

CYCLING EUROPE



Monastery cycling tour - Bulgaria

GUIDED CYCLE TOUR - 8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

Experience the atmosphere of Bulgarian monasteries and history on a bike.

This tour is not just a circuit of some of the most interesting Bulgarian monasteries. It is also a journey through Bulgaria's history, since all of the featured religious buildings are monuments to everything that happened in Bulgaria over the last 700 years or so. Along with the rich history you will cycle in the green of the mountains ("Balkana") and see outstanding nature - beautiful waterfalls, caves, rock cliffs, forests, vast meadows, rivers and valleys combined with crop and potato fields.

We bike along the central part of the Balkan Mountains exploring many scattered villages nestled among quiet valleys and beautiful green mountain landscapes. It seems that time has stopped here and life is quiet and peaceful - people still use the horse driven cart, look after their small herds of sheep, goats and cattle, cut the grass in the old fashion way, take care of their small vegetable gardens or just sit in front of their houses and have a chat with smiles on their faces.

Admire the artistry of local woodcarvers, icon painters and house builders while exploring well preserved houses, churches and craft shops from 18 – 19C. The Balkan Mountains along with monasteries and the people living here played an important role in the Bulgarian Revolutionary Movement and struggle against the Ottoman Empire. This region has been a stronghold of Bulgarian spirit and culture through the years and retains the pride and traditions of Bulgarian people.

Tour highlights:

- ◆ Arbanasi village is famous for its massive houses that resemble minor fortresses, several monasteries and old churches
- ◆ Dryanovo Monastery " Archangel Michael" is situated in the gorge of Dryanovska River where limestone rocks rise high on all sides making it almost unapproachable.
- ◆ Tryavna has preserved its old town square, the only one left in the country, which has been proclaimed as a Monument of Architecture.
- ◆ Petropavlovski Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul was founded in the 10thC
- ◆ Etura Open-air Ethnographic Museum. Master craftsmen fashion beautiful gold, silver, copper, leather and wooden articles right before your eyes from early morning until late at the night.
- ◆ Shipka Monastery - built in the traditional style of 17th-century Russian cathedrals, this monastery stands to the living memory of Russian soldiers and Bulgarian revolutionaries who died during the Russian-Turkish Liberation War.

Itinerary:

Day 1. Arbanasi

Arrival at Sofia Airport and transfer to the architecturally well preserved Arbanasi village and St Nicholas monastery where we stay the next two nights. Dinner in a traditional Bulgarian restaurant (mehana).



Day 2. Orthodox Monastery - Hotnitsa waterfall - Veliko Tarnovo

Today we start with a visit of the picturesque Transfiguration orthodox monastery, with famous icons and frescoes, near Veliko Tarnovo. Then we bike to the beautiful Hotnitsa waterfall and eco trail. After a short walk we continue biking near Hotnista Gorge until you reach the main road to Sofia. Short car transfer before you start biking again to Buria (Storm) village then among beautiful hilly landscapes with nice views to reach Dryanovo cliffs. You finish cycling near Dryanovo town. Time for some

sightseeing in Veliko Tarnovo, the medieval capital of Bulgaria whose cliff edge houses flank both banks of the Jantra River overlooked by Tsarevets medieval fortress. Transfer provided back to St. Nicholas Monastery in Arbanasi.

Cycling distance: 30 - 38 km / uphill cycling 400 /downhill 450 m



Day 3. Merdanski Monastery - Kapinovo Monastery

Transfer to Dragizhevo village where you start biking. Enroute pass by Merdanski Monastery and continue in direction to Plakovo and Kapinovo monastery founded in 1228 by Tsar Ivan Assen II. We stay overnight in the peaceful Kapinovo monastery and enjoy dinner in the lovely monastery courtyard.

Cycling distance: 33 km (or 53km with possible extension to Zlataritsa) uphill cycling 550m / downhill 550m

Day 4. Kilifarevo Monastery - Dryanovo Monastery

After short transfer you start cycling through the villages Plakovo, Golemanite and Natsovtsi to Kilifarevo monastery which was built between 1348 – 1350 and lies in the valley of the Belitsa River. After lunch and a visit of the monastery you continue with a short but challenging ascent to Ialovo village. Then you cycle along Dryanovska River to Dryanovo town. From there you are transferred to Dryanovo monastery where we stay overnight. Optional visit of the nearby Bacho Kiro cave. Cycling distance: 34 km / uphill cycling 500m / downhill 450m

Day 5. Bojentsi Architectural Reserve - Tryavna

In the morning we have a short transfer and then start cycling up and down to Bojentsi village where we spend some time for sightseeing its old houses and cobbled streets. After a short transfer start cycling on quiet roads to National revival town of Tryavna, where we stay overnight.

Cycling distance: 35 km / uphill cycling 600m / downhill 700m

Day 6. Gabrovo - Etura open air museum - Sokolski Monastery

Cycling from Tryavna up a mountain pass (ascent 350m) and then downhill to Gabrovo. The next stop is the open-air ethnographic museum of Etura. Its 18 -19th century water-driven machinery, crafts and lifestyle come alive before your eyes. The various machines, arrangements of workshops and manual tools are all authentic. From here you have four more kilometers (180m ascent) to the picturesque Sokolski Monastery, where you stay overnight.

Cycling distance: 28 km / uphill cycling 500m / downhill 350m



Day 7. Shipka monument - Shipka Monastery - Plovdiv

After breakfast in Gabrovo town transfer to the historic Shipka Pass and memorial on Stoletov peak on the Balkans mountain ridge. You get on the bikes for a 10 km up/down ride in beautiful beech forest to the historic Buzludza area. A supreme downhill ride on the southern slopes of the mountains awaits you. You continue biking to Shipka town where we visit the richly decorated Shipka Monastery and church. Transfer to Plovdiv, where we stay overnight.

Cycling distance: 30 km, uphill cycling 200m, downhill 1000m. Road conditions are generally good except an 11 km stage between Shipka and Buzludza (some bumpy sections with potholes)

Day 8. Departure

After breakfast transfer to Sofia or Plovdiv Airport for departure. Group transfer



between 9 am to 7 pm.

GRADE

Moderate – Longest day is 45 km and shortest 28 km with elevations of up to 650m and downhill 700m. Time is allowed for sightseeing at the monuments. The guide with the support vehicle checks several times a day with the group, waiting by crossroads in case you need a lift or bike maintenance. Cycling is mostly on well-surfaced quiet country roads but with the odd bumpy section, potholes and rough asphalt. Traffic can be encountered entering the towns.

2013 SCHEDULE

18 May, 1 June, 20 July, 10 & 17 August, 14 & 28 September

2013 COSTS PER PERSON IN EUROS:

Share twin €555 Single room supplement €100
Group size 6 – 12 participants

INCLUDED IN COST:

- Transfer from/to Sofia or Plovdiv airports
- 7 nights accommodation: in monasteries for 5 nights; 1 night in a family-run guesthouse; and one night in a hotel. All rooms with private facilities throughout
- Meals – breakfast daily, 6 dinners
- Transportation throughout the whole journey
- English speaking guide/driver with support vehicle accompanies the tour throughout from arrival at the airport on Day 1 to departure at the airport on Day 8. Guides are well-trained and experienced local people with good knowledge of English.
- Hybrid bike with 24 gears, bottle cage, rear carrier, helmet (panniers must be requested), map holder.
- Maps and road book
- VAT and all local taxes.

NOT INCLUDED IN COST:

- Meals – lunches and dinner on Day 7
- Rental of panniers - €10 for the week
- Entrances
- Tips and gratuities
- Items of a personal nature
- Private transfers if required - Sofia Airport - Sofia city centre: €15 (per person); Plovdiv Airport - Plovdiv centre: €15 (per person); Sofia-Plovdiv or vv. €60 (per vehicle)

DRESS CODE

♦ Dress code in monasteries and churches - men are not allowed to enter in shorts and women should not expose their legs and shoulders.

Book through: ***“A Walker’s World”***
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