



BANSKO – Pirin Mountains Adventures

Introduction:

The Pirin Mountains – named after Perun, the god of Thunder, are Bulgaria's wildest peaks, comprising numerous protected areas and no less than 60 mountains over 2,500 m, or 8,202 ft, high. Generally speaking, the terrain is alpine, meaning that most of the trekking is done above the tree zone. This tour features stupendous views of crystal-clear mountain lakes, green dales, extraordinary rock formations and rich wildlife. During the rest of the trek there will be opportunities to explore the mountains either alone or as part of an impromptu trek organised with the local guide.

Bansko is a three-hour drive from Sofia and Plovdiv and is located on the outskirts of the Pirin National Park – the largest protected area in Bulgaria. It will be your base camp on this walking holiday. With its special architecture of Ottoman and Greek origin, Bansko offers visitors a wealth of experience. The stone houses, many of which look like miniature monasteries, exist side by side with the modern structures of this little town, which boasts only 12,000 inhabitants. Bansko boasts a multitude of restaurants and local eateries as well as a lively cafe scene.

Special highlights:

Pirin Mountains are the second highest in Bulgaria after Rila Mountains and the third in the Balkan

Peninsula (Mount Vihren 2914 m a.s.l.). **Bansko** (925 m a.s.l.) is one of the biggest winter resorts in the country.

Dobrinishte is famous for its mineral pools with average temperature of the water + 34o C

Itinerary:

Day 1. Arrival at Sofia or Plovdiv Airport and transfer to Bansko for overnight accommodation.

/dinner/

Day 2. In the morning we have a transfer to Vihren hut. The path gently ascends in Bunderishka valley, reaching Todorina Porta. We start descending from there, passing by the beautiful Todorini Ochi Lakes (Todor's Eyes Lakes) and then entering the circus of Vasilashki Lakes. Further down we enter the old Mura forest and reach Demianitsa hut. We continue following Demyanitsa River and end the trek at Todorova Ornitsa, where the bus waits to take us back to the hotel.

Walking time: 6-7hrs; uphill walk: 800 m; downhill walk: 900 m

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 3. After breakfast we start with a transfer to the foothills of the Pirin Mountains, but this time to Dobrinishte (a 15 minute drive). Dobrinishte is a balneological resort, east of Bansko, famous for its mineral springs since ancient times. From there the bus travels on to the Gotse Delchev hut (about 20 min drive; 1,450 m, 4,757 ft). Here we take the

chairlift to the Bezbog hut (2,236 m, 7,335 ft.) - the start of today's trek, which is a 30 minute ride. The target of the day is Mount Polezhan, the fifth highest peak of Pirin mountain (2,851 m, or 9,353 ft). There are incredible views on the way to the top and from the summit itself. One can count 17 glacial lakes from a single point, including the biggest lake in Pirin – Popovo Lake. These are probably the most beautiful panoramic views available from these mountains. It takes approximately 5 hrs to complete the walk. We return to the Gotse Delchev hut via the same lift.

Transfer to the hotel in Bansko.

Walking time: 6hrs; Uphill walk: 650 m (2,132 ft); downhill walk: 650 m (2,132 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 4. A fairly difficult ascent to Mount Vihren (2,914 m, or 9,560 ft) awaits us. In the morning we go by bus to the Vihren hut (30 minutes; 1,950 m, or 6,397 ft). En route there will be various opportunities to enjoy most of the Pirin's peaks and also the Vlahini and Bunderishki lakes. If the weather is good we have lunch on the peak itself, enjoying the amazing scenery. After that we return to the Vihren hut, and by bus, to the hotel in Bansko for dinner and overnight accommodation.

Uphill walk: 1,000 m (3,280 ft); downhill walk: 1,000 m (3,280 ft); walking time: 7-8 hours.

(Please note: This route involves negotiating a steep path all the way up and down, with many sections passing

over rocks. It is only recommended for tourists in good physical condition. Otherwise, please consider the alternative programme for Day 3, which includes walk in the circus of Bunderishki Lakes: There we visit Muratovo, Ribnoto (The Fish), Dulgotto (The Long), Zhabeshkoto (The Frog) and Okoto (The Eye) lakes. On the way we enjoy beautiful breathtaking panoramic views, flowers and the crystal waters of the rivers and the lakes. It takes about 4-5 hrs to complete this tour, which returns to the Vihren hut before heading back to the hotel in Bansko by bus.

Uphill walk: 400 m (1,312 ft); downhill walk: 400 m (1,312 ft); walking time: appr. 4 hrs)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 5. Transfer to Sofia / Plovdiv airport for departure.

/breakfast/

All walks in the original program could be adjusted by the guide on spot depending on the physical condition of the hikers (there is a diversity of hiking trails in the mountains, varying in difficulty grade).

The tour provides the opportunity more days to be added to the program if purchased in advance. These could be spent on self-guided walking in the area, more guided walks, guided sightseeing tours to famous places nearby (Sofia, Rila Monastery, Melnik and Rozhen Monastery, Kovachevitsa etc.) etc. Please ask for quotation for any of these possibilities.

Accommodation:

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

You will stay 4 nights in a family run hotel (3 stars), with rooms with private bath/toilet on half board (breakfast & dinner included). In case you decide to stay in a mountain hut as a part of a customized tour, which can be requested in advance, please note that you may have to stay in a dorm where shower/toilet are shared with few other rooms. Blankets and linen are provided in the huts – no need to bring such with you.

Tour type: GT

Difficulty grade (trekking days only): **B (days 1 & 2), C (day 3)**

Best period: June – September

Weather:

Temperatures expected for this period are between +10 and +25°C. Temperatures above 2000 m a.s.l. may drop to -5C after the end of August. Rainfalls or short but heavy showers are possible, being a bit prolonged during spring and late autumn.

Equipment and clothing:

Necessary items: daypack (35 l) or larger one (60 l) if you decide to stay overnight in a mountain hut; 3-season walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; waterproof outer shell garment (breathable if possible!); sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion; trekking sticks.

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

Group size: Min. 2 persons

The price includes: accommodation and boarding as mentioned above, transfers to/from Sofia and Plovdiv airport; English-speaking guide, transfers as per itinerary;

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.

VAT and all local taxes.

The price does not include: map (could be requested in advance when booking the tour), tips, entrance fees, lunches/lunchpacks, alcohol drinks, cigarettes and other personal expenses.

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> (appr. 7-8 hrs drive)

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)

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;

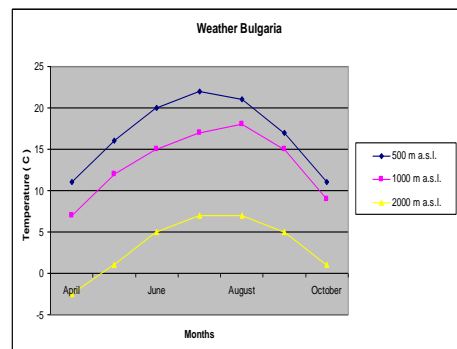
Distribution of the lands - 0 - 400 m.a.s.l. - 59,8 %; 400 - 1000 m.a.s.l. - 27,6 %; 1000 - 2000 m.a.s.l. - 11,9 %; over 2000 m.a.s.l. - 0,7 %

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

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