

BULGARIA

Transbalkan trek



Guaranteed departure dates for 2008: 21/6, 12/7, 02/8, 16/8, 30/8, 13/9

Ref. number: ZZ-HKBUL02G

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

Introduction:

The Central Balkan National Park is one of the most popular hiking destinations in Bulgaria. The name of Stara Planina mountains ("Balkan") comes from the ancient history of our land. It is not surprising that the whole peninsula is named after the mountains. Despite the severe climate, the inaccessible gorges and the awesome valleys it has given shelter to people since ancient times, during the Thracian and Roman days, up to the present.

Our trip offers a combined trek through two of the most exciting natural reserves in the Balkan Mountains: Kozyata Stena (The Chamois' Rocks; famous for its flowering Edelweiss during summer) and Northern Dzhendem. We climb Mount Botev – the highest peak in the Balkan Mountains (2,376 m, or 7,795 ft) and enjoy the imposing view of the Sredna Gora, Pirin and Rodopi Mountains and the fertile Thracian Valley. Sharp pinnacles, deep canyons, century-old Beech woods, waterfalls, unique rock formations and vast alpine meadows hide extraordinary diverse wildlife. The tour ends in the town of Plovdiv, where a relaxed walk along the paved streets of the old quarters will bring us a couple of centuries back in time.

Special highlights:

Balkan Mountains (highest peak: Mount Botev 2376 m a.s.l.) are the longest (550 km) and the biggest of all mountains in Bulgaria.

Cherni Osam is a village, perched on both banks of the Cherni Osam River

and an excellent base to explore the National Park Central Balkan.

Chiflik is a village located at the upper stream of the Beli Osam River.

Troyan Monastery "Assumption of Virgin Mary", being the 3-th largest in Bulgaria, is built in the style of the Bulgarian Renaissance.

Beklemeto Pass (1320 m a.s.l.) is a mountain resort very popular for summer and winter mountain marches in the high part of the mountains.

Plovdiv (160 m a.s.l.) ranks as the second Bulgarian city in population and size. The old town of Plovdiv is one of the oldest European towns contemporary to Troy and Mikena.

Itinerary:

Day 1. Arrival at Sofia or Plovdiv airport and transfer to the Beklemeto pass in the Balkan Mountains where we stay overnight (2 hrs from Plovdiv; 2,5 hrs from Sofia).

/dinner/

Day 2. In the morning we start off from Beklemeto (1,320 m, or 4,330 ft) heading towards the peak sections of the mountains leading to the Troyan Pass (1,525 m, or 5,003 ft), before continuing westwards. From here the path follows the summit of the Balkan ridge, passing along the southern slopes of Kozyata Stena Reserve. The northern slopes of Kozyata Stena (1,562 m, or 5,124 ft) house an impressive population of Edelweiss, which flower during the summer. This trek takes around three hours from Beklemeto. At the foot of Baba Peak (1707 m or 5,599 ft) we turn northwards. En route we pass a rocky gully famous for its avalanches in winter.

We now have about 2,5 hrs more to go before we reach the village of Chiflik (600 m, or 1,968 ft). Then we transfer to our hotel in Beklemeto (about 30min). Uphill walk: 250 m, or 820 ft; downhill walk: 950 m, or 3,116 ft; walking time: about 5-6 hours

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 3. After breakfast we head off from Beklemeto to the Dermenka hut (1,504 m, or 4,934 ft). This route features a strenuous but rewarding descent along the Cherni Osam River, where the Steneto Reserve (included in the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere reserves on account of its virgin nature) awaits us. Then it's on to the village of Cherni Osam itself. Steneto is also a recognised bird zone. The number of birds registered here is higher than in any other reserve in the Central Balkan region. From Cherni Osam we take the transfer to Troyan Monastery, where we will take a short stroll along the monastery walls. Later in the afternoon we leave for Apriltsi (the transfer takes about 30min), where we will stay overnight.

Uphill walk: 450 m (1,476 ft); downhill walk: 650 m (2,132 ft); walking time: around 7-8 hours

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 4. Pack and leave your luggage at the reception – it will be picked up on day 7 and transferred to Plovdiv. In the morning we will embark on a short sightseeing trip around Apriltsi (506 m, or 1660 ft), which affords you a good insight into the local way of living. At around noon after short transfer we take a walk along one of the new local eco-

paths, ascending towards the Pleven hut (1,390 m, or 4,560 ft) where we will stay overnight. The trek takes about 1 hr. By the hut we will have time to visit Vodnita Dupki Cave (The water holes), where Brown Bears are seen from time to time. The magnificent views towards Mount Botev are preferred by some tourists as a part of a more relaxed afternoon before the ascent to the peak during the next day.

Uphill walk: 600 m (1,968 ft); downhill walk: 100 m (328 ft); walking time: 1-4 hours (depending on the extensions in the afternoon)

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 5. Today we will head towards the Balkan Mountains' giant - Mount Botev (2,376 m, or 7,795 ft). Some 30 min after Pleven hut the path goes along the edge of the Northern Dzhendem Reserve. Here you will have the opportunity to enjoy for an hour the inaccessible pinnacles of probably the most picturesque part of the mountains. In case of clear skies we may see the ridges of Pirin and Rodopi mountains. Some 3 hrs from Pleven hut we reach the Botev refuge, where we can leave our luggage before the ascent. Then we continue to the top, where we get in 1 hr more before going back to the refuge. During the development of what are now the Balkan Mountains, the granite basis of the peak was broken up by river erosion. As a result, the terrifying rock faces of the Northern Dzhendem and the Heavenly rocks to the south were shaped. As the weather on the top is famous for its inconstancy we will not spend much time there. Three hours more and we end up in Vasil Levski hut (1450 m a.s.l. or 4,756 ft), where we stay overnight. En-route we pass through Stara Reka Reserve, protected many rare species of plants, inhabiting the meadows by the spring of several rivers that start from this area.

Uphill walk: 1100 m (3,608 ft); downhill walk: 1040 m (3,411 ft); walking time: 6-7 hours

/breakfast, lunchpack, dinner/

Day 6. Walking through the mixed forest by the Vasil Levski hut we reach

in an hour a flat place where many mountains paths cross each other. From this point signposted track leads to Rai hut - our last stop for today. Along the trail we pass through several springs, lying at the foot of the vertical cliffs, surrounding Mount Botev from the south. Here we can enjoy the Southern Dzhendem Reserve. Highlights of the area are also the Heavenly Rocks and the Heavens Waterfall ("Raikoto pruskalo"). At a height of 124.5 m (408 ft), it is not just the highest waterfall in Bulgaria, but on the entire Balkan Peninsula. We spend the night in the Rai hut (1,560 m, or 5,118 ft). Uphill walk: 600 m (1,968 ft); downhill walk: 450 m (1,476 ft); walking time: about 4-5 hrs

/breakfast, lunchpack, dinner/

Day 7. The route begins with a steep descent along the stream of Biala Reka River to a monastery above the town of Kalofer. From there we take the transfer to Plovdiv (taking about 1,5 hrs), where the rest of the afternoon can be spent on a self-guided sightseeing trip or shopping along the paved streets of the old quarter of Plovdiv.

Uphill walk: 20 m; downhill walk: 800 m (2,624 ft); walking time: 4 hrs

/breakfast, lunchpack, dinner/

Day 8. After breakfast you will have transfer to Sofia or Plovdiv Airport for departure (transfer time: 20 min to Plovdiv Airport or 2 h to Sofia Airport)

/breakfast/

Accommodation:

We stay in 3-star hotels (days 1, 2 & 3) and guesthouse (day 7) with private facilities and in mountain huts (days 4, 5 & 6) with shared facilities on HB (breakfast & dinner included). Lunchpacks are included for the mountain treks during the days 5, 6 & 7.

Luggage transportation:

Unnecessary luggage will be transferred as follows:

Day 3: from Beklemeto Pass to Apriltsi

Day 7: from Apriltsi to Plovdiv

Tour type: GT

Difficulty grade: B (days 2 & 4) / C (days 3, 5, 6 & 7)

Best period: June – September

Weather:

Temperatures expected for this period are between +10 and +30°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: daypack for days 2 & 3 (35 l) and rucksack (60 l) for the rest days in the mountains; 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".

Vaccination:

Optional. See "General" for more information.

Group size: Min. 4 persons

The price includes: accommodation and boarding as mentioned above; transfer to/from Sofia or Plovdiv airport; English-speaking guide; luggage and private transfers as mentioned above; VAT and all local taxes.

The price does not include: map (could be requested in advance when booking the tour), tips, alcohol drinks, meals outside the program, entrance fees, 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:

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.

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.)
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

