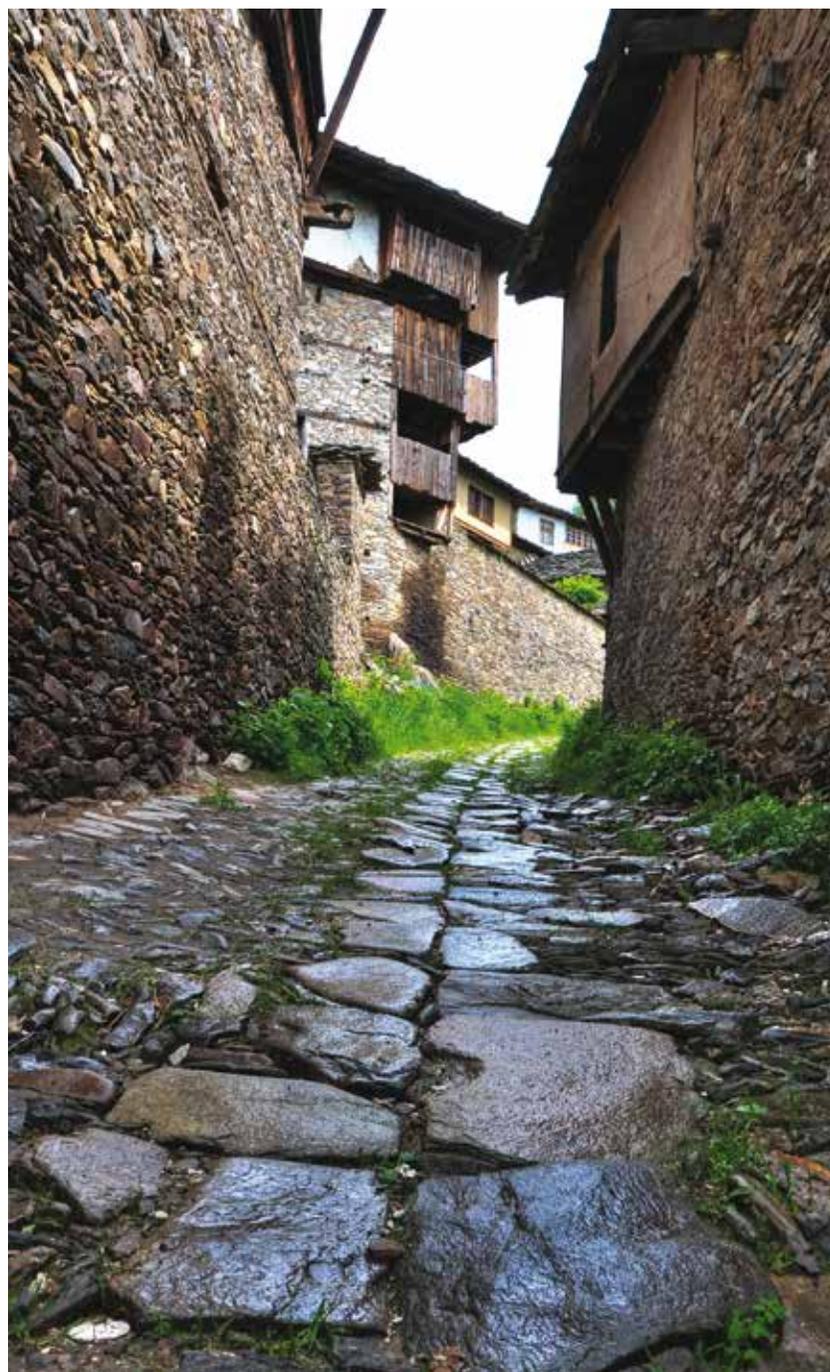
A scenic view of a wooden walkway built along a stone wall next to a river in a lush green valley. The walkway is made of wooden planks and has a rustic wooden railing. The stone wall is made of large, irregular stones. The river is calm and reflects the surrounding greenery. The sky is blue and clear.

 VILLAGES • LOCAL FOODS • SIGHTSEEINGS

SLOW TOURISM

IN BULGARIA



SLOW TOURISM IN BULGARIA

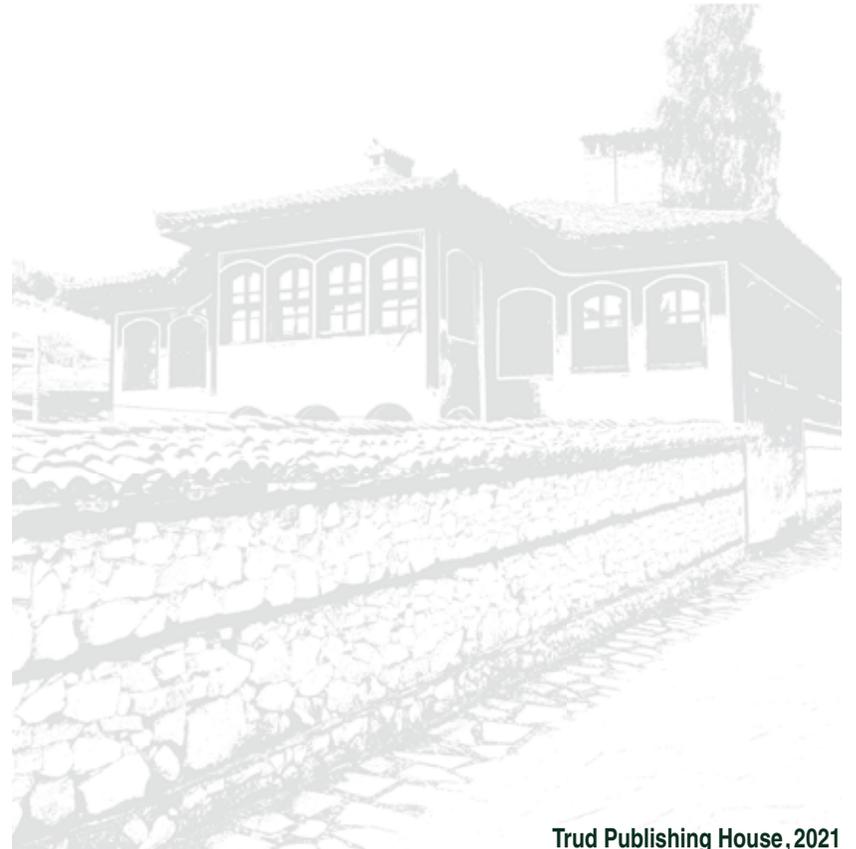


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Carpe diem*

Slow down, just slow down, take it slow and take it easy.

These are lyrics from a popular Bulgarian song, performed by Stephan Valdobrev, which has become like a fresh anthem for several generations of Bulgarians in the very year it was released.

The speedy tracks of life have taken away the joy of it. The fast forward life style has become an issue not just in our daily routine but has taken the pleasure from our vacations. Short holidays turn into constant race with reaching WOW points and a crazy online selfie contest.

However, over the past decade or so, a more relaxed tendency towards vacationing has emerged, more fulfilling and bringing more enjoyment as part of the so called „slow tourism“. It is not just a catchy new term devised to rival standard ideas of vacation for example „all inclusive“ or „5 countries in 5 days“, but one that offers an enjoyable, stress free alternative to the mass and over organised tourism of today.

Alternative, recreational, rural, eco or green tourism are other tags attributed to the „slow tourism“ phenomenon. However it's phrased, the main purpose remains the same, to find the most enjoyable ways to slow down, kick back and for a few carefree days leave the stresses of our everyday lives behind. Where we can jump off the beaten track into unspoilt countryside, sample home cooked foods, where birdsong replaces car horns, the rumble of trains by the mooing of cows and the fragrance of flowers not the stench of city streets fills our nostrils.

This all began back in 1986 where protests in Rome against the influx of fast food chains led to master chefs proposing „slow eating“ not fast food, as a virtue inseparable from being part of a higher quality of life. This later led to the Italians expanding this concept to „slow cities“.

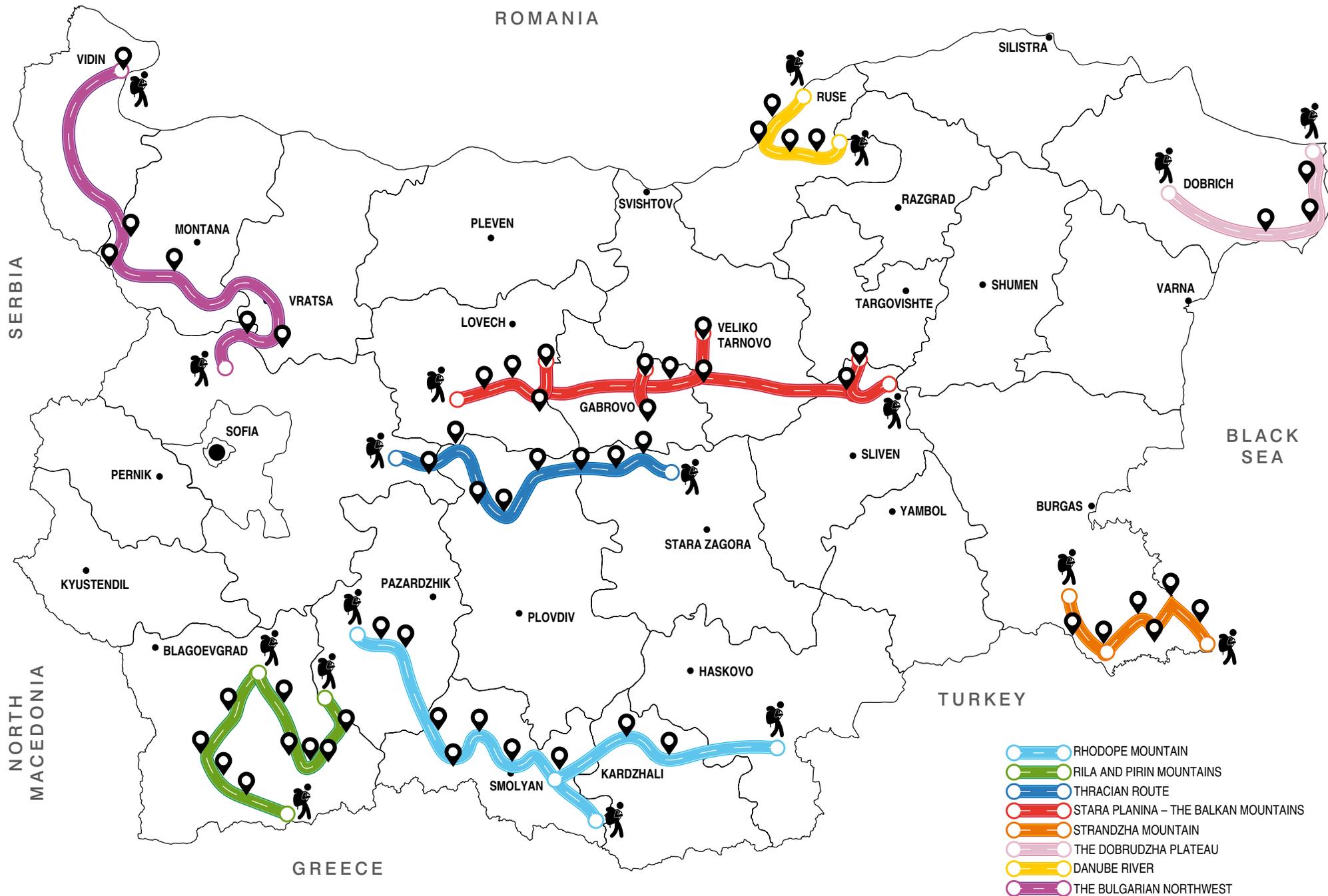
The connection between the development of „slow tourism“ and eating well is undeniable. Don't rush your meal, enjoy and savour the taste of fresh, locally sourced quality meat, vegetables, fruit and wines. All prepared by chefs and cooks who bring the very best of the produce to your table.

Bulgaria is a fantastic choice for any traveller who wants to experience a friendly, unspoilt, historic, charming country, where the friendliness of the people is matched only by the beauty of it's natural scenery and which will have you yearning to revisit.

The seven routes that have been selected in this booklet are just the beginning, an appetizer for the main course of your experience to having a „slow time“, healthy, happy, friendly, carefree unforgettable visit to Bulgaria.

Do things at your own pace, and heed the lyrics from the song „Look around, listen, talk to others, feel the silence, dance, wait a while and above all else relish the moment.“

* Seize the day (lat.).



- RHODOPE MOUNTAIN
- RILA AND PIRIN MOUNTAINS
- THRACIAN ROUTE
- STARA PLANINA - THE BALKAN MOUNTAINS
- STRANDZHA MOUNTAIN
- THE DOBRUDZHA PLATEAU
- DANUBE RIVER
- THE BULGARIAN NORTHWEST

RHODOPE MOUNTAIN

The meander of Arda River by Rusalsko Village

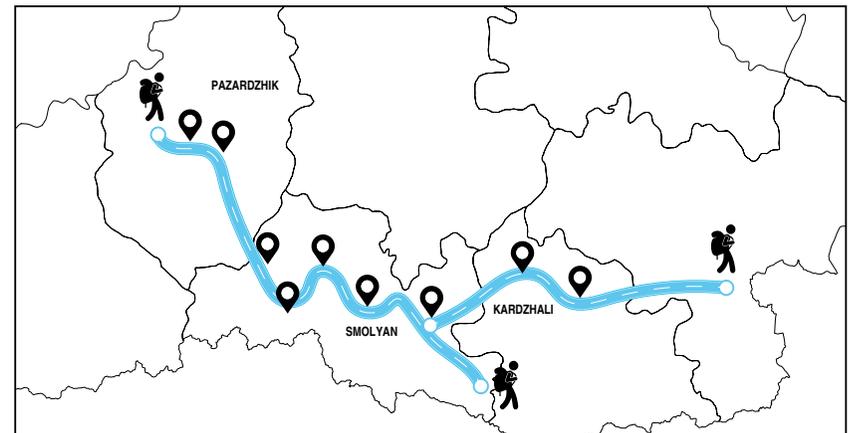


Kardzhali Dam

Stunning views around the Rhodope dams

The Rhodope dams Dospat, Vacha, Golyam Beglik, Shiroka Polyana, Batak, Kardzhali might of use for the lives of people but driving, dining, walking, cycling or just standing by them is unforgettable experience of stunning views, combining all living components in one – the crystal fresh air, the clouds reflection into the bright blue water, the protective shapes of mountains all around and tranquility that gives enough space to clear your soul, mediate or just feel great of being alive. What is amazing about those dams is that they all lie low below the road and you can easily have a panoramic view all around. It would be a good idea to make a road plan and visit all of them, take time to observe the best views and witness the sunset. All around these picturesque dams, guests can rely on the great local hospitality. It is believed that Rhodope Mountain has a soul and it lives in the heart of each Rhodope resident. No doubt, you can taste fantastic local cuisine, rent a boat, go fishing by yourself or with a local, take a long bike ride or nice strolls, enjoy the views with each stride – looking over to the dams or take an eco-path deep into the mountain.

Dospat is a town in the very heart of Rhodope Mountain – about 200 kilometers from Sofia. The locals believe to be blessed by the remarkable natural beauty all around them. Having all at one place water in abundance, centuries old coniferous forests and a little island almost in the middle of the water makes the fairytale view. The local climate is somewhat peculiar – due to the truncated mountain relief, spring comes late, the summer is cool and the autumn is warm,





Dospat Dam



Vacha Dam

golden and breathtakingly gorgeous and the winter is mild. If you visit it in the summer, you can enjoy not just the views, but eat fresh trout from **Dospat Dam**. The entire dam is a blessing for everyone, fond of fishing, water sports or just rowing on a sunny day.

On the other side of the same dam is the village of Surnitsa. Just ten minutes away from the village, in the Orfino area, you can find hotels and guest houses, overlooking the dam, surrounded by greenery of forests and wide meadows. The air is crisply clear as it is all round Rhodope Mountain.

The next dam in line is **Golyam Beglik**. This is one more place where you can have an unspoiled and unforgettable peaceful vacation. In the area, called Chatuma, a small village with houses for rent. It is a great place for travelers, who are on their way of discovery of memorable moments of tranquility and beauty. You won't find this place on a global reservation platform, there is no all-inclusive, television or spa treatment. There you find yourself in the embrace of a heartwarming nature, which you can explore on your feet or rent a kayak.

Very near is the **Shiroka Polyana Dam**, which is officially on the top of the list of the most attractive ones. Well, if you dare to tour all of them in Rhodope, in the end you would be surely uncertain which one to point out.

Shiroka Polyana is surrounded by tall, old, shadowy pine forests, crystal clear air and views that resemble an illustration from a fairytale. The shore line is twisting around and from a top position, it looks like there are many little dams. The little bays provide privacy. In the hot months many people choose to open a tent there and feel the freedom of being under the stars and on the warm summer earth. But if you are not the tent kind of person, you can always rent any of the small chalets on the east coast.

Varcha Dam is one more breathtaking area with unforgettable views. It is surrounded on all sides by mountains and hills and by the banks one can find many places to stay at – small hotels and guest houses, hidden in the lush greenery of the area. This is a charming small oasis of tranquility, just an hour and a half away from the capital Sofia. It is ideal for an entire family to rest there as well as a romantic getaway. Naturally, this is a perfect place for fishing. Part of the local charm are the pontoon houses, some of which could also be rented. Almost like the Caribbean but...better.

Batak Dam is not among the largest in Bulgaria but it also qualifies for exceptional attractiveness. It is located in the Western Rhodope, near the city of Pazarchzhik. It offers great conditions for camping, relaxation, fishing and a variety of water sports – water ski, rowing and motor boats or high speed water jets. On the western banks of the dam is located the famous resort Cigov Chark. In this area of the dam lies a charming little island, more like a sticking piece of land with trees, which brings extra colour and romantic sense. Many little hotels and guest houses offer excellent conditions for shorter or longer vacations, overlooking the small island. Most of the road by the dam is leveled and it is a great opportunity to take a bike and drive all around it – it is about 25 kilometers and about one third of it is on an off road trail. The good news is that along the way, there are plenty of charming little restaurants where you can stop and regain your power by having something tasty and typically local.

Just 12 kilometers from Batak Dam is situated the **Bulgarian Spa Capital Velingrad**, popular with its nearly 80 mineral springs, excellent hotels, offering the best spa treatment anyone can dream of and due to the mild climate, it is always the right season to visit it. The Kleptuza Lake, situated in the city is among the most preferred places for relaxation. It is being filled by the largest karstic spring in Bulgaria, with the same name. It is one of the natural wonders – all year round, its temperature is always 8 degrees Celsius.

Next to Velingrad is the charming town of Rakitovo, known with its clock tower that has been working for over 150 years. It was built in 1872 and still measures time as it passes us by. Take some time, have something to eat or drink there and just imagine what a world would be around in another 150 years with this clock tower, still in service.

The meandering streams of Arda River are among the wonders of the Eastern Rhodope Mountain

The Rhodope Sea – this is how people call **Kardzhali Dam**. Situated along the Arda River, the dam offers endless opportunities for relaxation and fun activities

The clock tower, Rakito Village

Kleptuza Lake, city of Velingrad



in the water and by the shore – from sitting quietly, having a drink and reading a book to cycling, fishing, water skiing, rowing, driving a water jet and so on. In **Glavatartsi Village** you can find many hotels and guest houses.

If you would be tempted to discover the wild beauty of Rhodope Mountain, you should definitely take time and discover the playful shapes of the meandering streams of Arda River, as some of the most attractive ones are in Kardzhali Dam. Ask the locals for „The turn“ and they will tell you which road to follow into the mountain so you go to a breathtaking location where you can spend a day, just by looking at the changing water and sky colours. A few villages are situated along the gorgeous view: **Star Chitak, Rusalsko and Liybino**.

The meandering streams continue in the area of **Madzharovo Town** – a mining little place, close to the Turkish border. In the summer it is a favourite place for canoeing, kayaking and other water activities.

Over Madzharovo you will see a wall of magnificent rocks, called Kovan Kaya by the locals. It is one of the last habitats in all of Europe of the griffon vulture and the endangered Egyptian vulture. This is a wild and rather impressive area. With a car, you can visit the neighbouring village of Borislavtsi. The road leading to it is among the most picturesque in Bulgaria. Cars are driving on the edge of a narrow and deep cliff, surrounded by mountain ridges and on the bottom is the curving Arda River.

Western Rhodope Mountain – beautiful nature and relaxing time

The Western Rhodope Mountain is famous for the charming, exquisite, tranquil and authentic villages where anyone can take refuge from the daily noise of the big city, breathe the fresh air, fill his eyes with the unspoiled natural beauty and feel the romance of the old, peaceful way of life.

The great meander of Arda River, next to Madzharovo Village



The big bend in Kardzhali Dam, by the village of Star (Old) Chitak



The ethnographic village of Zlatograd



Zlatograd is a small town, which is close to the Greek border. It is very attractive with its well preserved authentic old houses, which are so charming that walking there feels like traveling back in time. The little shops offer not just local craft for sale but guests are invited to take a class and produce something themselves or be part of a souvenir production. Every owner of such a shop is

a story telling machine who would share with you anything you might be interested in – from their craft to the life story of the white cat, sitting by the fireplace on a cold winter day. You can visit originally conserved local houses and get acquainted with the first social media project: on the second floor of the typical homes, there is a little area, enough for three or four small stools, which is like a tiny balcony, but covered with glass on all sides. There the local women would sit, look down on the street and gossip about anyone passing by. So it was called The Gossiper. In the workshops, you can see the production of weaving, leather, knife craft, gold, copper, wood carving, pottery, etc.

The Gem in the Crown is the village of **Kovachevitsa** – by all means the most picturesque of all villages in Western Rhodope Mountain. Although, being fair, we would also call it One of the Gems as it would be a pity to miss the other villages that shape the magic of the region.

Kovachevitsa is located near the town of Gotse Delchev, where the river Mesta divides the Rhodope Mountains and the majestic Pirin Mountain. The village has been acknowledged as an architectural and historical reserve because of its unique stone and wooden houses, some of which are over 200 years old. They have been built on several floors, with wide verandas and covered with stone slabs, instead of tiles. The streets of the village are narrow and steep, covered with cobblestones. The unique architecture of Kovachevitsa has inspired generations of film directors, photographers and poets. The village has been a setting for over twenty movies.

The village of Leshten is very close to Kovachevitsa Village and from an architectural point of view, they look quite the same. Leshten has been acknowledged as an architectural reserve as most of the houses are authentic, dating back to the XVIII century and were built in the typical Rhodope style – with plastered facades, wooden ceiling, thick high stone walls and roofs with stone slab roofs. However, Leshten has one little charming advantage over Kovachevitsa: from the windows of the local houses people enjoy the stunning views of the snowy

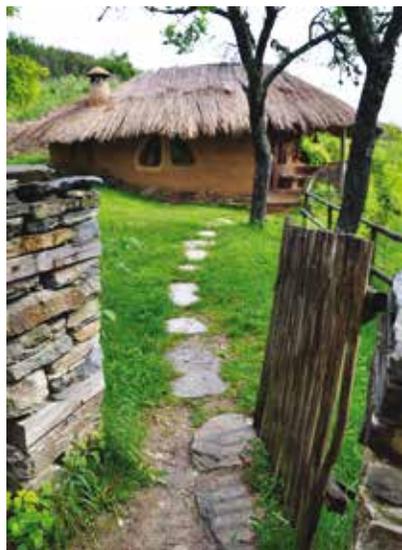


Kovachevitsa Village

peaks of Pirin Mountain. Several new eco-homes in the village have been made of straw, adobe, wood and other natural materials and among them the most famous one is the Clay House, also known as the Flintstone Family Home. Actually, all old houses in the village have been built as eco, centuries before the new construction fashion.

Nearby is located the **village of Ognyanovo**, which is also a popular destination with its mineral pools as the water comes directly from the springs in the mountain. This village offers a significantly larger hotel selection as it is not an architectural reserve.

In the same area of the Western Rhodope is located the **village of Dolen**, which is one more authentic place with a well-preserved natural atmosphere. It also has the statute of an architectural reserve and many of its houses are also called cultural monuments. The houses have been built with typical white facades, impressive stone walls, charming narrow windows, overlooking the streets and with roofs covered with stone slabs. Some of these authentic homes have been converted into family hotels. The village is an excellent setting for romantic photos – why else would the cinematographers have chosen it many times for a movie set.



The Flintstone Home in the village of Leshten

In the village of Leshten



In the footsteps of the mythical Orpheus

The village of Kosovo is a charming little place in the Rhodope Mountain, located just 45 kilometers from the city of Plovdiv, following the exit to Smolyan. The village is attractive with its peaceful and tranquil character and beautiful architecture. Several neighborhoods are scattered on the hills, all built in the typical local style and spread along the cobbled streets. Seldom can you visit a place in our overpopulated world with only eight permanent residents. However, in the summer, people who are fond of natural beauty, natural food and natural relaxation, fill the village. **Momchilovtsi** is a village located near an area, called Rozhen. It entices visitors with its crystal fresh air, beautiful surroundings and nature and with the opportunity to enjoy true relaxation high in the mountains. This is also the most populated village in the mountain, with nearly 1300 inhabitants. Family hotels and guest houses are open at any time of year but it is a good idea to visit it specifically in the winter as the Kartala Sports Center, which offers skiing and snowboarding is just nearby. The famous ski resort of Pamporovo is just half an hour away by car drive.

Shiroka Laka is among the villages that will enchant you and make you love the Rhodope Mountain for eternity. Being in Shiroka Laka is not like travelling in time – there time seems to have stopped and there you can leave all heavy thoughts far behind like they have never existed. The peaceful calmness of the local people who never have to hurry, the tranquility that surrounds homes and streets, the gentle breeze and the lovely voices of birds turn into the best meditation one can possibly experience. Give yourself the pleasure of free wandering on the narrow cobbled streets and look around the beautiful homes, built around the XVIII century in the typical local style – two-storey, with bay windows and in internal wooden staircase. Most rooms are quite big in size, with a typical wooden seating area by the windows, covered with traditional rugs with many colourful handmade pillows. Dozens of eco-trails begin from Shiroka Laka and lead to the neighbouring villages of Gela, Stikl, Solishta and Stoykite.

Momchilovtsi Village



Kosovo Village

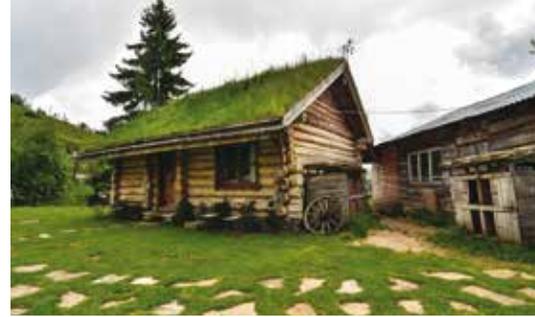


The village of Gela is another picturesque place in Rhodope Mountains, located at nearly 1500 meters above sea level. It is believed that the village is among the three most naturally energized places of Bulgaria, along with the village of Rupite and the area of Krastova Gora. According to locals, the fresh mountain air combined with the breeze, coming from the Aegean Sea brings negative ions, which makes the entire area an excellent choice for people with lung issues. Gela is also among the sunniest places in Europe with over 280 bright days a year. The village became famous in the UK in 2004, when the local choir of elderly women, performing folklore music, refused to let British tourists in. The case had to do with the refusal of the British Consulate in Sofia to issue visas to the old singers to attend a folklore festival in the UK. So the grannies stood at the threshold of the village and sang to the group from the UK but did not let them in. The entire group of UK visitors went straight back to the embassy in Sofia and demanded that the talented old women were given visas. Ever since, English tourists are of different statute when visiting. The village is surrounded by lush meadows and forests where you can find wild fruits and feel the soul melting aroma of herbs. Walking around, you can enjoy the captivating views of the surrounding peaks Golyam Perelik, Orpheus, Snezhanka (which means Snow White) and Turlata. About a dozen eco-trails begin straight from the village.

Solishta is a village at the foot of Perelik Peak. It is somewhat excluded from the big streams of people in the near villages of Shiroka Laka and Gela, although the conditions remain the same – tranquility, fresh air, virgin forests, wide greenery with pastures and meadows and the cheerful bells of the freely grazing herds. Anyone can just pick a direction and walk freely. There are several family hotels and guest houses in the village. In the morning you can still cuddle in your cozy bed, listen to the crowing of roosters and the hen's chuckle and then have breakfast with delicious Rhodope katmi, prepared by your hospitable and friendly hosts. At night you can sit outside and count the stars, accompanied by a large crickets orchestra.

Trigrad is a beautiful Rhodopean village, located almost on the border with Greece. The place is associated with the myth of the Thracian hero and singer Orpheus, who descended in the realm of the dead in search for his beloved Eurydice. According to local beliefs, Orpheus reached the underground possessions of Hades through a nearby cave, called The Devil's Throat. Therefore, every year in Trigrad is held the festival Orphic Mysteries, which combines ancient pagan rituals with mummary processions of Rhodope songs.

The road to the village passes in front of the **Trigrad Gorge** – a majestic 7-kilometer gorge, which the Trigrad River has carved for millions of years in the marble rocks. Taking a trip by the gorge is one of the memorable experiences that will leave you breathless. As you are driving up the road, you will first



Gela Village



The Trigrad Gorge

pass by scenes like taken from a pastoral artist – green fields, flowering trees, plowed fields, wide meadows and freely grazing herds.

If you feel tempted to taste the real local cuisine, you can't miss **Smilyan**. To every Bulgarian, the name of the village always goes with the word Bob, meaning beans. It sounds like Smilyanski Bob. The bean grains are large and almost perfect in shape and this bean is the main livelihood of the locals. But having delicious bean specialties is not the only reason to visit Smilyan. The village is well known for its beautiful views, the traditional local hospitality and the fresh air. Among the local landmarks is an old tower, built by Turks as an observatory but after the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman dominance in 1878, it was converted into a clock tower.

The Rhodope cuisine is divine



Tasty, rich in flavours and products, food is a trade mark of Rhodope Mountain. The Rhodope Cherverme is a divine experience – it is a whole lamb, roasted slowly, so slowly, being rotated about two feet away from the fire, that in the end the meat is melting. It is no food – it is a sensation.

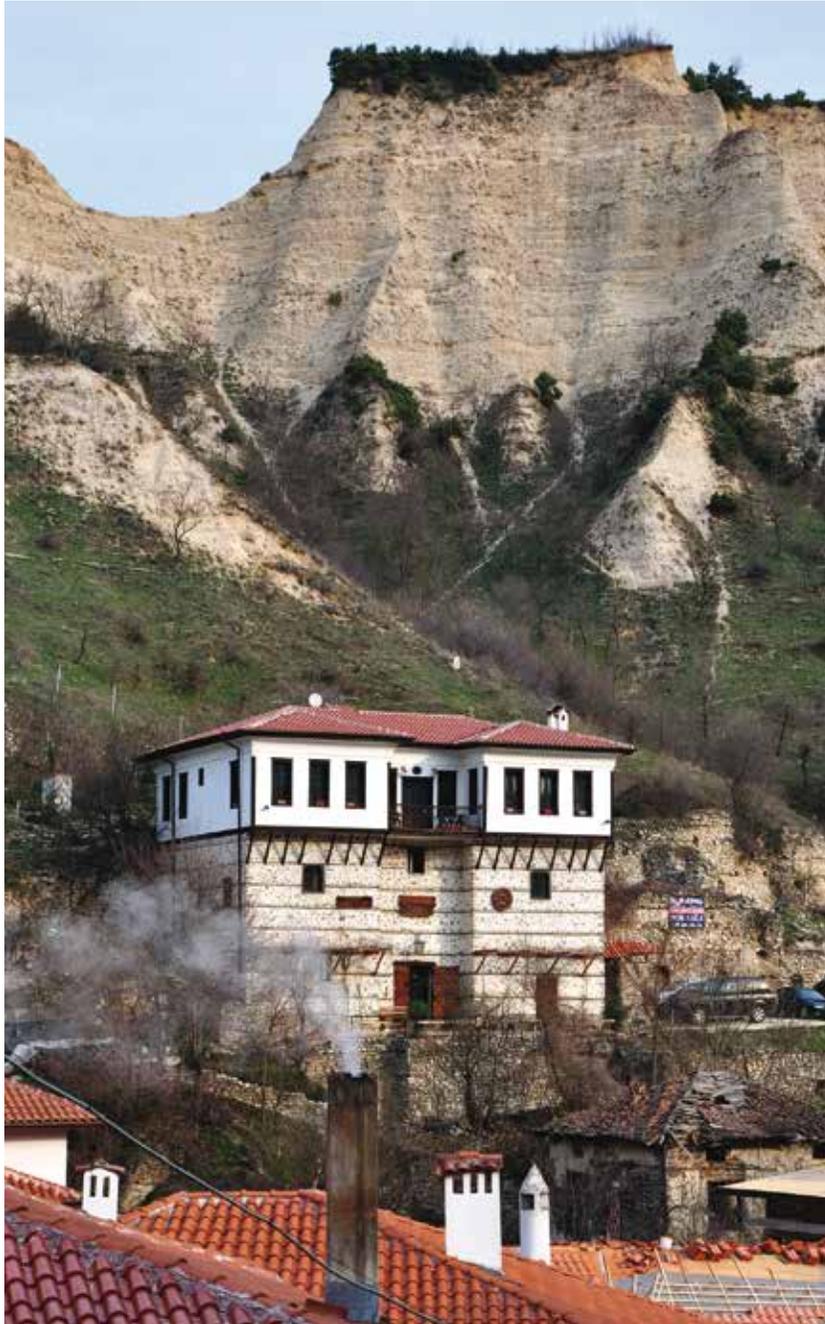
Another typical meal is the so-called Rhodope Patatnik. It is so traditional, that there is no home in the area, where people would not have it but the recipe is somewhat variable. It consists of mashed potatoes and what is it in there, you should read on the menu or just ask your hosts. Polenta with cheese, Katmi, Klin are also typical for the region, so they are worth trying. The Smilyan Beans is one of the Rhodope prides. If you ask the local people, there is no tastier bean so you should try a few of its varieties in the local dishes.

Naturally, you can choose among fresh fish – trout, catfish and even sturgeon. The Rhodope Branza is a type of white cheese, typical only for this part of Bulgaria.

RILA AND PIRIN MOUNTAINS



Down the road to Bansko



Melnik

The town of Melnik is a wine destination surrounded by marvelous rock formations

Rila and Pirin are the two highest mountains in Bulgaria. Together with the valleys of the Struma and Mesta rivers, they create an incredibly impressive region where some of the most picturesque Bulgarian villages are located.

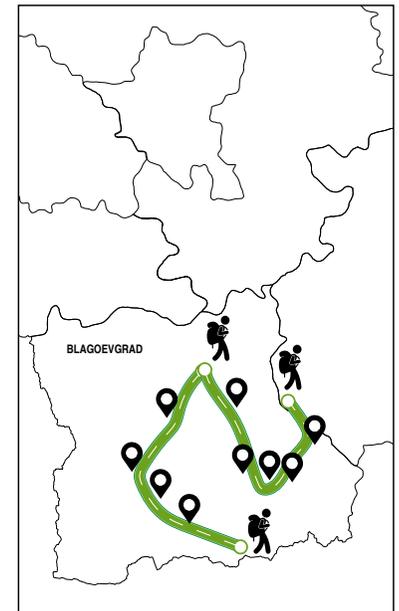
The deeper you go into these mountains, the better you would feel the spirit of the quiet, tranquil old times and become part of traditions that bring the best of the past in a sophisticated and charming way.

Staying in an antique guest house, appreciating the local cuisine based on old-style recipes and feeling blessed by the surrounding beauty are the key factors for an unforgettable slow motion vacation that elevates the soul and widens all smiles.

You can either relax where you are or can go fishing, horseback riding, rafting, collect herbs or pick mushrooms, take long strolls on eco-trails or go climbing. There is an unlimited assortment of activities and leisure opportunities.

The area of **Sandanski** and **Melnik** towns is a great choice for anyone, interested in fun and relaxing holidays amidst beautiful landscapes. The Struma Valley is among the most picturesque places in Bulgaria, which has wide, mildly hilly terrain, wide green meadows, lush and futile vegetation, vineyards, spreading to the horizon. Many private wineries are scattered and wine connoisseurs can choose among wonderful wine tours. The popular villages are **Harsovo, Kromidovo, Kapatovo, Zornitsa, Logodazh**.

The smallest Bulgarian town of **Melnik** with only 300 residents is a fantastic slow vacation destination, located in the outskirts of Pirin Mountain. The charming town combines natural landmarks, rich history, tasty cuisine and outstanding wine. It is particularly beautiful because of its famous sand-rock formations, called mels, resembling giant guards, protecting the town all around. The traditional Melnik houses are remarkable and with the natural surround-





Rozhenski Monastery



The road tunnel between the villages of Lyubovishte and Rozhen



The church in Dobarsko Village



View towards Dobarsko Village

ings, create a feeling of a fairytale town. Most homes were built in the XVIII and XIX century and by that time the village was inhabited by wealthy families, engaged in wine production and tobacco growing. Many of these homes remain intact till present days. By the end of the Ottoman rule over Bulgaria, in the late XIX century, Melnik wine had already become famous all over Europe.

The Melnik taverns, locally called Mehana – a promising word for all Bulgarians, who believe that Mehana cuisine is always so much better than the one from a regular restaurant – attract with their homey old style furniture, natural materials, traditional colours, specific hand painted pottery and authentic atmosphere from the Revival Period of the XVIII and XIX century. Guests are tempted by some of the interesting local dishes and delicacies, which recipes have been preserved for centuries. A key experience one should not miss is tasting Melnik wine.

Once you are completely satisfied with your relaxation, a walk around town, nice meal, you can take an eco-trail and hike to a point with a magnificent view on the town and the rocks around it.

It is a great idea to visit **Rozhen Monastery** – the biggest Christian church in the Pirin Mountain region. There you can see a copy of the Mount Athos Monastery, a miraculous icon of the Holy Mother of God, the Gatekeeper. It will be a rather nice walk from Melnik to the monastery along a picturesque eco-trail. It goes through some of the most attractive places with views on the sandy rocks.

The famous resort Bansko is a gourmet destination

The winter resort **Bansko**, in the very heart of Pirin Mountain, has become famous all over the world, traditionally hosting FIS World Cup competitions in slalom and giant slalom. The elite skiers of the world are always in awe from the outstanding natural beauty and the local hospitality, combined with delicious cuisine.

The winter ski area is easily transformed into a great summer destination for all who love fresh mountain air, downhill biking, hiking uphill and many more activities, organsided in the area.

Bansko Town on the other hand has an impeccable reputation of a gourmet destination all year round. The taverns in the region, including the ones in the towns of **Razlog**, **Dobrinishte** and the surrounding villages, offer hospitality, excellent food and wine, many places to visit and fun attractions.

A remarkable place with an exciting story behind it is the **Dancing Bear Park**, near the town of **Belitsa**. The park, stretched on an area of 30 acres (120 thousand square meters) is a home to twenty brown bears who were once enslaved and forced to dance in front of tourists and thus, earn money for their owners.

The park was created with the great personal and financial support of the famous French movie legend Bridget Bardot. In the first years of the bear's salvation, when bears saw people through the fences of their park, they began dancing even by themselves. But time passed and nowadays all bears are just happy, lazy, relaxed animals who have truly happy retirement from slavery in their natural environment with dense forests and hills, where they can roam free and secluded; meadows where they can stretch under the sun, swimming ponds and artificial dens for animals who would know how to dig their own habitats.

The village of **Dobarsko**, located in the outskirts of Rila Mountain is within close proximity and the houses are built on the hills. From the windows and the terraces of the local homes one can enjoy great views of Pirin Mountain and the Mesta Valley.

The village has become best known for its church with a mural depicting Jesus Christ as an astronaut on board of a space rocket. The church has a statute of national monument.

The village of **Gorno Draglishte** is the right place to taste authentic specialties from the Razlog region. Most products are locally grown and their flavor is second to none. Any food, cooked with such naturally grown ingredients feels like a delicious blessing. You can learn how to prepare the emblematic traditional dishes chumlek, shupla and sui chushchi. Ask your host to tell you more of their specific preparation.

If you are tempted to learn new skills, you can try weaving a loom, to spin a spindle like Snow White or knit a sock with five hooks – this however, is much easier to watch.



Delchevo Village



Visit the Nevrokop Region

The region of Nevrokopsko is situated in the southernmost part of Pirin Mountain, the Western Rhodope Mountain and Mesta River. If you would like to take a refuge from the buzzing world and find tranquility, beauty and feel the coziness of an authentic guest home from the XIX century, your place is called **Delchevo**. It is located between the Pirin peaks, just eight kilometers from the municipal center of Gotse Delchev.

The picturesque village offers unspoiled nature, fresh air, exquisite authentic architecture from XVIII and XIX century and the tranquility of the place, off the beaten track. Most of the homes have been declared cultural monuments. They have been built amphitheatrical on the slopes of the mountain and walking along narrow cobbled streets is part of the relaxation. Several eco-trails begin from the village and lead to wonderful areas, suitable for picnics. The local taverns are excellent choices for the quiet evenings.

Not far from Delchevo is the Holiday Village **Omay**. It is one more excellent choice to escape the big city and all busy forms of life. Omay is spread over 120 acres (500 decares), at the foot of Slavyanka Mountain, near the Greek border.

The unique design of the village with seven houses is into every little detail – from the eco homes to their furniture, sunbeds, barbecue and relaxation area in front of the pool. The fabulous atmosphere is complete with two lakes, forests, meadows and many rocks in all sorts of shapes and formations.

Holiday Village Omay



Holiday Village Omay



Although the houses seem primitive, Omay offers real luxury, surrounded by the quiet silence of unspoiled nature. Anyone can pick himself the products for his next meal, catch a fish, pick mushrooms in the forest and the hosts will cook them for you. Many activities are available and the final result is always related to happiness and recreation.

Nafpovoc delicacy

The regions of Bansko and Razlog are famous with some of the most delicious Bulgarian delicacies.

Although all of Bulgaria is fertile, offering in abundance naturally grown vegetables and fruits, which are extremely tasty; rich of fantastic and healing herbs, traditionally it is the meat, prepared with a pinch of magic that has carried the pride of the local people.

One of these traditional specialties, produced for centuries in the villages of Gorno Draglishte, Dolno Draglishte, Dobarsko, Bachevo and other villages in the Razlog region, is called Nafpavok. It is a raw dried, well-aged meat delicacy, usually prepared in December. It is sort of sausage, stuffed with minced pork and it is pushed so hard, that in the local dialect, the word nafpuva, means stuffing it to a maximum. For the preparation is used only local meat – in a way the masters of the Nafpovoc are personally acquainted with the pig. The meat is seasoned with salt, cumin, homemade savory, mint, oregano, black pepper. The minced meat is stuffed into the pig's intestine or duodenum. Then it has to dry and age under the roof of the house, above the top



floor for at least four months, being naturally ventilated. Then it is buried in ashes and this is what preserves it till the end of summer.

In Bansko and in the region, you can try many other specialties such as **chomlek**, **kapama**, **Banski starec**, **Bansko sausage**, etc. Most of the dishes use slow cooking and are being cooked for hours in clay pots and this is one more reason why the taste is so unforgettably delicious.

THRACIAN ROUTE



Damascena Complex

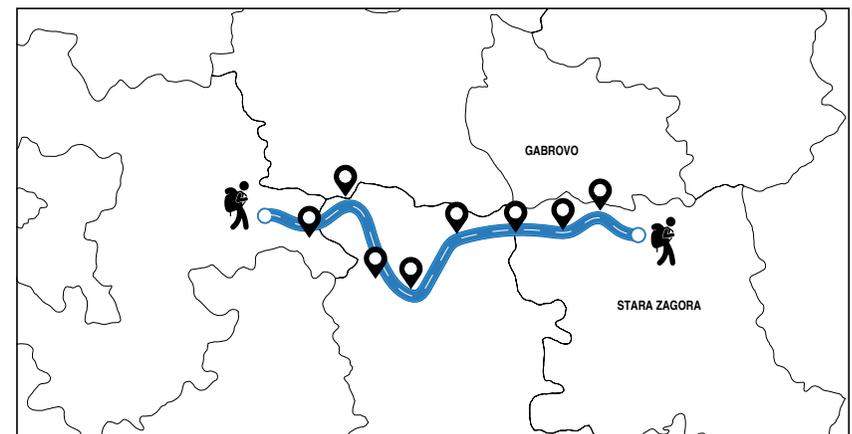
An unforgettable journey through the Upper Thracian Plain and the Valley of Roses

The Upper Thracian Plain is a vast area on the middle reaches of Maritsa River, situated between Sredna Gora Mountain, Rhodope and Sakar Mountains. To the north of Sredna Gora Mountain and to the south of the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina – means Old Mountain and this is how all Bulgarians call it), follows a chain of hollows and valleys, some of which are well known around the world, like the Rose Valley – the area where grows the famous oil-bearing rose – of the Bulgarian symbols. Most of the towns and villages in the valley are connected to the Sub-Balkan Road – the longest in Bulgaria. Its 508 kilometers begins at Gyeshevo Border with the Republic of Northern Macedonia, goes all the way to the capital Sofia and then to the biggest Black Sea city, south of the Balkan Mountain, Burgas.

Taking this route and discovering what lies on its path qualifies for a great adventure in slow motion and will lead to many sweet and unforgettable moments.

You can visit one little town after another – all filled with evidence of exciting history and authentic remains and the local people will welcome you with their traditional hospitality.

Chavdar Village was named after one of the most popular 19-th century local warriors, leader of a rebellion group against the Ottoman rule. Nowadays the village is tranquil and charming, situated on the banks of Topolnitsa River. It is in the outskirts of Sredna Gora Mountain and offers fresh and clean air,





Lush green meadows near Chavdar Village



Neolithic homes near Chavdar Village

modern infrastructure, wonderful renovated park, playgrounds, sport grounds and additional extras that make local people really proud of their village.

The Topolnitsa Archeological Park has on display five reconstructed early Neolithic homes and nearby it is worth visiting the beautiful church from where the entire village is on display, with the hills of the Balkan Mountain in the background.

Taking a slow stroll to top of any of the near hills offers a great range of pastoral, idyllic views, almost like a creation of an impressionist – lush green meadows, blooming trees, white sheep herds.

The town of **Koprivishtica** also lies in the outskirts of Sredna Gora Mountain. It is like a magnet for people, enchanted by history and well preserved authentic places. The town offers more than 380 historical and architectural monuments. Two of the museum-houses belong to some of the most important leaders of the national rebellion against the Ottoman Empire of 1876, called the April Rebellion. The bells of the old cathedral church Assumption of St. Mary declared the beginning of the dramatic rebellion. Nearby everyone can stand on the little stone bridge where the first rifle sounded on April 20, 1876.

The town is a fantastic place to visit for a few days. Many of the historical homes have been turned into comfortable guest houses and the hosts who are usually descendants of the old local families will treat you like personal friends. They will be your guide to the tastiest local cuisine and offer you the happiest and richest breakfast you may dream of!

If you would like to take a lot of photos with an authentic atmosphere, if you would like to learn some hand craft, just take your time as this is your place!

Koprivishtitsa



Hisarya



Hisarya is a town of health. In a few more words – it offers over twenty healing mineral springs of naturally heated water. The Romans knew of the natural wealth so they built quite a few baths in the centuries when they lived on our soil, which was then part of the Roman Empire. The remains of the ancient town of Dioclecianopol were the grounds on which Hisarya was built. The town still can use the protection of the defensive fortress town walls, which have survived the weight of many ages incredibly well.

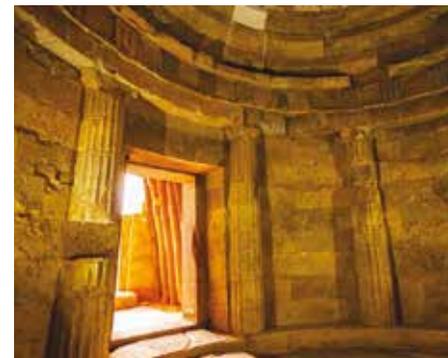
Within a close proximity to Hisarya you can visit **Starosel Village**, known for its Thracian tombs and megaliths, as well as for its excellent wineries and high class guest houses as well as superb restaurants. Spa treatment with wine is popular as well as with other local natural products. Having a few days there will add extra taste and joy to your slow motion relaxation and appreciation for a place, which is equally modern and historically rich.

Nearby is situated the **Chetinyova Tomb** – an open temple, part of a large Thracian cult center from V–VI B.C. The dimensions of the round floor of the temple is 5,3 meters in diameter and the plan of the tomb shows that a rather important and worshiped leader was laid. For the construction of the entire installation were used four thousand large size cut stones and only a mighty leader could afford such investment in his eternal life. Archeologists assume that it was the tomb of the Thracian ruler Sitalk.

On your way to Starosel you will pass the Staro Zhelezare Village, which has become world famous for its graffiti. All houses have been transformed into an open museum of colours and sense of humour. On the house walls you can see or take a selfie with Donald Trump talking to a cow, Emanuel Macron preparing Bulgarian salami, Angela Merkel, famous actors, local people.

The town of **Sopot** is one more charming stop along the Sub-Balkan Road. It is also the birthplace of one of the greatest Bulgarian writers, called Ivan Vazov (1850–1921). Nowadays his well-preserved home has become a museum. If you are curious about old craft, you should definitely visit the Ethnographic Center Sopotski Esnaf. The word esnaf is of Turkish origin (it does make sense since the Ottoman Empire has ruled these lands for five centuries, till 1878) and means an owner of a private small business. However, even in

The Sitalk tomb in Starosel



Staro Zhelezare – the graffiti village





The house-museum of Ivan Vazov



Kalofer – the birth town of Hristo Botev



The Rose Festival in Kazanlak



Damascena Complex in Skobelevo Village

the old times, Bulgarians were taking too much pride in their financial progress, were called esnafs in the most negative aspect. Sopotski Esnaf though will give you the pleasure to see how in the old days men produced wood craft, knives, ceramics, icons, paintings. For the adventurous visitors and due to its strong winds over the hills, Sopot has also developed as a center of flying activities.

Karlovo Town is next along the road and it is known as the birthplace of the greatest and most known Bulgarian rebellion against the Ottoman Rule, Vasil Levski. His real name was Vasil Kunchev but the name Levski comes from the Bulgarian word luf – lion as he was an incredible athlete known for the risky and long jumps he took even over wide and deep cliffs. Among all national heroes, Vasil Levski is the most worshiped one. Being in the city, one can spare a bit of time just to learn about the achievements and the national value of Levski. It is also worth visiting the architecture complex Old Karlovo. If anyone is willing to feel the thrill of following the steps of Levski and other local brave men, he can take any of the tens of well-organized eco paths through the heart of the Balkan Mountains, which lead to waterfalls and mountain huts.

The town of Kalofer is the birthplace of a handsome, brave and talented man, called Hristo Botev, who gave his life for the liberation of Bulgaria from the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the April Uprising of 1876 (the one that began in Koprivshtica with a rifle fire over a little stone bridge). Botev did not die in Kalofer though as he had crossed the Danube River from Romania. In Kalofer you can visit his home, the Kalofer Monastery for men, as well as the eco-trail, called Byalata Reka or The White River, part of a complex with the same name, which includes bivouac and survival center for children, learning the laws of nature. The Byalata Reka eco trail is among the most beautiful and interesting in all of Bulgaria. A few bridges cross the powerful waters of the Byala river and if you take the trail at the beginning of spring, you will see quite a few waterfalls as well.

For centuries Bulgaria has been a proud leader in the production of rose oil. The typical production for the area gave its name Rose Valley, which includes the Karlovo and Kazanluk valleys.

In **Skobelevo Village** you can discover the secrets of rose production. The village is situated in the outskirts of the Balkan Mountains. The Damascena Complex, named after the most elite sort of oil roses, one can see sophisticated

rose installation and interesting ethnographic exhibition. On display is the most primitive system for rose oil extraction, called Gylpana, used 300 years ago. It only makes sense to end your trip in the **city of Kazanlak** – the very Capital of Roses. The Rose Museum in the city has more than 15 thousand exhibits on display, related to roses and rose oil. Each June, Kazanlak hosts the Rose Festival, which was three days to begin with and since a few years it has become a month long, filled with spectacles, art events, performances, rose picking in the early mornings – everyone who can contribute to the spirit of art in the city, is invited. The culmination has always been choosing Rose Queen and the big parade, which gathers thousands of spectators.

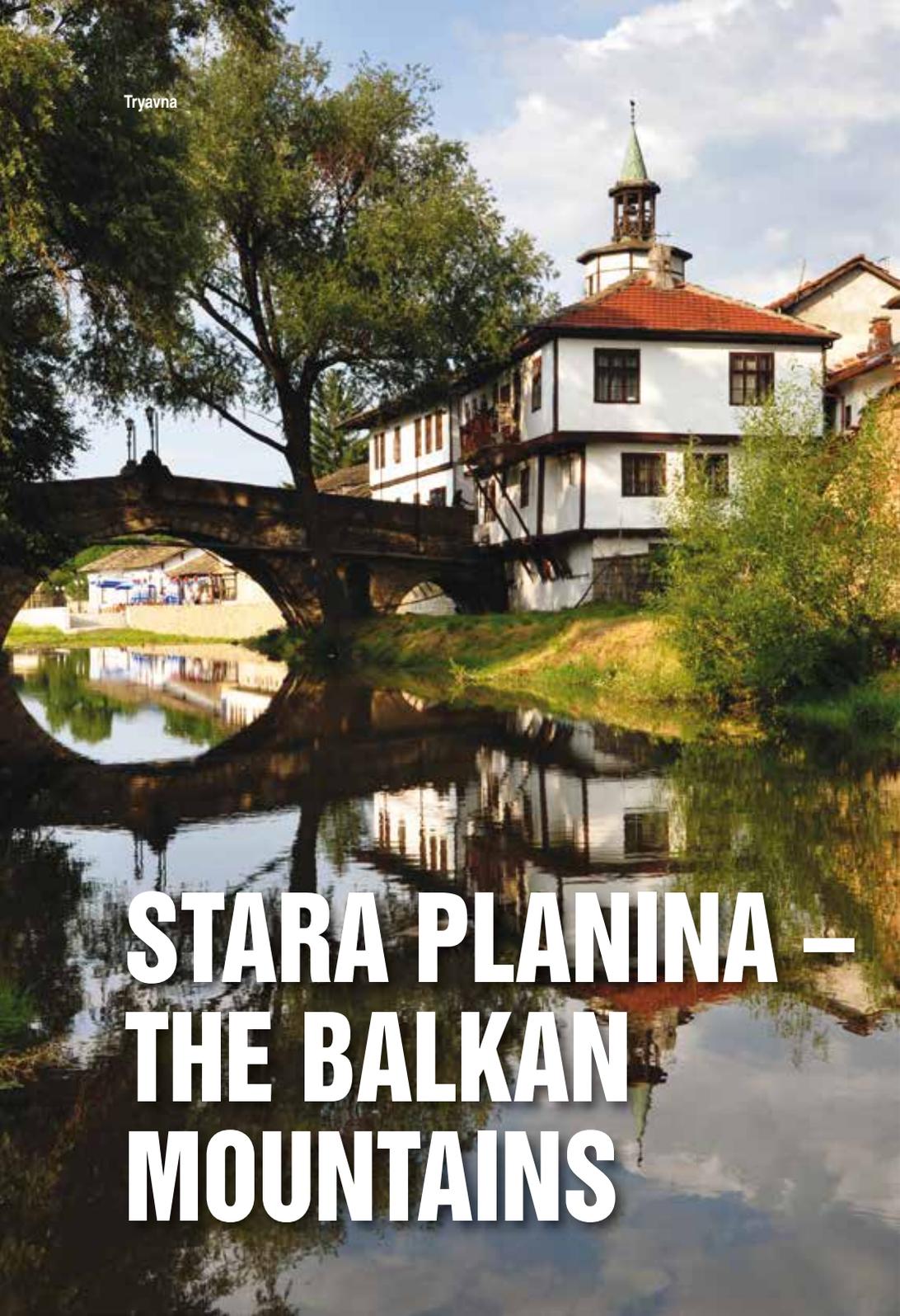
On the other hand, Kazanlak is a cradle of exciting legends, related to some of the richest and mightiest Thracian rulers. In 2004 was discovered the tomb, called Golyama Kosmatka and it revealed a gold treasure that was completely preserved, including a crown of leaves. The importance of the discovery became world news in the field of archeology. Along with all the gold, was found a completely preserved bronze head, believed to be the one of Sevt III, from V century B.C.

The full joy of touring rose and historical places comes in the end with a visit to Koprinka Dam. You can take a boat and look around or walk along the water and in the end – have fresh fish in the local restaurant and even spend the night in the little hotel, just above the restaurant with a view over the water.

Food and tastes



The villages and areas in the outskirts of the Balkan Mountains are well known for their bio farming, where you can try the tastiest yellow and white cheese. In the entire area are bred and live freely cattle, buffalo, sheep, some of which are rather rare breeds. The taste of the milk products is one of a kind and lots of visitors leave with loads of delicious products. The fruitful Thracian Plain is famous for its tasty fruits and vegetables. The savor and the aroma of the garden grown tomatoes alone, will make you fall in love with the area. You can relish the so-called Lutenitsa – traditional spread appetizer made of mixed baked red peppers and cooked tomatoes. Then you can add any of the local dishes – sausages, baked meals, meats, vegetarian delicacies, pastries and so on – all these delicious meals that every Bulgarian family enjoys.

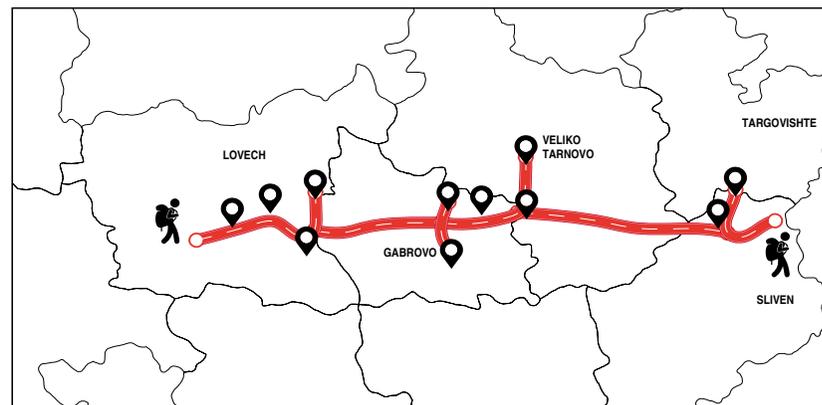


STARA PLANINA – THE BALKAN MOUNTAINS

Visit picturesque villages on both sides of the Balkan Mountain

The National anthem of Bulgaria begins with the words Proud Stara Planina. Although geographically people around the world refer to the mountainous backbone of Bulgaria as to Balkan Mountains, in translation Stara Planina means The Old Mountain. Historically Bulgarians believe it has its character and motherly feelings, protecting people who have always lived there or who were seeking refuge in turbulent times. Exploring Stara Planina is a way to feel the Bulgarian soul. Stara Planina is not only the lengthiest but it is a natural dividing line almost through the middle of the country from west to east, ending on the Black Sea Coast. It also divides the country visually into northern and southern. On both sides of Stara Planina lay picturesque and tranquil towns and villages. Some of them are admitted to be architectural masterpieces from the so called National Revival, which lasted between 1760 and the end of the 19-th century. In Western terms we can call it Bulgarian Renaissance. If you would be tempted to discover the timeless beauty and serenity of these places, you can also rely on modern infrastructure and excellent accommodation with spa centers, mineral water, water pools, memorable cuisine and friendly atmosphere.

Zheravna is among the villages that have preserved the true spirit of the National Revival and has the statute of an architectural preserve. The cobbled streets are no good for high heels as they have been the same centuries ago. It is not surprising that Thracians have lived there. During the times of the Ottoman Empire, it was a rich place, as it was on a main road. One of the richest men in the village owned over 30 thousand cattle in the mid 1800. Nowadays





The village of Zheravna

most old houses have been authentically restored and a stroll through the old streets give the feeling of slow transition in time that brings the feeling of a life filled with pride, hard work and harmony. It does take some time to walk around 200 houses, surrounded by stone walls and under the shade of old trees, spreading their crowns over the cobbled ancient streets. Restaurants in Zheravna are known for their delicious meals with local products – any meat, any vegetarian or vegan meal is an experience of its own. There nobody would take a bite but rather sit down in a cosy saloon of an old house, feel the scent or the ancient beams, relax with a glass of good wine and choose a meal that awakens all sorts of sensations. There you can try Bulgarian delight, white jam, which is a completely new experience and coffee, cooked on hot sand. Each year, in the last weekend of August, Zheravna becomes the home of a great international Festival of Folklore Costumes. Right in the middle of centuries old pine forest gather hundreds of people, dressed in authentic folk costumes, some of which are over 150 years old! For three days all people gathered there performed live folk music, sing and dance. If you would like to be part of the incredible time travel, you can always ask the local people to find a costume for you and be part of the audience and the performers at the same time.

Within close proximity is the village of **Medven**. It is the birthplace of the most esteemed chronicler of the turbulent times related to the April Uprising of 1876, Zahari Stoyanov. Many of the Medven houses are well preserved since the mid 18-th and 19-th century. Only two kilometers away you can take an eco-trail that will lead you to the natural Blue Pool. In the same area you can visit

Arbanasi Village

The town of Elena



Ichera Village with its cobbled streets and many well preserved old houses as well as the town of **Kotel** where you can walk along 110 authentic homes for the Revival Period and visit some of the old churches.

The picturesque villages around the old capital of Bulgaria Veliko Turnovo are quite popular for taking a slow and relaxing vacation. The jewel in the crown of these charming villages is called **Arbanasi**, just 5 kilometers away from Turno-

Samovodska Charshia



Samovodska Charshia in Veliko Turnovo is the most famous marketplace of the old capital. It was developed in the 70-s of the XIX century. In Turkish, the word Charshia means shopping and trading area, while the word Samovodska refers to the name of a village nearby from where many traders and producers had come. It has had not only marketing significance but also social and cultural value. The marketplace flourished and spread down the cobbled streets by the rich two stories high houses and even in the old times it had many inns and the one of Hadji Nikola of 1858, is still there. People were enjoying back then as well as nowadays a lot of bakeries and pastry shops, traditional craft workshops. In recent days visitors can eat many traditional dishes, buy

local souvenirs hand crafted of natural material – pottery, knives, copper, wood carving, icon painting, sweets, bakery, authentic folklore costumes. Each museum is a world of exciting stories, which reveal moments of brave human development.

vo, which qualifies on the top of the most scenic and well preserved old Bulgarian villages. It is situated on the top of a rocky plateau that offers a fantastic view over the old capital and the magnificent ancient fortresses – Tzarevetz and Trapezitsa. Over 300 authentic homes have been preserved, dating from XVII and XVIII century. Their yards have been turned into lush gardens and even the restaurants that are also situated inside and outside of the authentic homes are surrounded by greenery, under very old trees and by beautiful blooming flowers. The nearby **town of Elena** offers one more approach to exciting history among

Bozhentsi Village





Kostenkovtsi Village



Ethnographic Complex Etara

well preserved Revival Period homes and churches. Elena was the first place in Bulgaria in the XIX century, which had a teaching facility for teachers. The Bulgarian word for it is rather charming, as it refers to candle casting but it is called teacher-casting. The smart and educated priests of their time were deeply involved in the education process and spreading their knowledge to young men. Elena also offers a great range of culinary and tasty traditions. The joy of visiting Elena could be well divided between listening to the moving stories of the past and the pleasant time with the local cuisine. It is a must to try the famous Elena ham – this is the traditional analogue of the Spanish hamon or the Italian prosciutto.

Ethnographic Complex Etara



The only outdoor ethnographic museum on the Balkans is called Etara. It is located just 15 kilometers away from Gabrovo. This is the local time machine that transfers visitors 150 years back in time. A whole traditional village has been created with its cobbled streets, charming two storey houses, authentically coloured. Anyone can see for himself the production of various goods, even – if he would dare – try the extra heavy hammer of the blacksmith on the red hot iron; put on the traditional wool clothes and hats, go through the classrooms of the first schools and see the punishing sticks in the corner. This is one of the very few remaining places (also in Bozhenci), where you can buy the local famous red rooster lollipop or sugar glazed apple on a stick. A full day at Etara means living in a story, learning of a distant lifestyle, choosing charming souvenirs, some made before your eyes or with your own touch of assistance and of course – eating so well, that you would like to be there once again on the next day.

Tryavna



The city of Tryavna is among the most beautiful Bulgarian towns. As Bulgaria has many symbolic towns, this one is also called The Capital of Woodcarving and by this craft it is well known around the world. The talent and the knowhow was passed from father to sons and the locals preferred patterns of floral motives – roses, hollyhock, marigold, vine leaves, as well as the sun. Some of the house ceilings are all turned into an amazing wood carved sun – a breathtaking piece of art. Among all floral motives, there are peacocks, pigeons, nightingales, even a few camels. The local wood artists use the wood from walnut, linden, alder, pear, oak, poplar. They do not add extra colours to their work but combining the different wood creates different shades.

Nowadays anyone can visit the exhibition room in the local school for woodcarving and purchase models at a rather reasonable price. For centuries it was a sign of wealth to give to the newlyweds wood carving from Tryavna. If you take a relaxing day of enjoying the art of wood, you would certainly be tempted to bring something back. On the main square you will see one more of the symbols of the town – the clock tower, built in 1814. If you use the old stone bridge to cross the Dryanovska River, you will come to the old market place – Charshiya – where you can visit many small craft shops with well-preserved production techniques for ceramics, wool, leather, metal and so on. You can also taste the coffee, which is still made in the style used 150 years ago.

The city of **Gabovo** and the surrounding area is an inseparable part of the entire experience in Central Stara Planina. Gabrovo itself is known as the Bulgarian Humour Capital and the local people are known for their penny-pinching lifestyle. This is why the symbol of the city is a tailless cat – the locals used to cut the cat's tail so the warmth of the room in the winter would not vanish, when the cat slowly goes through the door. Each year people enjoy the Humor Festival, always led by a cat figure. However, Gabrovo is also known for the first public school, opened in 1835, still under the Ottoman rule. The name of the city was first known as Gabruva in 1477 but it is believed, it was established by the blacksmith Racho about 250 years ago, when he settled there to be of service to travelers, who needed new horse shoes. Nowadays a big statue of Racho stands in the middle of the Yantra River, which also flows through Veliko Turnovo and crosses the city of Gabrovo. Comfortable, quiet and friendly hotels as well as guest houses are always open to meet their guests. The local cuisine is typical for the region and offers a lot of natural dairy and meat products. Directly from the city, one can take the eco trails through the mountain, which is still populated with wild animals that accidentally cross before the eyes of the walking people. There is a direct Roman road from Gabrovo through the mountain and the forest to the village of **Bozhentsi**. By car



Baba Stana neighborhood (mahala) in Oreshak Village



The village of Staro Stefanovo

one should take a regular road but for walking or cycling, the surviving Roman path is fantastic. Bozhency is the closest one would name a fairytale village. It is a fantastic place for tourism, relaxation and rich, quality cuisine. You can stay in a guest house, which is over 200 years old or have your meal in the tiny, cosy restaurant on the charming little square that has passed three centuries of existence. Even in the summer it brings idyllic joy to sit by the fireplace and breathe the fresh air of Stara Planina.

Kostenkovci Village is also comfortably hidden in the hills of Gabrovo Balkan area. It offers incredibly crisp and fresh air, which makes the summers refreshingly cool. It seems isolated from the rest of the world and the few guest houses are excellent choices to escape the city and have a few days of quiet relaxation, long strolls and delicious meals.

Stara Planina has been divided by the main towns, surrounded by small villages. So as some would give a general idea of an area by Gabrovski Balkan, the Troyan Balkan is like a starting point to a new ring of charming villages around the town of Troyan. One of the most preferred villages is **Oreshak**. The name comes from a word, which is related to a walnut forest. The village lies on the opposite banks of Cherni Osam River, at the outskirts of Stara Planina. The old part, called Baba Stana is where you will see very well preserved and renovated Revival Period houses. In Oreshak people can visit one of the most complete exhibitions of hand crafted items – fantastic panels, delicate masterpiece of woodcarving, wool carpets and blankets, clothing.

Ribaritsa Resort Village



Nearby is located **Troyanski Monastery**, where you can see the icon of Saint Mary, Mother of Jesus.

Along the way, you can stop at **Staro Stefanovo** – a rather small village, which is not even listed on all paper maps. However, it is known at The Film Village – it has been chosen many times as a scene for shooting movies not only by the authentic houses but also by the beautiful waterfalls in the region.

In the same region is located **Shipkovo Village**, known for its hot mineral spring used for healing procedures. The hot pools with mineral water are open to tourists all year round.

The Chiflik Village offers the same hot springs, authentic architecture, beautiful nature, tasty food and friendly atmosphere. A picturesque resort is the **village of Ribaritsa**, which is among the lengthiest in Bulgaria as it stretches for 12 kilometers. The village is a perfect destination to hide away from busy daily routine and it offers many easy tracks where one can walk for hours, breathe the fresh air and leave behind any stress.

Elenski But is the Bulgarian prosciutto



The so-called Elenski But or Elena Venison is a dry-cured ham from the town of Elena and it is among the most popular delicacies in the country. The meat has specific taste and can be preserved for several years due to the special process of preparation and the climatic conditions in this part of Stara Planina. The delicacy has become the emblem of the Veliko Turnovo Region. The devoted Elena Pastrami locals

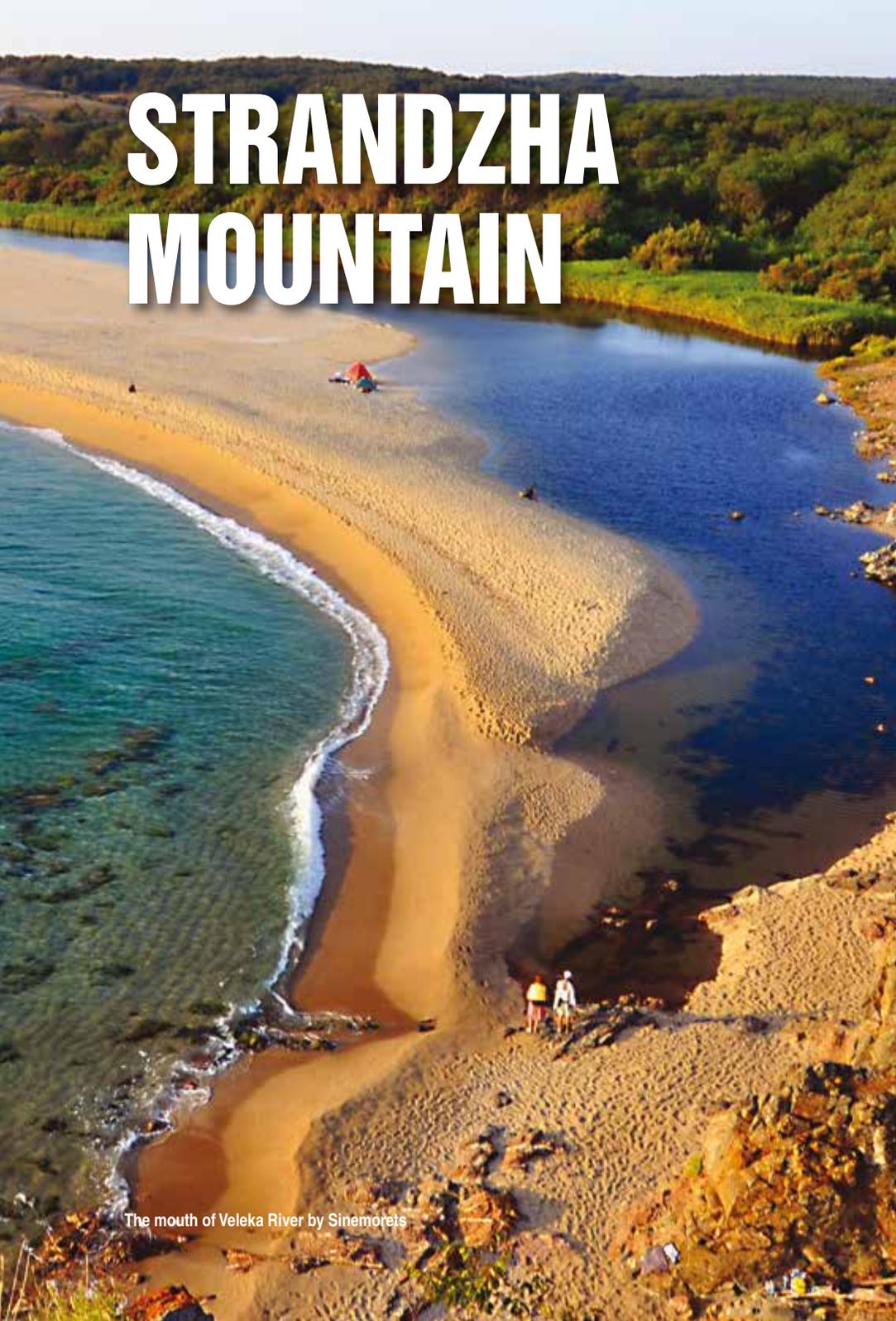
are confident that the recipe has existed for more than 200 years. The leg has to stay in salt for 40-50 days in a special oak barrel and then it is washed with the salty water of the traditional sour cabbage – sauerkraut, which has been fermented by various lactic acid bacteria. The sauerkraut is another major player in our traditional cuisine and if you wish to try all sorts of dishes with it, you better visit Bulgaria in the winter months. Each year, on 26-th of October, known also as Dimitrovden – the Name Day for saint Dimitar and all men and women, who have the same name, the town of Elena becomes the center of Elena But Festival – one of the most popular culinary events in the country.

Shtirnik



For the Gabrovo Region, the local specialty is called Shtirnik – a green pastry that is traditional only for this part of Bulgaria. Shtir or Amarantus is a cosmopolitan genus of an annual perennial plant. In Gabrovo the pastry with Shtir goes also with spinach – healthy and delicious. So one can never go by with just a bite!

STRANDZHA MOUNTAIN



The mouth of Veleka River by Sinemorets

Visiting the mythical Strandzha Mountain

Strandzha Mountain is called mystical for bearing legends and offering sacred places to visit. Nature Park Strandzha is the largest preserve in Bulgaria. It is located in the south-east part of Bulgaria, bordering with Turkey. Due to its remote location from the main cities and specific climatic conditions, the mountain has preserved some rather unique vegetation samples as well as birds and wild animals. Strandzha is the only place where you can see the so-called Zelenika (*Rhododendron ponticum*), also called Pontic Rhododendron – and evergreen bush, which blooms in May and June with bright purple flowers.

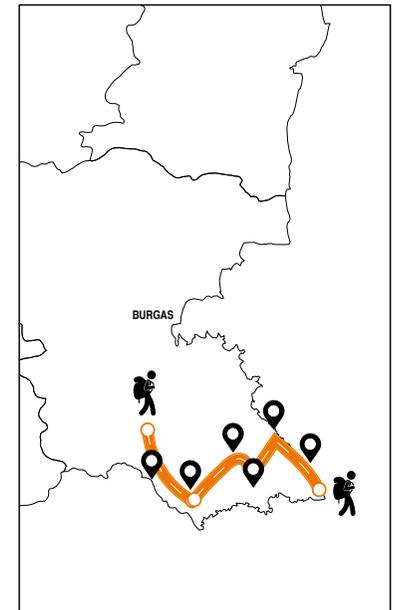
The mountain to which the locals refer just as Strandzha, has preserved through history extraordinary traditions. One of them refers to the so-called Nestinari. This is a folklore ritual that combines an ancient pagan practice of cult to the Sun and reverence to St. Konstantin. The most attractive part of the ceremonies, performed on 21-st of May 21-t or 3-d of June, is the dance on embers. It is believed that overwhelmed by the spiritual experience, the dancers – men and women, feel no heat, no pain and they never get burned.

All over the mountain are scattered little, charming villages with well-preserved authentic homes and churches, that carry the ambience of the past ages.

Their close proximity to the South Black Sea has turned these villages into a pleasant place to spend a day and one can always ask a tour operator for assistance or find the route himself and have a pleasant, quiet, tasty and relaxing time.

Strandzha is an excellent choice for a satisfying vacation. The little villages around the city of **Malko Tarnovo** offer excellent conditions for recreation, vacationing and adventurous discoveries done with pleasant slow approach.

The mountain is sacred not just to the locals and many visitors are attracted by the deep natural power of the Thracian megaliths, stone tombs, sanctuaries, consecrations and other mystical re-





A house in Brashlyan Village



Interior from the old church school in Brashlyan Village

mains from the ancient civilisations that have survived for thousands of years.

The gem in the crown is the **village of Brashlyan**. Its name means ivy. The village is called an authentic architectural preservation and most of its houses have a statute of historical monuments. They carry the traditional Strandzha style: most houses are two stories high, with an outside staircase. The first floor was built of stones and wood beams, while the second floor is entirely made of wood.

Visitors can take time and visit the church St. Dimitar, which has been built on the top of an old Thracian sanctuary and then look at the church school, built in 1872, which is right next to it. The ethnographic collection consists of items with 150 years of history.

The area offers picturesque trails that lead the way to relaxing and pleasant days and also by several local chapels.

Bulgari Village is a must stop of all tours around Strandzha. The name of the village means Bulgarians. It is also known as the Village of Ember Dancers. The ancient tradition is being performed on June 3-d, when the villagers celebrate the day of the church in the Bulgari Village, called St. Konstantin and Elena.

The ember dancers and their performance have been included on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The **Mladezhko Village**, which means Youthful, will lead you on a different path. It has been named after the river Mladezhka (apparently Youthful River), which flows through the village. There you can find an eco-trail that would lead you to the river spring and to the caves nearby. There has been found evidence

The church in the Bulgari Village



Bare foot dances on burning embers in Strandzha



that these caves were once populated. Nowadays it is the tourists who can spend some time in their cosy, comfy curves and imagine what a life would be to rely only on natural stones for your daily protection.

Within close proximity you can visit the remains of an early Byzantine fortress, called The Big Kalé.

Be ready to face the tranquil beauty of the surrounding areas of **Stoilovo Village**. The village is just 10 km. away from the town of Malko Turnovo.

Surprisingly, Stoilovo does not mean anything in Bulgarian but it comes from a popular and rather old name. The word Stoya means someone is standing up, strong and confident. So whoever was the Stiol, the village was named after, he certainly stood for his name, his pride and his deeds.

Nearby you can enjoy the biggest waterfall in Strandzha – Dokizak. It is incredibly beautiful any time of year, easily approachable, always full of water and if you are enchanted by photography, get read with a tripod, rubber boots and you can spend a day enjoying new and new angles.

Discovering Strandzha and its friendly and picturesque atmosphere, you can spare time and visit also the **villages of Kost** (means bones), **Brodilovo** (refers to people who like wandering around), **Gramatikovo** (comes from the word grammar – one would assume smart and educated people lived there), **Kondolovo** (The name was given in 1950 after a great warrior in 19-th century, called Georgy Kondolov), **Slivarovo** (the name comes from the word plum).

Enjoying the slow motion of your vacation, one can choose a boat trip to the mouth of the rivers **Ropotamo** and **Veleka**. There are two ways to do this: get on board of any of the small tourist boats or hire a kayak. If you take a kayak, you are free to row around at your own speed and stop at whim to look around and get acquainted with flora and fauna.

While rowing your kayak along Veleka River, you can see the yellow water-lily, which blossom in the summer, bamboo, alder, ash tree, elm tree as well as forests with long-stemmed, woody vine that bring a feeling of an exotic tropical forest. By the river banks live Caspian Swamp Turtles and other species.

The mouth of Veleka River by **Sinmorec** is among the most vivid views along the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast. When entering the Black Sea, Veleka Riv-

You can rent a kayak on the Veleka River



Take a boat for a trip on Ropotamo River





The mouth of Veleka River by Sinemorets



Caspian swamp turtles by Veleka River

er creates a beautiful sand strip, which is about 500 meters long. The sea water there reflects all shades and colours, varying from sky blue to emerald green. In this protected area live many rare birds and fish. Over this part of Trandzha is the migration birds route Via Pintika.

The local specialty is called Strandzha Dyado

The translation of the delicacy is a bit awkward as the name Dyado means grandfather. In another area of Bulgaria, they offer Banski Starec, which means Old man from the city of Bansko. Then you can read on the menu „Old fried man from Bansko“. The real story is that for centuries the old men in the traditional big Bulgarian families knew the best recipe for the preparation of each type of meat but it was the crafty

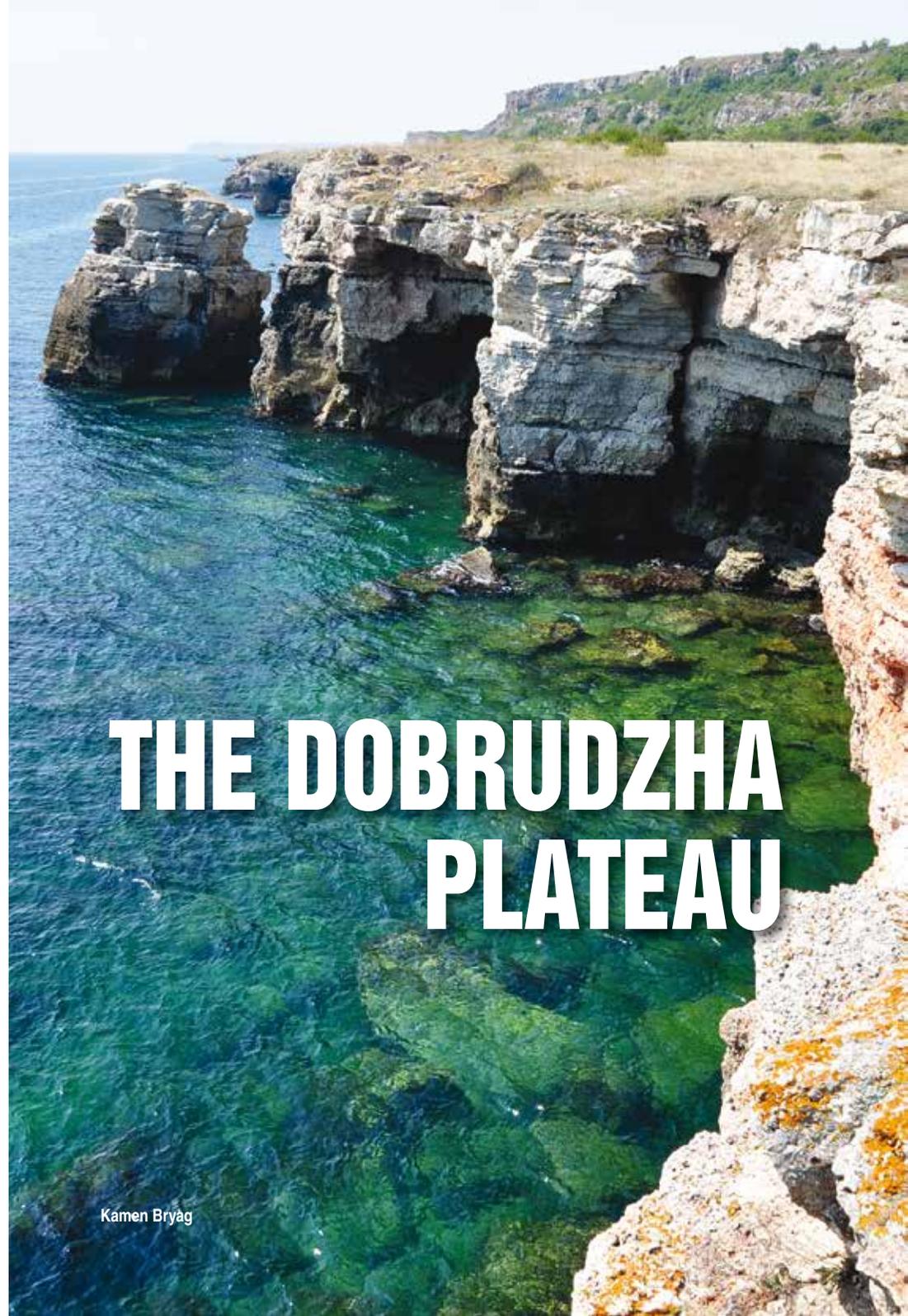


women who did the tastiest cooking. So if you read on the menu „Cooked granpa“ or „Grandpa starter“, you should trust it and try it!

The Strandzha Dyado is a local sausage that has been prepared for generations from times immemorial. It consists of chopped pork meat and raw bacon, needs salt, black and red pepper and the so called chubritsa – specific dried herbs. It is being prepared by the end of winter and usually dries for about 30–40 days. Locals believe that its astonishing taste has also developed due to the local specific climate.



The close proximity with the sea offers a great variety of fish specialties for the people of Strandzha Mountain. Along the entire South Black Sea Coast quite popular are **mussels**, **Burgas style, fish soup**, as well as **fresh grilled fish such as horse mackerel, surmullet, baby bluefish**.



THE DOBRUDZHA PLATEAU



The Northern Black Sea Coast enchants tourists with its wild beauty

Along the Northern Black Sea Coast – wild beaches and delicious seafood

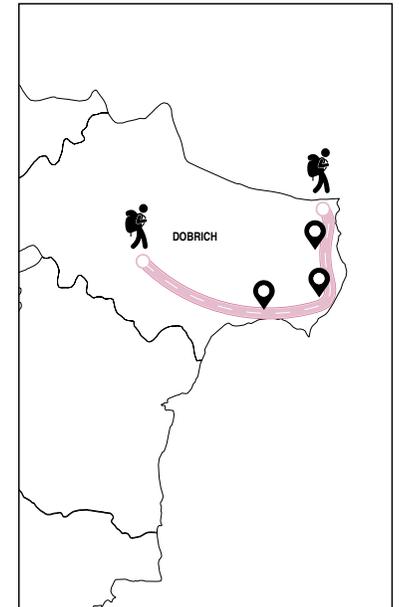
The Dobrudzha Plateau and the Northern Black Sea Coast are excellent choices for slow tourism even on the busiest summer days. Unlike the Southern Black Sea Coast, there are no large resorts. North of the town of Kavarna, the coastal line is mostly rocky and the sandy beaches are very few. However, the lack of natural luxury as soft sand by the beach is a blessing for all, who enjoy natural experiences and camping. The area offers an abundance of natural landmarks and fabulous nature.

Kaliakra Cape is a small peninsula, about 2 kilometers long, a piece of land cut into the sea, like a stretching arm, the lengthiest along the Bulgarian shore. The steep limestone slopes of the cape make it inaccessible from the sea and that was a reason good enough to build a fortress in the Middle Ages. At the very top you will find a small chapel and a stone gate, which reveals a beautiful view of the sea. It is an ideal place to make a marriage proposal, to have the most romantic wedding or sit down and observe the sun sinking by the end of the day.

At the foot of the eastern slope, numerous niches and caves were once inhabited by monk seals but sadly the species is now extinct.

Nar Kaliakra Cape you will see the almost perfect semicircle shape of the famous **Bolata Bay**. The sea bed there is shallow, sandy and silky soft and the water is clear. It is a great location to walk round it and relish the view from above or just sit by the sea and enjoy it.

Another similar landmark in the region is **Chirakman Cape**, which rises next to the town of Kavarna, within a walking distance of 3 kilometers. The cape is remarkable by its vertical slopes, accessible only by experienced climbers. The name means torch and most probably in the past, it was also used as a lighthouse as the first recorded settlement was from I century B.C. It used to stretch





Kaliakra Cape

much further into the sea but a significant earthquake shortened it nearly by half. The erosion, caused by the sea water has also contributed to its current appearance. In the little bay, below the Chirakman Cape you can find fishermen's villages with small houses, lots of boats and a beach. The cape itself is an excellent take off point of hang gliders. If you wish to take it slow, just make a few photos of them.

Kamen Bryag, which means Stony Shore, is a village that has turned into a cult place for generations of Bulgarians and they increase in numbers every year. The tradition is that on June 30-th, people of all ages gather on the rock next to the village to meet the sunrise on 1-st of July. It all began with the rock and roll fans the emblem song of Uriah Heep July Morning. The place was not chosen on mere whim – it is believed that this most eastern part of Bulgaria is first illuminated by the rising sun. Nowadays, if you wish to take part in the big July Morning show and sing with your arms wide spread towards the rising sun, you better be there the day before. Why not witness two mornings instead of one?

Just 2 kilometers south of Kamen Bryag is located the archeological reserve, called **Yailata**. There an ancient cave settlement was found. It is called a cave town as 101 cave dwellings were created, dating from V century B.C.

Tyulenovo is a small village known for its unique rocky beach, suitable for diving and all sorts of extreme sports. The concept of slow vacationing includes taking enough time to do risky and exciting activities all day long in

Chirakman Cape



Boala beach



Kamen Bryag

a wonderful area. Hardly can you come across tourists who have brought a towel just to lie back on the sand. For starters – there is no sand but the rock formations are so amazing. The coast is dotted with bizarre rock formations and caves. Among them stands out a fantastic massive rock, which on one side forms an arch – this is probably the most photographed site on the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast and once gain – a fantastic place to admit your love, propose marriage, get married or have the photo session of a lifetime! Naturally, in the area you can find decent hotels and guest houses where you can stay during your unforgettable vacation.

Near the village is situated the town of **Shabla**, which in contrast to Tyulenovo, offers a wide sand beach.

The biggest attraction on the coast is the lighthouse, which is the oldest and highest in Bulgaria – 32 meters tall, standing on the most eastern point of Bulgaria. Of all Bulgarian lighthouses, it is the oldest operating lighthouse in the Black Sea with rather interesting history and the most original architecture, which is visible for 17 miles into the sea. The facility existed even in the Roman times but it was built as such in 1768, during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The local people claim that Shabla Lighthouse was built as reduced copy of the Lighthouse of Alexandria – one of the Seven Wonders of the World of Antiquity. Near the small village of **Krapets**, is located the largest wild beach along the entire Bulgarian coastline. It is nearly 7 kilometers long and stretches all the way to the border with Romania at Durankulak. The sand is golden and fine like

The Lonely Rock by the village of Tyulenovo



Yailata

The rock arch near Tyulenovo





The lighthouse near Shabla Village



Shabla Village

silk, the seabed is shallow and the waters are crystal clear. There you can enjoy your privacy on the wide beach overlooking the horizon and surrounded by wild nature. Even in the most active summer days, this paradise remains farther away from the crowds.

In the Krapets area you can find small family hotels and guest houses. The summer is the right time for camping.

Just a kilometer away from Krapets is located the **Durankulak Lake**, which is a natural estuary – a submerged sea valley, separated from the sea by a sandy strip. In the middle of the lake is located an island and on the island stands the temple of Cybele and one of the largest prehistoric necropolises in the world, over 2500 years old. Nearby are the remains of the oldest and the largest Neolithic settlement in Europe from 5250–3800 BC.

Durankulak Lake



The beach by Krapets Village



Old Dobrich complex



The architectural and ethnographic complex Old Dobrich is an oasis in the heart of the city of Dobrich, which feels like time travel to all visitors. At the beginning of the XVI century, still under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the area was called Odun Bazaar and it was located on the crossroad between Turkey and the rest of Europe. It was a rich place, offering all types of locally produced goods to the constantly passing caravans. Nowadays some of the most important crafts have been preserved and the original look of the bazaar has been restored. There you will find potters, blacksmiths, weavers, coopers, icon painters, goldsmiths, woodcarvers and they all perform their work with the same precision and devotion, believing this is the way to keep the living soul of the old times as well as the pride of the ancestors. Among the attractions of the complex is the restored old clock tower.

Mussels are the leading delicacy of the Kavarna Region



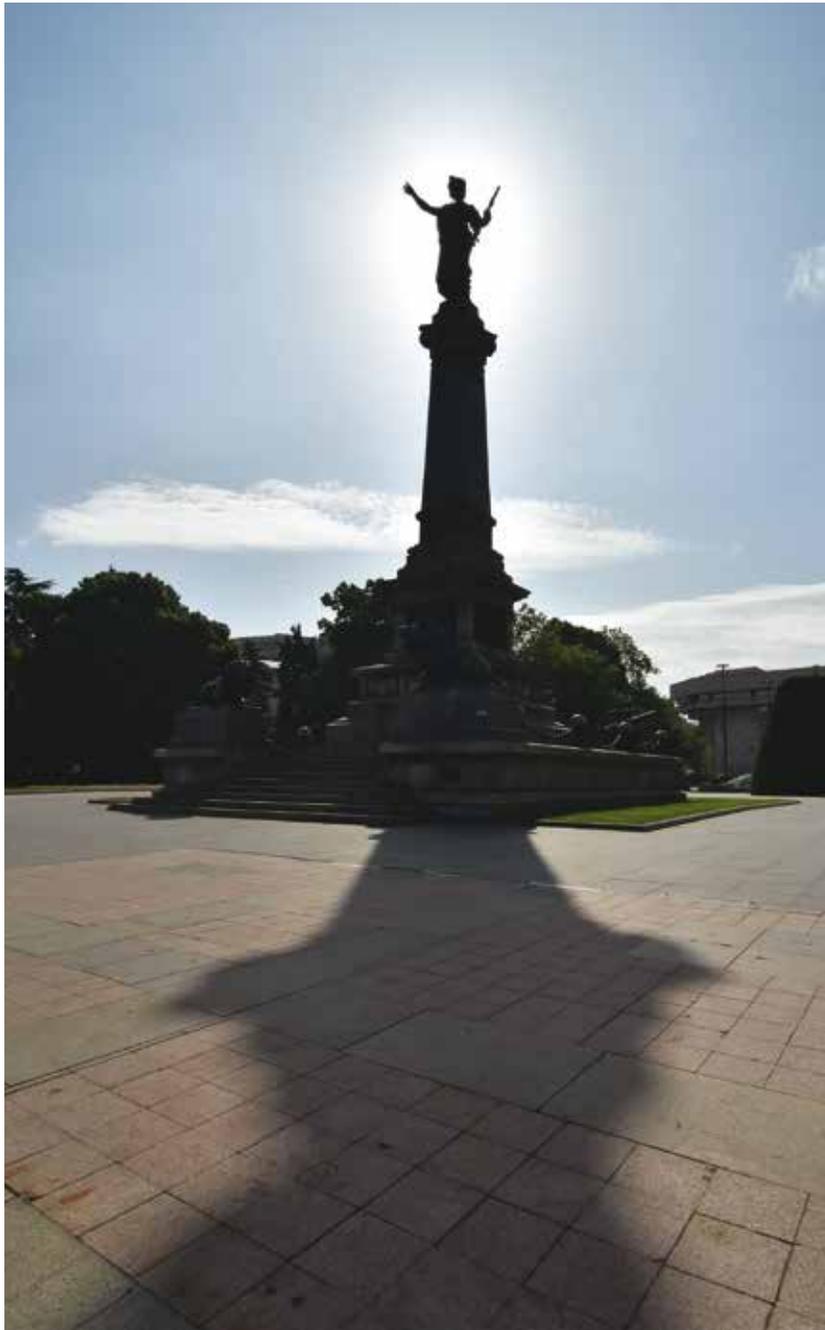
The Northern Black Sea Coast is famous for its mussel farms. One of the popular places for tasting delicious mussel's specialties is in the area of Dalboka. It is located north of Balchik, in the beautiful Kaliakra Bay. It is a must visit place along this part of the Black Sea. The view is fantastic, the splash of water is relaxing and sparing time for the mussel gourmet experience is always worth it. Apart from mussels, you can try fish soup that combines the tastes of turbot, mullet and another type of sea fish. They go especially well with brine – a spicy sauce, which is popular in Dobruzha specially to bring special flavor to fish soup and other seafood dishes.



DANUBE RIVER



Sunset over Danube River

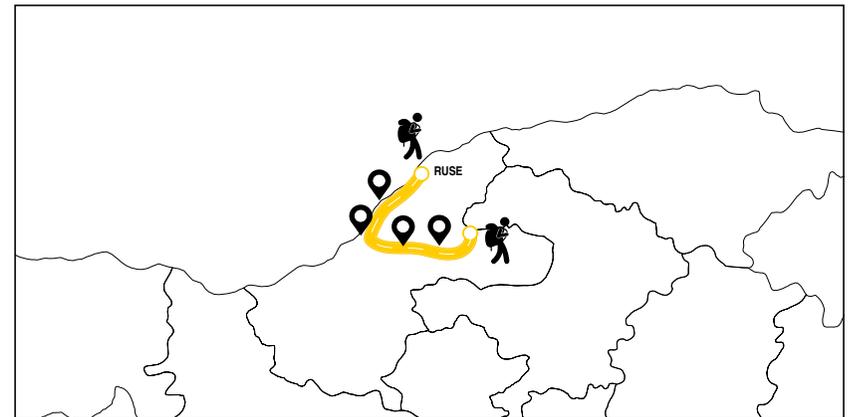


The Stature of Liberty in Ruse

The wild beauty of the Bulgarian Northeast

The Danube river stretches all along the northern border of Bulgaria for 470 kilometers out of all its length of 2850 kilometers, dividing Bulgaria with Romania – from the westernmost point near the city of Vidin to the town of Silistra on the east. The river floats through Europe and it is the second longest river, after Volga. The Danube was once a long-standing frontier of the Roman Empire and nowadays it flows through ten counties, ending in Bulgaria into the Black Sea. The river runs through the largest number of countries in the world.

The places, worth visiting, begin from the **city of Vidin**. The park, along the river, is tranquil and shady and leads directly into one of the best preserved fortresses of Bulgaria, called Baba Vida. It was first built in Roman times, then expanded during the years of the Bulgarian kingdoms, used as a fortification during the Ottoman rule and many years later – as a film production set and a stage for operas and concerts. A picturesque hotel is situated into the park and has a nice swimming pool in the summer. The restaurants, offering fresh fish from the river, are all along the garden. Going to the east by the river, you may take a break in the **town of Svishtov**. It is well known for its Roman remains that reveal a large settlement, which had a hospital for wounded soldiers and a recreation area, which nowadays we can call a spa. The town hosts the most attractive Roman battles – an international event, called Eagle on the Danube. Romans (hundreds of devoted club members to ancient Roman history) from all of Europe arrive for several days of parading, cooking authentic food (presumably) and combating in the best Roman traditions.





Srebarna Preserve



Ruski Lom Nature Park



The Stature of Liberty in Ruse

Once you leave the Romans of Svishtov behind, you are heading to the Little Vienna or the Danube Capital, called **Ruse**. The Danube River was the stream that brought to Bulgaria and to the gorgeous city many achievements of the Western civilization. For the first time Bulgarians saw their paving of streets in 1834, modern printing house in 1864, the railway in 1866, the brewery in 1876, a movie screen in 1897 and so on. Ruse is the biggest city along the river and it is particularly interesting with its architecture and exquisite buildings built in the early XX century in neoclassical style, mixing Baroque, Renaissance, Gothic and Empire design. One can easily feel the resemblance with buildings in Vienna as well as with the variety of beautiful fountains. Just like in Vidin, Rouse has wonderful parks by the river where you can also have a romantic dinner or take a seat in a restaurant on a water pontoon. The Youth Park is an attractive place with its rosary gardens. Its emblem is called the Vase – a sculpture of live flowers more than 3 meters high, which is a masterpiece of flower art. Each year it is arranged with different floral figures – hearts, moons, suns, etc. Over 30 thousand stalks for flowers are used to obtain a complete

composition, which brings pride and delight to the Ruse residents and rejoices the visitors. Danube River is also very popular for the cruise industry. Ships from Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia dock every summer by Vidin, then Oryahovo, Nikopol and Ruse, of course. In addition to sightseeing in the cities, tourists can expand their trips in other incredibly interesting areas inland, still not far from the river. All along restaurants offer fresh and deliciously prepared fish.

When it comes to beautiful areas to explore, **Lipnik Forest Park** is the largest in Bulgaria. It is located 10 kilometers east of Ruse, near the village of Nikolovo. Its name comes from the huge linden (lipa) forest, which covers an area of 20 thousand decares. A large canoe-kayak canal gives one more opportunity for relaxation. Others can just rest by the pond with the water lilies, where wild ducks and other rare birds nest. The authentically preserved nature in the region gives an opportunity to explore wildlife. A particularly good place is the **Srebarna Biosphere Reserve**, which is on the route of migratory birds Via Pontica and is also listed on the UNESCO World Natural Heritage List. The

The Profitable Bulding in Ruse



The Batenberg Palace in Ruse



The Vase in the Youth Park in Ruse



Forest park Lipnik, near Ruse





Forest park Lipnik, near Ruse



The Cherven fortress tower



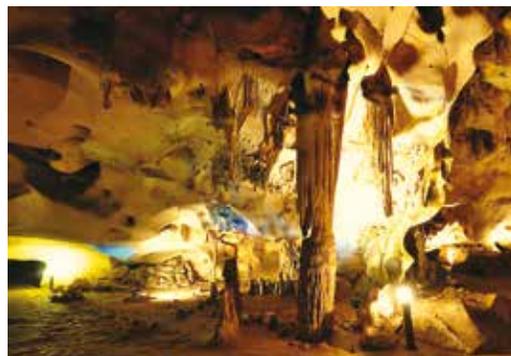
Srebarna Lake is a home of rare birds as well as other endangered species and it is worth to spare time and observe the beauty of their natural life. Quite near is located **Rusenski Lom Nature Park**, which is also rich of various animal species but it is particularly popular for its rock monasteries. The park is located between the canyons of three rivers: Rusenski Beli Lom, Cherni Lom and Malki Lom. The park is rich in caves and rock niches. They are scattered at different heights all over the rocks and some sources indicate they are over 200.

The history of rock churches and monasteries goes back to the early Christianity – V–VI century, which puts them among the oldest in Europe. Hermit monks lived inside the rocks. The rock monasteries are scattered along the entire Rusenski Lom Valley but most of them are concentrated in the area of the villages of **Ivanovo**, **Besarabovo**, **Nisovo** and **Koshov**. The village of Koshov is the end of the route for canoers who came down Cherni Lom River.

Orlova Chuka cave is among the landmarks in the region. It is the second largest cave in Bulgaria and its galleries stretch for nearly 12 kilometers but the unusual rock formations and shapes inside the cave make it truly attractive. Some of the galleries are naturally decorated by beautiful wavy arches, which give a sense of modernism. One of the great attractions is the Great Stalactone Gallery, which is over 3,5 meters high and some of the formations are 50 cm thick. The stalactone is a formation between stalactites and stalagmites as they merge in a course of hundreds of thousands of years. Such formation could be

Rock monastery Gramovets near the village of Kroshov

Orlova Chuka cave



Ivanovski Rock Monastery



very strong, like an old tree stem or truly fragile, almost like hanging by a thread but all stalactones are equally impressive. Many caves have both – stalagmites and stalactites but fewer are those, which a man can visit at the right time, when the million years of slow drops have built a complete shape. Speaking of slow vacations – how much slower could it be!

The geological estimates give an impressive age of over one million years to these formations and over 2 million years for the cave.

No wonder in the cave were found remains from prehistoric times when men had established their settlements and out of their daily struggle through all ages remained spearheads, flint scrapers, an ax, pieces of pottery. These are the little pieces of story, telling how people lived during the late Paleolithic period. We would never know if the bear skeletons found in the same cave means that the inhabitants became victims of the bear or it was the other way around and the locals had the luxury of using the bear's skin. It is a rewarding experience visiting the **medieval fortification town of Cherven**, which used to be among the most important military and administrative centers of the Second Bulgarian State, which existed from 1185 till 1396, when Bulgaria fell under the Ottoman domination.

Cherven was built over a Byzantine fortress in the 6-th century from the time Emperor Justinian. Subsequently, the city was conquered by Bulgarians. It was built on a steep rocky hill, surrounded on three sides by the Cherni Lom River.



The big cave near the village of Pisanets

Due to its location and developed defense system, Cherven was an essential military center, defending the old capital Veliko Turnovo on the north.

Each year, at the beginning of May, Cherven Fortress welcomes the traditional Medieval Festival. Visitors are invited to put their strength and skills to a test in various competitions and demonstrations or enjoy a medieval battle performed by real warriors, dressed appropriately for the age they represent.

Pisanets is another attractive village in the area, located in the valley of Beli Lom River and attracts visitors with the interesting rock formations around it. The Great Cave is located near the village and it is impressive with its nearly 30-meters arch from where the view over the valley is spectacular. If you are fond of events organized in natural surroundings, the cave hosts concerts, exhibitions, art workshops and other cultural events.

The valey of the Beli Lom River is surrounded by interesting rock phenomenon



Include fresh Danube fish on your list of local experiences



Danube cuisine relies on fresh fish from the river. Most restaurants along the coast-line offer delicious fish soup and various specialties with catfish, carp, silver carp, grass carp and sturgeon fish. Fish is usually offered fried, grilled or baked on red tile. A traditional local specialty is catfish, milling style. The recipe originates from Ruse and it is quite popular in the Danube region. The fish is marinated in advance, then fired and after that – an oven baked with big slices of onions and tomatoes. Finally – to justify the name – special mill sauce is added, which consists of lemon, olive oil and specific species.

THE BULGARIAN NORTHWEST



Belogradchishki Skali (Belogradchik Rocks)

The Northwest offers pristine nature, delicious food and hospitality

The vast area of the Danubian Plain and the cities of Vidin, Vratsa and Montana rarely appear in the glossy catalogs of the tour operators. The main reason for such neglect is the considerable underdevelopment of the region, often defined as the poorest region in the European Union.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain a great number of local people migrated to the capital Sofia and abroad, which led to a dramatic population decrease. However, the Northwest remained an attractive tourist destination that offers delicious food and great hospitality, combined with attractive nature.

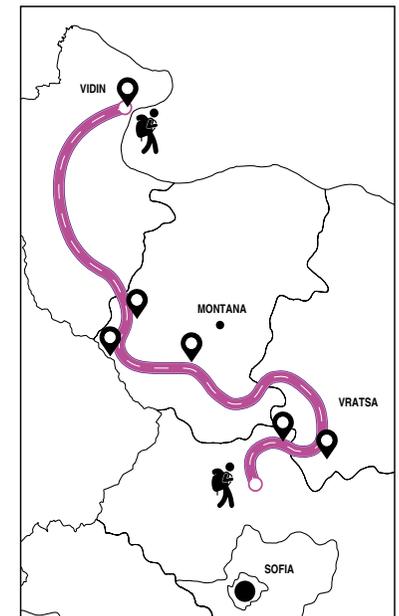
However, this does not make the Northwest a less attractive tourist destination. Apart from delicious food and hospitality, the area also offers beautiful nature.

An exciting fact is that the biggest concentration of natural caves is in this area. You can explore Magurata, Ledenika, Venets, Lepenitsa, Elata, Zmeyuva Dupka, Temnata Dupka, Ponora, Zashishka, Kozarska and others. Traces of human activity dating 1,4 million years back, was found in the Kozarnika Cave. The inhabitants occupied it in the early Stone Age (Paleolithic) and were distant ancestors to Homo Sapiens. In Magurata, which is among the largest caves in Bulgaria, were found over 700 paintings of men and animals, decorating the walls for over 8 thousand years!

In the same region is located one of the most impressive natural phenomena in Bulgaria – Belogradchik Rocks. It is no coincidence that they were nominated in the ranking for the New Seven Natural Wonders of the World.

The rock formations have been sculpted and carved over a period of 200 million years. They are stunningly beautiful and impressive with their bizarre shapes and reddish colour, due to the high content of iron oxide. Some of the rocks rise to 100 m height.

Now! How to describe the breathtak-





The meander of Iskar River by Tserovo Village



Baba Vida fortress

ing views of the Iskar Gorge! There the Iskar River penetrates deep into Stara Planina, forming a picturesque ravine, surrounded by amazing rock formations, caves, waterfalls and the amazing views surprise again and again with every turn. Monasteries were built long time ago, being well hidden and protected by the solid hillsides.

The area is suitable for tourism all year round and the trails along the gorge offer exciting views from higher points as well as down by the river.

Near the villages of **Tserovo**, **Zasele**, **Bov**, **Lakatnik**, **Cherepish** and **Lyutibrod** the meanders are worth seeing one after the other.

On the Danube River you should visit the ancient **fortress Baba Vida**. It has been authentically preserved, located in the northern part of the city of Vidin.

It is surrounded by a moat that is filled with water even nowadays, when the river is high. The access was through a drawbridge. It was the castle of the ruler of the Vidin Kingdom – Tsar Ivan Sratsimir until 1396, when began the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

The Danube Park in Vidin is overlooking the river and it is a pleasant place for walks, seeing the passing ships and the Danube Bridge 2, which crosses Danube towards Romania. In the park is located the beautiful building of the city theater Vida, Osman Pazvantoglu's mosque and his library, the Turkish Post Office, the Telegraph Gate – part of a large fortification construction, built in 1735 but the walls were partially placed over the Roman defensive wall, called Bononya.

Chiprovtsi is a town famous throughout Bulgaria for its carpet weaving. Carpet production has been a craft and livelihood of the population in this Bal-

The historical museum in Chiprovtsi



A museum house in Chelopek Village



kan town for all times. The Chiprovtsi carpet is part of the cultural heritage of Bulgaria and is one of the emblems of the region. You can see the rich exhibition of hand-woven carpets in the Historical Museum of the city. It is believed that the crafty women of Chiprovtsi, who keep the tradition in their hands put in the carpets not just the traditional cotton and wool but their desires as well.

In the recent year, in the Vratsa region rural tourism has been actively developed. In the semi-mountainous villages of **Zgorigrad**, **Chelopek** and **Pavolche** there are many guest houses that offer complete relaxation, offering delicious homemade food, located amidst remarkable nature. Rural tourism has good traditions in the villages around Mezdra – **Ruska Bela**, **Opletnya**, **Zverino**, **Lik**, **Lyutibrod**, **Tipchenitsa**, **Rebarkovo** and **Ochin dol**.

Berkovitsa is a resort town at the foot of Kom Peak – the fourth highest peak in Western Stara Planina. From the top begins the Bulgarian section of the trans-European tourist route „E-3“, popularly known as „Kom-Emine“. Near Berkovitsa you can take the new eco-trail and visit the beautiful Hajdushki waterfalls.

Varshets is another preferred tourist destination in northwestern Bulgaria. In addition to its mineral water and sanatoriums that offer spa treatments, the town attracts with the beautiful landscapes of the city parks and close proximity to Rayski Kat (Paradise Corner) and Zanozhenski waterfalls. Varshets has its modern contribution in history: there, in 1924, was built the first Bulgarian casino, where in 1930 was held the first beauty contest. Due to its healing springs, since 1910 Varshets was known as European class spa destination. To this day it is still called the City of Health.

Turlak cuisine is unique



Bel Muzh is a traditional dish of the Turlaks – a community living in northwestern Bulgaria, famous with its extremely delicious meatless dishes. The Turlaks are mountain people and their name comes from the round shape of the barn, where they used to keep their cattle. Their main livelihood was stock raising. Although they were breeders, they ate meat

only on holidays. Their daily menu is completely meatless.

The local specialty Bel Muzh is made from 2–3 pieces of fresh unsalted cheese, which is mashed in a pan and stirred on the fire until it melts. Then a bit of salt is added and 4–5 tablespoons of flour until it thickens like porridge. After stirring it until it is well done, it is served in a plate.

Although it is meatless, the Turlak cuisine is incredibly tasty and healthy and it has been preserved to this day in the so-called Turlakia – about 30 mountain villages in the area of Vidin and Montana – from Salash and Stakevtsi through Chuprene to Chiprovtsi and Govezhda.

SLOW TOURISM IN BULGARIA

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Technical editor *Stefka Ivanova*

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E-mail: office@trud.cc
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