

## ***5 Days of Running in Rila&Vitosha***

1. In short: A 5-day itinerary: four days trail running tour, combining the most scenic places in Rila and Vitosha mountains plus one day of cultural exploration of the UNESCO protected Rila monastery area. The tour includes climbing of the highest peak on the Balkans - Musala 2925m. Around 100 km of trail running amongst the most beautiful areas of Vitosha and Rila mountains, close to the capital city Sofia and with short transfers each day. With more than 4000m D+ and around 5000m D- this tour suitable for beginners, but it is more appropriate for advanced runners. However, this is not a competition and the accent of the tour is exploration of new places and enjoyment of the beauties of nature, while safety of all participants will be observed at all times! The tour is prepared in such way so in case of bad weather the days can be rearranged and we can get the most of our time in the mountains.
2. Accommodation: 4 nights in guest houses, 1 night in hotel
3. Difficulty: intermediate
4. Price: 360 eur/person in a group of minimum 5 participants
  - price includes
    - All nights w/ breakfasts and dinners
    - All transfers during the trip
    - Licensed mountain guide
  - price DOES NOT include
    - Transport to Bulgaria - flight, bus, train etc.
    - Drinks during the trip
    - Lunch packs, energy bars or sandwiches during the days
    - Mountain insurance
    - Any equipment for trail running
  - Price is calculated for a group of 5 persons
5. Itinerary:

	DATE	LOCATION	TRANSFER	ACTIVITY	ACCOM.
1		Vitosha	Sofia - Aleko hut 40min; Aleko - Govedartsi: 1:45h	The high Vitosha loop - ~25km; ~1000m D+; ~5h	Guest house in Govedartsi
2		Rila	Govedartsi - Vada hut 30min	The Seven Rila Lakes and Skakavitsa waterfall - ~22km; ~1500m D+; 5-6h	Guest house in Govedartsi
3		Lakatiitsa	-	Zekiritsa peak loop - ~25km; ~700m D+; ~4-5h	Guest house in Govedartsi
4		Rila	Govedartsi - Borovets	Musala peak and the valley	Guest house

			30min; Borovets - Sapareva banya 1:30h	of Maritsa river - ~27km; 1000m D+; 5-6h	in Sapareva Banya
5			Sapareva banya - Rila Monastery - Sofia - ~3:30h total	Exploration of the UNESCO protected Rila Monastery and Sofia city tour	Hotel in Sofia

## 6. Detailed description:

### DAY 1 Vitosha

A short transfer from the capital city Sofia takes us to 1800m near the Aleko hut - the place where organised Bulgarian tourism began long ago in the 19th century. A beautiful easy alpine trail allows us to climb the highest peak of the mountain - Black peak (2290m). In beginning of June there might be still some snow drifts remaining from the winter season. The trail leads a long way down to the forest area and crosses the famous "stone rivers" - a unique geological phenomenon, product of pure mechanical weathering of the rocks. Then a long and not steep climb gets us back to the open plateaus of the mountain with great panoramas in all directions.

In the afternoon a short drive takes us to the village of Govedarts, to a comfortable guest house with delicious traditional food.

ACTIVITY: Around 25 km; D+ 1000m/D- 1000m, 5h

### DAY 2 The Seven Rila lakes

After a rich and delicious breakfast we head for a short transfer with the bus to the near Vada hut, situated in the forest at 1350m altitude. The route starts with a 30 min relatively steep climb and after that it goes gently up all the way to Skakavitsa hut at 1800m. The hut is located in a nice valley in a natural preserve, home to many rare botanical species and wildlife. Near the hut we are going to visit the highest waterfall in Rila - Skakavitsa waterfall with its impressive 70m height. The route continues towards the valley of the most famous lake group - The Seven Rila Lakes. It's a place with strong energy and many spiritual people come to meditate and to relax in this beautiful nature. Fantastic panorama in all directions is the reward from the Green rock peak on the ridge above the lakes. Then a long descend gets us back to the bus and in 30 min driving we are back in the hotel.

ACTIVITY: Around 22 km; D+ 1500 m/D- 1500 m, 5-6 h

### DAY 3 Lakatitsa

Today we start our run directly from the hotel. First we climb gently the slopes of Lakatishka Rila or Lakatitsa all the way up to the highest Zekiritza peak (1740m). The views to the Malyovitsa range are really stunning as we go out of the forest areas. It is interesting that this low mountain is still considered a part of the Rila mountain although so different. The way back is along the wide mountain meadows and a long river valley right back to the

village Govedarts. It's a shorter day, compared to the others, but just perfect so that we can relax and prepare for the next day and for mount Musala.

ACTIVITY: Around 25 km; D+ 700 m/D- 700 m, 4-6 h

## DAY 4 Musala peak

Today we head towards the highest peak in Bulgaria and on the Balkan peninsula - Musala (2925m)! A 30 min transfer takes us to the oldest ski resort Borovets, where we take a gondola lift to Yastrebets peak (2369m). This will skip us 1000 m climbing in the beginning of the day. From the top of the gondola lift our way to Musala is very clear and begins with a nice and flat warm up run to Musala hut (2389m). Another 600m climbing in a total of 7 km and we are on the top of Bulgaria! In the beginning of the 20th century the first meteo station was built here and it still operates. There is also a small room that can be used as a shelter in emergency cases. The route then follows the main ridge of Rila to climb several more 2700m + peaks before we enter the valley of Maritsa river - the biggest river that flows in Bulgaria. We pass two huts on the descend back to Borovets - a perfect opportunity for hot soup and fresh herbal tea.

From Borovets the bus takes us to the town of Sapareva banya in around 1:30h. The town is famous with its hot thermal springs which is one of the most relaxing things after an exhausting mountain trip!

ACTIVITY: Around 27 km; D+ 1000 m/D- 2000 m, 5-6 h

## DAY 5 Exploring the UNESCO heritage Rila Monastery and city tour of Sofia.

As our running across the mountains is finished we will go to explore one of the most important cultural sites in Bulgaria - the Rila monastery and the cave, where St. John of Rila spent 12 years of his life fasting, praying and preserving the cyrillic alphabet with rewriting many scripts. To go to the cave we have two options - longer around 1:30-2h or shorter around 20-30 min depending on the weather and our wishes.

From the monastery it takes a 2h transfer back to Sofia where we'll have a city tour and a final dinner in a traditional bulgarian tavern.

ACTIVITY: optional hike to the cave of St. John of Rila - 30 min or 2h, depending on time and condition of the group.