

THE BEST HIKING TRAILS OF BULGARIA RILA AND PIRIN NATIONAL PARKS

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS



On this tour we will visit Bulgaria's most picturesque alpine treks and the Balkans' tallest summit: Musala (2925m/9596ft). Rila and Pirin Mountains are situated southwest in the country. They were both glaciated and the relief shows obvious signs of this process. The alpine flora and vegetation belt above 2500m is really impressive.

Rila is probably the most famous alpine range in Bulgaria not only because it is with its 2925m the highest in the country and on the Balkan Peninsula, but also because of its special charm and stories about it. These start with the Thracian origins of the mountain's name (Rila – well-watered mountain) and continue with the belief that Rila is a holy spiritual mountain, a place to gather wisdom and reunion with nature. There are many sacraments in this mountain and they say it is a blessed one, a center for higher divine power. Rila offer us spectacular vast scenery and plenty of sparkling glacial lakes.

Pirin is the second highest mountain and its face is completely different. It is covered with white marble rocks, which form breathtaking landscapes together with the sky. Its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea determines the mild and sunny climate and the reputation of the sunniest mountain range. The local stories tell us about bravery, freedom and dignity. Its symbol is the eagle and sometimes you really have the feeling as if you are flying in the clouds. Pirin National Park is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. Pirin has acquired an Alpine relief - rocky marble or granite peaks and cliffs, deep cirques, well-shaped glacier valleys and numerous lakes.

During our tour in the two national parks we will enjoy broad alpine meadows and serrated summits, glacier lakes, stone rivers, rare plant and animal life. We will also visit the Rila Monastery a UNESCO Cultural Heritage site and one of Bulgaria's best-known sights.

The hikes are suited to people experienced in alpine walking. They could be adapted according to the group's fitness level. There are sufficient alternative walking routes in case of bad weather. All the hikes are designed to follow the light pack principle – the guests take only a day's supplies of water, food, and clothing. The rest of the luggage either remains inside the transfer vehicle, or in your accommodation.

1. THE SEVEN RILA LAKES

Hike duration 3 hours, 6 km/4miles; climbing and descending 350m

Activity level: moderate

The Seven Rila Lakes – very beautiful group of seven glacial lakes. The area is easily accessible by a chairlift and offers a variety of paths and hiking routes. A transfer from Sofia takes us for 3 hours to the Panichishte Resort cable car which takes us to the Seven Rila Lakes Cirque. We are going to explore them one by one. Each lake is named after its most characteristic feature: The Tear, The Eye, The Kidney, The Twin, The Trefoil, The Fish Lake and The Lowest Lake. The walking route is of moderate difficulty with individual brief paths featuring steep inclines. Our accommodation for the night is a mountain hut. This will give us the opportunity to stay longer in the beautiful area of the lakes and to start the next day's hike at a higher altitude.



2. MALYOVITSA

Hike: 7 hours of walking, 18km/11miles; climbing 800m/2600ft and descending 1200m/3960ft)

Activity level: challenging

Today we face the most challenging walk of the tour, mainly because of its length. We continue along the crest where we enjoy further stunning views towards the Urdini and Elenski Lakes situated beneath us. We are going to pass the Malyovitsa Summit (2729m/9088ft). The region we enter is the cradle of the Bulgarian rock climbing and mountaineering. It impresses with its steep pyramidal peaks. After lunch we descend into the beautiful valley. Then continue via a trail surrounded by coniferous forests and Alpine shrubs and settle into a nice family hotel at the village of Govedartsi – our accommodation for the next two nights.



3. MUSALA

Hike: 6 hours of walking; 13km/8miles; climbing and descending 750m/2460ft

Activity level: moderate

Musala is the highest peak of the Balkan Peninsula – 2925m /9,596ft. The name derives from "Mus Allah" ("the mountain of Allah"), being so named during the period when Bulgaria was part of the Islamic Ottoman Empire. A cable car takes us from the Borovets Resort to the setting-off point for the hike. The serrated wall of Musala never leaves our sight as we ascend through stone rivers and past glacier lakes. The genuinely impressive view from the peak to the surrounding mountains offers a deserving end to the whole adventure. On a clear day it offers us an impressive view. All major mountain ranges of Bulgaria can be seen from the top. After a picnic lunch, we descend on the way back



4. RILA MONASTERY

Hike duration 2 hours, 5 km/3miles, no significant elevation loss or gain

Activity level: easy

We will visit today one of the most picturesque orthodox structures, the Rila Monastery. It played a major role in preserving Bulgarian culture and Orthodoxy alive during the Ottoman occupation. Today's walk leads us to the cave of St Ivan Rilski - the hermit founder of the monastery community. According to the legend, anyone who is able to pass through the hole in the cave's roof proves himself as a righteous person. That's how we decide who is worthy to continue the tour ;) After lunch at a nice restaurant by the river we depart for the town of Bansko. We will settle in a cozy family hotel for the next four nights.



5. VIHREN SUMMIT

Hike: 6-7hrs of walking; 9km/5,5miles; climbing and descending 1000m/3300ft.

Activity level: challenging

Today you will explore the Karst parts of Pirin, which are also home to the endangered Edelweiss, the elusive Wallcreeper and the shy Balkan Chamois (wild goats). The target today is Mount Vihren: Bulgaria's second-highest and the Pirin's highest summit, Reaching 2,914 m/9,560 ft. Our efforts will be rewarded with spectacular views.



6. BUNDERISHKI CIRQUE

Hike: 6-7hrs of walking; 16km/10miles; climbing 700m/2300ft and descending 1100m/3650ft)

Activity level: moderate

Today, we visit one of the most picturesque parts of the Pirin: the Banderishki Lakes *Cirque*. Many trekking routes cross this beautiful area. We pass among some of the 16 glacial lakes, revealing one by one as we climb the terraces. We pass through the Yulen Nature Reserve and descend into virgin fir groves following a shady path along the Demyanitsa River. A transfer takes us back to Bansko.



7. POLEJAN SUMMIT

Hike 5 hours of walking; 8km/5miles; climbing and descending 650m/2100ft)

Activity level: moderate to challenging

Chair cable car to the Bezbog Hut. This is the setting-off point for the hiking trek to the Polezhan Summit (2851m/9354ft) which offers one of the most beautiful panoramas in the Pirin, over 17 stunning glacier lakes, The peak is surrounded by three Cirques with three groups of lakes - Disilishki in the north, Polezhanski in the south and Strazhishki in the west. We use the classic route through the northeast ridge, which is not difficult or too steep, except of the last 20-minute stage of the summit.

8. TRANSFER BACK TO SOFIA