

BULGARIA

Balkan Mountains self-aided trek



Guaranteed departure dates for 2008: Every Saturday from May to September

Ref. number: ZZ-HKBUL02

(Other dates also possible within the best period if the requirement for min group size is fulfilled)

Introduction

The Fore-Balkan area of the Balkan Mountains offers a unique and diverse landscape, dotted with tiny villages lost in greenness and flowers, offering visitors not only tranquillity and calmness, but also the opportunity to experience the unique and cosy atmosphere of authentic Bulgarian villages. In this region, traditions are a big part of modern life. Old water mills are still at work; fulling mills continue to wash colourful carpets; the famous "rakia" (brandy made from grapes or plums) is prepared right in front of you; Bulgarian housewives prepare unforgettably sweet jams made with wild berries; and the old farmers still make the famous Balkan brine cheese with sheep and goat's milk. And all this surrounded by the wild nature of the Central Balkan National Park and one of its nine green pearls – the biosphere reserve of Boatin, housing one of the largest belts of Beech forest.

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 Dzhendema are part of the world Biosphere Reserves Network under the UNESCO "Man and Biosphere" Program.

Ribaritsa village is a beautiful mountain resort with numerous little country houses and villas, which according to latest measurement has

the biggest concentration of oxygen in the air in Bulgaria.

Glozhene Monastery was built in the 13-th century by the Ukrainian prince Glozh, housing an icon at the age of about 1000 years.

Itinerary

Day 1. Arrive at Sofia or Plovdiv Airport and transfer to Yamna village (situated at 650 m, or 2,132 ft) for overnight accommodation (about 1,2hrs drive from Sofia or 2,5hrs from Plovdiv).

/dinner/

Day 2. Yamna is a typical village for the Fore-Balkan region – long and scattered among the small valleys and hills. After breakfast, you will head for another part of the village, where the first stage of the trek starts. As an introduction to the whole trip, the trek offers lots of typical landscapes and experiences – picturesque, vast meadows dotted with lots of old apple tree gardens, the ringing bells of grazing sheep and horses and so on. The path follows the ridge over the village and descends by a small cave towards the outskirts of Cherni Vit village, renowned for its great dancers and traditional Bulgarian folklore singers. From there you have a transfer to the neighbouring village of Divchovoto for your overnight accommodation.

Walking distance: 17 km, or 10,4 miles; walking time: about 5 hrs; uphill walk: 400 m (1,312 ft); downhill walk: 600 m (1,968 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 3. This morning you embark on arguably the most adventurous part of the

tour. The track passes through the century-old Beech forests of the Boatin Reserve (at 825 m, or 2,706 ft), reaching the peak at 1,080 m, or 3,500 ft, after an hour of gentle ascent. From there, it descends over the other side of the hill, reaching a forestry road that leads to the region of Kostina, where one of Bulgaria's national heroes (Georgi Benkovski) was killed by the Turks. You can have lunch there. From this point you walk 3 km, or 1.8 miles, along a peaceful asphalt road amongst gardens, meadows, villas and houses, arriving in the village of Ribaritsa, where you stay overnight (at 545 m, 1,788 ft). Distance: 10.5 km, or 6.5 miles; walking time: about 3,5-4 hrs; uphill walk: 250 m (820 ft); downhill walk: 530 m (1,738 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 4. Today you walk along Debeli Dial, the ridge surrounding Ribaritsa from the north and climb its highest peak Debeli dial (1150m). The path continues to Vasiliov Hut, but before that, you will turn right descending down the Osenovia Rat ridge at the upper parts of Ribaritsa, which is actually the longest village in the country (12 km, or 7.4 miles, long). On the way back to your hotel you have the opportunity to observe the way of life of local people and to enjoy the idyll of a typical Balkan mountain village.

Walking distance: 14 km, or 8,6 miles; walking time: around 4.5 hrs; uphill walk: 400 m (1,312 ft); downhill walk: 400 m (1,312 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 5. In the morning you will be transferred to the neighbouring town of

Teteven (located at 415 m, or 1,361 ft; and some 6 km, or 3.7 miles, from Ribaritsa). After checking into the hotel, you will have leisure time for sightseeing and shopping. There are some interesting sites in the town which are well worth visiting – like the historical museum, the Vsiyah Sveti church (and the chapel next to it); the St. Iliya Monastery built in the 14th Century; the picture-gallery in the centre of the town etc. An optional afternoon walk to a the picturesque waterfalls Skoka (The Jump), with an extension to Haidushka poliana peak with the picturesque Haidushka poliana stone shelter on its top, (955 m, or 3,133 ft) is also available.

Walking distance: 13 km, or 8 miles; walking time: around 4 hrs; uphill 540 m (1,771 ft); downhill walk: 540 m (1,771 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 6. Cherven peak (1,221 m, or 4,005 ft.) is the easternmost summit of the three peaks located on the northern side of Teteven. This giant is today's target. The path starts from Teteven and travels upwards through broad-leaved forests and vast meadows to the rocks of Cherven peak, offering a superb panoramic view over the town of Teteven and the valley of the Beli Vit River. Take some time to rest at the platform located on the very edge of the rocks, where you can enjoy the whole valley. From there take the new eco-path leading to Babintsi village. From the village it is a further two-hour walk downhill to Teteven.

Walking distance: 13 km, or 8 miles; walking time: around 5 hrs; uphill walk: 700 m (2,296 ft); downhill walk: 700 m (2,296 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 7. After a transfer to the village of Glozhene (some 8 km, or 4.9 miles from Teteven) a short trek through the Beech woods delivers you to Glozhene Monastery, where you can see the 1000-year-old icon of St. George. From the monastery you will

come across a dirt road leading to the pass between Goliam Izvor village and Teteven, and then following the quiet road, you reach Goliam Izvor. Stay overnight in Goliam Izvor village (450 m, or 1,476 ft).

Walking distance: 13 km, or 8 miles; walking time: about 4 hrs; uphill: 400 m (1,312 ft); downhill walk: 350 m (1,148 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

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

/breakfast /

DETAILED ROAD BOOK AND MAP WILL BE PROVIDED UPON ARRIVAL

Accommodation:

You will stay in family-run hotels with en-suite facilities (days 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6) and in a guesthouse with shared facilities (day 7). The meal plan is based on HB (breakfast and dinner included). Ordering lunchpack (at the amount of 5-6 Euro) for the longer trekking days will not always be possible directly from the hotel (e.g. day 2). 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 (especially days 2 and 7).

Please note that we use this region due to its unspoiled by the mass tourism environment, where the locals are still not used to deliver the best hotel services and some gaps may occur.

Luggage transportation:

Unnecessary luggage will be transported as follows:

Day 2: Pack and leave your luggage at the reception of the hotel. It will be taken in the morning and delivered to the hotel in Divchovoto in the afternoon.

Day 3: Pack and leave your luggage at the reception of the hotel. It will be taken in the morning and delivered to the hotel in Ribaritsa in the afternoon.

Day 5: In the morning you will be transferred together with your luggage to

the hotel in Teteven, where you check in before going on a sightseeing trip or afternoon hike.

Day 7: Morning transfer to Glozhene is arranged for you and your luggage. You start walking from there while your luggage continues with the driver to the guesthouse in Goliam Izvor, where you will spend the night.

Tour type: IT

Difficulty grade: 2 Easy

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:

Necessary items: mobile phone (ESSENTIAL! In case of emergency in the mountains). For the full list with recommended items see "General".

Vaccination:

Optional. See "General" for more information.

Group size: Min. 2 persons.

The price includes: transfers to/from Sofia and Plovdiv airport; detailed roadbook and map; luggage transfers, accommodation and boarding as mentioned above; VAT and all local taxes.

The price does not include: tips, lunchpacks and other meals, entrance fees, alcohol drinks, cigarettes and other personal expenses.

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:

IT: Individual tours

There is no guide on this tour. You travel individually and we are responsible for the hotel overnights and /some/ transfers. Sometimes you will travel together with other people. If you wish a guide can be arranged, if ordered. We take it for granted that you can read maps, provided by us upon arrival.

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.

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, Marseille 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)

Biggest 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

