



Bulgaria

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Why Go?

Bulgaria (България) may be best known for its long, sandy Black Sea beaches, but there's much more to see than that. Bulgaria boasts no fewer than seven mountain ranges and varied landscapes ideal for hiking, cycling, climbing and wildlife-watching. The country has some of Europe's most modern ski resorts as well. You'll find churches and monasteries full of vibrant icons, picturesque villages of timber-framed houses and cobbled lanes, and dramatic reminders of the country's ancient heritage, from Thracian tombs and Roman ruins to medieval fortresses, Ottoman mosques and communist monuments slowly crumbling away into history. Bulgaria's cities, too, reward visitors, with treasure-filled museums and galleries, and parks sprinkled with cafes and restaurants. Getting around is easy and still remarkably cheap so brush up on your Cyrillic, buy a bus ticket and get ready to explore.

Best Places to Eat

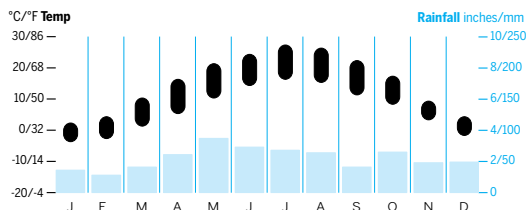
- » Manastirska Magernitsa (p159)
- » Mehana Mencheva Káshta (p166)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Niky (p155)
- » Hotel Bolyarka (p166)
- » Hotel Renaissance (p169)
- » Hotel Bolyarski (p179)
- » Hotel Tony (p193)

When to Go

Sofia



Jan This is a great time to go skiing in Bansko or down Mt Vitosha.

Mar–May Fine spring weather welcomes folk and festivals across the country.

Jun–Sep Spend lazy days on the Black Sea beaches and nights at Bulgaria's best clubs.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Lev (lv)
- » **Language** Bulgarian
- » **Money** ATMs are everywhere
- » **Visas** Not required for citizens of the EU, UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 110,910 sq km
- » **Capital** Sofia
- » **Country code** ☎359
- » **Emergency** ☎112

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	1.60 lv
Canada	C\$1	1.51 lv
Euro Zone	€1	1.96 lv
Japan	¥100	1.63 lv
New Zealand	NZ\$1	1.28 lv
UK	UK£1	2.32 lv
USA	US\$1	1.53 lv

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** 50 lv
- » **Two-course meal** 10 lv
- » **Museum entrance** 4–10 lv
- » **Beer** 2 lv
- » **City transport ticket** 1 lv

Resources

- » **BG Maps** (www.bgmaps.com)
- » **Bulgaria Travel** (www.bulgariatravel.com)
- » **Beach Bulgaria** (www.beachbulgaria.com)

Connections

Although Sofia has international bus and train connections, it's not necessary to backtrack to the capital if you're heading to Bucharest or Istanbul. From central Veliko Tŕrnovo, for example, there are daily trains both ways – and much of the country offers overnight buses to Istanbul. Heading to Greece or Belgrade by train means going through Sofia; for Skopje, you'll need to catch a bus from there, too.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Start with a day in Sofia, visiting the Archaeological Museum and Borisova Gradina, then take the bus to Veliko Tŕrnovo for a few days of sightseeing and hiking. Next, head to Varna for some sea and sand. More adventurous travellers may want to head further south along the coast to prettier resorts closer to the Turkish border.

Two Weeks

After a couple of days in Sofia, catch a bus to Plovdiv and wander the cobbled lanes of the Old Town. From there, take a day trip to visit the Bachkovo Monastery. After a few days in Plovdiv, make for the coast, staying a couple of nights in ancient Sozopol. Head north to overnight in Varna then get a connection to Ruse for a glimpse of the Danube and some fine museums. Finish in Veliko Tŕrnovo.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Banitsa** Flaky cheese pasty, often served fresh and hot.
- » **Kebabche** Thin, grilled pork sausage, a staple of every *mehana* (tavern) in the country.
- » **Tarator** On a hot day there's nothing better than this delicious chilled cucumber and yoghurt soup, served with garlic, dill and crushed walnuts.
- » **Beer** You're never far from a cold beer in Bulgaria. Zargorka, Kamenitza and Shumensko are the most popular nationwide brands.
- » **Wine** They've been producing wine here since Thracian times and there are some excellent varieties to try.
- » **Kavarma** This 'claypot meal', or meat stew, is normally made with either chicken or pork and is one of the country's most popular dishes.
- » **Shkembe chorba** Traditional stomach soup is one of the more adventurous and offbeat highlights of Bulgarian cuisine.
- » **Shishcheta** This shish kebab, consisting of chunks of chicken or pork on wooden skewers with mushrooms and peppers, is widely available.
- » **Musaka** Admittedly, Bulgarian moussaka bears more than a passing resemblance to its Greek cousin but it's a delicious staple of cheap cafeteria meals.