



BULGARIA

Short Facts

Official Name: Republic of Bulgaria

Political System: Parliamentary Democracy

Official Language: Bulgarian

Currency: Lev

Capital City: Sofia (Population 1,402,000)

Geography: Total Area: 110,944 square kilometres. Third largest country in southeast Europe

Population: 7,606,000

Neighbours: Romania, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece and Turkey

Ethnicity of the population: Bulgarians (83.9%) Turkish (9.4%), Romany (4.7%), Russian, Armenian, Vietnamese and others (2.0%).

Population by religion: Most Bulgarians are Bulgarian Orthodox. Other religious denominations include Islam, Protestantism and Roman Catholicism

HISTORY

The influence and territorial expansion of Bulgaria increased in 811 when Bulgaria won a war against the Byzantine army led by Nicephorus I in the Battle of Pliska. In 864, Bulgaria accepted Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Throughout history, particularly in the 11th and 12th century, Bulgaria experienced several uprisings by its people.

In 1393, the Ottomans captured Tarnovo, and occupied Bulgaria. The Bulgarian population was decimated by the invading forces and suffered greatly from the Ottoman oppression. Bulgarians had to pay much higher taxes than the Muslim population, and lacked judicial equality with them. Bulgarians converted to Islam but often retained Bulgarian language, dress and some customs compatible with Islam. Throughout the five centuries of Ottoman rule, the Bulgarian people organized several attempts to re-establish their own state.

During World War I, Bulgaria found itself fighting on the losing side as a result of its alliance with the Central Powers. Following the loss in World War I, in the 1920s and 1930s the country suffered political unrest. During World War II, Nazi Germany allowed Bulgaria to occupy parts of Greece and of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria became one of only three countries (along with Finland and Denmark) that saved its entire Jewish population (around 50,000 people) from the Nazi camps through different rationales and the continued postponement of compliance with German demands.

In 1945, after World War II, Bulgaria became a communist state and part of the Eastern Bloc. In 1990, the Communist Party gave up its monopoly on power and Bulgaria undertook a transition to democracy and free-market capitalism.

GEOGRAPHY

Bulgaria has a large diversity of geography including Alpine snow-capped peaks and sunny coastline. Hilly country and plains lie to the southeast of the country along the Black Sea coast and along Bulgaria's main river, the Danube which lies to the north.

CLIMATE

Bulgaria overall has a temperate climate, with cold winters and hot summers. The Balkan Mountains have some influence on climate throughout the country: northern Bulgaria experiences lower temperatures and receives more rain than the southern lowlands.



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ECONOMY

Bulgaria has experienced rapid economic growth in recent years, even though it continues to rank as the lowest-income member state of the EU. The economy relies primarily on industry and agriculture. Bulgaria produces a significant amount of iron, copper, gold, coal, electronics, refined petroleum fuels, vehicle components, and construction materials.

SCHOOLS IN BULGARIA

Children aged between 7 and 16 must attend full-time education. The State provides education in its schools free of charge, except for higher education establishments, colleges and universities. The curriculum focuses on eight main subject-areas: Bulgarian language and literature, foreign languages, mathematics, information technologies, social sciences and civics, natural sciences and ecology, music and art, physical education and sports.

CULTURE

A number of ancient civilizations, have influenced the culture, history and heritage of Bulgaria. Bulgaria has nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the ancient city of Nesebar. Another important historical artefact, the oldest treasure of worked gold in the world, dates back to the 5th millennium BC, coming from the site of the Varna Necropolis.

The country has a long-standing musical tradition. National folk music has a distinctive sound and uses a wide range of traditional instruments, such as gudulka, gaida, bagpipe, kaval and tupan. Bulgaria also has a rich visual arts heritage, and you can see many frescoes and murals in heritage buildings throughout the country. Many of them were produced in the medieval times.

FOOD

Lukanka (spicy salami), banitsa (filo pastry and egg), shopska salad, lyutenitsa (red relish), sirene (cheese) and kozunak (sweet bread) are distinctive Bulgaria dishes.

RECREATION

Bulgaria performs well in sports such as volleyball, wrestling, weight-lifting, shooting sports, gymnastics, chess and tennis. Football has become by far the most popular sport in the country. Bulgaria participates both in the Summer and Winter Olympics, and by 2008 had won a total of 212 medals: 51 gold, 84 silver, and 77 bronze.

YFU IN BULGARIA

YFU Bulgaria provides arrival and departure orientations for students. In some areas, volunteers may organise events or excursions for YFU students in the surroundings.

EXCHANGES WITH:

Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Greece, USA, Hungary, France, France, Japan and South Africa amongst other countries.