

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

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Mountain Biking Bulgaria's Alpine Ranges, 7 days

Itinerary:

Day 1, Sofia, Bulgaria:)

Arrival in Sofia. Transfer to the town of Bansko, located on the Northern slopes of Pirin Mountains, in Razlog Hollow between Rila, Pirin and Rhodope mountain ranges. You'll meet with your guide and discuss the route for the next few days. Time to get used to the new place, walk around the old town of Bansko and dinner.

Day 2, Pirin Mountains: Bansko to Obidim Village, 39 km, + 500 m

20 min along the asphalt road from Bansko up the mountain will take us to the start of our route for today. We follow a large dirt road through the pine forests with some nice views towards the valley and opposite Rila Mountains until we reach the asphalt to the other ski area in Northern Pirin – the Dobrinishte-Bezbug road. With an additional 20 min uphill along the road we reach the chair lift station and get a lift up to 2240m, in the heart of Pirin National park. We'll see the Bezbug glacial lake and Bezbug peak. Descent back along nice forest roads and further towards Obidim village. It's a small

settlement with great views to the surrounding mountains. Accommodation in a guest house.

Day 3, Pirin Mountains – Rhodope Mountains: Obidim to Ortsevo, 55 km, +1300 m

A demanding day: we start with a nice descent to the bottom of the valley of Mesta River which marks the border between Pirin and the Rhodopes. Further 25 km, mostly uphill, will take us to the main ridge of Velijski Rhodopi. It is the most southwestern range of the endless Rhodopes, inhabited mainly by local Muslims, called Pomacs. Many of the villages have no asphalt access and the lifestyle of the local farmers hasn't significantly changed since the times of their forefathers.

We pass near Medeni Polyani Village and bike an additional 15 km along the ridge via Zlataritsa Village until we finish in Ortsevo Village at 1500 m above the sea. This is the most scenic part of the route for today – amazing views towards the mountains of Bulgaria and Greece, as well as the surrounding valleys. Accommodation in a local house in the village.

Day 4, Rhodope Mountains – Rila Mountains: Ortsevo to Belmeken, 28 km, + 700 m

A short ascent will take us on the main ridge above Ortsevo Village. From the ridge we'll take a nice descent down to the valley, to the small town of Yakoruda, where we get the famous narrow gauge train to take us up the mountain once again. The journey takes an hour, we get off at Avramovo station at nearly 1300 m above the sea. This is the highest rail station on the Balkans. Avramovo is located right on the border of Rila and Rhodope Mountains.

We'll continue biking in the Rila Mountains, following a dirt road that ascends in the direction of the Belmeken area of Southeastern Rila. At the end of the day we will reach Hristo Smirnenski Hut, located at 1860 m above the sea, at the so-called Wolf's Meadow locality. Overnight in the hut.

Day 5, Rila Mountains: Belmeken to Granchar Hut, 43 km, +700 m

Today we bike high up in Rila Mountains. First we'll follow the asphalt road up to Belmeken Dam at 2000 m. Then we get a nice panoramic macadam road that cuts the south slopes of the mountains and goes towards Treshtenik area with gentle ascents and descents. Final ascent will take us up to Granchar Hut at 2200 m in Rila National Park. The hut is located on the shores of Granchar Lake – a beautiful glacial formation. Accommodation in the hut – main luggage is not transferred today.

Day 6, Rila Mountains: Granchar to Govedartsi, 43 km, + 450 m

An epic day is in front of us! We'll cross the whole mountain, biking on the famous Kaiser's Road, a historical high mountain road built in the beginning of 20th century around WWI, to connect the northern and southern slopes of Rila. It was the initiative of the Bulgarian King Ferdinand, who wanted to show the beauties of the mountains to his relative, the German Kaiser. Not so much left from the infrastructure nowadays, but still there is enough remnants that will give us the impression of this project.

After 8 km of ascent along the winding road we reach the main summit of the mountains at Zavratchitsa Pass at 2450 m and then descend towards Zavratchitsa Hut. The highest massif of Rila and on the Balkans – Musala Ridge, is on our left side. Further we take a nice single track that goes up and down and reaches Chakur Vojvoda Hut. The last section is a long descent down to Borovets ski resort at 1300 m.

The last section for today is a 17 km long quiet asphalt road that goes from Borovets via Beli Iskur Village down to Govedartsi Village at 1100 m. Accommodation at the village.

Day 7, Rila Mountains: Govedartsi to Sapareva Banya, 32 km, + 800 m.

Our last day is devoted to the area of Lakatishka Rila, a hilly sub-range that gives magnificent views toward Rila Mountains to the south and Vitosha and Balkan to the north. We'll ascend its highest peak – Zekiritsa at 1735 m and finally descend to Sapareva Banya Village (800 m), famous for its mineral pools.

Afternoon drive to Sofia – 1,5 hours, or accommodation in the village. It's a good base for visiting the famous Seven Rila Lakes region of Rila or Rila Monastery.