BULGARIA - CENTRAL BALKAN MOUNTAINS - £1,400

11th July 2020 - 25th July 2020 (15 days)

This tour follows quiet roads through beautiful countryside. The hills are covered with a patchwork of small fields and trees, rural villages with traditional small scale agriculture including horses and haystacks. Further into the mountains is centuries-old forest, with rocky outcrops, canyons, and high mountain meadows. Signs of the rich history and culture are everywhere: in the monuments, architecture, monasteries, towns and friendly people along the route. We'll visit the capital of the 2nd Bulgarian Empire and the World Capital of Humour!

The region is particularly rich in historical sites and architecture from the Bulgarian Revival period and the struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire. The mountains are host to an extraordinary biodiversity; as well as the varied plant life you might see deer, tortoise and wild boar as well as birds of prey soaring above. The Central Balkan National Park is one of the largest and most valuable in Europe including World Heritage Primeval Beech Forests. Distances are moderate to give time to stop, see, photograph or visit the many interesting sights. Mountain springs provide refreshing cool water; the excellent food and good quality hotels, some with swimming pools, help create relaxing and sociable evenings. Fully supported.

HOLIDAY TYPE: Guided
TOUR MANAGER: Steve Millard
GRADE: Moderate
BOOKING STATUS: Places Available
ACCOMMODATION: Hotel
BOARD BASIS: Most Meals
TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS: Land Only
ROAD / OFF ROAD: Road
HOLIDAY STYLE: Moving-on
VEHICLE SUPPORT: Full Vehicle Support
HOLIDAY REF NO: 03526

Holiday Itinerary

Saturday 11th July
Meet at Sofia Airport for a coach transfer to our hotel in Arbanasi, departing at approx 1400. Arbanasi lies on a high plateau overlooking Veliko Tarnovo. For centuries it was a favoured residence for merchants, craftspeople and the nobility; more recently it hosted a holiday home of the former communist leader. Today it is an architectural reserve featuring stone houses built as fortresses and five churches with 3600 frescoes. Stay two nights. Meals: D

Sunday 12th July
Short ride to visit Veliko Tarnovo, a town with more than 5000 years of history and erstwhile capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire. During the Middle Ages it was one of the main European centres of culture and known as the ‘Second Constantinople’. The historic old town is built in a picturesque location on the steep slopes of the dramatically meandering Yantra river, surrounded by hills. 19km (500m total ascent). Meals: B L D

Monday 13th July
Cycle to Dryanovo Monastery, a functioning Bulgarian Orthodox monastery founded in the 12th Century. Tucked away in a spectacular river valley it was a Haidut (resistance fighter) hideout. We'll visit Bacho Kiro cave where 46,000 year old fossilised human remains and the oldest known ornaments in Europe were found. Enjoy viewpoints overlooking the valley and visit the monastery, its museum and grounds. 59km (780m total ascent). Stay one night
Tuesday 14th July
We'll cycle to Tryavna, a quaint historic town that became a centre of crafts during the Bulgarian Revival period and developed its own unique architectural style. This pretty town has a preserved historic centre complete with clock tower from 1814, galleries and museums. 48km (950m total ascent). Stay two nights. Meals: B L D

Wednesday 15th July
Rural day ride with time to look around Tryavna afterwards. Meals: B L D

Thursday 16th July
Cycle to Kazanlak. We'll cross the main ridge of the Balkan Mountains over a pass that rises to 950m. On the descent there's 19km of unpaved road, and because of this the whole pass is almost traffic free. It may be possible to jump on the train to miss out the unpaved section, depending on the yet to be published timetable. After a 650m descent we come out into the Valley of the Thracian Kings. 80km (810m total ascent). Stay one night. Meals: B L D

Friday 17th July
Today we'll first visit a 2400 year old Thracian Tomb, a World Heritage site for being an exceptionally well-preserved masterpiece of aesthetic and artistic work. We'll also visit an ornate gold-domed Russian Orthodox Church, then after lunch we'll cycle up to our hotel near the top of the mountain. The hotel was formerly a holiday home for the communist political and cultural elite; it has recently been restored to its original luxurious style. 38km (1050m total ascent). Stay one night. Meals: B L D

Saturday 18th July
First a short ride to the top of the mountain at 1435m to see an amazing communist monumental building, so large and prominent it was first visible from our route four days before. Continue along the ridge to visit a monument and museum of Bulgarian independence. Enjoy an 800m descent to lunch, visit an open air museum village showing Bulgarian life as it was and sometimes still is, then continue to our hotel in Gabrovo. 43km (450m total ascent). Stay two nights. Meals: B L D

Sunday 19th July
Free day. Options include visiting Gabrovo, the renowned international capital of humour and satire(!). The town boasts the House of Humour and Satire, which is a museum, gallery and cultural institute. The town also has a cinema, two theatres, a number of other museums and a planetarium. Alternatively you could cycle up to a winter resort that lies at the geographical centre of Bulgaria, or cycle to a restored historical village. Meals: B D

Monday 20th July
Cycle to Apriltsi, a mountain resort in the shadow of Botev Peak (2376m), the highest peak in the Balkan Mountains. The town of Apriltsi was formed by merging four villages, and it still has a spread-out rural appearance with some traditional Bulgarian houses. 55km (940m total ascent). Stay two nights. Meals: B L D

Tuesday 21st July
Day ride with spectacular views of the highest parts of the Balkan Mountains via small rural villages and quiet narrow roads, some unpaved. 43km (650m total ascent). Meals: B L D

Wednesday 22nd July
Cycle to Chiflik, a popular and picturesque mountain spa resort, famous for the edelweiss flowers that grow there and the natural thermal waters that flow from its many springs. At the hotel we can enjoy bathing and relaxing in the healing water. On the way there we'll take a break for lunch in the town of Troyan; named after a Roman Emperor, the town is a centre for traditional pottery and solid wood furniture making. 48km (550m total ascent). Stay one night. Meals: B L D

Thursday 23rd July
Cycle to Teteven via a mountain pass at 1225m. Ivan Vazov, ‘Patriarch of Bulgarian literature’, wrote of the place: “Had I not come to Teteven, I would have remained a foreigner to mother Bulgaria ... I have been wandering, I have been rambling, but I have not seen a more wondrous paradise.” It is indeed set in a lovely location surrounded by towering peaks and boasts a historic centre, churches and four museums. 62km (700m total ascent). Stay two nights. Meals: B L D

Friday 24th July
In the morning we'll ride up the side of the valley to the mountain village of Babintsi at an altitude of 1000m. From there it's a short walk to a Chapel perched on top of a conical hill; take in the panoramic views in all directions, and then enjoy the ride back down to Teteven. 19km (650m total ascent). Meals: B D

Saturday 25th July
Transfer to Sofia Airport where the tour ends. Meals: B

Meals: B = Breakfast  L = Lunch  D = Dinner

Holiday Summary

Accommodation & Meals
Accommodation is in good quality hotels with en-suite rooms. Most hotels have air conditioning and free Wi-Fi, several have swimming pools and/or spa facilities. Rooms are shared twin or doubles as appropriate or, for a supplement, single occupancy is normally available. Breakfast and dinner are provided at the hotel. Lunches are provided on cycling days, in restaurants where available or otherwise as a roadside picnic. Snacks and emergency rations are available on a help-yourself basis. The food is excellent, comprising a wide variety and choice of dishes from the local cuisine prepared using fresh local produce; vegetarians are well catered for.
Vehicle Support
There is a support vehicle for luggage which has limited space for riders if they are unable to cycle on a particular day. The very friendly and helpful driver is also on call to assist with any difficulties during the tour.

Passports, Visa & Health
EU citizens must hold a passport that is still valid on the date of their return to their home country. Holders of non-EU passports are advised to check whether they require a visa. There are no compulsory health related requirements for UK residents, but you are strongly advised to check that your tetanus protection has not expired. You must also carry your European Health Insurance Card.

Travel Insurance
Our Booking Conditions stipulate that, for holidays outside the UK, travel Insurance is mandatory. Details of the level of cover needed and other conditions you should check are stated in the Booking Conditions. CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours Ltd cannot accept responsibility for any costs that may be incurred due to insufficient insurance cover.

Price
The price of £1,400 is based on a minimum number of 10 people taking part in the holiday; please note Booking Conditions, clause 3. If there are insufficient bookings by 2nd May 2020, we will contact you and return all monies paid, although in certain circumstances the holiday may still run at below minimum numbers but at the same price.

Price Includes
- 14 nights hotel, sharing room
- 14 breakfasts, 11 lunches, 14 dinners
- 2 drinks per day with lunch or dinner
- Snacks and emergency rations
- Entry fees at Tsaravets Fortress, Bacho Kiro Cave, Museum at Dryanovo Monastery, Thracian Tomb, Shipka Memorial Museum, Etara museum village.
- Transfers between Sofia airport and first and last hotels
- Luggage transfer and vehicle support for riders and bikes
- CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours costs

Price Does Not Include
- Travel to and from Bulgaria
- Entry fees at attractions not described above
- Any other personal expenses
- Travel Insurance
- Gratuity for support driver
- Single occupancy supplement (£170, subject to availability)

Payment Schedule
A deposit of £240 per person is payable upon booking, with the final balance of £1,160 per person to be paid ten weeks prior to departure, by 2nd May 2020.

Cancellations
Should you be forced to cancel your booking for any reason you must notify us in writing. Cancellation charges are as follows:

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<th>Written notice received:</th>
<th>Cancellation charge:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Before 2nd May 2020</td>
<td>Deposit (£240)</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 2nd May 2020 through to departure</td>
<td>100% (£1,400)</td>
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+ Additional Information

Area Covered By The Holiday
The Balkan Mountains stretch right across the middle of Bulgaria from the Black Sea coast in the east to the Serbian border in the west and give their name to the wider region, the Balkans. The range consists of a high ridge with lower foothills to the north and south. We'll be cycling in the central and highest part of the range, passing near the highest peak, Botev (2376m). The route passes close to the Central Balkan National Park, recognised by UNESCO as ‘one of the most valuable and the largest protected areas in Europe’.
We will stay in fascinating locations which provide the opportunity to explore. The towns are mostly small and well-spaced out, making for quiet roads and ideal cycling. The area has an incredibly rich history, having been populated continuously since the first migration of humans to Europe 1.5 million years ago. In more recent history many civilisations have come and gone, including Thracians, Romans, two Bulgarian Empires, Byzantines, Ottomans and a Communist People’s Republic. All have left their mark on the land and in the rich culture and folklore. This region is particularly rich in architecture from the Bulgarian revival period, a time under Ottoman rule when Bulgarians rediscovered their culture and resisted their rulers. The more recent communist period is shown in the large number of monuments and public art, architecture, infrastructure and town planning. We'll see an enormous memorial building for the Bulgarian Communist Party, its remarkable architecture makes it look like a giant flying saucer on top of a mountain peak.
Photographs taken from the route can be viewed here.

Rides & Rest Days
This tour is classified as suitable for experienced touring cyclists. There are eight moving on days and the riding is hilly with three longer climbs between 500 and 800m. There are a few steep sections, but they’re short; the longer climbs have gentle gradients which can be taken at a relaxed pace with a low gear. There are five days where we stay put, on most of these days there is an optional ride organised. These days also give the opportunity to
explore independently the places where we’ll be staying in more depth, or to have a complete rest and use the hotel facilities. Despite the hilly terrain most of the tour is designed around a leisurely pace leaving plenty of time en-route for taking in the views, seeing interesting sights, taking photographs, enjoying the food and experiencing the culture. Most of the time we won’t ride as one group so that people can go at their own pace, particularly on the climbs, though we’ll regroup occasionally throughout the day. One of us will always ride at the back to help with any problems and ensure no one is ever left behind.

Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is in good quality comfortable hotels. Rooms are en-suite and most have air conditioning and free wi-fi. Several hotels have swimming pools and spa facilities. Breakfast choice varies and can be continental style, pancakes, omelettes, scrambled eggs, French toast or a buffet. Lunches will mostly be taken in local restaurants, where available. Dinners will be in the hotel restaurants. Snacks for emergency rations are available on a help yourself basis. Water plus 2 beverages per day with lunch or dinner are included; these can be soft or locally produced alcoholic drinks.

For food expect an amazing variety of Bulgarian specialities made from fresh local produce. Most meals will be served as lots of individual dishes in the centre of the table for everyone to share, allowing everyone to try out different foods and eat from those they like most. There’s plenty for everyone and vegetarians are well catered for. On tours in Bulgaria dining has always been considered a highlight and it fosters a sociable atmosphere.

Travel

As no travel is included it is very important to note that neither your Tour Manager nor CTC Holidays & Tours are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group. Before finalising travel arrangements to meet the tour, you should ensure that you have read and understood our booking conditions. Should this tour not attract sufficient bookings to reach the minimum operating size, we may cancel the tour at any time up to 10 weeks before departure. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation or wait until you have been informed that the tour is going ahead, as in the event of the tour being cancelled, we will not be responsible for any losses incurred.

You must make your own way to Sofia Airport or make your way to the hotel where the tour begins. Large bicycle bags or boxes can be stored during the tour ONLY if arriving at and departing from Sofia Airport at the times set out below. If you wish to join or leave the tour at the first or last hotels, only a polythene bag such as the CTC Bike Bag can be taken on the tour in the luggage vehicle.

There are flights to Sofia from Manchester and London Heathrow. Please make sure that the flight will carry your bike. Also make sure that your flight arrives on the first day by 1330 or earlier; if your flight is delayed, the coach may have to depart without you. Also, make sure the flight leaves Sofia Airport after 1230 on 25 July. Flights to Sofia are now available from several regional airports; but their arrival times might not be appropriate for the tour. Indirect connecting flights are also available, however with these there is more chance of serious delay for yourself or your luggage (bike) if you fail to make the connection. Please check with the Tour Manager before making any flight bookings if you're at all unsure.

Group Information

The maximum group size will be 22 excluding the Tour Manager(s).

Weather & Clothing

At this time of year the average weather is sunny and warm or hot, upper 20s during the day and cooling off to mid teens during the night. This can vary considerably according to the weather pattern at the time, and rain or thunder storms are possible. It is recommended you take a fleece and long trousers for evenings and waterproof cycling jacket and gloves in case of rain. Sunscreen is essential, as is covering your head.

Cycles & Equipment

A reliable touring cycle, hybrid or lightweight ATB is suitable for this tour. You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes. A low bottom gear (e.g. small chainring smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended. If you are unsure about gears, please discuss with the Tour Manager. Mudguards are optional but show courtesy to those who are following you in wet weather. Lights are recommended but might not prove essential. New tyres are recommended of at least 32mm diameter and a tread for varied road surfaces; some sections of the route are in a poor condition with potholes and short sections are unpaved. Participants will be expected to carry each day sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs.

You will not need to carry luggage, but a rack top pack or bar bag will be useful for carrying wet weather gear, spare clothing needed for the day, camera, snacks and your map.

Maps & Guides

OFRM Geotrade electronic maps, which can be used on Garmin GPS devices, have been used to plan the route, and GPS tracks will be made available before the trip. Additionally other electronic maps, such as Google Maps and OpenStreetMap (OSM), also show the route. A free map of Bulgaria can be downloaded to smartphones or suitable gps devices from OpenStreetMap.

Printed road maps of Bulgaria cover the route of the tour, though have little detail in the towns. Having your own map is only necessary if you wish to cycle independently of the group, and for that purpose a GPS or suitable Smartphone is recommended. Standard Guidebooks on Bulgaria generally cover the main towns in the region of the tour.

Travel Insurance & Advice

In addition to travel insurance, EU nationals should carry a European Health Insurance Card, obtainable from www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC/. This enables you to take advantage of emergency medical services free or at a discount under a reciprocal provision that exists between EU member states. Your travel insurer may refuse to meet the extra costs of medical treatment if you do not carry this card.

Before booking you should check the latest travel advice from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office including security and local laws, plus passport and visa information, at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice or on 0845 850 2829.

Tour Manager’s Contact Details

If you require any assistance, or have any queries, please don’t hesitate to contact the Tour Manager using the information provided below.

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