

# Sofia

## General information

Sofia is the capital city of Bulgaria, it is a large city with many things to do, whether it be shopping or relaxing in the local spas and restaurants, there are lots of quiet areas in Sofia so you don't always have to be in the busy part but however if you were to venture into the city life you won't be disappointed, you will never find a better city it is filled with brilliant night life and great tourist facilities.

Transport is never a problem with taxi's, trams and buses going in and out of the city everyday!

Restaurants are fantastic with a very tasteful Bulgarian cuisine, and yet they will always have an English menu to suit your every need.

You will find more information and details for Sofia below, letting you know all useful information that I'm sure you will need in the future if you decide to experience the Capital.

### Airport Information

Recent renovations at the Sofia Airport have made travelling a better experience and one can now enjoy the advantages of a small airport. The renovated areas are clean, light, airy and smoke free (smoking is only allowed in the cafe areas).

In the departure building the old chandeliers and wall mosaics have been brought to life and a high tech cafe at mezzanine level adds to the relaxed atmosphere in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of earlier times.

There is also a bank and other improvements. the washrooms in the departure lounge area include features for people with disabilities and a baby-changing room.

### Money

Bulgaria's currency is called **Lev** (BGL), plural: **Leva**. One Lev is made up of 100 **stotinki**.

The currency was redenominated in 1999. Now it is tied to the EURO and the exchange rate is fixed at EURO 1 = BGL 1,95583.

Exchange bureaux are found on all major streets in Sofia. Some of them, located in the downtown area of the city, charge commission but are not very up-front about it. Best to ask how much you will receive before you hand over

your money. Don't be tempted to change money on the streets or you might be cheated. Travellers cheques must be cashed at banks and most charge a commission.

### Accident and Emergencies

**Tel: 150**

The Accident and Emergency Hospital for Sofia is the **Pirogov hospital** at 21, Gen. Tottleben Blvd., opposite the Rodina hotel (tel. 915 44 11). They don't generally speak English so try to take a Bulgarian speaking friend with you. There is a ward for foreigners in the **Okruzhna Bolnitsa** hospital in Mladost 1, tel. 975 90 00/01. Your Embassy may be able to refer you to a doctor who speaks your language.

There are several private polyclinics (**Vita** - tel.:943 43 98, **Thorax** - tel.:912 85, **IMC** - tel.:944 93 26, **Biocheck** - and **Greenberg**) in Sofia who charge for their services and have various specialists on duty, many of whom speak other languages.

### Public Transport

There are trams, buses, and trolley buses (as well as a recently-opened short section of the city subway - see map for details) which cover most of the city. There is also a fleet of privately run 'Marsh-route taxis' which covers the more obscure routes. (Ticket price 1 lev. Pay the driver as you get on.) Public transport runs daily from 5 a.m. till 11.30 p.m. for buses, 12.30 a.m. for trams.

### Taxi Services

<b>Company</b>	<b>Tel.</b>
<b>OKAY SUPERTRANS</b>	<b>973 21 21</b>
<b>YES TAXI</b>	<b>91 919, 91 818</b>
<b>TAXI-S-EXPRESS</b>	<b>9 1280</b>

Listed above are a few reputable companies as far as pricing goes. All legal and registered taxi cabs must be yellow, and operate by meter. Rates per km (between 0.30 - 0.56 leva), any starting and call-out charges must by law be displayed on the windows. Dispatchers and drivers usually speak only Bulgarian, so you may need someone to help you order one by phone, and you should learn how to name your destination. Remember that they will give you a 3 digit number of the taxi which will come to pick you up. Avoid getting into an argument with the driver.

## ***SOFIA - MAIN POINTS OF INTEREST***



### **ALEXANDER NEVSKI MEMORIAL CHURCH**

Completed in 1912 in honour of the Russian casualties of the 1877-78 War of Liberation from Ottoman Rule. Gold-domed, it is the finest piece of architecture in the Balkans. Craftsmen and artists from 6 countries worked on the five-aisle church in the course of 30 years and created real masterpieces of icons, frescoes, murals and huge chandeliers. The interior decoration, made of Italian marble, Egyptian alabaster, Brazilian onyx, gold, mosaics embodies the spirit of the finest Eastern Orthodox traditions. A superb collection of icons - the best in Bulgaria - can also be seen in the Crypt.

### **ROTUNDA OF ST. GEORGE**

A C4 brick building in the courtyard behind the Sheraton Hotel, adorned with finely preserved early medieval frescoes. There are also remains of a C2 street and other Byzantine ruins.



### **ST. SOFIA CHURCH**

The 4th-6th century basilica was built during the reign of Justinian. It has survived intact with 1600- year-old mosaic details and towards the end of the C14 gave the city its name. Beside the wall of the church is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

## **THE NATIONAL PALACE OF CULTURE**

The biggest Congress Centre in the Balkans. It is located in the centre of the city and faces the Vitosha Mountain.



## **THE CHURCH OF ST. NEDELYA** (Opposite the Sheraton Hotel)

Built in medieval times and known as the Church of the Blessed Sveti Kral. The current building was reconstructed after 1925 when it was almost completely destroyed by a bomb explosion.

## **VASSIL LEVSKI MONUMENT**

Vassil Levski was the principal architect of the campaign to free

## **SOFIA UNIVERSITY**

Bulgaria from the oppression of the Ottoman Empire. The monument marks the spot where he was hanged by the Turks in 1873.



The country's most prestigious university. It was built a decade after Sofia became Bulgaria's capital in 1879 with funds bequeathed by the brothers Evlogi and Christo Georgiev.

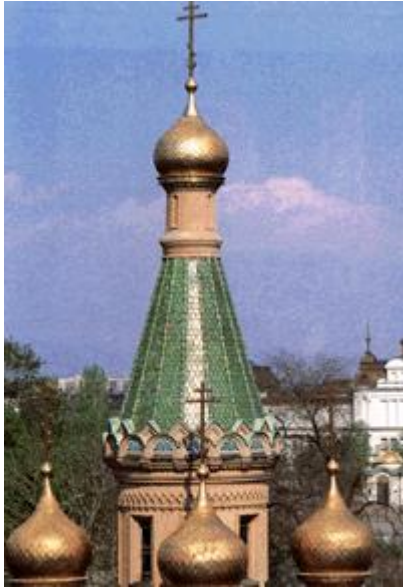
## **DRAGALEVTSI**

A suburb in the woods at the foot of Mount Vitoshka. About 3 km further on is DRAGALEVTSI MONASTERY, founded during the reign of King Ivan Alexander. Frescoes date back to the C15. The church, which is part of the original monastery, often sheltered the Apostle of Freedom Vassil Levski during the C19.

## **BOYANA**

A suburb at the foot of Mount Vitoshka, notable for the BOYANA CHURCH, built in the C11. Frescoes are claimed to be among the oldest and most interesting examples of East European Medieval art. Like Rila Monastery, the BOYANA CHURCH has been listed by UNESCO as a part of the world's cultural heritage.





**THE RUSSIAN CHURCH**



**MOUNT VITOSHA**

It has become very much a part of Sofia owing to its accessibility by means of the cabin lifts at Knyazhevo and Simeonovo. Cherni Vrah, the highest point, gives wonderful views over the whole region. The winter ski-resort Aleko lies at 1868 m and the ski season lasts from early December until late spring. The beautiful scenery makes the whole area attractive throughout the year

### **Activities in Sofia**

Sofia is one of the most exciting locations and destinations in Bulgaria Located in the western part of the country, the Bulgarian capital offers an unlimited variety of activities and sightseeing to its visitors.

A weekend in SOFIA would not be complete without taking part in some of the many activities available to you, some examples of which are listed below.

Let us help you get your hotel accommodations in this exciting Eastern European metropolis. Then, give us some ideas of what you would like to experience and we can add the finishing touches to your unforgettable weekend.



#### **Paint balling**

Have you ever had the desire to load up a gun and take a shot at a friend (without actually hurting your friend? Just a 15 minute drive into the outskirts of Sofia in the beautiful forest of the Mt. Vitosh national mountain park is the site where you and your friends can load up a paintball gun and pretend to be agent 007 or the Terminator to your heart's content. Your experience will include a paintball gun, 200 paintballs, protective clothing, and a mask. You will participate in several games lasting up to 30 minutes each. The entire activity will span about 2 hours. Come on out and give it "a shot".



### **Bar crawl**

This event starts and finishes at your hotel and takes you to some of the most trendy bars and clubs around Sofia. Tekila bar is famous for its city centre location and exclusive parties. The Brillantin music club is an upscale 'take a break' bar with special DJ retro mix music. Karamba is one of the hottest clubs in the city featuring gorgeous Brazilian dancers and is perfect for a high energy finish to the night with music and dancing available until 5AM. This tour includes free entrance and a drink in each club.



### **Folklore evening \***

Experience the cultural history of Bulgaria in food, song and dance. This activity includes a visit to a traditional folk restaurant in either Sofia's city centre or in the foothills of Mt. Vitosha just outside the city. Your experience will include a floor show of Bulgarian national dances and songs, culinary specialties of the unique Bulgarian cuisine and perhaps wine tasting in an underground tavern.



### **Horse Riding**

This particular activity needs to advise customers how they will get to the venue from their hotel in Sofia.

This is truly an unforgettable experience for anyone who loves natural beauty and historic landmarks and desires to experience both from horseback. The stable are situated near the Bulgarian/Greek border in the Rhodope Mountains.



### **National crafts tour**

Bulgarian artisans have a sense of aesthetics and a perspective of the world around them that allows them to create art out of any material readily available - wood, clay, fabric copper, silk,,silver or a myriad of other natural and man-made materials. Applied crafts have gradually emerged from their early beginnings of hand work needed for the support of everyday life to become a variety of different art forms: A perfect example of of this evolution from domestic necessities to work of art is Bulgarian embroidery with its beautiful colors and intricate geometrical figures.

## SPA RESORTS



### Devin

Devin is a renowned spa and holiday resort. Conveniently located only 35 km north-west of the world famous winter resort Pamporovo, 90 km south of the picturesque town of Plovdiv and 220 km south-east of the Bulgarian capital Sofia, Devin stands amongst the Western Rhodope hills at an altitude of 700 m.

### Hissaria

Hissaria- ancient as its healing springs, young as their refreshing sprays of water. Traces of life in the village go back to 5000 BC.



### Bankya

The small town of Bankya ,a picturesque spa resort which is developing worldwide popularity, is situated amidst greenery and sunshine. Located 17 km west from Sofia, at the foot of Lulin Mountain, it is famous for its healing mineral waters and well-organized sanatorium and resort accommodation with highly skilled medical specialists. Recommended by numerous patients that have recovered after cardiovascular disorders.

### Velingrad

One of the largest and probably most beautiful of the Bulgarian spa resorts, the town of Velingrad is ideally located in the Central-Western part of the Rhodope Mountains, surrounded by pine tree laden hills and broad-leaved forest mountain heights leading into vast meadows and embowered glades.

