

BULGARIA: THE LAND OF ORPHEUS

GREAT VALUE

8-day / 7-night **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn walking holiday in the spectacular Rodopi Mountains



Bulgaria has an ancient and a rich, diverse and fascinating history. It has also been a member state of the European Union since 2007. Bulgaria's capital, Sofia, is a rapidly changing city with a history dating back some 7000 years. The Thracians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Slavs and Turks have all conquered this country leaving their distinctive traces on the architecture, language, gastronomy and culture.

The Rodopi Mountains are believed to be the birthplace of the mythical hero Orpheus, who with his lyre made animals and beasts docile, and trees dance. Most famously he took part in the journey with the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece and attempted to bring his beloved wife Eurydice back from Hades.

Our self-guided walking holiday takes you through these ancient lands, known as the 'green heart of Europe' where you will discover vast pinewoods, reputedly the largest in the Balkans. The people of these mountains make their living by working on the land. They are very hospitable although English is not widely spoken or understood. The walking paths will show you through some of the most spectacular parts of the Rodopi Mountains including the *Trigrad Gorge*, the *Devil's Throat Cave* and *Miraculous Bridges*. You will discover unspoiled nature at its best. In the villages there is a chance to meet the locals and to eat delicious meals prepared with organic food. Visit one of the country's largest monasteries at Bachkovo, and in Plovdiv's old town you will find a melting pot of many different cultures.

Departs: Daily on demand May to October

Cost from: **\$850** per person twin share Single Room Supplement: \$195

Includes: 6 nights of ensuite accommodation in small family-run hotels, 1 night in mountain hut with shared facilities, 7 breakfasts, 5 dinners, return airport transfers from and back to Sofia airport, transfers to/from walks as per itinerary, walking maps and route notes, luggage transfers, 24-hour emergency telephone assistance.

Not Included: Lunches, dinner on days 1 and 7, tips, personal expenses, drinks, entrance fees

Getting there: There are flights into Sofia's airport from many international destinations by many airlines including Bulgaria Air and Easyjet. Sofia is linked by train to Vienna (via Budapest and Belgrade) and Istanbul.

When to go: May and September are the best months to go. July and August can be quite hot but early morning starts will reduce the impact of the heat.

Solo Travellers: This tour is not available for solo travellers.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary: The itinerary may change due to local conditions or operational reasons.

Day 1: Arrive in Sofia

Plan to arrive in Sofia mid-afternoon and be transferred to your hotel. Dinner is at your own arrangements.

Day 2: Shiroka Laka – Gela

walking @ 16km (5 hours)

Transfer this morning to Shiroka Laka in the Rodopi Mountains. This quaint village dates back to the 17th Century and is now an architectural and folklore reserve. Afterwards continue to Gela, the highest village in the mountains (1500m). Gela lies at the foot of the Rodopi's highest peak, Golyam Perelik, the legendary birthplace of Orpheus. Here you can stretch your legs with a delightful circular walk from your guesthouse to the nearby villages of Stikul and Solishta.

Day 3: Gela – Lednicata Hut – Mugla – Chairski Lakes

walking @ 19km (6 hours)

A rewarding day walking on forest tracks and old mule trails mostly above the tree line through the heart of the Rodopi, with magnificent views over Mt Turlata and Mt Perelik. After a short rest in the small village of Mugla, you reach your overnight destination, Chairski Lakes Hut. This typical alpine hut is named after the lakes nearby formed by melting glaciers during the Ice Age.

Day 4: Chairski Lakes – Trigrad Cave – Trigrad

walking @ 9km (4 hours)

An easy walk today from Chairski Lakes Hut, first walking alongside the Chairska River, then onwards to the Devil's Throat Caves. The waterfall inside the caves is 42 metres, one of the highest in Europe, a spectacular underground experience. Afterwards continue on to the small village of Trigrad, your base for tonight. This peaceful location is a great area for bird watching.

Day 5: Trigrad – Yagodina Cave – Yagodina – Lyaskovo

walking @ 9km (4 hours)

Ascend to a forest trail leading into alpine meadows with views over Trigrad Gorge, then continue to the spectacular Yagodina Cave, one of the longest and deepest in Bulgaria, with many abysses and labyrinthine tunnels. There is an optional 45-minute tour through cave galleries featuring remarkable calcite cave pearls, stalagmites and stalactites. Continue walking to the relatively unspoiled village of Lyaskovo to stay overnight.

Day 6: Lyaskovo – Ziburdo

walking @ 18km (6 hours)

A challenging walk through forest along ancient trails criss-crossing streams to an alpine meadow, then a steep climb to a lookout point at 1470 metres, with panoramic views across the mountains. Then descend through thick pine forest to Ziburdo.

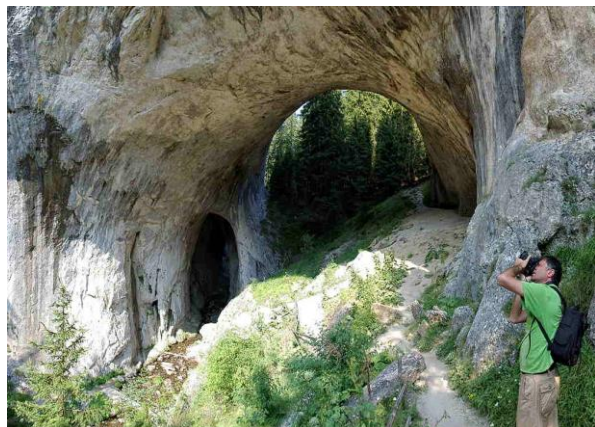
Day 7: Miraculous Bridges – Orehovo – Bachkovo Monastery – Plovdiv

walking @ 21km (7 hours)

After breakfast a transfer to the Miraculous Bridges rock formations, then walk to Kabata alpine hut and the small Tsirikova church for breathtaking views over the valley. From the church descend to Orehovo for the drive to the Bachkovo Monastery, one of southern Bulgaria's architectural gems, then be transferred to Plovdiv. Plovdiv is dotted with Thracian, Roman and Byzantine ruins, including the majestically restored 2nd Century Roman amphitheatre. Dinner tonight is at your own arrangements with plenty of options.

Day 8: Departure day.

After breakfast at your Plovdiv hotel, transfer back to Sofia for your onward travel arrangements.



Outdoor Travel offer walking holidays in many parts of Eastern Europe including the **Tatra Mountains** in Poland, the **Dalmatian Coast** of Croatia, the **Julian Alps** in Slovenia, and Transylvania in Romania.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations:

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