landlocked

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+389

A 45-minute trip to North Macedonia

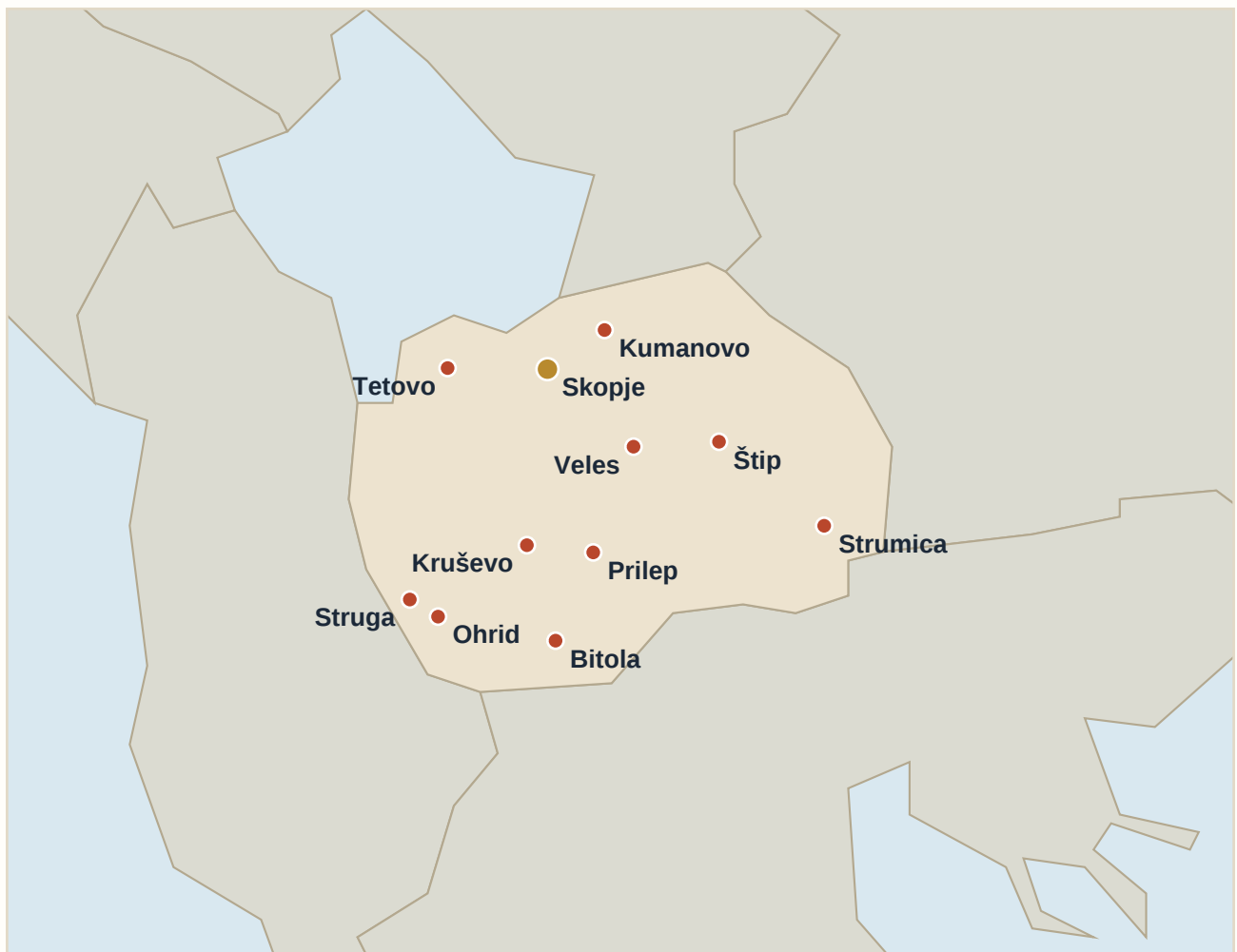
Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find North Macedonia together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 356 BC: Philip II takes the south; 1913: The Treaty of Bucharest; 2020: NATO membership. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Tave grave and Ajvar. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Dobro utro" (Good morning), "Dobar den" (Good day, hello), "Dobroveer" (Good evening). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://preview.worldstroll.com/countries/north-macedonia/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

North Macedonia and its cities



- Skopje (Skopje Region): The Stone Bridge and the Old Bazaar, Matka Canyon nearby, The birthplace of Mother Teresa
- Kumanovo (Northeastern Region): Its jazz festival, The Kokino archaeological site nearby, Tobacco and metal industries
- Tetovo (Polog Region): The Painted Mosque (Šarena Džamija), The Arabati Baba Tee, Two universities
- Veles (Vardar Region): The Vardar river through the town, Pastrmajlija, The road to ancient Stobi
- Štip (Eastern Region): The Isar fortress above the town, Its pastrmajlija festival, Textiles and fashion
- Strumica (Southeastern Region): Prehistoric sites nearby, The Carevi Kuli hill above the town, A mild, warm climate
- Prilep (Pelagonia Region): High-quality tobacco, Markovi Kuli fortress, Its summer beer festival

- Kruševo (Pelagonia Region): The Makedonium memorial, Old stone houses, The singer Toše Proeski, who grew up here
- Bitola (Pelagonia Region): The ruins of Heraclea Lyncestis, The Manaki Brothers film festival, Its pedestrian main street
- Ohrid (Southwestern Region): The Church of St. John at Kaneo, Samuel's Fortress, Lake Ohrid and its beaches
- Struga (Southwestern Region): The Struga Poetry Evenings, The Black Drin river, which divides the town in two, Beaches on Lake Ohrid

A short history of North Macedonia

The story of North Macedonia runs from ancient kingdoms and Roman towns, through medieval empires and a great school of Slavic letters in Ohrid, to five centuries of Ottoman rule, life in Yugoslavia and independence in 1991.

- 356 BC** **Philip II takes the south**
King Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, added Lynkestis, Pelagonia and the southern part of Paeonia to his kingdom. Around this time he founded the city of Heraclea Lyncestis, whose ruins stand near Bitola.
- AD 518** **An earthquake destroys Scupi**
Scupi, a Roman town founded in the late 1st century AD, was destroyed by an earthquake and abandoned. It was rebuilt under Emperor Justinian I, and today's Skopje grew from it.
- AD 886** **Clement's school in Ohrid**
Saint Clement, a disciple of Cyril and Methodius, founded a school of learning in Ohrid. The Ohrid Literary School helped to spread the Cyrillic script among the Slavs. Clement is the patron saint of Ohrid and of North Macedonia.
- 1018** **Byzantium retakes Ohrid**
Tsar Samuel had ruled a large medieval empire from Ohrid from about 990. After years of war, the Byzantine emperor Basil II took the city in 1018 and brought the region back under Byzantine rule.
- 1346** **Dušan crowned in Skopje**
Stefan Dušan, who had made Skopje the capital of the Serbian Empire, was crowned emperor in the city. After his death the empire broke up into smaller states.
- 1392** **Skopje becomes Ottoman**
Skopje became part of the Ottoman Empire, which then ruled the region for about five centuries. The Ottomans built the Old Bazaar with its inns, mosques and baths, and the Stone Bridge was rebuilt in their time.

- 1903** **The Ilinden Uprising**
On Ilinden, St Elijah's Day, rebels rose against Ottoman rule. In the town of Kruševo they declared a republic that lasted from 3 to 13 August before the uprising was crushed. Its leaders are remembered as national heroes.
- 1913** **The Treaty of Bucharest**
After the two Balkan Wars, the region of Macedonia was divided between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. Most of the territory of today's North Macedonia went to Serbia.
- 1944** **ASNOM founds a Macedonian state**
On 2 August 1944, the anniversary of the Ilinden Uprising, the partisan assembly ASNOM met in secret and proclaimed a Macedonian state within Yugoslavia, with Macedonian as its official language.
- 1963** **The Skopje earthquake**
Early on 26 July 1963 a strong earthquake destroyed about 80 percent of Skopje and killed more than 1,000 people. Help came from 78 countries, and the city was rebuilt to new plans, including a centre designed by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange.
- 1991** **The independence referendum**
On 8 September 1991 voters approved independence from Yugoslavia. The country left the federation peacefully, and 8 September is celebrated as Independence Day.
- 1993** **Joining the United Nations**
The country became a member of the United Nations. Because of the disagreement with Greece over its name, it was admitted under the provisional reference "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".
- 2001** **The Ohrid Agreement**
From February to August 2001 government forces fought ethnic Albanian insurgents in the north and west. The Ohrid Framework Agreement of 13 August ended the conflict and gave more rights to the Albanian community, including wider use of the Albanian language.
- 2019** **The country becomes North Macedonia**
Under the Prespa Agreement, signed with Greece in June 2018 beside Lake Prespa, the country's name changed to the Republic of North Macedonia. The change came into force on 12 February 2019.

2020

NATO membership

On 27 March 2020 North Macedonia became the 30th member of NATO. In July 2022 it opened accession talks with the European Union.

What people eat in North Macedonia

Macedonian food is Balkan food, shaped by Ottoman and Mediterranean cooking. The warm summers grow excellent peppers, tomatoes, beans, fruit and grapes, and white cheese, yogurt, wine and rakija are part of daily life. A meal often starts with a fresh salad and a small glass of rakija, then moves on to a slow-baked dish of beans, meat or vegetables in an earthenware pot, and ends with a syrupy sweet and coffee.

Tave grave

All of North Macedonia, with a well-known Tetovo-style version

White beans cooked with onion and dried red pepper, then baked in a shallow earthenware dish until thick and slightly crusty on top. Sausage or smoked meat is often added.

Ajvar

Across North Macedonia and its neighbours

A thick relish of red peppers, roasted whole, peeled and slowly cooked with oil, sometimes with aubergine. It can be sweet or hot and is eaten on bread or next to grilled meat.

Šopska salad

Popular across the Balkans, first named in Bulgaria

Diced tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and onion, lightly dressed with oil and covered with a thick layer of grated white brined cheese.

Pastrmajlija

Štip, Veles and the east of the country

An oval, open bread pie topped with small cubes of salted, dried meat, sometimes with an egg baked on top.

Ohrid trout

Lake Ohrid

A trout found only in Lake Ohrid and the rivers around it, long a speciality of the lakeside towns. Its taste is often compared to a cross between a brown trout and a salmon.

Turli tava

All of North Macedonia

A mixed vegetable bake of potatoes, aubergine, okra, green beans, peppers and tomatoes, with or without meat, slowly cooked in a clay dish called a tava.

Stuffed peppers

All of North Macedonia

Peppers filled with rice, or with rice and minced meat, and baked in a light tomato sauce.

Pindžur

All of North Macedonia

A summer and autumn relish of roasted red peppers, tomatoes and garlic, often with aubergine. It is chunkier and fresher than ajvar.

Zelnik

All of North Macedonia

A pie of very thin layers of pastry filled with white cheese, eggs, leeks or spinach, or in winter with pickled cabbage. It is best eaten warm, often with yogurt.

Village meat

All of North Macedonia

A rich stew of pork with mushrooms, onions, peppers, smoked meat and wine, finished with cheese and traditionally cooked and served in a clay pot.

Burek

All of North Macedonia

Layers of thin dough baked in a round pan with a filling of melted cheese, minced meat or other fillings, and sold by the slice.

Kebapi

All of North Macedonia

Small grilled fingers of spiced minced meat, a favourite at the grill houses called skara.

Tulumba

All of North Macedonia, from Ottoman cooking

Ridged fingers of fried dough, soaked in sugar syrup while still hot, so they are crisp outside and sticky inside.

Baklava

All of North Macedonia, from Ottoman cooking

Many sheets of thin pastry layered with chopped nuts, baked until golden and soaked in syrup.

Rakija

All of North Macedonia

A strong brandy, most often made from grapes, sipped slowly with salad before a meal.

Mastika

North Macedonia and Greece

A spirit flavoured with mastic, the resin of a small evergreen Mediterranean tree, which gives it a light taste of pine and herbs.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- When glasses are raised, people say "Na zdravje!", which means "to your health".
- A meal often begins with a salad such as šopska and a small glass of rakija.
- At grill houses (skara), side dishes such as salad, bread and potatoes are usually ordered separately.
- Coffee culture is strong: Turkish-style coffee is traditional, and the macchiato is the most common order in modern cafés.
- Meals are unhurried, and service can be slow, so relax and enjoy the conversation.
- The best-known local wines are reds from the Vranec grape, and the Tikveš region around Kavadarci and Negotino is the centre of wine making.

Tave grave

White beans cooked with onion and dried red pepper, then baked in a shallow earthenware dish until thick and slightly crusty on top. Sausage or smoked meat is often added.

Ingredients

- 500 g large dried white beans, such as butter beans
- 2 onions, one whole and one finely chopped
- 1 or 2 dried red peppers
- 1 tablespoon plain flour and 2 teaspoons sweet paprika
- 4 tablespoons sunflower oil
- Salt, black pepper and a handful of chopped parsley
- Optional: 2 smoked sausages, sliced

Method

1. Soak the beans in cold water overnight. Drain, cover with fresh water, bring to the boil, then drain again.
2. Cover the beans with fresh water, add the whole onion and the dried peppers, and simmer gently for about 1 hour, until soft but not falling apart. Remove the onion.
3. Heat the oil in a small pan and fry the chopped onion until soft. Stir in the flour and paprika for 30 seconds, then stir this into the beans with salt, pepper and parsley.
4. Heat the oven to 220°C. Pour the beans with enough cooking liquid to cover them into an earthenware or other ovenproof dish, and add the sausage if you use it.
5. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, checking now and then and adding a splash of hot water if it looks dry, until thick and browned on top. Serve hot with bread.

Šopska salad

Diced tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and onion, lightly dressed with oil and covered with a thick layer of grated white brined cheese.

Ingredients

- 4 ripe tomatoes
- 1 large cucumber
- 2 peppers, raw or roasted and peeled
- 1 small onion or 3 spring onions
- 150 g white brined cheese (sirenje) or mild feta
- 3 tablespoons sunflower or olive oil and 1 tablespoon wine vinegar (optional)
- Salt and a little chopped parsley

Method

1. Dice the tomatoes, cucumber and peppers into small pieces and put them in a bowl.
2. Chop the onion finely and add it. Season with a little salt.
3. Dress with the oil and, if you like, the vinegar, and toss gently.
4. Grate or crumble the cheese thickly over the top so that it covers the vegetables, and sprinkle with parsley. Serve at once.

Turli tava

A mixed vegetable bake of potatoes, aubergine, okra, green beans, peppers and tomatoes, with or without meat, slowly cooked in a clay dish called a tava.

Ingredients

- Optional: 500 g beef, lamb or pork, cut into cubes
- 3 potatoes, peeled and cut in chunks
- 1 aubergine and 1 courgette, cut in chunks
- 200 g okra or green beans
- 2 peppers, 2 carrots and 1 onion, all sliced
- 3 tomatoes, chopped, and 2 garlic cloves
- 5 tablespoons sunflower oil, 1 teaspoon paprika, salt and pepper

Method

1. Heat the oven to 180°C. If you use meat, brown it in a little oil in a pan first.
2. Put the meat and all the vegetables in a large earthenware or ovenproof dish. Add the oil, paprika, salt and pepper and toss well.
3. Pour in about 250 ml of hot water, cover with a lid or foil and bake for about 1 hour.
4. Uncover, stir gently and bake for another 30 to 40 minutes, until the vegetables are soft and lightly browned. Serve with bread.

Stuffed peppers

Peppers filled with rice, or with rice and minced meat, and baked in a light tomato sauce.

Ingredients

- 8 medium peppers
- 400 g minced pork or beef, or a mix
- 100 g short-grain rice, rinsed
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon paprika, salt, pepper and chopped parsley
- 500 ml tomato passata
- 2 tablespoons sunflower oil

Method

1. Heat the oven to 180°C. Cut the tops off the peppers and remove the seeds.
2. Fry the onion in the oil until soft. Mix it with the meat, rice, paprika, parsley, salt and pepper.
3. Fill the peppers loosely, leaving room for the rice to swell, and stand them upright in a baking dish. Put the tops back on as lids.
4. Mix the passata with 250 ml of water and a pinch of salt and pour it around the peppers.
5. Cover and bake for 50 minutes, then uncover and bake for 15 to 20 minutes more, until the peppers are soft and the rice is cooked. Make sure the meat is fully cooked through.

Useful phrases

Dobro utro

DOH-broh OO-troh · Good morning

Dobar den

doh-bahr DEHN · Good day, hello

Dobro veer

doh-BROH-veh-chehr · Good evening

Dobra no

DOH-brah NOHTCH · Good night

Do viduvanje

doh vee-DOO-vah-nyeh · Goodbye

Prijatno

PREE-yaht-noh · Goodbye (literally "pleasant")

Kako ste?

KAH-koh steh · How are you? (polite)

Mnogu dobro, blagodaram

MNOH-goo DOH-broh, blah-GOH-dah-rahm · Very well, thank you

Ve molam

veh MOH-lahm · Please

Izvinete

eez-VEE-neh-teh · Excuse me, or sorry

Kako se vikate?

KAH-koh seh VEE-kah-teh · What is your name? (polite)

Jas se vikam...

yahs seh VEE-kahm · My name is...

Zboruvate li angliski?

zboh-ROO-vah-teh lee AHN-glees-kee · Do you speak English?

Jas ne razbiram

yahs neh RAHZ-bee-rahm · I don't understand

Kolku ini ova?

KOHL-koo CHEE-nee OH-vah · How much does this cost?

Kade se toaletite?

KAH-deh seh toh-ah-LEH-tee-teh · Where are the toilets?

Na zdravje!

nah ZDRAHV-yeh · Cheers! (literally "to your health")

Smetkata, ve molam

SMEHT-kah-tah, veh MOH-lahm · The bill, please

Pomoš!

POH-mohsh · Help!

Things you might not know

1. Mother Teresa was born in Skopje in 1910 and lived there until 1928. A memorial house now stands on the site of the church where she was baptised.
2. Lake Ohrid is one of the oldest and deepest lakes in Europe. It is up to 288 metres deep and is home to more than 200 species found nowhere else.
3. Ohrid is said to have once had 365 churches, one for every day of the year.
4. The flag shows a yellow sun with eight broadening rays on a red field. It was designed by Miroslav Grev and adopted on 5 October 1995.
5. The documentary Honeyland, about a beekeeper of wild bees in a remote village, was nominated in 2020 for the Academy Awards for both Best Documentary Feature and Best International Feature Film. It was the first non-fiction film nominated in both categories.
6. The Manaki brothers, pioneers of Balkan cinema, had their photography studio in Bitola, then called Manastr. Their 1905 film The Weavers is regarded as the first motion picture shot in the Balkans, and Bitola has held a film festival in their honour since 1979.
7. The country's rivers flow towards three different seas: the Aegean, the Adriatic and the Black Sea. The Vardar alone drains about 80% of the land.
8. The Macedonian alphabet is a form of Cyrillic with 31 letters. It was standardised in 1945.
9. The name of the denar comes from the denarius, a silver coin of ancient Rome.
10. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, studied at a military school in Bitola in late Ottoman times.
11. The Struga Poetry Evenings, held every year since 1961, have given their Golden Wreath award to poets such as W. H. Auden and Mahmoud Darwish.
12. More than 30,000 eggs were used to prepare the paint for the decorations of the Painted Mosque in Tetovo.
13. Water from Lake Prespa, which lies about 150 metres higher, flows through underground channels in the mountains and comes out in springs that feed

Lake Ohrid.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to North Macedonia, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Tave grave or Ajvar? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- The independence referendum (1991). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Joining the United Nations (1993). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The Church of St. John at Kaneo, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of North Macedonia, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know North Macedonia?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. Struga's ancient name, Enchalon, comes from the Greek word for eel.

- A) True
- B) False

2. Which town is best known for growing and processing high-quality tobacco?

- A) Kruševo
- B) Struga
- C) Ohrid
- D) Prilep

3. What is the Macedonian word for bread?

- A) voda
- B) leb
- C) pivo
- D) riba

4. "Jas ne razbiram" means "Do you speak English?"

- A) True
- B) False

5. During the Ilinden Uprising of 1903, rebels declared a short-lived republic in which town?

- A) Ohrid
- B) Tetovo
- C) Kruševo
- D) Strumica

6. The Church of St. John at Kaneo stands on a cliff above which lake?

- A) Lake Dojran
- B) Lake Mavrovo
- C) Lake Ohrid
- D) Lake Prespa

7. The Manaki brothers shot what is regarded as the first motion picture in the Balkans in Skopje.

- A) True
- B) False

8. What does "blagodaram" mean?

- A) Thank you
- B) Cheers
- C) Goodbye
- D) Please

9. In which alphabet are menus and shop signs in smaller Macedonian towns often written?

- A) Arabic
- B) Cyrillic
- C) Hebrew
- D) Greek

10. Which town holds a yearly festival for the meat-topped bread pie pastrmajlija?

- A) Tetovo
- B) Štip
- C) Struga
- D) Ohrid

11. What is the highest mountain in North Macedonia?

- A) Triglav
- B) Olympus
- C) Korab
- D) Musala

12. The ancient city of Stobi was built where the Crna river meets which other river?

- A) Bregalnica
- B) Black Drin
- C) Vardar
- D) Treska

Quiz answers

1. True

True. Enchalon comes from the ancient Greek word for eel. Today the Black Drin river flows out of Lake Ohrid at Struga.

2. D) Prilep

Prilep is a regional centre for high-quality tobacco, and its tobacco is used by large cigarette makers.

3. B) leb

"Leb" is bread. "Riba" is fish, "voda" is water and "pivo" is beer.

4. False

False. "Jas ne razbiram" means I don't understand. To ask if someone speaks English, say "Zboruvate li angliski?"

5. C) Kruševo

The Kruševo Republic lasted from 3 to 13 August 1903, before Ottoman troops retook the town.

6. C) Lake Ohrid

The Church of St. John at Kaneo overlooks Lake Ohrid from a cliff in the town of Ohrid.

7. False

False. The Manaki brothers had their studio in Bitola, then called Manastr, not in Skopje. Bitola has held a film festival in their honour since 1979.

8. A) Thank you

"Blagodaram" means thank you. "Molam" means please, or you're welcome.

9. B) Cyrillic

Macedonian is written in Cyrillic. Road signs also show town names in Latin letters, but menus and signs in smaller towns are often in Cyrillic only.

10. B) Štip

Štip holds the Pastrmalijada festival every year. Pastrmajlija is especially popular in Štip, Veles and the east of the country.

11. C) Korab

Korab, 2,764 m, on the border with Albania, is the highest mountain. Triglav is in Slovenia, Musala in Bulgaria and Olympus in Greece.

12. C) Vardar

Stobi stood where the Crna river joins the Vardar, near today's Gradsko, and later became the capital of a Roman province.

North Macedonia visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

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