

BEST OF BULGARIA IN 12 DAYS

Sun, Sep 24, 2023 through Thu, Oct 05, 2023



DAY 1

Welcome to Bulgaria

Sun, Sep 24, 2023

Join your guide and group at 4 p.m. today in our Sofia hotel for a "Welcome to Bulgaria" get-together. We'll take a neighborhood stroll before enjoying our first taste of Bulgaria's rich cuisine over dinner together.

Light walking: 2–4 miles throughout the day on mostly level terrain. No bus. Sleep in Sofia.

DAY 2

Exploring Sofia

Mon, Sep 25, 2023

Today we'll take a walking tour to uncover Sofia's intriguing past and present. We'll visit the President's Building, where we'll stop for the changing of the guard, as well as the Sofia Synagogue. We'll also tour the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, famous for its gilded domes and masterful mosaics. Then you can "follow the yellow brick road" (Sofia has one) to explore the bustling market hall and more of the city's center on your own. We'll wrap up our day by meeting with a local, who will answer questions and tell us about issues facing Bulgaria today.

Moderate walking: 2–6 miles throughout the day with some hills and stairs. No bus. Sleep in Sofia.

DAY 3

Rila Monastery

Tue, Sep 26, 2023

We'll dive headfirst into Bulgarian culture today with a visit to the Roma community in the town of Dupnitsa, where we'll visit kids at a local school, learn about Roma history and culture, and eat lunch together in a local restaurant. Later, we'll drive through the scenic Rilska Valley en route to our destination high in the mountains: the remote and mystical Rila Monastery. We'll take a tour of this 14th-century architectural treasure and its fabulous frescoes before heading to our countryside hotel near Rila, where we'll enjoy dinner together.

Moderate walking: 2–6 miles throughout the day with some hills and stairs. Bus: 4 hours. Sleep near Rila.

DAY 4

Bessa Valley Wines

Wed, Sep 27, 2023

This morning we'll visit the countryside residence of the Bulgarian Royal family, Tsarska Bistritsa. After lunch together, we'll depart the countryside for the city of Plovdiv, stopping where merchants from Troy journeyed 4,000 years ago: a Bessa Valley winery. We'll learn the history of some of Europe's oldest vineyards — from ancient times to the Communist "collective era" to the entrepreneurial present — and enjoy a tasting. Then we'll continue on to Plovdiv, one of Bulgaria's most delightful cities, where we'll enjoy dinner together.

Moderate walking: 2–6 miles throughout the day with some hills and stairs. Bus: 4 hours. Sleep in Plovdiv.

DAY 5

Renaissance Plovdiv

Thu, Sep 28, 2023

Once the capital city of ancient Thrace, Plovdiv is actually older than Athens and Rome, with archaeological relics dating back 7,000 years. We'll start our day with a walking tour of Plovdiv's old town, including Trajan's second-century Roman theater and its commanding view of the city. We'll also visit the structures that Plovdiv is proudest of: the old town's unique collection of elegant, pastel-pretty "Bulgarian Renaissance" homes from the 19th century, and the Dzhumaya Mosque, the oldest in Bulgaria. The remainder of the day is free for you to explore more of this cultural and cosmopolitan city.

Strenuous walking: 2–8 miles throughout the day with lots of hills, stairs, and uneven terrain. No bus. Sleep in Plovdiv.

DAY 6

Kazanlak and Burgas

Fri, Sep 29, 2023

We'll drive to the Black Sea today, stopping in Kazanlak for lunch together and to visit some of the greatest examples of early Hellenistic art: a fourth-century BC Thracian tomb covered with magnificent murals, and another packed with beautifully preserved gold and bronze artifacts. We'll end our day with dinner together along the seaside in the lovely port town of Burgas. Enjoy a post-dinner stroll through the city's historical center or follow the picturesque promenade on Burgas Bay.

Light walking: 2–4 miles throughout the day on mostly even terrain. Bus: 7 hours. Sleep in Burgas.

DAY 7

Nesebar and the Black Sea

Sat, Sep 30, 2023