



TREK THE BALKANS 1-7 JULY 2028

Event Pack



Welcome to your Trek the Balkans Event Pack!

Here, you'll find everything you need to know about the incredible adventure you are about to embark on.

Contents

1. General Facts and Figures
2. Training
3. Support, Health and Vaccinations
4. Packing Checklist
5. Travel Insurance
6. Travel Requirements and Money
7. Day to Day in the Balkans
8. Food, Drink, Accommodation
9. Weather and WiFi
10. Fundraising
11. Extending your stay

Thank You From Velindre

You are helping raise vital funds for the Hospital of Hope, enabling life-changing care, research, and support for patients and families across South East Wales and beyond.

Every step you take, every penny you raise will help make a real difference.

Inside this pack, you'll find everything you need to feel confident and prepared for the trek, so please take time to read through it carefully.





General Information

Four countries. Three incredible summits. One unforgettable Balkans adventure. Memories that last a lifetime.

Our Three Summits

Gjeravica - 2,656m / 8,714ft - Kosovo

Zla Kolata (Kollata e Kege) - 2,534m / 8,314ft - Montenegro

Mount Korab - 2,764m / 9,068ft - Albania & North Macedonia

Kosovo

Capital: Pristina

Population: Approx. 1.6 million

Currency: Euro (€)

Highest Peak: Gjeravica

Languages: Albanian and Serbian

Fun Fact: Kosovo is the youngest country in Europe in terms of its declaration of independence, with a mix of cultural influences.

Montenegro

Capital: Podgorica

Population: Approx. 623,000

Currency: Euro (€)

Highest Peak: Zla Kolata

Languages: Montenegrin

Fun Fact: Despite being one of Europe's smallest countries, Montenegro has extraordinary mountain scenery at its borders.

Albania

Capital: Tirana

Population: Approx. 2.35 million

Currency: Albanian lek (ALL)

Highest Peak: Mount Korab

Languages: Albanian

Fun Fact: Albania is one of Europe's most rapidly emerging adventure destinations with spectacular mountains and valleys.

North Macedonia

Capital: Skopje

Population: Approx. 1.82 million

Currency: Macedonian denar (MKD)

Highest Peak: Mount Korab

Languages: Macedonian

Fun Fact: North Macedonia is at the heart of the Balkans, known for dramatic mountains, clear lakes, and rich cultural heritage.



Trek Grade and Training

The more you train before the trek, the more you will enjoy it. With preparation, the right kit, and a positive attitude, the rewards are exceptional.

Grade:

The trails are established and generally well-marked, and the trek is not considered technically difficult. However, **this a tough and demanding mountain trek**, and should not be underestimated.

You will encounter a wide variety of mountain terrain, including steep ascents and descents, rocky sections, uneven grounds, steps and loose stones.

Walking days can be long, with several hours spent on your feet and significant elevation gain and loss. The cumulative effect of walking day after day can be as challenging as any individual section of route.

You do not need to be an experienced mountaineer, but you should be comfortable walking for long periods in mountainous terrain in a range of weather and trail conditions.

Good preparation is key!

Training:

Hills and Mountain Walking

- ▶ Walk outdoors on hills and varied terrain
- ▶ Include plenty of ascent and descent, gradually increasing distance and elevation
- ▶ Aim to complete several longer 2-3 day training walks
- ▶ Practise walking with your backpack, gradually increasing the weight

Building Stamina

- ▶ Walking, running, cycling, swimming, rowing, cross-training and stair climbing help increase fitness and endurance.

Strength & Conditioning

- ▶ Focus on legs, glutes, core and back
- ▶ Use exercises such as squats, lunges, step-ups, calf raises and controlled downhill movements
- ▶ Don't forget mobility and stretching - good flexibility, balance and stability can help you move more confidently.



Training Opportunities

Velindre will be hosting a number of guided training walks accompanied by ROC Adventures who are qualified mountaineers.

This trek is graded as tough, making preparation a key part of the adventure. To help you feel confident and ready for the challenge ahead, training is essential.

In the lead-up to the overseas event, we'll be hosting a series of training sessions in partnership with ROC Outdoor Adventures, who have supported our training programme for the past three years.

These sessions are a fantastic opportunity to build your fitness, gain valuable trekking experience, and get to know your fellow participants, so we'd strongly encourage you to join us whenever you can.

We want everyone to get the most out of this incredible experience and enjoy every step of the journey. The training sessions are designed to help ensure the group feels comfortable with the demands of the trek, as some days will involve covering significant distances within set timeframes.

By preparing together beforehand, we can give everyone the best chance of having a safe, enjoyable, and rewarding adventure.





Support and Health Info

Although this is a remote mountain trek, you'll be fully supported throughout the journey by our experienced UK and local teams.

Support Teams:

Two Ultimate Challenges Tour Managers will accompany the group, overseeing the day-to-day logistics and supporting participants along the route.

UK Doctor(s) will travel with the group and provide medical support.

Experienced local mountain guides will accompany the groups. They have excellent knowledge of the local area, trails and conditions, and will lead the way.

Communications equipment will be carried by the local guides, including mobile phones and/or radios, to maintain communication.

A satellite phone will be carried for emergency communication in remote areas

Luggage transfers will be arranged each day, meaning you only need to carry a small day rucksack containing essentials.

Health and Vaccinations:

You must seek professional medical advice from your GP or local travel clinic.

You should bring your own regular medication with enough supplies for the whole trip and a small first aid kit. You'll need to complete a detailed medical form, covering any pre-existing conditions and current medication.

These details will be passed to the doctor accompanying the group, who may wish to contact you prior to the event to clarify any medical conditions or requirements.





Packing Checklist

Your luggage allowance for your flight to Pristina is likely to be around 20-23kg. **Please note the max allowance on the trek is 10-12kg** meaning you will have to leave some luggage at the hotel in Pristina and be reunited with it at the final night hotel ahead of the celebratory dinner

Equipment:

- Trekking rucksacks (30-35 litre)
- Kit bag for transporting main luggage (max. 10kg-12kg)
- Plastic bags/dry bags
- Sunglasses (essential)
- Sun cream (small bottle)
- Lip protection
- Sleeping bag liner
- Water bottles (min. 2-3 litres)
- Head torch with spare batteries
- Travel towel
- Trekking poles (essential)

Hiking Boots:

It is imperative that you get your walking boots well in advance of the trip - to break them in and get your feet used to them. Walking boots with tough, moulded soles are the best all-round solution. Your boots need to protect the feet, keep them warm and dry, provide grip, and support the ankles.

We recommend getting your boots properly fitted at an outdoor store and buying one size larger than normal.

Clothing:

- Leather/waterproof ankle-high walking/hiking boots with thick soles + spare laces (worn in)
- Waterproof trousers + jacket with hood (essential, both as light as possible, not insulated)
- 2 / 3 pairs of specialist trekking socks (not woolly socks)
- Underwear + one thermal set
- Trekking trousers + shorts (lightweight + quick drying)
- 2 non-cotton trekking t-shirts (breathable fabric)
- Lightweight fleece (mid-layer)
- Warm jacket (light as possible, needs to fit under waterproof jacket)
- Warm hat (lightweight, woolly)
- Gloves (lightweight, waterproof)
- Sun hat/cap
- Shoes for the evening (trainers)
- Sweatshirt + warm trousers for the evening
- Travelling clothes
- Celebration dinner clothes





Packing Checklist cont.

Top tip: It's a good idea to wear your hiking boots on the plane, just incase any luggage goes astray on the flight out!

Health and Hygiene:

- Personal toiletries
- Small personal medical kit (antiseptic cream, plasters, blister treatment, knee support, pain killers, insect repellent, sting relief, diareze, Imodium, and re-hydration salts)
- Water purification tablets
- Mini pack of wet wipes
- Blister kit (enough for whole trip)
- Toilet paper / nappy sacks
- Normal medication

Miscellaneous:

- Passport (to be carried whilst trekking, needs to be kept dry)
- Cash (for tip at the end of the trip, refreshments at hotels)
- Isotonic drink powder or tablets (optional)
- Energy bars or tablets / chocolate / nuts
- Earplugs (in case of snorers!)
- Camera / batteries / memory cards / adaptors / power banks
- Photocopy of important documents (insurance details / passport)
- If you wear contact lenses, it is advisable to also bring your glasses
- Credit card (for emergencies)
- Small tupperware (for packed lunch each day)





Travel Insurance

Please be aware that it is your responsibility to ensure that you are correctly covered for the trip (which should include evacuation and repatriation).

Travel Insurance Advice:

We recommend you take out travel insurance to make sure you are fully covered for the event, and make sure to clarify its precise nature to your insurers (an escorted trekking tour up to 2,800m). If you have an existing policy, we recommend confirming it meets the trip requirements.

We recommend you are insured for the full duration of your trip. The policy should be taken out prior to the departure date, and should not cease until you return. As a minimum, the cover should include: COVID-19 (pre-departure and whilst overseas), air evacuation, medical expenses, and repatriation. Failure to inform the insurance company of any pre-existing medical conditions may invalidate your policy or subsequent claims.

If you choose not to take out the appropriate travel insurance, and you fall ill or are involved in an accident, you will not be covered for those associated costs.

GHIC - European Health Insurance Card (free):

The old E1-11 European Health Insurance card has now been replaced by the GHIC card. This gives you the right to access state-provided healthcare during a temporary stay in the EU.

If you still have a E1-11 card with a valid expiry date, this is still valid. Once expired, you can replace it with a new GHIC.

Please ensure you apply online and bring this with you. Please note: This does not replace Travel Insurance, and is best used in conjunction with it.





Travel and Money

Making sure you have the correct travel requirements is essential - plus around 250-300 Euros spending money.

Requirements for Travel:

Passports

Participants must have at least 6 months validity on their passports from the date of return to the UK (please check for all other nationalities). For UK passport holders - please note: If you have additional months on your passport this will not be accepted.

FCDO Advice

We recommend that you periodically review the travel advice issued by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, which relates to all aspects of your destination.

Visas

Visas are not needed for UK passport holders. All other nationalities should check on the relevant embassy website.

Money:

Currency

Euros in Kosovo and Montenegro, Lek in Albania, Denar in Macedonia, however you can use Euro freely. Credit cards and Cash machines are only available in Peja, but it is advisable you bring Euros in cash (small denominations).

Things To Buy

The accommodation each night has beer and other soft drinks available. Some of the guesthouses may have wine and raki available too. (You can pay in cash/Euros).

Tips and Gratuities

Our local crew and guides work extremely hard on the trek. If at the end of the challenge participants would like to show their appreciation, we suggest a tip of 50 Euros per person.





Day to Day in The Balkans

Each day will follow a similar rhythm, but the experience will vary depending on terrain, distance, and weather - which makes for a great adventure!

A Typical Day

Each day will start with an early breakfast prepared by your guesthouse hosts, before we set off on the trail at around 7:00am-8:00am. Start times may vary slightly depending on the day's route, weather and conditions.

Lunch will usually be a packed lunch prepared by you at breakfast and carried in your day rucksack. There will be regular opportunities to stop, rest, refuel and enjoy the scenery along the way.

Once we arrive at our next guesthouse, you'll have time to settle into your room, shower, relax, and recover after the day's walking. There will usually be the opportunity to buy a local beer or soft drink, and spend some time reflecting on the day's adventure with the group.

Dinner will be prepared by your guesthouse hosts and will typically be a hearty, home-cooked meal. After dinner, we'll have a short briefing covering the following day's route, weather, timings and anything else you need to know before setting off the next morning.





Food, Drink, and Accommodation

Local cuisine and incredible culture!

Food:

The food in this part of the world will be something you will eagerly anticipate at the end of each day. Food is freshly cooked and has a mix of Balkan, Turkish, and European influence. At the guesthouses the breakfasts are simple, homemade bread with locally grown vegetables, dairy products, and eggs. Dinners include traditional soups, meat dishes, vegetables, pies.

Guesthouses also will provide you with a packed lunch each day - often including a sandwich with feta cheese and vegetables, fruit and a sweet cake. Everyone will be required to prepare their own sandwiches each morning, which you will carry in your rucksack.

Vegetarians and other dietary requirements are generally not be a problem as the homestay families can provide alternatives. However, some choices are basic and limited, so you may prefer to bring some items from home.

Drink:

Water is provided from mountain streams or in guesthouses tap water is drinkable. However, if you are concerned about drinking untreated water, we recommend you take water treatment tablets with you. Bottled water is available to buy at the hotels in Peja.

Accommodation:

The accommodation on trek will include simple homestay / guesthouse / lodge-style with simple bathroom facilities. Rooms are likely to accommodate between two to five people per room. It may be necessary for male and female groups to share the room (unless noted otherwise on your request), but not guaranteed in each guesthouse. It always depends on availability of rooms.

Sheets, pillows and blankets, towels, shampoo, warm water, and other basic services are provided, but it's recommended to pack a travel towel and sleep liner just in case, and for extra comfort.



Weather and WiFi

Enjoy the opportunity to immerse yourself in nature, mountains and the elements - and switch off from technology!

Weather Conditions:

It's impossible to predict the precise weather conditions you will encounter during the trip, as mountains are notorious for creating their own localised weather.

Summer weather is generally excellent, with hot days, clear skies, and little rain, and daytime temperatures in the lower valleys typically range between 15°C and 30°C.

Temperatures drop in the evenings in the mountains. In late September-early October conditions are a little cooler and pleasant for trekking, typical around 18°C during the day.

There is always the chance of rain and colder nights at higher elevations. There is also a small possibility of early snowfall on higher passes.



WiFi, Mobile, and Charging:

Connectivity will be limited, particularly while out on the trails. Some guesthouses will have WiFi and plug sockets available, but connection may slow or unreliable and charging points may be limited.

There will be little or no mobile signal in remote mountain areas, so please don't rely on your phone for communication.

We recommend arranging an eSIM or suitable roaming package before departure if your phone is compatible. Check with your mobile provider regarding coverage and roaming in Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia, as these countries may not all be included in standard European roaming packages.

Bring a power bank and make sure your phone and other essential devices are fully charged each morning.



Fundraising Support

Our experienced Fundraising Team will support you at every stage of your fundraising journey, helping you plan, deliver and promote your activities.

How much do you need to raise?

To secure a place on the trip each participant will need to pay a non refundable entry fee of £250, and raise a minimum of £4,500 in sponsorship.

80% of your fundraising target must be reached by **1st April - 12 weeks before departure**, as this is when the charity receive the invoice from the tour operators.

Whilst we understand this is a lot of money, our incredible Fundraising Team support over 100 overseas participants each year. With the help of our tools, resources, and expertise, we are more than confident that we can help you reach the finish line!

Although your initial registration fee will meet some of the costs of the trip, a percentage will also have to come out of the money you raise - with an event of this size, this is unavoidable. This means that each person who sponsors you must realise that a percentage of your fundraising will be used to cover these costs.

Therefore, when you are organising any fundraising events please ensure that any promotional materials clearly state that the funds raised will be used for the purposes of the overseas challenge you are engaged in, to ensure the person sponsoring or donating is aware that a percentage will be used towards the trip's costs.

If you feel unhappy about this, you can speak to us about paying for a section or all the costs of the trek yourself and fundraise for the remainder of the target.





Fundraising Support cont.

Find out more about what is included within the trip, covering the costs yourself, how Gift Aid works, and fundraising for multiple events.

What's included in the trip?

- Group transfers to/from UK airport
- International return flights
- All food (unless otherwise stated)
- Local English-speaking head guide and support staff
- Accommodation
- Drinking water on challenge
- Internal road transfers
- Celebration dinner
- UK Doctor whilst on the challenge
- Lead charity staff on challenge

Covering the cost yourself

Most participants pay the initial £250 non refundable deposit themselves and then fundraise the remaining total required for the challenge however, you may wish to cover the total costs yourself. Should you want to follow this option, you will be able to count gift aid towards your final total (subject to the gift aid being successfully screened by HMRC). To find out more about this option, contact:

✉ amy.penketh@wales.nhs.uk

Gift Aid

You can claim Gift Aid on a fundraising target that includes travel, provided that the donor pays the cost of flights and accommodation themselves. If you are not paying for the trip costs yourself, gift aid is not able to count towards your fundraising total. When planning towards your fundraising target, please remember it can take 8-10 weeks for a Gift Aid claim to be processed and for Velindre University NHS Trust Charity to receive the money from HMRC.

Carrying Funds Over

Funds raised under a specific event and/or event logo must be allocated to that event's fundraising total. Donations cannot be transferred between events unless this has been pre-agreed, in writing, with Velindre University NHS Trust's Charity and clearly communicated to donors in advance. To fundraise for a separate event, participants must create a new fundraising page (e.g., JustGiving) and include full details of the separate event.



Fundraising Support cont.

We are here to support you every step of the way - just as you will be supporting us by raising vital funds for the Hospital of Hope.

Fundraising Process

We will supply you with a fundraising guide with useful tips and ideas to help you through your fundraising journey. It is important to read this before beginning your fundraising.

Following this, it is a good idea to start your fundraising as soon as possible, as this will allow you the maximum amount of time to reach, and hopefully exceed your target.

We will be communicating regularly with all participants at checkpoints throughout the year to give us a good guide on who might need some extra support along the way.

If you are not quite reaching checkpoints, please don't be alarmed if we reach out to you for a chat. We really want you to succeed and will support in the best possible way we can.

If you do not feel confident in reaching your fundraising target by the fundraising deadline, we will be happy to discuss your options.

Your donations could help fund...

- ✔ Over £1.5 million each year dedicated to pioneering research and clinical trials.
- Did you know?** Velindre Cancer Charity currently contribute funding to over 40 active clinical trials.
- ✔ 50% of all Specialist Nurses at Velindre Cancer Centre.
- ✔ An entire team of psychologists and counsellors at Velindre Cancer Centre, including a dedicated staff psychologist.
- ✔ Specialist education books, lion teddies and worry monsters designed to help families explain a cancer diagnosis to their children.
- ✔ Two dedicated family and relative rooms providing a safe space for quality family time in a non-clinical setting.





Thank You for Reading!

This is set to be an epic adventure - and with the right equipment, training, and advice, we'll make memories that will last a lifetime!

Extending your Stay:

If you would like to stay on after the trip, please contact Ultimate Challenges:

☎ 029 7386 4680

Flight extensions are subject to availability and allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. A £95 administration fee per person applies, plus any additional airfare above the original group fare.

Please request your extension as early as possible and no later than 3 months before departure.

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Some information in this pack is subject to change.

Contact the Charity

☎ 029 2031 6211

✉ info@velindrefundraising.com

🌐 www.velindrefundraising.com

