

BULGARIA

Rodopi Mountains self-guided trek



Guaranteed departure dates for 2008: Every Saturday from May to September
(Other dates also possible within the best period if the requirement for min group size is fulfilled)

Ref. number: ZZ-HKBUL01

Introduction:

Definitely a tour that remains alive in your memory for years. Passing through some of the most spectacular parts of the Rodopi Mountains (the Trigrad Gorge, Yagodina Cave, The Miraculous Bridges and so on), this trip gives you the opportunity to explore the mountain without being escorted by a guide, relying just on your own ability to handle exciting and surprising situations! Pre-arranged accommodation and luggage transportation during the whole trip ensure the pleasure of unrestricted walking through the wilderness of the mythical Orpheus' native lands. The trail affords breathtaking views over high rocky cliffs, dense woods, alpine meadows and the tiny villages still housing the ancient spirit of times gone by.

Special highlights:

Rodopi Mountains The Rodopi Mountains (with highest peak: Golyam Perelik (2191m a.s.l.) are the oldest mountains on the Balkan Peninsula.

Trigrad (1250 m a.s.l.) is a small village in the central part of the Rodopi Mountains.

Yagodina Cave is among the longest caves in Bulgaria (more than 10 000m mapped so far), considered to be one of the most beautiful in Europe with its outstanding stalactites, stalagmites, columns, ponds and cave pearls in them.

The Devil's Throat Cave has its name from a legend. It tells that if you let something flow in the cave river it will never come out again. And there is a cave waterfall - one of the highest

underground waterfalls in Europe, 42 m high.

The Miraculous bridges (1450 m a.s.l.) are 2 unique rock formation (about 40 m. high) covering an area of 40,3 hectares. **Bachkovo Monastery** is the second largest Bulgarian monastery.

Itinerary:

Day 1. Arrival at Sofia or Plovdiv Airport and transfer to Yagodina for your overnight accommodation (3.5 hours). Upon arriving at your hotel the driver will continue on with the unnecessary luggage to your hotel in Trigrad, where you will stay on Day 2, so please keep the things that you are going to need for the walk on Day 2 and leave the rest in the car.

/dinner/

Day 2. Today you will have a short walk to the Yagodina Cave and back to Trigrad village (walking distance – 15 km, or 9,3 miles.). After the cave tour (be prepared for the temperature inside the cave which is only 6°C), the path continues through coniferous woods, potato fields and along the upper edges of the high cliffs of the Trigrad Gorge to Trigrad itself, where you will stay overnight.

Uphill walk: 600 m (1,968 ft); downhill walk: 250 m (820 ft).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 3. Starting from the hotel in Trigrad, the trail leads to the remote village of Vodni Pad and back to Trigrad village (walking distance – 20 km, or 12,3 miles). This stage provides you with a good overview of the way of life experienced by the local people, combined with the serenity of the coniferous forests en route.

The path is a good one, passing through coniferous woods the entire time. After ascending to the summit region of the mountains, the track follows its highest points affording views on the right-hand side of potato fields and green meadows. You can stop in Vodni Pad for lunch and a siesta. The return journey is a real delight, tracing the Trigradska River all the way back to Trigrad village.

Uphill walk: 400 m (1,312 ft); downhill walk: 450 m (1,476 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 4. The walk today starts from Trigrad village, and continues through alpine meadows and old forests to the Chairski Lakes before heading back to Trigrad – via the Trigrad Gorge and The Devil's Throat Cave (walking distance – 22 km, or 13,6 miles). As the trek is a bit long you will need to make an early start in order to complete all the stages. At first the path heads up over the opposite hill of Trigrad village. Then following the ridge it goes down along green meadows, full of orchids during summer time, to the dirt track that leads on to the Chairski Lakes. Having visited the lakes, the path goes back down to another point of the same dirt track. Then along the Livadnitsa River, flowing in into Trigradska River at the beginning of Trigrad Gorge itself, you continue uphill along the asphalt road through the gorge. You just have to walk between the 250 m (or 820 ft) high cliffs of the gorge to The Devil's Throat Cave and further on to Trigrad. You will stay overnight in the same hotel in Trigrad. Uphill walk: 900 m (2,952 ft); downhill walk: 700 m (2,296 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 5. An early morning transfer to Beden village (1,150 m, or 3,772 ft) will deposit you at today's starting point. Your luggage will continue with the car and will be waiting for you at the guesthouse in Liaskovo village, where you will stay overnight (walking distance – 24 km, or 14,8 miles). From Beden, the path travels up to the ridge by the Dry Peak, weaving northwards through picturesque hills and affording superb views across the mountains to Liaskovo village (1,185 m, or 3,887 ft). This is the most panoramic day of the program.

Uphill walk: 350 m (1,148 ft); downhill walk: 315 m (1,033 ft).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 6. After breakfast you start your trek from Liaskovo to the Skalnite mostove Hut (1,620 m, or 5,314 ft), a 15 km walk (or 9,3 mile) through century-old coniferous woods and hidden meadows. Your luggage will be taken from Liaskovo and will be waiting for you at the end of the day when the guide meets you by the hut. After a visit to the rocky phenomenon of The Miraculous Bridges (which is most probably a result of an ancient cave collapsing during an earthquake), you will make the short transfer (30 km, or 18.6 miles) to the village of Kosovo, where you will stay overnight.

Uphill walk: 635 m (2,083 ft); downhill walk: 200 m (656 ft)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 7. In the morning you will have time for a short stroll around the village. Then you will be transferred to Plovdiv via the Bachkovo Monastery (there we will make a short stop). In the afternoon you can go on a sightseeing tour in Plovdiv's Old

Town, which still possesses ancient houses and monuments. You will stay overnight in Plovdiv.

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 8. Depending on your departure time you will have transfer to Sofia or Plovdiv Airport (transfer time: 20 min to Plovdiv Airport; 2 hrs to Sofia Airport).

/breakfast**DETAILED ROAD BOOK AND MAP WILL BE PROVIDED UPON ARRIVAL****Accommodation:**

You will stay overnight in small pensions and guesthouses (days 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7) with en-suite facilities and a guesthouse (day 5) with shared facilities on HB (breakfast & dinner included). Ordering lunchpacks is available in each of the pensions if necessary for the day walks (at the amount of 5-6 Euro).

Luggage transportation:

A daypack for carrying personal items during the daily treks is necessary. Unnecessary luggage will be transferred as follows:

Day 1: from Yagodina to Trigrad upon arrival in Yagodina

Day 5: from Trigrad to Liaskovo (after leaving you in the village of Beden)

Day 6: from Liaskovo to the village of Kosovo

Day 7: from Kosovo to Plovdiv together with you

Tour type: IT**Difficulty grade: B****Best period: May-September****Weather:**

Temperatures expected for this period are between +15 and +30°C. Sometimes noontime could be a little exhausting for

trekking on open territories. 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); walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; sunscreen lotion; mobile phone (ESSENTIAL! In case of emergency in the mountains). Fountains with drinking water are available during the daily walks.

For full list with recommended items see "General".

Vaccination:

Optional. See "General" for more information.

Group size: Minimum 2 persons

The price includes: transfers from/to Sofia or Plovdiv airport; detailed roadbook with 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.)

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

