



## Bulgaria - Transbalkan trek

### Introduction

The Central Balkan National Park is one of the most popular hiking destinations in Bulgaria. The name of Stara Planina mountains ("Balkan") comes from the ancient history of our land. It is not surprising that the whole peninsula is named after the mountains. Despite the severe climate, the inaccessible gorges and the awesome valleys it has given shelter to people since ancient times, during the Thracian and Roman days, up to the present.

Our trip offers a combined trek through two of the most exciting natural reserves in the Balkan Mountains: Kozyata Stena (The Chamois' Rocks; famous for its flowering Edelweiss during summer) and Northern Dzhendem. We climb Mount Botev – the highest peak in the Balkan Mountains (2,376 m, or 7,795 ft) and enjoy the imposing view of the Sredna Gora, Pirin and Rodopi Mountains and the fertile Thracian Valley. Sharp pinnacles, deep canyons, century-old Beech woods, waterfalls, unique rock formations and vast alpine meadows hide extraordinary diverse wildlife. The tour ends in the town of Plovdiv, where a relaxed walk along the paved streets of the old quarters will bring us a couple of centuries back in time.

### Special highlights

**The Central Balkan National Park** (716 sq. km) was established for the

conservation of the unique nature of the Central Balkan Mountains. One-third of the Park's territory comprises nine reserves, four of them - Boatin, Tsarichina, Steneto and Dzhendem are part of the world Biosphere Reserves Network under the UNESCO "Man and Biosphere" Program.

**The village of Chiflik** lies 15km southwest of the town of Troyan, at the foot of the Kozya Stena peak in the Balkan mountain. It is situated in the upper valley of the Beli Osam river, amidst thick forests and alpine landscape. The holiday complex just outside the village is built near a powerful mineral water spring, the capacity of which is 3,000 litres per minute.

**Kozia Stena biosphere reserve** is established in 1987 to protect the rich biological diversity of the area. Except Edelweiss, century old beech and fir-tree woods, in the area could be seen more than 40 species of rare and endemic plants. In the reserve nest more than 60 different species of birds like the Northern Goshok (*Accipiter gentilis*), the Eurasian (or Northern) Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), the Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), the Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*), the Ural Owl (*Strix uralensis*), etc.

**The Troyan Monastery**, founded during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is the third largest monastery in Bulgaria. The Monastery is famous for the creative work of Zahari Zograph who painted both the exterior and

the interior of the church. The iconostasis in the central church is a wood carving dating to 1839.

**Saeva dupka** is one of the most impressive caves in Bulgaria. Its five halls and 400 meters of corridors offer some of the most beautiful cave formations in the country. Saeva Dupka is also famous with its "Concert hall" that has hosted many Choral music performances, thanks to the excellent acoustic conditions.

**Plovdiv** (160 m a.s.l.) ranks as the second Bulgarian city in population and size. The old town of Plovdiv is one of the oldest European towns contemporary to Troy and Mikena.

### Itinerary

**Day 1.** Arrival at Sofia or Plovdiv Airport and transfer to the town of Teteven, where we stay overnight (about 2 hours drive).

**Day 2.** Short transfer to suburb Skribatna where the trek to Lesidren village starts. The path goes through broad-leaved forest and lush meadows. The minibus is waiting for us at Siniya vir (The Blue Pool) near Lesidren. Short transfer to Lesidren for lunch. Transfer to Saeva dupka cave and then back to Teteven.

*Uphill walk: 400 m; downhill walk: 400 m; walking time: 4-5 hours*  
**/breakfast, lunch/**

**Day 3.** After breakfast we start with a

transfer to the mountain pass Bogoe via Ribarica village. From there we start our day's march to Chiflik village famous for its hot mineral springs and swimming pools. The path follows the low ridge between two rivers finally reaching Haidushka pesen area from where the bus will take us to Chiflik.

After check-in at the hotel we will have free time to relax enjoying the hot thermal water in some of the swimming pools. The water, the temperature of which is 52 degrees C is suitable for treatment of diseases of the muscular and bone systems, as well as respiratory, neurological, urological, gynecological and stomach disorders.

Overnight in Chiflik village.

*Uphill walk: 300 m; downhill walk: 100 m; walking time: 5-6 hours.*

**/breakfast, lunch, dinner/**

**Day 4.** Transfer from Chiflik to Haidushka pesen to continue our trek to the main ridge of Stara planina. The track ascends gradually through the old beech forest of Kozya stena reserve. Then following the ridge we get to Beklemeto. Transfer to Troyan monastery where we stay overnight.

**/breakfast, lunch, dinner/**

**Day 5.** Transfer to Smesite. This is the start point for the trek to the Pleven hut. The path goes along Zelenikovo monastery and through beech forest and Polenici peak reaches the hut where we stay overnight.

*Uphill walk: 700 m; downhill walk: 200 m; walking time: 7-8 hours .*

**/breakfast, lunch, dinner/**

**Day 6.** From Pleven hut the path goes through a beech forest, reaching a place, called "Murgata".

Then it continues by the foothills of the "Milk Peak" to "Hristo Botev" refuge with great views to the majestic rocks of Northern Dzendem reserve (Dzendem means Hell). From there we start climbing the highest peak of the Balkan Mountains - Mount Botev (2376 m a.s.l.). From the peak the track weaves among the rocky slopes of the mount (The Tarzan's path), providing excellent view to the precipice of the Southern

"Dzhendem". Then we continue to "Rai hut" passing by the Heavens Waterfall ("Raikoto pruskalo").

*Uphill walk: 1000 m; downhill walk: 900 m; walking time: 6-7 hours.*

**/breakfast, lunch pack, dinner/**

**Day 7.** Descending through the rocky slopes of the Southern "Dzhendem" we finally reach Panicite area where

our mountain experiences end. Transfer to the city of Plovdiv, where we stay overnight. Visiting The Old Town we enjoy the atmosphere and the architecture of Bulgarian revival times.

*Uphill walk: 25 m; downhill walk: 1000 m; walking time: 4 hrs.*

**/breakfast, lunch/**

**Day 8.** After breakfast you have a transfer to Sofia or Plovdiv Airport for departure (1hr to Sofia or 3hrs to Plovdiv).

**/breakfast /**

**Accommodation:** We stay in 3 star hotels in double/single rooms with private facilities (days 1, 2, 3 & 7), Troyan monastery (in rooms with private facilities, day 4), mountain huts in double rooms with shared facilities (day 5, WC/shower available on the floor) and in dorms with shared facilities (day 6).

\* NOTE! The price is per person sharing a double room accommodation. Single traveler who has ordered a bed in a shared double room must be prepared to pay for a single room if a room-mate cannot be arranged. Single room is not available on day 6.

The meal plan is based on 7 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 1 lunch pack and 4 dinners (days, 3, 4, 5 & 6).

You may need to buy some light food from the local shops or en-route in advance.

Water fountains are scarce thus make sure you have the right amount of water for each of the days. The guide will inform you day by day about the water sources along the route and the places where you can buy snack, energy bars, etc.

**Luggage transportation:**

Unnecessary luggage will be transported as follows:

Day 3: from the hotel in Teteven to the hotel in Chiflik village.

Day 4: from Chiflik village to Troyan monastery

Day 5: from Troyan monastery to Pleven hut

Day 6: from Pleven hut to the hotel in Plovdiv, where we stay on day 7. \*Please note that you have to bring with you all the items which you will need along the route of day 6 & day 7 and for the overnight on day 6.

**Tour type: GT**

**Difficulty grade:** B (days 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7) / C (day 6)

**Best period:** May-September

**Weather:**

Temperatures expected for this period are between +10 and +30°C. Sometimes

noontime could be a little exhausting for trekking on open territories (e.g. a part of day 6). Rainfalls or short but heavy showers are possible, being a bit prolonged during spring and late autumn.

**Equipment and clothing:**

For the full list with recommended items see "General".

**Vaccination:**

Optional. See "General" for more information.

**Group size:** Min. 4 persons.

**The price includes:** transfers from/to Sofia airport; all ground transfers as per itinerary; luggage transportation as per itinerary; accommodation and boarding as mentioned above; English-speaking guide; entrance fee Saeva Dupka cave; VAT and all local taxes.

**The price does not include:** map (could be requested in advance when booking the tour); tips; alcohol drinks and other personal expenses; other possible activities (not included in the price) which are optional and payable on spot. If you break the trip plan you pay on your own the extra expenses for transport and accommodation.

**Joining instructions:**

**Low-cost flights to Bulgaria:** please check: Wizz Air - <http://wizzair.com/>; Easy Jet - <http://www.easyjet.com/>; Germanwings - <http://www.germanwings.com/>; My Air - <http://www.myair.com/>; Penguin Travel – <http://www.flybulgarien.dk/>; Norwegian Air Shuttle - <http://www.norwegian.no/>.

**Joining the tour:** in recent days there are loads of opportunities to book a cheap flight to Bourgas or Varna airports instead of landing at Sofia Airport. We can arrange for you a bus or train ticket to Sofia or Plovdiv, where most of the tours start. Here are some approximate prices for transfers:

**By bus:** Bourgas or Varna to Sofia – appr. 20 Euro/person one way (appr. 5-7 hrs drive)

**By train:** Bourgas or Varna to Sofia – appr. 15 Euro/person one way (sleeping compartments +10 Euro). For train schedules please check:

<http://bdz.creato.biz/en>

**By plane:** Bourgas or Varna to Sofia – appr. 100 Euro/person one way (for schedules and prices please check: <http://www.air.bg/en>) (appr. 1 hr flight)

**Private transfers:** Bourgas airport – Sofia (appr. 4 hrs drive): 150 Euro/car (1-3 pax); 190 Euro/bus (4-7 pax);

Varna airport – Sofia (appr. 6 hrs drive): 170 Euro/car (1-3 pax); 210 Euro/bus (4-7 pax)

Transfers from Bourgas or Varna airport to the railways/bus stations in these cities –

25 Euro per car one way (1-3 pax), 45 Euro per bus one way (4-7 pax)

**GENERAL**

**TOUR TYPES & GRADES**

We provide different varieties of tours as regards to their types and difficulty grades! Whether you will choose individual and group tours with a guide or combined tours with a guide for some part of the trip depends on you. We emphasize on using local experienced guides with knowledge of the local language, culture, history, art, etc. The tours are conducted in the English language. Guides in other languages are available upon request.

**Tour types**

Our tours are divided in different tour types, regardless of being guided or not or if someone travels alone or in a group. We have prepared your vacation so that you can concentrate on new impressions and experiences, awaiting you all the time. Here is a description of the various tours:

**GT: Group tours** There is a guide accompanying you throughout the whole trip, meeting you at the airport upon arrival and leaving you at the airport again for departure. We use well-trained and experienced local people with good knowledge of English. The group size is normally 6-12 people, if not specially mentioned.

**Difficulty grades**

To prepare yourself for the best of your vacation we recommend that you start planning it in an advance. Good physical condition is required. In order to achieve it we advise you to start walking, jogging or cycling everyday. Swimming a couple of times a week is also highly recommended. You do not need much to get yourself in shape. And don't forget that the most important tip for an unforgettable active holiday is to choose a trip which corresponds to your physical condition!

**B: Moderate**

Most of you, who are used to walking during a long weekend, will be in condition to cope with a tour of this level. You should be in good health condition and not too bad physical condition. We have successive days of longer and more difficult walking and days of lighter walking. Some parts of the day routes are done at a higher altitude. The paths are in good condition. We walk for 5-7h a day. You are free to skip some walks and have a rest.

**C: Difficult**

These tours include trekking which is a little harder, normally on a challenging terrain. We take it for granted that you are in good condition and fit. You should be physically prepared at home to get the maximum of the tour. Most of the trekking is done at a greater height (max 3000 m). As on other tours you are free to skip some treks and have a rest.

**Extensions: Yes, Black Sea**

This is a unique proposal, which gives you the opportunity to stay in Bulgaria for one week more at the incredibly low price! We can offer a great variety of means of accommodation - from home stays (no meals) to 2, 3 and 4-star hotels (BB or HB) on the Southern Bulgarian Black Sea Coast:

- Sunny Beach - a big modern resort with hundreds of hotels, cafes, pubs, casinos, water-sports facilities etc.
- Sozopol, Nessebar - small towns (founded by the ancient Greeks) with picturesque old quarters and a specific atmosphere.
- Lozenets - a peaceful small village with a beautiful beach. Only 4-5 km from the forests of the Strandzha Mountains where you can go walking, biking or riding horses.

**Equipment and clothing:**

You should always remember that you must try to keep the weight of your hiking equipment down to a minimum. Your packed daypack should weigh no more than 10-15 kilograms.

Recommended items: waterproof rucksack (60 l) & daypack (35 l); walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; light casual shoes/sandals for walking and/or for travelling; gaiters; loose, casual trousers for trekking; waterproof trousers; fleece windstopper jacket; windproof, waterproof outer shell garment (breathable if possible!); hat for sun protection; sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion and lip balm; water bottle; torch (headlamp); mobile phone; underwear (not cotton); mosquito repellent; trekking sticks.

**Vaccination:**

Tick-borne encephalitis, Marselle fever and Crimea haemorrhagic fever is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Check latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure.

**Money and personal expenses**

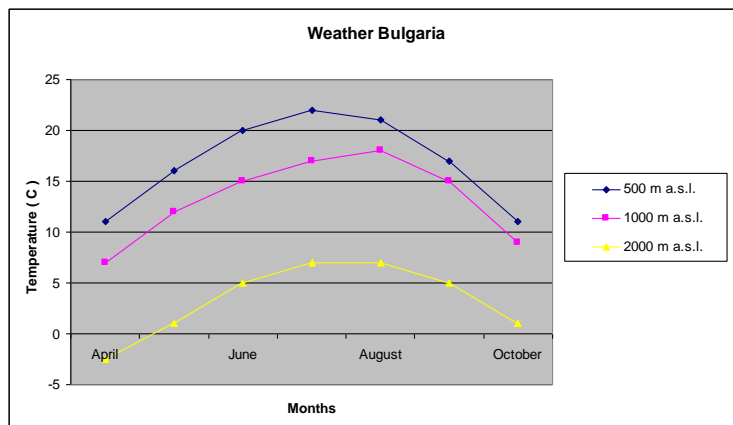
You will need some extra money to cover meals, drinks and extra trips not included in the tour price. Additional money for souvenirs and personal things could also be spent. That is why it is always necessary to have Bulgarian money in cash.

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 - 1,6-1. 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 – 0,3 Euro
- Tea – 0,3 Euro
- Beer (0,5 l) – 0,5-1 Euro
- Soft drink (0,5 l) - 0,4-0,5 Euro



- Bottle of water (0,5 l) - 0,3-0,4 Euro
- Bottle of mark red wine (0,75 l) - 5-10 Euro
- Three-course lunch - 4-10 Euro
- Lunch pack - 2-3 Euro

**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.

**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

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**Weather**

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

Mean 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)

Mean 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;

**Altitudinal distribution of annual  
temperatures in Bulgaria**