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About Bulgaria

General Information about Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a country in Southeastern Europe and is situated on the Balkan Peninsula. To the north the country borders Rumania, to the east – the Black Sea, to the south – Turkey and Greece, and to the west – Yugoslavia and Macedonia. Bulgaria is a parliamentary republic with a National Assembly (One House Parliament) of 240 national representatives. The President is Head of State.

Geography of Bulgaria

The Republic of Bulgaria covers a territory of 110 993 square kilometres. The average altitude of the country is 470 metres above sea level.

The [Stara Planina](#) Mountain occupies central position and serves as a natural dividing line from the west to the east. It is a 750 km long mountain range stretching from the Vrushka Chuka Pass to Cape Emine and is part of the Alpine-Himalayan mountain range. It reaches the Black Sea to the east and turns to the north along the Bulgarian-Yugoslavian border.

A natural boundary with Romania is the Danube River, which is navigable all along for cargo and passenger vessels.

The Black Sea is the natural eastern border of Bulgaria and its coastline is 378 km long. There are clearly cut bays, the biggest two being those of [Varna](#) and [Bourgas](#). About 25% of the coastline are covered with sand and hosts our seaside resorts.

The southern part of Bulgaria is mainly mountainous. The highest mountain is Rila with Mt. Moussala being the highest peak on the Balkan Peninsula (2925 m). The second highest and the mountain of most alpine character in Bulgaria is Pirin with its highest Mt. Vihren (2914 m), followed by the Rhodope Mountains and [Vitosha](#).

The plains and the lowlands in the country cover large areas to the north and the south of the [Stara Planina](#) Mountain. The Danube Plain is the biggest, bordering Yugoslavia to the west, the Dobroudzha region and the Black Sea to the east, the river Danube to the north and the Balkan Mountains to the south. Its relief is noted for the numerous plateaus, hills and river valleys cutting through the mountain. Dobroudzha is a hilly plain, situated in the north-eastern corner of Bulgaria. It is also referred to as "the granary of Bulgaria".

The Rose Valley is located to the north between Stara Planina and the long and low mountain chain of Sredna Gora Mountain. Besides the widespread crops, the valley is typical for the oil-yielding rose grown there. It is one of the patents of the unique climate of Bulgaria. Another is the world-famous Bulgarian yogourt, made with the help of the yeast-type "bacillus Bulgaricum" (Lactobacterium Bulgaricum Grigoroff).

The Thracian Lowland is the second biggest in the country, starting from the mountains that surround [Sofia](#) to the west and reaching the Black Sea to the east. It stretches between the Sredna Gora to the north and Rila, the Rhodope Mountains and Strandzha to the south. Crops typical for the southern longitudes are grown there and sometimes two harvests are gathered.

Many European travellers claim that Bulgaria is Eden on Earth. It has everything: a sea; rivers and lakes, high mountains, virgin forests, plateaus and plains, hot and cold mineral springs.

Climate in Bulgaria

Bulgaria as a whole is situated in the moderate climatic zone. The country can be conditionally divided into two climatic zones. The Stara Planina Mountain is considered the watershed between them. Winters are colder in Northern Bulgaria and much milder in the Southern part of the country. Winter temperatures vary between 0° and 7°C below zero. Very rarely temperatures may drop below 20°C below zero. Typical continental and changeable is the climate in spring. It is exceptionally favourable for the growth of fruit-bearing trees, for whose fruit Bulgaria has been renowned in Europe for centuries. Summer is hot and sweltering in Northern Bulgaria, especially along the Danube River.

The climate in Southern Bulgaria is determined by the air-currents from the Mediterranean. Summer temperatures do not reach the extremes as in Dobroudzha and along the Danube and are usually moderate: about 28°-30°C. The highest readings are usually taken in the towns of [Rousse](#) and [Silistra](#), sometimes reaching above 35°C. Autumns are mild and pleasant in Bulgaria. The multi-coloured forests in autumn add to the picturesque landscape. Autumn showers in principle are more frequent than in spring. May, October and November are the rainiest months. As is natural, in the high mountains the temperatures depend on the altitude.

There are different climatic zones suitable for the growth of one or another rare species or crops. Typical examples are the Sub-Balkan valley, referred to as the Rose Valley, some regions in the Rhodope Mountains where one can find the unique flower of Orpheus, the region of the town of [Sandanski](#) where olives and citrus fruit are grown, etc. There are some interesting areas from a climatic point of view, such as the [Sofia](#) Plain, the regions of [Sliven](#) and [Varna](#), where strong winds blow almost throughout the year. In the first two cases they are due to the proximity with the Balkan Mountains and its passes, which let all winds blow constantly through them. In the case with [Varna](#) this phenomenon is due to the specific microclimate of the Bay of Varna and the sea air-currents coming from the north.

Population of Bulgaria

The last census (in 2001) showed that 7 973 673 people live in Bulgaria. The average life expectancy for women is 74, and for men - 67. About one quarter of the population is at the age of pension. Most of Bulgarian population lives in cities. More than a million and a half people live in the capital city of [Sofia](#), which is approximately one fifth of the total population.

There are many ethnic groups living in Bulgaria (Turks, Gypsies, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Wallachians, and Albanians) as a consequence of its historical and geographical specifics. All minorities live in harmony with the Bulgarian population without any social or ethnic pressure.

Bulgarian Economy

The first steps made by Bulgarian economy in the modern sense of the word date back to the beginning of the 19th century when Bulgaria became famous for its agricultural production. In the beginning of the 20th century the country was one of the biggest exporters of early vegetables, fruit, milk, cheese, butter and meat in Europe. Up to the middle of the 20th century Bulgaria was considered a typically agrarian country.

The development of the industrial production and the manufacture date back to the first third of the 19th century. The factories in [Sliven](#), [Gabrovo](#), [Veliko Turnovo](#) and [Stara Zagora](#), the development of crafts in these towns and in many others near the Balkan Mountains, gained good markets for Bulgaria and made it popular among the partners from the east and the west.

The national industry advanced at a moderate pace till the middle of the 20th century when the government decided to turn the country into an industrial giant on the Balkans. This strategy was successful to a certain extent but it was at the expense of significant investments and a number of mistakes, connected with the lack of sufficient natural resources. The basic doctrine of the government was to increase the number of the working class, which implied opening of new enterprises, construction of new factories and works, power plants, industrial enterprises and dams. The volunteer brigades of school children, soldiers and university students contributed as a free work resource. At that time Bulgarian economy was bound with the economy of the USSR and the socialist countries through participation in COMECON and that gave impetus to certain branches of the national industry and revived the trade between those countries. On the other hand, Bulgaria did not have a choice and could not apply the principles of marketing and competition to the import and export of goods because of the lack of alternative trade partners.

Today Bulgaria is looking again for partners and markets. The collapse of planned economy and the introduction of the free market economy and competition caught the Bulgarian producers unprepared. A lot of companies went bankrupt. Privatisation is still in progress. There were no preferential laws until recently to give impetus to local production. There were not enough tax and customs preferences to make Bulgarian producer assure prime quality and expand production. The foreign investments soon after November 10, 1989 clashed against walls of old decrees and regulations that deterred potential investors.

The country has been in a situation of a currency board since 1997 tying the national currency to the DEM, and since 1st January 2002 – to the Euro. This stabilised the Bulgarian Lev, put an end to the

financial chaos and devaluation, and restored the hope of the people for realistic and stable savings and investments. The Parliament passed a packet of laws, which helped for modernisation of legislation and revival the production. The restitution of land and other real estate property as well as the privatisation advancing at full speed gave Bulgarians a chance to work and earn from their labour. There is a nation-wide opposition to the industrial racketeering, the disloyal competition, the production and distribution of low quality products and the piracy in the industrial and intellectual sphere. A reform in the field of banking is still to be implemented because of the emergence of a great number of banks and their bankruptcy at the expense of their clients. The financial, industrial and insurance companies and groups are also fought against because of the unfair deals, concealing of taxes, etc.

Today Bulgaria exports mainly agricultural products, electrics transporters, electricity and non-ferrous metals. It is especially famous for its yogourt and dairy products as well as oil-yielding roses, flowers and a variety of wines and brandies. The country imports various technical equipment, computers, audio and video equipment, electric appliances and household ware, ready-made clothes and raw materials. Tourism, which used to be an emblematic feature of the country's economy, is also successfully developing. Tourist establishments are to be totally privatised, modernised and renovated so that a better image and promotion of Bulgaria is achieved through it. Bulgaria possesses an incredible amount of natural resources which, with a little effort, better organisation and loyalty, could be turned into attractive centres for tourists and sportemen from all over the world. Many tourist companies have already met the world standards and attract their own guests to Bulgaria.

About Sofia

The capital of the Republic of Bulgaria is the city of Sofia (1 096 389 inhabitants, 550 metres above sea level). The city lies in the Sofia Plain, enclosed by the Balkan Mountains to the north, the Lozen Mountain to the southeast, Mountain Vitosha to the south, the Lyulin Mountain to the southwest. The the plain is open to the northwest in the direction of Yugoslavia, and to the southeast to the Thracian Lowland. Sofia is situated 55 km from the Yugoslav border at Kalotina checkpoint, 113 km from the Gyueshevo checkpoint with Macedonia, 183 km from the Greek border at Koulata, 315 km from the Turkish border at Kapitan Andreevo, 211 km from the Romanian border at Vidin, 324 km at Rousse, 392 km from our maritime border at the port of Bourgas, and 470 km from the port of Varna. In close proximity to the capital city lie Pancherevo Lake and Iskar Dam. The Iskar River flows by the city, and several smaller rivers cross the city, the most popular of these being the Vladaya and the Perlovo Rivers.

Sofia is linked by international routes with the capitals of Europe, and via Istanbul and Ankara, with the Middle East. Below is a list of the distance in kilometres to some of these cities:

Amsterdam	2242
Ankara	1010
Athens	863
Barcelona	2541
Belgrade	390
Berlin	1745
Bern	1773
Bonn	1973
Brussels	2196
Budapest	779
Bucharest	383
Warsaw	1691
Vienna	1044
Gdansk	2053
Gibraltar	3792
Dublin	2948
Istanbul	568
Kiev	1519
Copenhagen	2135
Lisbon	3826
London	2512
Madrid	3166
Marseilles	1908
Milan	1371
Moscow	2371
Munich	1483
Oslo	2715
Paris	2307

St. Petersburg 3079
Prague 1352
Rome 1632
Rostov on the Don 1831
Stockholm 2754
Tirana 579
Hamburg 2303
Helsinki 2

Bulgarian Mountains

It can safely be asserted that Bulgaria is a mountainous country. Approximately half of its territory is occupied by mountainous formations various in their area, height, nature and origin. All of them are a ring of the powerful range of the Alpine - Himalayan Massif comprising a multitude of mountainous systems on the two continents - Europe and Asia.

The mountains in Bulgaria are extremely diverse in kind. If they lack something, it is solely the "cosmic" altitudes and the everlasting snow and ice. Small and big, barren and forested, rounded and steep, low and high, rocky and openly Alpine all of them are accessible during the four seasons of the year and they provide for limitless opportunities for recreation, sports and tourism.

Geographical science indicates the existence of 37 mountains on the territory of Bulgaria, 36 of them situated in the southern part of the country and the mountain range of [Stara Planina](#) is the border between Northern and Southern Bulgaria. It is namely the mountain range of Stara Planina, the longest and the biggest in area, known as the Balkan Mountains, too, which gave the name to our Balkan Peninsula. The second longest mountain range in our country is spread in parallel to it, to the south - Sredna Gora. These two mountains, except their magnificent natural endowments, are closely related to the history of our people as well. The most impressive mountainous system, however, is the Rila-Rhodope Massif, including Rila, Pirin, the Rhodopes, Slavianka and Sturgach.

[Rila](#) is the sixth highest mountain in Europe and the highest mountain on the Balkan Peninsula (Mt. Moussala 2925 m). [Pirin](#) is the most beautiful and Alpine-like Bulgarian mountain. The Rhodope Mountains, the larger part of which are on Bulgarian territory (a smaller part is in Greece), are the second in area and one of the most interesting of our mountains in relation to flora and fauna, the architecture of the settlements and the cultural traditions of the population. Slavianka and Sturgach are border Greek mountains. Slavianka is a very interesting tourist site famous for its fields of Pirin tea. Two lower mountains are situated to the east of the Rila-Rhodope Massif - Sakar and Strandzha. Strandzha is closely related to the struggles of Bulgarian people for liberation from Ottoman Rule. Another mountain system is the Plana-Zaval Group, including 5 mountains in it - Zavalaska, Viskiar, Liulin, Vitosha and Plana, situated in a line, to the south-east of the border with Serbia. The highest, biggest and most famous of them is the [Vitosha](#) Mountain. Located in the immediate proximity to the south of the capital city, it is the most visited mountain. The organised hiking movement in Bulgaria was commenced on the principal mount of this range - Mt. Cherni Vruh (2290 m). On 27th August 1895 at the appeal of the great Bulgarian writer and democrat Aleko Konstantinov, 300 citizens of Sofia climbed it on foot from Sofia-city - quite incredible for the time!

The Verila-Rui group comprises 7 comparatively low mountains, located between the border with Serbia and the Rila Mountain. These are Rui (bordering with Serbia and the highest in the group - 1706 m), Ezdimir, Strazha, Liubash, Cherna Gora, Golo Burdo and Verila. In spite of their low altitude above sea level and their small area, each of these mountains is interesting in itself. The Ostritsa Reserve, for instance, is situated in Golo Burdo and it is extremely rich in endemic vegetation kinds.

The mountainous system of Kraishte has 11 individual mountain formations. Like in the Verila-Rui group, the mountains here are small in area and comparatively low. The highest of these mountains are those bordering with Serbia - Milev and Kurvav Kamuk, 1733 m and 1737 m respectively.

The Osogovo-Belasitsa mountainous group is situated in the south-west corner of Bulgaria. Osogovo and Belasitsa Mountains are over 2000 metres high, and Vlahina and Ialashevskia Mountain, follow them closely in altitude. The fifth mountain within this group is Ograzhden. Four of the mountains are on the Bulgarian-Macedonian border, and Belasitsa is situated on the territories of 3 states - Bulgaria, Greece and Macedonia. Mt. Tumba (1881 m), is a knot between the three neighbouring Balkan countries.

Of all the 37 small and big mountains, 8 exceed the altitude of 2000 metres: Rila (Mt. Moussala - 2925 m), Pirin (Mt. Vihren - 2914 m), Stara Planina (Mt. Botev - 2376 m), Vitosha (Mt. Cherni Vruh - 2290 m), Osogovo Mountain (Mt. Ruen - 2252 m), Slavianka (Mt. Gotsev Vruh - 2212 m), the Rhodopes (Mt.

Golyam Perelik - 2191 m) and Belasitsa (Mt. Radomir - 2029 m). All of them are subject to tourist and sports related activities and the Rhodopes are quite densely populated as well.

The high-mountain lakes add to about 400 in number and they are scattered around cirques of the Rila and Pirin Mountains and one - in Stara Planina. There are a lot more natural lakes of other origin, mainly around the Rhodopes and fewer around Stara Planina. This is a priceless wealth of Bulgarian nature, which shall henceforward attract and charm thousands of fans.

The unique mountainous nature of Bulgaria is increasingly becoming a foremost concern for the state in view of its preservation for the present and the future generations. Dozens of biosphere reserves have been established and huge territories of Pirin, Rila and Stara Planina were declared National Parks. The Pirin National Park was included in the UNESCO list of protected territories and natural sites, representing super-national, universal values.

The opportunities offered by Bulgarian mountains in relation to the pleasant and beneficial use of one's free time are great in number. For motor tourists there is a sufficiently branched road network providing access to the most interesting natural, historical and cultural places of interest, as well as to all the settlements and resorts. Hiking tourism related opportunities are unlimited in number and hiking can be practised during all four seasons of the year. It is mainly for its purposes that over 300 chalets (for information and reservations contact tel.: 02 9801285) and high-mountain cabins were built in the Bulgarian mountains, a sufficiently dense network, which allows for the longest mountain hikes to be concluded within one day.

Thousands of kilometres of marked trails provide a high degree of security when moving around in the mountains. The four-colour marking characteristic of most European countries with developed hiking is adopted in Bulgaria. The key colours in it are red, blue, green and yellow, and white colour is an auxiliary one. It should be known that the red marking, in principle, is for ridges. Winter marking consists of yellow-black metal stakes, at a height of between 3 and 4 metres and indicates the comparatively safest way along a certain route in the event of serious snow cover. The greater part of the routes, particularly in Rila, Pirin and along the ridges of Stara Planina, have azimuth table plates in addition to the numbering of the stakes.

There are very good ski-sports opportunities in four big ski-centres in the Bulgarian mountains - [Borovets](#) (Rila), [Pamporovo](#) (the Rhodopes), [Aleko](#) (Vitosha) and [Bansko](#) (Pirin). Of them Borovets has got the highest coefficient where the European Cup races are organised. Borovets was the host of a round of the World Cup as well. The smaller ski-centres of local importance include Semkovo, Panichishte, Rilski Ezera (Rila Lakes), Maliovitza and Govedartsa in Rila, Bezbog in Pirin, Petrohan, Kom, Strazhata, Beklemeto, Pleven, Uzana, Chumerna in Stara Planina, Zdravets, Byala Cherkva, Persenk, Yundola, Martsiganitsa in the Rhodopes, Vetrovala and Konyarnika in Vitosha and others. Not only the slopes of the Alpine-like mountains of Rila and Pirin offer marvellous ski-tourism related conditions but so do Stara Planina, the Rhodopes, Vitosha, and Osogovo as well.

Bulgarian mountains offer excellent conditions for one of the most attractive and emotional kinds of sports in the open air - mountaineering. Alpine sites in our country, which are of interest even to the most outstanding climbers in Europe add up to dozens. In the first place, without a rival, is the Maliovitza mountain ridge of Rila - the cradle and centre of Bulgarian mountaineering - a vast Alpine "stadium", among which the most beautiful Bulgarian peak rises - Mt. Maliovitza (2730 m). Other well-known Alpine sites are Vihren and Stapalata (the Stairs) in Pirin, Vratsata, Lakatnik, Raiski Skali (Paradise Rocks), Severniya Dzhendem (Northern Hell), Maglizh and Karandila in Stara Planina, Kominite (the Chimneys) and Rezniovete in Vitosha, the gorge on Erma River.

There are very good conditions for other modern mountainous sports, too - mountain marathon, mountain biking, delta- and paragliding, rafting and kayaking.

Their beauty, diversity and accessibility during all the seasons of the year make Bulgarian mountains an object of desire for home and international tourism.

The perfectly organised and equipped Mountain Rescue Service (MRS) and 15 well-trained dogs take care of the health, life and security of tourists and sportsmen in the mountains. About 50 permanent and 700 voluntary mountain rescuers provide for the security of the territory of all the Bulgarian mountains and through their dedicated labour and love for the people and the mountain they inspire calmness and more confidence in all nature admirers. The Central 24-hour Check Point is located in the MRS Station in Lozenets district of the capital city, tel.: 02 9632000; 0481843; 088621286. A permanent radio connection is maintained with over 250 chalets and MRS check-points. Several central bases function with the Mountain Rescue Service - in [Borovets](#), Maliovitza, [Bansko](#), Dobrinishte above Mt. Bezbog and Pamporovo, Mechi Chal above the town of Chepelare, as well as a great number of local bases - Aleko, Cherni Vruh and Opheliya in Vitosha Mountain, Vezhen, Buzov Dial, Uzana and Bulgarka in Stara

Planina, Osogovo in the mountains above the town of Kiustendil, Zdravets in the Rhodopes, above [Plovdiv](#). There are a lot of temporary and permanent rescue check-points as well - Rezena and Konyarnika in Vitosha Mountain, Markudzhitsite and Tchatarluka in Rila, Chalin Valog, Yavorov Chalet and [Shiligarnika](#) in Pirin.

The Mountain Rescue Service structures have successfully participated in stamping out the consequences of earthquakes and other natural disasters in Turkey, Greece, Armenia, Egypt and in Bulgaria, as well. Since 2000 the Vitosha Life Insurance Company PLC offers mountain life insurance. The annual fee of 20 Leva covers first aid in the mountain, transport to a hospital and treatment.