



DESTINATION:
**DANUBE
BULGARIA**

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Discover the wild charm of the Bulgarian Danube



Depicted by great composers and poets, the blue Danube is closely linked to Bulgarian history since the establishment of the first Bulgarian state in the Balkans. Today the great river forms a 480km long northern border with Romania. Our grandparents remember when it used to be completely frozen over and how wedding guests with caravans and carts crossed the ice from one bank to the other. Wild animals did the same in their search for food during the cold winter months and found new hunting grounds on the opposite side. In this part of Europe, the Danube has retained its wild charm. Forests and wetlands dominate its entire length. Deserted islands enlivened only by birds, riverside marshes and lakes full of biodiversity, fishing villages, several towns of around 30,000 inhabitants and only one city of 145,000 – welcome to the Bulgarian Danube.

The Bulgarian bank of the Danube holds unexpected treasures and beauties. Perhaps because this region has always been far removed from major investment projects or any kind of tourism, its authenticity has been preserved. Here you find the remains of Roman towns, which once guarded the northern frontier of the empire; ancient Bulgarian castles; Turkish military forts; the best preserved painted rock churches from medieval times; impressive Thracian tombs and Muslim Tekkes (mosque complexes). A number of these monuments

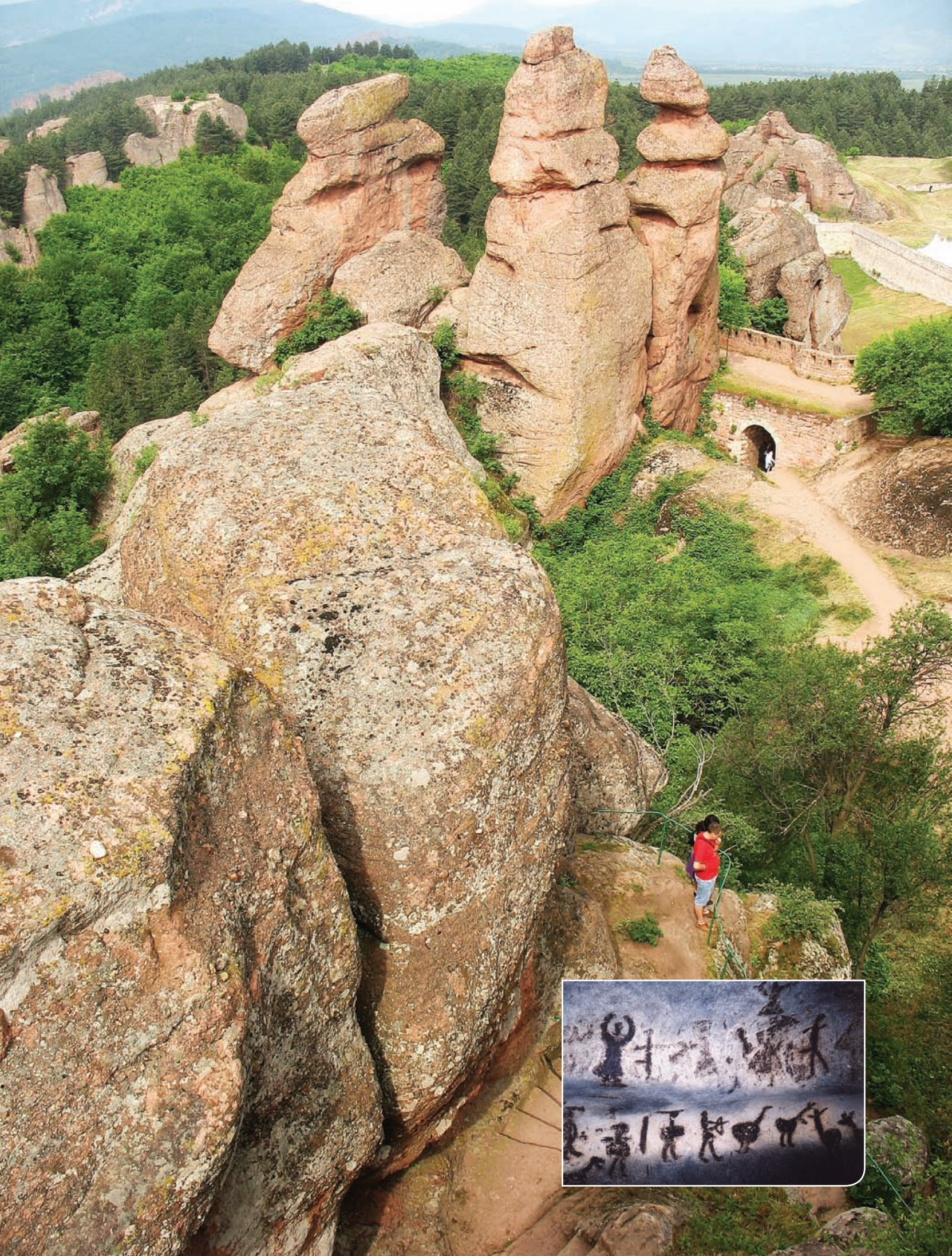
are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Traditions live on through numerous folklore groups, local festivals and colourful costumes. This northern folklore is particularly popular in Bulgaria with its combination of Viennese waltzes and the Balkan rhythms of the region. Of particular note is the culture of wine and local cuisine. Gamza from Novo Selo; sparkling wine from Magura; Svishtovska Cherga; Vratshanska Temenuga (Muscat), the wineries in Oryahovo, Lyaskovets, Ruse, Silistra, Pleven, are witness to long traditions. Like along on all major rivers, fish is a speciality. But in general the cuisine is dominated by Bulgarian national characteristics – banitsa, shopska salad, stuffed vine leaves, yoghurt and delicious vegetables and fruits.

Even for many Bulgarians, the Lower Danube is something of a mystery. Travelling downstream by boat towards the sunrise, you see only green forests, wild islands and occasional lights indicating a human presence. Having preserved its longstanding beauty, the river is today a bridge between Balkan countries, creating an active European partnership and bilateral cooperation.

Borders between countries are not what they used to be. It is definitely time to discover the Bulgarian Danube!





Vidin

Belogradchik
Chiprovtsi
Vratsa

Vidin is situated on the right bank of the Danube, in the northwest corner of Bulgaria, about 5 km across the river from the Romanian town of Kalafat and 20 km from the Serbian border. It is a favourite stop for all cruises going on the Danube. Vidin was settled in the third century B.C. by the Thracian tribe, Tribali. Later on it became part of the Roman province of Upper Mizia. In the Middle Ages, it was the capital city of one of the Bulgarian Kingdoms for almost 50 years before it fell under Ottoman rule in 1396. Still standing today is the Baba Vida Fortress, Bulgaria's best-preserved medieval citadel.

Belogradchik is a small town, situated in an extremely picturesque region with unique rock formations and a well preserved Ottoman fortress. Nature has carved out of the red stone huge pillars and figures which look like soldiers, monks, wild creatures and fairy tale heroes. It is the most amazing geological site in this part of the Balkans. And it offers excellent opportunities for hiking, caving, biking, rockclimbing, fishing or even astronomy.

Here, at the end of the world... you find the little town of **Chiprovtsi**, hidden in the Western Balkan Mountains. It is famous for its centuries old carpet-weaving tradition which still thrives today, thanks to the technical school and local craftsmen. Second-hand carpets from Chiprovtsi are one of the latest trends in home decoration, especially in France.

Vratsa, situated at the foot of Vratschansky Balkan Mountain, has retained its atmosphere and charm from the beginning of the 20th century. The history museum is famous for its extremely valuable golden Thracian treasures and original examples from the famous Vratsa goldsmiths' school. Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park is situated nearby. It represents one of the richest regions of karst rock formations in Bulgaria, featuring caves, precipices, waterfalls, huge limestone formations ideal for rock-climbing. It is a favourite place for climbers all year round and a starting point for hiking and mountain-biking routes. The park also offers opportunities for village tourism in small family-run guesthouses.

Iskar Gorge is a natural miracle of the Stara Planina mountain range. For thousands of years the waters of the Iskar River have dug their way into the rock and carved out incredible shapes. The total length of the gorge is 156 km. It offers wonderful hiking and biking trails, old monasteries to visit, caves, waterfalls and lots of small villages.

Cherepish monastery

Cherepish Monastery of the Assumption dates back to 1370. During the Ottoman occupation it became an important educational centre. The famous Cherepish Gospel was bound here in 1512 with gold covers and decorated with biblical scenes.





Silistra



Pleven



Pleven is located in the central part of the Danube plain. The city was a major battle ground during the Russian-Turkish War of 1877–1878. The joint Russian and Romanian army paid dearly for the victory, but it paved the way for the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the restoration of Bulgaria as a state and the independence of Romania. Therefore almost all the landmarks in Pleven are related to this War of Liberation. In the centre of town is a Mausoleum dedicated to the Russian and Romanian soldiers who died during the war. The renowned Pleven Epic 1877 Panorama was created in honour of the 100th anniversary of the battle and was modelled on the Borodin Panorama in Moscow. And the Museum of Wine is the best of its kind in Bulgaria.

Svishtov is situated on a high terrace where the Danube reaches its most southern point in Bulgaria. The town first came to prominence in 483 AD, when Theodoric the Great established his capital Nove here. In Svishtov there are many archaeological, artistic and architectural monuments of national importance.

Toutrakan is on the high Bulgarian bank of the Danube, 433 km from the Delta. Many of its old buildings are influenced by Romanian architecture. The Danube Museum of Fishing & Boatbuilding is housed in the town's former public baths. Among 500 artefacts, depicting the history of fishing, one can see nets, harpoons, fishing boats... all typical of life in Toutrakan.

Silistra is situated on the right bank of the Danube, 375 km from the Delta. Landmarks in Silistra are the Town Museum of History and the Ethnographic Museum. Remnants of the ancient Roman fortress and a Turkish military fortification are to be seen at different places in the town and along the river bank. Half of all Bulgaria's apricots grow here in the Silistra region, which makes it the most popular place to taste apricot brandy.

Silistra

Toutrakan

Svishtov

Pleven



Sveshtari

The Sveshtari **Thracian Tomb** (3rd century BC) reflects the fundamental principles of the structure of Thracian cult buildings. The tomb has a unique architectural decor. The discovery of the Thracian Tomb of Sveshtari was one of the most spectacular archaeological events of the late 20th century. Sveshtari is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Demir Baba Tekke is a 16th-century Alevi mausoleum near the village of Sveshtari in the Ispirih municipality. The mausoleum is thought to be the resting place of Demir Baba, a 16th-century Alevi saint. The tomb itself is a heptagonal building constructed out of local sandstone. There is a holy spring nearby. The Tekke is located in a region, populated mainly by Muslims, which gives opportunities to visit beautiful mosques in the towns of Razgrad, Targovishte and Shumen.







The development of cultural, cruise, festival and conference tourism within the region is based on a rich cultural program which includes events such as the March Music Days (international festival for symphonic & cantata-oratorio), the Golden Rebeck Folk Festival, The Jazz Fest–Ruse and the Theatre Days Festival.

Ruse

Ruse is the largest Bulgarian city on the Danube and is the birthplace of Elias Canetti, the 1981 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature. It is described as the 'Pearl of the Danube' and is considered to be amongst the most beautiful cities in Bulgaria. It is a crossroads on the international route between Bucharest and Istanbul, over the only bridge between Bulgaria and Romania, and is one of the most important water corridors on the Lower Danube. The distance to the Romanian capital Bucharest is just 72 km.

Ruse occupies a significant role in the Bulgarian national history. The city was founded in the 1st century as a

Roman military fortification with a river port, and was named Sexaginta Prista – the port of 60 vessels. Under Ottoman rule, Ruse was the administrative centre of a large region. After the Russian–Turkish war of liberation in 1877-1878, it became the biggest city in independent Bulgaria. As a result of the wide range of economic and cultural contacts with the countries along the Danube, Ruse grew into a modern city, with a predominantly European appearance and traditions.

Numerous elegant buildings were designed by Italian, Austrian, German and Bulgarian architects.



Tsarevets Hill Archaeological Reserve

The site is in the eastern part of the town. Its restored fortified walls in combination with perfect natural defences provided safety to the key institutions of the Bulgarian medieval state. The so-called Baldwin Tower rises in the most southern part of the fortress. Here the Latin Emperor Baldwin was captured by Tsar Kaloyan after the defeat of the Crusaders in 1205 near Odrin. For the past two years Tsarevets has also been a unique setting for open-air concerts.





Veliko Tarnovo is one of the most enchanting and charming cities in Bulgaria. It stretches along both banks of the river Yantra which cuts a spectacular gorge through the Pre-Balkan Mountains. Famous for its historic role as capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1187 – 1393), it is now an attractive modern city, a renowned university town and capital of Bulgarian arts & crafts. The city's 'Sound & Light show' is outstanding and uses the historic city walls as a natural backdrop.

Gurko Street has carried through the ages the atmosphere of the Bulgarian National Revival. The 18th & 19th century houses rise above one another on the rocky banks of Yantra and are reflected in its waters. Cosy cafes, small restaurants, art galleries and ethnographic exhibitions blend with the past in a very romantic way.

Arbanassi is located 4 km away on a hill above the lights of Veliko Tarnovo. It flourished as a trade and crafts centre between the 16th & 18th centuries, when its monumental stone houses and churches with rich interior decoration, woodcarvings and mural paintings were built. This Arbanassi type of house can best be described as a fortified dwelling. The village is classified as an Architectural & Historic Reserve of national importance. In the vicinity of Veliko Tarnovo there are dozens of famous monasteries, including those of the Transfiguration, the Holy Trinity, Kilifarevo, Kapinovo, Dryanovo, Liaskovets and the Virgin Mary in Arbanassi. Their priceless frescoes and relics prove the important position of Veliko Tarnovo as a Christian spiritual centre throughout the ages, right up to the present day. Some of these monasteries offer accommodation facilities.

Veliko Tarnovo

Arbanassi

Lovech

Lovech, the Bulgarian town of lilac, is picturesquely situated on the Osum River. It has a well-preserved medieval fortress, dating back to 12th century. Close to the fortifications is the old quarter of Varosha, the neighbourhood from the time of the National Revival with over 160 houses of characteristic architecture and the famous covered bridge of Lovech, which links Varosha to the rest of the town.





Traditions and Music

The Danube is not only the biggest river in the Balkans, but also a bridge that brings together different ethnographic groups. It influences the everyday life of the people living along the riverside and breathes life into their customs, rituals and festivals, which are associated with respect for water as a life source and the notion of what is 'mystical' and 'unattainable'.

Customs of the Danube settlements play a specific part in the overall cultural picture of Bulgarian society. From the ceremony of St. Jordan's Day, when young men compete to find a cross in the Danube thrown in by the local priest; the winter 'kukeri' mummers' masks to the rain-bringing customs, called 'Butterfly' and 'German'... they all depict an incredible wealth of traditions for special days and holidays. An iconic Bulgarian custom is the celebration of St. Trifon Zarezan's Day, the day on which the vines are pruned for the first time in winter.

The music of the Bulgarian Danube is definitely inspired by the beauty of the area, the peaceful and solemn flow of the great river, and the huge feeling of space stretching all the way to the horizon. Famous for its two folk regions of Northern Bulgaria and Dobrudzha, the Bulgarian Danube is the birthplace of the ingenious

Crafts and work along the Danube are naturally linked to fishing related occupations such as the making of nets, rods and other devices; the building of boats and farming. The region of Dobrudzha in the north-eastern part of the country is the granary of Bulgaria.



composer of brass music, Diko Iliev, whose work skilfully combines authentic Bulgarian and Western European music from the early 20th century. Pancho Vladigerov is arguably the most influential Bulgarian composer of all time. He was one of the first to successfully combine idioms of Bulgarian folk music and the West European art music tradition. Vladigerov marked the beginning of a number of genres in Bulgarian music, including the violin sonata and the piano trio. He was born in Zurich, but lived and worked in Shumen and Sofia.

The preservation of this unique form of Bulgarian culture is one of the great challenges of modern times. Typical of Bulgarian folk music, for example, are the irregular rhythms, high pitch, two- and three-part singing. Modern artists have to go back to Bulgaria's cultural roots to study and re-create different themes from over one thousand years of vibrant folklore.



Wine and Cuisine

Culinary traditions and wine culture are an integral part of the identity of Bulgaria. Wine production here has a longer history than the Bulgarian state itself. It is a historical fact that in the lands of the Thracians, who inhabited the territory of modern Bulgaria, wine was part of everyday life and pagan rituals. Archaeological findings only serve to confirm the information we have from Homer and Herodotus. More importantly, despite the vicissitudes of history, some Thracian grape varieties have survived to the present day. Original wines from the Danube plain are: Pamid, Gamza and Misco (Temenuga). Pelin (wormwood) is perhaps closest to the ancient tradition and often uses more than 30 different herbs in its ageing process!

Since 2000 the Bulgarian wine industry has been achieving great results. In 2010 alone 19 Bulgarian wines received an International Wine Challenge Award and another 26 won Decanter Awards.

The emergence of Bulgarian wine tourism is already a reality, and the first hotels and guesthouses have already been built next to major wineries where Bulgaria produces some of its best wines, and the next step is to create themed wine tours. The world's newest Wine Museum opened in Pleven in 2008. It houses a collection of more

than 7,000 bottles of Bulgarian wines, some of them aged up to 90 years.

The excellent conditions for agriculture, together with the variety of peoples and cultures that have passed through Bulgaria have played a significant role in the wine culture and today's national cuisine, which is rich in regional flavours. Bulgarians share with neighbouring Greeks, Turks, Serbs and Romanians a true cultural treasure of common dishes. Although in terms of product denomination and certification of origin Bulgaria is still behind, there are many examples of local specialties that bear all the characteristics of a single brand. In many cases the amazing variety of herbs determines the taste and aroma of the dishes (Bulgaria ranks third in the world in the export of herbs).

There is no more famous culinary product associated with Bulgaria than Bulgarian yogurt. It is known worldwide, and Bulgaria is the true habitat of the 'Lactic bacteria' which is an indispensable source of health! Since 2001 they celebrate National Yogurt Day in Razgrad. Another Bulgarian champion is Shopska salad, closely followed by the Bulgarian rural organic tomatoes and Banitsa cheese pie in all its regional variations. A unique cooking contest is held every year at the village of Banitsa, between Vratsa and the Danube.



35% of all Bulgarian wines are produced on the Danube plain. The most renowned vineyards are Magura and Lyaskovo (sparkling wines), Vidinska Gamza, Lopushna, Oryahovo, Leventa (Ruse), Pleven, Svishtov, Suhindol, Targovishte...





The Malak Preslavets Swamp The Srebarna Lake Biosphere Reserve

The Srebarna Lake Biosphere Reserve is 16 km to the west of Silistra. It comprises Lake Srebarna and the surrounding banks of the Danube, occupying a territory of 600 hectares. It is a wonderful sight with its surface of cane and bulrushes, water lilies, marsh marigold, marsh fern, duckweed, etc. Various kinds of birds nest here – some 150 protected species of marsh birds such as pelicans, black coots, water swallows, egrets, ibis, wild geese, 11 species of wild ducks, etc. The reserve is included in the UNESCO list of the most valuable natural sites worldwide.



The Malak Preslavets Marshland is a protected area between the towns of Tutrakan and Silistra and is a feeding ground for herons, ibis, fallow deer stags, cormorants and other birds. It is the paradise for the white water lily (*Nymphaea alba*) and here is where the largest number can be found in Bulgaria.



Persina Nature Park is the only one in Bulgaria to be located along the Danube River in the Svishtov-Belene lowlands. It consists of numerous islands, marshlands and river-line wetlands. The park is unique and the largest wetland 'Ramsar Convention' site for waterfowl in Bulgaria. There are two island groups – one around Nikopol consisting of four islands and the other around the town of Belene with 19 islands.

Over 743 higher plant species inhabit the park territory. The internal marshes contain typical marsh communities – yellow water lily, broad-leaved pondweed, yellow floating-heart and water chestnut in the shallow parts. In the park there are also 1,100 animal species. The highlight of the park is the birdlife. Over 200 species have been recorded and almost all of them have conservation status. The Belene Island Complex is one of the most important regions in the world for rare species like the whitetailed eagle, the cormorant and the heron.





ИЗЪ СЪСЛАВНОУ ПОУЧЕ
СЪБЪЛЪЖЕ

НЕ ПОЕДИТЕ СЪМЪ СЪКЪРЪЕ
ПЪРВОУТО СЕГО

СЪБЪЛЪЖЕ ПЕТРО

ЧЪТИ ДОЖИВЪ СЪБЪЛЪЖЕ ПЕТРО

ИЗЪ СЪСЛАВНОУ ПОУЧЕ

Rusenski Lom



In the eastern part of the Danube plain, some 20 km south of Ruse, travellers find an island of wild nature – the **Nature Park Rusenski Lom**. Its name derives from the river Rusenski Lom – the last tributary of the Danube on the Bulgarian side.

It is one of the few sanctuaries for the preservation of nature in north-eastern Bulgaria. The vegetation here is of both forest and steppe varieties. The pride of the park is the rare and protected floral species, one of which is an indigenous Bulgarian variety. Five others are endemic species to the Balkans. Among these are the *Chamaecytisus kovacevii* and *Verbascum dieckianum* which are found solely along riverbanks. The park is truly a paradise for bird-watchers. Many endangered European species can be seen here. Because of this, the river basin has been declared an Ornithological Important Place. Numerous crevices, ledges, cave entrances and platforms provide the ideal conditions for rock-nesting birds like the black stork (only nesting here in rocks), golden eagle, Egyptian vulture,

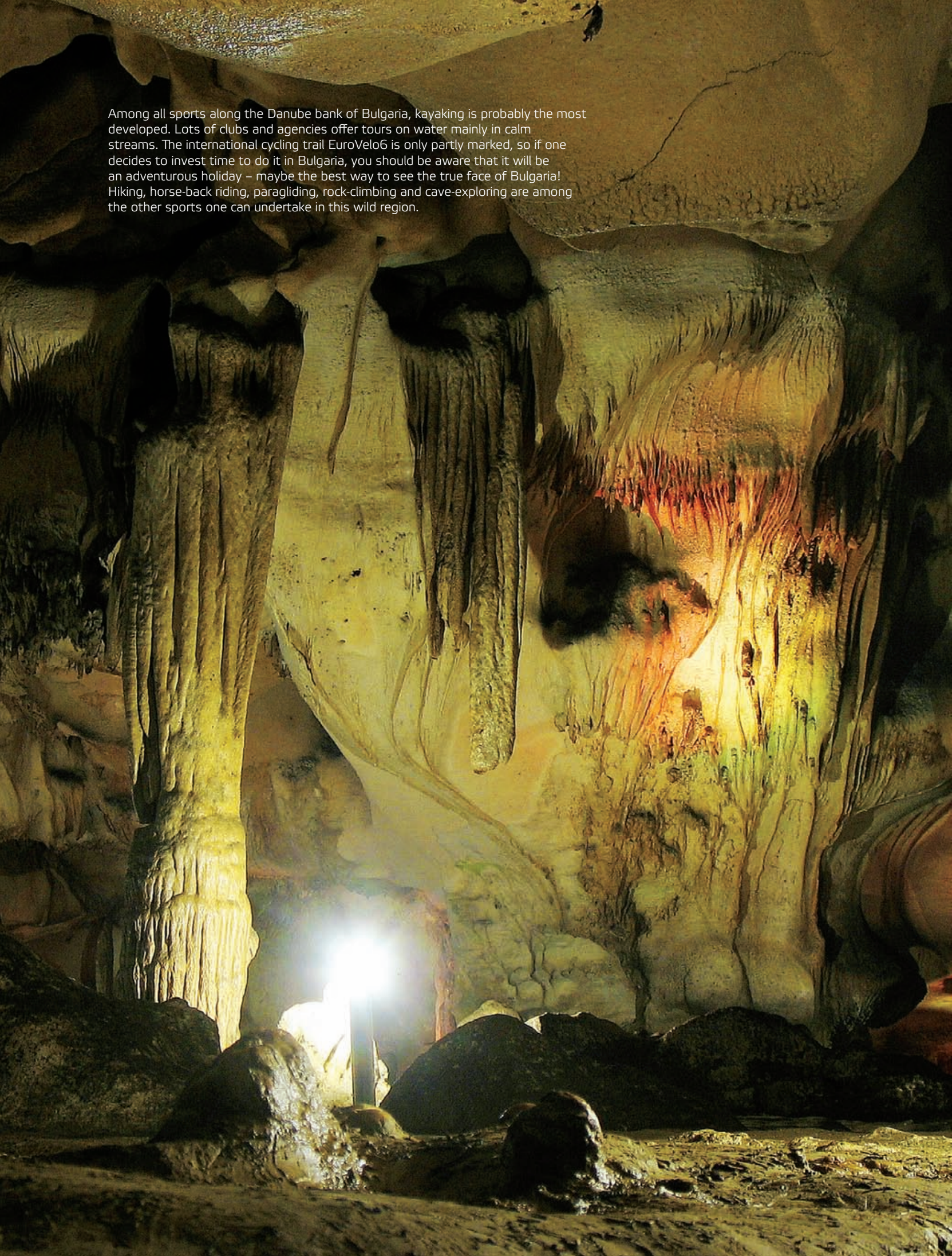
long-legged buzzard, ruddy shelduck, saker falcon, rock dove, eagle owl and others. The park is a natural breeding area for deer and wild boar. Wolves, foxes and other predators also inhabit the park. This magnificent network of valleys was also used in medieval times by monks who constructed dwellings and churches right in the rock faces. Forty of the 250 individual dwellings which remain are located within the park.

The Archaeological Reserve of the '**Rock Churches**' near the village of Ivanovo includes the rock monastery of 'St. Michael the Archangel'. It was one of the largest ecclesiastical and literary centres in Bulgaria during the 13th and 14th centuries. Well preserved frescoes in six churches and chapels are among the most precious achievements of Bulgarian medieval art. The church of the Virgin Mary is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is situated at a height of 38m and has 2 rooms and a chapel. The total area is 64m². And the walls and ceiling are entirely covered with frescoes!

The Archaeological Reserve in **the medieval town of Cherven** includes the ruins of a castle, a church (the former seat of regional ecclesiastical power) and a boyar palace (its secular equivalent). It is home to Bulgaria's best preserved medieval fortress tower in the shape of a square, 12m high with sides 8.5m long. An impressive fortified underground water-source can also be seen here.



Among all sports along the Danube bank of Bulgaria, kayaking is probably the most developed. Lots of clubs and agencies offer tours on water mainly in calm streams. The international cycling trail EuroVelo6 is only partly marked, so if one decides to invest time to do it in Bulgaria, you should be aware that it will be an adventurous holiday – maybe the best way to see the true face of Bulgaria! Hiking, horse-back riding, paragliding, rock-climbing and cave-exploring are among the other sports one can undertake in this wild region.



Outdoor activities



Useful CONTACTS



www.adodunav.org

Association of 34 municipalities in the Danube region of Bulgaria

www.bsc.rousse.bg

Ruse Business Support Centre, supporting SMEs in Ruse and the region.

www.danubecc.org

The Danube Competence Centre (DCC) is an international tourism cooperation platform that works to build and support networks of tourism stakeholders by investing in people and skills, enhancing regional cooperation and promoting the mutual interests of its members. DCC aims to create a single tourism brand for the Middle and Lower Danube region. Countries represented: Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine and Austria, with the financial support of the Government of Germany (GIZ). DCC is based in Belgrade.

www.baatbg.org

Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism is a nonprofit public benefit organization established in 1998. Main achievements: green certification, network of the responsible and sustainable tourism businesses & stakeholders, innovative strategic thinking. Among the significant projects of the association is the development and implementation of 'Green Lodge' certification.

www.wwf.bg

WWF (originally World Wildlife Fund) has been active in Bulgaria since the early 1990s in the field of the sustainable forestry management, protected areas, freshwater as well as agriculture and rural development. WWF runs the Danube-Carpathian Programme in Bulgaria since 1998, putting efforts to preserve, restore and sustainably manage the natural values of the Danube-Carpathian ecoregions.

www.bepf-bg.org

The Bulgarian Environmental Partnership Foundation supports local tourism projects and the development of cycling trails, the collection and provision of information about the traditions, cuisine and cultural & natural heritage of the Danube.

www.bspb.org

The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) is Bulgaria's first (1990) and largest Non-Governmental Organization dedicated to biodiversity conservation.

www.bbf.biodiversity.bg

The Bulgarian biodiversity Foundation strives to enhance the network of protected natural areas in Bulgaria.

www.hiking-bulgaria.com

The most comprehensive website covering outdoor activities and adventure in Bulgaria (Odyssea-in Travel Ltd). It presents the best of Bulgaria as a travel destination with real values – people, nature and all the adventures one can undertake in the wild. Tours along the Danube are featured too.

Useful Links:

www.visitvidin.com – information on Vidin

www.visitsvishtov.com – information on Svishtov

www.tic.rousse.bg – information on Ruse

www.info.portal-silistra.net – information on Silistra

www.velikoturnovo.info – information on Veliko Tarnovo

www.lomea.org – Nature Park 'Russenski Lom'

www.persina.bg – Nature Park 'Persina'

www.vr-balkan.net – Nature Park 'Vrachanski Balkan'

www.winemuseum-bg.com – Museum of Wine in Pleven

tibelogradchik@gmail.com – for information on Belogradchik

Photographs in this brochure by:

Alexander Ivanov, Mihail Mihov, Lubomir Popiordanov, Svidna Mihailova, Nikolai Kovachev, Rositsa Lozanova, Georgi Palahutev, Boiko Kalev, Alexander Tonev, Laurence Fleury, Mehmed Aziz, Archives of Odyssea-in, Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park and the Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism.

All texts are written by: Mihail Mihov and Lubomir Popiordanov, Odyssea-in

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NATIONAL TOURIST
INFORMATION CENTRE
OF THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY,
ENERGY & TOURISM

1 Sveta Nedelya Square
1040 Sofia, Bulgaria
Tel.: +359 2 9335826,
+359 2 9335811

e-docs@mee.government.bg
www.bulgariatravel.org