

# Cycling Europe

## BULGARIA 2020

### RODOPI MOUNTAINS CYCLE TOUR

Semi-Guided - 8 Days/7 Nights

The Rodopi Mountains are located in the oldest part of the Balkans with some of the loveliest coniferous forests in the country. The landscape is gentle and rolling, with gorges intermingling with river basins and valleys. Here one can also find 70% of the world minerals, as well as some 600 caves. Flora and fauna contain species that have become extinct in other European countries. Locals live a traditional way of life: wooden carts pulled by horses, donkeys or cows; nomadic gypsies picking mushrooms and berries in the woods; local Muslim inhabitants growing tobacco and potatoes; and herds of sheep and goats descending the mountain at day's end. You will cycle through villages with typical Rodopean architecture where speech, songs and customs of the local people create the special identity of the region.

You have the chance to visit Bachkovo Monastery, the second largest in Bulgaria; see the Miraculous bridges, two unique natural rock bridges about 40 m. high; Velingrad – the largest Bulgarian spa resort famous for its healing hot mineral water.





## ITINERARY

### Day 1.

Arrive at Sofia or Plovdiv Airport and transfer to your hotel in Sofia.

### Day 2. Sofia– Belmeken Dam – Velinograd spa town

Transfer to the cycling start a few kilometers before the village of Sestrimo. Cycle up to the Belmeken dam (2000 m) through old coniferous woods. In the afternoon the road passes the lundola's mountain meadows before descending to the spa town of Velinograd, where you stay overnight in a hotel with mineral water swimming pool.

**Cycling:** 42 km -3.5 hrs; uphill cycling 140m; downhill cycling 1440m

### Day 3. Batak Dam – Beglik Dam - Dospat

Cycle from your hotel in Velinograd through the picturesque landscape of Tsigov Chark countryside, a holiday spot with hotels, cabins and restaurants, to reach the Batak Dam. From here, the road rises steeply for the next 10 km, to the highest point of the stage – the countryside around Kartela at 1,700 m. From this point you descend for most of the way. Some 8 km further along you reach the Goliam Beglik dam then continue through forest, to a lovely picnic spot where the dam can easily be viewed. After lunch and a siesta in the fresh air bike to another jewel in the Rodopi Mountains, the Shiroka Poliana Dam, before continuing on to the town of Dospat at 1,200 m, where you stay overnight.

**Cycling :** 71 km – 6-7 hrs; uphill cycling 1300m; downhill cycling 810 m

### Day 4 Yagodina Cave – Devil's Throat Cave – Trigrad

From the centre of Dospat the route climbs for 2 km. After a short while, the road begins to descend, before continuous undulations through pastoral areas, passing a Roman bridge, spruce woods and potato fields. The first large settlement is the town of Borino, primarily inhabited by Muslims. This route affords beautiful views over the central parts of the Rodopi Mountains, and the natural phenomenon of the Buynovsko Gorge. Next stop is the Yagodina Cave, one of the longest caves in Bulgaria with outstanding stalactites, stalagmites, columns, ponds and cave pearls. The route continues to Trigrad village, passing between the 2m high cliffs of the Trigrad Gorge (1,450 m). Here another cave, The Devil's Throat is found, containing one of the highest underground waterfalls in Europe. Arrive in the picturesque mountain village of Trigrad at 1,200 m, where you overnight at a small family-run hotel.

**Cycling** 48 km – 5 hrs: uphill cycling 1200 m; downhill cycling 1250 m





## Day 5 Shiroka Laka – Smolyan Lakes - Smolyan

A pleasant descent along the Trigradska River brings you to the village of Grohotno and the natural rock phenomenon, "The Elephant" – a 10 m high rock formation. Continue biking upstream of the Shirokolushka River to the village of Shiroka Luka. Stop here to discover the well preserved Ridopean houses dating back from the Bulgarian Revival period. Perhaps have lunch here then continue biking to the village of Stoykite through some wonderful coniferous forests with views of the Rodopi Mountains. Arrive the Smolyan Lakes for

overnight. **Cycling** : 66 km – 6-7 hrs; uphill cycling 1260 m; downhill cycling 1510 m



## Day 6 Rozhen - Borovo

Leave Smolyan in the direction of historic Rozhen cycling upstream of the Byala River and past the small village of Sokolovtsi. Continue climbing up to a big picturesque meadow where you being a gentle downhill ride to Laki, through the Momina-voda protected area. Nearby is the picturesque village of Borovo and a religious place with chapels and healing springs – Krastova Gora. Overnight in Borovo

**Cycling** : 58 km - 5 hrs; uphill cycling: 1480m; downhill cycling: 1420 m

## Day 7 The Miraculous Bridges – Bachkovo Monastery - Sofia

The downhill ride continues along the picturesque Jugovska River valley to the main road. A short transfer brings you to the Miraculous Bridges rock phenomenon for sightseeing. Afterwards cycle back downhill towards the Plovdiv road. The next village on the way is the spa centre of Narechenski Bani. Reach the second largest monastery in Bulgaria, Bachkovo. Here we have lunch and the cycling ends. Travel by vehicle to Sofia for overnight.

**Cycling** : 56 km - 5 hrs; uphill cycling 1310m, downhill cycling 860m.

## Day 8

Arrangements end after breakfast. You will be transferred to Sofia or Plovdiv airport.

## GRADE

**Roads:** Mainly isolated village asphalt roads with little traffic, road conditions are relatively good with some exceptions (bumpy sections, potholes, rough asphalt). We do not go off road. The traffic might be a little bit heavier at some sections but only for a short while.

Moderate to energetic cycling with days of 4 – 7 hours of cycling per day. Expect some steep climbs.

## GUIDE/DRIVER

The guide with the supporting vehicle and the luggage checks several times a day if everything is OK, waiting by crossroads, accompanying guests to breakfast, lunch and dinner and giving information on interesting sites en-route.

## SCHEDULE 2020

Can start any day 01 May – 31 October

## 2020 COST PER PERSON IN EURO

Share Twin/Double	€710 based on 2 people travelling together
Share twin/Double	€620 based on 4+ people travelling together
Single room supplement	€90
Hybrid bike	€ 70
Electric Bike	€140
Helmet	€ 5
Pannier	TBA

## 2020 COST INCLUDES

- Group transfer from/to Sofia or Plovdiv airports (private transfers available at extra €20)
- English speaking guide/driver with a supporting vehicle throughout the tour
- 7 night's accommodation in family-run hotels/guesthouses in rooms with private facilities throughout
- Meals – breakfast daily, 5 dinners
- Detailed route notes and maps

## 2020 COST DOES NOT INCLUDE

- Bike Rental
- Pannier Bags and helmet
- Entrance fees, tips
- Lunches and 2 dinners
- Items of a personal nature

Private transfers if required - Sofia Airport - Sofia city centre: €20 (per car ); Plovdiv Airport - Plovdiv centre: €20 (per car); Sofia-Plovdiv or vv. €65 (per vehicle)

## DRESS CODE

- Dress code in monasteries and churches - men are not allowed to enter in shorts and women should not expose their legs and shoulders.







*Book through:*

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**Ph 09 4867473 Fax 09 484 0091**

**Email: [info@walkworld.co.nz](mailto:info@walkworld.co.nz)**