



Bulgaria - Vitoshka – Rila alpine mountain bike adventure

Introduction:

Have you ever thought of going above 2000m with a bike or you have done it and want to do it again? This tour is specially designed for the enduro mountain bikers who love biking in pristine alpine landscapes including crystal clear glacier lakes, wild rivers, waterfalls, big glacier valleys, high alpine peaks and meadows with abundant wildlife. Surrounded by the alpine beauties and positive energy of the mountains every uphill and harder stage seems easier and pleasant and fills you with strength and desire to bike and see more and more. The biking in the highest mountain in Bulgaria includes the historic Kayser's way made in the beginning of 20C by the Bulgarian Tzar Ferdinand to show Rila Mountains beauties to the Austrian Kayser. You will bike down to the lowest southern parts of the mountain and visit typical villages of the region. You will also see the Brown Bear sanctuary in Belitsa, where dancing bears used by the gypsies in the past are rehabilitated and brought back to normal life. At the end you will have the option to choose either to finish the tour with a pleasant downhill ride of 1300 vertical meters from Bezbog lake to Dobrinishte village or take a rest and do a cultural trip to the biggest and most famous monastery in Bulgaria – Rila monastery.

Special highlights:

Penguin Travel DMC-Bulgaria

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Vitoshka mountains – it is of a volcanic origin and a big part of it is proclaimed for national park which is the oldest one on the Balkans. Its highest peak is Cherni vrah (2290) and there are 2 natural reserves in the mountain as well as the longest cave in Bulgaria (Duhlata – 17 km long).

Cherni vrah (Black peak) – the highest peak in Vitoshka mountains – 2290m with great panoramic views.

Rila mountains – are the highest mountains in Bulgaria and on the whole Balkan Peninsula with Mount Musala - 2925 m a.s.l. with very rich biodiversity and 4 Natural reserves.

Govedartsı – a small village in the foothills of Rila mountains famous for cattle breeding.

Borovets – one of the most biggest ski resorts and oldest mountain resort in Bulgaria, with former residence of the Bulgarian kings.

Kayser's way – built at the end of 19th century by the Bulgarian King Ferdinand for showing the beauties of Rila mountains to the Austrian Kayser.

Granchar lakes – 3 beautiful glacier lakes in the Granchar cirque. Semkovo – famous ski resort in Southern Rila.

Dobarsko – small typical mountain village with 2 old churches from 19 c.

Belitsa – small town in Rila housing the Belitsa dancing bears park.

Rila Monastery (1147 m a.s.l.) is the most popular tourist site among all monasteries in Bulgaria equally for its

size, natural surroundings, architecture, wall paintings and ancient history.

Itinerary

Day 1. Meeting at Sofia airport and transfer to the city centre for overnight. **/dinner/**

Day 2.

Transfer to Aleko hut in Vitoshka mountains. The biking starts from 1850m on a gravel road in direction to the highest peak of the mountains - Cherni Vrah peak (2290m). The road climbs gradually and reveals pleasant panoramic views towards Sofia and the mountains, passes through the Black plateau and the natural peat reserve "Torfeno branishte". Reaching the top you will have great panoramic view towards Rila mountains and can have a nice lunch in the small buffet. After some rest the downhill ride starts. First you ride down on alpine meadows passing by 2000 m high peaks Skoparnik, Kupena, Siva gramada, the rock formation Haidushka rock. Further down you enter the forest and enjoy the shade down to Yarlovo village. You can continue for 5 more kilometers downhill ride on the asphalt road to Kovatchevtsi village or get on the bus. Transfer (44 km, 30 minutes) to Govedartsı village for overnight.

Biking specifics:

Distance: 28 km; Uphill/downhill biking: 400m/1200m; Time: 5 hours; Highest elevation: 2290m

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 3.

Transfer (23km, 25 min.) to Borovets resort. The Biking starts on a dirt road on the famous Kayser's way (made for the former Bulgarian king) via the rock formation Wolf's stone, Chakar vojvoda hut, Sara giol palace and further upstream Prava Maritsa river to Zavratchica hut at 2200m. Overnight.

Biking specifics: Distance: 20 km; Uphill/downhill biking: 800m/100m; Time: 6 hours; Highest elevation: 2200m

Day 4. Today we continue biking on the Kayser's way surrounded by stunning alpine peaks and meadows. The road climbs at 2450m and the goes down to Grnchar hut (2200m) situated in the Granchar circuss with 3 glacier lakes. You continue downhill on a dirt road and asphalt road to Treshtenik place for overnight.

Biking specifics: Distance: 18 km; Uphill/downhill biking: 500m/800m; Time: 5 hours Highest elevation: 2450m

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 5. Nice dirt road will lead us from Treshtenik in direction to Semkovo resort. We bike in forests at around 1800m and pass through Toritsa, Solishteto and Vranchevo areas. Option for some afternoon rides in the area. Overnight in Semkovo.

Biking specifics: Distance: 15 -30 km; Uphill/downhill biking: 300m/300m; Time: 4 hours Highest elevation: 1850m

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 6. Biking today takes us to Belitsa via the picturesque village of Dobarsko. The route starts with a downhill ride near Belitsa River, then climbs up to Krotov Chuchur place, Titevica and Dobarsko hut. From there

GENERAL

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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.

we continue downhill to the small village of Dobarsko. After a rest and visit of the two old churches we hit the dirt road downhill along Klinica River to Dolno Dragalishte village, then climb up a small hill and bike down again to Belitsa town. Here we will visit the dancing bears rehabilitation park.

Biking specifics:

Distance: 25 km; Uphill/downhill biking: 300m/850m; Time: 6 hours Highest elevation: 1700m

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 7. Today you can choose either to have a relax day and visit Rila monastery and do some sightseeing Sofia or do some biking (with optional use of a chair lift up to 2200m) in Pirin mountains and Bezbog lake area. We end up in Sofia, where some time at leisure may be spent in the late afternoon hours for sightseeing, shopping etc.

Day 8. Transfer to Sofia airport for departure.

/breakfast/

Accommodation:

Guesthouses/family-run hotels with en-suite facilities (days 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7) and dorm (twin rooms if available) in a mountain hut with shared facilities (day 3) on halfboard (breakfast and dinner included)

Ordering lunchpacks is available in each of the hotels if necessary for the day tours (at the amount of 5-6 Euro).

Luggage transportation:

The unnecessary luggage stays in the supporting vehicle, which makes the transfers. For the overnight stay in the hut (day 3) bikers should allow clothing for 2 days and carry it in a daypack during the rides on days 3 and 4.

Tour type: GT

Difficulty grade: C (days 5, 6) / D (days 2,3,4)

Best period: June – September

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:

IT+: Individual tours with a guide

The same as the Individual tours, with the only difference that there is a local guide provided for some of the days. During the

Weather:

Temperatures expected for this period and area are between + 10 and +25°C. Sometimes noontime could be a little exhausting for cycling on open territories. Rainfalls or short but heavy showers are possible, being a bit prolonged during spring and late autumn. Mornings and evenings are getting cooler.

Equipment and clothing:

Mountain bikes and helmets are provided by the company. Wearing a helmet is obligatory. Cycling gloves, breathable clothes, waterproof gear, cycling shoes/trainers. Knee pads are also advisable during the downhill sections. For list with recommended items see "General".

Bicycles:

For our mountain biking tour we provide brand new first class hardtail performance mountain bike with aluminum frame and the following components:

- 24 gears, "Sram" shifters and derailleur
- Fork - "Rox shocks Dart 1" – 80 mm travel
- "Avid" V-brakes
- "Truvativ" crankset
- "Mavic" 26" rims
- "Truvativ" handlebar and stem

The price includes: accommodation and boarding as mentioned above; mountain bike and helmet, English-speaking guide; driver with a supporting vehicle; transfers from/to Sofia airport and throughout the tour; luggage transfers; VAT and all local taxes.

The price does not include: flights, travel insurance, tips, entrance fees, alcohol drinks, cigarettes and other personal expenses

days with a local guide most probably you will be together with other tourists.

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

3,5-5 hours of cycling per day on average over hilly or flat terrain with only several steep parts (climbing max. 12 %) which can be skipped if it's a guided tour with a supporting vehicle. All people used to cycling should be able to make this trip. However 30-50 km cycling per day is recommended for some time before the start of the tour.

C: Difficult

4, 5 – 5, 5 hours of cycling per day on average. At some steep (but short) parts you may need to push your bike. These are usually mountain biking tours along dirty roads and mountain paths. Bikers should be well prepared to face trails with climbs and bumpy parts from time to time. Some physical preparations are essential before booking a tour with this grade.

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.
 - Nessebar, Sozopol - 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:

Recommended items: good quality padded cycling shorts (baggy style); cycling helmet; cycling shoes; fleece headband; fingerless biking gloves; lightweight windproof biking jacket; waterproof trousers; fleece windstopper jacket; sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion and lip balm.

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 – 0,3 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 - 4-7 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

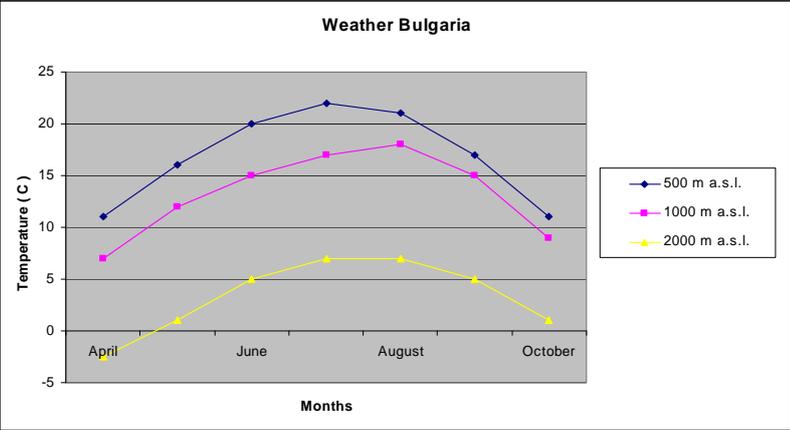
Weather

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