The Orpheus Mountains self-guided

Chernatitsa range occupies a really special place in the perching bright ridges and dark gorges of the Rhodope Mountains. Not only because it lies in the middle of these vast mountains, but also because it nests all of its beauty within. Its high ridge is covered with centuries-old spruce and fir trees all the way up to the highest peak Persenk (2091 m), while in its lower parts deciduous forests encircle lush meadows. Nature has also created in Chernatitsa the spectacular sculpture Chudnite Mostove (Marvelous Bridges), and man has left precious traces of its centuries-old coexistence with the mountains – the Roman roads and old consecrated grounds, hidden in its labyrinths, are a real challenge for the adventurer. Let's not forget Assen's Fortress and Bachkovo Monastery – unique masterpieces of the Bulgarian medieval architectural art. Small stone villages spiritualize pastoral landscapes, where, invisible to the eye, the animals - the true owners of this natural paradise – inhabit undisturbed.

In the hard for the Ottoman Empire 1878, when as a result of yet another Russian-Turkish War Bulgaria finally got its freedom from a 5-century old foreign domination, an Englishman serving under the Turks – Sinclair bey – organized a rebellion among the Muslims in the Rhodope villages in order to break territories away from the newly established Bulgarian state. And he succeeded, though these Muslims were ethnic Bulgarians. The result was that 15 villages refused to obey the Bulgarian government and for several years they had lived in a kind of autonomy. Informal leader of this so called Republic of Tamrash was Mehmed Aga from the village of Tamrash, whose residents as well as the resident of the other breakaway villages took an active part in the bloody suppression of the April uprising – the last attempt of the Bulgarian population before the war to gain its freedom on its own. This cruelty was not forgotten – years later when the Balkan War ended the disputable situation and Rhodope Mountains were finally annexed to Bulgaria, the local Christian population burned and destroyed Tamrash. Now high in the mountains there, where the village used to be, are left only walls covered with nettles and the curiously looking tombstones in what has survived from the Muslim cemetery.

Introduction:
Definitely a tour that remains alive in your memory for years. Passing through some of the most spectacular parts of the Rodopi Mountains (the Trigrad Gorge, Yagodina Cave, The Miraculous Bridges and so on), this trip gives you the opportunity to explore the mountain without being escorted by a guide, relying just on your own ability to handle exciting and surprising situations! Pre-arranged accommodation and luggage transportation during the whole trip ensure the pleasure of unrestricted walking through the wilderness of the mythical Orpheus' native lands. The trail affords breathtaking views over high rocky cliffs, dense woods, alpine meadows and the tiny villages still housing the ancient spirit of times gone by.

Special highlights:
Rodopi Mountains The Rodopi Mountains (with highest peak: Golyam Perelik (2191m a.s.l.) are the oldest mountains on the Balkan Peninsula.
Trigrad (1250 m a.s.l.) is a small village in the central part of the Rodopi Mountains.
Yagodina Cave is among the longest caves in Bulgaria (more than 10 000m mapped so far), considered to be one of the most beautiful in Europe with its outstanding stalactites, stalagmites, columns, ponds and cave pearls in them.
The Devil's Throat Cave has its name from a legend. It tells that if you let something flow in the cave river it will never come out again. And there is a cave waterfall - one of the highest underground waterfalls in Europe, 42 m high.
The Miraculous bridges (1450 m a.s.l.) are 2 unique rock formation (about 40 m. high) covering an area of 40,3 hectares.
Bachkovo Monastery is the second largest Bulgarian monastery.

Itinerary:

Day 1. Arrival at Sofia, Plovdiv or Burgas airport and transfer to Plovdiv. Accommodation in the old town. Free time for sightseeing in Plovdiv.

Day 2. Transfer to Yagodina cave. After the cave tour (be prepared for the temperature inside the cave

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which is only 6°C), the path passes by Yagodina village continues through coniferous woods, potato fields and along the upper edges of the high cliffs of the Trigrad Gorge to Trigrad itself, where you will stay overnight. Unnecessary luggage will be transferred to the hotel in Trigrad.
Walking distance: 15 km; walking time: 4hrs; Uphill walk: 600 m (1,968 ft); downhill walk: 250 m (820 ft).
/breakfast, dinner/

Day 3. The walk today starts from Trigrad village, and continues through alpine meadows and old forests to the Chairski Lakes before heading back to Trigrad – via the Trigrad Gorge and The Devil's Throat Cave (walking distance – 22 km, or 13,6 miles). As the trek is a bit long you will need to make an early start in order to complete all the stages. At first the path heads up over the opposite hill of Trigrad village. Then following the ridge it goes down along green meadows, full of orchids during summer time, to the dirt track that leads on to the Chairski Lakes. Having visited the lakes, the path goes back down to another point of the same dirt track. Then along the Livadnitsa River, flowing in into Trigradska River at the beginning of Trigrad Gorge itself, you continue uphill along the asphalt road through the gorge. You just have to walk between the 250 m (or 820 ft) high cliffs of the gorge to The Devil's Throat Cave and further on to Trigrad. You will stay overnight in the same hotel in Trigrad.
Walking distance: 22km; walking time: 6 hrsUphill walk: 900 m (2,952 ft); downhill walk: 700 m (2,296 ft)
/breakfast, dinner/

Day 4. An early morning transfer to Beden village (1,150 m, or 3,772 ft) will deposit you at today's starting point. Your luggage will continue with the car and will be waiting for you at the guesthouse in Liaskovo village, where you will stay overnight (walking distance – 24 km, or 14,8 miles). From Beden, the path travels up to the ridge by the Dry Peak, weaving northwards through picturesque hills and affording superb views across the mountains to Liaskovo village (1,185 m, or 3,887 ft). This is the most panoramic day of the program.
Walking distance: 24km; walking time: 6-7 hrs; walk: 350 m (1,148 ft); downhill walk: 315 m (1,033 ft).
/breakfast, dinner/

Day 5. After breakfast you start your trek from Liaskovo to the Skalnite mostove Hut (1,620 m, or 5,314 ft), a 15 km walk (or 9,3 mile) through century-old coniferous woods and hidden meadows. Your luggage will be taken from Liaskovo and will be waiting for you at the end of the day when the driver meets you by the hut. After a visit to the rocky phenomenon of the Miraculous Bridges (which is a result of an ancient cave collapsing during an earthquake), you will make the short transfer (30 km, or 18.6 miles) to Orehovo, where you will stay overnight.
Walking distance: 15km; walking time: 4-5 hrs; Uphill walk: 635 m (2,083 ft); downhill walk: 200 m (656 ft)
/breakfast, dinner/

Day 6. Today you do a loop hike in the area of Orehovo. The route leads you to a beautiful river gorge with nice waterfalls, water cascades and rock formations. Overnight in Orehovo.
Walking time: 4 hrs; Uphill walk: 400 m downhill walk: 400 m
/breakfast, dinner/

Day 7
Today you start with a hike leading you to Kosovo village. Then you will be transferred to Plovdiv via the Bachkovo Monastery (there we will make a short stop). In the afternoon you can go on a sightseeing tour in Plovdiv's Old Town, which still possesses ancient houses and monuments. You will stay overnight in Plovdiv.
Walking time: 5 hrs; Uphill walk: 400 m downhill walk: 500 m
/breakfast/

Day 8. Depending on your departure time you will have transfer to Sofia, Plovdiv or Burgas Airport (transfer time: 20 min to Plovdiv Airport; 2 hrs to Sofia Airport, 3.30hrs to Burgas).
/breakfast/

DETAILED ROAD BOOK AND MAP WILL BE PROVIDED UPON ARRIVAL

Accommodation:
You will stay overnight in small pensions and guesthouses (days 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7) with en-suite on HB (breakfast & dinner included, except for dinner on day 1 and day 7). Ordering lunch pack is available in each of the pensions if necessary for the day walks.

Luggage transportation:
A daypack for carrying personal items during the daily treks is necessary. Unnecessary luggage will be transferred as follows:
Day 2: from Yagodina cave to Trigrad upon arrival at Yagodina cave.
Day 4: from Trigrad to Liaskovo (after leaving you in the village of Beden).
Day 5: from Liaskovo to the village of Orehovo.
Day 7: from Kosovo to Plovdiv together with you.

Tour type: IT

Difficulty grade: B

Best period: May-October

Weather:
Temperatures expected for this period are between +15 and +30°C. Sometimes noontime could be a little exhausting for trekking on open territories. Rainfalls or short but heavy showers are possible, being a bit prolonged during spring and late autumn.

Equipment and clothing:
Necessary items: daypack (35 l); walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; sunscreen lotion; mobile phone (ESSENTIAL! In case of emergency in the mountains). Fountains with drinking water are available during the daily walks.
For full list with recommended items see "General".

Vaccination:
Optional. See "General" for more information.

Group size: Minimum 2 persons

The price includes: transfers from/to Sofia, Burgas or Plovdiv airport; detailed roadbook with map; luggage transfers, accommodation and boarding as mentioned above; VAT and all local taxes.

The price does not include: tips, lunchpacks and other meals, entrance fees, alcohol drinks, cigarettes and other personal expenses.

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

Tour types
Our tours are divided in different tour types, regardless of being guided or not or if someone travels alone or in a group. We have prepared your vacation so that you can concentrate on new impressions and experiences, awaiting you all the time. Here is a description of the various tours:
IT: Individual tours
There is no guide on this tour. You travel individually and we are responsible for the hotel overnights and /some/ transfers. Sometimes you will travel together with other people. If you wish a guide can be arranged, if ordered. We take it for granted that you can read maps, provided by us upon arrival.

Difficulty grades
To prepare yourself for the best of your vacation we recommend that you start planning it in an advance. Good physical condition is required. In order to achieve it we advise you to start walking, jogging or cycling everyday. Swimming a couple of times a week is also highly recommended. You do not need much to get yourself in shape. And don't forget that the most important tip for an unforgettable active holiday is to choose a trip which corresponds to your physical condition!
B: Moderate
Most of you, who are used to walking during a long weekend, will be in condition to cope with a tour of this level. You should be in good health condition and not too bad physical condition. We have successive days of longer and more difficult walking and days of lighter walking. Some parts of the day routes are done at a higher altitude. The paths are in good condition. We walk for 5-7h a day. You are free to skip some walks and have a rest.
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Extensions: Yes, Black Sea
This is a unique proposal, which gives you the opportunity to stay in Bulgaria for one week more at the incredibly low price! We can offer a great variety of means of accommodation - from home stays (no meals) to 2, 3 and 4-star hotels (BB or HB) on the Southern Bulgarian Black Sea Coast:
- Sunny Beach - a big modern resort with hundreds of hotels, cafes, pubs, casinos, water-sports facilities etc.
- Sozopol, Nessebar - small towns (founded by the ancient Greeks) with picturesque old quarters and a specific atmosphere.
- Lozenets -a peaceful small village with a beautiful beach. Only 4-5 km from the forests of the Strandzha Mountains where you can go walking, biking or riding horses.
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Equipment and clothing:
You should always remember that you must try to keep the weight of your hiking equipment down to a minimum. Your packed daypack should weigh no more than 10-15 kilograms.
Recommended items: waterproof rucksack (60 l) & daypack (35 l); walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; light casual shoes/sandals for walking and/or for travelling; gaiters; loose, casual trousers for trekking; waterproof trousers; fleece windstopper jacket; windproof, waterproof outer shell garment (breathable if possible!); hat for sun protection; sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion and lip balm; water bottle; torch (headlamp); mobile phone; underwear (not cotton); mosquito repellent; trekking sticks.
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Vaccination:
Tick-borne encephalitis, Marselle fever and Crimea haemorhagic fever is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Check latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure.
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Money and personal expenses
You will need some extra money to cover meals, drinks and extra trips not included in the tour price. Additional money for souvenirs and personal things could also be spent. That is why it is always necessary to have Bulgarian money in cash.
The payments in Bulgaria are usually made in "LEV" (BGN), which is the official currency. The exchange rate with EU and USD is quite changing sometimes, but approximately it is: BGN:EU - 2:1; BGN:USD - 1,6-1. Credit Cards could be used primarily in some supermarkets and restaurants in the biggest cities as well as in the petrol stations. Usually it is marked on their front doors if Credit Cards are accepted. ATMs ("bankomates") are more frequent (again in the biggest towns only!). Traveler's cheques take quite a lot of time to handle and not each bank deals with them (in many cases it takes even few days since their deposition in the bank!) - thus they are not recommended! Here are some examples of comparative costs in Bulgaria (NB: prices in mid-range restaurants!):
- Coffee – 0,3 Euro
- Tea – 0,3 Euro
- Beer (0,5 l) – 0,5-1 Euro
- Soft drink (0,5 l) - 0,4-0,5 Euro
- Bottle of water (0,5 l) - 0,3-0,4 Euro
- Bottle of mark red wine (0,75 l) - 5-10 Euro
- Three-course lunch - 4-10 Euro
- Lunch pack - 2-3 Euro
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Cell phone coverage
Currently the whole territory of Bulgaria is covered with a mobile connection. However the trekking & cycling tours are done in mountainous areas where the signal could be weak or even lacking from time to time. In such a situation you just need to change your location a bit in order to find available network.
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Electricity
In Bulgaria two-pin sockets are normal. Voltage is 220 watts. If you come from the U.S. or UK you need to purchase an adapter, which is available only in Bulgarian cities and biggest winter and sea resorts.
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Brief about Bulgaria
Territory - 110 912 sq. km.
Population - 7 538 000 (2003) (83,9 % ethnic Bulgarians; 9,4% Turks; 4,7% Roma; rest – smaller minorities Russians, Armenians, Vlachs, Jews, Karakachans etc.)
Relligion – 82,6% Orthodox, 12,2% Islam, 0,7% Protestant, 0,5% Catholics, 4,1% Others.
Capital city - Sofia (1 377 531 people in 2006)
Bigest towns - Plovdiv, Varna, Bourgas, Rouse, Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven
Mountains - 37 (biggest - Balkan Mountain: length - ~ 550 km.; width ~ 30-60 km.); (highest - Rila Mountain - peak Musala - 2 925 m.a.s.l.)
Boundaries - North - Romania; East - Black Sea (coastline 378 km.); West - Serbia, Macedonia; South - Greece, Turkey;
Distribution of the lands - 0 - 400 m.a.s.l. - 59,8 %; 400 - 1000 m.a.s.l. - 27,6 %; 1000 - 2000 m.a.s.l. - 11,9 %; over 2000 m.a.s.l. - 0,7 %
Protected areas - 3 national parks, 10 nature parks, 55 reserves, 35 managed reserves, over 350 protected areas and 500 natural monuments
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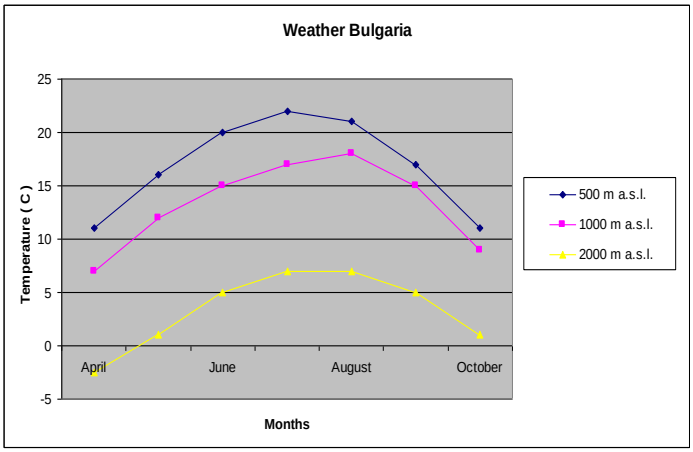
Weather
Mean year temperature - + 10,5 °C (Abs. Min. - -38,3 °C ; Abs. Max. - + 45,2 °C)
Mean rainfall per year - 416 - 650 mm. in the lowlands; 650 - 1193 mm. in the highlands
Rainy days per month – May – 7; June – 8; July – 6; August – 3; September – 6; (number may be higher in the mountains)
Mean daily/night temperatures (up to 1000 m a.s.l.) - May + 22/12 °C; June + 26/16 °C; July + 28/17 °C; August + 26/15 °C; September + 23/13 °C;

Altitudinal distribution of annual temperatures in Bulgaria



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