

British-Bulgarian Society Special Interest Tours

2018

TASTE OF BULGARIA TOUR

16 – 21 SEPTEMBER (Tour Code: TOB) Price: £1,100

(Based on a group of 6 or more, a smaller group will incur a supplement)

EARLY BOOKING DISCOUNT: £50 PER PERSON IF BOOKED BY 30 SEPTEMBER 2017



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



Balkania Travel



Bulgarian wine came to prominence in the UK in the mid 80s, but its cuisine still remains one of its best-kept secrets. The abundant local natural ingredients grown in the country's favourable climate are its strength. Its traditional cooking has integrated features of the cuisines of its Mediterranean neighbours with local Bulgarian, Slavic and Central European traditions, into a wonderful Balkan mix. See for example "The Food and Wine of Romania and Bulgaria" by Silvena Johan Lauta, published by Aquamarine, and available in the UK.

Some of the national dishes include beans in soups or stews, charcoal grilled kebabcheta (rissoles), banitsa (cheese pastry), stuffed peppers and pickled cabbage leaves and dry cured salamis. Lyutenitsa, a spicy home-made relish of peppers, eggplant and tomatoes is a particular favourite. Seasonal desserts use ripe fruit, e.g. figs, quince, roast pumpkin with honey and walnuts. Kiselo mlyako (yoghurt) is a product synonymous with the country, traditionally made with the indigenous *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*. Many local herbs complement more familiar spices to give Bulgarian cooking its unique flavours. The delicious Bulgarian white cheese Sirene, a prized product in the foodhalls of Harrods in the 80s, is a main ingredient of the Shopska salad, one of the most popular starters on the Bulgarian table, to go with aperitifs, such as Rakiya and the aniseed Mastika. Bulgarian meals are lengthy affairs. Entertaining guests is one of the passions of the Bulgarians. Come on our tour and learn the recipes of each dish served, 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, dating back from 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 is being implemented by many independent wine makers. Our tour takes place at the most exciting time in the vine-growers' year. 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 over 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 16 September

Scheduled flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Meet and greet your genial host and guide Mrs Jordanka (Dani) Kotseva. Drive south through the Struma Valley to the village of Dobarsko, at an altitude of 1,070m between three of Bulgaria's great mountains, Rila, Pirin and Rodopi. Only 170 kms away from the modern capital and you are already in an environment and lifestyle from a bygone era. After checking into your comfortable hotel for two nights, you are welcomed at your dinner with local specialities and entertainment by the Dobarski Babi ensemble for your first taste of Bulgaria.

Monday 17 September

After your Bulgarian breakfast we go on a walking tour of the village. Visit the tiny church of St. Teodor Tiron and Teodor Stratilat, built in 1614, on UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage list. See the mural depicting Christ ascending to heaven as if in a rocket, an image unique in the world. Continue the tour and pop into a village house to find out more about the locals' lifestyle and be treated to some home made delicacies. Return to the hotel and after some rest join a Bulgarian cookery lesson, preparing for yourselves some of the dishes for your dinner. Overnight Dobarsko.

Tuesday 18 September

After breakfast we bid farewell to Dobarsko to cross the Rodopi mountain towards the fertile Thracian Plain. At its southernmost edge we reach the village of Vetren Dol, where we visit a local house. Bulgarians have a strong countryside living tradition and many city dwellers keep a country house as well, where they spend long weekends looking after gardens, orchards and vineyards, gathering harvests and making winter preserves from their own crops. After a hearty welcome and home-made treats, continue to Plovdiv, which has a 7,000-year history and is declared Europe's Capital of Culture for 2019. After checking in, take a walking tour along the pedestrian street "dvizhenie" (like the Italian Corso) to the Old Town, a cultural reserve of the Bulgarian National Revival Period (18 -19 C.). Visit the most famous monuments of the Roman period as well. Dinner at one of its many local restaurants with a specially selected tasting menu, demonstrating Plovdiv's excellence in the famed Thracian cuisine. First of two overnights in Plovdiv.

Wednesday 19 September

After breakfast, a day outing takes us first to the Assenova Krepost, the remains of an 11th Century fortress marking the Northern frontier of Byzantium. Continue up the Rhodopi Mountain road to Bachkovo Monastery, known and appreciated for the unique combination of Byzantine, Georgian and Bulgarian culture, united by common faith. It was founded in 1083 and survived the 5 centuries of Ottoman rule. A local riverside restaurant is our choice for lunch, noted for its mountain trout specialities. Return to the Thracian Plain and visit the famous Todoroff 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 a tasting in its beautiful reception room decorated with original pictures by Bulgarian artists, specially commissioned for use on the wine labels. Hear the old story of Mavrud, a legendary hero, also the name of the most common indigenous vine/wine variety. Return to Plovdiv. Your Guide will advise you about your choice of restaurants for your independent dinner.

Thursday 20 September

After breakfast, transfer to Sofia, check-in at your luxury hotel. Walking tour of the centre of Sofia's central "Largo" around the excavations of the 4th Century ruins of the Roman city of Serdika. Emperor Constantine favoured the city for its mineral baths and considered for a time making it the capital of his Empire. Visit to the magnificent gold-domed Patriarchal church Alexander Nevski. Farewell dinner with folk show.

Friday 21 September

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

Bulgaria 2018

OUR PRICE INCLUDES:

- Return scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia with all taxes and charges.
- 5 nights accommodation, on a twin bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Half board plus, (Full breakfast and 3-course dinner, local home made treats), one wine-tasting, one Bulgarian Cuisine cookery course.
- Coach for transfers and excursions with professional driver.
- English speaking guide.
- All museum entrance fees.

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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Further Information from Dr Annie Kay, B-BS Tours Organiser,
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