

The Rila-Pirin mountain trek



Guaranteed departure dates for 2009: 4/7, 11/7, 1/8, 29/8, 5/9

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

Ref. number: 48203-06

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Introduction:

A unique mountain hike above the clouds of the highest Balkan Peninsula's mountains. During the trek we will visit the highest peak on the Balkans in Rila Mountains (Musala, 2925m a.s.l.) and the giant of Pirin Mountains (Vihren, 2914 m a.s.l.). We will explore enormous national parks, housing vast alpine meadows, stone rivers, glacial lakes, rare vegetation and rich animal life. The biggest Bulgarian monastery (Rila Monastery) and probably the most famous Bulgarian landmark will also be visited as a part of the trip. The trek is made with 2 centers – one for Rila and one for Pirin Mountains. This allows hikers to enjoy a permanent lodging for the two parts of the tour without accommodation changes every day. The daily walks are loop-like, passing through the best walking areas of the mountains, easily made with only a backpack on the back (30 l). Depending on the weather conditions the program for some of the days can be twisted in order to avoid mountain storms. Hikers fallen in a bad physical conditions can skip some of the walks if necessary, without impeding the itinerary of the rest group.

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.

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. Arrival at Sofia Airport and transfer to the mountain village of Govedartsis (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. In the morning we board the bus and head for the Vada hut (1,410 m, or 4,625 ft). This is the starting point for the trek to Seven Rila Lakes hut (2,190 m, or 7185 ft), which we reach in three hours. The path follows the summit between the rivers Dzherman and Cherni Iskar, offering fine views of both the Vitosha and Verila mountains. We will have lunch by the hut and make a short walk around The Seven Rila Lakes before continuing towards our next stop – the Rila Lakes hut (2,100 m, or 6,889 ft). The walk takes around 45 minutes. Continuing on for another 90 minutes, we arrive in the region of Goreloto, where the next hut, Lovna (1,654 m, or 5,426 ft), is situated. After a further 90 minute trek, we arrive at Vada

hut, where the bus will be waiting to take us back to Govedartsis.

Uphill walk: 1,050 m (3,444 ft); downhill walk: 850 m (2,788 ft); walking time: 6-7 hrs

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 3. In the morning we have a transfer to Maliovitza resort (13 km, about 25 min; 1,720 m, 5,643 ft). From there we start walking along the valley of Maliovitza River towards Maliovitza hut (1950 m a.s.l., 6396 ft). Then the route goes through Razhdavitsa ridge along Kamilata peak (The Camel Peak; 2621 m a.s.l., 8596 ft) and reaches the wide circus of Prekorechki lakes, enclosed to the southeast by the steep slopes and rocky walls of Popova Kapa peak (2704 m a.s.l.; 8869 ft), Kупenite (2731m a.s.l.; 8957 ft), Iglite (The Pins) and Lovnitsa peak. After about 2.30 hrs the path reaches Strashoto Lake. The meadows by the lake are excellent place to have our lunch packs consumed. Then we continue walking downhill on a steep rocky slope to the west coast of Yonchevo Lake (about 1.30 hrs). From the lake we have about 1.45 min walk back to Maliovitza resort. Transfer to Govedartsis.

Uphill walk: 850m (2,788 ft); downhill walk: 850m (2,788 ft); walking time: about 6.30 hrs

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 4. After breakfast we have a transfer to the ski resort of Borovets (1,350 m, or 4,429 ft; a 15 km or 9.3 mile transfer). In Borovets we take the gondola lift (which takes around 25 min) to Yastrebets (2,369 m; 7,770 ft). From there we begin walking along the

beautiful path through Dwarf Pine massifs. On the way the track passes the ski-runs of Yastrebets. The jagged form of Mount Musala can be enjoyed throughout the walk. From the Musala hut it will take another 2.15 hours to climb the peak, passing by the Musalenski lakes and the "Icy lake" rest area in between. 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 Vitosha and the Sredna Gora Mountains; the green summits of the Rodopi Mountains; and last, but not least, the long body of the Balkan range. We rest here before heading back to Yastrebets and back down to Borovets via the gondola.

Transfer back to Govedartsi.
Uphill walk: 650 m (2,132 ft); downhill walk: 650 m (2,132 ft); walking time: about 6.30 hrs

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 5. Transfer to the most famous landmark of Bulgaria – Rila Monastery. We will make a short hike (about 1hr uphill walk through old Beech woods) to the hermitage of St. Ivan Rilski (2-3 hrs) and sightseeing of the Monastery itself. The bus will take us to the next stop nearby, the amazing sand forms near Stob village – The Stob Pyramids. We continue to Bansko (925 m, or 3,034 ft), which will be the starting point for our treks in Pirin Mountains. In Bansko we will have a short rest in the hotel. In the afternoon we will make a sightseeing trip in the old quarters of the town. Uphill walk: 150 m (492 ft); downhill walk: 150 m (492 ft); walking time between 2-3 hours

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 6. 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.

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 7. In the morning we have 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 (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. The bus waits to transfer us back to Bansko.

Uphill walk: 650 m (2,132 ft); downhill walk: 650 m (2,132 ft)

/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.

Difficulty grade: days 2, 3, 4, 7 – B/C, day 6 – C/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 (35 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 and boarding as mentioned above; transfer to/from Sofia Airport; English-speaking guide and private transfers throughout the tour; lift tickets as per itinerary; 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/>; Sky Europe - <http://www1.skyeurope.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. 15 Euro/person one way (appr. 5-7 hrs drive)

By train: Bourgas or Varna to Sofia – appr. 10 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)

Transfers from Bourgas or Varna airport to the railways/bus stations in these cities – 25 Euro per car one way (1-3 pax), 45 Euro per bus one way (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

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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 (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

