

## ROSE VALLEY – Cultural & Walking Tour

**Duration:** 7 nights / 8 days

**Activity level:** EASY to MODERATE

### DESCRIPTION

With this tour we invite you to the core of the Balkans. We are heading to the geographical and the historical heart of the Balkan Mountain, from where the name of the peninsula originates from. The tour is featuring the famous Bulgarian Rose Valley in its beauty, cultural contrasts and long history. The famous rose oil production is centered in the city of Kazanlak. A short remark – Bulgaria exports about 85% of the rose oil in the world. In the same city, the still operational military factory Arsenal used to prepare the widely known machine gun Kalashnikov during the communist era. We are going to explore the history and present of both phenomena. The rose and gunpowder scent are deeply integrated in the culture of this region and the people living there. A 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman person from this region, regardless Greek, Bulgarian or Turkish, will always carry a gun – the artifact of destruction. In the same time he, and surprisingly often she, will have a piece of beauty in his/hers pocket – a flask with couple of drops from the Damascena rose oil (Damascena = rose from Damaskus). We will see the houses where, those people were living, their arts and crafts, their legends, poetry and ideals, and finally their deeds. We will hear their stories through original narratives, poetry, and even personal family stories from their ancestors. Those are the Balkan stories about struggles for independence, rebellious spirit, about the never-ending Balkan Mountains and the wonderful Rose valley. We will dig even deeper in the history of this region, also known with its other name – the Valley of Thracian kings. That is not by chance, with its over 800 tombs (one of them UNESCO World heritage site) and settlements we will have the chance to explore the temperament and culture of these ancient native people. They were well known for their wine, joyful life around the mineral springs and fine arts. Come, smell, touch, experience and delight yourselves with the Guns and Roses tour.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Historic Koprivshitsa and Karlovo – Bulgarian National Revival architecture
- Ancient Thracian tombs, vineyards, and wine tasting in Starosel
- Buzludzha – UFO monument, representing communist ideology
- Dryanovo region - breathtaking eco path and “Bacho Kiro” cave
- Sokolski Monastery and the prettiest Russian Church in Bulgaria
- Arsenal – the largest Kalashnikov producer from the communist era
- The Thracian tomb of Kazanlak – UNESCO World heritage site
- Visit to Rosarium, Museum of Roses and authentic Rose distillery
- Koprinka Reservoir and Dam – Monumental dam construction from the communist era
- Bozhentsi - architectural reserve
- Unexpected pleasant surprise

## ITINERARY

### Day 1 The town of Koprivshtitsa and Starosel Tombs and Winery

We depart from Sofia - the capital of Bulgaria and head to Koprivshtitsa – a town with one of the best examples of the Bulgarian version of Ottoman architecture. We will enter into some of the houses of the richest 19<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarians. After digging into the Bulgarian Revolutionary and Poetic past we move a bit farther south and much further in the history. Starosel is an ancient Thracian settlement, famous with its well preserved 6 tombs, dating back to the 4-5 c. BC. The Thracians, the local people on the Peninsula along the Greeks, were smart people. They have delighted themselves with a lot of wine and mineral water. In the next two days will behave like them and enjoy one of the best wines in the SPA and Wine-cellar complex of Starosel.



### Day 2 Karlovo - the gate to the rose valley

Today we take off to the town of Karlovo, where we follow the footprints of the 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary Vasil Levski. We will visit his birth house and walk in the old part of the city, announced as an architecture reserve. Our way brings us to the 15<sup>th</sup> century old “Kurshum” Mosque - literally meaning the “Bullet” mosque and named after its leaden roof. The first touch to the magic of the local roses and herbs awaits us not far from here. Our afternoon delight is a refreshing walk into the nature reaching the Suchurum waterfall close to Karlovo. On the way back to the mineral baths retreat we will stop for a short degustation of white and yellow cheese at a local dairy shop.



### Day 3 The eco path “Byala reka” (White river) and the city of Kalofer

We will have a refreshing start into the day. The eco path “Byala reka” (White river) is a pure delight for the forest lovers. Deep into the woods of the National park “Central Balkan” (UNESCO tentative natural reserve) we will have a 3 hours walk. We will cross 8 wooden bridges, look above dozens of river pools and magnificent rocks, while listening the songs of the birds. The eco path is moderate and yet adventurous. Put your mountain shoes on and enjoy the track : ) After having a fresh trout from the same river for lunch we move to the town of Kalofer. We will visit one Orthodox monastery and get to know the beauty of the Kalofer lace. Shortly after, we continue our way to the village, where we will sleep in the next two days.



### Day 4 The village of Bozhentsi, Dryanovo monastery, eco path and cave

We are already in the ethnographic village of Bozhentsi. We won't start from there though. Our first attraction site is the eco path by the Dryanovo monastery. The path will welcome us with its oak forests, high cliffs and amazing views from its terraces. We will pass the marvelous “Sini vir” (Blue pool) just before having a proper Balkan meal in the 12<sup>th</sup> century monastery.



# adventure & GUSTO



Next stop is the amazing “Bacho Kiro” cave (3.6 km deep). Finally we return to the architectural reserve of Bozhentsi, famous with its slate roofs, cobblestone pavement and hospitable people.

## Day 5 Shipka Peak, Buzluzda Peak and Koprinka Reservoir

We return to the South side of the Balkan mountain. Our walking journey starts from the St. Nikola peak (1326 m), from where we will walk down to an architectural master piece in the middle of the forest. After two hours walk down the Balkan mountain we reach the Russian Shipka memorial church. This masterpiece of Russian Orthodox architecture in Bulgaria was built to commemorate one of the most important battles from the Russo-Turkish war from 1877-1878. From there we go for lunch in a former socialist restaurant at the Koprinka reservoir to enjoy a culinary miracle – the wels catfish soup. Our accommodation for the next days is right at the lake shore. In the afternoon we drive upwards to another peak (1441 m), where instead of a mountain top, we will see one of the most futuristic and impressive monuments of communism– the **Buzludzha monument in a form of an UFO.**



## Day 6 Kazanlak Roses and the Thraciam tomb UNESCO World heritage site

Just 30 km east from Koprinka reservoir we visit the city of Kazanlak. It is **the city of Guns and Roses.** Today our focus falls on the roses. We start with a walk through the city Rose Rosarium Park and enter the brand new Rose museum. After a feast in the “Bulgaran” restaurant we head to one of Bulgaria’s seven UNESCO world heritage sites – the Thracian tomb of Kazanlak. This royal tomb will unveil us some great examples of Early Hellenic mural depictions. Following the stairs outside of the tomb we will visit the Ethnographic museum for rose liquor and rose jam degustation in an authentic atmosphere. After that we end up in our 100 % spruce wood by the Koprinka reservoir and enjoy a special dinner in a nearby village.



## Day 7 Kazanlak Guns and Rose distillery

It is already familiar to us to welcome the day with an exciting walk. It will guide us through an old Megalith place, ruins of a fortress and bring us to Kazanlak. The guns come next. The Arsenal Factory used to be one of the most notorious Kalashnikov rifle producers during the Cold war, well known for its high quality. I don’t know what is hidden behind this claim, but definitely your country has a weapon industry as well. By the way Arsenal is still the largest weapon producer of Bulgaria. Only the name of the rifle has changed, but the factory and its Cultural Centre from the communist era are intact. Within in it is the third largest hall in the country with an impressive crystal chandelier in the main hall. After recognizing the culture hidden behind the weapons will take a look at them. We will be granted an access to the special exhibition armory room of the facility. Finally we lay down the arms and cheer an unforgettable century old rose distillery in a village next by. With rose cream on our hands, rose liqueur in our taste, happiness in our hearts and great memories in our minds, we end the tour.



## Day 8 Transfer to Sofia