



## **BULGARIA - NEW FACE IN EUROPE**

Bulgaria ... A marvelous piece of land, cuddled in the Balkan Peninsula, amongst the rich folds of Stara planina mountain and the undulations of the vast Danube valley, the majestic mountains of Rila, Pirin and Rodopi and the infinite Thracian lowlands ... Astonishing landscapes and hospitality you just cannot imagine unless you have experienced it!

What's so special about it? Why would you like to come here? What possibly can you expect to see and feel?

### **BULGARIAN TOURISM: A COMPETITIVE SECTOR IN THE BULGARIAN ECONOMY**

At present, Bulgaria is one of the least populated European states. Bulgaria is approximately the size of England, but with a population of only eight million people. As well as eleven blue flag beaches, Bulgaria has 354 km of Black Sea Coastline, 37,000 km of hiking paths in the mountains and a series of almost unpublicised Roman, Greek and Thracian historical attractions, including nine UNESCO world heritage sites.

Over the last years the Bulgarian tourist industry has emerged as a Cinderella success story, being identified by the WTO as one of the most appealing 'new faces' in international tourism. In 2005 over 4.6 million tourists visited Bulgaria. The strength of the industry was demonstrated during 2002; a year in which tourists flow decreased internationally, yet Bulgaria recorded a 20 percent rise in visitor numbers.

In 2005 the income from tourism exceeded EUR 1.8 billion and the share of tourism in the Gross Domestic Product reached 13 per cent. Half a million persons are directly involved in tourism. For the period 1998 till 2005 the number of foreign tourists in Bulgaria has doubled and from 2 million it increased to more than 4 million. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) the number of foreign tourists in Bulgaria will exceed 20 million in 2020.

#### **The EU countries are the largest market for the Bulgarian tourist services.**

The number of tourists from UK, Ireland, France, Austria and Germany grew considerably. The number of tourists from Czech Republic and Poland is also increasing acknowledging the return of Bulgaria on the tourist market of the Central European countries. The largest number of tourists is from Turkey (886 118), Romania, Greece, Germany, United Kingdom, Macedonia, Serbia and Monte Negro, Russia. The Bulgarians traveling abroad have also increased. After the drop in 1995-2000, in the last years the number of Bulgarians traveling abroad has increased by 9 percent compared to previous years and reached 4,2 million.



Bulgarians travel mainly in Turkey (more than 1.659 million Bulgarians have visited our Southern neighbor) followed by Greece, Germany, Serbia and Monte Negro, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, UK etc. In 2005 revenues from nights spent are estimated at EUR 247 million accounting for a growth by 23 per cent compared to 2004.

### **Specialized infrastructure**

In the last few years, the specialized infrastructure is developing with extreme dynamism. For the period 1996-2005 the available accommodation (hotels, motels, huts) has increased by 70 per cent. In some Black Sea regions the supply of accommodation doubled. Bulgaria disposes of 190 Thousand beds, located in more than 300 sites. The specialized infrastructure is being permanently modernized and renovated. Two and three star hotels are prevailing though higher category sites are being built in the last years.

### **The recourses ...**

Bulgarian **seaside resorts** offer surfing, water skiing, diving, underwater fishing, underwater archaeology, paragliding, parachuting. The yacht ports and marinas in Balchik, Varna, Nessebar and Bourgas offer opportunities for yachting.

Routes have been devised for pedestrian, biking and horseback tourism, photo- and eco-tourism, visiting natural, archaeological and cultural landmarks, etc.

Convenient ski runs and facilities for **skiing tourism and winter sports** are on offer in the mountains of Rila, Pirin, Rhodope, Vitoshka, and Stara Planina. The ski-season duration in the high-altitude mountain resorts is up to 190 days.

The Pamporovo, Borovets, Bansko and Aleko resorts have year-round functioning accommodation premises and winter sports infrastructure (lifts, Alpine skiing and ski-running runs). In response to modern demand - new ski tourism centres are also getting established in Smolyan, Chepelare, Dobrinishte, Malyovitsa, Semkovo, Velingrad, Gabrovo, etc. During the summer season, mountains in Bulgaria offer diverse options for active tourism. Programmes are on offer for pedestrian, biking and horseback tourism, hang-gliding and motor hanggliding, parachuting, aquatic sports, rock climbing, spelaeology tourism, orientation competitions, scout camps, etc.

**Spa tourism** is a traditional component of Bulgaria's image as a tourist destination. There are 600 mineral water springs in the country - 75 with warm to hot water. Bulgaria's thermal mineral water is distinguished for its great chemical and curative diversity. There are 22 spa resorts of national and 43 of regional importance. At the moment mineral water resource utilization is less than 40%, so there is a big potential for development of spa tourism market in Bulgaria.

**Cultural tourism** - there are over 30,000 historic monuments in Bulgaria (7 of which are included in the UNESCO world culture heritage list), 36 culture reserves, 160



monasteries, 330 museums and galleries. There is a plenitude of monuments from different historic epochs: Thracian tombs, finds from the Ancient Greek times, Roman fortresses, historical monuments from the time of the First and the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, architectural attractions from the National Revival period, which have shaped fully or partially the face of Bulgarian towns.

**Ecological tourism** - Bulgaria's countryside avails exceptional capacities to diversification of the Bulgarian tourist product and new types of tourism. The network of 3 national and 11 natural parks, 89 reserves and 2,234 natural landmarks preconditions various types of specialized tourism: cognitive and nature-science tourism, photosafari, observing birds and plants, rock climbing, alpinism, speleology tourism, etc.

Opportunities for **rural tourism** are offered in a number of villages in the Rhodopes, Pirin, Rila, the Balkan range, and the Strandja Mountain, as well as in the Dobroudja Plain, with well preserved traditional crafts, architecture, and folklore.

**Come and discover all this treasure for yourself!**

*Sources:*

*National Statistic Institute, Bulgaria*

*Bulgarian National Bank*

*Bulgarian State Agency for Tourism*

*Bulgarian Foreign Investment Agency*

The project "Bulgaria - New Face in Europe" is funded within the implementation of the Communication Strategy for the Accession of Bulgaria to the European Union.

Additional information on all aspects related to the accession process of Bulgaria to the EU can be found on the following internet sites:

[www.evroportal.bg](http://www.evroportal.bg) and [www.mfa.government.bg](http://www.mfa.government.bg)



The project "Bulgaria - New Face in Europe" is implemented by  
the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vratsa

and the Euro Info Center BG808 Vratsa

