



TOURIST RESOURCES OF THE SKOPJE REGION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTHERN MACEDONIA

Abstract: The scientific paper presents the geographical position, climate, hydrography, traffic and traffic routes and tourist resources of the Skopje region located in the Republic of Northern Macedonia and its connection with other tourist regions in the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the Balkans and Europe. From the tourist resources of the Skopje region are first presented the archeological sites of the city of Skupi, the Skopje aqueduct, the stone bridge built in the XV century and is a link between the new and the old part of the city of Skopje, then the old Skopje Bazaar which is the closest destination regardless of which side arrives in the city of Skopje with its markets and various old crafts that in the past and today have played a major role in attracting various traders from the Balkans and beyond with its markets and fairs. The scientific paper also presents the Monastery of St. Panteleimon with the monastery church of the same name located in the village of Gorno Nerezi on the mountain Vodno 8 km. In the Skopje region there are 80 archeological sites and 19 sites in the city of Skopje. In the Skopje region there are 128 churches, 7 monasteries and 18 mosques from the Ottoman period. Further in the scientific paper is presented the Mustafa Pasha Mosque which was built in 1492. The scientific paper also presents the Matka canyon which is located on the river Treska, a right tributary of the river Vardar and is located 17 km southwest of Skopje.

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Introduction: The Skopje region is one of the eight statistical regions in the Republic of Northern Macedonia. This region is located in the Republic of Northern Macedonia and borders with: Vardar region, Polog region, northeast region, east region and southwest region. The Skopje region covers the Skopje valley, and its area is 1,812 km² or 7.3% of the total area of the Republic of Northern Macedonia. The Skopje region has a total population of 571,040 inhabitants and thus the Skopje region is the most populous region in the Republic of Northern Macedonia. The largest ethnic group is the Macedonians, but in this region there are also: Albanians, Roma, Serbs, Bosniaks and Turks.

1. Geographical position of the Skopje region

The Skopje valley is bordered by mountain ranges, Skopska Crna Gora to the north, Gradishtanska Planina to the east, the Mokra Planina massif to the south and the branches of Karadzica, Suva Gora and Zeden to the west. The Skopje region is directly connected with the beautiful gorge valleys of the river Vardar, such as the Dervenska and Taor gorge, the Shishevka

gorge on the river Treska, the Kachanica gorge on the river Lepenec and the Badarska gorge on the river Pchinja.



Map 1. Geographical position of the Skopje region in the Republic of Northern Macedonia.

2. Climate in the Skopje region

The Skopje tourist region is characterized by an average annual temperature of 12°C and an average annual rainfall of 500 mm. The region has a continental climate with small penetrations of Mediterranean influences, and in the higher areas a mountainous climate prevails.

3. Hydrography: Rivers and lakes in the Skopje region

In the Skopje region, in a small area, there are several large rivers that pass through many picturesque gorge valleys. The most important rivers are: Vardar, Lepenec, Pchinja, Kadina Reka, Markova Reka and Treska. Of special interest are the lakes: Matka and Kozjak in the gorge-canyon valley of the river Treska, then the thermal mineral bath Katlanovo, the mineral springs in Volkovo and other hydrographic objects.

4. Traffic and traffic routes in the Skopje region

There are several traffic routes in the Skopje region. One leads from Belgrade in the Republic of Serbia to Thessaloniki in the Republic of Greece, the second leads from the Adriatic Sea to Thessaloniki, the third leads from Kriva Palanka and Kumanovo in the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the fourth goes from Struga-Ohrid and Debar to Skopje. In the context of tourism is the railway traffic and Skopje International Airport managed by the Turkish company TAF. The Skopje region, which is located at such an important crossroads, besides Skopje as the capital of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, also has 120 rural settlements.

5. History and culture of the Skopje region

In the Skopje region there are about 80 archeological sites, 19 sites in the city of Skopje by settlements as solitary finds, settlements, necropolises from Neolithic, Copper, Iron, Early Ancient, Late Ancient, Roman and Middle Ages, 128 churches, 7 monasteries, 18 mosques and a number of cultural and historical events and monuments.

5.1. Skupi Archaeological Site

The city of Skupi dates back to the Roman period. The site has been known since the end of the 19th century. In 1883. The English explorer Arthur Evans stayed in Skopje and registered the Roman ramparts on Zajcev Reed, which he explained as the remains of the Acropolis of Skupi. Archaeological excavations at the Skupi site began incidentally before World War II. The Museum of the City of Skopje, as the owner of the site, started the systematic archeological excavations in 1966. which with smaller interruptions, are continuously performed until today. So far, the walls, the theater, the civil basilica, the city villa, the city bath, the street - cardo, the Christian basilica, parts of the eastern and western necropolis have been fully or partially explored.



Figure 1. Plan-sketch and remains of the city of Skupi.

5.2. Skopje Aqueduct- (Junist Aqueduct)

The Skopje aqueduct is an archeological site located near the village of Vizbegovo, near the city of Skopje. The date of its construction was not known until recently. It was considered to date from the ancient Roman Empire or the medieval period of the Empire, in the time of Justinian I, from 527-554, hence this aqueduct is also called Justinian's aqueduct. According to these opinions, he was connected with the city of Skupi. It is believed that water was carried through the aqueduct from the Lavovec spring in the village of Gluvo in Skopska Crna Gora, to the "artillery barracks", the Mustafa Pasha Mosque, to the former Turkish Uqumat, Kurshumli-an and the Siya Bey Mosque. The water was transported through the aqueduct through pipes that went from west to east.



Figure 2. Skopje Aqueduct (Junist Aqueduct).

5.3. Stone bridge

The stone bridge in Skopje is one of the most important sights of the city.

It is located in the center of the city and connects Macedonia Square and the Old Skopje Bazaar. There are two assumptions about the construction of the bridge. According to the first confirmed by archeological excavations, the stone bridge was built in the VI century, immediately after the catastrophic earthquake of 518, during the construction activities that were undertaken throughout the Empire by Emperor Justinian I. According to the second assumption, which is backed by historical sources, the bridge was built during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror (1444-1446; 1451-1481), between 1451 and 1469. Today, the stone bridge is considered a symbol of the city of Skopje and is the main element of the coat of arms of Skopje, which in turn is painted on the flag of Skopje in yellow-gold color. In its original form, the bridge had 13 arches, with a total length of 213.85m. and a width of 6.33 m. It was built of travertine blocks lined with great mastery and precision, interconnected by iron clamps, fastened with cast lead, crushed stone, and mortar used inside the pillars. Some of them - such as the middle pillar, which in its upper part ends with a decorative niche, have large rooms with a dual function inside, to reduce the load on the pillar, but also to serve as rooms with guns.



Figure 3. Stone Bridge and the Coat of Arms of the City of Skopje.

5.4. Old Skopje Bazaar

The Old Skopje Bazaar is a commercial and cultural-historical part of the city of Skopje and one of the biggest sights of the city. It is located in the area from the Stone Bridge to Bit-pazar and from the Kale to the Serava River. According to the administrative division of the city, the area of the bazaar is located on the territory of the municipalities of Cair and Centar. The first documented data on the existence of a shopping center governing the city of Skopje, the place rapidly grew into the largest shopping part of the city, which housed about 30 mosques, numerous palaces and inns, as well as other Turkish monuments. The bazaar was badly damaged by the earthquakes of 1555 and 1963, the fire of 1689, and the two world wars, after which it was rebuilt several times. But, despite the damage suffered, the bazaar is the only cultural monument in the Republic of Northern Macedonia, which recognizes the heritage of many cultures and civilizations that participated in its creation. Ottoman architecture prevails in the bazaar, although remnants of Byzantine architecture are noticeable, and lately the application of modernist architecture has been noticed. Many of the buildings that once served as overnight accommodation for trade travelers or as hammams for deputies and managers in the city have been repurposed and serve as a venue for cultural and artistic events. There are several mosques, turbines, two churches and a clock tower in the area of the bazaar and its surroundings, and in the second half of the XX century the buildings that make up the Museum of Macedonia and the building of the Museum of Contemporary Art were built. The site of today's bazaar dates back to the 12th century.



Figure 4. The Old Skopje Bazaar.

5.5. Matka

Matka is a canyon on the river Treska, a right tributary of the river Vardar, covers an area of about 5,000 hectares and is located 17 km southwest of Skopje. According to the morphogenetic characteristics, it is a penetrating gorge. Matka is the oldest artificial lake in the Republic of Northern Macedonia whose accumulation was built in 1938. It was obtained by partitioning the river Treska with the dam "St. Andreja" and creating an artificial accumulation in the Matka canyon. The main inflow of water is the river Treska with a maximum length of 7 km., And the largest width is 120 m., With an area of 0.25 km². The lake is stocked and often used for fishing. In this lake is the underwater cave Vrelo, one of the deepest caves in Europe, which has a depth of more than 203 m., This canyon is very interesting and attractive for visiting both domestic and foreign tourists in the Republic of Northern Macedonia. The karst forms and 10 caves with a length of 20 to 176 meters and the two precipices with a depth of up to 35 meters deserve special attention in this area.

Matka is one of the largest refuge centers during the glacial period, which contributed to the presence of many relict and endemic plants and animals in this area today. Of the total number of 1,000 plant species, 20% are endemic or relict. Of the tertiary relics, the Koshanin violet and the natalie ramonda are more important. Two new species of real spiders and five fake scorpions have been discovered at the Matka site. 119 species of diurnal and 140 species of moths are registered in the canyon. It is important to note that 77 species of Balkan endemic small butterflies are found in Matka Canyon, and another 18 species are new to science. Within the canyon is the speleological park "Jovica Grozdanovski", named after the tragically killed climber.

The park consists of three caves, as well as one underwater cave.



Figure 5. Matka Canyon.

Due to the peculiarities of the terrain and the difficult accessibility that offered greater security, in the past in the Matka canyon were built a large number of churches and monasteries and other sacred buildings. Due to the large number of churches and monasteries, Matka is also called Mount Athos. Today there are most churches from the medieval period, most of them are completely preserved, and some are in ruins or there are only their foundations.

In the Matka canyon there are the following churches and monasteries: "Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God", Monastery "St. Nikola" Shishevski Monastery, church "St. Andreja", church "St. Spas" with remains of the early Christian churches "Holy Trinity" and "St. Holy Week. Besides the religious buildings, high in the Matka canyon, there are the remains of the former medieval fortress Markov Grad. It was built as an escape for the population and the monastery churches, at the time of the arrival of the Ottomans.



Figure 6. The Monastery of St. Andrej - Matka.

5.6. The Church of St. Panteleimon

It is located in the village of Gorno Nerezi, on the mountain Vodno, 8 km southwest of Skopje. The monastery complex is fenced with high walls, and in it are the church and the monastery lodgings. On the walls of this cultural monument is preserved a fresco painting, Byzantine painting from the time of the Komnini dynasty. The frescoes on the vault of the church were erected by the Byzantine prince Alexei Angel, son of Constantine Angel and Theodora, daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus. The church, according to its dimensions, belongs to the order of the smaller churches of the type inscribed cross in a rectangular space, ie a combination with a free cross. For the construction of the church, ordinary crushed stone was used, taken out in the vicinity of the monastery and bricks, which were masterfully turned into polychrome surfaces, which emphasizes the impression that the building grew from a monolithic wall, which ends with a larger octagonal and four smaller four-sided domes. From the time the church was built in 1164 to 1555, when one of the strongest earthquakes occurred in this area, the monastery was completely preserved. It is not known what the old monastery quarters were and how much they were damaged, but the church is known to have lost the central dome in which, presumably, Jesus Christ the Almighty was painted, with the figures of the prophets flanked on the sides of the eight windows. Some of the vaults, in which compositions illustrating the Great Feasts were painted, were also damaged. Let us mention that in the Skopje diocese in the Skopje region there are a total of 128 churches and 7 monasteries:

- *St. Andreja Monastery* on Lake Matka built in 1389.
- *Gornjanski monastery* in the village of Gornjane, the church dates back to 1307.
- *Kucevishki monastery* in the village of Kucevishte, the church of the monastery dates back to the 14th century.



Figure 7. The Church of St. Panteleimon.

- *Monastery "St. Nikola"* - in the village of Ljubanci on the Skopska Crna Gora Mountain, renovated in 1847.
- *Ormanski Monastery*, another name Monastery "Holy 40 Martyrs", the church is newly built.
- *Monastery "Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God"* - in the village of Pobožje, built in the 14th century.
- *Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God* in Novo Lisice, built in 2010.

5.7. Mosques from the Ottoman period

There are 18 mosques from the Ottoman period in the Skopje region, these religious buildings are a real cultural treasure today in attracting tourists from the Republic of Turkey to the city of Skopje.

5.7.1. Mustafa Pasha Mosque

Mustafa Pasha Mosque is in Skopje, which is located on the stretch between Kurshumli an, the church "St. Spas" and the Kale. The mosque was built in 1492, as a legacy of the vizier Mustafa Pasha, in whose honor it received its name. Historically, the building included a turbe, fountain, imaret and madrasa, of which today are preserved the tomb of Mustafa Pasha, the sarcophagus of his daughter Umi and the fountain in the courtyard of the mosque, as well as the remains of tombstones and the imaret and madrasa. The mosque was built in 1492, as a legacy of Mustafa Pasha, who was the vizier of Sultans Bayezid II and Selim I and held high positions in the Ottoman Empire. He owned a large property in Rumelia and four villages around Skopje: Bulachani, Batinci, Rastak and Creshevo. He was the son of Abdullah, had two wives, both named Khurshid, and four daughters, Hani, Umi, Shah Zaman and Huma. In Skopje, with his own funds, he built a mosque and a mosque, and in the mosque there were residential buildings in which the clergy lived. Evliya Çelebi, in his travel notes, noticed the existence of a madrasa of Mustafa Pasha in Skopje. From the marble slab above the front door, on which is written a text in Arabic script, it is learned that the building was built on the foundations of a medieval church. Unlike other buildings in and around the bazaar, the Mustafa Pasha Mosque was not severely damaged by the 1963 earthquake, but some reconstruction work was carried out after it. The last renovation was completed in 2011, and a grand delegation from Turkey, led by Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdog, attended the grand opening of the mosque. The construction of the mosque is a characteristic representative of the early Constantinople architecture. Its base is square and is covered with a dome, whose diameter is 16.3 m. The dome was built on trumpets which are decorated with Arabic and on the left side of which are motifs painted from the time of the construction of the mosque, while on the right side are newer and without any special artistic value.

There are 18 mosques from the Ottoman period in Skopje and they are:

- *Arasta Mosque* built in the 15th century.



Figure 8. Arasta Mosque and the fountain in the courtyard of the mosque.

- *Burmali Mosque* built in 1495.



Figure 9. Burmali Mosque.

- *Dukandzik Mosque* built in 1549/1550.



Figure 10. Dukandzik Mosque.

- *Isa Bey Mosque* built in 1475.



Figure 11. Isa Bey Mosque.

- *Ishaq-bey Mosque* built in 1438.



Figure 12. Ishaq Bey Mosque.

- *Yahya Pasha Mosque* built in 1504.



Figure 13. Yahya Pasha Mosque.

- *Yigit Pasha Mosque* built in 1445.

- *Murat Pasha Mosque* built in 1802/1803.

- *Sultan Murat Mosque* built in 1436.
- *Tutunsuz Mosque* built in the 17th century.
- *Hadji-Kasam mosque* built in the 15th century from 1489-1490.
- *Hussein Shah Mosque* built in the middle of the 16th century from 1553 to 1566.
- *Ibni Pajko Mosque* The mosque is mentioned until 1946/1947.
- *Kazanjiler Mosque* built in the 17th century and destroyed in the 1963 earthquake.
- *Kjose Kadi Mosque* built in the 18th century.
- *Haji Balaban Mosque* built in the 15th century in 1440.
- *Hudaverdi Mosque* built in the late 15th and early 16th century.

Conclusion:

According to the results of the scientific paper, we conclude that the Skopje region is one of the most developed regions in the Republic of Northern Macedonia. It is the most populated region in the Republic of Northern Macedonia, but also the most visited by domestic and foreign tourists.

- The Skopje region has a favorable geographical position;
- The climate in the Skopje region is favorable throughout the year;
- The Skopje region is rich in hydrographic objects (rivers and lakes);
- The Skopje region has excellent traffic connections with all parts of the country, the Balkans and Europe;
- The Skopje region has 80 archeological sites, of which they are presented as many meanings for tourists: the Roman city of Skupi and the Skopje aqueduct;
- The Skopje region has a large number of cultural and natural monuments and buildings such as: the stone bridge, the old Skopje bazaar, Lake Matka, 128 churches of which presented St. Panteleimon, 7 monasteries and 18 mosques from the Ottoman period where represented Mustafa Pasha Mosque.

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