

ANCIENT TREASURES OF BULGARIA

4 - 14 October (Tour code: ATB)

Leader: Yordanka (Dani) Kotseva

Price: £2,700



This tour gives you the perfect opportunity to visit the remains of the Thracian civilization, which is one of the least known in Europe, and which will be our main focus. However Bulgaria has treasures from many other different eras: Neolithic, Roman, Hellenic, Byzantine and Ottoman. We shall visit four of the seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Bulgaria: Boyana, Kazanluk, Madara and Sveshtari. The tour ends in Varna, home of the oldest worked gold in the world.

Projected itinerary (which might be amended if for example opening times are changed)

Sunday 4 October Flight from Heathrow to Sofia, scheduled arrival 14.05.

Afternoon visit to the National Archaeological Museum, housed in a fine former 15th century mosque, for a guided visit and lecture, with a glass of wine. Dinner and first of two overnight stays.

Monday 5 October Walking tour of the extensive ruins of Roman Serdika.

In the afternoon visit the National History Museum in Boyana and the nearby UNESCO World Heritage Site, Boyana Church, famous for its remarkable frescoes. Dinner and second night in Sofia.

Tuesday 6 October From Sofia drive east with views of the Stara Planina and the Central Balkan National Park to the north and then through the Valley of the Roses to another World Heritage Site, the Kazanluk Thracian Tomb. The mural paintings from the late 4th century BC were found to be perfectly preserved. Continue to Stara Zagora for one night. (Total 250 km/5hrs). Maybe time for a stroll in the lovely City Garden.

Wednesday 7 October Visit to the Neolithic Dwellings Museum, the Regional History Museum displaying a mosaic floor and an excavated Roman road, and Forum Augusta Trayana (Roman Theatre). Drive to Plovdiv for a two-night stay. (100km/2hrs).

Thursday 8 October Visit the Old Town with its picturesque cobbled streets, timbered buildings and the Ancient Theatre of Phillipopolis, which can seat 4,000 spectators and is still in regular use. In the New Town, the Archaeological Museum has a rich collection, the Cultural Centre Trakart has its wonderful mosaic floors and the Small Basilica, the remains of a Christian church also has mosaic floors. The Bishop's Basilica of Phillipopolis is Bulgaria's largest Early Christian church, after a long period of neglect, it has now been restored, the extensive mosaics are the best-preserved part of the building.

Friday 9 October Drive to Perperikon, the largest megalithic ensemble in the Balkans, covering 12 square kilometers. There was a palace, cemeteries, water reservoirs, gates and a fortress. Some claim it to be the long-lost sanctuary of Dionysus. On the way to Haskovo for an overnight stay, visit Konush, where a Thracian tomb was discovered in 2006. Hear the story behind the warning "Be careful when you walk about, because the gods always take what belongs to them!" (80km/2hrs)

Saturday 10 October Drive northeast to Sliven for a one-night stay. On the way visit the Aleksandrovo tomb, dating from 4th century BC. It has impressive proportions and well preserved frescoes which reveal a lot of information about the Thracian way of life. Adjacent to the tomb is the Thracian Art Museum. (120km/3hrs)

Sunday 11 October Drive to Razgrad, on the site of the Roman town of Abritus. Its museum has gold coins and jewellery, and a magnificent Golden Pegasus, the front part of a winged horse, a mythical creature with special significance in Thracian iconography. There is also a display here of items from our next destination the Sveshtari tomb. Sboryanovo Historical and Archaeological Reserve includes more than 140 monuments such as burial mounds, sanctuaries and a Thracian town. The main exhibit is the UNESCO listed Sveshtari Thracian tomb. The most striking image inside is of the ten caryatids, their arms raised as if to carry the roof, their features and clothing display very fine workmanship. Continue to Shumen for a one-night stay. (140km/4hrs)

Monday 12 October Drive to Veliki Preslav, a former capital of Bulgaria, founded in 821AD. Descriptions of it at its peak mention many churches and a palace richly decorated with paintings and precious metals. Next we visit another World Heritage site, the Madara Horseman, the only rock relief in Europe, carved high up on an inaccessible rock face. Wind and rain have eroded it but it depicts a symbolic hunting scene. Pliska, the third of our visits today, preceded Preslav as the capital of Bulgaria's First Kingdom, it covered a huge area defended by citadels and an extensive fortification system. Drive to Varna for a two-night stay. (90km/2hrs)

Tuesday 13 October Varna was an inhabited place before the Greeks established the colony of Odessos in about 580BC. Its Archaeological Museum is home to the famous oldest worked gold in the world. There are more than 2,000 gold objects, nearly pure, 23.5 carat. One stunning display shows the bones of a tribal leader with skilfully made gold jewellery and possessions around him. The 2nd century Thermae are the remains of the largest Roman public building in Bulgaria. It seems to have been very ornate and well equipped, with an aqueduct providing water for the cold, warm and hot baths. Ancient Odessos was clearly a place of importance.
Farewell Dinner.

Wednesday 14 October Morning flight to Sofia, time for some further visits to Roman Serdica, two churches Sv. Georgi Rotunda and the Basilica of Sv. Sophia. From the latter you can enter the East Necropolis where there are 50 tombs and graves in different styles and designs. There are some interesting short videos in the well-arranged museum. Return flight to Heathrow.

OUR PRICE INCLUDES:

- Scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia, and Varna to Sofia and then to Heathrow, checked baggage, all government, airport and other taxes and charges.
- Accommodation in 3* and 4* hotels with en-suite facilities on a double/twin bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Half board.
- Coach/mini-coach with driver for all transfers and excursions.
- Guide/interpreter, throughout. Specialist guide at Perperikon.
- Archaeology lecture.
- Entrance fees.

NOT INCLUDED:

- Travel Insurance (Compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Lunches (about £4 - £5).
- Drinks and personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement (£250).

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

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