

HIDDEN EUROPE ROUTE PLAN

India - Poland - Albania - North Macedonia - Montenegro - Rome & Vatican City

15 Days from New Delhi or Mumbai

India -> Warsaw -> Lodz -> Krakow -> Tirana -> Ohrid -> Montenegro -> Rome -> India

Prepared as a planning draft. Flight frequency, prices and visa rules must be reconfirmed before booking.

Core idea: Start with a direct India-Poland gateway, move efficiently by Polish trains, use Tirana as the Balkan base, then return to Schengen through Rome for the strongest final sightseeing and India flight logic.

Executive Summary

This version replaces Istanbul with a Rome + Vatican City ending. It keeps the original commercial idea - less-travelled Europe for Indian travellers - but improves the final flight logic by ending inside the Schengen area with Rome as a major international gateway.

Item	Recommended Plan
Ideal duration	15 days / 14 nights. This is tight but realistic if internal flights are aligned well.
Start point	New Delhi or Mumbai to Warsaw. LOT lists direct connections from both Delhi and Mumbai to Warsaw.
Poland routing	Warsaw -> Lodz -> Krakow. Lodz is closer to Warsaw than Wroclaw and reduces surface travel time.
Krakow excursion	Auschwitz-Birkenau only as the main out-of-city day trip, as requested.
Balkan base	Tirana, with day trips to Ohrid in North Macedonia and Kotor/Budva in Montenegro.
Final city	Rome with Vatican City for two nights / two sightseeing blocks, then India flight.
Visa strategy	Do not treat this as Schengen-only. The tour exits Schengen for Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro. A multiple-entry Schengen visa is strongly preferred, and Balkan entry rules must be reconfirmed.

Important visa correction: Rome at the end helps with the final India flight and returns the group to Schengen, but it does not remove Balkan entry requirements. The safest planning assumption is a valid multiple-entry Schengen visa that has already been used to enter Poland before the group enters Albania and the Balkans.

Route Logic

Leg	Mode	Logic
India -> Warsaw	Direct flight preferred	Creates a strong Schengen entry point through Poland, with LOT direct options from Delhi and Mumbai.
Warsaw -> Lodz -> Krakow	Train	Efficient domestic rail movement; avoids unnecessary airport time inside Poland.
Krakow -> Tirana	Flight	Use low-cost/direct options when available; avoid long bus/rail combinations.
Tirana -> Balkan day trips	Private tour or curated group day tours	Keeps hotels simple and avoids repeated luggage movement.
Tirana -> Rome	Direct flight preferred	Fast Schengen re-entry; avoids Istanbul stopover complexity and keeps the end within Europe.
Rome -> India	Direct/one-stop depending on city/date	Rome-Delhi direct options exist; Mumbai should be verified for exact date, with Delhi or one-stop fallback.

15-Day Itinerary at a Glance

This table is the clean planning skeleton. The detailed day-by-day section after this expands each day with sightseeing, pacing, transport notes, and booking cautions.

Day	Route	Stay	Main Plan
1	India -> Warsaw	Warsaw	Arrival, Old Town orientation, light dinner.
2	Warsaw	Warsaw	Royal Route, Old Town, Royal Castle exterior/area, Lazienki Park, Palace of Culture viewpoint.
3	Warsaw -> Lodz	Lodz	Train to Lodz, Piotrkowska Street, Manufaktura, street art.
4	Lodz -> Krakow	Krakow	Train to Krakow, Old Town, Main Market Square, Cloth Hall, St. Mary's Basilica exterior/interior as feasible.
5	Krakow	Krakow	Wawel Hill, Kazimierz, Vistula walk, Polish food evening.
6	Auschwitz-Birkenau	Krakow	Full Auschwitz-Birkenau guided tour day. No other heavy sightseeing.
7	Krakow -> Tirana	Tirana	Flight to Tirana; Skanderbeg Square and Blloku evening.
8	Tirana + Kruje/Dajti	Tirana	Bunk'Art / city highlights plus Kruje or Dajti depending on arrival fatigue.
9	Berat or Albanian heritage day	Tirana	Berat day trip preferred for UNESCO/Ottoman-town feel; Kruje/Shkoder alternative.
10	North Macedonia: Ohrid	Tirana	Long day tour to Ohrid Old Town, lake viewpoints, churches, return to Tirana.
11	Montenegro: Kotor + Budva	Tirana	Long Adriatic day tour; Kotor Old Town, Bay of Kotor, Budva viewpoint/old town.
12	Tirana buffer / optional Kosovo	Tirana	Recovery, Durres beach, shopping, or optional Prizren day trip if the group wants one more country.
13	Tirana -> Rome	Rome	Morning/early afternoon flight; Piazza Navona, Pantheon area, Trevi Fountain evening.
14	Rome + Vatican City	Rome	Vatican Museums/Sistine Chapel/St. Peter's plus Castel Sant'Angelo or Trastevere.
15	Ancient Rome -> India	Flight	Colosseum/Roman Forum/Palatine or relaxed shopping; evening/night flight to India.

Flight and Transport Strategy

The itinerary is designed around direct international gateways where possible, and short internal European flights only where they save major time.

Sector	Best option	Practical note
Delhi/Mumbai -> Warsaw	LOT direct preferred	Use Delhi or Mumbai depending on group origin and fare. Keep the arrival day light.
Warsaw -> Lodz	Train	Use PKP Intercity/regional train. Lodz is near Warsaw and works better than Wroclaw for a short itinerary.
Lodz -> Krakow	Train	Prefer direct PKP Intercity services when the date opens. Keep luggage light.
Krakow -> Tirana	Flight	Check Wizz Air/Ryanair/Buzz schedules for your exact date. If direct flight day does not match, consider moving the Tirana flight one day earlier/later or using Warsaw/Katowice as fallback.
Tirana-based Balkan trips	Private van/day tour	For Indian groups, private tours are more comfortable than public buses due to border timing and early starts.
Tirana -> Rome	Direct flight	Direct services are commonly listed to Rome Fiumicino. Choose morning/early afternoon if possible to save Rome evening.
Rome -> Delhi/Mumbai	Delhi direct preferred; Mumbai verify	Rome-Delhi direct services are visible on airline schedules. Rome-Mumbai direct status can vary by date/source, so keep Delhi or one-stop Mumbai as backup.

Booking Sequence

- First lock international flights: India -> Warsaw and Rome -> India.
- Then check Krakow -> Tirana and Tirana -> Rome flight days; adjust Poland/Balkan nights around those flights.
- Book Auschwitz official-guided entry or a reputable Krakow transfer + guide package early.
- Use refundable hotels in Tirana until Balkan entry/visa rules and tour availability are reconfirmed.
- For group comfort, use private day tours for Ohrid and Montenegro rather than public transport.

Recommended baggage discipline

Low-cost intra-Europe flights can become expensive if every traveller carries large check-in bags. For this route, plan one cabin bag plus one compact check-in bag only if the airline bundle makes sense. Confirm baggage before final costing.

Visa and Border Strategy for Indian Passport Holders

This section is the most important operational part of the tour. The itinerary uses Schengen countries at the start and end, but Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro are not Schengen countries.

Country / Area	Planning position	Operational caution
Poland + Italy / Schengen	Apply for a Schengen visa based on the main stay/entry logic. Because the route exits and re-enters Schengen, request multiple entry.	Schengen stay is normally counted within the 90 days in any 180-day rule. Final authority is the consulate/border officer.
Albania	Albania uses a Type C short-stay framework. Travellers without a qualifying exemption may need Albania e-visa.	Many travellers use valid multiple-entry Schengen/US/UK routes for exemption, but the exact table and conditions must be checked for Indian passports before booking.
North Macedonia	The official North Macedonia MFA states that third-country nationals with a multiple-entry Schengen C visa valid at least 5 days beyond intended stay may enter for up to 15 days per entry.	This makes Ohrid feasible as a day trip if documents are correct and border timing is manageable.
Montenegro	Montenegro officially states Indian nationals require a visa, but holders of valid Schengen/US/UK/Ireland visas or residence permits may enter/stay/transit up to 30 days, not beyond visa validity.	Tour operator must confirm border acceptance for Indian passports and the exact documents required on the travel date.
Rome return	Rome is a Schengen re-entry. Multiple-entry Schengen visa is necessary if travellers have already exited Schengen to Albania/Balkans.	Do not use a single-entry Schengen visa for this itinerary unless the Balkan section is removed.

Minimum document pack to carry on Balkan day trips

- Original passport with valid Schengen visa sticker and entry stamp/record into Schengen.
- Printed flight tickets: India -> Warsaw, Krakow -> Tirana, Tirana -> Rome, Rome -> India.
- Printed hotel confirmations for Poland, Albania and Rome.
- Travel insurance covering all countries visited, not only Schengen.
- Tour confirmation with vehicle details, guide contact and day-trip route.
- Proof of funds/card and emergency cash in EUR.

Rule of thumb: If the group does not receive a multiple-entry Schengen visa, either remove the Balkan section or change the ending. Do not risk Schengen re-entry failure at Rome.

Detailed Day-by-Day Programme

Day 1 - India to Warsaw

Overnight	Plan
Warsaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fly from New Delhi or Mumbai to Warsaw. Prefer a direct LOT service when fares are sensible. ● Arrival transfer to hotel. Keep the first evening light: Old Town walk, Castle Square, simple Polish dinner. ● Do not schedule museums today; long-haul fatigue and immigration time can disturb the plan.

Note: Recommended area: Old Town, City Centre or near a metro/tram corridor. Keep the hotel rail-accessible for Day 3.

Day 2 - Warsaw full sightseeing

Overnight	Plan
Warsaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Morning: Old Town, Royal Castle area, Castle Square and Barbican lanes. ● Afternoon: Lazienki Park and Palace on the Isle; optional Palace of Culture viewpoint if weather is clear. ● Evening: Nowy Swiat / Krakowskie Przedmiescie for cafes and dinner.

Note: Pacing: This is a comfortable capital-city day. Avoid too many paid museums unless the group is strongly history-focused.

Day 3 - Warsaw to Lodz

Overnight	Plan
Lodz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Morning train Warsaw -> Lodz. Keep the departure after breakfast to avoid rush. ● Check in and explore Piotrkowska Street, OFF Piotrkowska, street art murals and Manufaktura. ● Evening: Lodz has a more alternative/industrial vibe than classic postcard Poland; present it as a 'different Poland' stop.

Note: Why Lodz works: It is closer to Warsaw than Wroclaw and saves travel time while adding a distinct city character.

Day 4 - Lodz to Krakow

Overnight	Plan
Krakow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Train Lodz -> Krakow. Aim for a direct morning or late-morning train if available. ● After hotel check-in: Main Market Square, Cloth Hall, St. Mary's Basilica area and Florianska Street. ● Evening: gentle walk in the Old Town; do not overpack before Auschwitz day.

Note: Hotel area: Old Town edge, Kazimierz, or near Krakow Glowny if the group prefers easy transfers.

Day 5 - Krakow city day

Overnight	Plan
Krakow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Morning: Wawel Hill, Wawel Cathedral area and Vistula river views. ● Afternoon: Kazimierz Jewish Quarter, cafes and local food stops. ● Evening: optional folklore dinner or relaxed Old Town free time.

Note: Keep this as the cultural buffer day before Auschwitz. Do not add Wieliczka or Zakopane because the user specifically chose Auschwitz only.

Day 6 - Auschwitz-Birkenau only

Overnight	Plan
Krakow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Full-day Auschwitz-Birkenau visit from Krakow. Use official guided entry or a reliable transfer + licensed guide arrangement. ● The official Museum lists guided options including tours that cover Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. ● Evening should remain quiet and respectful. Avoid party-style programming after this day.

Note: Practical note: Carry passport/ID, arrive early, follow bag-size restrictions from the booked provider/Museum rules, and brief the group on respectful conduct.

Day 7 - Krakow to Tirana

Overnight	Plan
Tirana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fly Krakow -> Tirana if the direct schedule matches. Otherwise use a nearby Polish airport fallback such as Katowice/Warsaw if fare and timing justify it. ● Arrival in Tirana, hotel check-in, Skanderbeg Square orientation. ● Evening: Blloku district for dinner and cafes.

Note: Balkan base principle: Keep the same Tirana hotel for several nights to avoid exhausting luggage movements.

Day 8 - Tirana city + Kruje or Dajti

Overnight	Plan
Tirana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Morning: Skanderbeg Square, Et'hem Bey Mosque exterior/visit where permitted, National History Museum area, Pyramid of Tirana. ● Afternoon option A: Kruje Castle and bazaar for Ottoman/Albanian heritage. ● Afternoon option B: Dajti cable car if weather is clear and the group wants a lighter scenic day.

Note: This day establishes Albania before crossing into neighbouring Balkan countries.

Day 9 - Berat or Albanian heritage day

Overnight	Plan
Tirana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preferred: Berat day trip for white Ottoman houses, castle area and a very photogenic old-town feel. ● Alternative: Shkoder if the group wants northern Albania, lake views and a softer pre-Montenegro geography. ● Return to Tirana for the night.

Note: Do not sleep in Berat unless you are willing to change the Day 10 pickup logistics.

Day 10 - North Macedonia: Ohrid

Overnight	Plan
Tirana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Very early start from Tirana to Ohrid. Expect a long day due to border crossing and mountain/lake roads. ● Main stops: Lake Ohrid promenade, Old Town, Church of St. John at Kaneo viewpoint, Ancient Theatre area, local lunch. ● Return to Tirana at night.

Note: Ohrid is the right North Macedonia choice: scenic, compact, distinctive and much better for travellers than trying to include Skopje on a rushed day.

Day 11 - Montenegro: Kotor + Budva

Overnight	Plan
Tirana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very early departure for Montenegro. Keep this as a private tour if budget allows. • Primary focus: Bay of Kotor, Kotor Old Town and scenic viewpoints. Add Budva Old Town/shoreline if timing and traffic allow. • Return to Tirana late evening.

Note: This is one of the longest days, but it gives the Adriatic coastline payoff. Avoid adding more stops just to increase country-counting.

Day 12 - Tirana buffer / optional Kosovo

Overnight	Plan
Tirana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best default: recovery day in Tirana, cafe time, shopping, Bunk'Art if missed, or Durres beach half-day. • Optional ambitious add-on: Prizren, Kosovo day trip, only if the group is energetic and entry rules are reconfirmed. • Pack and prepare for Rome flight the next day.

Note: This buffer protects the itinerary from weather, border delays and missed Balkan activities. It is not wasted time.

Day 13 - Tirana to Rome

Overnight	Plan
Rome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a direct Tirana -> Rome flight, ideally morning or early afternoon. • After check-in: Pantheon area, Piazza Navona, Trevi Fountain and Spanish Steps depending on hotel location. • Evening: light Italian dinner; avoid Vatican today unless arrival is very early.

Note: Schengen re-entry day: keep documents accessible at the airport and avoid tight onward plans.

Day 14 - Vatican City + classic Rome

Overnight	Plan
Rome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning: Vatican Museums and Sistine Chapel with timed entry, then St. Peter's Basilica if queues/security allow. • Afternoon: Castel Sant'Angelo exterior/bridge, Tiber walk, or Trastevere. • Evening: Rome historic center free time.

Note: Book Vatican timed entry well in advance. Dress code and security lines must be communicated to the group.

Day 15 - Ancient Rome and flight to India

Overnight	Plan
Flight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning/afternoon depending on flight: Colosseum, Roman Forum and Palatine Hill, or a lighter shopping/food plan if luggage logistics are difficult. • Late afternoon/evening: airport transfer to Rome Fiumicino. • Fly Rome -> Delhi preferred for direct logic; Mumbai should be checked against live schedules or routed one-stop/domestic via Delhi.

Note: If the return flight is early morning, move Ancient Rome to Day 14 afternoon and keep Day 15 as airport-only.

City Positioning and Experience Notes

Place	How to sell it to Indian travellers	Best experience angle
Warsaw	A modern European capital rebuilt from wartime destruction, with a clean and impressive Old Town.	History + royal route + good first Schengen entry city.
Lodz	The 'different Poland' stop: industrial heritage, murals, film-school energy and creative streets.	Street art, Piotrkowska, Manufaktura, cafes.
Krakow	Poland's most classic tourist city, with the strongest atmosphere and Old Town appeal.	Old Town + Wawel + Kazimierz + Auschwitz day.
Tirana	A colourful, affordable Balkan base that feels different from mainstream Europe.	Skanderbeg Square, Blloku, bunkers, cafes, day-trip hub.
Ohrid	The most beautiful North Macedonia choice for a short tour.	Lake, churches, old town, viewpoints.
Kotor/Budva	The scenic Adriatic coastline payoff after the inland Balkan section.	Bay of Kotor, walled old town, coast, photography.
Rome + Vatican	The premium finale: instantly recognisable, Schengen, and strong India flight connectivity.	Vatican, Pantheon, Trevi, Colosseum, Italian food.

What to avoid in marketing

- Do not call the whole trip Schengen-only. It is Schengen + non-Schengen Balkans + Schengen re-entry.
- Do not promise Serbia or Greece within 15 days unless the itinerary is extended or another country is removed.
- Do not advertise Rome-Mumbai as guaranteed direct without checking the exact date. Rome-Delhi is the cleaner direct-flight anchor.
- Do not overpack Krakow with Salt Mine/Zakopane if Auschwitz is already confirmed.

Hotel, Meal and Costing Framework

This is not a final quote, but it gives a clean structure for costing the package later.

City	Nights	Recommended area	Hotel style
Warsaw	2	Old Town / City Centre / near metro	3-star superior or 4-star, breakfast included
Lodz	1	Piotrkowska / Manufaktura side	Central boutique/business hotel
Krakow	3	Old Town edge / Kazimierz / Krakow Główny	Walkable hotel, breakfast included
Tirana	6	Blloku / Skanderbeg / central Tirana	Comfortable base hotel with early breakfast/packed breakfast support
Rome	2	Historic centre / Prati / near metro	Central hotel; avoid far suburbs due to short stay

Meal plan suggestion

- Breakfast included daily.
- Keep lunches flexible on city days; include lunches only on long day tours if the operator package makes sense.
- Offer Indian meals selectively, not every day. This route is better sold with local food experiences plus practical comfort food options.
- For Auschwitz day, keep meals simple and respectful; avoid a celebratory dinner immediately after the visit.
- Rome: include one group Italian dinner if budget allows.

Likely cost drivers

- International flights: India-Warsaw and Rome-India.
- Intra-Europe flights: Krakow-Tirana and Tirana-Rome, especially baggage bundles.
- Private Balkan day tours from Tirana, because Ohrid and Montenegro are long cross-border days.
- Rome hotel location. Central hotels cost more but save time and transfers.
- Vatican/Colosseum timed entries and guided-tour upgrades.

Fallbacks and Alternative Versions

Situation	Best adjustment
No multiple-entry Schengen visa	Do not run this itinerary as written. Either remove Albania/Balkan section and keep Poland + Italy only, or change the plan completely.
Krakow -> Tirana flight date does not match	Shift one night from Krakow or Tirana, or use Warsaw/Katowice as a fallback departure airport. Do not use a very long bus route.
Tirana -> Rome flight arrives late	Make Day 13 a Rome evening only, then keep Day 14 Vatican and Day 15 Ancient Rome before a late flight.
Montenegro day tour looks too tiring	Replace with Shkoder/Lake Shkoder or Albanian Riviera if season and road time are better.
Group wants one more country	Use Day 12 for Prizren, Kosovo, only if visa/border acceptance is verified. Do not add Serbia in 15 days.
Rome flight to Mumbai is not direct	End at Delhi direct and add domestic Delhi-Mumbai, or book Rome-Mumbai via a one-stop Gulf/European option.

If the user wants a truly Schengen-only version

Replace Tirana, Ohrid and Montenegro with Italy/Austria/Czech/Slovakia options. A Schengen-only 15-day itinerary could be India -> Warsaw -> Lodz -> Krakow -> Vienna/Prague -> Rome -> India. That would remove Balkan visa uncertainty, but it would also lose the less-travelled Balkans concept.

Pre-Booking Checklist

Step	Action	Status
1	Confirm passenger city preference: Delhi, Mumbai or mixed gateway.	Pending
2	Check LOT direct fares to Warsaw from Delhi/Mumbai for the chosen month.	Pending
3	Check Rome -> Delhi direct fares first; Rome -> Mumbai only if direct/price works on exact date.	Pending
4	Verify Krakow -> Tirana direct flight day and baggage rules.	Pending
5	Verify Tirana -> Rome flight timing; morning/early afternoon is preferred.	Pending
6	Check consulate/VFS appointment availability for Schengen visa and request multiple entry.	Pending
7	Confirm Albania entry route: Schengen exemption or Albania e-visa, depending on current rules and passenger visas.	Pending
8	Confirm North Macedonia and Montenegro border acceptance for Indian passports with the planned visas.	Pending
9	Book Auschwitz guided slot or reputable Krakow guided-transfer package.	Pending
10	Lock hotels with free cancellation until visas are issued.	Pending

Suggested final package title

Hidden Europe: Poland, Albania, Ohrid, Montenegro & Rome - 15 Days from India

Planning Sources Checked

The following sources were used for live planning checks. Flight schedules and visa rules can change, so verify again before payment and visa submission.

Topic	Source / checked detail
India -> Warsaw flights	LOT Polish Airlines India pages list direct connections from Delhi and Mumbai to Warsaw. Source: lot.com/in/en/flights/flights-from-india/flights-from-delhi and /flights-from-mumbai
Rome -> Delhi direct flight	ITA Airways Delhi-Rome/Rome-Delhi flightplan shows direct flight timings and notes that schedules can change. Source: ita-airways.com
Krakow -> Tirana	Wizz Air lists Krakow-Tirana flight booking route; public flight-search sources also list direct airlines/frequency that vary by date. Source: wizzair.com and route search results.
Tirana -> Rome	Route schedules list direct Tirana-Rome services and around 1h40 flight time. Source: flightsfrom.com/TIA-FCO and airline booking engines.
Auschwitz visit	Auschwitz-Birkenau official visiting page lists guided tour options covering Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Source: auschwitz.org/en/visiting/
Schengen rule	European Commission explains Schengen short-stay rule of up to 90 days in any 180-day period and that a Schengen visa is generally valid for Schengen countries. Source: European Commission Migration and Home Affairs.
North Macedonia entry	North Macedonia MFA states third-country nationals with multiple-entry Schengen type C visa valid at least five days beyond stay may stay up to 15 days per entry. Source: mfa.gov.mk
Montenegro entry	Montenegro official page for India states Indians require a visa, and also states holders of valid Schengen/US/UK/Ireland visas or residence permits may enter/stay/transit up to 30 days. Source: gov.me
Albania visa framework	Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs describes Type C short-stay visa and links to official e-visa. Source: punetejashtme.gov.al and e-visa.al
Vatican	Vatican Museums official website for openings/closures and ticketing checks. Source: museivaticani.va

Disclaimer: This document is a planning draft, not legal/visa advice. Airline schedules, visa acceptance, border practices and tour availability can change without notice. Confirm with official sources, airlines, consulates/VFS and tour operators before selling or collecting final payment.