



## Bulgaria - The Rila-Pirin mountain trek

### Introduction:

This trek takes place in the two mountain chains which contain the Balkan Peninsula's highest peaks housing vast national parks, rare vegetation and rich animal life. The trip is structured to take the participants to remote regions with beautiful and unspoiled natural landscapes. If you do not have the time for extensive trekking in the world's biggest mountain ranges, this tour is strongly recommended. Here you can enjoy the physical challenge of alpine landscapes above the tree border, as well as the cultural treasures of Bulgaria and the warm hospitality of the local people.

### Special highlights:

**Rila Mountains** are the highest mountains in Bulgaria and on the whole Balkan Peninsula with Mount Musala - 2925 m a.s.l.

**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 situated at the northeastern foot of Pirin Mountains beneath the highest and the most beautiful Karst part of the mountains. It is recently one of the biggest ski resorts in Bulgaria.

### Itinerary:

**Day 1.** Arrival at Sofia airport and transfer to the mountain village of Govedartsi (1150 m a.s.l.), where we stay overnight (1hr drive). This is our

base for the hikes in Rila Mountains for the next 4 nights. All starting points of the walks for the next days are within 30min transfers.

**/dinner/**

**Day 2.** We start after breakfast with a short transfer (9 km) to Vada hut (1410 m a.s.l.). From the hut we start ascending in the direction of Lovna hut and then to the area of The Seven Rila Lakes. The path follows the summit between the rivers Dzherman and Cherni Iskar, offering fine views towards both Vitoshka and Verila mountains. Eventually we make a hike among the famous glacial lakes. On our way back we will descent on a hidden treasure – unmarked trail, that goes past 3 beautiful waterfalls. (6 hrs; uphill walk/downhill walk: 900m)

**/breakfast, dinner/**

**Day 3.** Short transfer to Maliovitza resort. From there the path weaves up along the valley to the wide circus of Prekorechki

Lakes, enclosed by the steep slopes and rocky walls of several peaks exceeding 2700m (Popova Kapa, Kuppenite, Iglite etc.). We visit also The Scary Lake before walking downhill on a steep rocky slope to the west coast of Yonchevo Lake (more than 200m long) and further to Maliovitza resort. (7 hrs; uphill/downhill walk: 900m)

**/breakfast; dinner/**

**Day 4.** Today we climb the highest peak on the Balkans – Musala (2925 m a.s.l.). Short transfer brings us to Borovets ski resort, where we take the lift to Yastrebets Peak (2369 m a.s.l.). Enjoyable walk along Dwarf Pine massifs with the jagged form of Mount Musala at the background leads

us to Musalenski Lakes, lying at the foot of the peak. The view from the top is truly breath-taking – you can make out the remaining peaks of Rila Mountains; the marble edges of the Pirin Mountains; Mount Vitoshka and the Sredna Gora Mountains; the green summits of the Rodopi Mountains; and last, but not least, the long body of the Balkan range. (6 hrs)

**/breakfast; dinner/**

**Day 5.** Transfer to the most famous landmark of Bulgaria – Rila Monastery. Sightseeing and leisure hike to the hermitage of St. Ivan Rilski. The next stop nearby are the amazing sand forms near Stob village – The Stob Pyramids. Then we continue on to the foot of Pirin Mountains and the town of Bansko, which is the starting point for the hikes in Pirin Mountains and overnight location for the next 3 nights. (3 hrs; uphill/downhill walk: 400m)

**/breakfast, dinner/**

**Day 6.** A fairly difficult ascent to Mount Vihren awaits us. In the morning we go by bus to the Vihren hut. En route there will be various opportunities to enjoy most of the Pirin's peaks. The path weaves through "Kazanite" region famous for the incredible variety of plants (Edelweiss among them). If the weather is good we have lunch on the peak itself, enjoying the amazing scenery. After that we return to Vihren hut. (7-8 hrs; uphill walk: 1,000 m; downhill walk: 1,000 m)

**/breakfast, dinner/**

**Day 7.** Transfer to Gotse Delchev hut. Here we take the chair lift to Bezbog hut

(2236 m a.s.l.), where the walk towards Mount Polezhan (2851 m a.s.l.) starts. This trip offers probably the most beautiful panoramic views in the mountains where one can count 17 glacial lakes from a single point, including the biggest lake in Pirin Mountains – Popovo Lake (almost 30m deep). (5 hrs; uphill/downhill walk - 650 m)

**/breakfast, dinner/**

**Day 8.** Transfer to Sofia airport for departure (2,30hrs drive).

**/breakfast/**

**Accommodation:**

We stay overnight in 3-star hotels with rooms with en-suite facilities on HB (breakfast and dinner included). Luggage is taken care of throughout the whole trip.

**Luggage transportation:**

Luggage is taken care of throughout the whole trip.

**Tour type: GT**

**Difficulty grade: D**

**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 -5°C 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: rucksack (60 l); 3-season walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; waterproof outer shell garment (breathable if possible!); sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion.

For the full list with recommended items see “General”.

**Group size:** Min 4 persons

**The price includes:** accommodation, boarding and luggage transfers as mentioned above; transfer to/from Sofia or Plovdiv airport; English-speaking guide and private transfers throughout the tour; VAT and all local taxes.

**The price does not include:** maps (could be requested in advance when booking the tour), entrance fees, tips, 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)

**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.

**D: Challenging**

Tours of this level demand that you be really in good shape. The paths are not always in the best condition and the marking can be scarce. There are day-treks with big ascents and descents. Changing weather conditions /even in midsummer/ play an important role when trekking at a very high altitude and may cause changes of the preliminary route. This is to be decided by the mountain guide on the spot. Normally, the treks are 6-8h per day, but some can be longer. Preliminary trekking experience is an advantage, but not necessary if you are really in good shape. Note that during some of the days, you should personally carry your baggage, which is naturally an additional difficulty.

**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.)  
Religion – 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**



