

Icon Painting & Monastery Tour (Bulgaria)



The tempera technique has been used in Bulgaria since ancient times. After the official adoption of Christianity in 865 this method was applied to icon production. This way of depicting icons has been preserved for more than 1,100 years. The oldest icons found in Bulgaria illustrate that the tempera technique kept the images unchanged since they were created.

The soft radiance of the Bulgarian icon is a grand dimension of the fate, stability and spiritual evolution of the Bulgarians after their conversion to Christianity in the 9th Century. Nameless master painters filled the dead iconographic scheme with life, exquisiteness and bursts of color. Canonical ascetic faces were replaced by youthful looking saints, humble hermits, venerable prophets and lifelike portraits of the Blessed Virgin. Their deep-set eyes radiate wisdom and a love of mankind. The virtuoso line and the vivid exuberant color imposed a new ideal of beauty, previously unseen in the Christian world. Icons are an integral part of Bulgarian church art. The first icon schools were established in monasteries. These religious sites have preserved the spirit of Christianity throughout the centuries and in the years of foreign domination the icons served as a cultural link with the traditions of the past. Bulgarian icon art experienced its greatest upsurge after the 10th Century, peaking in the 12-14th Century when Bulgaria was the leading centre from which the use of icons spread

throughout the Slav world and the Balkan Peninsula. The tradition of Bulgarian icon painting was enriched during the National Revival Period (17-19th Century). Today the most valuable examples of icon painting can be found in the Alexander Nevski Crypt, the National Museum of History and the museums in Varna and Tryavna. A considerable selection is kept on the altars of churches and monasteries throughout the country.

Departure dates:

01 May 2008 - 30 September 2008 **every day**

Country region: Central and Western Bulgaria

Price with flight ticket: KD995

Trip plan:

Day 1: Arrival at Sofia Airport. Transfer to one of the numerous monasteries within 120 km, or 74 miles, of Sofia. Dinner and an overnight stay.

Day 2: Today we begin the icon painting course. The first day will involve attaching the linen to the round (1-1.5 hours).

Day 3: Preparation of the background. Priming. (7 hours).

Day 4: Grinding and coping of the picture, sticking the gilding. Isolate the round. (4-5 hours).

Day 5: Basic color layout of the clothes and base. (5 hours)

Day 6: Dress modeling of the face and hands. (5 hours)

Day 7: Shaping the face, hands and inscriptions. (5 hours)

Day 8: Completing the work and applying the polish (1 hour). Drive to the Cherepishki Monastery for sightseeing. Dinner and overnight stay at Srupecki or Chekotinski monasteries.

Day 9: Visit to the Etropolski, Glozhene and Troyan monasteries. Dinner and overnight stay at Troyan Monastery.

Day 10: Drive to Veliko Tarnovo and sightseeing tour of the city. Overnight stay in Arbanasi.

Day 11: Visit the unique Church of Nativity and the Kostantsaliev's house. In the afternoon visit to the Preobrazhenski and Kilifarevski monasteries. Overnight stay in Arbanasi.

Day 12: Sightseeing at Dryanovo Monastery, Etara Open-air Ethnographic Museum and a replica Thracian tomb in Kazanlak with murals from the 4th Century BC. Overnight stay in Plovdiv.

Day 13: Morning sightseeing tour of Plovdiv. After lunch – visit to the Bachkovo Monastery. Overnight stay in Plovdiv.

Day 14: Drive to the biggest and most famous monastery in Bulgaria – Rila Monastery. Sightseeing. Continue for Sofia. Dinner and overnight stay in the capital.

Day 15: Transfer to Sofia Airport.

Accommodation and food: Fourteen nights in monasteries (with sometimes very basic accommodation) and small family type hotels with HB (breakfast and dinner included).

Price of extra services: Single room supplement: KD85

Included in the price: accommodation as described, ground transfers and entrance fees as per program; English-speaking guide; icon painting courses (incl. tuition and materials) as per itinerary;

Excluded from the price: meals outside the program; flights; personal expenses

Practical information: EXTENSION AT THE BLACK SEA COAST: we have a unique proposal, which gives you the opportunity to stay on a sea holiday for extra week after your active tour at an incredibly low price! We can offer a great variety of means of accommodation - from home stays to 4-star hotels in Sozopol, Nessebar, Sunny Beach, Lozenets, St. Vlas, Golden Sands etc. and all this with arranged transportation right after your tour and before your departure flight (prices vary between KD85 and KD250 per person per week depending on the hotel category and the meal plan; transportation is included).

Tour highlights:

- Sofia – The capital of Bulgaria.
- The Cherepishki, Etropole, Glazhene and Troyan monasteries.
- Veliko Tarnovo (the Old Bulgaria’s capital) is regally situated along the historical hills of Tsarevets, Trapezitsa and Sveta Gora on the two banks of Yantra River.
- Arbanasi – with houses that resemble miniature fortresses.
- Bachkovo Monastery – known for its unique architecture and amazing icon paintings.
- Plovdiv is one of the oldest European cities contemporary to Troy and Mikena. It has existed as a settlement for around 8,000 years.

Tour difficulty: A 

No special experience is needed; everyone who is in condition to cope with long Saturday walks in the forest can also cope with these tours. As a rule, the trips are short and at a low altitude. Often, it is your choice to join or skip a day-tour. The routes follow a hilly terrain without steep ascents and descents. Normally we walk 3/5h a day.

Group Size: min 6