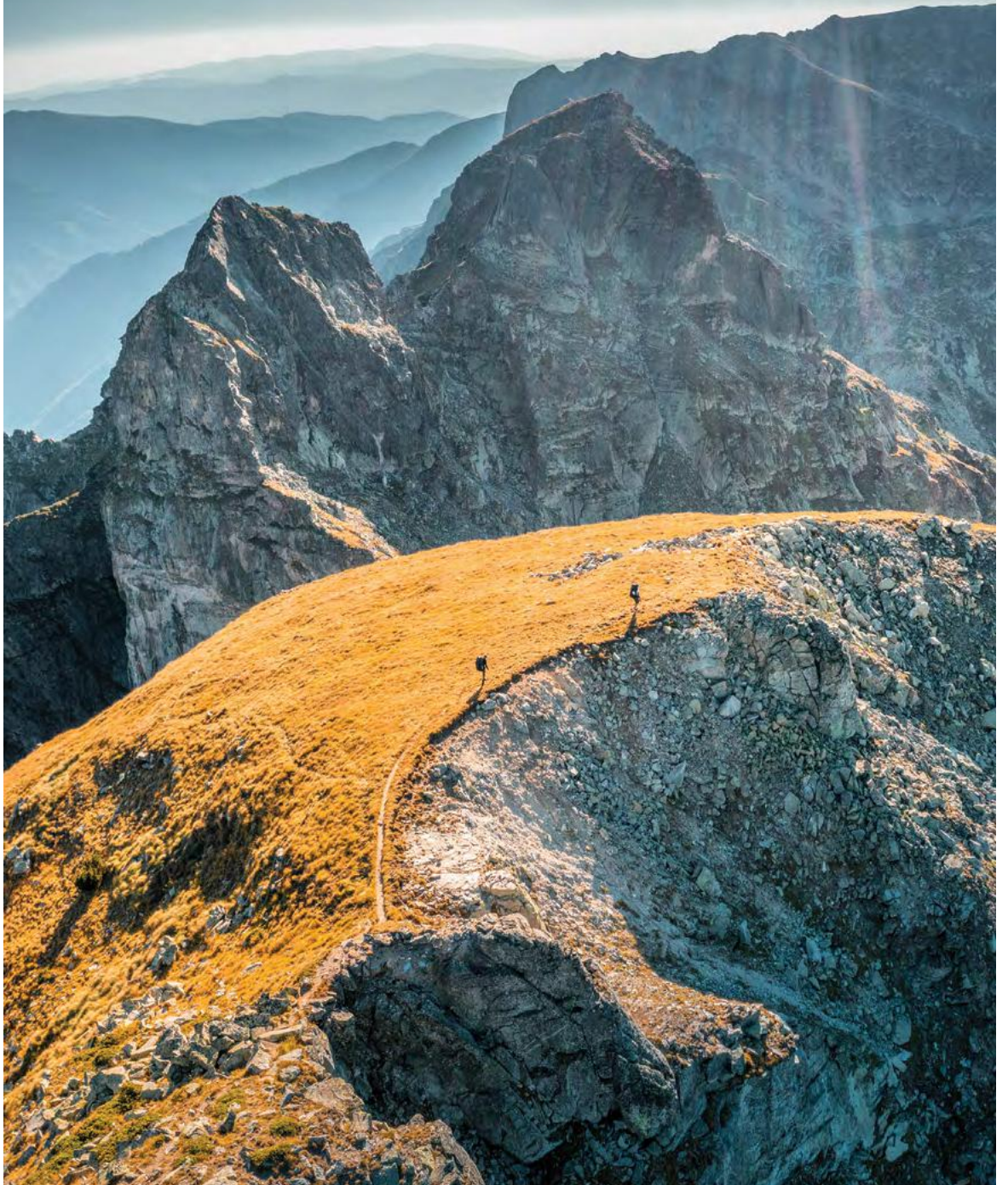


BULGARIA

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360mag.bg



ADVENTURE & CULTURAL TRAVEL

hiking-bulgaria.com



stenata.com

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more than
200
lodges and shelters

37 peaks
over **2700 m**

over
50
mountain resorts

over
340
natural sites

200 km
beaches

TO SUMMIT

SEA



more than
90 rivers

over
300
lakes

The highest mountain peaks and some of the most inaccessible and stunning places around the globe feature on any travel agent's list. After thousands of years of nomadic wandering, marches of conquest, missionary work, daring exploration and mountaineering expeditions, the world has now dubbed all that Brownian motion adventure travel.

Allergic to confined spaces, travellers are individuals in quest of extraordinary spots. What floats their boat is... suspending their hammock at the very edge of a breath-taking precipice, or building an old-time wigwam to share with someone close at heart in pursuit of their dreams... Enriching experiences far from the hubbub of globalisation - a place, a trip, an en-

counter with an authentic, hospitable and unique local culture... Somewhere new, or a lifestyle matching their ever more demanding taste for adventure... Get lost in Bulgaria. Find yourself.

FOUR SEASONS

SPRING

Rafting
Camping
Trail running
Bird-watching



AUTUMN

Trekking
Surfing
Climbing
Biking



WINTER

Ski
Snowboard
Ice climbing
Mountaineering



SUMMER

Sailing
Cliff jumping
Diving
Kayaking



From ancient shipwrecks on the bottom off the deceptively tranquil Black Sea shores, through the soft shapes of East Bulgaria's woody hills treaded on for millennia by Thracians, Romans, Greeks, barbarians and Crusaders, to the escarpments and rocky cathedrals of Belogradchik and Vratsa and the celestial peaks of the Rila and Pirin Mountains. Bulgaria is about

choice. Your choice. And it's about experiences. Plenty of them: Join the fearsome kukeri in their dance to scare winter away, spend a spring morning rose-picking in the Rose Valley, collect herbs from the fragrant meadows of the Rhodope and Balkan Mountains in summer, and witness the impressive autumn migration of hundreds of thousands of birds on

their way from North Europe to Africa, then try making our trademark pepper relish called lyutenitsa and get a taste of the new wine. Four seasons packed with great opportunities. An abundance of adrenaline and adventure. For connoisseurs and chronic nomads.

WATER

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▶ **Bulgaria borders more than 900 km of water, with 470 km of the Danube's total length of 2850 km being the country's northern border, and its Black Sea coast extending for 387 km.**

RIVERS

Of Bulgaria's more than 540 rivers, 32 extend for over 100 km each, including the Danube, Iskar (368 km), Tundzha (350 km), Maritsa (322 km), Osam (314 km) and Struma (290 km). Taking their sources from mountainous areas and flowing through spectacular gorges, many of the country's rivers are a great destination for visitors as diverse as the range of activities they have to offer, from families with children to extreme adventurers.

River activities:
trekking, canyoning,
camping, rafting, kayaking
and fishing.

River locations:
Lakatnik at the Iskar River and the entire Iskar Gorge, the Devil's Bridge at the Arda River, the Rilska, Beli Vit, Cherni Vit, Mesta, Veleka and Rusenski Lom Rivers. Whitewater kayaking: the Manastirska River (in the Rila Mountain), the mouth of the Kamchiya River, the Yantra River (near the town of Byala), the Tundzha River (near the town of Elhovo), and more.

@ [moew.government.bg](https://www.moew.government.bg)
Ministry of Environment and Water

▷ Bulgaria's rivers belong to one of two drainage basins, ultimately flowing either into the Black Sea or into the Aegean Sea.





Struma, photos: Adventure Net

RAFTING

▶ **An Outdoor & White Water Fest kick-starts the rafting & kayaking season in late March every year.**



Bulgaria has several rafting hotspots and a well-developed network of rafting centres, clubs and professionals promoting this kind of sport among tourists and organising rafting races and sports events. Popular rafting locations include the Struma River Gorge, the Iskar Gorge, the Rusenski Lom Canyon and the Arda River Valley.

Other rafting spots in Bulgaria:

Lakatnik at the Iskar River, the Devil's Bridge at the Arda River, the Rilska, Beli Vit, Cherni Vit, Mesta, Veleka and Rusenski Lom Rivers.

@ [kresna.org](https://www.kresna.org) - website with useful information

www.bulgariatravel.org

Struma, photo: Ivan Dobrev

Struma

The Struma River takes its sources at an altitude of 2246 m, just below the Vitosha Mountain's highest peak, Cherni Vrah (2290), and then flows past Bulgaria's highest mountains Rila and Pirin. Its underground flow has carved out the karst labyrinth of Bulgaria's longest cave, Duhlata. The Struma is the country's most popular rafting river, with well-developed commercial and sports rafting facilities. A number of sports clubs operate along the river, with well-equipped rafting centres near the towns of Kresna and Simitli. If it's advanced rafting routes you're

after, that's where you can hire the equipment and qualified guides from. A special rafting campsite near Kresna offers not only the required rafting infrastructure but also an adventure park with a variety of attractions. It is here, in the Kresna Gorge, that the Struma features one of the Balkans' most technically challenging rafting routes, with a total length of 18 km. The river's rating is Class 3-4 Pool-Drop, which means intermittent rapids followed by sections of calm water. It is the venue for annual races, some of which are international.

More about the place:

Dozens of natural, archaeological, architectural and tourist sights along the river are worth visiting: the picturesque cliffs of the Zemen, Skrino and Kresna Gorges, the Zemen Monastery, the extinct Kozhuh volcano and the mystic Rupite area with its thermal springs, the Tisata Natural Reserve, the ruins of the medieval Krakra fortress, the Kadin Bridge of the village of Nevestino, and many more.

ADVENTURE TRAVEL IN BULGARIA

More activities

around: *Kayaking possible almost year-round (whitewater in spring, otherwise touring between Kresna and Strumyani). Cliff jumping, canyoning. Wildlife watching (over 140 species of birds and other animals). Cycling and trekking routes (Kresna-Slivenitsa-Strumyani-Kresna, with a total length of 28 km). Hunting and fishing (with the Golak Hunting and Fishing Society of the village of Strumyani). A few thermal springs (Stara Kresna, Oshtava, Marikostinovo, some of which out in the wild). Wine tours along the Struma valley.*



KAYAKING

If you're a fan of kayaking tours, you'll find splendid opportunities in almost every corner of Bulgaria. Whitewater kayaking is available in some of the mountainous areas. Driven by the rising popularity of this pastime, it is not only rowing and sports clubs but also an ever larger number of travel agents that tend to include kayaking in their portfolio.

► **Kayaking on the Arda, you can visit dozens of ancient fortresses, sanctuaries and forgotten villages.**



Arda, photo: Ivan Dobrev

Other kayaking spots in Bulgaria: The TID (Tour International Danubien) annual international regatta on the Danube, the Iskar River. Whitewater kayaking: the Manastirska River (in the Rila mountain), the mouth of the Kamchiya River, the Yantra River (near the town of Byala), the Tundzha River (near the town of Elhovo), and more.

@ [bko.bg](https://www.bko.bg) - Bulgarian Kayak Association



📍 Arda

The Arda is Bulgaria's 9th longest river, flowing through the Rhodope Mountains for 242 km and leaving Bulgaria for the last 30 km of its course. Its scenic valley boasts natural and historical sights and is the perfect destination for a few days of kayaking combined with camping and a variety of outdoor activities on and by the river. The Arda feeds three of Bulgaria's most picturesque reservoirs - Kardzhali, Studen kladenets and Ivaylovgrad, which, along with the river valley near the town of Madzharovo, are a great choice for relaxing recreational tours almost

Arda, photo: Ivan Dobrev

📍 More about the place: Numerous historical sights along the Arda River Valley suggest a rich history. In addition to the ruins of ancient fortresses (including Krivus near the village of Bashevo, Pathmos near the Borovitsa Lodge, Monyak near the town of Kardzhali, and many more), it is worth exploring some of the countless Thracian sanctuaries (notably Chit Kaya in the vicinity of the village of Lisitsite, the cromlech near the village of Dolni Glavanak, and more). One of the most popular points of interest here is the medieval Devil's Bridge near the town of Ardino. The biodiversity here boasts more than 4300 animal species, including the critically endangered Egyptian vulture along with three other vulture species (in the Valchi dol Reserve near Madzharovo), the imperial eagle, the black stork, the European bison (in the Studen kladenets Game Breeding Station), and a wolf population. A Nature Conservation Centre near Madzharovo, known as the Vulture Centre, features a campsite and a bird hide.

📍 More activities around: Rafting in spring (in the section from the Beli izvor Hydropower Plant to the point where the river flows into the Kardzhali Reservoir, known as the Zero Point). Mountain hikes and cycling (the TransRhodopi Long-Distance Biking Trail, the Sultan's Trail long-distance footpath), ecotourism, esoteric tourism (the ancient Perperikon, the sanctuary of Tatul, the Utrobata (Womb) Cave, the cromlech near the village of Dolni Glavanak, and more).

WATERFALLS

Bulgaria's waterfalls have a great diversity of outdoor activities to offer, such as hiking (the Waterfalls Canyon), ice climbing in winter (the Boyana and Skakavitsa Waterfalls and the Severen Dzhendem Rserve), and highlining (the Skaklya Waterfall). Most of them are accessible through well-maintained hiking trails, and picnic sites are conveniently set up nearby. Popular destinations include the Raysko praskalo (Heavenly Sprinkler) in the Balkan Mountains, which is the highest permanent waterfall in the Balkans (124 m), the Krushuna Waterfalls, an exquisite series of turquoise-coloured pools connected with charming little falls near the village of Krushuna, and the remarkable Bovska Skaklya Waterfall near the village of Zasele in the Iskar Gorge, ranking as Bulgaria's fourth highest waterfall (120 m). The Waterfalls Canyon, a scenic trail right at the outskirts of the town of Smolyan, boasts as many as 40 waterfalls of varying heights, the tallest one (68 m) bearing the name of the legendary Thracian harpist Orpheus.

Other popular waterfalls:

Vrachanska Skaklya (Bulgaria's tallest, though not permanent one, with 141 m), the picturesque Rilska Skakavitsa (the Rila Mountain's highest one, 70 m), the Hotnitsa Waterfall near its namesake village in Veliko Tarnovo Region), Vidimsko praskalo in the Balkan Mountain's Severen Dzhendem Reserve, the Boyana Waterfall in the Vitoshka Mountain.

▶ **The Dyavolsko garlo (Devil's Throat) Cave deep in the Trigrad Gorge engulfs the river that carved the awe-inspiring landscape around and is home to the Balkans' highest underground waterfall (42 m).**

@ waterfallsbg.info
Waterfalls in Bulgaria



CANYONING

With an abundance of riverbeds with particularly suitable geomorphological features, canyoning is simply a must in Bulgaria's adventure travel portfolio. The gorges of the Struma, Erma and Trigrad Rivers, as well as the Iskar Gorge near the village of Karlukovo, are some of the country's preferred canyoning destinations. A number of rafting clubs also offer this activity in their range of services.

▶ **The First Love highline, set up by Lyudmil Ivanov, extends for 130 metres, at a height of 50 m above the river in the Emen Canyon, which also features a nice trail and a little gem of a waterfall.**

📍 **Popular spots:** *the Sheytan dere Canyon of the Struma River, the Negovanka River (in Veliko Tarnovo Region), the Popina Laka Waterfall near the town of Sandanski*



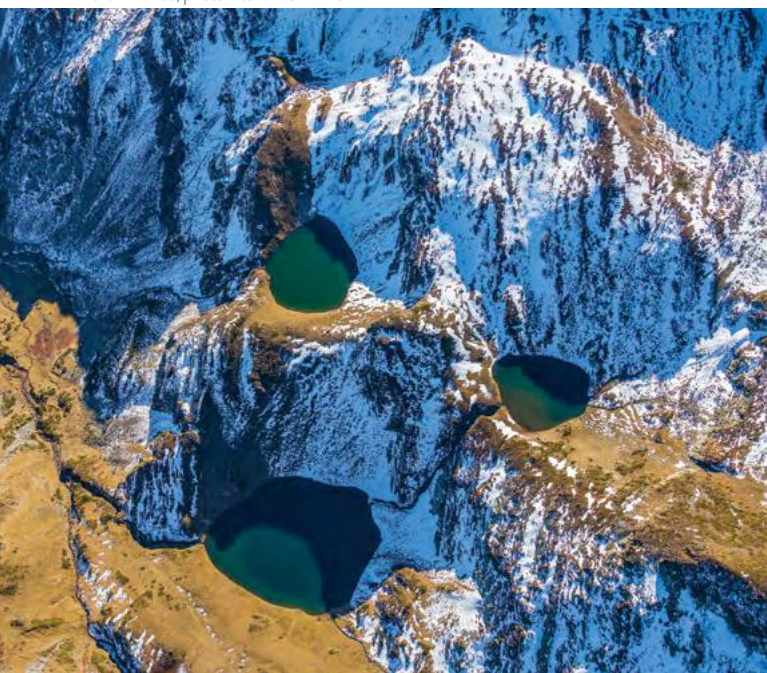
LAKES

Bulgaria boasts more than 300 alpine lakes and more than 1000 reservoirs. Many of them are a wonderful venue for outdoor activities such as trekking, cycling, rowing, sailing, wakeboarding and more. A large part of these bodies of water are at an elevation of 1,500 m or more. By far the most popular alpine lake destination in the Balkans is the Seven Rila Lakes cirque. In another part of the Rila Mountain, a large sports complex at 2,000 m above sea level is a convenient starting point near the serene Belmeken Reservoir. Rila also boasts the Balkans' highest artificial lake, Kalin, at 2,394 m. Near the Black Sea you will find the pre-

Other lakes of interest: Lake Srebarna (a biosphere reserve on the UNESCO list, featuring a great diversity of protected bird species), Durankulak (a coastal lake that is host to a large number of rare species and an archaeological park).



Urdini Lakes, photo: Alexander Ivanov



Ledeno ezero 'The Ice Lake'

This is the Balkans' highest lake, at an altitude of 2,709 m, just below Southeast Europe's highest peak, Mount Musala (2,925 m). With a surface area of 1,8 hectares and a depth of 16,4 metres, this gem of a lake is in the bottom of a deep and shady cirque, and its ice never completely melts, not even in summer. It is one of the total of 7 Musala Lakes.

www.bulgariatravel.org

cious ecosystems of the Shabla, Pomorie and Atanassovo Lakes and the Mandra Reservoir. If you are simply looking for easily accessible fishing and camping sites, you will find plenty of suitable reservoirs and lakes in Bulgaria's plains and lowlands.

RESERVOIRS

Activities: trekking, cycling, sailing, wakeboarding, water attractions, kayaking, camping, windsurfing

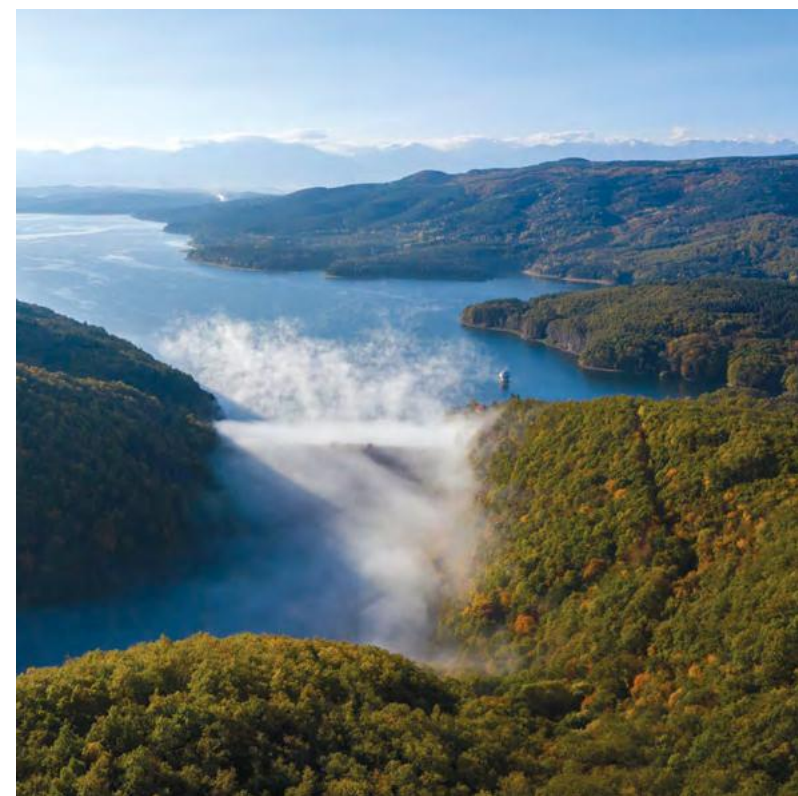
▶ **The Belmeken high-altitude sports complex is a preferred training centre for athletes from all over the world. Its attractive natural surroundings and altitude, along with the conditions it offers, are only matched by one other sports complex in Europe.**

Other reservoirs of interest: Batak and Golyam Beglik (near the town of Batak), Studen kladenets (Bulgaria's second largest reservoir, located near the town of Kardzhali), Ticha (Bulgaria's reservoir with the longest shoreline, near the town of Veliki Preslav), Pchelina (near the town of Radomir), Koprinka (near the town of Kazanlak)

@ bd-dunav.org
Danube River Basin
Directorate

Iskar Reservoir

Iskar is Bulgaria's largest reservoir, both in terms of surface area (30 sq.km) and volume (580 million cubic metres). It is fed by its namesake river. At a distance of just 20 km from the capital city of Sofia, it is the country's largest inland destination for water sports and activities. Along the waterside you will find a number of camping and recreation zones as well as facilities for a variety of sports and water activities.



SEA

Bulgaria's Black Sea coast, stretching for 378 km, is the country's eastern border. It boasts vast beaches with fine-grain sand, picturesque bays and coves, and dramatic cliffs. The Black Sea washes against the slopes of two of Bulgaria's mountains, the Balkan Mountain, where its easternmost point, Cape Emine, divides Bulgaria's coastline in two, and the mystic Strandzha Mountain in the south. In the north, between the town of Balchick and the village of Tyulenovo, a high rocky plateau drops abruptly into the sea to form imposing coastal scenery, such as the impressive Cape Kaliakra and the delightful little beach of Bolata right next to it. The waters of 16 of the country's rivers flow directly into the sea, shaping unique nature spots, such as the beaches at the mouths of the Veleka, Kamchiya and Ropotamo Rivers. Campers' favourite beaches Silistar, Karadere and Irakli have retained their fabulous beauty, with parts of them included in the territory of some of Bulgaria's 18 coastal protected areas. Bulgaria's Black Sea coast offers virtually unlimited active recreation opportunities, and the country's two big seaside cities - Varna in the north and Burgas in the south - have all the infrastructure that adventure travellers and fans of all sorts of water activities may need, including an airport and a passenger seaport each.

@ [marad.bg](#) Maritime Administration Executive Agency

► **Though not famous as an island country, Bulgaria does have its five islands in the Black Sea: Zmiyski ostrov (Snake Island), St Anastasia, St Ivan, St Kirik and St Peter.**




SAILING

Sailing is a well-developed sport in Bulgaria, with long-standing traditions. Towns and cities such as Balchik, Varna, Pomorie, Burgas and others have their own yacht clubs, facilities and sailing schools, and marinas exist in almost any location along the coast. National sailboat competitions take place on a regular basis, while Varna and Burgas frequently host races within prestigious international regattas, such as the Black Sea Tall Ships Regatta, the International Black Sea Championship and more. Sailboats are available for rent, and if you just want to get a taste of the experience, you will easily find sailing excursion offers.

▷ **The Bosphorus (the Strait of Istanbul) being close by, the Bulgarian Black Sea coast is conveniently connected to the Mediterranean and thus the World Ocean.**



Begljika Reservoir, photo: Marin Kafedjiiski

 **Other sailing spots:**
The Iskar Reservoir

 **[bulsaf.bg](https://www.bulsaf.bg)**
Bulgarian Sailing Federation





DIVING

Curious underwater terrain, dozens of shipwrecks near the coast, and easily accessible shores make diving an ever more popular pastime for fans of active recreation. Bulgaria's coastal cities and most of its seaside resorts have at least one diving club each, offering underwater adventures for beginners and advanced divers alike. Top diving destinations include Krokodilite (The Crocodiles) and the cape of Maslen nos near the town of Primorsko in the south, and the craggy shores of the villages of Kamen bryag and Tyulenovo in the north.

▷ **Two objects have been intentionally scuttled to make diving attractions: the Pioneer fishing vessel, between Sozopol and the St Ivan Island, and a Tu-154 aircraft once used for government flights, near Varna.**

 **Other diving spots:**
The Underwater Seals' Cave (Maslen nos), the Underwater Chapel (Primorsko), Dardanelite (near the village of Varna), the Petrified Forest (near the town of Sozopol), the Safak Shipwreck (town of Tsarevo)

 **Other activities:**
freediving, snorkelling, underwater fishing

 **[bnaua.org](https://www.bnaua.org)**
Bulgarian National Association for Underwater Activities

WAKEBOARD/ WATER SKIING

Water skiing and wakeboarding are also in Bulgaria's portfolio of popular water activities. Special wakeboarding and water skiing boats are available at the major seaside destinations. The country also boasts a few wake parks, two of which at the seaside: in Varna in the north and near the village of Chernomorets in the south.

▶ **In late summer, the Bratushkovo Reservoir (near the town of Slivnitsa) traditionally hosts the National Wakeboard Championship.**

Other wakeboarding spots: *Inland wakeboarding facilities are also available in the Bratushkovo and Kazichene Reservoirs, in the city of Plovdiv, and more.*

@ bewsasurf.wordpress.com Bulgarian Extreme Water Sports Association



SURFING

Even though the Black Sea is not famous for big waves, surfing conditions along Bulgaria's coast are decent almost year-round, and best between late September and December. Bulgaria's most attractive surf spot is undoubtedly Ahtopol, where the combination of underwater terrain and certain above-surface factors produces waves alternating and breaking similarly to ocean ones. Other popular locations include the beach of the Koral Campsite and the Silistar Beach in the south, and the Kabakum Beach near the Zlatni Pyasatsi (Golden Sands) Resort in the north.

▶ **Every year Ahtopol hosts the Youngsters vs Old Chaps competition, with the status of a national championship. It takes place near the town's emblematic lighthouse.**



KITE-/ WINDSURFING

Windsurfing is a well-known sport in Bulgaria, with long-standing traditions and windsurfing clubs and schools existing all along the Black Sea coast. Some of the country's reservoirs also boast suitable windsurfing conditions. Kitesurfing has been gaining popularity over the past years too. Preferred destinations for both types of sport in the south include the North Beach in the Burgas Bay, where most major competitions take place, the Arapya Campsite near Tsarevo and more, while the top kitesurfing and windsurfing spots in the north are the beaches of Shkorpilovtsi and Krapets.

Other kitesurfing/ windsurfing spots: *Good spots for beginners include the Zlatnata ribka (Goldfish) Campsite and the Atliman Cove (near the town of Kiten). Reservoirs that offer suitable conditions almost throughout the year include Iskar, Gorni Dabnik, Dospat, Koprinka, Dolna Dikanya, Lobosh and others.*

▶ **Nicola Abadjiev from Bulgaria holds the European river kitesurfing distance record: 320 km on the Danube in 12 hours.**

CLIFF JUMPING

Other cliff jumping spots: The cliffs of the Old Town in Sozopol, Chudnite skali (The Wonderful Cliffs) of the Tsonevo Reservoir

The diversity of precipitous cliffs all along Bulgaria's Black Sea coast attracts fans of cliff jumping. A favourite in the north is the Ashalaka area near the village of Tyulenovo, but its soaring cliffs are only suitable for advanced jumpers. Cape St Agalina near the town of Sozopol is a top cliff jumping destination in the south, offering great possibilities to plunge into the sea from heights reaching 15 m on both sides of a fjord-like cove.

▶ **Todor Spasov from Bulgaria is part of the global elite of the Cliff Diving Series, a high diving competition where participants plunge into the sea from a height of 27 metres.**



DEEP WATER SOLOING

The indented, precipitous shore between the village of Tyulenovo and the Yaylata area has in recent years been discovered as the perfect venue for this fun pastime, soloing directly above water. More and more climbers appreciate the great properties of the cliffs here, conveniently overhanging the water.

Top locations The cliffs near the villages of Tyulenovo and Kamen bryag

@ climbingguidebg.com
website for climbing in Bulgaria



▶ **Climbing fans gather in the area near Kamen bryag in August every year for an informal meeting that has become a major climbing event recently.**

MOUNTAINS

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39 📍 *E4 The Balkans' High Trail*
40 📍 *E8 Rila - Rhodopes*
- 41 TRAIL RUNNING**
- 42 CLIMBING**
45 📍 *Vratsa*
46 📍 *Lakatnik - Vrazhite dupki*
47 📍 *Karlukovo*
48 Via Ferrata
49 Bouldering
50 Mountaineering
52 Ziplining
53 Climbing walls/ Adventure Parks
- 54 CAVES**
55 📍 *Saeva dupka*
 📍 *Snezhanka*
 📍 *Devetashka Cave*

NATURAL DIVERSITY

Bulgaria's small territory boasts a surprising wealth of varied landscapes and natural assets. Four of its mountains are markedly alpine: Rila (with Southeast Europe's highest point, Musala Peak, 2,925 m), Pirin (Vihren Peak, 2,914 m), Slavyanka and the Central Balkan Mountain. A total of eight mountains in the country rise above 2,000 metres, and 37 peaks exceed 2,700 m in altitude.

Diverse in their geological origin, topography, climate and biology, and accessible in both summer and winter, mountains in Bulgaria are the perfect venue for active recreation and sports. It is the distinctly alpine mountains, in particular those abounding in serene alpine lakes, that attract most visitors. The ancients considered these unapproachable heights as the dwelling of gods, and they named them accordingly. Pirin, for example, is associated with the name of the Slavic god of thunder Perun. Before the Slavs, the Thracians called it Orbelus, 'Snow-Covered Mountain', while some linguists associate that name with Thracian or Greek words meaning rock. The name Rila is also believed to be of Thracian origin and mean 'Water Mountain'. Countless legends surround Bulgaria's mystic Rhodope Mountain, where the mythic Thracian harpist Orpheus lived, as legend has it. Bearing the name of Queen Rhodope of Thrace, this vast

(roughly 240 by 100 km) area of the Balkans has for centuries impressed with its impenetrable forests, named *Silva Magna Bulgarica* in medieval sources. The Balkan Mountain, popularly called *Stara planina* (The Old Mountain), is the longest mountain range in Southeast Europe and a distinct climatic divide that was named *Haemus* in antiquity, after Rhodope's brother and king of Thrace. *Vitosha*, the unique dome-shaped mountain right next to the capital city of Sofia (and therefore a top adventure and hiking destination), is also believed to bear a Thracian name, meaning 'Two-Summit Mountain'.

Wreathed in legends, the Sakar and Strandzha Mountains boast rare natural treasures. Despite their much more modest altitudes, they attract visitors with their many dolmens and the pre-Christian tradition of fire-walking, surviving to this day.

Tourists in the uplands can find a place to stay in several hundred lodges, a few refuges and some sports centres. Alternatively they can choose from a multitude of guesthouses and family-run hotels at the foot of the mountains and get a genuine taste of local life and culture.



► **Impressed at how close to Sofia the Vitosha Mountain was, 19th-century Viennese geologist Ferdinand von Hochstetter said: 'Sofia and Vitosha are inseparable, just like Naples and Vesuvius.'**

📍 **More mountains:**
Sredna gora, Erulska,
Ruy, Chepan, Konyavska,
Lozen

@ planini.eu - Mountains and People, Bulgarian Association of Mountain Leaders

MOUNTAIN LODGES AND SPORTS CENTRES

As a country with a wealth of mountains, Bulgaria has well-developed upland tourism infrastructure and sports centres, with plenty of active organisations. A network of over 250 mountain lodges, refuges and sports centres conveniently cover all important trekking routes as well as the approaches to them. They are crucial to Bulgaria's mountaineering movement, providing not only accommodation but also the facilities indispensable to the training of outdoor and mountain sports professionals and rescuers. Lodges such as Aleko in the Vitosha Mountain, Eho, Kozya stena

and Mazalat in the Balkan Mountain, Rilski ezera and the emblematic Malyovitsa in Rila, and Mechi chal in the Rhodope Mountain are just a few of the country's major cradles of hiking and mountaineering. Refuges provide shelter from bad weather at key locations, such as Vitosha's Cherni vrh (Black Peak) and the breath-taking arête of Koncheto (the highest refuge in Pirin). There is even a weather station on the Top of the Balkans, Musala Peak. A growing number of mountain lodges and refuges are now operated by young and motivated people who add a charming touch of ingenuity.

Just a few examples of this much welcome revival are the tech-oriented Septemvri and Balkanity in Vitosha, the artsy Lovna in Rila, and Belasitsa in its namesake mountain. Some lodges are right next to skiing facilities, such as the Pleven Lodge in the Central Balkan Mountain, Bezbog in Pirin, Dobrila in the Balkan Mountain, and more.

@ www.btsbg.org
Bulgarian Tourist Union

@ bulgarian-mountains.com/Huts
a website listing mountain accommodation in Bulgaria



📍 Belmeken High-Altitude Sports Complex

Activities: sports training, trekking, hiking, camping, freeride skiing and snowboarding

At 2,000 m above sea level, near Belmeken Peak and its namesake reservoir in Eastern Rila, the Belmeken High-Altitude Sports Complex was built in 1968 as a high-altitude training centre for a wide range of sports, as well as for family recreation and organised school events. Due to its elevation and unspoiled nature, it is a preferred training location for athletes from around the world and is only matched by one other facility in Europe, the Sierra Nevada High-Altitude Training Centre.

@ nsb.bg
Belmeken

▶ **The first mountain lodge ever built in Bulgaria, in 1922, is Skakavitsa, now a hotspot for ice climbers.**

Activities: climbing and mountaineering, trekking, hiking, camping, freeride skiing and snowboarding

📍 Malyovitsa Training Centre

At an elevation of 1770 m in the Rila Mountain, at the foot of Malyovitsa Peak, this training centre is known as the cradle of Bulgarian mountaineering. Over the years it has evolved into an established training hotspot for mountaineers and mountain professionals. There is a ski slope right next to it. The centre is located at a crossroads of major marked routes to top destinations such as the Rila Monastery, the Seven Rila Lakes, Lake Strashnoto (The Scary Lake) and many more. This is also one of the approaches to the E4 international trekking route. The area of the Malyovitsa Lodge not far up the valley is a hotspot for climbing and alpinism and a popular starting point for trekkers and ski tourers in the Rila Mountain.

Echo hut, photo: Vladislav Terziiski



TREKKING AND HIKING

Mountain hiking has long-standing traditions in Bulgaria. In 1895 the writer Aleko Konstantinov, a renowned public figure at the time, initiated the first mass hike to the Vitosha Mountain's highest peak, Cherni vrh (Black Peak). Since then, a network of over 10,000 km of hiking and trekking trails of varying difficulty has been developed. Most routes are well-marked. Metal marker poles painted yellow and providing detailed navigation information are a precious aid in winter, especially when visibility

is poor. Cairns also show the way on some routes. Several international trekking routes cross Bulgaria. Popular hiking destinations include not only the country's mountains but also the Black Sea coast, numerous canyons and the areas around lakes and reservoirs. The country's highest mountains Rila, Pirin and Central Balkan are the best known hiking and trekking destinations but definitely not the only ones deserving attention. The Rhodope Mountain and particularly its western part will enchant you

with its speciality: village-to-village hikes and cosy nights at guesthouses. The areas around Trigrad, Kovachevitsa, Smolyan, Devin, Ivaylovgrad and Velingrad are quite popular among fans of this type of travel, along with other regions of Bulgaria, such as those around the towns of Belogradchik, Vratsa, Gabrovo, Elena, Veliko Tarnovo, Sevlievo, Sopot, Kalofer and Sliven in the Balkan Mountain, as well as the entire Strandzha Mountain.

@ planini.eu
Mountains and People,
Bulgarian Association
of Mountain Leaders



Trekking and hiking locations:

Vitosha and its Stone Rivers; the Seven Rila Lakes; the Belogradchik Rocks; the Ovech Fortress Trail near the town of Provadiya; the Rila, Pirin and Central Balkan National Parks, the Emen Canyon; Perelik Peak, the Chernatitsa Ridge and Trigrad (all three in the Rhodope Mountain), the Tran gorge.

Activities:

hiking and trekking, ascending mountain peaks, culture and historical tours, waterside hikes

E3 KOM - EMINE

@ www.btsbg.org
Bulgarian Tourist
Union

Kom-Emine is Bulgaria's longest and most popular marked trekking route. It traverses the Balkan Mountain Range, from Kom Peak close to the Serbian border in the west, all the way to Cape Emine on the Black Sea coast in the east. This is the final section of the E3 European long-distance path, connecting the Atlantic to the Black Sea. The section through Bulgaria is 580 km long, with a total elevation

gain of 20,500 m and elevation loss of 21,500 m, and passes right by Bulgaria's geographic centre, near the Uzana Lodge. It takes between 18 and 25 days to complete in summer and climbs more than 100 peaks in the Balkan Mountain. A large number of mountain lodges along the route provide accommodation.

▶ **The first man to complete this route, in 1933, was Pavel Deliradev, one of the founders of Bulgarian speleology.**

Shipka, photo: Lubomir Popyordanov

Points of interest along the route: Todorini kukli (Theodora's Dolls) Peak, Murgash Peak, Trastena Lodge, Eho Lodge, Severen Dzhen-dem Reserve, Pleven Lodge, Botev Peak, the Singing Rocks, Mazalat Lodge, Shipka Pass, the Flying Saucer (former communist monument) of Buzludzha, Yurushki Cliffs, Chumerna Lodge, Tvarditsa Pass, the lighthouse of the village of Emona

Marking: Triple white-red-white stripes painted on stones, trees or other prominent objects are the summer marking along this route. The winter marking here comprises metal poles painted in an alternating yellow-and-black pattern. These are placed at 200-metre intervals.



Points of interest along the route: Cherni vrah (The Black Peak), the Seven Rila Lakes, Malyovitsa, the Predela Pass, the northern karst ridge of the Pirin Mountain with the arête of Koncheto and Vihren Peak, Tevno Lake, Kapatnik Peak.

Marking: White-red-white stripes painted on prominent static objects, or arrow-shaped signs with a red tip.



E4 THE BALKANS' HIGH TRAIL

The E4 European long-distance path connects Portugal to Cyprus. Its section in Bulgaria is known as the Five-Mountain Trek, as it traverses the crests of the Vitosha, Verila, Rila, Pirin and Slavyanka Mountains. This route of roughly 260 km takes, on average, 14 days to complete.

@ European long-distance path network
www.era-ewv-ferp.org/e-paths/

▶ **Koncheto (The Foal) is a narrow arête on the northern karst ridge of Pirin. At an altitude of 2,810 m, with precipices on both sides, this is one of Bulgaria's most extreme destinations. A metal rope installed in the narrowest section serves as a safety railing.**

Koncheto, photo: Sofia Popyordanova



E8 RILA - RHODOPES

The E8 international trekking route starts at the Atlantic coast of Ireland and ultimately reaches Istanbul. In Bulgaria it connects the Serbian border near Kalotina to the village of Mezek near Svilengrad in Southeast Bulgaria, traversing on its way Eastern Rila and the Rhodopes. The marked section starts at the skiing resort of Borovets in Rila and passes by numerous ancient sanctuaries and fortresses. The section in Bulgaria is 400 km long and takes roughly 14 days to complete.

Points of interest along the route:

Musala Peak, Avramovo Narrow-Gauge Train Station, the Dyavolsko garlo (Devil's Throat) Cave, the Yagodina Cave, the unique Maltepe Thracian tomb and the Kaleto Fortress near the village of Mezek


Marking:

White-red-white stripes, as well as small, yellow square signs inscribed 'E8'.

@ European long-distance path network
www.era-ewv-ferp.org/e-paths/

www.bulgariatravel.org

TRAIL RUNNING

 **Other popular trail running races:**
 Cherni vrah Peak Trail Race, Thracian Ultra, Run 4 Chepan, Belasitsa Sky Run

@ racecalendar.bg

In recent years trail running has become a favourite outdoor activity for many Bulgarians. A growing number of running clubs and societies are established, more and more running routes are marked, and GPS tracks are uploaded online. Organising and taking part in trail races has evolved into a form of tourism in its own right. Some races target professional athletes. Pirin Ultra is Bulgaria's most prestigious ultramarathon and part of the Skyrunner World Series. Another ultramarathon attracting

international participants is the 160-kilometre Persenk Ultra in the Rhodopes, with a total elevation gain of 7,100 m. Tryavna Ultra is a popular race in the Balkan Mountain that crosses three municipalities and dozens of villages. Adventure Sky Run is the highest-altitude trail race in Bulgaria and indeed in the Balkans. The oldest and most popular race is the one around the Vitosha Mountain, with a length of 100 km.

▶ **More than 60 trail running races of varying difficulty take place in Bulgaria every year.**



Chepan Mountain, Running for Chepan, photo: Plamen Kudenko

CLIMBING

▶ The grade of Bulgaria's hardest climbing routes is 9a. These are 'Onwards and Upwards' near Karlukovo and 'El Niño' near Dryanovo.



Bulgaria's mountaineering has traditions dating back almost a century. Given the diverse topography and broad range of altitudes and climate conditions in the country, it is no wonder that climbing sites, routes and destinations exist virtually everywhere - in the Balkan, Rhodope, Pirin, Rila and Vitosha Mountains, near Sliven, Karlovo, Vratsa, Veliko Tarnovo, Tyulenovo, and many more. The hills in Plovdiv boast unique climbing routes right in the heart of Bulgaria's second largest city. The country's higher mountains such as Rila, Pirin and the Balkan Mountain are a perfect venue for alpinism. Cave tourism has great potential to thrive, given the 67 caves and caverns accessible to visitors.

@ bfka.org
Bulgarian Climbing and
Mountaineering Federation

@ climbingguidebg.com



Ice climbing, Skakavitsa, photo: Ruslan Vakrilov



► **Every autumn Vratsa hosts an Annual Climbers' Meeting.**

Vratsa, photo: Lubomir Popiordanov

Vratsa, photo: Ruslan Vakrilov

📍 Vratsa

Soaring like a gothic cathedral, the cliffs of Vratsa are known as Eastern Europe's Verdon, and for a good reason. Limestone escarpments overhanging the town of Vratsa and the Leva River for kilometres feature over 480 climbing routes. Of those, 220 are equipped for sport climbing (in sectors such as Stegite, Malkata dupka (The Little Cave), Manastirski dol, etc.), while the rest are meant for traditional climbing and require skilful use of the full range of climbing gear (Zgorigradska stena (Zgorigrad Wall), Tsentralna stena (Central wall) and other sectors). Climbing routes here are of varying difficulty grades, ranging from 5a to 8c for sports routes and reaching 7c for traditional climbing routes. This destination is also suitable for beginners' training.



Lakatnik, photo: Ruslan Vakrilov

📍 Lakatnik - Vrazhite dupki

Lakatnik is a favourite destination for climbers from Sofia not only because it is fairly close to the capital city but also because... they simply love the glorious little climbers' cabin perched right on the rock face! This climbing site boasts more than 100 routes for sport and traditional climbing as well as bouldering, with difficulty grades ranging from 3a to 8b+. Nearby, the canyon of the Proboynitsa River is home to a much loved climbing site: Vrazhite dupki (The Enemy Caves), a limestone escarpment roughly 1 km long that faces south and enjoys a very mild microclimate even in winter. The cliffs are mostly 20 m high, which is also the length of most routes here. Vrazhite dupki are equipped for sport climbing, but some sections are also suitable for bouldering.

▶ **The Orlovo gnezdo (Eagle's Nest) climbers' refuge is a small wooden cabin built in 1938 by a group of mountaineers on a tiny shelf on the rock face.**



Eagle's Nest Shelter, photo: Marin Kafedzhiyski

📍 Karlukovo

A karst region with a wealth of cliffs and caves, Karlukovo is a perfect setting for climbing and speleology experiences. The highlight of the area is the Prohodna Cave (Passage Cave), naturally illuminated by daylight through two impressive eye-shaped openings in its vault. No wonder it is commonly known as 'The Eyes of God'. This lofty underground passage is 262 m long, over 40 m high, and between 20 and 50 m wide. It is mostly sport climbing routes that you will find in and around the cave, with difficulty grades ranging between 4c and 9a. One of the greatest perks of climbing in the Prohodna Cave is that you can do it even on rainy days. The routes most liked by climbers are 'Pop-Folk', 'Nepobedim' (The Invincible) and 'El Choro'. The cave is a protected area, so climbing is subject to certain restrictions.



▶ **Perched on top of the cliffs overhanging the Iskar River, the Petar Tranteev National Speleology Centre is conveniently close to the Prohodna Cave. Four of the building's five floors are built in a rock crevice.**

Karlukovo, photo: Ruslan Vakrilov

VIA FERRATA

Bulgaria has 7 equipped via ferrata sites at different locations: the Malyovitsa Via Ferrata, a medium-difficulty route with an optional advanced section; the 40-metre via ferrata at the Haramiyska Cave in the Trigrad Gorge; the Golubovitsa 2 Via Ferrata next to its namesake cave near the village of Koshnitsa in the Rhodope Mountain; the Nevyastata (The Bride) Via Ferrata, comprising two routes next to their namesake crag above the town of Smolyan; the Rakitovo Via Ferrata, with a metal bridge and ladder; the Lednitsata Via Ferrata near the village of Brestnitsa, comprising routes of three difficulty levels; and the via ferrata next to the Dryanovo Monastery, a first-grade route;



▶ **Lednitsata is Bulgaria's first via ferrata, set up in 2007.**

BOULDERING

Bouldering is a recent trend in Bulgaria that has quickly become a favourite among climbers. The fast development of this sport is exclusively driven by a network of climbing gyms, and a range of sport clubs see to it that Bulgarian athletes refine their bouldering skills and that new bouldering sites are explored and developed. Bulgaria first hosted the European Youth Cup Boulder in 2017. The country's most popular

bouldering sites are in the Rila and Vitosha Mountains. In addition to the large number of bouldering routes that already exist, unlimited options are available for developing new bouldering problems. One of the most popular and easily accessible bouldering destinations is right at the periphery of the Boyana District of Sofia at the foot of the Vitosha Mountain and includes a number of bouldering sites. The country's most difficult boulder-

ing site is 'Danera' (The Tree Stump), a crag near the Beli Iskar Reservoir with a difficulty grade of 8B/V13. It was first climbed by Ivaylo Radkov, nicknamed Fazata, in 2011. The second climber to successfully surmount the challenge, in 2013, was the globally renowned Chris Sharma.

▶ **In 2018 Peter Ivanov from Bulgaria became the European youth champion in bouldering.**

📍 **More bouldering sites:** Panagyurski koloni (The Panagyurishte Pillars), village of Bozhenitsa, the Red Rocks (town of Lovech), the valley of the Rilska River.




MOUNTAINEERING

Mountaineering in Bulgaria is more than 90 years old, dating back to the establishment of the Bulgarian Mountaineering Club on 19 November 1929 in Sofia by a group of intellectuals and compatriots who had travelled to the high mountains of Western Europe. A snapshot 85 years later would show the Bulgarian Climbing and Mountaineering Federation uniting 33 clubs, itself a member of three international sports federations: the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA),

the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) and the International Ski Mountaineering Federation. Many of the major mountaineering sites in Bulgaria are in the country's highest mountain, Rila, particularly around the Malyovitsa Peak. Pirin, the country's mountain with the most alpine air, also boasts a number of popular routes, mostly in its northern part. The north face of Vihren Peak has been the venue of challenging ascents since 1934, and continues to be a preferred place

for alpinists to train and refine their skills. The Central Balkan Mountain is another great mountaineering destination, especially 'Rayskite skali' (The Heavenly Cliffs) and the Severen Dzhendem Reserve. Good sites for mountaineering training include the Reznyovete and Kominite areas in the Vitosha Mountain, as well as some spots in the Rhodopes.

@[bfka.org](https://www.bfka.org)
Bulgarian Climbing and
Mountaineering Federation

 **More peaks for mountaineering:** Otovishki vrah (Rila), Kabul (Rila), Dautov vrah (Pirin), Kutelo (Pirin), Kozya stena (Balkan Mountain), Golyam Kупen (Balkan Mountain)

Koteshti Chal, photo: Damyan Georgiev

www.bulgariatravel.org



ZIPLINING

@ [zipline.4epelare.com](https://www.zipline.4epelare.com)

Ziplines are operated at a number of places in Bulgaria. Popular destinations include the Struma River, the cliffs near the town of Klisura, the Chaya River near the Chepelare ski resort in the Rhodope Mountain, as well as the Chudnite Mostove (Wonder Bridges) rock formation nearby.



▶ **The longest Tyrolean traverse in the world, recognised as a Guinness World Record, measures 1,550 metres, between the Malyovitsa (2729 m) and Orlovets (2685) peaks in Bulgaria's Rila Mountain. It was crossed by Daniel Stefanov on September 19, 2008.**



CLIMBING WALLS/ ADVENTURE PARKS

Indoor and outdoor climbing walls exist in most of Bulgaria's cities and larger towns and near a number of tourist points of interest. They are most abundant in Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna. A particularly popular one is the outdoor climbing wall near the Nevyastata (The Bride) crag above the town of Smolyan. In addition, an ever larger

number of adventure parks in Bulgaria offer a diversity of attractions. Parks frequented by fans of active recreation include Kokolandia in Sofia, Nezabravka near the village of Popovtzi, and X Challenge Park in the seaside town of Tsarevo.

@ [kokolandia.com](https://www.kokolandia.com)
Adventure park in Sofia

@ [walltopia.bg](https://www.walltopia.bg)
Climbing wall in Walltopia's headquarters

@ [climb.nsa.bg](https://www.climb.nsa.bg)
Climbing wall of the National Sports Academy

▶ **The Bulgarian company Walltopia is a top global manufacturer of climbing walls and installations.**

CAVES

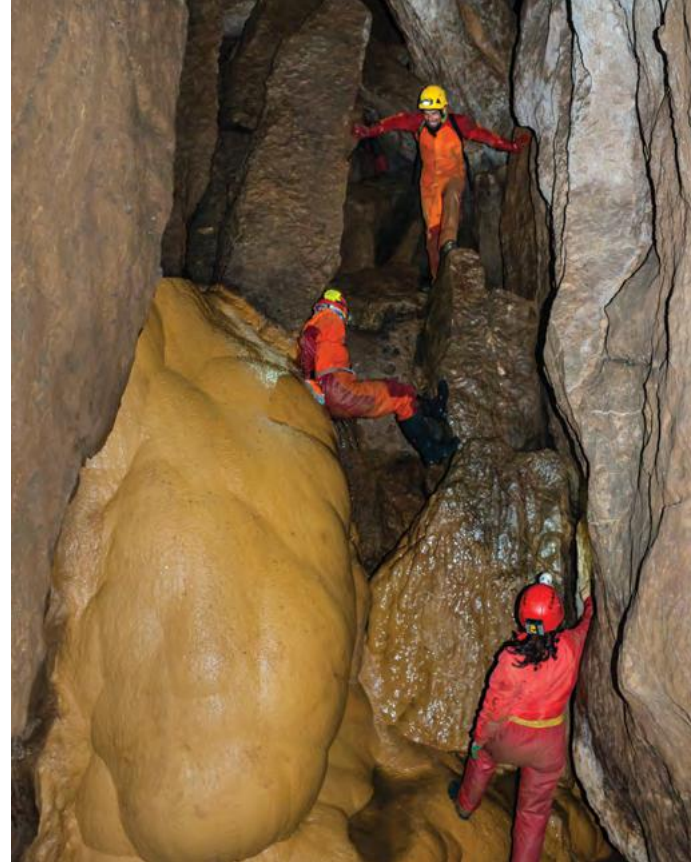
Along with a multitude of unexplored caves, Bulgaria has dozens of caves accessible to visitors without special equipment. More than ten of those are equipped with safety infrastructure and illumination installations and offer guided tours suitable even for visitors with no prior experience. The rest require certain skills to visit or are only accessible to trained speleologists. In addition to horizontal caves, pits and water caves are also to be found in Bulgaria. The longest horizontal cave is Duhlata (18 km)

near the village of Bosnek in Pernik Region, the deepest pit is Kolkina dupka (- 543 m) not far from the town of Svoge, and the longest water cave is Devetashka, in Lovech Region (2,500 m). Traces of prehistoric life have been found in many of Bulgaria's caves. They provided shelter to humans as early as in the Palaeolithic, and some even let us glimpse into ancient cultures - such as the Magurata Cave, with prehistoric drawings dating back more than 7,000 years.

Popular caves:
The Dyavolsko garlo (Devil's Throat) Cave, the Yagodina Cave, the Haramiyska Cave, Uhlovitsa, Saeva dupka, Bacho Kiro, Prohodna, Devetashka, Snezhanka, Ledenika, Orlova chuka, Magurata and Lepenitsa.

@ speleo-bg.org
 Bulgarian Federation of Speleology

► **No one has yet unravelled the great mystery of the Devil's Throat: whatever the river sweeps into the cave as it rushes down its natural entrance, such as tree logs, simply disappears and never comes out on the other side.**



📍 Snezhanka (Snow White)

This is arguably one of Bulgaria's most dazzling caves. Its length of 145 m is just enough to showcase a great diversity of cave formations, again including stalactites, stalagmites, rimstone pools and flowstone. Bright white deposits have been accumulating inside for millions of years in bizarre shapes. One such formation likened to the fairytale princess Snow White gave the cave its name. It is just 5 km away from the town of Peshtera in the Rhodope Mountain.

Berende, photo: Tsvetan Ostromski

📍 Saeva Dupka

The Saeva dupka Cave is close to the village of Brestnitsa in Lovech Region. It is named after two brothers, Sayu and Seyo, who would hide in the cave back when Bulgaria was dominated by the Ottomans. The largest of its 5 halls is called Srutishteto (The Rockfall), and not surprisingly: its ceiling collapsed in an earthquake in the 19th century. The Harmana hall, with its excellent acoustic, occasionally hosts concerts. A great variety of cave formations are to be seen here, such as stalactites, stalagmites, rimstone pools, flowstone and more. The cave is easily accessible and open for visitors.

📍 Devetashka Cave

The Devetashka cave, 18 km away from the town of Lovech, is also known as Maarata or as Oknata (The Windows), due to the seven openings of varying dimensions in its ceiling that illuminate most of its central course and part of its two branches. Explorations have found that the cave has been inhabited almost uninterruptedly throughout human history.

Magurata, photo: Lubomir Popyordanov

CYCLING

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@ bgcf.bg
Bulgarian Cycling
Federation

Cycling has been among favourite sports in Bulgaria in recent years, and an important segment of adventure travel. More and more people choose to explore the beauty of nature, go on bird-watching or botanical trips, or visit historical sights by bike. The cycling tours on offer vary in difficulty, from adrenaline-packed adventures on difficult terrain that will put your skills to the test, to relaxing family outings. You can choose between back-road cycling trips and mountain bike tours. Cycling trips around the

wine-cellars on the fringe of the Rhodope Mountain near Plovdiv, in Southwest Bulgaria and in some areas of North Bulgaria have been gaining popularity. More than 3,000 km of cycling trails have been explored and marked, and GPS tracks for them uploaded on special platforms. An ever growing number of bike centres throughout the country will give you lots of adrenaline. National and international races take place on a regular basis. A large number of amateur events are organised to pro-

mote specific regions. Some of those, such as the Vitosha 100 km mountain super trail race in late June, the Bike & Run 4 Chepan race in April, and the Lion Heart Ultra Cross Triathlon around Primorsko and Strandzha in early September have grown into a tradition and attract hundreds of competitors.

▷ **Over 1 million bicycles are made in Bulgaria every year. Many Bulgarian and foreign athletes choose Bulgarian brands for their appearance in a range of international races, and they often win!**

MARKED/TRACKED ROAD AND MOUNTAIN BIKE ROUTES

Hundreds of marked bike routes exist in Bulgaria, some of which cross the entire country and connect different destinations. A large number of marked downhill race tracks have been set up in and around national and nature parks and other points of interest. Two international cycling routes cross Bulgaria: EuroVelo 6 and 13. The Balkan Mountain, crossing the country all the way to the Black Sea, attracts hundreds of cyclists inspired to reach the seashore using the Kom-Emine long-distance mountain trail or the roads at the foot of the mountain. The Rhodope Mountain is a favourite of mountain bikers, with its great terrain, abundance of bike routes, rich cultural and historical heritage, ethno-religious diversity and the unmatched hospitality of locals. Other popular routes include combinations of the Vitosha and Verila Mountains that may then

culminate with an ascent to the Seven Rila Lakes and finish at the Rila Monastery. Networks of marked bike trails also exist the area of Bansko, Dobrinishte and Razlog, as well as in Northwest Bulgaria, with scenic routes around Belogradchik and Vratsa. Routes along the Danube, the mountain road connecting Etropole, Troyan and Gabrovo, and certain areas along the Black Sea coast have also been gaining popularity.

Cycling routes in Bulgaria are commonly marked by colour triangles pointing in the right direction at any fork or crossroads. These are painted onto trees, stones, etc., and have gained the status of an unofficial bike trail marking standard. Additional signs and other types of marks will help you find your way around. Detailed GPS tracks are available for most cycling routes in Bulgaria.

► **Dunav Ultra is Bulgaria's longest cycling route, stretching for 740 km along the Danube to reach the Black Sea. It mostly uses back and dirt roads. In recent years this has been the venue for the organised Dunav Ultra event in late summer.**

@ www.mtb-bg.com
The Bulgarian mountain bike website

@ bikearea.org



📍 Rudopia

Rudopia is one of the longest mountain bike routes in Bulgaria. Starting from Velingrad, a town known for its spas, it crosses the Rhodope Mountain to reach the must-visit village of Mezek. With a total length of roughly 450 km, this route takes you to the Beglika Reservoir, the villages of Buynovo and Trigrad, the Chairski Lakes, the village of Mugla, the Pamporovo resort, the Rozhen and Haydushki polyani areas, the valley of the Borovitsa River, the

Kardzhali and Studen kladenets Reservoirs, the ancient city of Perperikon, the Arda River valley, Madzharovo and finally Mezek near the Greek border. Cosy guesthouses and family-run hotels offer accommodation all along the route, which means you can enjoy this scenic ride without having to carry heavy baggage. It usually takes 8 or 9 days to complete the full route.

@ www.bikearea.org

📍 The TransRhodopi Long-Distance Trail

@newthraciangold.eu
the creators of the route

This is another cycling route enjoying great popularity in Bulgaria. It partially overlaps with the Rudopia route, but pays much more tribute to the mystic eastern part of the Rhodope Mountain. Its length of almost 500 km is divided in 17 sections of 15 to 40 km each. Accommodation is available at the end

of each section. The route combines relaxing asphalt and dirt roads with more challenging mountainous terrain, and takes travellers to most sights worth seeing in this part of Bulgaria. This medium-difficulty route can be done from April to October, spring and autumn being a particular-

ly good time for it. The trail is marked with red-and-white triangles as well as signs. Some sections overlap with trekking routes marked with standard white-red-white hiking trail markers.

▶ In some areas, alternative local trails parallel to the main route make it possible to choose from diverse variants of this adventure.



📍 Belogradchik

The Belogradchik Rocks around their namesake town are among the Balkans' most impressive nature sights. A vast network of mountain bike trails with a total length of 375 km wind around the unearthly rock formations and take visitors to most major nature, culture, historic and ethnographic spots in the area. The level of difficulty, length and elevation gain/loss of the trails vary broadly, and most sights can be

reached in more than one way. The best times to ride on these trails are spring, starting from early April, and autumn, roughly until mid-November. Red triangular signs conveniently point the way.

▶ The main route, named the Wild Northwest, is divided in 6 stages doable in roughly 6 days.

📍 **Other popular cycling routes:** The Shumen Plateau, with four short marked cycling trails of varying difficulty; the circular cycling route between the mouth of the Veleka River at the Black Sea coast and the village of Brodilovo in the Strandzha Mountain; the area around the town of Mezdra, with a few circular or connecting XC and AM trails of varying difficulty; more than 30 cycling routes around the town of Vratsa with a medium to high level of difficulty; seven perfectly set-up routes around the town of Razlog with a total length of 160 km.

BIKE CENTRES

Bulgaria's first bike centre featuring a chairlift and bike tracks is in the Balkan Mountain above the town of Sopot and has been hosting a number of national and international races since 2007. The bike park of Borovets was set up in 2009, with a number of DH tracks of varying difficulty, and the existing gondola and chairlifts adapted to carry bikes. Borovets has been hosting world cup races ever since.


Another popular bike centre featuring a chairlift is the one in the Pamporovo resort, with downhill routes to the towns of Chepelare and Smolyan. Every year in late June it hosts a Bike Fest with lots of music, races and fun. A growing number of bike centres with

well-designed tracks, either marked or not, are being set up in different parts of the country. In most of them, bikers can rent transport to the starting points of downhill trails. Alternatively, they can reach them on their bikes, riding on longer, less steep routes. It is usually a local, donation-funded bike club that maintains and develops the tracks on a voluntary basis.

Bike centres with tracks reachable by road are for instance available in the Osogovo Mountain near the town of Kyustendil, the Belasitsa Mountain near the town of Petrich, and the Balkan Mountain near the towns of Zlatitsa and Chelopech.

Sofia and Petrich are cycling hotspots in their own right. With a total of five mountains around the capital city, the area of Sofia features over 200 km of XC, AM/enduro and DH tracks. The increasingly popular Vitosha 100 km mountain super trail race attracts hundreds of runners and cyclists every year. The three trails of the Petrich Bike Park offer perfect enduro conditions.



 **Popular bike centres:**
Zlatitsa Bike Park, Blagoevgrad, Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv, Burgas, Varna, Kyustendil

▶ **The Alabak area in the north-western part of the Rhodope mountain is an attractive bike destination that includes the bike centres around Varvara and Velingrad. More than 30 sections of marked trails offer a total of 300 km of bike adventure. A novel bike trail marking concept is piloted here, using colour triangular signs showing the direction, difficulty and unique number of each section.**

WINTER

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sledding, snowkiting, moun-
taineering, snowshoeing

[@pss-bg.bg](#)
Mountain Rescue Service

► **Established in 1896 for the royal family of Ferdinand I of Bulgaria, Borovets is the country's oldest resort and a starting point for winter treks to the Balkans' highest peak, Musala.**

The meeting of continental air masses with Mediterranean climate, combined with the large number of ultra-prominent mountain peaks and ridges, leads to fairly heavy snowfall above Bulgaria. Snow conditions remain good in the mountains for several months a year, and the active winter sports season can extend from December to April. Humid air masses coming in from the Aegean Sea ensure the powder all passionate skiers and snowboarders dream of. Ski touring, freeride skiing and snowboarding, snowshoeing, winter horse-riding tours, outdoor hot springs, ice climbing and mountaineer-

ing... you name it, Bulgaria has it. The dozens of cosily small ski areas retaining their authentic local spirit will not only offer you plenty of opportunities for outdoor sports and adventures but also give you a taste of local culture and lifestyle, including traditional cuisine and curious history. Many of the country's mountain lodges are open in winter, making several days' ski tours easy, convenient and safe. Bulgaria's three large ski resorts, Borovets, Pamporovo and Bansko, have well-developed infrastructure and frequently host prestigious champi-

onships, such as the Alpine Ski World Cup and the Snowboard World Cup. The Vitosha Mountain, right next to the capital city of Sofia, attracts locals passionate for adventure throughout the winter. The numerous guesthouses near popular nature, historical and culture destinations and hot springs are also a convenient option if you want to experience the country's mountains in winter.

ALTERNATIVE RESORTS/ SKI AREAS

A highlight of winter adventure travel in Bulgaria, some mountain lodges are right next to small-scale skiing facilities. Far from big slopes but also big crowds, these spots offer plenty of alternative tourism opportunities, and will give you a chance of getting a feel of small resorts and the rural idyll off the beaten track.

Of a total of 241 km of ski slopes in Bulgaria, some 160 km are in the three largest ski resorts, Borovets, Pamporovo and Bansko. Lifts above Borovets and Bansko will take you to slopes at altitudes exceeding 2,600 m. Major ski areas ensure good skiing conditions throughout the winter season by backing up snowfall with snow cannons. The 29 much smaller ski resorts and areas have been developing rapidly in recent years, attracting ever more tourists.

Popular smaller resorts and ski areas: *In the Rila Mountain: Semkovo (7 slopes with surface lifts); Kartala; Panichishte (a fairly large area near the Rilski ezera and Pionerska Lodges); in the Balkan Mountain: Pleven Lodge (2 slopes and 1 small beginner's area); Beklemeto (2 alpine slopes with surface lifts and a children's slope); Uzana (3 slopes with surface lifts).*

@ skiingthebalkans.com

▶ Many of Bulgaria's winter resorts are close to hot springs and boast excellent spa infrastructure.

📍 Dobrinishte Ski Area

At the foot of the Pirin Mountain, this popular skiing and winter sports destination boasts a 5-kilometre main slope going down from the Bezbog Lodge to the Gotse Delchev Lodge, with some alternative sections of varying difficulty, a chairlift and snow cannons. The much flatter section at the foot of the ski slope is the beginners' zone, with two platter lifts. The splendid coniferous forest around the slope is a fun off-piste alternative to some sections. Approaching the top station while riding on the chairlift, look up to the right and you will see the Bezbog Peak. Its namesake lodge, right next to the station, is on the shore of a beautiful glacial lake, not surprisingly of the same name.



📍 Bodrost Resort

The Bodrost holiday area is tucked away in a valley in the southwestern part of the Rila Mountain. It includes the cosy Bodrost Mountain Lodge at an altitude of 1250 m, and the nearby Kartala Ski Resort, with a total of 5 km of ski slopes enjoyable for both weathered and less advanced skiers and snowboarders. The bottom station of the six-seater gondola lift is ingeniously integrated in the top floor of the Kartala Hotel, at an altitude of 1,400 m. In that lower section of the ski area

skiers can use a surface lift reaching an elevation of 1,750 m, and another, shorter one, for beginners. The gondola takes you to the top of the slope, at an altitude of 2,250 m, where you can enjoy a breathtaking panorama of Rila's peaks to the north and northeast and the whole of Northern Pirin to the south. This is the starting point of a scenic hiking route to the Makedonia Lodge. Freeriders will find plenty of off-piste opportunities around.

▶ Pamporovo-Chepelare is the most extensive ski-area in Bulgaria, surrounded by the charming landscape of the Rhodopes with its picturesque villages and some smaller ski resorts around, such as Kartola.



SKI TOURING FREERIDING

The specific features and scale of Bulgaria's mountains make ski touring not only possible but really enjoyable, with a very agreeable walk/ride balance. Most locations are fairly close to one another and easily accessible, without spoiling the Big Mountain feeling. The large number of mountain lodges and refuges open in winter make several-day tours possible, and the diverse terrains will enchant advanced and beginner ski

tourers alike. The higher parts of Rila and Pirin are particularly good for freeriding. Favourite areas include Malyovitsa and the Seven Rila Lakes in Rila, as well as Todorka and Bezbog in Pirin. Freeride opportunities are to be found around winter resorts too. Elevations above 2,000 m boast good and fairly avalanche-safe freeride conditions from December to April.

 **More ski touring/ freeriding areas:** Cherni vrah (Black Peak) in Vitosha, Petrohan in the Balkan Mountain, Yavorov Lodge in Pirin, Zavrachitsa Lodge in Rila, the area around the Perelik Peak in the Rhodopes.
@ www.befsa.com
Bulgarian Extreme & Freeride Ski Association



Vitosha

Rising right next to the capital city, Vitosha is not just an easily accessible outdoor destination with good infrastructure but also a great ski touring venue with a multitude of varied routes. It can be crossed from east to west and from north to south, and will entertain freeriders with its snow gullies. Popular ski touring spots include Stenata (The Wall) above the Aleko Lodge, the Boulevard Gully, Reznovete, and the slopes above the village of Chuyetlyovo.

Areas favourite to freeriders include again Reznovete with the Golyam Rezen Peak, where several routes have been established: Lavinata (The Avalanche), Rebroto (The Rib), Funiyata (The Funnel) and others, as well as Stenata above the Aleko Lodge. Most freeride routes in Vitosha are of medium to high difficulty, starting at altitudes above 2000 m, with elevation differences varying between 250 and 350 m.

▶ **A 40-minute drive will take you from downtown Sofia to the Aleko Lodge, a hotspot for outdoor sports and adventure just 25 km from the city's bustling centre.**

WINTER HIKING/ SNOWSHOEING

The beauty of Bulgaria's mountains is accessible to hikers in winter too. One-day or longer snowshoeing tours in Rila, Pirin and Vitosha will take you from lodge to lodge and to popular peaks. In the Western Rhodopes, snowshoeing trips will take you from village to village, and local guest-houses will not only put you up for

the night but also give you a taste of local cuisine, culture and lifestyle. The countless hot springs at the foot of the mountains, with a multitude of outdoor and indoor pools and spa centres, promise a splendid finale of any winter day spent in the outdoors.

▶ Winter hikes to Vitosha's Cherni vrah (Black Peak) are particularly popular, and one of the safest options you can choose.

 Popular winter hiking and snowshoeing spots: the Musala and Malyovitsa Peaks in Rila, the Selimitsa Peak in Vitosha, the Alabak Ridge in the Western Rhodopes

@ www.planini.eu
Mountains and People,
Bulgarian Association of
Mountain Leaders



SNOWKITING

▶ An annual SnowKite Fest taking place in late winter has become an attractive tradition in the Vitosha Mountain.

Snowkiting is fairly new to Bulgaria but has been gaining popularity as it is a fairly affordable pastime and conditions are good for it at many spots in the mountains. A number of clubs now offer qualified training. The Vitosha Mountain is a particularly suitable venue, with huge flat or mildly sloping open areas above the forest (starting at 1850 m) where the wind is fairly constant.

@ iztreshteam.org

 More snowkiting spots: Kartala Ski Area, Belmeken, the Seven Rila Lakes

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📍 Sopot

75 SKYDIVING

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76 BUNGEE

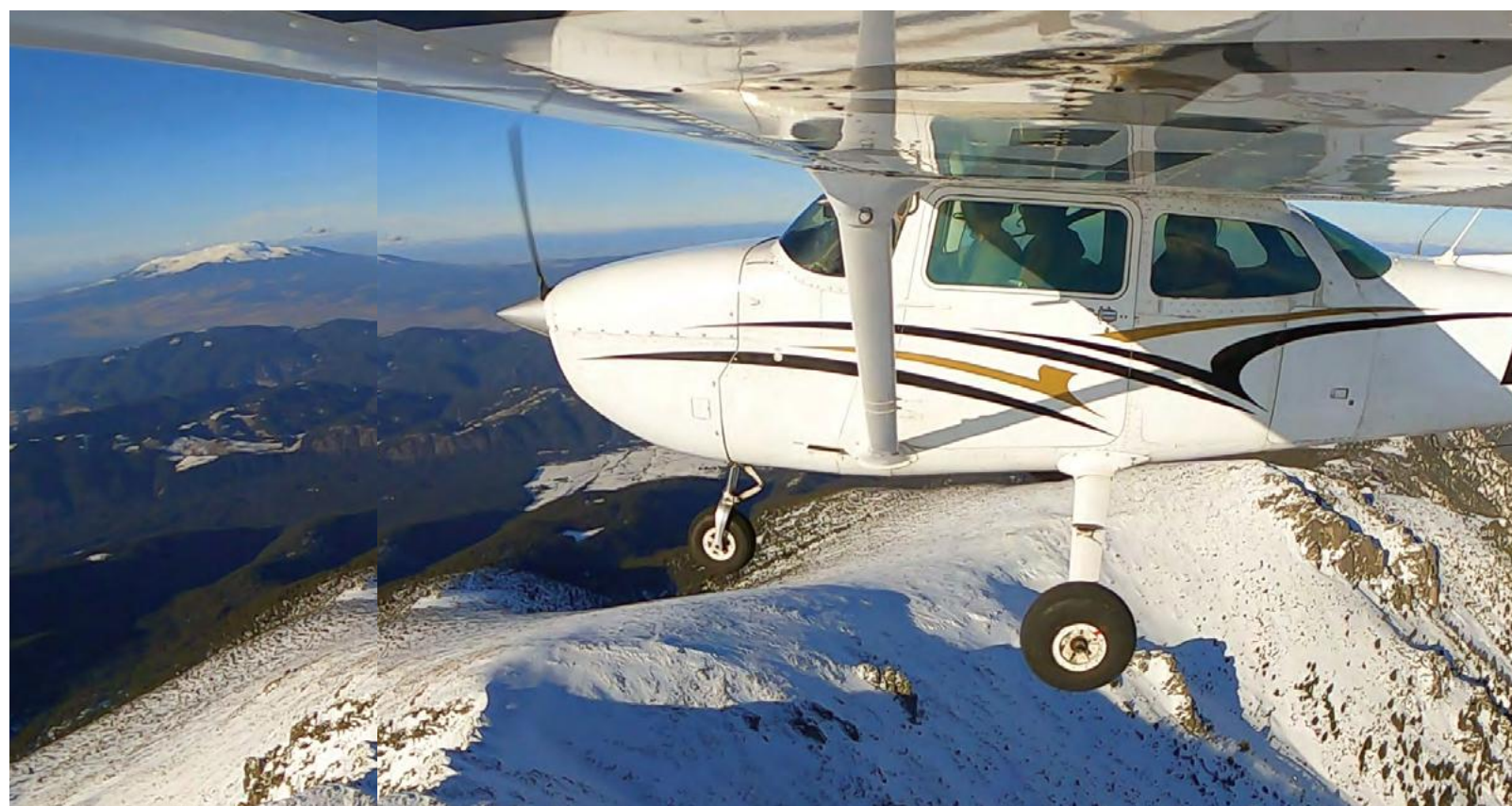
77 HOT-AIR BALLOONS

Light aircraft aerial tours over the mountains or the Black Sea coast are available from a number of small airfields in Bulgaria. All of them offer flying lessons, and some are internationally licensed to train pilots. Both engine aircraft and gliders are flown. Parachuting is a well-developed sport, with infrastructure and drop zones set up across the country. Many sport clubs offer skydives and training courses, all with licensed instructors. The seaside resort of Primorsko is one of the most popular skydiving destinations for tourists. Bulgaria's diverse topography, coupled with favourable weather factors, have made the country a thriving paragliding destination

offering commercial flights and pilot training, and buzzing with sports events. The active paragliding season spans April to October, but conditions are good on some sunny winter days too. In addition to more than 80 marked take-off sites, many options still remain unexplored. Rounds of the Paragliding World Cup take place in Bulgaria and have helped make the country a popular destination for paragliders from all over the world. Many clubs across Bulgaria offer commercial tandem flights.

📍 **Air sports hotspots:** The small airfields of Lesnovo, Silistra, Belozem, Kazanlak; the Primorsko, Ihtiman and Montana drop zones; the gliding centres of Sopot, Shumen, Sofia and more.

@ www.bnac.bg
Bulgarian Air Sports Federation



@ [dropzone.bg](https://www.dropzone.bg)
skydiving

SKYDIVING

📍 Montana

The AVA Flying Centre near the village of Erden in Montana Region is a world-class skydiving destination. It has its own airfield, aircraft hangar, restaurant, bungalows, swimming pool, parachute-folding hall, education room and skydiving hall, and top instructors. The fact that global and European accuracy landing champions coach or are trained here is yet another proof of the centre's excellence. Here you can learn skydiving according to world-class standards, or do your first tandem skydive with an instructor. The world's third largest manufacturer of skydiving equipment AVA Sport is headquartered here, which is yet another guarantee of safety and quality.



Montana, photo: Ivo Karakashev



Sopot, photo: Konstantin Velichkov

PARAGLIDING/ HANG GLIDING

📍 Sopot

Bulgaria's top paragliding destination is undoubtedly Sopot, a town at the foot of the Balkan Mountain in the middle of the country. The mountain's southern slopes generate perfect conditions for long cross-country flights. A number of sports events take place here every year, including rounds of the Paragliding World Cup. Conditions are suitable for both beginners and proficient paragliders. The Shambhala extreme sports centre on the fringe of the town has excellent facilities, including a chairlift, a campsite, a swimming pool, a bike centre and an adventure park. Bulgaria's best paragliders regularly train above Sopot. This is the most popular place to hire an experienced pilot for a tandem flight.

Sopot is also known for its organic food, and local ice-cream has turned into an international favourite.

🏃 **More activities around:**
cycling, trekking, medieval fortresses, wine cellars, hot springs


@ [lift-sopot.com](https://www.lift-sopot.com)
Paragliding/ Hang Gliding in Sopot



BUNGEE

Bungee jumping is quite popular with tourists in Bulgaria, and the diversity of options on offer tickle their zest for adventure. At 120 m high up in the air, the Vitinya viaduct is the highest bungee hotspot in the Balkans. The Devetashka Cave is another attractive bungee jumping venue, boasting the Balkan Peninsula's highest cave vault (40 m). Many of the country's sports and adventure clubs offer this kind of

adventure commercially, and some even organise bungee tours of the top jumping destinations. Night-time jumps and jumps from hot-air balloons are also on option.

 **Popular bungee jumping destinations:** Vitinya, Asparuhov Bridge, Bunovo, Devetashka Cave, Prohodna Cave, Klisura and more.

@ [bungee.bg](https://www.bungee.bg)

▷ **The first bungee jump in Bulgaria was in 1989, from the Asparuhov Bridge in Varna.**



HOT-AIR BALLOONS

@ [adrenalin.bg](https://www.adrenalin.bg)

Exploring the beauty of Bulgaria from a hot-air balloon is yet another exciting option. Flights are offered at different places in Bulgaria, but it is probably the area of Belogradchik that is most attractive. Here you can enjoy a bird's eye view of the picturesque Belogradchik Rocks, the towns and villages around and several ancient fortresses, flying over the entire Belogradchik plateau. You can also book flights in

Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Sopot and Razlog, and even enjoy lunch or dinner in the air. Adventure flights over inaccessible wild spots are a special highlight. Once in several years, the skies above Razlog host an international hot-air balloon fiesta.



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Bulgaria is among Europe's most biodiverse countries, and home to a huge number of animal and plant communities exemplifying almost all major habitat and biotope types known in Europe. This includes more than 4,100 higher plant species, of which 170 are endemic to Bulgaria and 300 to the Balkan Peninsula. The fauna is represented by 94 mammal, 420 bird, 36 reptile, 16 amphibian, 207

fish and about 27,000 insect and other invertebrate species. Some 37% of Bulgaria's territory is covered in woods and forests, and 60% of those are of natural origin.

@ balkani.org
Balkans Foundation

@ bbf.biodiversity.bg
Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation

@ orhidei.biodiversity.bg
Orchids in Bulgaria

▶ **The vast range of biogeographical factors at play and habitat types found in Bulgaria are the basis for an immense diversity of flora and fauna, and the country's biota is among the richest in Europe.**

PROTECTED AREAS

▷ Bulgaria's system of protected areas has been evolving for 90 years. In 1931 the Silkosia area in the Strandzha Mountain became the first reserve to be designated in the country, and in 1934 Vitosha became the first nature park in Bulgaria and indeed in the Balkans.



Popular protected areas:

Pirin National Park, with the greatest diversity of coniferous plants in Bulgaria; Strandzha Nature Park, the country's largest protected area; Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park, with Bulgaria's most vigorous cave system; Tsentralen Rilski Reserve, one of Europe's vastest reserves, and more.

@ [eea.gov.bg/zpo/bg](https://www.eea.gov.bg/zpo/bg)

Register of protected areas in Bulgaria

@ [parks.bg](https://www.parks.bg)

Website of the Association of Parks in Bulgaria

www.bulgariatravel.org

To protect Bulgaria's precious biodiversity, a total of 1023 protected areas have been designated. These cover approximately 5.2% of the country's territory and 7% of its woodlands and fall into one of six categories: national parks (3), nature parks (11), managed reserves (35), reserves (55), natural sites (346) and protected sites (573).

All these protect unique natural ecosystems found only in Bulgaria or

the Balkans and featuring a diversity of wild plant and animal species and habitats. Some of the country's protected areas are also UNESCO World Heritage sites. Bulgaria's diverse nature is a great asset for ecotourism in the country's parks and reserves, where possibilities for visitors to observe rare bird and animal species, plants and natural phenomena are virtually unlimited.

The boundaries of protected areas in Bulgaria are marked with double white-and-red stripes painted onto trees or other static objects. Signage at sites frequented by tourists provide details about the protected area and the restrictions applying to visitors.



Silivryak, photo: Yves Fouques




Sand lily, photo: Sofia Popiordanova



BIRDS

Bulgaria's 420 recorded bird species represent more than 70% of Europe's bird diversity. This is explained by the country's geographic location and well-preserved nature. Of all bird species found in Bulgaria, 327 are protected and 140 are listed in the Red Data Book. These include the black stork, the European honey buzzard (common pern), the golden eagle, the corn crane, the Eurasian woodcock, the stock dove, the white-backed woodpecker, the black woodpecker, the lesser spotted eagle, the Eurasian hobby, the northern goshawk, the

Egyptian vulture, the short-toed snake eagle, the saker falcon, the lesser kestrel, the ruddy shelduck and many others. Bulgaria is one of the very few places in Europe where the Egyptian vulture and the masked shrike are to be found. Two of Europe's largest bird migration routes cross Bulgaria: Via Pontica (along the Black Sea Coast) and Via Aristotelis (along the Struma River Valley).

 **Popular birdwatching sites:** Srebarna Reserve, Poda Protected Site, Kamchiya Reserve, Atanasovsko Lake, Kamen bryag and more.

@ [bspb.org](https://www.bspb.org)
Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds

@ [birdsinbulgaria.org](https://www.birdsinbulgaria.org)
Online database of Bulgaria's bird fauna, with photographs

@ [madzharovo.com](https://www.madzharovo.com)

▷ **The spots to spot an Egyptian vulture in Bulgaria are in the Arda River Valley: the Studen kladenets Reservoir and the area around Madzharovo.**



ANIMALS

In addition to birds, a further 400 vertebrate animal species have been identified in Bulgaria, of which almost 100 are mammals. The most common predators in the country are the grey wolf, the fox and the jackal. Deer, roe, wild boar, chamois and other wild mammals are also not uncommon. Bulgaria is home to a number of endangered animal species. The country's Red Data Book includes 19 mammals

(such as the European pine marten, the marbled polecat, the brown bear, the Eurasian otter, the European wildcat, several bat species and more), 13 reptiles (the Montpellier snake, the European glass lizard, the European ratsnake, Hermann's tortoise, the Greek tortoise and others), as well as two amphibian species (the alpine newt and the Syrian spadefoot).

 **Popular wildlife observation spots:** the Singing Rocks Reserve in the Central Balkan Mountain, the area around the town of Devin in the Rhodopes, the Yulen Reserve in the Pirin National Park, and many others.

@ [rewilding-rhodopes.com](https://www.rewilding-rhodopes.com)
initiative to rescue the animals' population in Eastern Rhodopes

▷ **A unique rehabilitation park in the southern part of the Rila Mountain is now home to the country's former dancing bears. Rescued years ago but incapable of surviving in the wild, and many still suffering from post-traumatic stress, they can safely spend the rest of their lives in an environment as close as possible to their natural habitat.**

FORESTS

📍 Popular old-growth forests:

The deciduous forests around Botevgrad, the old forests around Sevlievo, the primeval forests around Kyustendil, the Bayuvi dupki – Dzhindzhiritsa Reserve in Pirin and the Parangalitsa Reserve in Rila. The primeval beech forests of the Central Balkan National Park recognised as world natural heritage by UNESCO.

@ wwf.bg/what_we_do/forests

Website of the Bulgarian office of the World Wildlife Fund



For aeons the land of today's Bulgaria was covered in thick, impenetrable forests. Chronicles by many historians and travellers mention the magnificent woods of Thrace, the Ludogorie, the Rhodopes, Rila and Pirin, referred to as the Great Bulgarian Forest (Silva Bulgarorum). Nowadays Bulgaria is still among Europe's most wooded countries, with 37% of its territory covered in forests, mostly of natural origin. Four percent of those are old-growth forests unaffected by human presence, mostly in natural reserves,

national parks and less accessible uplands and areas designated as drinking water resources in the Rhodopes, the Balkan Mountain, Rila, Pirin and Strandzha. The average age of trees in Bulgaria is 53 years, and 100 to 150 years in primeval forests. A great asset of the country's forests is the immense diversity of tree species, both coniferous and deciduous ones. Conifers account for 21.6% of Bulgaria's woodlands, and deciduous trees for 68.4% and rising. Forestry in the country is managed by regional

forestry departments and state-run enterprises. Their mandate includes taking care of trees, cultivating woodlands, and improving hiking trails and infrastructure.

▷ **In 2020 the conservation of old-growth forests in Bulgaria won the European Citizens' Award within the Natura 2000 Awards.**

TREES

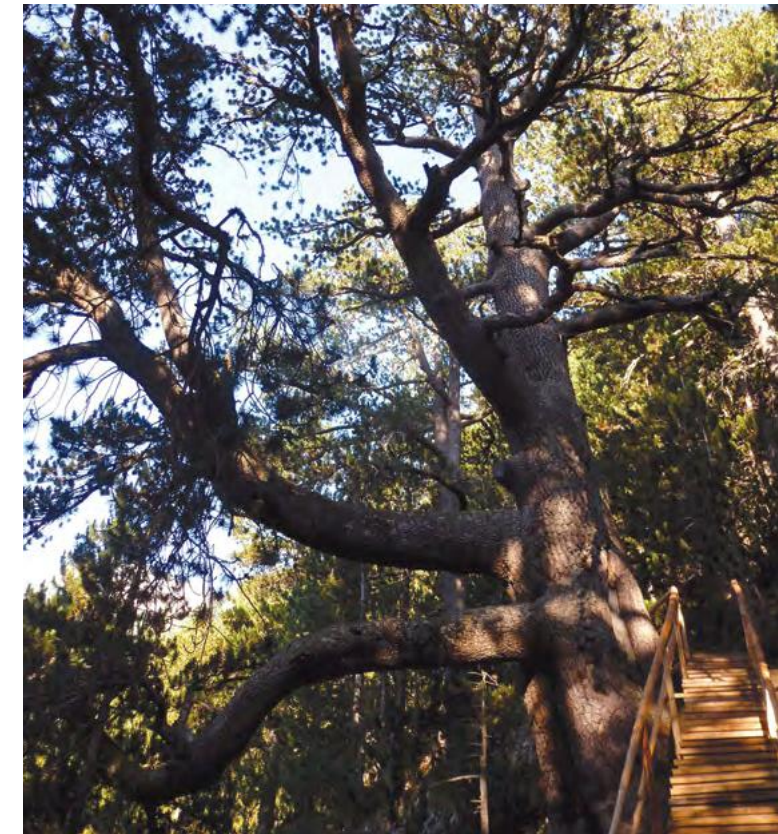
Bulgaria is also home to more than 20 individual trees that are over 1,000 years old and attract many visitors. The two oldest ones are the Oak Tree of the village of Granit (with an estimated age of over 16 centuries) and Baikushev's Pine (more than 13 centuries old). Other popular venerable trees include, among others, the Old Elm-Tree in downtown Sliven, a symbol of the town believed to be 1119 years old, and the 1295-year-old Oriental plane in the garden of the St. George Monastery of the village of Zlatolist.

📍 The Granit village Oak Tree

Considered to be Bulgaria's oldest tree, the Oak of the village of Granit (Stara Zagora Region) is approximately 1668 years old. It is a European oak (*Quercus robur*) – a deciduous species of the Fagaceae family. In spite of its almost dry crown, the tree is still alive and has several green boughs. It is supported by a steel scaffolding.

📍 Baikushev's pine

One of Bulgaria's most loved venerable trees is Baikushev's Pine. At an age exceeding 1,300 years, this Heldreich's pine (*Pinus heldreichii*) is Bulgaria's oldest coniferous tree. It is in the Pirin Mountain, between the Banderitsa and Vihren lodges. This 26-metre-tall ancient tree measures 2.48 m in diameter and 7.8 m in circumference. It bears the name of Kostadin Baikushev, the forester who discovered it in 1897 and then studied and described it.



EQUESTRIAN TOURISM

Horses have a symbolic meaning in Bulgaria's consciousness as one of Europe's oldest nations. More than 13 centuries ago Khan Asparuh led his horse-mounted troops to the Balkans to establish the first Bulgar-Slavic state, and the horse's tail was his flag. Horses have been integral to the daily life of Bulgarians for centuries, and it is no wonder that the country has in recent years evolved into one of Europe's most attractive equestrian tourism destinations.

Diverse landscapes, unfenced riding routes and unspoiled countryside just one or two hours away from the capital city: these are just some of the blessings passionate equestrians


will discover in Bulgaria. Some twenty equestrian centres in Bulgaria offer one-day or longer horse-riding tours of varying difficulty levels. These often include some of the hundreds of hot springs and dozens of wine cellars in the country. One-day riding tours near Sofia are mostly around the mountains close to the capital city - Vitosha, Plana and Lakatishka Rila. Another popular option not far from Sofia is the 3- or 4-hour ride from the village of Golyam Izvor in the Balkan Mountain near Teteven to the Glozhene Monastery, perched on a cliff with a great view.

The Rhodope Mountain is a much loved destination for week-long riding treks,

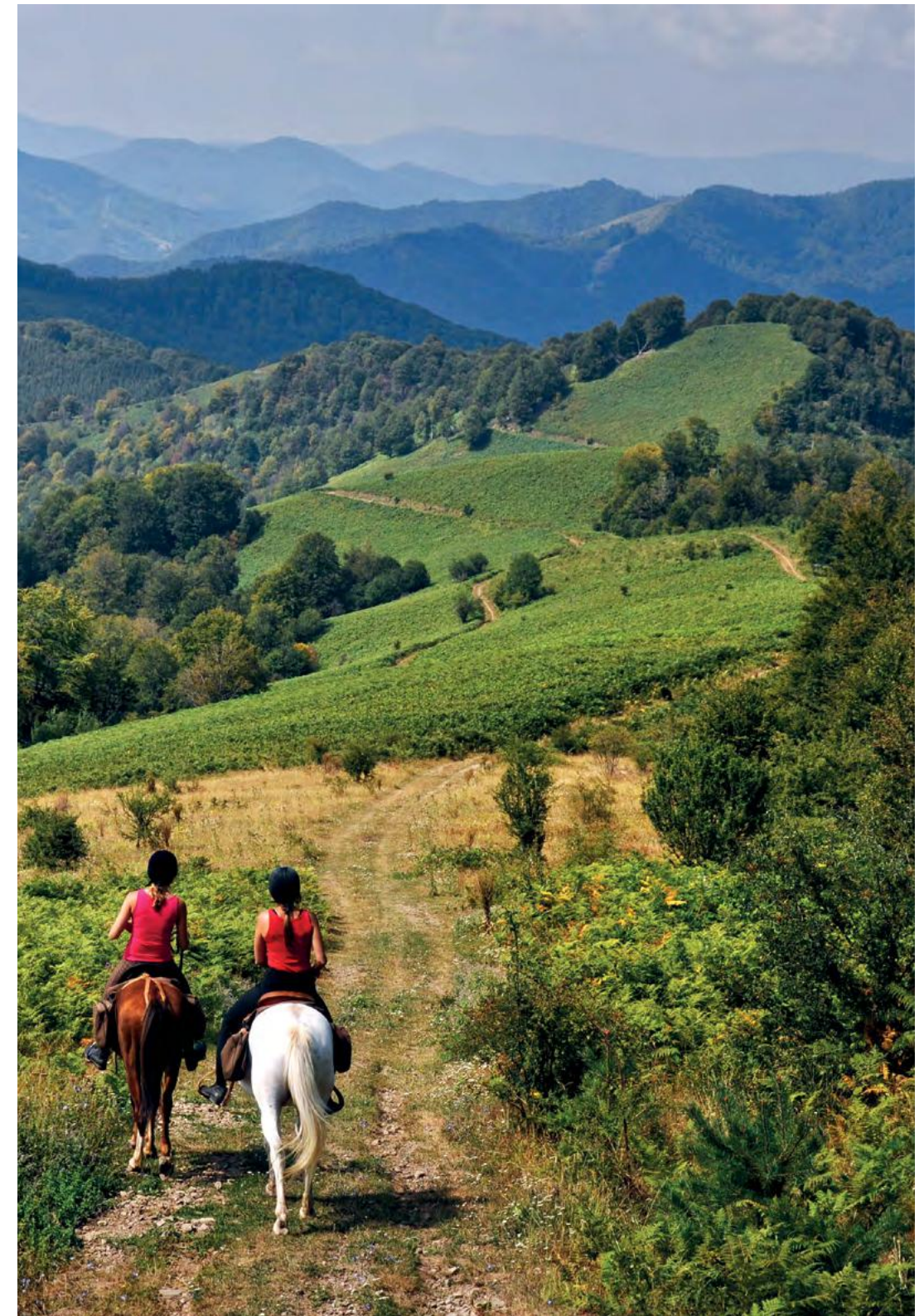
with mild terrain making longer trotting and galloping possible. The vast majority of tours in the Rhodopes will take you to Shiroka Laka, a delightful village with architectural reserve status, the breath-taking gorges of Trigrad and Yagodina and their two surprisingly dissimilar caves, and pamper you in the spa resort of Devin.

Spa and wine are the theme of riding tours in the Sredna gora Mountain as well. The highlights of those include the picturesque town of Koprivshtitsa, another must-visit architectural reserve, and the Thracian temple and tomb of Starosel. Here, too, you will be rewarded with plenty of trotting and galloping.

▷ **A ranch near the village of Kovachevtsi offering equestrian tours rose to fame after scenes of Rambo: Last Blood were filmed there.**

 **Popular equestrian tour areas:**

The Teteven and Troyan areas of the Balkan Mountain, the Sredna gora Mountain, the Western Rhodopes and the Lakatishka Rila Mountain.





Chatama Area, Beglika, photo: Bikearea

Chatama

@ [chatama.bikearea.org](https://www.chatama.bikearea.org)
Chatama Forest Centre

The Chatama Forest Camp in its namesake protected area on the shore of the Golyam Beglik Reservoir, 9 km away from the dam, has gained recognition for its sustainable development practices, nature conservation initiatives and informal education for children. It focuses on responsible tourism and cultivates an understanding for nature and a conservationist mindset among youngsters. Chatama hosts a number of travel programmes and projects, primarily aimed at

educating children to respect and care for nature.


Chatama mostly hosts summer camps. Children learn camping, orienteering, climbing, cycling and calm-water canoeing/kayaking, led by a team of professionals well versed in outdoor activities and working with children. The annual Beglika Fest, taking place nearby every August, is a kaleidoscope of music, art, crafts, outdoor lifestyle, workshops, sustainability and more.

▶ **The Chatama Forest Camp is a sustainability oasis, generating its electricity through a photovoltaic installation, treating its wastewater in a biological lagoon, and using only compost toilets.**

GREEN SCHOOL CAMPS

Popular as 'green schools', outdoor and nature camps are an opportunity for learning in nature much loved by children and parents alike. Offered at most resorts and holiday villages both in the country's mountains and at non-urbanised spots along the Black Sea coast, green schools vary broadly

in their thematic focus: from training in specific school subjects, arts or sports to useful outdoor skills, survival and experiential learning.

 **Popular camps:**
Summer astronomy schools in the Belite brezi area near the town of Ardino and the Rozhen Observatory, the Kartali Nature Camp organised near the Studen kladenets Reservoir and focusing on wild birds, the Fun Math summer school in the village of Oryahovitsa, the year-round youth centre in the village of Stakevtsi, the Momina krepost complex in the Ksilifor area, and others.



MOUNTAIN RESCUE SERVICE (MRS)

Emergency telephone numbers MRS:

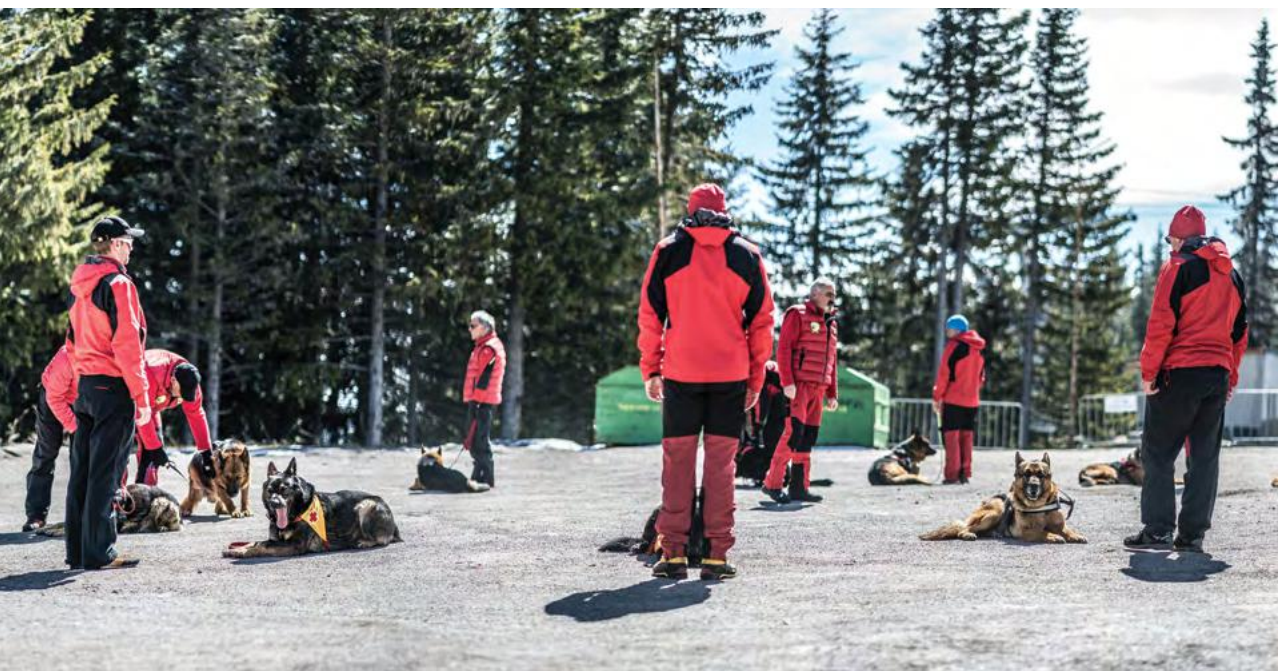
112 EU-wide emergency number

1470 (all mobile operators)

02 963 2000 The Mountain Rescue Service 24/7 Centre



► **The Mountain Rescue Service has 21 rescue dogs living with their leaders close to mountain hotspots and ready for action at any time. The MRS's dogs have been involved in a large number of rescue operations, helping significantly reduce the time to locate people buried in avalanches or lost in the mountains.**



The Mountain Rescue Service (MRS) has a key role to play when it comes to the safety of tourists in the mountains and rescue operations in cases of accidents or disasters in Bulgaria. It started as individual voluntary rescue operations by separate informal mountaineering groups in 1933, and has since then evolved into a major structure within the Bulgarian Red Cross, with rescuers saving lives on a voluntary basis to this day. The MRS's primary task is to help in case of accidents in the mountains. Rescuers take duty shifts at key points in Bulgaria's high mountains and organise rescue operations, some of which of great technical and organisational complexity, to evacuate victims to hospitals. The MRS also works to prevent accidents in the mountains. It issues daily updates about weather

and avalanche conditions in major mountain resorts. The MRS also organises training events for children and adolescents. More than 650 volunteer rescuers respond to rescue emergencies as members of the MRS's 32 teams. In addition, 50 staff rescuers are in charge of the overall organisation, administration and daily tasks relating to the MRS's activities and of maintaining the MRS's equipment and facilities. Of the MRS's volunteers, 58 are medical doctors, with a crucial role when special medical aid is required for victims high up in the mountains or at other inaccessible locations, and when casualties are transported to hospitals. They also provide medical training to the rest of the rescuers. Primary mountain rescuer training comprises a two-year course in which trainees acquire

comprehensive knowledge and skills in a number of fields, including first aid, mountain rescue techniques and tactics, skiing and alpine techniques, topography and orienteering, general mountaineering, communication technology, transport equipment, and other special topics. Mountain rescuers regularly attend training courses to upgrade their skills, and annual technical tests organised nationally verify the preparedness of rescue teams to organise and conduct operations.

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newthraciangold.eu - TransRhodopi Long-Distance Biking Trail

bikearea.org - Routes

62 BIKE CENTRES

MTB-BG.com - the Bulgarian mountain bike website

bgcf.bg - Bulgarian Cycling Association

- SCHNEE -

66 ALTERNATIVE RESORTS / SKI AREAS

befsa.com - Bulgarian Extreme & Freeride Ski Association

68 SKI TOURING/ FREERIDE

skiingthebalkans.com

70 WINTERWANDERUNG

planini.eu - Mountains and People, Bulgarian Association of Mountain Leaders

71 SNOWKITE iztreshteam.org

- AIR -

74 PARAGLIDING - lift-sopot.com**75 SKYDIVING** - dropzone.bg**76 BUNGEE** - bungee.bg**77 HOT-AIR BALOON** - adrenalin.bg

bnac.bg - Bulgarian Air Sports Federation

bulatsa.com - Bulgarian Air Traffic Services Authority

- NATURE -

80 PROTECTED AREAS

eea.government.bg/zpo - Register of protected areas in Bulgaria

parks.bg - Association of Parks in Bulgaria

82 BIRDS

bspb.org - Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds

83 ANIMALS

balkani.org - Balkani - Wild Nature Association

84 FORESTS AND TREES

wwf.bg - Bulgarian office of the World Wildlife Fund

86 EQUESTRIAN TOURISM

bakt.bg - Bulgarian Equestrian Tourism Association

horseridingbulgaria.com

88 GREEN SCHOOLS

chatama.bikearea.org - Chatama Forest Centre

mon.bg

bbf.biodiversity.org - Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation

rewildingrhodopes.com

- MRS -

90 pss-bg.bg - Mountain Rescue Service under the Bulgarian Red Cross

- TEAM -

360mag.bg - extreme sports magazine

hiking-bulgaria.com = oldest alternative tourism agency

stenata.bg - oldest tourism and adventure sports' store

planini.eu - Mountains and People, Bulgarian Association of Mountain Leaders

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

List of contact details of some major tourist information centres of the Ministry of Tourism throughout Bulgaria providing detailed information about the possibilities for adventure tourism in the region concerned.



MOUNTAIN GUIDING

Organised hiking tours in Bulgaria date back to 1895. As the country's hiking and mountaineering movement evolved, precursor forms of mountain guide training emerged. Yet the guiding profession proper would appear much later. In 1990 a group of mountaineers established Bulgaria's first adventure travel agency and laid the foundations of modern guiding. The Bulgarian Association of Mountain Leaders, known as the Mountains and People Association, was established in 1997. The guiding profession has been regulated since 2003.

Two distinct levels of guiding exist in Bulgaria: mountain leaders accompany tourists on summer hiking and

trekking tours as well as winter/ snowshoeing hikes, and may also lead mountain bike or ski tours subject to the required additional training, while mountain guides are qualified to guide tourists on any terrain, using special mountaineering gear and climbing techniques if required. Guiding professionals are listed in the National Tourism Register of Tour Guides and Mountain Leaders and Guides. In 2018, similarly to Europe's top associations of mountain leaders and guides, the Mountains and People Association adopted its Code of Ethics for Mountain Leaders and Guides.

Active Bulgarian mountain guides and leaders are also members of organisations such as IFMGA and UIMLA.

You are interested or already have some experience in mountaineering, rock climbing, ice climbing, ski touring, snowshoeing, technically challenging treks, via ferrata or mountain bike tours, or simply prefer to be in safe hands when hiking? Then explore the world of mountains with a professional mountain guide or leader..

@ www.planini.eu
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BULGARIA

ADVENTURE TRAVEL

Bulgaria boasts the full range of terrains, landscapes and opportunities for adventure any outdoor enthusiast may dream of. Mountains rising over 2,900 m, more than 200 mountain lodges and over 300 alpine lakes, clearwater rivers and canyons, tens of thousands of kilometres of marked hiking trails, a well-developed system of protected areas, and more than 300 km of coastline.

FROM SUMMIT TO SEA



FOUR SEASONS

Every time of the year brings new adventure. In spring we open the rafting, kayaking and canyoning season along high-water rivers, we climb old and new routes, we marvel at the sheer scale of bird migration, and we pitch camp for a long, nine-month season that's also great for cycling throughout. In summer we hike through cool ancient forests, we balance on challenging rocky arêtes, we fly, we surf, we dive and enjoy plunging in water. In autumn we are still high up in the mountains, hiking and trekking, and we continue camping. Winter rewards us with great skiing, snowboarding and mountaineering experiences.



bulgariatravel.org

