

**WANDERLUST and SERENDIPITY**

**A walking tour based in Koprivshitsa**

**29 May – 5 June 2023 (Tour code: WT)**

**Leader: Dimitar (Mitko) Petrakiev**

**PRICE: £1,360**

(Based on a group of 8, a smaller group may incur a supplement).



Spend an 8 day holiday exploring Vitosha, Sofia's high mountain and picturesque Koprivshtitsa and its surroundings, looking for birds, butterflies, flowers and other wildlife. Combined with some walking and light hiking and visits to archaeological, cultural and historical sites. Walks are graded as L to M (Leisurely to Moderate). The pace will be easy to moderate, with some short hills, on easy to moderate terrain. Reasonable fitness is required. Daily distances are in the itinerary. There will be some steep unsurfaced paths, and, in open country, it may be muddy with obstructions such as stiles or steps.

You should bring hiking boots that are well broken in, or sturdy trainers. A waterproof, a fleece, and layers of clothing i.e. T-shirt and jumper, as early mornings and evenings can be chilly in the mountains, but may well be very warm in the sun in the middle of the day. A light rucksack will also be useful.

Dimitar (Mitko) Petrakiev is a tour leader and mountain guide with over ten years' experience of birdwatching, butterfly and other natural history tours. He is also qualified as a climbing instructor and for cave rescue and first aid. He has also led archaeological and cultural tours for the B-BS.

The beautiful scenery, friendly people and excellent wine and food are additional highlights, and the tour price includes a donation to the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds or other Bulgarian conservation organisation.

The B-BS offers you the benefits of over forty years' experience of organising tours to Bulgaria. For your financial protection our tour operators for over twenty-five years, Balkania Travel Ltd. are licensed by the UK Civil Aviation Authority, ATOL 4465 and bonded by the International Air Transport Association, IATA number 91- 2 7839.

Hotels are comfortable (and well situated for our walks) but not luxurious. The hosts in Koprivshtitsa are all members of the same family, very welcoming and very knowledgeable about their town and the neighbourhood. They source local produce and wines for their restaurant. For our research visit, as you see in the photo above, they dressed in traditional costume and greeted us with leaves from the plant Zdravets to wish us welcome and good health.

The holiday is on a Half-Board basis. Final details will be sent to participants approximately two weeks before departure.

## **Projected Itinerary (which may be subject to adjustment)**

**Monday 29 May** Flight from Heathrow to Sofia, arriving early afternoon. Brief transfer (Sofia Airport is only 10 kms from Downtown Sofia) and check-into your Sofia hotel for 1 night. Time for a tour of the capital city, including some of its lovely parks, change some money, get acclimatised! Dinner and overnight.

**Tuesday 30 May** Visit to Sofia's favourite Mount Vitosha for birdwatching and a short hike. Our bus takes us to Aleko hut at 1,800m altitude. From there we get onto the Plateau (100m elevation gain, distance - 2.5 km, around one and a half hours in total). The UNESCO biosphere reserve (known as Bistrishko Branishte) is a refuge for native spruce forest and subalpine meadows and numerous birds such as Nutcracker, Crossbill, Firecrest, Ring Ouzel, Willow Tit, Pallid Swift and many more. After a picnic lunch, transfer to Koprivshitsa for a 6 night stay.

**Wednesday 31 May** Koprivshitsa is a small mountain town (1,000m) in Sredna Gora, the wooded hills between Sofia and Plovdiv, near the famous Valley of the Roses. It played an important part in Bulgarian history and is an Architectural Reserve, with its preserved National Revival buildings. Explore the village and one or two of the house-museums, and learn a little about its heroes.

**Thursday 1 June** Explore the meadows south of the town for early butterflies, various orchids and interesting plants, as well as several local bird species such as Corncrake, Water Pipit, Crossbill, Goshawk, Long-legged Buzzard, Crested Tit and Sombre Tit.

**Friday 2 June** Day in Central Balkan National Park. Short drive to Beklemeto pass (1,525m) from where we'll hike along the main ridge, distance - 8km, elevation gain 150m, three and a half hours, looking for some high altitude species like Golden Eagle, Rock Partridge, Ring Ouzel, Horned Lark, Water Pipit, Black Woodpecker, Alpine Chough.

**Saturday 3 June** Local walk. Koprivshitsa – Pop peak. Starting from the town, this will be 3-4 hours of easy to moderate walking west of Koprivshitsa along forested trails and open meadows. Easy, but very picturesque (400m elevation gain, distance – 8km).

**Sunday 4 June** Day visit to Hisarya. The area around the town is interesting for birds, butterflies and dragonflies. Nearby we shall visit the site of the Thracian temple at Starosel, followed by a wine tasting in the local wine cellar. Some of the birds we may see: Bee-eaters and Rollers, Red-rumped Swallow, Long-legged Buzzard, Lesser-spotted Eagle, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Isabelline Wheatear, Wryneck, Golden Oriole, Barred Warbler, Black-headed Yellow Wagtail, Tawny Pipit, Short-toed Lark and many more.

During your stay in Koprivshitsa, we'll organize for you a visit to some of the festivities of the famous Festival of Roses in the Valley of the Roses.

**Monday 5 June** Transfer back to airport for your return flight to the UK.

# BULGARIA 2023

## OUR PRICE INCLUDES:

- Return flights between Heathrow and Sofia, including all taxes and charges.
- Half Board.
- Accommodation in small, friendly hotels (family-run in Koprivshitsa) with en suite facilities on a twin-bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Mini-coach for transfers and excursions.
- Specialist Bulgarian leader.
- All museum fees.
- Wine tasting.
- Donation to Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds or other Bulgarian conservation organisation.
- All reserve entrance fees.

## NOT INCLUDED:

- Lunches (about £4 - 5).
- Travel Insurance (compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Drinks and personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement (£105).

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Further information from Dr Annie Kay, B-BS Tours Organiser.

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