



## **BULGARIA, DISCOVER THE UNKNOWN EUROPE**

14 DAYS DEPARTING 18TH JUNE 2012 (EX SOFIA)

### **DETAILED ITINERARY**

This exceptional and unique journey will see you hiking in the wild areas of Rila and Central Balkans National Parks, walk around the Sacred Seven Rila Glacial Lakes, visit monasteries and painted churches, experience the local culture and traditional village life including the annual Enyovden celebrations, taste the Balkan's culinary traditions and cuisine.



### **DAY 1 - 18TH JUNE**

#### **ARRIVAL TO SOFIA**

You will be transferred from the airport to your hotel in the city centre. This evening you will enjoy a taste of Balkan's cuisine.

**Accommodation:** 3 star city hotel

**Included meals:** dinner

### **DAY 2 - 19TH JUNE**

#### **PANORAMIC WALK AND TROYAN MONASTERY**

Breakfast

Transfer to the Balkan Mountain Range by private bus (approx 1.30 hours).

Today we will start our walk in the highlands with amazing views to the main ridge and the lower fields. We will take a rest at the Mountain Chapel which has been built high on the rocks. The bus will wait for us at the small village of Babinci "The grandmothers' village" where you will experience the traditional village life.



This afternoon we will transfer to the Troyan Monastery, which is the third biggest and most important Orthodox sanctuary in Bulgaria.

**Option:** visit to the local Ethnographic museum

**Walking time:** 4-5 hours (Ascent: 500m/ Descent: 500m)

**Night stop:** Beli Osam village

**Accommodation:** Authentic Family-run Guesthouse

**Included meals:** breakfast, picnic-lunch, dinner

### DAY 3 - 20TH JUNE

#### PANORAMIC WALK AND POTTERY WORKSHOP

Breakfast

Short morning transfer and 3-hour walk in the Pre-Balkan range to Vasiliov refuge (1360m). The altitudes are not high but the views to the Ridge of the Central Balkan Mountains are spectacular. Our walk will pass through glides and beech forests. At the end of the walk we will arrive at Shipkovo village, famous for its mineral waters.

**In the afternoon:** 2-3-hour pottery workshop in Aprilsi village.

**Walking time:** 3-4 hours (Ascent: 250m/ Descent: 650m)

**Night stop:** Beli Osam village

**Accommodation:** Authentic Family-run Guesthouse

**Included meals:** breakfast, picnic-lunch, dinner

### DAY 4 - 21ST JUNE

#### "DJENDEM NATURE RESERVE" WALK AND FOLKLORE DANCING

Breakfast

Today we will reach mountain hut Pleven, hidden in the footsteps of Mt. Botev (2376m) – the highest peak in the Balkan Range. The views to the Northern Djendem Nature Reserve are stunning! We will have a picnic lunch break at the hut.

In the afternoon: enjoy some Folklore dancing in Aprilsi village, before transferring to Veliko Tarnovo (approx 1.30 hours).

**Walking time:** 4 hours (Ascent: 500m/ Descent: 500m)

**Night stop:** Veliko Tarnovo

**Accommodation:** 3\* Hotel

**Included meals:** breakfast, picnic-lunch, dinner



## DAY 5 - 22ND JUNE

### TARNOVO PANORAMIC WALK AND ARBANASSI VILLAGE

Breakfast

Today our walk starts right from Samovodska Charshia – the crafts street in town. From there we will walk to Preobrajenski Manastir, passing through the old town with cobbled streets and panoramic views. Once we reach the Monastery we will take the bus to the nearby Arbanassi Village architectural reserve which is famous for its revival houses and beautifully painted churches. Later: we will have lunch in a traditional restaurant and visit the Konstantsalieva House Museum and Nativity of Christ Church. In the afternoon we will visit the Old Castle “Tzarevets” in Veliko Tarnovo.

**Walking time:** 3 hours (Ascent: 350m/ Descent: 200m)

**Night stop:** Veliko Tarnovo

**Accommodation:** 3\* Hotel

**Included meals:** breakfast, lunch, dinner



## DAY 6 - 23RD JUNE

### ETARA CRAFTS MUSEUM - ENYOVDEN CELEBRATIONS

Breakfast

Short transfer to Etera Ethnographic Crafts Street. It is a one of its kind open-air museum, where you can observe woodcarving, pottery, furriery, coppersmiths and a cow-bell workshop. Enyovden is one of Bulgaria’s most celebrated national holidays, along with Easter, Christmas and St. George’s Day. It is both a religious feast and a traditional folk ritual. The celebrations have mystical pagan roots and are related to the summer solstice, healing waters and wild herbs. The celebrations are held on 23rd and 24th June.

Today’s walk will take in views to Southern Bulgaria, passing through a nature reserve with century old forests. In the afternoon we will visit the Shipka Russian Church “The Nativity of Christ” – one of the most beautiful churches in the country. At the end of the day we will arrive at Kalofer town (600m above the sea level) – the most popular starting point for hiking in the area.

**Walking time:** 3 hours (Ascent: 100m/ Descent: 700m)

**Night stop:** Kalofer Town

**Accommodation:** Family-run Guesthouse

**Included meals:** breakfast, picnic-lunch, dinner



## DAY 7 - 24TH JUNE

### ECO-TRAIL WALK AND KOPRIVSHTITSA VILLAGE

Breakfast.

After breakfast we will take the local bus for a short transfer or we can walk some 5km from the end of town to reach Kalofer Monastery "The Nativity of Mary" (17th century). From there we will enter into Southern Djendem Nature Reserve, part of the Central Balkan Park. Our hike we will be part of "Byala Reka" (White River) Eco-trail, famous for its many wooden bridges and white-water pools.

In the afternoon we will go to Koprivshtitsa: a town museum, famous for its revival style houses and rich history.

**Optional visit of:** Oslekova House-museum; Lyutova House-museum; the Church "The Assumption of the Virgin Mary". We will have free time for walk around this magical village.

**Walking time:** 2.30 hours (Ascent: 200m/ Descent: 200m)

**Night stop:** Koprivshtitsa

**Accommodation:** Family-run Guesthouse

**Included meals:** breakfast, picnic-lunch, dinner

## DAY 8 - 25TH JUNE

### RHODOPI MOUNTAINS WALK AND SPA

Breakfast.

Today we will reach Rhodopi Mountains, known as the Land of Orpheus. We will enjoy a lovely walk in endless pine forests of this magical mountain.

**Optional:** free time this afternoon to relax or take a SPA or massage treatment.

**Walking time:** 3 hours (Ascent: 300m/ Descent: 300m)

**Night stop:** Velingrad

**Accommodation:** SPA-hotel

**Included meals:** breakfast, picnic-lunch, dinner



## DAY 9 - 26TH JUNE

### MOUNTAIN RAILROAD TRIP

Breakfast.

In the morning we will catch the picturesque mountain train connecting Rhodopi, Rila and Pirin Mountains. The train is used mainly by the local ethnic groups living in the area. The train is slow enough to enjoy the scenery and the endless pine forests.

Our final train stop we will be at the footsteps of Rila Mountains, near Semkovo village. From there we will have a short transfer by bus to the starting point of our 3-hour hike. At the end of this walk we will reach Dobarsko village, famous for its church "St. Theodor Tiron and Theodor Stratilat" – 17th century church with unique frescoes. We will sleep in a small mountain village with great views to the nearby sceneries.

In the evening: home-made traditional dinner.

**Walking time:** 3.30 hours (Ascent: 400m/ Descent: 400m)

**Night stop:** Gorno Draglishte village

**Accommodation:** Family-run guesthouse

**Included meals:** breakfast, lunch, dinner

## DAY 10 - 27TH JUNE

### PIRIN MOUNTAIN WALK AND BANSKO TOWN

Breakfast.

We start the day with a short transfer to Vihren hut (1960m) – starting point for many hikes in Pirin National Park. Today we will do a circuit hike to the glacial lakes in Buderitsa circus. The area will charm you with its alpine scenery and white marble peaks of the mountain.

In the afternoon: visit of Bansko town and free time.

**Walking time:** 4.00 hours (Ascent: 450m/ Descent: 450m)

**Night stop:** Gorno Draglishte village

**Accommodation:** Family-run guesthouse

**Included meals:** breakfast, lunch, dinner

## DAY 11 - 28TH JUNE

### RILA MONASTERY (UNESCO)

Breakfast.

We start the day with a transfer to the biggest monastery in Bulgaria – Rila Monastery. The sanctuary was founded in the 10th c. by the Saint Hermit Ivan Rilski. Nowadays the monastery is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and consists of the church of the Holy Virgin, Monastery Museum, a Medieval kitchen and Medieval tower. After lunch, an easy walk will bring us to St. Ivan Rilski's hermitage cave, situated in the deep forests of Rila Monastery Nature Reserve. In the afternoon: transfer to Separeva Banya.

**Walking time:** 2 hours (Ascent: 200m/ Descent: 250m)

**Night stop:** Separeva Banya

**Accommodation:** 3\* Hotel

**Included meals:** breakfast, lunch, dinner



## DAY 12 - 29TH JUNE

### THE SEVEN RILA LAKES

Breakfast.

The Seven Rila Lakes are one of the symbols of the country. Every year, thousands of people gather around the lakes to honor the sun and to feel the spiritual energy in the area. First we will pass by all of the seven lakes until we reach the high point from where we will have a bird's-eye view.

**Walking time:** 5 hours (Ascent:600m, Descent:600m )

**Night stop:** Separeva Banya

**Accommodation:** 3\* Hotel

**Included meals:** breakfast, picnic-lunch, dinner



## DAY 13 - 30TH JUNE

### SOFIA

Breakfast.

In the morning we will transfer to Sofia and take in a walking city tour. Later: free timeto discover the city on your own or to do some shopping. Farewell dinner tonight in a traditional Bulgarian restaurant.

**Night stop:** Sofia

**Accommodation:** 3\* Downtown Hotel

**Included meals:** breakfast, lunch, dinner

## DAY 14 - 1ST JULY

### DEPARTURE DAY

Breakfast.

You will be departing for your own destinations with memories of an unforgettable experience through the unknown Europe.

Direct transfer to the airport.



## IMPORTANT NOTES

### Food & drinks

All food quality is carefully selected following the true local Bulgarian tradition.

### Local Guide

The group will be accompanied by a local English speaking guide. Our guides are highly professional, very friendly with an extensive knowledge of the area. They know every hidden corner and will give you the opportunity to experience all the unspoiled places and the real culture of Bulgaria.

### Transport

A private bus and driver will be available for the group for its everyday transfers and transportation of luggage.



### INCLUDED WITH THIS TRIP

- 13 nights accommodation
- All meals as detailed on the itinerary
- All transfers listed in the itinerary
- Train ticket for the mountain train in Rhodopi Mountains
- Chairlift round ticket to the Seven Rila Lakes Hut
- Guided walks and workshops listed in the itinerary
- Services of a fully experienced bi-lingual guide

### ACCOMMODATION

Family-run Guesthouses and 3\* Hotels



### NOT INCLUDED WITH THIS TRIP

- International Airfare
- Visa fees - each member of the group must carry a valid passport (valid for at least 6 months beyond the duration of your trip) and have obtained the appropriate visas
- Tips, personal telephone charges.
- Travel Insurance (compulsory) - You will need to give the policy number prior to departure
- Items of a personal nature; postage, drinks and souvenirs
- Museum Entrance fees
- Additional optional activities and SPA treatments
- Medical Advice - Please refer to your GP or local travel clinic for up to date travel health advice for the area(s) you are visiting.



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