

Discover Bulgaria and Macedonia *and the history of Jews in these countries*

(11 days)

Day 1: SOFIA

Arrival in Sofia, meeting with the guide. Check in in the hotel. Visit the **centre of the capital**: Church of St. Sofia, Aleksandar Nevski Memorial Cathedral and the Museum of the "icons". It is a Bulgarian Orthodox Cathedral in Sofia, built in Neo-Byzantine style, it serves as the Cathedral of the Patriarch of Bulgaria and is one of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in the world, as well as one of Sofia's symbols and primary tourist attractions. Visit the Church of St. Nedelia (XIX century), the Rotunda of St. George (II century), considered the oldest building in Sofia, the old Mosque. Accommodation at your hotel (D)

Day 2: SOFIA - SKOPJE (220 km)

Breakfast and departure for Macedonia. In the late morning arrival in the **Monastery of St. Osogorski**, the second for importance in Macedonia. The monastery hosts two churches: the first one was med during the XIII century and the other of the XIX century. Arrival in Skopje. Visit the new part of the capital: the of Cathedral Kliment Ohridski, painted by Slavo Brezovski and consecrated on 12 August 1990, the Feudal Tower dating from the XVII century, the Old Railway Station built in 1940, almost destroyed in the earthquake that hit Skopje on 26 July 1963. Even today, the damages on the outside part of the building, can be seen. The big clock on the main entrance stopped at 5.17: time when the earthquake began. *Visit of the **Holocaust Memorial Centre in Skopje** The modern, multi-million dollar edifice stands in the heart of what was once the city's Jewish quarter, in the center of the Macedonian capital Skopje. It was built by the Jewish community of Macedonia, which today numbers some 100 members. Macedonian Jewry benefited from a 2002 law providing for the return of heirless Jewish property, a law that is widely recognized as one of the best in Europe. **Meeting with the Jewish community** in Macedonia that is a small, but highly respected community, servicing as a bridge of communication between Macedonia and Israel. It numbers about 200 people, of which most of them live in the capital Skopje, but also in Stip.* Accommodation at your hotel (B,L,D)

Day 3: SKOPJE - TETOVO - OHRID (150 km)

Breakfast. Visit the **old part of the capital**: the Medieval Fortress made in the middle of the VI century, the Old Bazar made of narrow streets, flowing into small squares. The pedestrian path is characterized with one floor houses, all similar, where there are jewellerys, carpet shops, clothes, cotton objects, Islamic books etc, the Mustafa Pasa Mosque (XVI century) and the Church of St. Spas, probably built between XIII - XIX century. In side is one of the most beautiful iconostasis in the Balkans. Made for 5 years, from 1819-1824 by the brothers Marko and Retar Filipovski and Makarije Frckovski, it is 10 m. long, 4,5 m. high sides and 7 m. tall in the middle. After lunch departure for **Tetovo**. Visit of the **Painted Mosque**. The colorful mosque, known as the Mosque Aladza, was built in 1459, with the donation of two noble Muslim families Hursida and Measure, whose octagonal coat of Arms is in the mosque's garden. In the afternoon arrival in St. Bigorski Monastery. Visit of the monastery considered one of the most important in Macedonia. Departure for Ohrid. Arrivai in the late afternoon. Transfer to the hotel. Accommodation at your hotel (B,L,D)

Day 4: OHRID - ST. NAUM (50 km)

Breakfast. Visit the **old town**: the Samoil fortress on the hill above Ohrid, dates from the X century, from the time of Zar Samoil's ruling, the Roman Theatre built 2.000 years ago, (the total surface is 4.000 mq. From the discovered written vestiges, it is supposed that at first it was used for theatre plays, while during the Roman ruling became gladiator arena), the Cathedral of St. Sofia, which is considered as one of the greatest Byzantium Churches from the XI century, the wonderful Church of St. John Bogoslov from Kaneo (XIII century). In this Church the Byzantium and Armenian style are mixed. It has square foundation with three absides which carry the octagonal cupola. The outside walls are made of stone, and the inside are of bricks with ceramic decoration. Lunch. In the afternoon visit the **Monastery of St. Naum**, sites in the south part of the lake, in the immediate vicinity of the border Macedonia Albania. In the Church of the Monastery, there are no preserved frescoes made in the beginning of the XX century. Return to Ohrid. Accommodation at your hotel (B,L,D)

Day 5: OHRID - HERACLEA – BITOLA – STOBI – BEROVO (330 km)

Breakfast. Departure for the town of **Bitola**. *Till 1943 in Bitola were living more than 3500 Jews, now there is only one person. 3276 Jews were taken in Treblinka and none survived.* Visit the archeological site of **Heraclea**, 4 km from Bitola. Heraclea was founded by Philip the II, father of Alexander the Great, in the IV century b.C. The site housed: the amphitheater with 58,50 m diameter and 20 rows of seating places, magnificent and picturesque mosaics (V century), coolants and many other vestiges from the roman period. Visit the centre of Bitola: the Catholic Cathedral, the Church of St.Dimitrija made in 1830 from local rich traders donation and considered the most beautiful Christian Church from the Renaissance in Macedonia, the Clock Tower and the Mosque Isak, made in 1508 for Isak Celibi Ibni Asan. After lunch Departure for Stobi. Visit of **Stobi**. The trade and the location of Stobi were the main impulse for constant development during the Roman rule. Being at the crossroad of the road along Axios River (Vardar) and the road that connected Via Egnatia and Via Militaris, Stobi became one of the most significant towns in Macedonia. From 1st – 3rd century, during the Pax Romana, Stobi had changes in the urbanization, a demographic expansion and occupied the largest area in its history. In the period of the Augustus reign, Stobi became Civium Opiddum Romanorum and later it reached the status of Municipium. Although the dominant population was autochthonous, there were many citizens who had Ius Italicum and belonged to the tribes of Aemilia and Tromentina. *There also was a Jewish community in Stobi. By an inscription, we know the name of Tiberius Claudius Policharmos who rebuilt the synagogue and built his home next to it. He is signed as the father of the Jewish community.* Accommodation at your hotel (B,L,D)

Day 6: BEROVO - RILA - PLOVDIV (340 km)

Breakfast. Transfer to Rila. After lunch visit the **Rila Monastery**. Founded in the X century, the Rila Monastery is regarded as one of Bulgaria's most important cultural, historical and architectural monuments. It is on account of this also a key tourist attraction in Bulgaria and Southern Europe as a whole. It is traditionally thought that the monastery was founded by the hermit Ivan Rilski, whose name it bears, during the rule of Tsar Peter I (927-968). The hermit actually lived in a cave not far from the monastery's location, while the complex was built by his students, who came to the mountains to receive their education. The complex acted as a depository of Bulgarian language and culture in the ages of foreign rule. During the time of the Bulgarian National Revival (XVIII - XIX century), it was destroyed by fire in 1833 and then reconstructed between 1834 and 1862 with the help of wealthy Bulgarians from the whole country, under the famous architect Alexi Riletz. The erection of the residential buildings began in 1816, while a belfry was added to the Tower of Hrelyu in 1844. Neofit Rilski founded a school in the monastery during this period. The monastery complex, regarded as one of the foremost masterpieces of Bulgarian National Revival architecture, was declared a national historical monument in 1976 and became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983. Since 1991 it has been entirely subordinate to the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Departure for Plovdiv. Accommodation at your hotel (B,L,D)

Day 7: PLOVDIV - BACHKOVO - PLOVDIV (50 km)

Breakfast and departure for **Bachkovo Monastery**. It is an important monument of Christian architecture and one of the largest and oldest Eastern Orthodox monasteries in Europe. It is located on the right bank of the Chepelare River, 189 km from Sofia and 10 km south of Asenovgrad, and is directly subordinate to the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The monastery is known and appreciated for the unique combination of Byzantine, Georgian and Bulgarian culture, united by the common faith. Visit and lunch. Return to **Plovdiv**. In the afternoon visit the old town: the Nebet Tepe hill, where the most beautiful Houses-Museum in the city are located, the Ethnographic Museum housed in the wonderful House "Argir Kiuumsnogl" built in 1847, the Church of S.S. Costantin and Elena built in 1832, the old Roman amphitheatre dates back from II century, the "Imaret" Mosque, built in 1444 by the order of sultan Baiyazid. Free time. (B,L,D)

Day 8: PLOVDIV - KAZANLAK - VELIKO TARNOVO (210 km)

Breakfast. Departure for **Kazanlak**, the capital of the roses valley. Visit the Thracian Burial (UNESCO). In the IV century BC, near the ancient Thracian capital of Seuthopolis and close to the city, a magnificent Thracian tomb was built. Consisting of a vaulted brickwork "beehive" tomb, it contains, among other things, painted murals representing a Thracian couple at a ritual funeral feast. The tomb was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. Visit of the famous **Church of the Nativity of Shipka**. Visit **Etara**, the famous Ethnographic open - air reserve. In the afternoon arrival in **Veliko Tarnovo**. Visit the Tzarevez fortress and the market-place Samovodska Charshiya. Tzarevets is a mediaeval stronghold located on a hill with the same name. It served as the Second Bulgarian Empire's primary fortress and strongest bulwark from 1185 to 1393, housing the royal and the patriarchal palaces, and is a popular tourist attraction. Accommodation at your hotel (B,L,D)

Day 9: VELIKO TARNOVO - TROYAN - SOFIA (250 km)

Breakfast. Visit the village of **Arbanassi**: the Kostantsaiev House - Museum and the Church of the Nativity. Departure for the **Troyan Monastery**. It is the third largest monastery in Bulgaria. It is located in the northern part

of the country and was founded no later than the end of the XVI century. The main church of the monastery was reconstructed near the end of Ottoman rule during the Bulgarian National Revival period by a master-builder called Konstantin in 1835. The ornate interior and exterior of the church were painted between 1847 and 1849 by Zahari Zograf, a popular Bulgarian painter of the time, who also painted the central church of the Rila Monastery, the largest monastery in Bulgaria. The iconoclast in the central church is a wood carving dating to 1839. The Troyan Monastery is also, since the XVII century, the home of one of the holiest icons in Bulgarian Orthodoxy, the Three-Handed Virgin. After lunch visit of the Monastery. In the late afternoon arrival in Sofia. Check in the hotel. Accommodation at your hotel (B,L,D)

Day 10: SOFIA

Breakfast. *Day entirely dedicated to **Jewish history in Bulgaria**. Visit **The Jewish Museum of History - Sofia at the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria "Shalom"** was set up in the building of the Central Synagogue of Sofia on 8 May 1992. It is a continuation of the standing exhibition "The Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews 1941-1944", which was open from 1968 till 1990, in finding, preservation, studying and popularization of the Jewish cultural and historical heritage in Bulgaria. In the standing exhibitions "The Jewish Communities in Bulgaria" and "The Holocaust and the Rescue of the Jews in Bulgaria" photodocumentary materials and valuable collections of early printed books, ritual and other objects (dating back to the 18th - 20th centuries) are presented. Visit the **Sofia Synagogue**: Avraham Tadjer, the historian of the Sofia Jewish community, describes the event in his wonderful Ladino book "Notas Historikas" as follows: "The ninth of September, 1909 will be a historic day for Bulgarian Jews. On this day the Sofia Synagogue was opened, a great holiday not only for the Jews of the capital, but on this day the prestige of all Bulgarian Jews was elevated. With the opening of the Sofia Synagogue the respect for the Jewish community and all Bulgarian Jews was increased a great deal. All the stores were closed as for a holiday, and the whole Bulgarian population congratulated these children of Israel in honor of the festive opening of the Synagogue." The Synagogue is designed in the Spanish Moorish style with elements of the Viennese Secession movement. In accordance with Bulgarian Sephardic synagogue tradition, one enters through a large courtyard. The quiet courtyard with its small outbuildings almost transports the visitor to sunny Spain. It provides a pleasant contrast from the busy Exarch Joseph Avenue and during High Holidays, worshippers will take a brief rest before returning to prayers. **Meeting with the Jewish community in Bulgaria: "Shalom" is the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria.** Visit the building of the **Jewish cultural center**, where is the headquarters of the organization are operating information center, library, canteen, kitchen for the poor, adult rehabilitation center, medical offices, Service for distribution to food and medical care in their homes.*

*You may also know the story of **Dimitar Peshev**: he was the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Bulgaria and Minister of Justice during World War II. He rebelled against the pro-Nazi cabinet and prevented the Deportation of Bulgaria's 48,000 Jews. On 25 January 2000, in the Palace of Europe in Strasbourg, was inaugurated by Lord Russell Johnston a bronze bust of Dimitar Peshev The bust is exhibited. On 30 March 2008, in Jaffa, Israel, was dedicated a square in the presence of the mayor of Tel Aviv Ron Huldai and of the president of Bulgaria Georgi Parabanov to commemorate the man who rescued Bulgarian Jews. (B,L,D)*

Day 11: SOFIA – DEPARTURE

Breakfast. Transfer to the airport. Departure from Sofia.

***These priceless cultural and natural treasures are still little known to most tourists,
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