



EU Sky Route
star tourism

Bulgaria



Discover the magic of Bulgaria's land and sky

Overview

Discover the magic of Bulgaria's land and sky

Spend a week in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountains, a blend of stunning nature, historic masterpieces and unrivalled skies. You'll visit the country's most famous observatory NAO Rozhen in Sofia, the Smolyan Planetarium and the ancient 'sun worshipping' Thracian Observatory with plentiful opportunities to enjoy Bulgaria's endless stunning vistas, soaring mountains, nature-carved relics and ancient monuments. Bulgaria is a gem on the Balkan Peninsula, popular in winter for its snow-capped mountains and summer time with lush greenery and warm sunshine. It's packed with historical and cultural sites, with treasures dating back to 4000BC and an extensive history of astronomy and sun-tracking.

Astronomical delights

Planetarium Smolyan

On 6 September 1975, Bulgaria's biggest Planetarium with Public Observatory opened its doors in the town of Smolyan. Smolyan is a tourist centre in the West Rhodopes lying 800 metres above sea level, near the famous Bulgarian winter resort of Pamporovo. The Planetarium and Observatory complex is the town's most frequently visited attraction and is open seven days a week.

NAO Rozhen

The Rozhen National Astronomical Observatory was officially opened on 13 March 1981, although regular observations have taken place here since September 1980. NAO Rozhen is the biggest astronomical facility on the Balkan Peninsula and the visitor center is open throughout the year.

Tatul solar cult

Fourteen kilometres north east of Momchilgrad is Tatul, a village which has practised the Thracian system of rituals and beliefs centred on the solar cult since the 12th century BC. Tatul is still home to a sanctuary formerly used as an observatory for studying the movement of the sun.

Harmankaya

The site was used for positional astronomical observations of the solar solstices using vector horizontal astronomy. Measurements show that sun observations from the north east on artificially levelled ground were conducted here from around 2000 BC. There is reason to believe that these observations were included in the ritual practices of that time. In those days, the cult of God-Sun was widespread, practising 'cosmic structuring' actions to overcome chaos and ensure prosperity and good fortune.



Memorable sites

Plovdiv – UNESCO Heritage Site

Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria and one of the oldest in Europe, dating back to 4000 BC. The ancient settlement was situated on the natural elevation between Nebet, Taksim and Dzhambaz hills (the Three Hills). In ancient times Thracians inhabited the Three Hills and built a fortified settlement, the largest city in Thrace. In the 4th century BC Plovdiv, was conquered by Phillip of Macedonia. He gave the city one of its many names – Philipopolis – and encircled it with thick fortified walls. Later the Thracians regained their power over the city, but after a series of battles in the 1st century AD it became a part of the Roman Empire.

Asen's Fortress near Assenovgrad

Asen's Fortress is the most interesting and visited tourist attraction in the Asenovgrad region. It is situated three kilometres from the city on the top of a cliff, on the left bank of the Asenitsa River. You reach the fortress via a scenic route branching off the road just south of Asenovgrad heading toward Smolyan. The natural cliff where the fortress is situated comprises an area of 12 hectares. Its strategic location and natural defences explain why it has been used since the days of the Thracians, who fortified it in the 5th century BC. Asen's Fortress has seen three periods of substantial construction – during the 9th, 11th and 13th centuries. In 1231, Tsar Asen II (1218-1241) completed the largest expansion and rebuilding of the fortress, as proclaimed on a carved stone monument. The fortress was later named after him.

**Belintash**

This a plateau rock formation, 750 metres long, 30 to 50 metres wide and about 50 metres high, created by volcanic sedimentary rocks. The name 'Belintash' means 'White Stone' and its distinctive shape is down to nature's weathering of the rock. It is believed that an ancient Thracian sanctuary of god Sabaziy – god of the Thracian tribe Besi – existed there. In the upper part of the rock are two carved wells served by many drains filled with water. These aren't the only remains of the ancient Thracian sanctuary. Belintash is one of the many Thracian megalithic monuments in the Rhodope Mountains. The rock complex is also a nesting site for native birdlife including the Alpine swift (*Apus melba*), the Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*) and the Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*).

Perperek

This complex 20 km north of Kardzhaly is known to local people as Djin tepesi (The ghost's mountain). It features an open and unique boulder decorated with several characters from one of the oldest scripts in the world – Cretan Linear. Perperikon is the oldest church in the Rhodopes. Bishop Niketa Rimesianski translated the Bible into the local language of and began the Christianisation of the population. Perperikon became a bishopric and remained so until the fall of Bulgaria under Ottoman rule. In XIII-XIV century, it became a source of conflict between Bulgaria and Byzantium and was fortified with additional towers.



Tatul – The Village of the Gods

Tatul features an ancient pagan sanctuary and a medieval fortress. There are other rock masses to the north, where trapezium-shaped niches and rock vaults have been found. In a nearby field, tombs and stone objects have been unearthed bearing antique and medieval inscriptions. Research work that is still ongoing will determine if a temple of the famous Thracian musician and hero Orpheus was really from here, as folklore suggests. In 2006, a sensational announcement was made. Growing on the grave of Orpheus was a grapevine of the legendary Thracian 'zela' grape variety, thought to have died out centuries before. Most intriguing is the fact that there are no vines growing on this hill and no grapes grown within a 10 kilometre radius. The variety has since been named the "Tear of Orpheus" and is a blend of Mavrud and Cabernet flavours.

The Stone Wedding

This magnificent natural rock phenomenon sits south of the village of Zimzelen (Eastern Rhodopes), five kilometres from Kardzhali. This volcanic stone formation resembles a gathering of people, animals and birds and is estimated to be about 35 million years old. The various minerals in the rocks have coloured the wedding congregation in striking white, yellow, pink and green hues.

The Stone Mushrooms

These quirky and curious stone mushroom formations are located near the village of Beli Plast and stand three metres high, with pink spots, pure blocks and greenish cowls. Besides these charming stone relics, this region of Kardjali is also rich in cave formations.

Memorable sites

Sofia, capital of Bulgaria

Sofia is Bulgaria's capital and its largest city. Founded thousands of years ago, it is the country's cultural and economic centre. The city is located at a significant geographic and political crossroads. The route from Western Europe to Istanbul passes through Sofia via Beograd and Skopje, then through Plovdiv to Turkey. Sofia also connects The Near East and The Middle East, lying between the banks of The Danube and the shores of The White Sea on the one hand, and between The Black Sea and The Adriatic on the other.

Smolyan

Some of the most beautiful and picturesque places in Bulgaria are located in the Rhodope Mountains. Lush meadows in eye-catching nuances of green alternate with dark coniferous forests, steep cliffs and picturesque canyons. There are small hotels in the pretty town of Smolyan, but accommodation is also available in the neighbouring villages and Pamporovo mountain resort. The restaurants serve delicious local dishes and make you very welcome.

Ecopath "Canyon Falls"

This pretty trail is close to Smolyan and starts from an old Roman bridge and winds through woods and over dainty wooden bridges across Elena River. The route is dotted with 46 waterfalls; the largest, vod. Orfey, is an incredible 68 metres tall.



Pamporovo

Pamporovo is a resort designed primarily for skiing. Almost all ski runs start from the grand Shezhanka (the Snow White) Peak, with altitudes ranging from 1,926 to 1,400 metres. The tourist season begins in December and lasts well until the end of April. If you visit in the summer, climb Persenk Peak for Golyam Persenk, a 2,091 metre beautiful pyramid-shaped summit, the highest in Chernatitsa in the Western Rhodopes.

Shiroka Laka village

Located in the Rhodopes, 23 kilometres north east of Smolyan and 16 kilometres from Pamporovo, the name of this village derives from the old Bulgarian word "laka", meaning to curve, bend or meander. Shiroka Laka was formed in the 17th century and has since become one of Bulgaria's most popular tourist destinations. The village has preserved its architecture from the Bulgarian Revival Period, with a rich musical culture, beautiful landscapes and fascinating history. It is most famous for the beautiful Rhodope houses that sit amphitheatrically on both sides of the river.

Kardjaly

Kardjali is situated in the heart of the Eastern Rodophi Mountains, along the two banks of the Arda River. There are two big dams in the outskirts of the city – Studen Kladenec Dam to the east and Kardjali Dam to the south. The site is a popular place for recreation, fishing and historical and cultural tourism.

Places to stay



SOFIA

There are plenty of places to stay in the Bulgarian capital:

[Hotel Hemus \(3*\)](#)

www.hemushotels.com

[Best western SofiaCity Hotel \(4*\)](#)

www.sofiacityhotel.com

[Grand Hotel Sofia \(5*\)](#)

www.grandhotelsofia.bg

SMOLYAN

[Hotel Smolyan \(3*\)](#) www.hotelsmolyan.com

PAMPOROVO

Offering a mix of luxury hotels, family homes and cottages:

[Hotel Dafovska \(3*\)](#)

www.dafovskahotel.com

[Hotel Extreme \(4*\)](#)

www.hotel-extreme.bg

[Hotel Orlovetz \(5*\)](#)

www.hotelorlovetz.com

KARDJALY

[Hotel Kardjaly](#) www.hotel-kardjali.com



Places to eat



SOFIA

There are hundreds of restaurants, pubs, bars, cafeteria, guesthouses and hotels with restaurants in the Bulgarian capital:

[Hadji Draganovite izbi](http://www.izbite.com) www.izbite.com

[Podlipite](http://www.podlipitebg.com) www.podlipitebg.com

PLOVDIV

[The Old Plovdiv restaurant](http://www.oldplovdivbg.com) www.oldplovdivbg.com

[Happy village](http://www.veseloselo.com) www.veseloselo.com

PAMPOROVO

Dine in one of our recommended hotels or try [The White House restaurant](#)

SMOLYAN

Dine in one of Smolyan's recommended hotels or try restaurant [Rodopski kat](http://rodopskikat.com) <http://rodopskikat.com>

SHIROKA LAKA

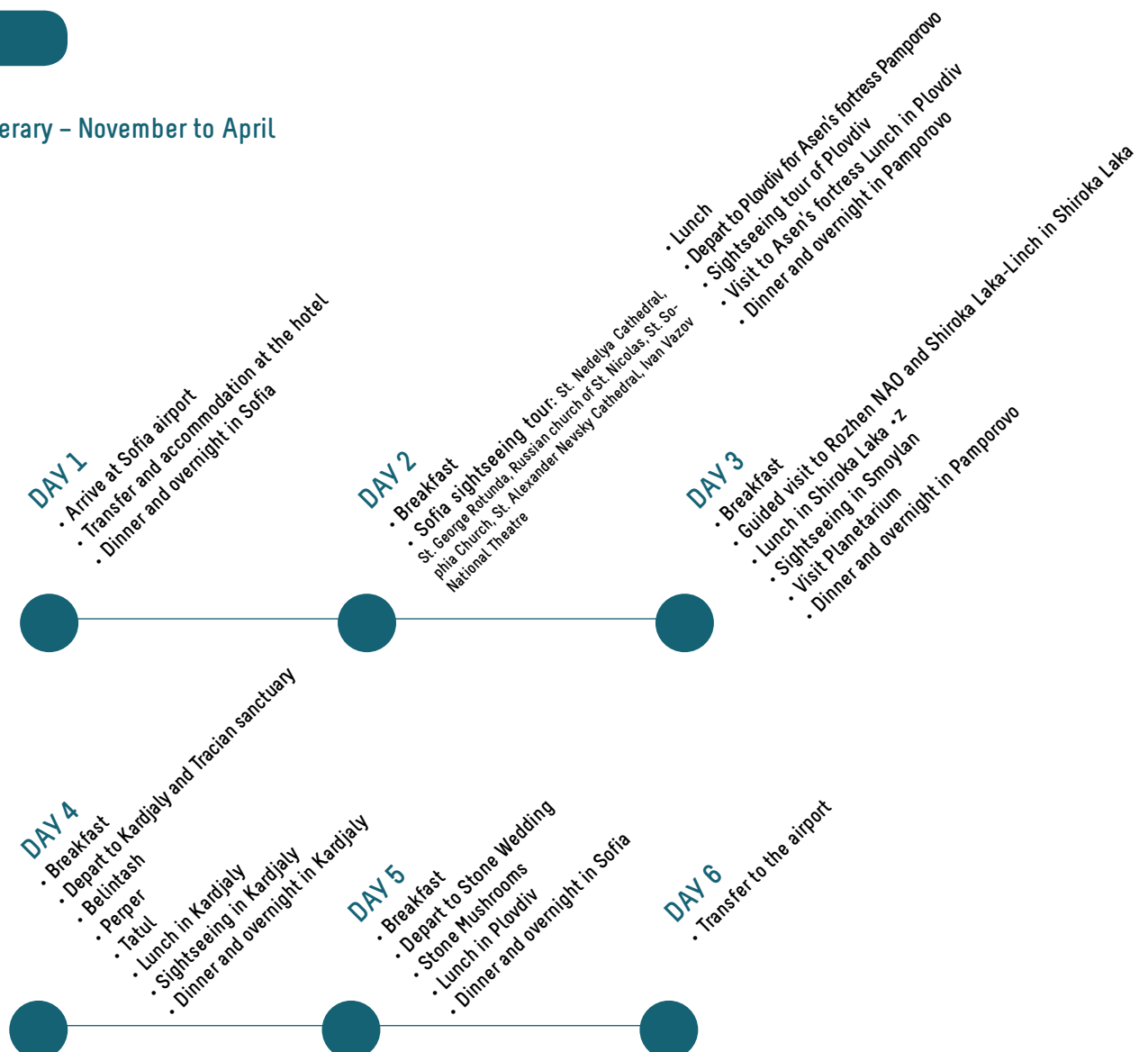
[Restaurant Kalina](#)

KARDJALY

[Mehana Rodopchani](#)

Itinerary

Winter itinerary – November to April



Winter itinerary – November to April

