

Explore Bulgaria's Jewish Heritage 16 – 22 October 2016

This tour visits two ancient cities and discovers their Jewish Heritage alongside their Eastern Orthodox and Ottoman traditions.

Price: £895 (Based on a group of 6 or more, if more people book, price will be lower – see Price Conditions at the end of the leaflet).



Bulgaria is very proud of the fact that it saved almost 50,000 of its Jewish population from being deported to labour and extermination camps in 1943, despite then being an ally of Nazi Germany. However after the war most of the remaining Jews emigrated, many to Israel, and of the buildings associated with them, some are in use and in good repair but many are neglected. During this tour we shall visit the cities of Sofia and Plovdiv, as well as the famous Rila Monastery, and three small towns: Samokov, Kyustendil and Pazardzhik, with interesting Jewish connections.

Bulgaria's beautiful scenery, friendly people and excellent wine and food are additional highlights. The B-BS offers you the benefits of nearly forty years' experience of organising tours to Bulgaria and excellent value.

For your financial protection our tour operators for the last twenty years Balkania Travel Ltd. are licensed by the UK Civil Aviation Authority, ATOL 4465 and bonded by the International Air Transport Association, IATA number 91-2 7839.

Projected itinerary (which may be subject to adjustment)

Sunday 16 October Flight from Heathrow to Sofia, where you will be met by your guide. Transfer to your central hotel. Welcome event. Dinner and first of four overnight stays.

Monday 17 October Walking tour of central Sofia to see the iconic St. Alexander Nevski Memorial Church, St. Sofia Church, the National Theatre, the Russian Church, the Rotunda of St. George, monuments dedicated to the salvation of Bulgaria's Jews and the recently excavated ruins of Roman Serdika. Our walk ends on Vitosha Boulevard where there are many cafes and restaurants for your independent lunch.

In the afternoon we shall visit Sofia's synagogue, built in the early 20th Century. Nearby is the newly opened Sofia History Museum, with its fascinating displays about city life through the ages. Afterwards we shall take our bus to visit the Jewish cemetery.

Dinner and overnight.

Tuesday 18 October Today we drive to Kyustendil to visit the house of Dimitar Peshev, the Bulgarian MP who successfully petitioned against the deportation of Jews in March 1943. His achievement has been acknowledged by his inclusion in the Righteous Among Nations at Yad Vashem.

Then we continue to Samokov where we have lunch and then visit the Sarafska House, once the home of the Sephardic Jewish Arie family, who settled here in the late 18th century and built this house in the mid-19th century. Nearby are the remains of the former synagogue. Also in the town centre is the mosque, which re-used some Jewish gravestones in the restoration of its porch. Return to Sofia.

Independent dinner.

Wednesday 19 October Visit the National History Museum at Boyana before driving south to the famous Rila Monastery, the largest in Bulgaria, a UNESCO listed World Heritage site. Its ancient defence tower is surrounded by a picturesque ensemble of monastic buildings and a beautiful main church decorated in the 19th century by the famous Bulgarian painter, Zahari Zograph. Tsar Boris III's grave is here. He distinguished himself during the Second World War by opposing attempts by Adolf Hitler to deport the Jewish population of his country.

Lunch near the monastery. Return drive to Sofia. Independent dinner.

Thursday 20 October Drive to Bulgaria's second city, Plovdiv, for a two night stay. On the way we shall stop at Pazardzhik. There was once a significant Jewish community in the town, the highest navigable point of the Maritsa River, from where Jewish merchants in the 17-19th centuries exported grain from the fertile Thracian Plain. Two former synagogues can be seen. The large synagogue is a particularly handsome building with fine frescoes.

Continue to Plovdiv and check-in to Trimontium Hotel and have a light lunch before setting off to explore. This is one of Europe's oldest inhabited cities, and its long heritage can be seen as you walk, with remains or buildings from the Thracian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Bulgarian eras. Our walking tour will visit the ancient stadium, the ruins of the first fortress on the top of the three hills, the Roman Theatre and the lovely 18th and 19th century houses in the Old Town. Some free time to enjoy the evening stroll along the pedestrianized main street.

Dinner in the Old Town.

Friday 21 October Visit to the Synagogue and meeting with a representative of the local Jewish community. The synagogue here is the oldest in Bulgaria, dating back to Roman times, and the only functioning synagogue outside Sofia.

Continue with visits to an early Christian church from the 5th to 6th centuries, which has well-preserved geometrical mosaics. Even earlier mosaics can be seen in the Archaeological Underpass, where the mosaics include a portrait of a woman, signed with the name Eirene. Independent lunch. Free time for shopping or further exploration!

Farewell dinner.

Saturday 22 October Leisurely start before driving to Sofia for your return flight to London.

Price conditions: At the time of booking we shall confirm and invoice at the **starting price** of **£895** per person. That price will be reviewed subject to number of participants booked at the time of due balance (8 weeks before departure) and if necessary, re-invoiced accordingly. E.g., if **7** people booked, the price will be reduced to **£870**, if **8** people book, the price will be at its **final lowest**, i.e. **£850** per person.

OUR PRICE INCLUDES:

- Return flights from Heathrow to Sofia with all taxes and charges.
- Accommodation in 3* and 4* hotels with en suite facilities on a twin-bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Half-board.
- Coach for transfers and excursions.
- English speaking Bulgarian guide.
- Entrance fees.

NOT INCLUDED:

- Lunches (about £4 - 5).
- Travel Insurance (Compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Drinks and other personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement £105

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