ITINERARY

A 5-day road trip to the heart of Ancient Macedonia

sponsored by **Region of Central Macedonia**

Delve into the fascinating world of Ancient Macedonia by retracing the footsteps of Philip II and his son, Alexander the Great, and visiting the cultural landmarks of a region

steeped in history.

Your itinerary takes you to the **Ancient Macedonians' most sacred sanctuary** and the resting site of Philip II of Macedon, as well as the remains of the great palace of Pella and **birthplace of Alexander the Great**. Also featuring Greece's northern city of Thessaloniki, the itinerary can be followed to the letter or you could extend or shorten your stay. Just prepare to travel deep into European history.

SHOW ROUTE ON MAP

Start point - End point

Thessaloniki airport

Distance

658 km (409 miles)

Means of transport

Car, Foot

Duration

5 days

Highlights

The Archaeological Park of Dion, Royal Tombs at Aigai and ancient city of Pella, the waterfalls of Edessa, the UNESCO-protected monuments of Thessaloniki and the legacy of Aristotle in Ancient Stagira

DAY 1 • OVERVIEW

Dion

135 km Car, Foot 3

Setting out from Thessaloniki's 'Makedonia' airport, your cultural road trip starts in **the most sacred town of ancient Macedonia**. Dion rose in importance as the Macedonian kingdom flourished in the 4th century BC and was where Philip II celebrated victories and Alexander offered divine sacrifices before his travels. Your day ends in Litochoro, in the shadow of Mt Olympus.

Stop 1

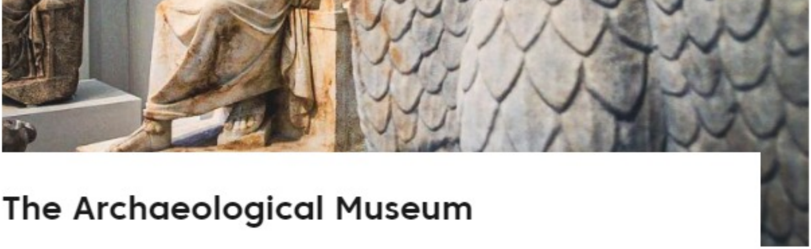
The Archaeological Park of Dion ⊖

The Archaeological Park of Dion

Dion is one of Greece's most atmospheric archaeological sites. Established to worship **Zeus**, its monuments are scattered amongst greenery, trees and ponds. A quarter of the park's 150 hectares is made up of sanctuaries – the oldest (end of 4th century BC) being dedicated to Demeter, two sanctuaries honouring Zeus (Hypsistos and Olympios) and the **Sanctuary of Isis** accessible over a small bridge. There is also a Christian basilica and public baths and, in the wider area, the remains of Hellenistic and Roman theatres.

Stop 2

The Archaeological Museum ⊖



The Archaeological Museum

Around 500m from the park, Dion’s Archaeological Museum is one of the most important in Greece, given the significance of the town. It contains the statues of the Sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos (those in the park are replicas) as well as statues of Isis, Dionysos and Aphrodite. You will also find a wide selection of smaller artefacts, including coins and vases. But perhaps the most intriguing exhibit is a **hydraulis**, a 1st-century BC wind instrument, similar to a church organ.

Stop 3

Litochoro

Litochoro

Your day ends in Litochoro, **the nearest town to Mt Olympus**. It manages to be both **mountainous and coastal** (being within touching distance of the Pieria coastline) and features Macedonian and neoclassical architecture. Wandering through cobbled alleyways and small squares (like Platanos Square), you'll find stone fountains and churches. And alongside the **Enipeas River** is a leafy municipal park. There are tavernas in the centre and along the riverbank serving traditional Macedonian food. And in summer months, head to Plaka beach. It's fully organised, with bars and restaurants.

DAY 2 • OVERVIEW

Vergina

107 km   Car, Foot   2

The Royal Tombs of Aigai, in Vergina, are one of the greatest burial sites from antiquity, containing the remains of Philip II (father of Alexander the Great) and other members of the great Macedonian dynasty. Your day ends in nearby Veria, a town with strong Byzantine influences.

Stop 1

The Royal Tombs ⊖

The Royal Tombs

This UNESCO-protected archaeological wonder preserves not just the palatial tombs of Philip II and other members of Macedonian royalty but also the integrity of a solemn burial mound. It contains **four palatial tombs**, including those of Philip II and Alexander the Great's teenage son, Alexander IV, and some of the most astonishing finds from antiquity – **the gold larnax containing Philip's bones** (emblazoned with Macedonian sun), his **massive armour** and **the golden wreath** he wore on his funeral pyre, appear almost luminous in the dimmed lighting of a museum that is within the burial tumulus. Around the mound are some 300 smaller burial sites, including the so-called **Cluster of the Queens**, where Philip's mother, Eurydice, and daughter, Thessaloniki, are buried.

Take a tour of the Royal Tombs of Aigai

Stop 2

Veria

Veria

The small city of Veria was founded in the 5th century BC, but its most striking legacy is from the 11th-14th centuries AD. Dozens of **churches** testify to its position as one of the most important cities of the Byzantine Empire. Also interesting is the **Jewish quarter** (known as *Barbouta*, after a fountain located there), dating from the 1850s. You will find an impressively decorated synagogue by the Tripotamos River. And in the **Kyriotissa district,** a maze of winding alleyways hides two-storey houses with characteristic overhangs. You'll find a selection of traditional tavernas and cafes on the river.

DAY 3 • OVERVIEW

Pella

100 km Car, Foot 3

Your third day takes you to the ancient capital of Macedonia. Pella is best known as **the birthplace of Alexander the Great,** eventually replacing Aigai as the site of the kingdom's principal palace and city. Your day ends in waterfall-filled Edessa.

Stop 1

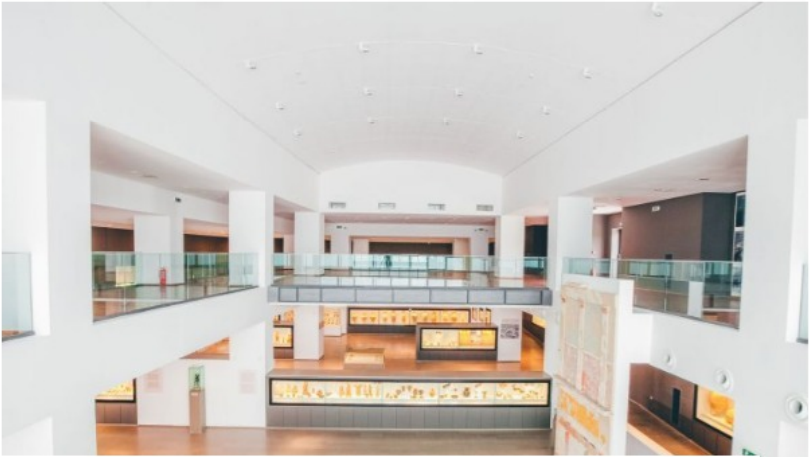
The archaeological site of Pella

The archaeological site of Pella

Though we are left with only the ground-level remains of the palatial complex and surrounding buildings, you'll be left in no doubt that Pella was the last word in ancient city planning. It was **far more than a royal palace**, with an agora and public and private buildings making it the political, economic and cultural centre of Greece. The city followed a Hippodamian grid plan of blocks and paved streets and had a sophisticated water supply and sewerage system. And Pella knew all about the finer things in life, with **Doric and Ionian embellishments** to buildings and the floors of the richest houses being **decorated with mosaics**.

Stop 2

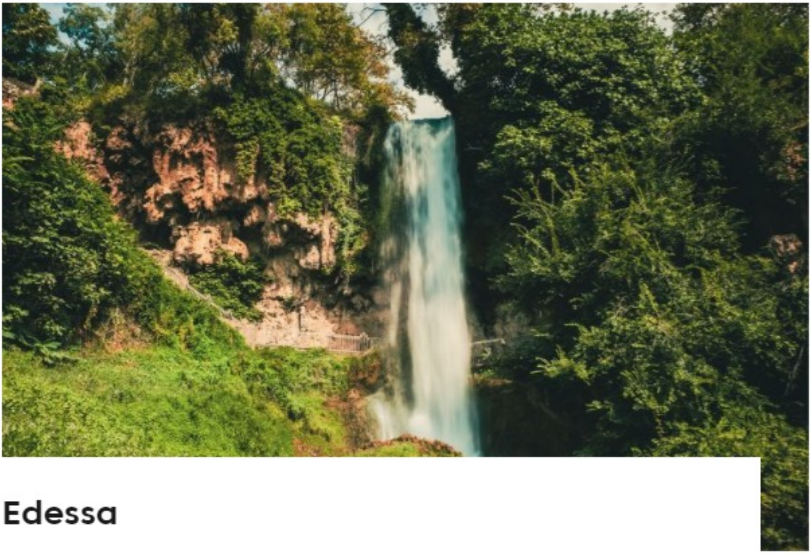
The Archaeological Museum ⊖



The Archaeological Museum

Completing your tour of ancient Pella is the on-site museum **housing many of the artefacts** from the city's heyday. The standout exhibits are **a marble head of Alexander the Great** and artefacts shedding light on **daily life in antiquity**, including a collection of intricate floor mosaics and 5m-tall wall decorations. There are also fascinating artefacts from the agora and **burial treasures**, as well as depictions of the palace revealing a layout of great **sophistication and artistry.**

Stop 3
Edessa



Edessa

Heading west, you reach Edessa, Greece's **city of waterfalls**. You can hear them before you see them, especially the 70m tall Karanos Waterfall (which has a footpath that takes you behind a thunderous curtain of water). There's an Open Air Water Museum, where you can learn about Edessa's once-prosperous water-powered textile industry, and a Folklore Museum. And your day ends in **Varosi** – a Christian district during Ottoman rule, with restored two-storey **traditional Macedonian houses** – at a *tsipouradiko* (*meze* restaurant) or *taverna*.

DAY 4 • OVERVIEW

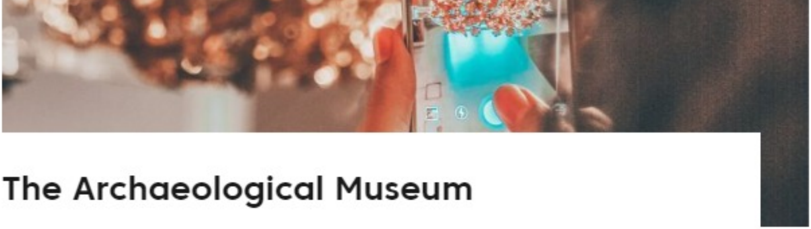
Thessaloniki

105 km Car, Foot 3

You head back to Thessaloniki today. **One day is barely enough** to do justice to this fascinating city, so feel free to extend your stay. But you're about to discover everything this fantastic city offers in terms of cultural wealth. Just be sure to make time to enjoy the famous food and nightlife scene. After all, culture comes in many forms.

Stop 1

The Archaeological Museum



The Archaeological Museum

Delve even **deeper into Macedonian history** with a visit to Thessaloniki's Archaeological Museum. And we mean deep! The museum's Petralona Hoard of bronze tools goes back to the 3rd millennium BC and you retrace the steps of the region's birth as an independent kingdom to when Thessaloniki was the seat of the eastern Roman Empire. Look out for the craftsmanship on the Macedonian tomb of Agia Parakaskevi and the intricate gold-work for which ancient Macedonians were famed – particularly in the **collection of gold wreaths**.

Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki

Stop 2

A cultural tour of Thessaloniki

⊖

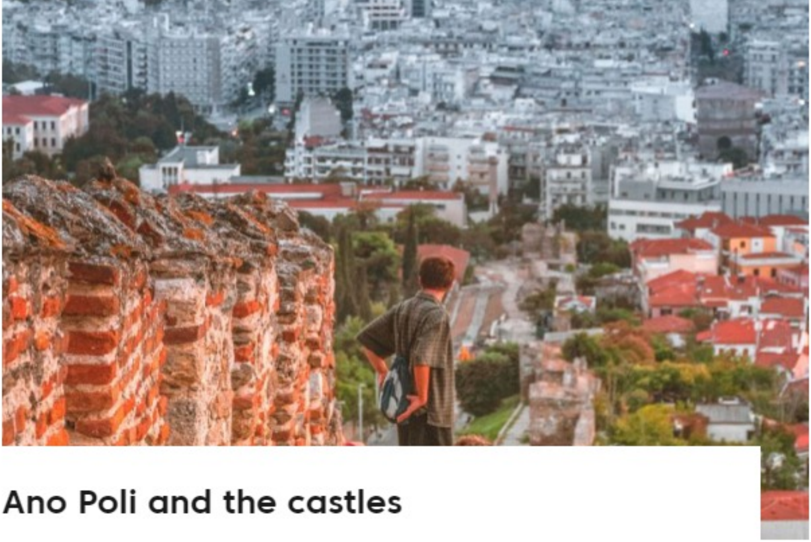
A cultural tour of Thessaloniki

Time to step into the streets of Thessaloniki and enjoy everything the city's diverse inhabitants have left us. The museum of the White Tower and nearby statue of a horse-mounted, battle-ready Alexander the Great are an obvious place to start. The Romans left us the **Galerian Complex** (including the Arch of Galerius, Octagon, Apsidal Hall and UNESCO-protected Rotunda) as well as their agora, while the Byzantines are represented through countless churches, including **Hagia Sophia** and **Agios Dimitrios** (also UNESCO World Heritage site monuments). And look out for the Ottoman influences in villas and **Bezesteni Market**.

Enjoy an open sights tour of Thessaloniki

Stop 3

Ano Poli and the castles



Ano Poli and the castles

Your day ends at the highest point of the city – the Ano Poli, or Upper Town. There are countless **gems hidden in the labyrinth of streets**, including the Byzantine **church of Hosios David** (with its fabulous murals) and the **Vlatadon Monastery** – both UNESCO-protected – and the Ottoman-era **Pasha's Gardens**. But the highlight up here is the **complex of Byzantine forts**, towers and walls – collectively known as the **Kastra** (Castles). The **Heptapyrgion** and **Trigoniou Tower** are musts, especially their views of the Thermaic Gulf. So once you're done, find yourself a traditional little taverna, ideally with a terrace view, and let the memories sink in.

DAY 5 • OVERVIEW

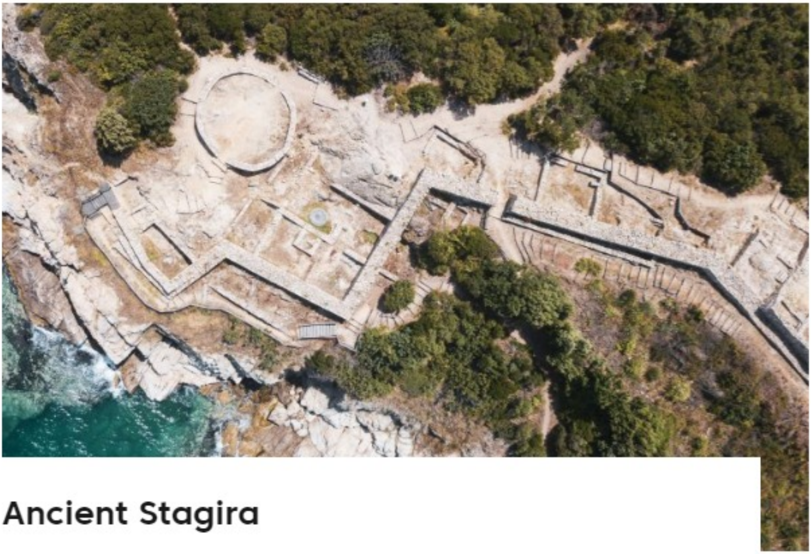
Ancient Stagira

211 km Car, Foot 3

Your final day takes you to the eastern coast of Halkidiki and Ancient Stagira, famous as **the birthplace of Aristotle**. You explore the legacy of not just one of the greatest philosophers of antiquity, but **the tutor of Alexander the Great** in matters of war, morals, logic and art. And once you're done in Ancient Stagira, you've more than earned yourself some time on the beach.

Stop 1

Ancient Stagira



Ancient Stagira

The ancient city of Stagira was founded in the 7th century BC, with Aristotle being born here three centuries later. But Stagira wasn't just important in antiquity, with the walls you find in the archaeological site being from Byzantine times. Also worth visiting is the **nearby**

Aristotle's Park, in which there are **instruments** (a prism, optical discs, a compass, a sundial, parabolic refractors and wind turbines) that allow you to test the effects of what Aristotle called '*the Naturals*'.

Follow in the footsteps of Aristotle

Stop 2

Nearby beaches

Nearby beaches

With all that culture under your belt, the rest of your day is spent **on the beach**. You can easily walk (or drive) from the archaeological site to **Sykia beach**, a charming little cove next door. Or head a bit further to **Olymbiada**, where there are more facilities and you can combine swimming with a **seafood meal in a waterfront taverna**. And let's not forget, you're in Halkidiki now, famous for its coastline. So if you want more **sunshine and sand**, you can extend your stay and search out more beaches here or down the Sithonia or Kassandra peninsulas. Alternatively, it's time to head back to Thessaloniki.

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