

# Bulgaria



The Towns  
of Bulgaria

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Sofia

With an area of 110 993 sq m and a population of 7 888 600, Bulgaria is one of the smallest countries in the Old continent, but due to its geographical position on the crossroads between the West and the East, Bulgaria has played a significant role in the region of the Balkan Peninsula and Europe. The old world cultures of Thracia, Greece and Rome settled and built towns and cities in what is now Bulgaria, followed by the proto-Bulgarians and the Turks. The greatest builders were the Romans and then the Byzantines. Most often the towns they built were successors of older settlements.

The Turks created a small number of new towns, though this was done mainly with a view to turning Bulgaria into a military-feudal controlled land. During the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, upsurge in Bulgarian crafts was observed. Numerous one-room workshops, storehouses for grain, and taverns were built, bringing new economic life.

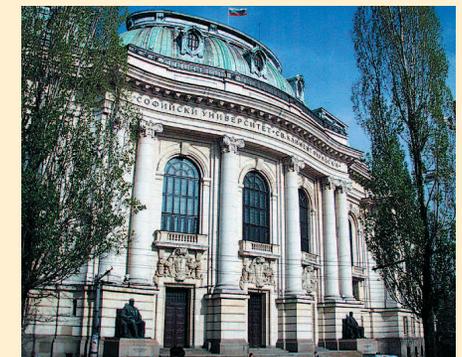
After the liberation from the Turks, a great number of these buildings disappeared from the towns. However, some of the most picturesque buildings, bringing a unique character to the different towns, have been preserved: Banya Bashi and Buyuk mosques in Sofia, the mosque in Plovdiv on Dzhoumaya Square, and the largest mosque in Bulgaria, the Tumbul mosque in Shoumen.

During the same period, the architecture of the Bulgarian Revival predominated in the towns and cities, based upon the designs of architectural, art and woodcarving schools in Tryana, Samokov and Bansko. Even now, many houses in the Revival villages and towns of Kotel, Koprivstitsa, Tryavna, Plovdiv, Bansko, Troyan, Asenovgrad, Gabrovo, Teteven, Samokov and Sliven are very well preserved and almost in their original form.

After the liberation from the Ottoman Yoke at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the towns in Bulgaria began to revive, growing bigger and getting modernized. In the bigger towns and especially in those near the water borders such as Rouse, Svishtov, Varna and Bourgas, European architecture forced its way. Famous architects such as Alberto Tsoki created buildings and monuments, thus bringing the spirit of the 'modern' European style. Unfortunately,

during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars some of these pearls of architecture were partially damaged or completely destroyed. However, those that survived have been well kept and maintained.

During the last century, due to the development of enterprises, factories, mines and other factors, a great number of existing towns became industrial centers, while small villages grew into towns. Many of these towns and villages have a rich and significant history and have been officially recognized as architectural reserves and museum towns.



# Sofia



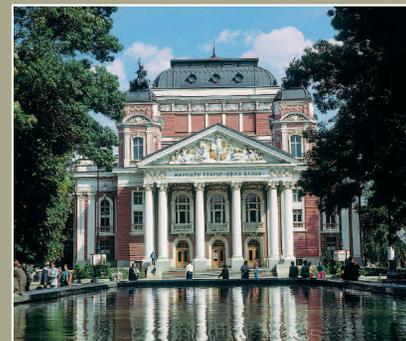
The capital of Bulgaria, Sofia, is one of the most ancient towns in the country. Sofia was named the capital in March 1879. In ancient times the culture of the Thracian tribe Serdes prospered, influenced by the Greeks (5<sup>th</sup> c. BC). The greatest boom of the town in Roman times was during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337), who used to state his love for the place by often saying, "My Rome is Serdica". Vestiges from the Roman-Christian period are found at St. Sophia and St. George church, respectively. The Roman basilica of St. Sophia is one of the most precious and unique historical architectural antiquities on the Balkan Peninsula, giving the contemporary capital of Bulgaria its name. Near to the church a necropolis was discovered showing centuries long usage. The church of St. George is the most ancient preserved building in the city. It was originally a Roman bath, converted into a church during the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

After 1194, when the Second Bulgarian Kingdom was established, Sredets marked its next uplift. Bulgarian architecture boomed, churches and monasteries were built. Among these, the famous church of Boyana with portraits and mural paintings that are noted as the first ever showing realistic expressiveness in European painting.

After the liberation from the Ottoman Yoke and its announcement as the capital, the town grew very fast and became the most significant political, economic, scientific, cultural and educational center in the country. Step by step its design was outlined with the buildings of the National Assembly (the Parliament), the Synod Hall, the Faculty of Theology, the National Theatre, the Palace of the Tsar, the town mineral bath, the Market Hall, the Central Post Office, the Court of Justice and the different ministries.

The head office of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Saints Cyril and Methodius University (the biggest and the oldest in the country), the National Art Gallery, the Archeological Museum and the National Museum of History are here. Amongst the great number of churches, the largest is the Alexander Nevski temple monument. The Russian church and the Jewish synagogue also deserve special comment. Sofia is one of the greenest capitals in Europe. Besides the great number of parks, the nearby mountains of Vitosha, Lyulin, Lozen, Plana and others are also suitable for rest and tourism.

Today Sofia is a dynamic, modern city hosting offices of many international corporations, business centers, entertainment and sports parks and complexes. Sofia is a business but also a tourist destination because of the innumerable unique sights from different epochs and cultures.



# Plovdiv



The eight-millennium long history of Plovdiv gives it the right to be considered a contemporary of early human civilizations and one of the most ancient towns in Europe. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Lucian said about it: "This is one of the most beautiful towns you can imagine. Its beauty shines from far away. And the great river Hebros passes at the foot of the hills..."

Brilliant antiquity, middle ages with elements of the Orient. Revival and Baroque combine with the folklore tradition to give the key-note to today's town center. The town is a crossing point of cultures, epochs, religions, and a crossing point of roads connecting countries and continents.

Plovdiv was first declared a town by Philip of Macedonia who gave it the name Philipopolis. During Roman rule the illustrious town had the right to coin its own money. Later Emperor Traian named it Ulpia Trimontium.

Plovdiv, the second largest city in Bulgaria, situated along the two banks of the river Maritsa, lies in the largest, the warmest and the most fertile lowland in the whole Balkan Peninsula. The climate here is extremely favorable, influenced by the breeze from the Aegean Sea. Spring comes early; summer is warm and lasts long, while winter is very mild. In Plovdiv you are always surrounded by the hills, decorated with greenery and old-time houses. The group of three hills consisting of Nebet Tepe, Taxim Tepe, and Dzhambaz Tepe is suffused with the magnificence of old-time Plovdiv. On the highest hill - the Bounardzhika Park, are the monuments to the Russian liberators. Among the landmarks outside of the old town is the Archeological museum, which is second only after the museum in Sofia for its collections and exhibitions. Collective finds of gold, silver, copper and bronze coins are displayed in the rare coin department. The famous gold treasure of Panagyurishte is also exhibited here. The Ethnographic museum, the Revival museum, the Science museum and the remains of the Roman Forum between the Trimontium Hotel and the Central Post Office are not less interesting to visit.

The cultural life of Plovdiv is active and various throughout the year. Prestigious international festivals are organized in the city.

The neighbourhoods of Plovdiv are interesting and preferred places to visit as well. One can find here famous natural as well as historic and cultural sights like the hot spring spas in Hisarya, the Narechen baths, the Medieval Assenova fortress, the Bachkovo monastery, the Arapovski monastery and numerous other places of interest.

For sport and exercise enthusiasts there are many locations available to enjoy them. A unique sports complex including a stadium, a rowing complex (the largest one in the Balkans), indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts and an athletics track are located in the northeastern part of the city.



# Varna



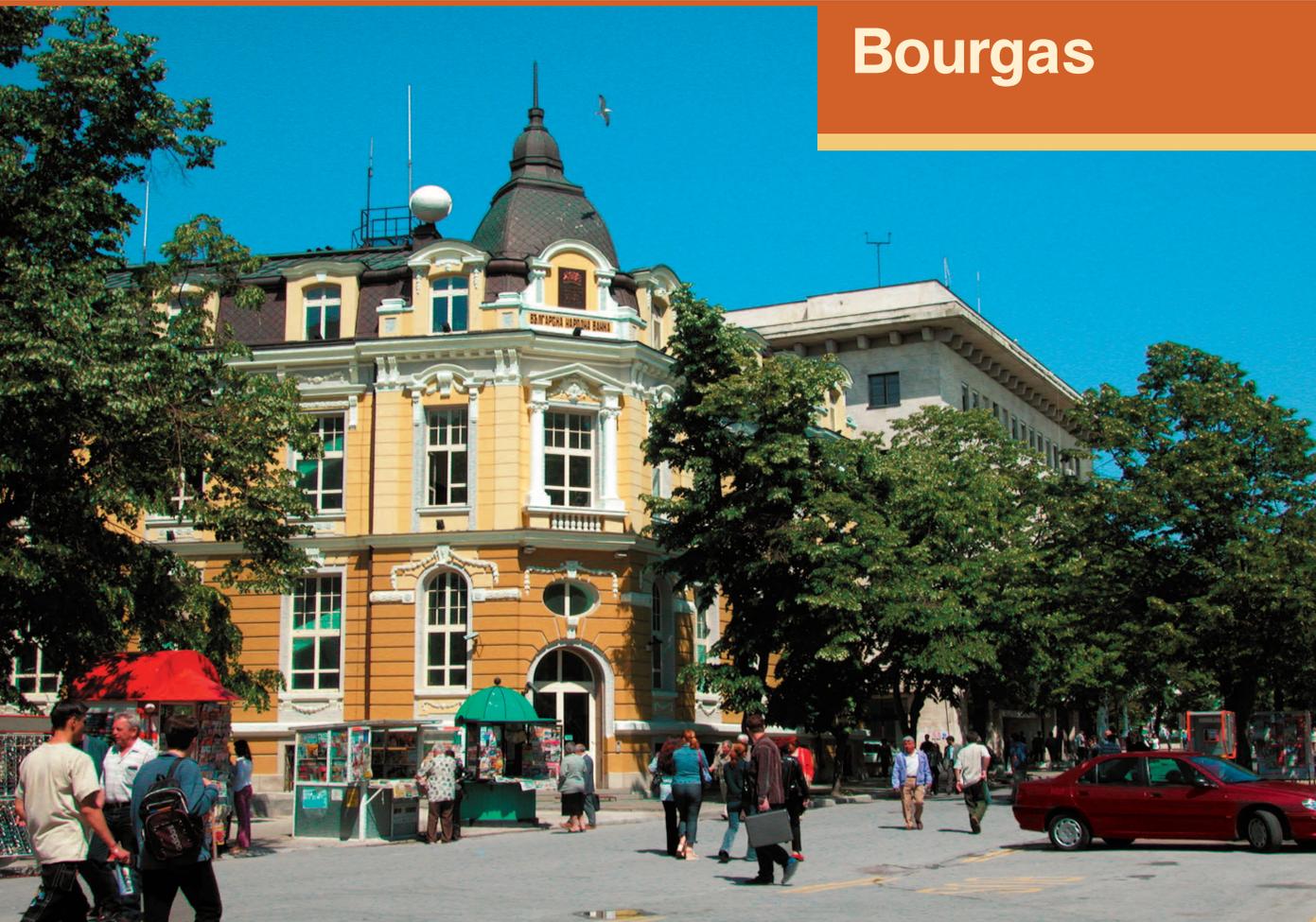
Varna, the gem of the Black Sea, is also a town with ancient history like most of Bulgaria's towns. The oldest gold jewelry in the world (dating from the second half of 5000 BC) was found in the Necropolis of Varna. The town is the successor of the colony of Odessos. It is also connected with the crusades in 1444. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the town became a first rate sea resort. This glorious, curious and not very well known period from the beginning of the last century is displayed in an exhibition at the Museum of Old Varna. Today Varna is the center of the North Black Sea coast. The harbor is the second largest in the country, there is an international airport, a railway station and active transport communication to the inner part of the country. Symbols of this sea town are the Sea Garden with its unique trees, many museums and cultural sites, the Festival and Convention Center, the Palace of Culture and Sports as well as the great number of restored buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries constructed in a Viennese style. Primorski Park offers a beautiful beach, a water slide, flower gardens and fountains, cozy cafes, an aquarium and a dolphinarium. The dolphinarium is one of the most entertaining attraction in Varna. There is also a planetarium in the Sea Garden. It is the first facility of its kind in Bulgaria. In the tower, the Foucault's Pendulum is mounted, unique for the Balkan Peninsula, which shows by visual aids the turning of the Earth on its terrestrial axis.

In Varna it is worth visiting the Archeological museum, one of the richest exhibits in Bulgaria, the Revival museum, where a valuable collection of icons is held, the Ethnographical museum which is located in a Revival period house. The Roman thermal baths (2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century) are the biggest ever found in Bulgaria. Also worth visiting is the Revival clock tower of 1880, as well as the cathedral of the Assumption in the center of the town. Among the summer attractions is the 'Rolba' water slide on the South Varna beach. Swimming lessons for children are organized in the mineral water swimming pool. In summer, the seaside strand of Varna becomes one of the most visited places in the town. People are attracted here by the beach, as well as by the summer clubs, discos, pizza bars and fish restaurants. The Children's Corner in the Sea Garden is very close to the Summer Theatre. Various and attractive amusements are offered for small children as well as for youngsters.



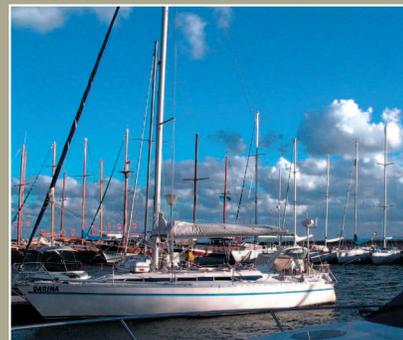


# Bourgas



The city of Bourgas is located on a peninsula in the western part of Bourgas Bay. It is surrounded by three lakes, Bourgasko, Atanasovsko and Mandrensko. A small town in ancient times, Bourgas has grown to become the biggest harbor in Bulgaria and the economic center of the South Black Sea coast with well developed industry and trade. There is an international airport, a railway station, as well as bus communication to the other parts of the country. The Sea Garden in Bourgas is in no way inferior to the Varna Sea Garden. The cathedral of Saints Cyril and Methodius has splendid mural paintings. The Armenian church, the Catholic cathedral, the churches of Deva Maria and St. Ivan Rilski, the Natural Science museum, the History museum and the Art Gallery are also worth visiting.

The town beach below the Sea Garden is also a popular destination. Many restaurants, sport and entertainment facilities are to be found along the beach.





# Rouse



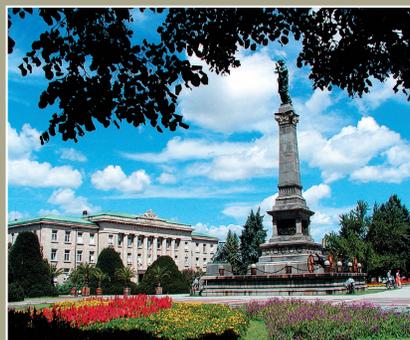
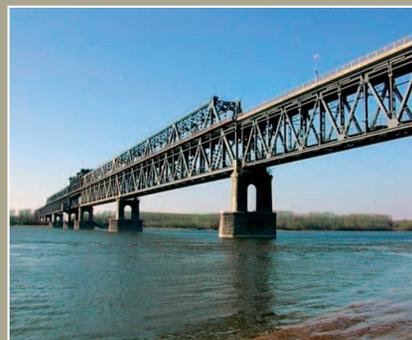
For many years this largest town on the Danube River bank has had the most 'European' atmosphere. The first railway was started in Rouse; the first insurance company was founded, the first Bulgarian house-press and the first film show took place. The public and social life in Rouse owes its special atmosphere to the numerous diplomatic representatives. After the Liberation, the writer Elias Canetti (born here in 1905) wrote: "With the help of Isaac Babel I realized that Rouschouk was the first window I looked through to see all the races, to listen to all the languages, to examine all the customs, to become acquainted with all the nations which somehow made a good team in this microcosm".

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup>, a lot of buildings were constructed, combining the elements of the Classic, Baroque, Renaissance, Gothic and Rococo styles. Numbering about 200, the buildings in old Rouse are a part of the Rouse architectural and historical heritage. Twelve of them are of national significance. The most impressive of all is the building of the Profit Hall with the winged Mercury on its roof (the old theatre), built after the design of architect Raul-Paul Brank, Georg Lang and Frank Scholtz. The 'Rouse Golden Dozen' also includes the Gymnasium of Music, the Catholic church (for a long time it hosted the only church organ in Bulgaria), the Saving Bank, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Knyaz Boris Secondary School for Boys, the Sailor's House, the Architect's House and others.

Rouse is a cultural and educational center. The International Festival, March Musical Days is held annually.

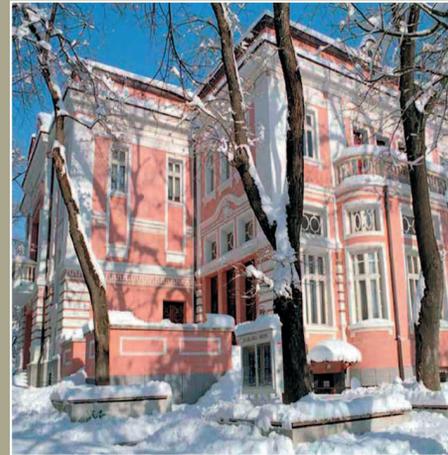
12 km to the east is Lipnik Park. It is a wonderful place for rest and active relaxation. The Rousenski Lom valley, a part of which is a nature park, is also an attractive recreation area.

Near the village of Cherven are the relics of a medieval town. The rock monasteries of Ivanovo with their unique frescoes are on UNESCO's World Heritage List. The Eagle Rock Peak Cave near the village of Pepelina is the second largest cave in Bulgaria.





## Stara Zagora



Stara Zagora, 'the town of lime trees and cypresses', was established in ancient times on a major crossroad from the Danube River toward the Aegean Sea and from Plovdiv to the Black Sea. Its historical existence is marked by the names Beroe, Augusta Trayana, Vereia, Irinopolis, Borouy, Eski Hisar, Zheleznik and finally Stara Zagora. After being burned down and completely destroyed during the War of Liberation, on 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1879 the symbolic foundation-stone for restoration of the town was laid down according to the plan of Lubor Beier. Thus, Stara Zagora became the first town after the Liberation to have modern town planning. The first opera house outside Sofia was opened here as well as the first provincial radio station. In 1895, the town's Ayazmo Park was laid out. A formerly barren hill was afforested with 2000 decares of magnificent woods of pine, cypress and almond tress. There is a wonderful walkway leading up the hill to a chapel above a healing spring.

The Stara Zagora mineral baths are close to the town. This spa resort is situated deep in the oaks, pine and elm tree forest. Nearby a Roman bath was founded in 161-163. In the region of the Well of the Bear one can find old collieries dated from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The beautiful nature, the interesting sights and the convenient location with fast and varied transportation make the town of Stara Zagora an attractive place to visit.



## Pleven



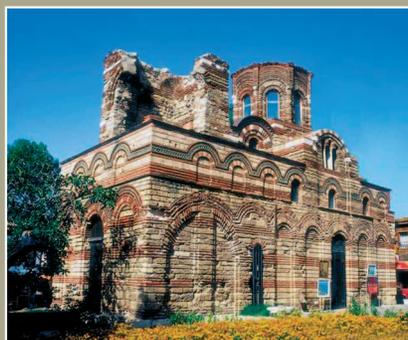
Not lacking in centuries old history, the town of Pleven became world famous during the Russian-Turkish War from 1877 to 1878. On 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1877 the liberation of the town determined the victorious outcome of the war. The press all over Europe described this event and Bulgarian people raised monuments of gratitude to the heroes of the epic Battle of Pleven. Today Pleven is a significant administrative, industrial, cultural, tourist, telecommunication, transport and commercial center. It is well known as the town of museums. There are dozens of museums and monuments within the territory of Pleven. Here also is the unique Pleven Epic 1877 Panorama Hall.



# Nessebar



To preserve the historical, cultural and ethnographic heritage that many centuries-old Bulgarian towns have been proud of, our country gave them the status of reserves and town-museums. It is not simple to summarize their significance and contribution to Bulgarian history of culture and to list all the sights and natural resources. To come in touch with the treasures of different civilizations, the Thracian, the ancient Greek, the Roman and others you have to see, come to know and feel them. Nessebar is the successor of the ancient Thracian town of Messeambria. Having lived through the vicissitudes of the stormy history of our lands, in 1956 the old section of the town was announced an architectural and archeological reserve which includes an ancient fortress wall with a gate dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and the churches from the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> and of the 10<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Because of its unique local color and the wonderful architecture, Nessebar was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. About 60 Revival period houses from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were also included. They lend unforgettable charm and atmosphere to the town with their oriels with wooden decorations. Three of the numerous old windmills have been restored. The old Turkish bath from the 18<sup>th</sup> century has also been preserved. In 1958 the Nessebar Golden Treasure was found. Along the narrow cobblestone streets life is busy till late at night. The numerous stores, restaurants, confectionaries and galleries allure with various temptations and exciting holiday spirit. The romance of Nessebar can be found in areas near the fortress wall as well as in the house yards.

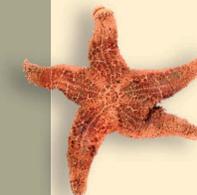
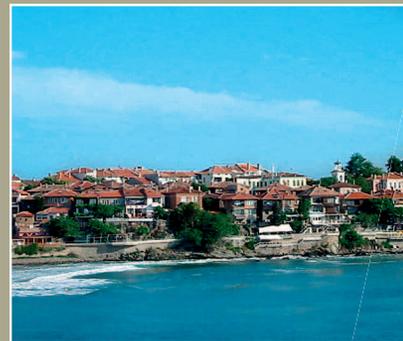


# Sozopol



Sozopol is the oldest town along the Black Sea coast line. The first settlement originated at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The underwater research in the region of the port of Sozopol has revealed the remains of dwellings, pottery, stone and bone tools dating back to the Bronze Age. In the bay of Sozopol many anchors and stocks were found dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. A proof of the significance of the trade in the port is the anchor. It is an emblem of the town and a constant mark on the money, which was coined in Apollonia as early as the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The rich town became the center of highly advanced art. The contemporaries called it Apollonia Magna ("the Great"). The ancient icons and the magnificent wood-carved iconostasis are wonderful masterpieces of the arts and crafts of those days. But that beautiful town was very often attacked and looted. Thus the Roman commander Marcus Lucullus took to Rome the bronze statue of Apollo which was 13 meters tall and was created by Calamis. Today it is kept in the Capitolium in Rome as a trophy and a remarkable example of the Hellenic arts.

Sozopol attracts a great number of Bulgarian and foreign tourists with its special charm. Antique streets with old houses, wood decorations and oriels, vines, wine cellars, ancient churches, chapels, museums and fishing boats..... An event of great interest each year is the Apollonia Arts Festival.



# Koprivshitsa



Koprivshitsa is one of the most interesting towns in Bulgaria. Having both well preserved ancient houses and a Revival past, it is a town museum in the absolute sense of the word. Situated in Sredna Gora Mountain, on the banks of the Topolka River, Koprivshitsa originated as a settlement in the 14<sup>th</sup> century after the invasion of the Turks in the Bulgarian lands. The early history of the settlement is lost in legends. However, its special statute in the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century secured prosperity and growth. The rich raced to build houses, palaces, magnificent churches, stone bridges and cobblestone streets. They took their models for construction from the architecture of Constantinople, Edirne and Plovdiv. In comparison with the other mountain towns in Bulgaria, the houses in Koprivshitsa are distinguished for their large open spaces, rich inner and outer decorations. Most splendid are the houses built in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1842-1870) and especially after the Crimean War till the Liberation. At that time the most remarkable architectural monuments in Koprivshitsa were built. These large houses with their numerous bright windows and splendid decorations of murals, French fashion ornaments and wood-carvings show the prosperity of the owners and arouse the admiration of visitors. Such are Oslekov House, Lyutov House, Kableshekov House as well as other architectural gems.

Together with the architectural grandeur of the town, Koprivshitsa was also a center of active cultural and educational life during the Bulgarian Revival. Koprivshitsa also lit the fire in the fight for national liberation.

The family hotels in Koprivshitsa offer hospitality and coziness in traditional atmosphere combined with all modern conveniences. Visits to the museums of Koprivshitsa and walks in nature are the preferred attractions for tourists. The gastronomic specialties and the folk music played in the numerous taverns and restaurants tempt guests to the mountain town.



# Veliko Tarnovo



Veliko Tarnovo, the capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, is 102 km away from Rouse, 120 km from Stara Zagora, 241 km from Sofia and 228 km from Varna. The curves of the Yantra River encircle the strongholds of Tsarevets, Trapezitsa and Sveta Gora hills (the hills on which the old capital city is located) making them unapproachable in older times and one of the most wonderful places in Bulgaria today. No one who has ever seen the houses huddled together and perched on the banks above the river Yantra will ever forget them. Neither can one forget the architectural masterpieces of Kolyo Ficheto, the churches of Saints Konstantin and Elena, Saints Cyril and Methodius, the Town Hall, the Inn of Hadzhi Nikoli, the House with the Little Monkey.... During the centuries long existence of Tarnovo a lot of unique cultural monuments were created and preserved; connected mainly with the glorious history of Bulgaria. The preserved relics of fortresses, castles and churches have witnessed the boom in Bulgarian culture during the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It will take at least a couple of days to see all sights of Tarnovo. Special mention deserve the Tsarevets hill where the Tsar's palaces and imposing buildings were as well as the Trapezitsa hill where the boyars lived and where you can still find the ground works of sixteen smaller boyar churches, the Assenova neighborhood with the Patriarch's church, the Samovodska Charshiya bazaar and the numerous Tarnovo churches. It is worth seeing the 'Sound and Light' show. Dramatic music, colorful lights, lasers and church bells combine to tell the glorious and tragic history of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1185 - 1393).

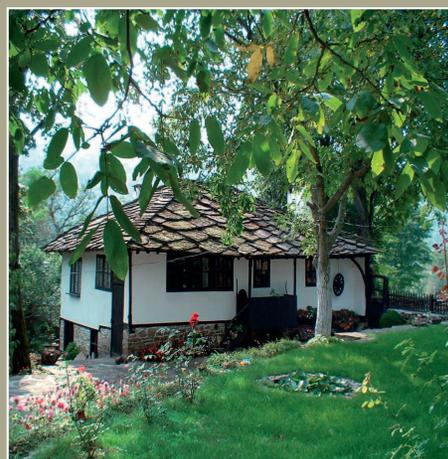
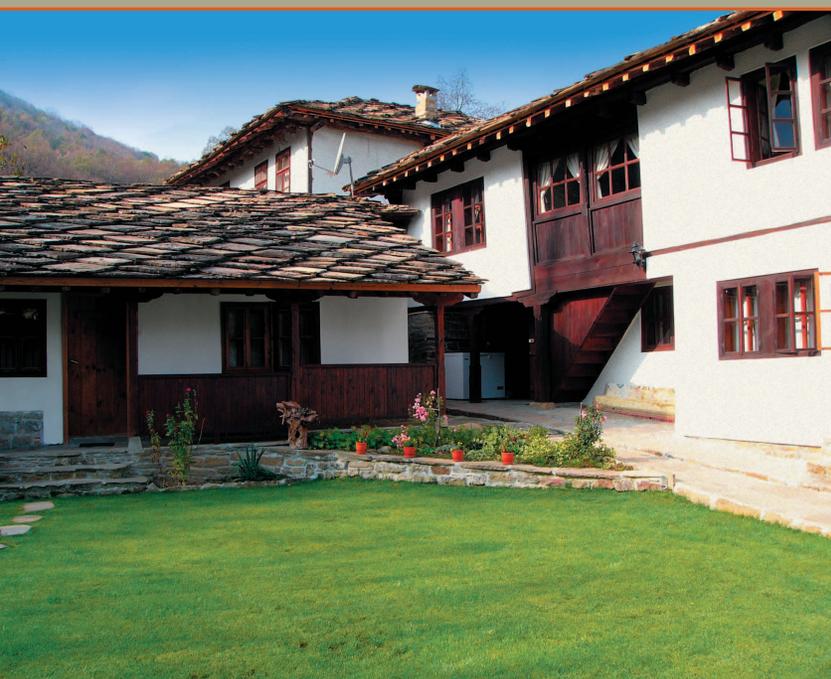


## Arbanasi



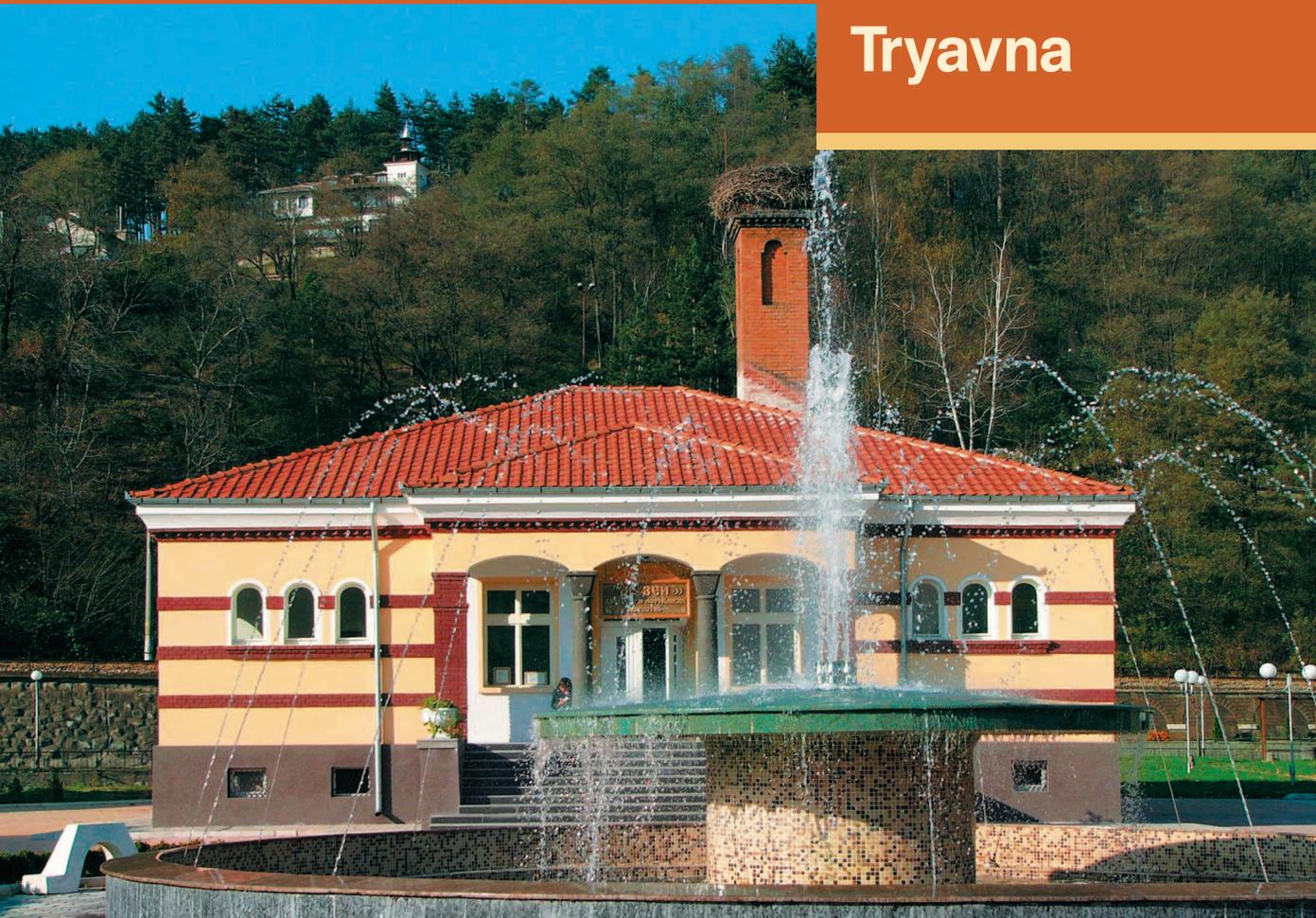
A visit to the magnificent Tarnovo is not complete without a walk around Arbanasi, which is only 4 km away from Veliko Tarnovo. This is a very old village with preserved ancient wealthy houses and churches with valuable paintings and wood-carvings. By a decree of the Tsar the village was declared a resort, and in 2000 was named a historical village of national importance. It is worth seeing the Konstantsaliev House, the Hadzhiliev House and many others, as well as the two monasteries – the monastery of the Assumption and the monastery of St. Nicolas, and the five other churches in the village. Another attraction in Arbanasi is the art shop in which you can buy not only paintings by Bulgarian artists but also souvenirs and antiques.

## Bozhentsi



Huddled at the foot of the Balkans, in the depths of virgin forests 15 km east from Gabrovo is the Architectural and Historical Reserve Bozhentsi. It is a picturesque spot which has preserved the fragrance of past times. The legend of the first settlers has been kept by each generation for six centuries; the story of the boyar from Tarnovo Bozhana and her nine sons who managed to escape in the mountains from the Turkish conquerors during the siege of Veliko Tarnovo. Till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bozhentsi was an economic, administrative, educative and cultural center for the nearby towns and villages. Today there are 100 houses between 100 and 250 years old, which have preserved the practical and artistic flair of Bulgarians. There are colorful taverns, shops for souvenirs and a small number of private hotels in old houses in the village of Bozhentsi. In two of the houses, museum exhibits display items dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The church of St. Elias the Prophet (1835) deserves special attention. The people of Bozhentsi managed to get permission for the construction of a bell tower - something which was expressly forbidden by the Turks. The church bell arrived from the remote Russian town of Toula. It is very interesting to see the monastery school and the wax purifying shop, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Near Bozhentsi are the monasteries of Dryanovo, Sokolovo and Kilifarevo.

# Tryavna



Tryavna - an ancient settlement, a place for relaxation and a modern town, all in one, is nestled in the northern slopes of the Balkans in the valley of the rushing Trevnenska River. The Revival atmosphere is preserved in the center of the town where the clock tower and the stone fountain stand. There is a well known cafe in the upper neighborhood. Today it is almost the same as in the past when the master builders created it. Here, behind the bridge, you can see two-storey houses with workshops and rooms upstairs, protruding eaves, large balconies and small windows, heavily covered with slate roofs. The halls and windows are shining with their masterly wood-carvings and couches, laces and embroidered tablecloths. The neat yards allure with box-woods, hollyhocks and vines. After Samokov the second center of the artistic revival was in Tryavna. Here the Northern Bulgarian iconography and wood-carving school originated, popular and respected all around the country. Tryavna is an attractive resort with its healthy climate, Balkan water and fresh air.

Tourist sites: The Tryavna Painting School Museum, the Museum of Wood-Carving Art, the architecture ensembles Kapitan Dyado Nikola Square, Slaveykov Street, the Kachaounska Mahala neighborhood, the church of St. Archangel Michael which has an exceptionally beautiful bishop's throne and a splendid wood-carved iconostasis, the Tryavna school.





# Bansko



Hugged in the warm embrace of the Pirin Mountains is Bansko, a museum town alluring tourists all year round. Since 1979 this town has been acknowledged as one of international significance to the tourism industry. Equally attractive during all 4 seasons, it offers various recreational resources. The domestic and international popularity of Bansko finds its roots in the perfect conditions for ski tourism combined with original folklore and old style Bulgarian architecture; stone houses that are guarded by high walls and solid double gates.

The majestic church 'St. Troitsa' (1835), made of granite, marble and brick masonry rises in the center of the town. Its interior astonishes with its grandeur, as well as with its iconostasis. All the icons were created by Dimitar Molerov, a native of Bansko who graduated in Vienna and established an icon painting school together with his son. Another sight to see is the old church, 'Deva Maria' (1808). Its iconostasis ranks among the few in the Balkans with such high artistic value.

Among the other sights in Bansko one can also visit the 'Nikola Vaptsarov' museum house, the House of Arts, the Ethnographic exhibition, the bazaar, a permanent icon exhibition, the Velian House, the Neophit Rilski museum and the Town Museum of History.

All Bansko restaurants and pubs serve both European and Bulgarian dishes. However, recommended are the local specialties such as Kapama, Katino meze, etc. Accompanied of course by quality Bulgarian wines.



# Melnik

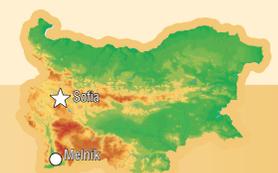


On the southwest slopes of Pirin we find the smallest Bulgarian town, which is also the most significant monument to medieval and renaissance Bulgarian culture. This is the town of Melnik. Together with the monastery of Rozhen it has been a cultural historic preservation since the 1960's.

Melnik is one of the most beautiful towns in Bulgaria. Founded by Thracians, it survived through Roman and Byzantine rule. Around 1209 the town became the capital of the Despot Slav realm. During the renaissance the town witnessed a second economic upheaval based on the production and export to Europe of Melnik's famous wine.

Melnik has historical and architectural monuments, as well as 70 wine cellars. In some of the cellars wine tasting is available. The biggest wine cellar in Melnik is the Kordopulova House; it has the capacity to store 250-300 tons of wine. This is also the largest house in Bulgaria from the middle ages. Its masonry bears the traces of old Byzantine and Bulgarian architecture with Levantine and Persian influence.

Another unique building is the Pashova House that resembles a feudal fortress. Now it is the home of the Town's Museum of History. The Bolyar House is considered to be the oldest building on the Balkan Peninsula. The town must-see places also include several churches as well as the monastery of Rozhen. All guests to the town have the opportunity to enjoy the accommodation of beautiful family hotels and experience the cuisine of local restaurants with authentic interior and great comfort.

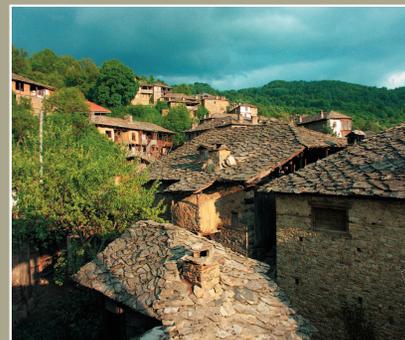


# Kovachevitsa



This little village is situated in the farthest southwest part of the Rhodopes Mountains, 23 km southwest of the city of Gotse Delchev. It has about 110 renaissance houses, some of which have been turned into small hotels that offer specialties of the Rhodopes cuisine. The Kovachevitsa architecture is unique and original. Words cannot describe it. You must see it for yourself. During the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century many of these houses were constructed on the foundations of a pre-renaissance settlement. The unique architectural style is the reason why the village was named an architectural preservation site in 1977. Tourists however are not only interested in the architecture of the houses but also in the local churches and temples.

At the time of the construction of St. Nikolas Church law forbade erecting churches that were higher than houses. As a result, the St. Nicolas church was built partially below its surroundings. Yet its size and proportions are really impressive. A small school was organized in the yard. Later on a four-storey bell tower was erected. The St. Nicolas Church is also noted for the 74 valuable old icons preserved in it. The church is now also an architectural monument and was built by well known Kovachevitsa builders. Outside the village and within the range of fragrant meadows and an old Roman cobbled road, one can find the small "St. George" temple built by those same builders. The place offers a breath-taking sight: 100 year old pine forests and an elevated view of Gorno Dryanovo village, Gurmen village and further on towards the Pirin Mountains. The area is full of natural beauties. An example is the Kanina River, famous for its three deep pools, Balkan trout and beautiful waterfalls.





## Shiroka Laka



Shiroka Laka is another architectural-ethnographic sanctuary, the only one of its kind in Bulgaria. This small village is the symbol of the Rhodopes culture and spirit. It has preserved the unique flair for beauty, grace and harmony of the people living in the Rhodopes Mountains.

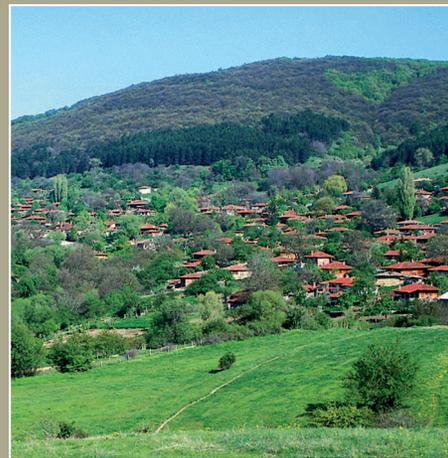
The church and monastery complex in the center of the village is a monument of great architectural value. The centuries old, 'Uspenie Bogorodichno' church, was built in only 40 days. The interior is embellished with carved wood, old icons and murals. An unknown icon painter from the Samokov School painted 10 of the icons. The iconostasis was made in 1835-1836.

The local ethnographic museum hosted by the Kalendzhieva House holds an astonishing collection of kitchenware, utensils, 'Kukeri' masks as well as looms. The Kukeri masks and the related costumes can be seen if one participates in or goes to the Kukeri Festival, that is held annually during the first week of March.

Shiroka Laka is also well known for the Bulgarian Musical School of Folklor Singing and Art. It was founded in 1971. Besides traditional Bulgarian songs and music, traditional instruments such as mandolin, wooden flute, bagpipe and rebec are taught as well.



## Zheravna



Zheravna is another architectural-ethnographic sanctuary preserved since renaissance times, with more than 150 houses, a 'cell' school, cloisters, a church, 8 lovely fountains, many hostels and small craft outlets. It is situated in an amphitheatre like hollow on the southeast slopes of the East Balkan Mountains and was founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century the village flourished when crafts, stock breeding and trade were developed. This is the period when the pattern of the traditional Zheravna house, built solely of rough carved oak wood with 2 meter deep sun shelters and wooden windows shades, developed. The exterior of the houses does not necessarily reveal the inner abundance of forms and details; carved wood, wall and door embellishments, window and furniture patterns. Many buildings such as houses, churches, schools, etc. have been preserved and turned into museums.





## Additional useful information

**State system of Bulgaria:** parliamentary republic

**Capital:** Sofia (1.2 mil. Inhabitants)

**Official language:** Bulgarian, alphabet – Cyrillic

**Religion:** Orthodox (85%), Muslim (8%), others (7%)

**Time zone:** GMT (London) + 2 hours, East-European time (Germany) + 1 hour

**Electricity:** 220 V, 50 Hz

**Entrance in the country:** Foreign citizens enter Bulgaria with their international passport, which shall be valid for at least three more months.

**Custom's formalities and limitations:** Upon crossing the state border of the Republic of Bulgaria passengers may import and export commodities that in type, quantities, and value are not of a commercial nature. These do not include objects the passenger carry for personal use and consumption objects. Passengers have the right to import at no custom duty or import fees the objects necessary to the foreign individuals for their stay in the country, which in their type and quantity correspond to both purpose and the duration of their stay, as well as consumption objects:

- tobacco products (passengers over 16 years of age)
- cigarettes - 200 items, or other tobacco products - 250 gr.;
- alcoholic beverages (passengers over 16 years of age)
- wine - 2 litres, and alcoholic liquors - 1 litre;
- other drinks: coffee - 500g. or coffee extract - 200g. tea - 100 g. or tea extract - 40g.;
- perfumes - 50 ml. and toilet water - 250 ml.

Passengers who are under full 16 years of age are not entitled to duty-free import of the commodities listed above, except for medications.

**Money exchange:**

The Bulgarian Lev is pegged to the Euro. 1 EUR = 1.955 BGN. You may exchange money in banks and in any of the numerous exchange offices. Some of those offices are opened during the holidays. Euro-checks may be cashed on a lot of banks.

**Credit cards:** Most of the biggest hotels work with VISA or Master Card. American Express is less widespread.

**Medical service:** Foreign citizens entering the Republic of Bulgaria are not required to have compulsory immunizations.

**Taxi-cabs:** In towns and resorts there are taxi-cabs situated in the respective taxi ranks.

**Urban transport:** In towns there is urban transport: buses and mini-buses. In Sofia there are trams, trolley busses and underground. Tickets are usually bought before getting on the vehicle.

**Post offices and telecommunication:** Working time of post offices is from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Postage stamps and postcards may be bought from the desks in the post office or from pavilions selling newspapers. There are a lot of internet-cafes from which you may talk cheap or send e-mails and use internet (most of them work night and day).

**Important phones:**

Dialling code for Bulgarian from abroad +359

Fire-brigade 160

First aid 150

Police 166

Traffic police – car accidents +359 2/982 72 823, +359 2/ 866 50 60

Road aid +359 2/ 962 54 12, +359 2/ 962 52 99

Airport +359 2/ 937 22 13

Central railway station in Sofia +359 2/ 931 11 11

International airport +359 2/ 952 50 04

**Tourist information centres:**

Zlatograd +359 3071/ 21 69

Rouse +359 82/ 824 704

Varna +359 52/ 602 907

Bansko +359 7443/ 82 77

Bozhentsi +359 67193/ 362

Veliko Tarnovo +359 62/ 622 148

Gabrovo +359 66/ 808 483

Elena +359 6151/ 37 32; 36 32

Kazanlak +359 431/ 62 566

Koprivshitsa +359 7184/ 21 91

Sozopol +359 5514/ 33 36

Tryavna +359 677/ 22 47

**Useful links:**

<http://www.sofia.bg>

<http://www.plovdiv.bg>

<http://www.moreto.net>

<http://burgas.start.bg>

<http://www.nessebar.com>

<http://www.burgasinfo.com>

<http://plevenmuseum.dir.bg>

<http://www.dir.bg>

<http://www.veliko-tarnovo.net>

<http://www.tryavna.bg>

<http://www.bansko.info>

<http://zheravna.hit.bg>

<http://discoverbg.net>

<http://aboutbulgaria.biz>

<http://www.bansko.info>

<http://www.cbbbg.com>

<http://www.bulcity.com>

<http://www.journey.bg>