

## Orthodox Easter Celebrations and Traditions

**13 - 19 April 2017** (Tour code: OE)

**Price: £1,350**

(Based on a group of 4 - 5, if more people book, price will be lower. See Price Conditions at the end of the leaflet).



This tour gives you the opportunity to explore the rich cultural and folklore traditions in Bulgaria relating to Easter. We shall visit small and remote villages where rural life seems unchanged for a century. We shall dye eggs on Holy Thursday, attend a Midnight mass at Easter and have a festive traditional lunch on Sunday. We shall also visit some of the most prominent historical and cultural sites in Bulgaria, including three on UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage list.

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)

**Thursday 13 April** Flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Transfer to your centrally situated hotel. After checking in, drive to Ihtiman, where the traditional dyeing of Easter eggs will be demonstrated to us by local ladies. They will also sing some folklore songs for us. The evening will finish with a home-made dinner there. Return drive to Sofia.

**Friday 14 April** Good Friday. Drive to UNESCO World Heritage listed Boyana church to see its beautiful pre-Renaissance frescoes from 1259. Then drive to the nearby National Historical Museum with its rich world famous collections. Return to central Sofia for lunch. Afterwards we shall have a walking tour, visiting Alexander Nevski Memorial Church and the Church of Sveta Sofia. Following the yellow brick road we can see the former Royal Palace, the National Theatre and the Rotunda of Sveti Georgi, as well as some of the recently excavated remains of Serdika, the Roman city of Emperor Constantine. During our tour we can experience in a church one of the traditions of Orthodox Easter – crawling under a table adorned with a richly ornate Plashtanitsa or Epitaphios. Independent dinner.

**Saturday 15 April** Drive to Rila monastery, another listed World Cultural Heritage site. It is the largest in Bulgaria, founded in the 10<sup>th</sup> C. by the hermit, Ivan Rilski, who is the national saint of the Bulgarians. We have a tour of the monastery, visiting the main church, the guestrooms, the Magernitsa (monastery kitchen), the museum with its ethnographic and ecclesiastical treasures, including the exquisite Rafael Cross. Bulgaria's last Tsar, Boris III, is buried here and nearby is the grave of James Bouchier (1850-1920) Balkan correspondent of The Times. Lunch in a monastery-owned restaurant with typical monks' dishes. Return drive to Sofia, some free time and independent dinner. Optional visit to Alexander Nevski Memorial Church to join the midnight celebrations dedicated to Easter.

**Sunday 16 April** Late breakfast then drive to Koprivshtitsa (about 2 hours). This mountain town is like an open-air architectural reserve with its numerous historic houses from the Bulgarian National Revival of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Walk along the cobbled streets and visit

some of the house-museums, and the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Easter lunch where we shall be the special guests of the local priest and his family for a traditional meal.

Afternoon departure for Kazanluk, visit to the Historical Museum, where we shall mainly focus on the Thracian artefacts excavated locally in the Valley of the Kings. Check in to our accommodation, then we have a short drive to a concert specially arranged for us, by an Eastern Orthodox a capella choir. Easter dinner. Overnight stay in Kazanluk area.

***Monday 17 April*** We start the day with visits to some of the nearby Thracian tombs, most dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> C. BC. They are the surviving evidence of the mysterious local civilization of Thracians, before the Slavs and the Bulgarians invaded and settled in these lands. In the morning we have arranged to attend the service of the Vladika (Bishop) of the Eparchy of Stara Zagora in the “Golden Church” at Shipka. We shall not miss the UNESCO listed Kazanluk Thracian tomb with its frescoes depicting different scenes from the life and beliefs of the Thracians. We shall visit the replica as the original is closed to visitors. Drive on to Plovdiv with lunch on arrival. Then we can explore the UNESCO listed Old Town with visits to house-museums showing the traditional interiors of merchants’ family houses in the early 19<sup>th</sup> C., the church of Sts. Constantine and Helena, the Roman theatre and Roman stadium. Independent dinner. Overnight in Plovdiv.

***Tuesday 18 April*** We begin by visiting the mosaics at the recently opened early Christian basilica (5<sup>th</sup> C. AD) and then drive south into the foothills of the Rhodope mountains to Bachkovo monastery. It was founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> C. by two brothers of Georgian origin serving in the Byzantine army. We shall visit the church, refectory and ossuary. Lunch nearby. Return drive to Sofia, on the way we shall stop at a winery in the famous Thracian Lowlands for a tour and a tasting. Farewell Dinner in Sofia.

***Wednesday 4 May*** Some free time for shopping or sightseeing before late morning departure to the airport.

***We hope to see you again in Bulgaria!***

**PRICE CONDITIONS:** At the time of booking we shall confirm and invoice at the starting price of £1,350. That price will be reviewed subject to number of participants booked by the due balance date (8 weeks before departure) and if necessary, re-invoiced accordingly. E.g., if 6 people book, the price drops to £1,250, if 8 people book, the price will drop by another £100 to its final level of £1,150.

**OUR PRICE INCLUDES:**

- Return flights from Heathrow to Sofia with all taxes and charges. Our online check in, seat reservation and boarding pass service
- Bed and breakfast and other meals where stated in the itinerary:  
5 lunches (including Easter lunch) and 4 dinners.  
Thracian Lowlands Winery visit for tour and tasting
- Accommodation in 3\* and 4\* hotels with en-suite facilities on a twin bedded shared occupancy basis, except at Kazanluk where pension/private accommodation is arranged.
- Coach/mini-coach with driver for all transfers and excursions.
- Guide/interpreter.
- Entrance fees.
- Bradt's Travel Guide to Bulgaria 2015 edition before your departure and information pack locally

**NOT INCLUDED:**

- Travel Insurance (Compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Lunches and light suppers where not included in the itinerary. (£4 - £5)
- Drinks and personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement (£130).

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