

TASTE OF BULGARIA TOUR

18 – 23 September 2016 (Tour code TOB) **Price: £1,200** (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).

Our tour takes place during the most gratifying time of the year for farmers and winemakers – the harvest, or vintage.



Bulgarian wine came to prominence in the UK in the mid 80s, but its cuisine still remains one of its best-kept secrets. Bulgaria is a melting pot of centuries old civilizations and cultures. East meets West here. Its traditional cooking has integrated features of the cuisines of its neighbours, particularly Greece and Turkey, with local Slavic and Central European traditions, into a wonderful Balkan mix. Bulgarian cooking uses abundant local natural ingredients provided by the favorable climate and geography. Europe's longest river the Danube, forming its Northern border with Romania, the Black Sea to the East, high mountain creeks and lakes, all provide many different types of fish. This time we concentrate on the fertile Thracian lowlands in the central South of the country, the Valley of the Roses and the Balkan Mountains in the middle. These areas produce plenty of fresh vegetables, fruit, the famous Bulgarian rose oil and rose water, milk and dairy products, as well as meat, poultry, game and mountain trout. The cuisine follows slow cooking home recipes passed down the generations, evolved over the centuries and integrating various influences. Modernity is admitted at a slow pace, ready-made meals occupy a small space on shelves. Television cookery shows are growing in popularity and there is an increasing number of cookery books. A

good bridge for Western enthusiasts is provided by e.g. "The Food and Wine of Romania and Bulgaria" by Silvena Johan Lauta, published by Aquamarine, and available in the UK. Bulgarian cooking is nowadays interpreted and refined in many types of eating establishments, from local Mechana and Kruchma folk-style taverns to Blue-ribbon restaurants. Some of the most characteristic dishes of the Bulgarian national cuisine are soups, stews, various types of roast and grilled meats, kebapcheta (rissoles), banitsa (cheese pastry), stuffed aubergines, peppers, courgettes, vine leaves, pickled cabbage leaves, dry cured spicy meats such as lukanka, sudzhuk and pastarma. Lyutenitsa, many beans recipes, baklava, and many more, are other local favourites. The yoghurt is excellent, and was actually developed by the Bulgarians, using the indigenous *Lactobacillus Bulgaricus* (which has completely taken over the Japanese market). Many local herbs, such as chubritsa, bosilek, mashterka, dzhodzhen, etc., complement more familiar Eastern spices. The delicious Bulgarian brine white cheese Sirene, a prized product in the foodhalls of Harrods in the 80s (the Greek variety Feta is something similar), is a main ingredient of the Shopska salad, one of the most popular starters on the Bulgarian table, to go with Bulgaria's favourite distilled drinks, Rakiya and the aniseed Mastika. Bulgarian meals and particularly starters with aperitif are lengthy affairs. Folk music is a favourite accompaniment and many songs praise rakiya and red wine. There's only one folk song mentioning white wine whose lyrics go "Oh you white wine, why aren't you red". Cooking, eating, drinking and entertaining guests is one of the passions of the Bulgarians. Learn the recipes of each dish, served on the tour and try your hand at making some of them. Take away with you a handful of aromatic Bulgarian herbs and spices from the vibrant country markets.

Bulgarian wine has centuries old traditions, starting with the mysterious first local inhabitants, the Thracians many centuries BC. During the last 20 years the Bulgarian wine industry has made enormous strides away from the familiar 1980s mass market wines produced under the state monopoly. Huge investments have been poured into young vineyards and new technology. A shift has taken place from big supermarket exports to local presentation in own wine cellars and smart restaurants. The best BG wines are now in BG. Come on our tour at the most exciting time in the vine-growers' year and be among the first to witness the sea-change in Bulgaria's wine-making.

Bulgaria's beautiful scenery, friendly people and historic sites complement the excellent wine and food as additional highlights. The B-BS offers you the benefits of its nearly forty years' experience of organizing tours to Bulgaria. Our tour price includes a donation to Bulgarian charitable organizations. For your financial protection our tour operators for 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.

Outline Programme (which may be subject to minor adjustments)

Sunday 18 September Scheduled flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Meet and greet by your genial guide Mrs Jordanka (Dani) Kotseva and transfer to your centrally located 4-star hotel. After a welcome drink with some local favourites, there follows a short walking tour. History and traditions spanning over 20

centuries at your finger-tips. See the remains of the Roman city of Serdika at the "Largo" and the magnificent gold-domed Patriarchal Alexander Nevski East Orthodox church. Dinner with aperitif and wine for your first taste of Bulgaria.

Monday 19 September Drive to Plovdiv and on the way stop at the village of Vetren Dol. Visit an authentic Bulgarian home and experience the hospitality of your welcoming hosts Tanya and Kiril and some of their home cooked delicacies and drinks. Bulgaria's hospitality has prompted some 30,000 Brits to buy property and move to Bulgaria, including two households in Vetren Dol. Continue to Plovdiv and check-in for a two night stay. Join the *dvizhenieto* (like the Italian *corso*), a traditional early evening stroll down the main street to the Old Town. Explore its steep cobbled streets, admire the picturesque timber-framed buildings from the Bulgarian National Revival period (18-19 C.) and take the stage at the spectacular Roman Theatre! Later, Dinner in the Old Town tasting a number of the famous Thracian specialities, such as salad of pink tomatoes, grilled aubergines and courgettes with *bosilek* sauce, buffalo cheese, *patatnik*, *pastarma*, *Katino Meze* (pork fillet, calf tongue, forest mushrooms, leeks, pickled gherkins, spices), etc. with the indigenous *Mavrud* wines. Overnight Plovdiv.

Tuesday 20 September After your Bulgarian Breakfast drive into the foothills of the Rodopi Mountains enfolding the Bachkovo Monastery, dating from the 11th century, with its wonderful internal and external frescoes. Return into the plains for another approach to the mountains towards the village of Brestovitsa, home to the indigenous variety *Mavrud*. Its vineyards greet you before reaching the village. Brestovitsa is best known in Bulgaria for the biggest number of wineries per head of the population and its festival of wine-makers and vine-growers *Trifon Zarezan*, celebrated each year on 14th February. Visit the most famous winery owned and run by the artistic Todoroff family. Some of their wines adorned the tasting tables of *Vinopolis* in London a few years ago. Tour of the boutique winery and tasting with snacks in its beautiful tasting reception room. It is decorated with original pictures by Bulgarian artists, some of which were specially commissioned for use in the labels of the Todoroff wine bottles. Hear the old legend of *Mavrud*. Return to Plovdiv. Your Guide will advise you for the restaurants of your choice for your independent dinner. Overnight.

Wednesday 21 September After visiting the local farmers' market, leave Plovdiv driving north through the Thracian Lowlands towards *Hissarya*, a spa town since antiquity with over 12 mineral springs and many Roman monuments. Continue to *Starosel* to see the Thracian tombs from 5th century BC. Visit nearby *Starosel* winery for a tasting in its solemn hall, replicating an ancient Thracian temple. On to the beautiful little mountain town of *Koprivshitsa* for dinner of mountain trout with white *Misket* wines from the Valley of Roses and overnight.

Thursday 22 September Morning walk in the steep cobbled streets of *Koprivshitsa* visiting some of its many house-museums. Cooking session to learn from the Chef how to prepare some Bulgarian dishes, e.g. *Shopska Salad*, *Pepper Burek*, *Kavarma* and *Gyuvetch*. You can either take part or you can just watch,

while enjoying a drink and local meze. Your farewell dinner is tonight and the menu will include some of the dishes prepared earlier and introduced by you. Share your experience in making them and your impressions as food critics.

Friday 23 September Leisurely departure to Sofia Airport for your early afternoon return flight to Heathrow.

Price condition: At the time of booking we shall confirm and invoice at the **starting price of £1,200** 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 8 people booked the price will be reduced to £1,100, if 9 people book, the price will be at its final **lowest of £1,050** per person.

OUR PRICE INCLUDES:

- Return scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia with all taxes and charges.
- 5 nights accommodation at centrally located hotels, on a twin bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Half board, (Full breakfast and 3-course dinner), two wine-tastings, one Bulgarian Cuisine cookery course.
- Coach for transfers and excursions with professional driver.
- English speaking guide.
- All museum entrance fees.
- Information pack including Bulgarian cookery recipes.

NOT INCLUDED:

- Lunches or light suppers, where not included (about £4-5).
- Travel Insurance (Compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Drinks (other than tastings) and other personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement £85.

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