

EUROPE · HISTORY · MOUNTAINS · HIKING · WINTER SPORTS · BEACHES · WINE



Bulgaria

Rila Monastery's striped arcades and frescoed church sit deep in pine-covered mountains, and Plovdiv's old town stacks National Revival mansions above a Roman theatre still used for concerts. Bulgaria adds Black Sea beaches, well-priced ski resorts and serious mountain hiking, and remains one of the EU's better-value destinations even after adopting the euro in 2026.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Bulgaria and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 11 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Sofia	 CURRENCY Euro (EUR) £1 ≈ €1.19	 LANGUAGE Bulgarian, Turkish	 BEST TIME May–Jun, Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £40–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 3h direct ~£60–£250 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+2 standard time

Bulgaria layers Thracian gold, Roman theatres, medieval fortresses and five centuries of Ottoman rule into one compact country, with the Rila, Pirin and Balkan ranges dividing it. A first trip usually starts in Sofia, heads south to Rila Monastery and the Seven Rila Lakes, then east to Plovdiv. From there, the Valley of the Roses and Kazanlak's Thracian tomb lead north over the Shipka Pass to Veliko Tarnovo, the medieval capital. Summer visitors finish on the Black Sea at Nesebar, Sozopol or Varna; winter ones head for the slopes of Bansko or Borovets.

Travel here is easy and inexpensive by western European standards: a good dinner with local wine costs far less than in Britain, and guesthouses and hostels are plentiful. Cyrillic signage is the main hurdle, though major roads and stations also use Latin script. Intercity buses are quicker than most trains, and a hire car opens up villages such as Koprivshitsa and Melnik. The coast gets very busy in July and August, while the mountains and monasteries are at their best in late spring and September. Many visitors are surprised by the quality of Bulgarian wine, especially reds from Melnik and the Thracian plain.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

SACRED SITE

Rila Monastery

Founded in the 10th century and largely rebuilt after an 1833 fire, Bulgaria's largest monastery wraps striped arcades around a church covered in vivid frescoes of saints and sinners. Stay overnight nearby to enjoy it after the tour buses leave.
- 2

HISTORY

Plovdiv Old Town

Painted National Revival mansions, several now museums or galleries, line cobbled lanes on the hills above the city centre. Below them, the nearly 2,000-year-old Roman theatre still hosts opera and concerts in summer, with views over the Thracian plain.

3

HISTORY

Tsarevets Fortress, Veliko Tarnovo

The walled hill of the medieval tsars rises from a loop of the Yantra River, crowned by the rebuilt Patriarchal Church. The town's houses cling to the gorge opposite, and a sound-and-light show plays over the walls on some evenings.

4

NATURE

Seven Rila Lakes

A chairlift lifts walkers towards a chain of glacial lakes between roughly 2,100 and 2,500 metres, linked by a few hours' loop with views down the Rila range. Go on a weekday between July and September to avoid the crowds.

5

ARCHITECTURE

Nesebar Old Town

A rocky peninsula joined to the mainland by a narrow causeway, packed with medieval churches of patterned brick and stone and old timber houses. It is UNESCO-listed and crowded by day in summer, so stay for the quieter evenings.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Sofia

≈ 1.2 million people

A walkable capital where the gold-domed Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, the ruins of Roman Serdica and the Boyana Church's 13th-century frescoes sit beneath Vitosha, a mountain you can hike or ski from town.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Plovdiv

≈ 335,000 people

Bulgaria's second city deserves at least two nights: the cobbled Old Town, the Roman theatre and stadium, and the Kapana district's bars and galleries make it the country's most enjoyable base.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Varna

≈ 325,000 people

The main Black Sea city has a long seafront park, sizeable Roman baths and an archaeological museum displaying the Varna Necropolis gold, among the oldest worked gold ever found.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Bulgaria

Best time: **May–Jun, Sep.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

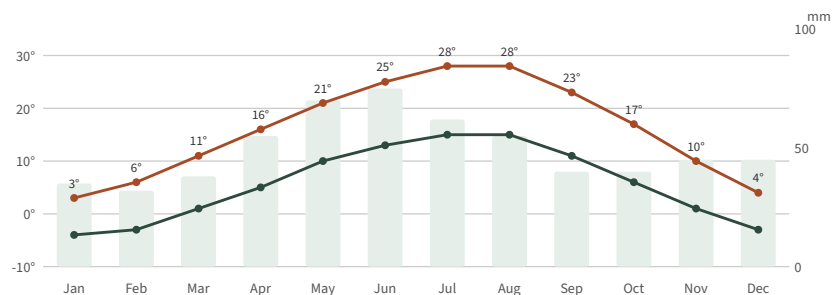
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Sofia

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan	Surva, Pernik On the last weekend of January, thousands of kukeri in huge masks, furs and clanging cowbells parade through Pernik to chase away evil spirits, in one of Europe's biggest masquerade festivals.
Mar	Baba Marta On 1 March Bulgarians exchange martenitsi, red-and-white woollen tokens worn until the first stork or blossom of spring, then tied to a tree.
Jun	Rose Festival, Kazanlak Early June celebrations in the Valley of the Roses, with rose-picking rituals in the fields at dawn, folk dancing, a parade through Kazanlak and the crowning of a Rose Queen.

How much does Bulgaria cost?

SHOESTRING £40 per person / day ≈ €47.61 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £85 per person / day ≈ €101 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ €202 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Shopska salad Chopped tomatoes, cucumber, peppers and onion buried under grated sirene, a salty white cheese; its colours echo the flag, and it usually arrives with a glass of rakia.	Banitsa Filo pastry layered with eggs and sirene cheese, baked until crisp and eaten for breakfast with ayran, a salty drinking yoghurt, or boza, a thick fermented grain drink.	Tarator A cold summer soup of yoghurt, cucumber, garlic, dill and walnuts, sharp and refreshing on a hot day.
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Getting around

Intercity buses link most towns faster and more often than trains, though the BDZ rail network is cheap and scenic on routes such as the narrow-gauge line through the Rhodopes. Sofia has a good metro that reaches the airport. Hiring a car makes monasteries, mountain villages and wine country far easier; road quality varies. Domestic flights connect Sofia with Varna and Burgas. Use reputable metered taxis or a taxi app rather than unmarked cars.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 112 (ambulance, fire, police) Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +359	TIME ZONE UTC+2 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Leave around 10% in restaurants if service is not already included, and round up taxi fares to the nearest euro.

ETIQUETTE

Bulgarians traditionally nod to mean no and shake their heads to mean yes, so confirm with words. Give odd numbers of flowers as gifts — even numbers are for funerals.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Vasil Levski Sofia Airport (SOF), Sofia; Varna Airport (VAR), Varna; Burgas Airport (BOJ), Burgas

Visas & entry for Bulgaria

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can travel without a visa to the Schengen area, which includes Bulgaria, for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. This applies if you travel: as a tourist; to visit family or friends; to attend business meetings, cultural or sports events; for short-term studies or training.

The requirements for working in Bulgaria are different.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B

Rabies

Tick-borne encephalitis

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Bulgaria

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Thu 24 Dec 2026

Christmas Eve

Fri 25 Dec 2026

Christmas Day

Sat 26 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Mon 28 Dec 2026	Christmas Day (observed)
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Wed 3 Mar 2027	Liberation Day
Fri 30 Apr 2027	Good Friday
Sat 1 May 2027	Holy Saturday · Labour Day and International Workers' Solidarity Day
Sun 2 May 2027	Easter
Mon 3 May 2027	Easter
Tue 4 May 2027	Labour Day and International Workers' Solidarity Day (observed)
Thu 6 May 2027	Saint George's Day, Day of the Bulgarian Army
Mon 24 May 2027	Day of Slavonic Alphabet, Bulgarian Enlightenment and Culture
Mon 6 Sep 2027	Unification Day
Wed 22 Sep 2027	Independence Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Bulgarian

ENGLISH	BULGARIAN	SAY IT
Hello	Здравейте	<i>zdra-VEY-teh</i>
Thank you	Благодаря	<i>bla-go-da-RYA</i>
Please	Моля	<i>MO-lya</i>
Excuse me	Извинете	<i>iz-vi-NEH-teh</i>
How much is this?	Колко струва това?	<i>KOL-ko STROO-va to-VA?</i>

Know before you go

Bulgaria adopted the euro in January 2026, replacing the lev; older guidebooks, menus and websites may still quote prices in leva (лв).

Learn the Cyrillic alphabet before you go — it takes an hour or two and makes bus stations, menus and street signs far less daunting.

Ski passes and lessons in Bansko, Borovets and Pamporovo cost much less than in the Alps, but book early for Christmas and the February half-term peak.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.