



Roundtrip in Bulgaria

Introduction: This tour takes you to a land with ancient history and beautiful nature where you can enjoy picturesque landscapes and at the same time learn something new. We travel through the whole country, which gives us an excellent opportunity of coming closer to the local people and their everyday life. Bulgaria is known as the land of magnificent monasteries. They are not only important historical monuments, but they are often beautifully situated in gorges or at the foot of the mountains. Our tour takes us up in Rila, Pirin, Rhodope, the Balkan Mountains and to some of Bulgaria's most interesting monasteries: Rila Monastery and Rozhen Monastery. Of course, we also visit some big cities: Sofia, Plovdiv, Veliko Turnovo. Last but not least, we drive through the most picturesque mountainous regions and pay a visit to two of the most impressive natural formations: **Yagodina Cave** and **The miraculous bridges**.

Special highlights:

- **Sofia** – the capital of Bulgaria, the second oldest city in Europe
- **Rila Monastery** – the most popular tourist site among all monasteries in Bulgaria
- **Plovdiv** – the second

Bulgarian city in population and size after the capital and one of the most beautiful in the country. •

• **Veliko Turnovo** – situated along the historical hills of Tsarevets, Trapezitsa and Sveta Gora on the two banks of Yantra River. •

• **Arbanasi** – austere houses that resemble minor fortresses on the outside, with high, solid walls and heavy gates, richly decorated and furnished on the inside. • **Melnik** (380 m a.s.l.) – the smallest and one of the most fascinating towns-museums in Bulgaria. • **Rozhen Monastery** – one of the few Bulgarian monasteries of the Middle Ages, which has survived relatively intact up to present days.

• **Yagodina cave** – a mighty cave with stalactites and stalagmites which has formed pearls and mystic figures.

Itinerary:

Day 1: Arrival at Sofia or Plovdiv airport. This first day you can have walking tour of Sofia: the National Library, Sofia University, The Parliament, St. Alexander Nevsky Patriarchal Cathedral, the former king palace turned into an art gallery, the National Theatre, St. Sofia Church, Sofia's oldest building – St. George Rotunda (dating from the 5th-6th C).

Day 2: After breakfast we drive southwards to the biggest and most famous monastery in Bulgaria – Rila Monastery. It is situated in Rila mountains and is included in UNESCO World heritage list. Rila monastery lies beautifully in Rila mountains enchanting surroundings. It impresses with pure and harmonious line of colonnades, arches, vaults and richly decorated murals. The next stop in the program is the old town of Melnik – Bulgaria's smallest town famous for its unique red wine and the natural sandstone pyramids. Before sunset we head to the picturesque Rozhen Monastery dating from the 13th c. – the only Bulgarian monastery that remained untouched during the Turkish domination to enjoy the fascinating view over Pirin mountain. Overnight in a hotel in Melnik. */breakfast/*.

Day 3. In the morning we continue further through beautiful Pirin Mountains towards the Rhodope Mountains – the oldest ones in Bulgaria. The rounded green slopes of the Rodopi stand against the sharp rocky peaks of Pirin. En-route we

pass by Dospat dam-lake – one of the mountains' blue pearls for a lunch stop. The highlight of the day is the visit to Yagodina Cave. The cave is among the longest ones in Bulgaria (with more than 10 000 m mapped so far). After a cave tour there we continue to the town of Devin, famous for its mineral springs. We stay overnight in Devin./breakfast/

Day 4. After breakfast we drive northwest to the city of Plovdiv, situated in the Thrace plain in Central Bulgaria. On the way there we stop to visit Chudnite mostove (Miraculous bridges) - a natural arch, formed by the forces in nature in the solid rock of the mountain. Overnight in Plovdiv. /breakfast/

Day 5. Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria. It is also one of the oldest on the Balkan Peninsula - it was the capital of Ancient Thrace and a big trade centre in the Middle Ages. The Old city of Plovdiv with its museums, historical sites, ancient houses and paved streets is a nice play for sightseeing. In the afternoon we have some free time for further sightseeing, rest or shopping. We stay overnight in Plovdiv. /breakfast/

Day 6. Today we head towards the town of Shipka, where we visit the renovated Memorial "Birth of Christ", the Russian church. The dramatic background of the mountain makes prominent the gilt of the domes and the multi-colored decoration of the church façade and attracts people's attention. Further to the north we visit the Etur - an open-air Ethnographic Heritage Museum which lies in green surroundings near the town of Gabrovo, with houses from the Bulgarian National Revival period and workshops for ceramics, copper and other handicrafts. After some 25 km more we reach the town of Veliko Turnovo, where we stay overnight. /breakfast/

Day 7: In the morning we can do a short sightseeing of Veliko Turnovo, which is considered the most beautiful Bulgarian town. Veliko Turnovo was the capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (13th C.). Remains of the magnificent medieval fortifications, churches and the palace still stand on Tsarevets Hill

(the King's Hill). The journey continues with a visit to the museum-town of Arbanasi with houses looking like fortresses. In the late afternoon we drive to the town of Koprivshtitsa where we stay overnight. /breakfast/

Day 8: Transport from Koprivshtitsa to Sofia. Departure. (transfer time: 2 hrs to Plovdiv Airport, 2 hrs to Sofia Airport). Leave the car./breakfast/

Accommodation and food: You stay in 3-star hotels with private facilities (days 1,3,6,7) and guesthouses (days 2,4,5) based on BB (breakfast included)

Tour type: IG

Difficulty grade: A

Best period: April – October

Group size: Min. 2 people – Max. 18 people

The price includes: Car rent Economy Class; guiding, accommodation and boarding as per program; all entrance fees; VAT and all local taxes.

The price does not include: Flight tickets, tips, meals not included in the program and other personal expenses.

GENERAL

Tour types

IG: Group Tours. There is a guide accompanying you throughout the whole trip, meeting you at the airport upon arrival and leaving you again at the airport for departure. We use well-trained and experienced local people with good knowledge of English. The group size (of different nationalities) is 6-12 people if not specifically mentioned.

Difficulty grades

A: Easy: No special experience is needed; everyone who is in condition to cope with long Saturday walks in the forest can also cope with these tours. As a rule, the trips are short and at a

low altitude. Often, it is your choice to join or skip a day-tour. The routes follow a hilly terrain without steep ascents and descents. Normally we walk 3/5h a day.

Extensions: Yes, Black sea coast

This is a unique proposal, which gives you the opportunity to stay on a sea holiday for extra week after your active tour at an incredibly low price! Accommodation at 2, 3 and 4-star hotels (BB and HB) in hotels in Sozopol, Nessebar, Sunny Beach, Lozenets, St. Vlas, Golden Sands etc.

Equipment and clothing:

No special equipment is required. Weather in Bulgaria can be very hot in the summer during the days but cooler in the evenings, so bring some warm clothes with you. Warm clothes will also be necessary for the cave visit on Day 3. A rain jacket and good walking shoes are recommended. Pay attention that weather in October can be rainy and rather cold.

Money and personal expenses:

You will need some extra money to cover meals, drinks and extra trips not included in the tour price. Additional money for souvenirs and personal things could also be spent. That is why it is always necessary to have Bulgarian money in cash. The payments in Bulgaria are usually made in "LEV" (BGN), which is the official currency. The exchange rate with EU and USD is quite changing sometimes, but approximately it is: BGN:EU - 2:1; BGN:USD - 1,7-1. Credit Cards could be used primarily in some supermarkets and restaurants in the biggest cities as well as in the petrol stations. Usually it is marked on their front doors if Credit Cards are accepted. ATMs ("bankomates") are more frequent (again in the biggest towns only!). Traveler's cheques

take quite a lot of time to handle and not each bank deals with them (in many cases it takes even few days since their deposition in the bank!) - thus they are not recommended! Here are some examples of comparative costs in Bulgaria (NB: prices in mid-range restaurants!):

- Coffee – 0,5 Euro
- Tea – 0,5 Euro
- Beer (0,5 l) – 1-1,5 Euro
- Soft drink (0,5 l) – 0,5-1 Euro
- Bottle of water (0,5 l) – 0,3-0,4 Euro
- Bottle of good red wine (0,75 l) – 6-10 Euro
- Three-course lunch – 7-10 Euro
- Lunch pack – 2-3 Euro

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Drinking water: We recommend you to avoid drinking water from tap. You can buy bottled water everywhere in Bulgaria.

Cell phone coverage

Currently the whole territory of Bulgaria is covered with a mobile connection. However the trekking & cycling tours are done in mountainous areas where the signal could be weak or even lacking from time to time. In such a situation you just need to change your location a bit in order to find available network.

Electricity

In Bulgaria two-pin sockets are normal. Voltage is 220 watts. If you come from the U.S. or UK you need to purchase an adapter, which is available only in Bulgarian cities and biggest winter and sea resorts.

Main language: Bulgarian.

Nice to know/Local traditions:

Tipping is popular in Bulgaria. You can leave 10 % of the bill to the waiter at a restaurant. Tips are also given to the taxi driver, receptionist, cleaning lady etc.

Good to have small coins for a visit to the toilet.

You should cover your shoulders at a church visit.

Post office is the only place where you can buy post stamps.

Bulgarians usually nod when they say no and shake their head from left to right when they mean to say yes.

Security: Be aware of pocket thieves especially in big towns and take a good care of your belongings.

Visa: Is not needed for EU citizens.

Vaccination: Is not needed for Bulgaria. Check latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure.

Insurance: Strongly recommended. Please contact us for more information if you want to buy an insurance for the planned trip.

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Weather

Average year temperature – + 10,5 °C (Abs. Min. – -38,3 °C ; Abs. Max. – + 45,2 °C)

Average rainfall per year – 416 – 650 mm. in the lowlands; 650 – 1193 mm. in the highlands

Rainy days per month – May – 7; June – 8; July – 6; August – 3; September – 6; (number may be higher in the mountains)

Average daily/night temperatures (up to 1000 m a.s.l.) – May – 22/12 °C; June – 26/16 °C; July – 28/17 °C; August – 26/15 °C; September – 23/13 °C;

Brief about Bulgaria

Territory – 110 912 sq. km.

Population – 7 538 000 (2003) (83,9 % ethnic Bulgarians; 9,4% Turks; 4,7% Roma; rest – smaller minorities Russians, Armenians, Vlachs, Jews, Karakachans etc.)

Relligion – 82,6% Orthodox, 12,2% Islam, 0,7% Protestant, 0,5% Catholics, 4,1% Others.

Capital city – Sofia (1 377 531 people in 2006)

Bigest towns – Plovdiv, Varna, Bourgas, Rouse, Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven

Mountains – 37 (biggest – Balkan Mountain: length – ~ 550 km.; width – ~ 30-60 km.); (highest – Rila Mountain – peak Musala – 2 925 m.a.s.l.)

Boundaries – North – Romania; East – Black Sea (coastline 378 km.); West – Serbia, Macedonia; South – Greece, Turkey;

Distribution of the lands – 0 – 400 m.a.s.l. – 59,8 %; 400 – 1000 m.a.s.l. – 27,6 %; 1000 – 2000 m.a.s.l. – 11,9 %; over 2000 m.a.s.l. – 0,7 %

Protected areas – 3 national parks, 10 nature parks, 55 reserves, 35 managed reserves, over 350 protected areas and 500 natural monuments

File last edited 24/10/2011.