

BULGARIA

Rock climbing course in Rila Mountains

Every Monday from June to September

(Other dates also possible within the best period if the requirement for min group size is fulfilled)

Introduction:

Rock climbing and mountaineering are old traditions in Bulgaria, beginning almost a century ago when the real exploration of these Alpine-like mountains started. Since then, Bulgarian mountaineers have climbed several of the world's peaks which exceed 8,000 m (26,246 ft), including the "Top of The World" – Mount Everest. The best natural conditions for acquiring top-notch skills are combined with the excellent tradition and reputation of Bulgaria's mountaineering schools. The expertise of these Bulgarian climbing instructors guarantees excellent results and complete safety to course participants.

The Rila Mountains form the highest range in the Balkans, with the highest peak Mousala standing at 2,925 m, or 9,596 ft. It is situated in the southwest of Bulgaria and occupies a territory of 2,629 sq km with an average altitude of 1,487 m (4,878 ft). At present around 120 trekking and climbing routes exist within the Rila Mountains, 106 of which are concentrated on the Maliovitza ridge (known as "Granite Paradise") and 14 in the eastern ridge of the mountains. For this reason, the Alpine & Mountaineering School is located in the same spot – some 90 km, or 55 miles, from the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. It is fully equipped for courses, and includes an indoor climbing wall. Its instructors are all professionals, with most of them working as lecturers at the Sport's Academy in Sofia. The rock-climbing course takes place over six full days; four hours per day. It takes around 45 min to reach the climbing sites from the hotel.

Special highlights:

Rila Mountains are the highest mountains in Bulgaria and on the whole

Balkan Peninsula with Mount Musala - 2925 m a.s.l.

Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria.

Founded seven thousand years ago, Sofia is the second oldest city in Europe.

Maliovitza resort is a famous place of the Bulgarian alpinism and mountaineering.

Rila Monastery (1147 m a.s.l.) is the most popular tourist site among all monasteries in Bulgaria equally for its size, natural surroundings, architecture, wall paintings and ancient history.

Itinerary:

Day 1. Arrival at Sofia or Plovdiv Airport and transfer to the Maliovitza resort in the Rila Mountains (1,5 hrs from Sofia; 2 hrs from Plovdiv). The remainder of the day will be spent on acclimatization walks (self-guided) in the general area.

/dinner/

Day 2-5. For the next five days you will receive tuition and instructor-guided rock climbing exercise. The program will concentrate on the important knowledge and skills you need to master for rock-climbing and mountaineering. This includes basic climbing techniques as: knots & knot tying; belay methods (mass belay, simultaneous belay, belay in sequence, self belay, top-roping); belay techniques (shoulder belay, belay with climbing gear/hardware etc.); climbing techniques (climbing glacia, edge, open book, crack-ups, overhang climbing, roof climbing); how to rappel; placement of belay – cams, nuts friends and so on; piton placement; equipment types and how to take care of your gear; setting rappel and rope management; an introduction to climbing multi-pitch routes; fixing ropes; styles of climbing (alpine, sport etc.); first aid in the mountains; camps and camping in the mountains; the dangers of the mountains, connected to weather, relief and more; orientation etc.

Depending on the weather conditions, the rest of your time (outside the course) could be spent on treks to some neighboring areas of interest in the region of Maliovitza. These include the Svinskoto Lake ("The pig's lake") a 1.5-hour walk (it is 150 m, some 492 ft, long, and about 2 m, or 6.5 ft, deep);

a two-hour trek to the Yonchevo Lake, a 200 m (656 ft) long and 4 m (13 ft), deep lake, named after the famous painter and mountaineer from the town of Samokov, Hristo Yonchev; the Malioviski Lakes (three lakes between 72 m, or 236 ft, and 115 m, or 377 ft, in length, situated in the circus of Maliovitza) which are a two-hour walk; the Strashnoto ("The Frightful") Lake refuge, a three-hour trek (200 m, or 656 ft, long and 2 m, or 6.5 ft, deep lake, located at the foot of the Kuppenite and Popova Kapa peaks at about 2,465 m, or 8,087 ft); Orlovets refuge – 2,5 hrs; Maliovitza hut – 50 min; to Vada hut (1,410 m, or 4,625 ft) – a 1.5-hour walk; the peak of Maliovitza (2,730 m, some 8,956 ft) – taking 3.5 hrs; the Tourist complex of Ovnarsko (1,544 m, or 5,065ft) built in 1910 as a hunting base for King Ferdinand, and a two-hour trek. The paths along these routes are clearly signposted.

/breakfast, lunch, dinner/

Day 6. This day you will climb Maliovitza peak (2729 m a.s.l.) on the northeast edge, using the simultaneous belay method. There you may learn too how to fix rope railing. After a sightseeing brake on the summit you will have about 3,30 hrs downhill walk to the hotel. On your way back you will pass Elenino Lake, the second and first ledges etc.

/breakfast, lunch, dinner/

Day 7. The lessons learnt will be applied practically when climbing more difficult routes than those of the days before. You will be expected to competently make the most of belay using sequence techniques. Of course your security will be guaranteed with top-rope system.

/breakfast, lunch, dinner/

Day 8. After breakfast you will transfer to Sofia or Plovdiv Airport for departure.

/breakfast/

Accommodation:

We stay in 3-stars hotel with en-suite facilities on FB (breakfast, lunch & dinner included). (* For advanced climbers we recommend 2 overnights at Orlovets or Strashnoto Lake refuges - very close to Rila's best climbing sites. Sleeping bag is necessary and should be brought by clients themselves.)

Tour type: IT+

Difficulty grade: B, C (days 2-6) & D (day 7)

Best period: June – September

Weather:

Temperatures expected for this period are between +15 and +25°C. Rainfalls or short but heavy showers are possible, being a bit prolonged during spring and late autumn.

General conditions:

The rock, where the practical courses will be conducted, represents generally stable granite. On many routes pitons are scarce, some are very well equipped, but pitons are often unstable. There are many passages for aid climbing. Red numbers in their start point mark most of the routes.

The area of Maliovitza is vast, offering various routes in different styles on the steep walls of 20-25 summits. The crags near Maliovitza hut are the most easily accessible and are good for bad weather conditions.

The weather in summer is often very rainy so climbing is possible in 1 of 3 days.

Equipment and clothing:

All special equipment is included. What is most important is to bring your own climbing-shoes and sleeping bag if you decide to spend a night in the refuge! English-speaking instructor is included in the package. For the full list with recommended items see "General".

Group size: Min. 2 persons

The price includes: accommodation and boarding as mentioned above, transfer to/from Sofia or Plovdiv airport to Maliovitza resort; 4 days instructor-guided lessons 4 hours/day (in English); 1 day practical activities; excursion to Maliovitza Peak on day 6; VAT and all local taxes. Also includes Return Airline Ticket & Travel Insurance for Kuwait to Bulgaria.

The price does not include: map (could be requested in advance when booking the tour), guidance for the rest time outside the program; tips; entrance fees; alcohol drinks; cigarettes and other personal expenses

GENERAL

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 with a guide

The same as the Individual tours, with the only difference that there is a local guide provided for some of the days. During the days with a local guide most probably you will be together with other tourists.

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 every day. 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.

C: Difficult These tours include trekking which is a little harder, normally on a challenging terrain. We take it for granted that you are in good condition

and fit. You should be physically prepared at home to get the maximum of the tour. Most of the trekking is done at a greater height (max 3000 m). As on other tours you are free to skip some treks and have a rest.

D: Challenging Tours of this level demand that you be really in good shape. The paths are not always in the best condition and the marking can be scarce. There are day-treks with big ascents and descents. Changing weather conditions /even in midsummer/ play an important role when trekking at a very high altitude and may cause changes of the preliminary route. This is to be decided by the mountain guide on the spot. Normally, the treks are 6-8h per day, but some can be longer. Preliminary trekking experience is an advantage, but not necessary if you are really in good shape. Note that during some of the days, you should personally carry your baggage, which is naturally an additional difficulty.

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.

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 wind stopper 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.

Vaccination:

Tick-borne encephalitis, Marseille fever and Crimea hemorrhagic 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.

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

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.

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.

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.)

Religion – 82,6% Orthodox, 12,2% Islam, 0,7% Protestant, 0,5% Catholics, 4,1% Others.

Capital city - Sofia (1 377 531 people in 2006)

Biggest 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

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;