

Guided and selfguided trips in Bulgaria and the Balkans - ski touring, snowshoeing, walking and mountain biking tours

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Walking in Bulgaria - Rila and Pirin Classic Routes, 8 days

Day 1: Arrival day

On the first day of your trip you`ll be collected from your hotel in Sofia or the Sofia airport and driven to the first location of your walking trip in Bulgaria – the town of Bansko. While it is a bustling ski destination during Winter, now you will find Bansko a charming quiet town that is worth visiting and exploring for a while – the old stone houses and the church, the small museums and the lively main square with mountain view. If you have the time do not miss the Sunday open market where locals (and not only) from the region offer their production. Bansko also has a good choice of traditional restaurants, some bars and other entertainment. The natural thermal pools of the nearby villages of Dobrinishte and Banya are easily accessible.

Accommodation in a quiet family hotel in the center of Bansko for 4 nights – double/twin en suite rooms and delicious homemade dinner. During your stay in Bansko, 2 of the dinners are arranged with the hotel, two are left to your own choice – we will recommend places to eat outside in Bansko.

Drive time: 2.45 hours

Day 2: Mount Polezan

2851m ;4:30hrs ~6.3km ↑595m ↓595m

First day up the mountains. About 40 min transfer will take us to Gotse Delchev Hut at around 1400m above the sea level. There is a chair lift service up to 2240m near Bezbog Hut, the start point of the trek for today.

The highest point for today is Mount Polezan, the fourth highest peak in Pirin. It is a very panoramic peak, with views towards the main mountain ranges in the region – Rhodopes, Rila, Pirin and some Greek mountains are clearly visible in good weather. Lift back down and transfer to Bansko, some free time to look around the town.

Day 3: Vasilashki&Bunderishki Lakes

2588m; 7:30hrs ~14km ↑1150m ↓650m

This is your “Lakes” day. The route goes through a couple of valleys, where you will see quite a few of the numerous glacial lakes of Pirin.

The day starts with a 20 min transfer up to the start point above Bansko. Initially the large walking trail follows the crystal clear river of Demyanitsa through the forest until you reach Demyanitsa Hut near the border of Yulen Reserve. Further you enter the territory of the reserve which protects some of the oldest conifer forests of Pirin, especially the so called Bosnian Pine (*Pinus Heldreichii*) – impressive centuries-old pine giants.

The first steeper ascent after the hut will take us above the forest line and up to the lowest one of Vasilashki Lakes – Golyamo Vasilashko Ezero (The Big One). Further we slowly gain elevation following the valley and more and more views and lakes will open up in front of us. By lunch time we should pass near the highest two lakes in the valley – Todorini Ochi Lakes (The Eyes of Todorka) and reach the pass of Todorka.

The descent starts from the col on the ridge at nearly 2600 m – a zig-zagging trail leads us down to Bundersihka Valley at the foot of Mount Vihren. Another 5 lakes (Bunderishki Lakes) are located in this area and we will spot them all in good weather – The Long One, The Fish Lake, Muratovo Lake, The Frogs Lake and The Eye. After the initial steep ascent a gentle trail goes down to Vihren Hut – end of the trek for today. 30 min transfer back down to Bansko.

Day 4: Mount Vihren 2914m

7:00hrs ↗8km ↑1000m ↓1000m

Exciting day is in front of us – the ascent of the highest peak of Pirin Mountains – Vihren Peak, the stone kingdom of the Balkan Chamois and the Edelweiss flower. Transfer back to Vihren Hut, which is the start point of the route today. The route is short in km but with steady inclination and rocky terrain, so be well prepared with walking sticks and good boots.

Note: in case you have fear of heights and rocky passages, we would recommend you to follow the south trail only – up and down the same way. Otherwise the loop we suggest initially traverses the slopes of Vihren and we ascend from the north, where the last passage is a bit more technical (please read below), then we descend from the south back to Vihren Hut.

The ascending trail traverses the east slopes of Vihren until we enter the so-called Big Pot – a glacially formed cirque which divides Vihren from the Marble Ridge, with impressive views towards the north face of Vihren. We ascend up to Premkata Col (possible detour to the Foal Ridge and back) and finally follow the markers up along the rocky slope of Vihren. This part of the trail requires little scrambling and although it is not risky (secured by a metal chain) nor requires any special skills, it is not suitable for people with strong fear of heights. The descent from the top is on the other (south) side, until we reach Vihren Hut and get our transport back to Bansko.

Day 5: The Rila Monastery or the Seven Rila Lakes in the Rila National Park

A visit to the UNESCO site – The Rila Monastery with an optional short walking tour or a 5 hour tour around the Rila Lakes instead of the Monastery.

Today we will change the region and move from Pirin to the Rila Range.

After breakfast, a 2h morning transfer will take us to the world famous UNESCO heritage site in Bulgaria – the Rila Monastery for a visit and an optional hike with a visit to the chapel and the grave of Ivan Rilski – the Founder. 2:15h walk ↗3km ↑50m ↓300.

We also give an option to visit the Rila Lakes area and skip the monastery, according to your preferences. In this option a 2,5h drive will take us to the bottom lift station of the Rila Lakes lift, our start point of the hiking tour. There are 2,5 to 6h long route options that include only the most famous lakes or the whole valley and the main ridge above.

Afternoon 1:45h drive to the village of Govedartsi, your next location. Accommodation in a family hotel for 3 nights.

Day 6: Mount Malyovitsa 2729m

7:00hrs ↻13.7km ↑1000m ↓1000m

We are aiming for the most beautiful prominent peak in the Rila Mts today – Mount Malyovitsa. 25 min transfer will take us to the start point at 1760 m, at the border of the Rila National Park. The walking trail follows Malyovitsa River and for about an hour we reach Malyovitsa Hut. Further up the valley the route follows the easiest terrain in order to reach the Dear`s Lake, located at 2480 m. The last section up to the top takes less than an hour – we reach the main ridge, with clear views towards the Rila Monastery at the bottom of the valley south from us, as well as the Pirin Range, Vitosha Mountains, large parts of the Rila Mountains and Musala Peak. After we reach the peak of Malyovitsa, we would walk back on a similar path, drive to the hotel in Govedartsi.

The peak of Malyovitsa and the Dears Lake from a distance. The Rila Monastery is located in the valley to the left.

Day 7: Mount Musala 2925m

6:30hrs ↻14.4km ↑650m ↓650m

The natural finish of our walking adventure in Bulgaria is to climb its highest peak – Mount Musala. This morning, a 30 min transfer will take us to the ski resort of Borovets, where we take the Yastrebets gondola lift up to nearly 2400 m.

We would start hiking with 1h of nearly flat terrain until we reach Musala Hut. The next stage is up to Ledeno Ezero Hut, located in the foot of Musala, at 2700 a.s.l. We follow a marked tourist trail winding through the bottom of the glacial valley, near the blue Musala Lakes. Last effort will take us up to the peak – around 45 min of walking a steeper zig-zagging trail up to the top of Musala. Same way back to your hotel in Govedartsi for a last third night there.

Day 8: Departure

There are a few options for that day:

Main one, calculated in the cost – we will drive you from Govedartsi straight to the Sofia airport or Sofia city center. The ride takes less than 2h.

We can drive you to Sofia on the previous evening, after climbing Musala and change the last night in Govedartsi with accommodation in Sofia. Please request us for the additional cost.