

Guaranteed departure dates for 2008: 16/8, 06/9

(Other dates also possible within the best period if the requirement for min group size is fulfilled)

Ref. number: -

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Introduction:

Known as the "autumn tour" this trip usually takes place at the end of summer. Encompassing two of the biggest migratory routes in Europe (Via Pontica and Via Aristotelis), Bulgaria is an important stopover for many migrating and wandering birds during this season. The Black Sea coastal wetlands (lakes and lagoons) provide some of the best conditions for watching thousands of soaring migrants. Huge flocks, comprising thousands of White Storks, White Pelicans and Honey Buzzards may be seen in just one day – along with many other birds of prey like Montagu's Harriers, Short-toed Eagles, Levant Sparrowhawks and many more. The extension to the eastern Rodopi Mountains will add Griffon and Egyptian Vultures to our checklist along with some other birds typical for the mountains along the southern Bulgarian border.

The migration along the Via Pontica flyway is a magnificent spectacle, attracting birdwatchers from around the world each year. Be part of it!

Special highlights:

Atanasaovsko Lake is a shallow hyperhaline lake which lies on Via Pontica migratory route and this is the reason why the species variety (with more than 300 species recorded so far) and astonishing numbers of birds attract birdwatchers, photographers and scientists from all over the world especially during migration. This is one of the places in Europe with more frequent observations of Slender-billed Curlew.

Studen kladenets Dam is situated in the Eastern Rodopi Mountains. Highly impressive cliffs along the deep main valley of Arda River and shrubby slopes around predetermine the vicinity as an important area for many species of European and global importance. The site is housing three species of vultures - Griffon, Egyptian and Black Vulture and many other raptors and small passerines.

Sakar Mountains are located between the valleys of the Maritsa and the Toundzha Rivers in South-Eastern Bulgaria and are mostly characterised by its low hilly relief (highest peak is Vishegrad – 856 m.a.s.l.). The temperate Mediterranean climate and the combination of uncovered shrubby slopes, checkered by small oak and other broad-leaved woods are appropriate for nesting of many interesting species of birds, Imperial Eagle among them.

Madzharovo is a small miner's town located in the Eastern Rodopi Mountains. The surrounding area is very typical for this part of the mountain with its vertical volcanic cliffs, following the meandering Arda River. Shrubs and low deciduous trees cover the territory around the settlement. The diversity of birds of prey here is really exceptional! During the breeding season the view of the sky is always quite attractive and very unpredictable.

Cape Kaliakra is situated in North-Eastern Bulgaria and is one of the first preserved areas in the country. It was especially established to protect the habitats of the Monk Seal as well as the maritime ecosystems, holding valuable steppe vegetation and breeding areas of several rare birds. The vertical cliffs (more than 50 m high) of the 2 km long Cape

Kaliakra, combined with the unique limestone surrounding area provide perfect conditions during the breeding season for plenty of species.

Itinerary:

Day 1. Arrive at Bourgas Airport. Overnight accommodation will be provided by the city of Bourgas for two nights.

/dinner/

Day 2. We devote the day to watching the delightful autumn migration of soaring birds using the Via Pontica migratory route from different viewpoints near Burgas (Atanasovsko Lake and Poda lagoon). In addition to the migrants (thousands of White Storks and Honey Buzzards, numerous Montagu's Harriers and also Levant Sparrowhawks, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Black Kites, Red-footed Falcons, Lesser Spotted Eagles and many more) these locations also attract many water-connected species of birds (White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Spoonbills, Caspian Terns, Pygmy Cormorants, Little Egrets, Marsh Sandpipers, Red-necked Phalaropes etc.).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 3. In the morning we head northwards, tracing the Black Sea coast where gatherings of huge flocks of storks, pelicans and birds of prey are expected the whole time. The journey continues to Pomoriisko Lake and Cape Kaliakra, the latter situated amongst the most valuable steppe habitats in Bulgaria (European Shags

(Mediterranean race), Stone-curlews, Alpine Swifts, Calandra and Short-toed Larks, Tawny Pipits, Lesser Grey Shrikes, Pied Wheatears can all be seen here). We spend the night in the town of Balchik (transfer time about 4-5 hrs).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 4. After breakfast we head to Dourankoulak Lake (Little Bittern, Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis, Great Egret, Ferruginous Duck, Stone-curlew, Whiskered Tern, Paddyfield Warbler, Calandra Lark and others) and the wetlands by the town of Shabla (Ferruginous Duck, Caspian Tern, Black-winged Stilt, Curlew Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Bee-eater, Roller, Hoopoe, Lesser Grey Shrike and many more). In the afternoon we head back to Bourgas. We spend the night by Bourgas (total transfer time about 4 hrs).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 5. Eastern European birds of prey await us this morning. We head to the eastern Rodopi Mountains and the town of Madzharovo. Although the breeding season has finished, there is still an opportunity to enjoy various passerines and, of course, many different species of raptors (Black Stork, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Rock and Blue Rock Thrush, Subalpine Warbler, Cirl and Rock Buntings, Red-rumped Swallows, Black-eared Wheatears and Rock Nuthatches). We spend the next two nights by Madzharovo (total transfer time about 3-4 hrs).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 6. An active birdwatching day. In the morning we take a trip to the spectacular area around the Studen Kladenets dam and explore the vicinity of Potochnitsa village. There we will

take a stroll to numerous vantage points, including the "vultures' restaurant" (Egyptian, Griffon and Black Vultures, Long-legged and Honey Buzzards, Short-toed Eagle, Eastern Bonelli's Warblers, Red-rumped Swallows, Blue Rock Thrushes, Black-eared Wheatears, Rock Nuthatches may all be seen here). In the afternoon we will take a short trip along the Krumovitsa River. Here we will continue watching and listening to passerines advertising their appearance in the undulating countryside (Stone-curlew, Olivaceous Warblers, Masked, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes etc.) (total transfer time about 3-4 hrs).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 7. In the morning we depart from the eastern Rodopi on a contrariwise journey back to Bourgas. The route will comprise more interesting habitats in the Sakar Mountains (viewing should include the Lesser Spotted, Short-toed, Eastern Imperial and Booted Eagles, Isabelline Wheatear, Woodchat, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes and others). In the afternoon we will again take time to watch the abundant migration along the Black Sea coast (total transfer time about 3-4 hrs).

/breakfast, dinner/

Day 8. Transfer to the airport for departure.

/breakfast/

Best period: August – September

Tour type: GT/IG

Weather:

Temperatures expected for this period are between +15 and +30°C. Rainfalls or short but heavy showers are possible, being a bit prolonged during spring and late autumn.

Difficulty grade:

No special physical condition required. 2-4 km per day walking along dirty roads and flat paths.

Accommodation:

We stay overnight in 3-star hotels (and in a guesthouse on days 5 and 6) with en-suite facilities on HB (breakfast and dinner included). Ordering lunchpacks is also possible.

Equipment and clothing:

Luggage transportation is taken care throughout the whole journey. However a small rucksack with personal things is quite useful during the daily trips. For full list of recommended items see "General".

Vaccination:

Tick-borne encephalitis, Marseille fever and Crimea haemorrhagic fever is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Check latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure.

Group size: Min. 2 persons

The price includes: accommodation and boarding as mentioned above; transfer to/from Bourgas Airport; English-speaking guide; luggage and private transfers as mentioned above; entrance fees for Poda lagoon and Cape Kaliakra; VAT and all local taxes.

The price does not include: flights, maps (could be requested in advance when booking the tour), tips, alcohol drinks, lunches/lunchpacks, other entrance fees, cigarettes and other personal expenses.

GENERAL

TOUR TYPES

We provide different varieties of tours as regards to their types! Whether you will choose individual and group tours with a guide or combined tours with a guide for some part of the trip depends on you. We emphasize on using local experienced guides with knowledge of the local language, culture, history, art, etc. The tours are conducted in the English language. Guides in other languages are available upon request.

GT: Group tours

There is a guide accompanying you throughout the whole trip, meeting you at the airport upon arrival and leaving you at the airport again for departure. We use well-trained and experienced local people with good knowledge of English. The group size is normally 6-12 people, if not specially mentioned.

IG: International group tours

The tours are similar to our group tours. The only difference is that these are multi-national. Guided services are in the English language, if no special arrangements have been ordered.

Extensions: Yes, Black Sea

This is a unique proposal, which gives you the opportunity to stay in Bulgaria for one week more at the incredibly low price! We can offer a great variety of means of accommodation - from home stays (no meals) to 2, 3 and 4-star hotels (BB or HB) on the Southern Bulgarian Black Sea Coast:

- Sunny Beach - a big modern resort with hundreds of hotels, cafes, pubs, casinos, water-sports facilities etc.
- Nessebar, Sozopol - small towns (founded by the ancient Greeks) with picturesque Old Quarters and a specific atmosphere.
- Lozenets - a peaceful small village with a beautiful beach. Only 4-5 km from the forests of the Strandzha Mountains where you can go walking, biking or riding horses.

Equipment and clothing:

You should always remember that you must try to keep the weight of your clothing equipment down to a minimum. Your packed rucksack should weigh no more than 10-15 kilograms.

Recommended items: waterproof rucksack (60 l) & daypack (35 l); walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; sandals; light casual shoes for walking and/or for travelling; gaiters; loose, casual trousers for trekking; waterproof trousers; fleece windstopper jacket; windproof, waterproof outer shell garment (breathable if possible!); hat for sun protection; sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion and lip balm; water bottle; torch (headlamp); mobile phone; underwear (not cotton); mosquito repellent; trekking sticks.

Vaccination:

Tick-borne encephalitis, Marseille fever and Crimea haemorrhagic fever is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Check latest requirements

with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure.

Money and personal expenses

You will need some extra money to cover meals, drinks and extra trips not included in the tour price. Additional money for souvenirs and personal things could also be spent. That is why it is always necessary to have Bulgarian money in cash.

The payments in Bulgaria are usually made in "LEV" (BGN), which is the official currency. The exchange rate with EU and USD is quite changing sometimes, but approximately it is: BGN:EU - 2:1; BGN:USD - 1,7-1. Credit Cards could be used primarily in some supermarkets and restaurants in the biggest cities as well as in the petrol stations. Usually it is marked on their front doors if Credit Cards are accepted. ATMs ("bankomates") are more frequent (again in the biggest towns only!). Traveler's cheques take quite a lot of time to handle and not each bank deals with them (in many cases it takes even few days since their deposition in the bank!) - thus they are not recommended!

Here are some examples of comparative costs in Bulgaria (NB: prices in mid-range restaurants!):

- Coffee - 0,3 Euro
- Tea - 0,3 Euro
- Beer (0,5 l) - 0,5-1 Euro
- Soft drink (0,5 l) - 0,4-0,5 Euro
- Bottle of water (0,5 l) - 0,3-0,4 Euro
- Bottle of mark red wine (0,75 l) - 5-10 Euro
- Three-course lunch - 4-7 Euro
- Lunch pack - 2-3 Euro

Cell phone coverage

Currently the whole territory of Bulgaria is covered with a mobile connection. However the trekking & cycling tours are done in mountainous areas where the signal could be weak or even lacking from time to time. In such a situation you just need to change your location a bit in order to find available network.

Population - 7 538 000 (2003) (83,9 % ethnic Bulgarians; 9,4% Turks; 4,7% Roma; rest - smaller minorities Russians, Armenians, Vlachs, Jews, Karakachans etc.)

Religion - 82,6% Orthodox, 12,2% Islam, 0,7% Protestant, 0,5% Catholics, 4,1% Others.

Capital city - Sofia (1 377 531 people in 2006)

Bigest towns - Plovdiv, Varna, Bourgas, Rouse, Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven

Mountains - 37 (biggest - Balkan Mountain: length - ~ 550 km.; width - ~ 30-60 km.); (highest - Rila Mountain - peak Musala - 2 925 m.a.s.l.)

Boundaries - North - Romania; East - Black Sea (coastline 378 km.); West - Serbia, Macedonia; South - Greece, Turkey;

Distribution of the lands - 0 - 400 m.a.s.l. - 59,8 %; 400 - 1000 m.a.s.l. - 27,6 %; 1000 - 2000 m.a.s.l. - 11,9 %; over 2000 m.a.s.l. - 0,7 %

Protected areas - 3 national parks, 10 nature parks, 55 reserves, 35 managed reserves, over 350 protected areas and 500 natural monuments

Weather

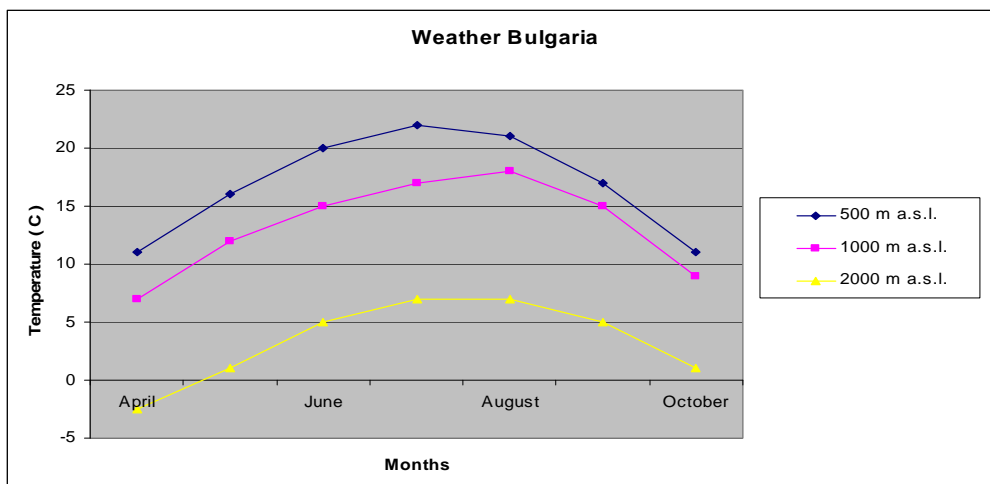
Mean year temperature - + 10,5 °C (Abs. Min. - -38,3 °C ; Abs. Max. - + 45,2 °C)

Mean rainfall per year - 416 - 650 mm. in the lowlands; 650 - 1193 mm. in the highlands

Rainy days per month - May - 7; June - 8; July - 6; August - 3; September - 6; (number may be higher in the mountains)

Mean daily/night temperatures (up to 1000 m a.s.l.) - May - 22/12 °C; June - 26/16 °C; July - 28/17 °C; August - 26/15 °C; September - 23/13 °C;

Altitudinal distribution of annual temperatures in Bulgaria



Electricity

In Bulgaria two-pin sockets are normal. Voltage is 220 watts. If you come from the U.S. or UK you need to purchase an adapter, which is available only in Bulgarian cities and biggest winter and sea resorts.

Brief about Bulgaria

Territory - 110 912 sq. km.