

WINE TOURS IN BULGARIA



WINERIES – LOCAL FOODS – SIGHTSEEINGS





WINE TOURS IN BULGARIA



THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM

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Photos and illustrations Ivan Mihalev

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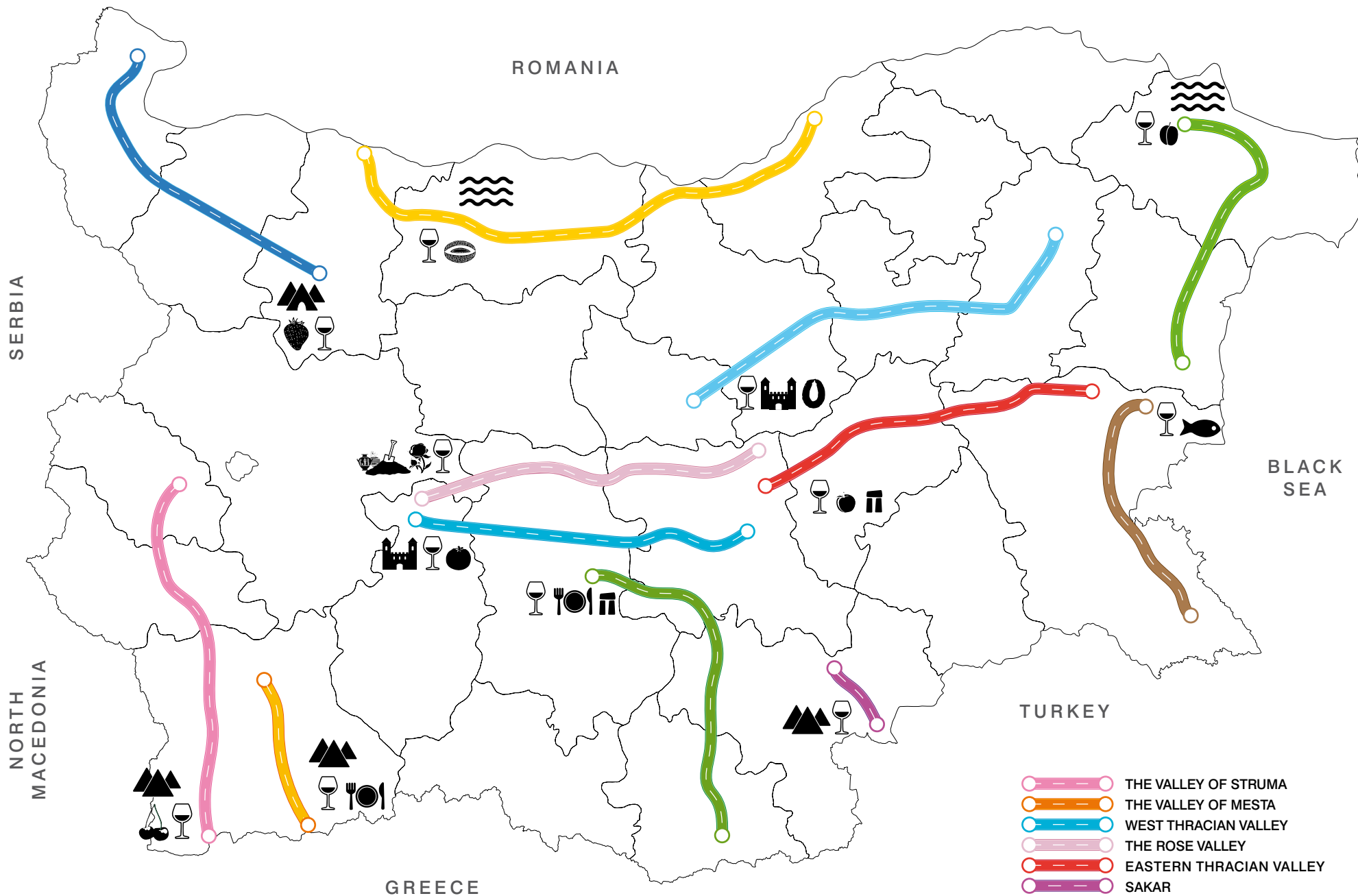
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Wine Tourism in Bulgaria – A Journey to the Richness of Taste and History

Bulgaria is a place of ancient vineyards and masterful traditions, inviting the fanciers of wine and travel to discover a unique world of aromas, stories and surprising tastes. Every glass of Bulgarian wine brings with it the aromas of sunny hills, centuries-old culture and the sparkling spirit of people who have built their passion into this art. Since the Thracians times, the period from around 1500 BC to the first century AD, to the present day, Bulgarian wine has been created with a deep connection to the land and nature, reflecting the spirit and customs of our ancestors.

The hidden gems of the Bulgarian wine routes offer not just tastings, but also exciting meetings with master winemakers and beautiful places of nature. Enotourism (or wine tourism) in the different regions of Bulgaria – from the Black Sea coast to the Struma and Maritsa valleys – reveals a variety of types of wine, each with its own character and history. The rich flavors of traditional Bulgarian varieties such as *Mavrud*, *Shiroka Melnishka Loza* and *Rubin* tempt the senses with their plenteous bouquets and they whisper of a centuries-old tradition that combined craftsmanship and love for wine.

This book is an invitation to adventure. From historic cellars to contemporary boutique wineries, Bulgarian wine routes will take you along paths where past and present, tradition and modernity intertwine. You will discover a land that welcomes you with hospitality, warmth and an rich source of flavors. This book is not just a guidebook, but a map to the wine culture in Bulgaria – a culture that will enrich and inspire your journey.



- THE VALLEY OF STRUMA
- THE VALLEY OF MESTA
- WEST THRACIAN VALLEY
- THE ROSE VALLEY
- EASTERN THRACIAN VALLEY
- SAKAR
- ZLATIA
- MOESIA
- NORTHERN BLACK SEA COAST
- SOUTH BLACK SEA
- OLD CAPITALS
- THE RHODOPE MOUNTAINS

A scenic landscape photograph of the Valley of Struma. A light-colored gravel path winds through a lush green valley. On the left, there are rows of bare, trellised vines. Tall, slender cypress trees are planted in rows along the path. In the background, a hill rises with a stone building featuring a cross on its roof. The sky is overcast.

THE VALLEY OF STRUMA



Welcome to „the Bulgarian Tuscany“



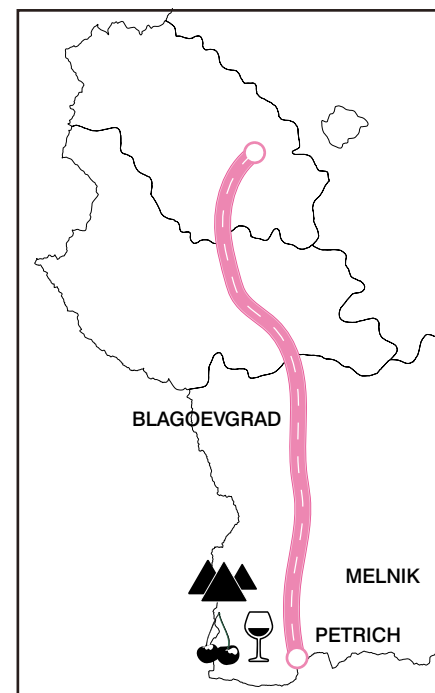
The valley of the Struma River is probably the most picturesque wine destination of Bulgaria. Some even call it „the Bulgarian Tuscany“ since the landscape around the town of Melnik strongly resembles the famous Italian province – with its charming villages and small family wineries situated along the road, inviting the tourists to drop by and taste their wines.

The weather conditions of the region are similar to those of the Mediterranean. This is the warmest and sunniest region of Bulgaria. The gentle breeze coming from the nearby mountains provides natural ventilation of the vineyards and prevents moisture.

The large number of sunny days during the year (over 280), the hilly terrain and the specific nature of the soil are prerequisites for growing mostly red grapes. The red wines of this destination have warm southern notes in its flavor, an intense colour, high density and mild tannins.

The most widespread variety of grapes in this region is Wide Melnik Vine. However, this variety ripens late in the year and is not resistant to cold weather. Its picking starts in mid-October and requires a hot summer and a long, warm and dry autumn. During the years of socialism, several hybrid varieties were developed with much better characteristics. These were Melnik 55 (a hybrid between Wide Melnik Vine and the French variety Valgидie), Ruen (a hybrid between Wide Melnik Vine and Cabernet, Melnik ruby and others.

Over the past years, the new-



ly-established wineries have concluded their production cycles by sowing more and more vines. Currently, there are vineyards where the varieties Merlot, Cabernet and Syrah are grown.

The wineries are expanding their vineyards for producing boutique wines of the varieties Nebbiolo, Petit Verdot, Sangiovese, Cabernet Franc, Grenache Noir, Primitivo, Marselan, Mourvèdre as well as the white wines Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Assyrtiko. Blending of Bulgarian and international varieties has been made.

The valley of Struma is the only area of Bulgaria where the variety Keratcu-da could be grown. This grape variety is grown in the region of Strumyani and Kresna. The wine is straw yellow and has a very pleasant flavour and distinguishing aroma.

Wine production in this part of Bulgaria has been the means of livelihood for the local population since time immemorial. The vineyards in the region of Sandanski take about 53% of the cultivated agricultural land. Their share in the region of Kresna, Strumyani, Petrich and Simitli is smaller.

The specific terroir gives the wine produced in the valley of Struma a marvelous aroma and taste. The average annual temperature in Sandanski is 14.1 degrees Celsius, with little rainfall and the duration of sunshine is the lengthiest – about 2500 hours. The winter is mild and the snow cover stays for a short time. Loam soil is predominant.

The major number of wineries have been registered around Melnik and Sandanski. They cover a large area including the villages of Harsovo, Vrania, Kapatovo, Hotovo, Kromidovo, Damyaniitsa, Zornitsa, Kolarovo, Marikostinovo and others.

Cellars dug into the rocks are the local attraction

In addition to wine production, the region is also popular as an excellent destination for wine tourism. Many of the wineries in Southwestern Bulgaria offer wine tours with wine tasting. They include walks around the production bases and the vineyards of the respective cellars, where technologists share stories of the wine from the vineyards to the bottle. At the end of these tours, it is time for wine tasting. While the tourists are enjoying a glass of wine, an enologist explains the typical features of the different types of drinks.

Some of the wineries in the region of Melnik offer accommodation in hotels



Many of the wineries in Melnik have dug their premises for storing wine into limestone

and guest houses. Various festivals and events dedicated to wine are regularly organized. Some of the local wine makers even offer to the visitors the opportunity to take part in picking grapes – an attraction that is becoming more and more popular.

Another attraction in the region of Melnik are the cellars dug into the rocks. This tradition dates back to centuries ago and such dug cellars could still be seen in Melnik and the region. The barrels are placed deep into the ground in order to store the wine under a lower temperature.

This part of the wine tours in the valley of Struma is the most interesting for the tourists. While walking through the rock labyrinths, they learn interesting stories about the famous Melnik wine by which the region became popular in many parts of the world during the time of Ottoman domination over Bulgaria.

The credit for this goes to the merchants from Dubrovnik, who founded their representative offices in Melnik and regularly transported caravans loaded with wine. The Melnik wine was carried to Thessaloniki and Venice in special wine chests loaded on mules and horses.

One of the famous admirers of the Melnik wine was Winston Churchill, who used to keep Melnik wine in stock and serve it to his highly-placed guests.

Thousands of people visit the Rila Monastery and Vanga's temple every year

The valley of Struma is not only a region for wine tours. It is also full of numerous natural, cultural and historical sites that are worth visiting.





The first stop on the way is the biggest Bulgarian monastery – the Rila Monastery, which is one of the symbols of Bulgaria and it is also under the protection of UNESCO.

The Stobs Pyramids are located to the side of the road to the monastery – an amazing natural site. The pyramids are rock-and-earth formations with a height of 7–10 m and thickness of up to 40 m.

The region of Melnik and the nearby village of Karlanovo is full of „mels“ – the popular Melnik Pyramids, which are among the natural wonders of Bulgaria.

Melnik architectural reserve has preserved its original appearance from the medieval period and the period of the National Revival from around 1760-s. Many of the houses in the town have been declared cultural monuments. The fortress of Despot Slav has been restored and is now open for visitors.

Baba Vanga's temple near the village of Rupite is a constant part of the tourist routes in the region. She was the most famous prophet even during the socialist era and her powers have been respected till present days. Rupite is located in the foot of the inactive volcano called Kozhuh. The remains of the ancient town of Heraclea Sintica are located nearby. They are still being studied by the archeologists.

You should not miss the Rozhen Monastery which is located near Melnik.

You will fall in love with the Pirin cuisine for life

The Pirin style cuisine is an unique mixture of traditional Bulgarian and Mediterranean cuisine as it has been influenced by the proximity of the Aegean Sea region. A variety of local spices and herbs enrich its flavour.



The taverns in Melnik and Rozhen attract the interest of the visitors with their folk-style furniture and authentic atmosphere typical for the National Revival period. There you can taste some of the most typical local dishes and delicacies preserved over the centuries. Taking a sip of Melnik wine with the delicious food is a must!

Along the Struma River, there are large chestnut forests, which are spread between the regions of Simitli and Petrich. People in both places honour the chestnuts by organizing celebrations in the early autumn. If you would choose to stay over in any of the guest houses in the region, you may be lucky to try chestnuts with veal in a pot. Some other dishes typical of the region are named Plyaska, Meshnik, Krayshnik.

Plyaska is a baked dish. It is made of very soft, almost mash-like dough of flour and water and the filling is made of herbs picked in the field and the forest, green vegetables from the garden, leeks and cheese.

Meshnik is a baked dish similar to plyaska but with a cabbage filling.

Krayshnik is similar to Kyustendil cabbage pie to a certain extent. But it is very different as the dough is made with yeast and the filling is fried fish. Women from the village of Kluch usually make this dish.



WINERIES:



Logodaj Winery – village of Logodazh (8)

Medi Valley – village of Smochevo (7)

Wine Cellar Villa Melnik – village of Harsovo (2)

Orbelus Organic Winery – village of Kromidovo (1)

Zlaten Rozhen Wine Cellar – village of Kapatovo (5)

Wine Villa Sintica Cellar – Sandanski (3)

Damianitza Winery – village of Damyanitsa

Kapatovo Family Estate – village of Kapatovo

Orbelia Winery – village of Kolarovo (4)

Rupel Winery – village of Dolno Spanchevo (6)

Zornitza Family Estate – village of Zornitsa, Blagoevgrad (9)

Wine Cellar Kiossev – village of Ilindentsi

AYA Estate Vineyards – village of Harsovo



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An aerial photograph of a valley. In the foreground, a river flows from the left towards the center. To the right of the river is a long, straight row of tall, thin evergreen trees. Further right is a large vineyard with rows of grapevines. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a blue sky with wispy clouds. The top of the image shows a dark, geometric structure, possibly a roof or a bridge, framing the scene.

THE VALLEY OF MESTA



People in Bansko and the Region Have Turned Delicious Food into a Cult

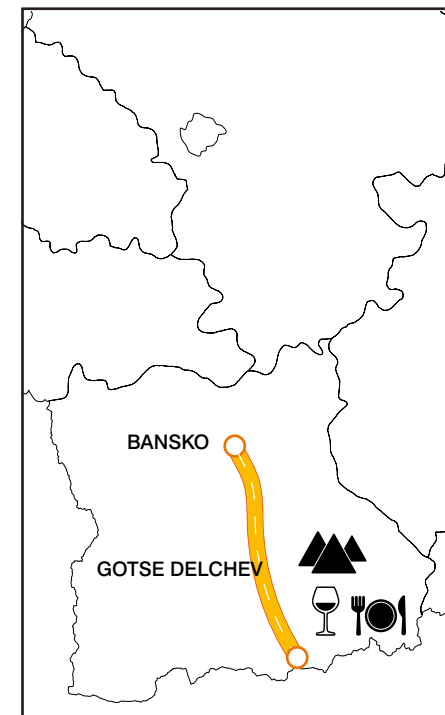


The valley of Mesta is a region attracting tourists with its delicious food. The popular taverns in Bansko, Dobrinishte, Razlog and Gotse Delchev are the reason why this region is known as Number One Gourmet Destination in Bulgaria.

The local rule is that delicious food goes well with good wine. The region itself has not been known for wine production as the geographical features of the region, characterized mainly by mountainous and hilly terrain have not been suitable for such vine growth.

Still, the route offers numerous opportunities for wine tourism in the region of Gotse Delchev, which vineyards are Ruby, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Ruby is typical for this region and is a hybrid between the Syrian variety Syrah and the Italian Nebbiolo.

The only larger winery in this region is called Uva Nestum, which from Latin means „Grapes from Mesta“. It is located near the town of Gotse Delchev and has become one of the new additions to the wine tourism in Bulgaria. Uva Nestum is a combination of a winery and a very modern hotel complex, which opened in the mid 2016. Thus, its owners want to show that first-class wine can be produced in this part of Bulgaria as well.





Try Banska kapama and nafpavok – the Bulgarian prosciutto

High-quality wine without a good appetizer would be like a beach without the sun. Anyone visiting the valley of Mesta will be satisfied – it offers a wide variety of unique meat delicacies.

The undisputed favourite is called Nafpavok. People say that it can have an authentic taste only in the Razlog Valley due to its specific climatic features.

The Nafpavok is a raw-dried seasoned delicacy, which has been typical local production for centuries in Gorno Draglishte, Dolno Draglishte, Dobarsko, Bachevo and other villages in the region of Razlog. It is usually compared to the Spanish jamon serrano or the Italian prosciutto crudo.

This delicacy bearing a strange name is prepared in December. It is called Nafpavok as the recipe requires the master of the delicacy to stuff chopped meat into an organic wrapping as hard as he can. In local dialect the process is called Nafpava and the final delicious product – Nafpavok. The gastronomical masterpiece uses only the best meat from home-bred pigs – loin, shoulder blade and leg. It is being cut in small pieces and seasoned with salt, cumin seed, savory, oregano and black pepper.

Banska kapama is made of several types of meat and is cooked in an earthenware pot



The chopped meat is then filled into the pig's stomach or duodenum. It is left to dry in the attic for at least 4 months over a grill which allows ventilation. Then, it is buried in ash which preserves it till the end of summer.

Naturally, when talking about good food, we shouldn't miss Bansko. The resort town is famous for its culinary traditions. Some of the unique specialties of Bansko are Chomlek, Kapama as well as the appetizers, called Banski Starets, Banski Sudzhuk and Karvavitsa (black sausage). The dishes are cooked slowly, for hours, usually in earthenware pots, in order to achieve the best taste.

To prepare Kapama, you need to fry a mixture of rice, chopped sauerkraut and sliced chekane (beetroot). It is seasoned with black pepper, bay leaf and salt. Then, veal, pork, chicken and karvavitsa (black sausage) are cut in large pieces. A layer of whole cabbage leaves are placed on the bottom of a large earthenware pot, then other layers are placed on top of it: pieces of meat, filling, cabbage leaves, meat, filling. After that, we pour in some white wine and fill the rest of the pot with water. We put the earthenware lid and seal it with dough. After it starts boiling, we leave it to simmer for about 5 hours.

The famous appetizer called Banski Starets or Babichka is made of minced pork fillet, seasoned with cumin seed, black pepper and salt. It is filled in straight intestines about 25 cm long, then it is pressed and dried in a well-ventilated place.



The ski slopes are not the only reason to visit this region

The valley of Mesta is located between three mountains – Pirin, Rila and Rhodopes. This is where the largest ski centre in Bulgaria is located – Bansko. The nearby village of Dobrinishte also has ski slopes and offers good conditions for winter tourism.

This region has a lot more to offer. It is full of picturesque villages and numerous natural sites, such as cascades, mountain tops, lakes, rock formations.

The oldest coniferous tree in Bulgaria can be found here – Baikusheva fir, which is over 1300 years old, as well as the only park on the Balkan Peninsula for retired dancing bears – Belitsa.

If you happen to be in the region of Razlog, don't forget to visit the unique medieval church in the village of Dobarsko. The temple is called St. Theodor Tyron and St. Theodor Stratilates and is famous for its remarkable murals. Some of them depict Jesus Christ as an astronaut in a space rocket.

The ancient town of Nicopolis ad Nestum near Gotse Delchev is worth visiting. It is located in the suburbs of the village of Garmen. The town was founded in 106 AD by the Roman emperor Trajan in honour of his victory over the Dacians.

Don't forget to visit the villages having the status of architectural reserves – Kovachevitsa, Leshten and Dolen.

The neighboring village of Bansko – Dobrinishte also has ski slopes and conditions for winter tourism



The valley of Mesta is locked between three mountains – Pirin, Rila and Rhodope

Bansko – nature, traditions, modernity

Bansko is not just a place where you visit only for skiing. Bansko is a combination of history, surrounded by the magnificent nature of the majestic Pirin Mountain.

The town has already won recognition as a settlement with rich and varied cultural and historical heritage that has played an important part in the establishment of Bulgarian values and has left a remarkable trace in the history of Bulgaria. This is the main reason why the town has become popular as a year-round resort over the last years.

The ancient history of the town can be seen in the archeological sites in the regions of Shipotsko, St. Ivan and St. Nikola.

The Holy Trinity Church is one of the most remarkable churches, a cultural monument about 200 years old.

The rich festival calendar prepared by the municipality attracts tourists to this mountain town throughout the year. It makes it a place of attraction not only for the winter sports lovers but also for those keen on theatre, ballet, opera, folklore, folk crafts and customs.



WINERIES:

Uva Nestum – 1,5 km from the town of Gotse Delchev on the way to the villages of Garmen and Leshten.





WEST THRACIAN VALLEY



The legend of the Stanimaka Malaga will take you to Asenovgrad



The fertile Thracian Valley has millennial traditions in wine production. In the region of Pazardzhik and Plovdiv, there is a large cluster of wineries around Brestovitsa, Perushtitsa, Krichim, Peshtera. They have been the means of livelihood for the population since time immemorial.

The numerous wineries in the region offer excellent conditions for wine tourism and also possibilities for accommodation and a longer stay. The wine in this region is combined with delicious food and plenty of natural, cultural and historical sites.

The region is characterized by very good conditions for vine-growing and wine production. The period of sunshine in the Thracian valley is among of the longest in Bulgaria. The soils are forest and sandy-clay, with very good calcium properties, which is extremely important for the ripening of the grapes and the accumulation of sugars and organic substances in grapes.

Who hasn't heard of the famous Asenovgrad mavrud? And those who have tasted it once, usually ask for more.

This variety is emblematic for the West Thracian Valley. The Mavrud grows best in the region of Asenovgrad since in the summer the temperatures are high, which allows this variety to accumulate sugar.





Asenovgrad Fortress is an emblem of the city, around which the best grapes for Mavrud are grown

There are legends about the wine made of this variety of grapes. Decades ago, the wine known as Stanimaka Malaga was made from these grapes. It is thick and strong, slightly astringent, with blackberry, raspberry and cherry flavor. To make such wine you need great skills as well as excellent grapes.

The annual wine festivals in Asenovgrad, which are held annually at the end of January, are organized as national celebrations. This is the time when the red wine starts streaming from the fountains in the Ribna Church and people can drink as much as they would like.

Nowadays, the famous Malaga is made only in Asenovgrad. Its master is Aristid Georgiev Chorbadzhakov – Chorbadzhaka. The wine is so thick and fragrant that people believe you can carry it into a piece of cloth. The citizens of Asenovgrad, who are true wine lovers, festively celebrate Trifon Zarezan. Then, they gather around the St. Trifon chapel where they organize wrestling competitions.

About 10 000 ha of agricultural land in the region of Plovdiv has been covered with vines. They are used to produce wine of the highest class admired by royals personages and presidents during their visits in Plovdiv. The weather conditions in the region are quite favourable – this is the border of the subtropical and the temperate zone. The summers are dry and hot and the winters are mild. These factors are extremely important for the terroir.

In addition to the legendary mavrud, the Thracian Valley is famous for its Ruby.

The second variety ripens 30–40 days earlier. It is a hybrid between two other varieties – Nebbiolo and Syrah. The wines made of Ruby are distinguished by their intense colour and the flavour is rich, with a mild ending.

It has been grown in the villages of Brestovitsa, Brestnik, Parvenets, Perushtitsa, which are located in the foothills of the Rhodope Mountains and also in the region of Septemvri. They form the so called Wine Route. Brestovitsa even patented the name „The Wine Capital“. Years ago, the local wine cellars established a union and developed a wine route, thus preparing the first common wine map of our country.

In the region of Brestovitsa, there are six large wine cellars and each private house has a wine cellar as well. The local people have been growing vines for more than a century. There are about 10 000 daa of wine and dessert grape vines. The first museum of wine in the region is located in the Vlahov house there.

„We grow the best Ruby because the tradition for growing this variety and making wine is passed from a father to a son“, explained the mayor of Brestovitsa Lyuben Radev.

The wine that is produced in the region of Plovdiv is of the highest class. The finished product matures in oak barrels, which are replaced every 5 years



Over 300 tourists a week visit the village on wine tours. When highly-placed guests visit Plovdiv, they usually visit the winery of the Agricultural University. It is located in the nearby village of Brestnik. The university ranks second in Europe for its collection of different varieties of wine in one place – 420 varieties grown on tens of hectares of vineyards. The cellar is the only one of its kind specializing in microvinification in Bulgaria. It is located 13 meters underground and is connected by two tunnels.

The wines produced in the nearby settlements of Parvenets and Perushtitsa are not inferior in quality either. There are wineries in the region near the villages of Ognyanovo and Chernogorovo in Pazardzhik, in Pazardzhik and Peshtera, Lesichovo and Pamidovo, as well as in Vinogradets, Slavovitsa, Vetren, Karabunar. Producers rely mainly on their own vineyards. The finished wine matures in oak barrels, which are changed every 5 years. Most of the production in the region is intended for export.

Try the Stanimaka sarmichki (stuffed cabbage or vine leaves) – they are excellent with wine

Plovdiv and Asenovgrad are famous for their culinary masterpieces. Each ethnic group inhabiting the two cities has left its mark on their cuisines. That's why they are unique and everyone who has tried the specialties comes back again.

The specialties popular in the city of the seven hills include the old town dish made of offal cooked in earthenware pots. The Armenians have bequeathed their keshkek – boiled wheat mixed with chicken, chopped into strips, poured with fried butter and specific spices. The Turkish Kapana Banitsa (bathed pie) is also a very good appetizer for wine.

Undoubtedly, the most famous Asenovgrad specialty is Stanimaka Sarmichki (stuffed cabbage and vine leaves). They are a Greek patent and are so small that there are legends about their making. The sarmichki should not be larger than 2–3 cm, made with both cabbage and vine leaves. The filling is the same for both types – rice, fine minced meat, salt, pepper and lots of cumin seed. They are lined up tightly like soldiers next to each other, so as not to fall apart. Pieces of pork are placed between the rows. Then, they are boiled for at least 4 hours on low heat. The meat becomes tender and the sarmichki just melt in your mouth. „If you only know how much Mavrud goes with them“, says Iliya Dimitrov from Asenovgrad.



The famous Stanimaka sarmichki are a preferred appetizer for wine

The Stanimaka sarmichki were first made by nuns in the monasteries. They used to prepare them to welcome highly-placed guests. Subsequently, this tradition was integrated into the urban lifestyle. They are so popular that a competition for their production has been organized in Asenovgrad for five consecutive years. It is held during the wine festivals at the end of January.

Start the tour around the region from the Old Town of Plovdiv

The Thracian valley combines wine, food and ancient history. Wineries, vineyards and cultural monuments complement each other, turning the area into a complete tourist destination.

There is no need to mention that today's Plovdiv is the capital of the former Roman province of Thrace. The city gives everyone the opportunity to immerse themselves in antiquity, just by looking at masterpieces such as the Roman Stadium, the Ancient Theatre, the Bishop's Basilica, the Old Town.

The architectural complex of the Old Town amazes with its Revival houses from the Revival period, dating from around 1760 and well preserved cobbled





The Old Plovdiv amazes with its Revival houses and cobble streets

36

streets. Nebet Tepe is the place known as the Plovdiv Acropolis. All the cultural layers can be traced on it – prehistory, antiquity, the Middle Ages.

And then filled with impressions from history, the tourists can explore the area further, heading for the Rhodope collar.

Naturally, the next stop along the way is Asen's Fortress – a medieval

The Red Church near Perushtitsa is a masterpiece of Early Christian architecture



Bachkovo Monastery is the second largest Orthodox church in Bulgaria. A miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary is kept in it

monument of national importance. It was recently renovated under the project „Asenovgrad – the sacred gate of the Rhodopes Mountains.“ The town is also known as the Bulgarian Jerusalem, as there are seventy chapels, fifteen churches and four monasteries in and around it. The only paleontological museum in our country with over 30,000 animal fossils dating back to eight million years ago is located in the nearby village of Dorkovo.

Bachkovo Monastery, the second largest monastery in Bulgaria, is also located nearby. The famous miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary can be found in it. The Arapovo Monastery is also located in the area of Asenovgrad. An image of the virgin mary in the church is believed to be helping women to conceive a child.

The town of Perushtitsa is famous not only for its vineyards and wonderful wines, but also for the restored Red Church – one of the examples of Early Christian architecture. It was built in the IV century ac during the reign of Emperor Anastasius. It is called red because red mortar was used in its construction. Frescoes from early Byzantine art can also be seen on it.

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VINERIES:



Boutique Wine Cellar Villa Yustina – village of Ustina (6)

Domain Bessa Valley – village of Ognyanovo (1)

Brestovitsa Winery – village of Brestovitsa

Bendida Winery – village of Brestovitsa

Villa Vinifera Winery – village of Brestovitsa

Dzhinvira – village of Brestovitsa

Via Vinera Karabunar Estate – village of Karabunar

Villa Velis – village of Karabunar

Zagreus Winery – Parvomay (2)

Dragomir Winery Estate – Plovdiv (5)

Neragora Winery – village of Chernogorovo (4)

Manastira Winery – village of Lesichovo (3)

New Bloom Winery – Saedinenie

Dvor#1 Winery – village of Perushtitsa

Nitchev Winery – village of Zlatovrah



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THE ROSE VALLEY



The Rose Valley enchants not only with its flavours but also with its marvelous wine



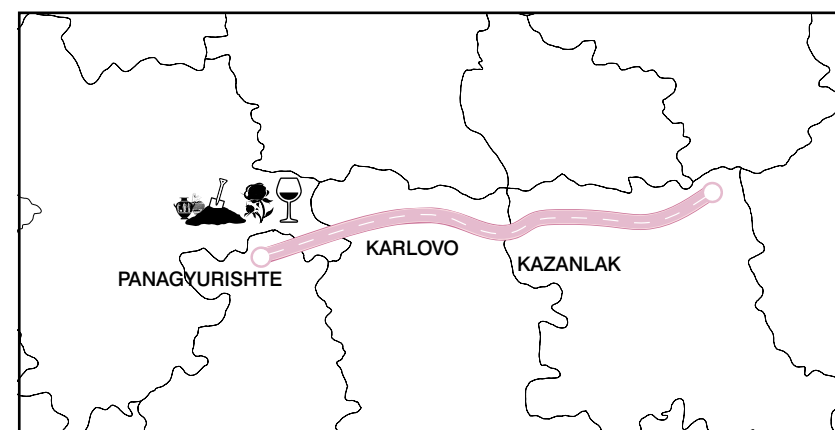
The Rose Valley is one of the most beautiful areas of Bulgaria. Located between two mountains – the Balkan Mountain and Sarnena Sredna Gora, this valley is best known for the growing of roses and the production aromatic rose oil – one of the symbols of Bulgaria around the world.

But apart from growing oilseeds, the area is also suitable for viticulture and wine production. The temperate-continental climate, the proximity of Sredna Gora and the deep moist soils give the wine a specific taste.

Mainly white varieties of grapes are grown in this region and less red grape varieties. The Karlovo Muscat is especially revered in the region, but "imported" varieties such as Cabernet and Merlot are also grown. The wines from the Rose Valley have a typically pleasant fruity aroma, fresh and harmonious flavour.

In Karlovo and the surrounding villages one can find large vineyards as well as production facilities for bottling wine. Modern wine cellars with hotel complexes have been added to the existing wineries from the age socialism, which offer both wine tasting and accommodation.

Panagyurishte has had traditions in wine production since ancient times. The vineyards in the area are on the southern slopes of Sredna Gora on the territory of Panagyurishte and Strelcha. The soils there are cinnamon-forest, sandy and clayey. The average temperature in July is 20.6 degrees Celsius and in January – mi-





The Hisar region is famous with the Starozhelezarski starets, which is prepared in every home

nus 1 Celsius. The planed vines are mainly Merlot, Mavrud, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah as well as varieties for white wines Muscat Otonel and Chardonnay.

There are the area of Starosel has also been known for the local traditions in wine production. There are two cellars with wine tasting rooms. Vineyards are also grown in the area around Hissarya.

Panagyurska Lukanka and Starozhelezarski Starets – the best wine appetizers

In the region of Hissarya they people say that the best appetizer for wine is Starozhelezarski Starets. It has been the pride of every household, who is producing it skilfully for generations. It consists of minced pork, salt, red hot pepper, black pepper and dried dill. It is first kneaded and after 12 hours it is mixed for the second time. It is filled in a pig's stomach or bladder, the air is „taken out“ and the opening is sealed with a piece of intestine.

It is then placed in a bowl between salted pieces of bacon. The first removal of Starozhelezarski Starets is at the start of the grape harvest. It is soaked in water overnight to desalinate, and then it is hanged on an wooden stick to drain. „The delicacy tastes amazing“, say people who have tried it.

The lyutenitsa of Kurtovo Konare is also famous. Every autumn there is a famous lutenitsa festival, which is attended by many locals. They prepare it with roasted peppers, tomato paste and spices. The event includes steak grills and wine is being poured.



The first early red tomatoes are raised in Kurtovo Konare



The feast of the Kurtovska Kapia it is celebrated every year in September

You can not visit Panagyurishte and not try the famous Panagyurska Lukanka combined with a good local wine. The Panagyurska Lukanka is made in many places, but the locals claim that only in Panagyurishte they follow the original recipe, passed down from generation to generation through the centuries. It includes two types of meat – pork and beef, in proportions that the citizens of Panagyurishte would not tell, as well as various spices, which are also a local secret.

The Panagyurishte Treasure and the temple of Sitalces

The wide area of the Rose Valley, which includes Panagyurishte, Starosel, Hissarya and Kazanlak, is known for its rich antiquity. The famous Bulgarian archaeologist Dr. Georgi Kitov discovered the Thracian cult complex of temples from antiquity.





A replica of the Panagyurishte golden treasure can be seen in the special vault hall of the historical museum in the city

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The largest one is that of the Thracian king Sitalces on Chetinyova mound.

The oldest inhabitants of these lands had not chosen the place by chance. They had a wonderful view of the plain, where they grew vines from which they made excellent wine.

Hissarya is the successor of the ancient Diocletian. The Romans chose it because of its twenty two healing mineral springs. The temperature of the healing water ranges from 31 to 52 degrees celsius. The rich archeology and the famous Camels attract thousands of tourists from the country and abroad.

Panagyurishte is a town with unique atmosphere and spirit. It combines a rich cultural and historical heritage, manifestation of the Revival spirit of the XVIII and XIX century, modern infrastructure and great economic potential.

The Historical Museum of Panagyurishte preserves weapons and uniforms from the April Uprising – the largest manifestation of the revolutionary fights during the Bulgarian Renaissance



Panagyurishte will captivate you with its revival spirit and the beautiful courtyards of the houses

Completely changed and renovated in the recent years, the city has preserved its remarkable architectural and historical monuments and unique artifacts. It is enough to mention the Panagyurishte Golden Treasure discovered in 1949 by the Deikovi brothers. A replica of it can be seen in the special vault hall of the Historical Museum and the original treasure is exhibited in the town for one month every year, usually in May.

In Panagyurishte, you can trace the major events of the history of the April Uprising of 1876, visit emblematic Revival cultural monuments.

Rose aroma and flavor in Kazanlak

The Rose Valley is the most beautiful place in Bulgaria by the end of May and the beginning of June, when the oil-bearing roses start blooming. Since 2011, an integral part of this celebration has been the Rose Festival – Rose Wine Expo Kazanlak.

Traditionally, the first Sunday of June in Kazanlak marks the culmination of the Rose Festival.

During this period Kazanlak turns pink with the blooming roses all over and matches with the colour of the valley at this time of year. Naturally, the rosé perfectly matches these colors.

„This wine is a phenomenon that follows the taste of the customer. With time, the profile of the people drinking wine is changing and nowadays, these are modern nomads who come from a certain place in the world and want to

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Traditionally, the first Sunday of June in Kazanlak marks the culmination of the Rose Festival

drink wine. The most suitable is the rosé“, explains Anna Dundakova, organizer of the festival.

The rosé is a type of wine, which style is determined by its color – enologists distinguish over 200 shades. It is said to be made from red grapes, but using a white wine technology. It is not a summer wine, as some people think, but it goes with all kinds of food throughout the year.

Regarding the rosé, Kazanlak is a phenomenon because the local people here have the knowledge to make and drink it without developing viticulture. They do not grow vines because they have decided that oil roses are more profitable.

There is another reason why people here like the rosé – it is believed that it was the favorite wine of the Thracians and Kazanlak is the heart of the Valley of the Thracian rulers. Ordinary people drank it from silver phials and the Thracian kings – from golden kylikes.

Only the lips of the chosen ones could touch these golden cups, but it was believed that when the king drank rosé from his kylix, it was a warning that he was ready for war and victory.

At the same time, the wine taught people to be tolerant.



The Rose Museum is also located in Kazanlak, where there are over 15 000 exhibits related to rose production

And since the rosé does not easily make you drunk, the guests of Kazanlak, including many foreigners, should not miss the opportunity to see the real golden kylix from the time of the Thracians, whose gilded copy is given as prize to the producer of the best rosé.

It weighs 228.5 grams and is exhibited in the historical museum of Kazanlak „Iskra“. There one can see the copies of the the golden mask of Teres from the „Saint“ mound and the bronze head of Seuthes III from the Tomb of Seuthes III mound, whose originals are in the Archaeological Museum in Sofia.



WINERIES:

Rumelia Wine Cellar –
Panagyurishte (1)

Château Copsa – village
of Moskovets (5)

Starosel Wine Cellar – village
of Starosel (2)

Domain Trifonoff Winery – village
of Pesnopoy (3)

Darobas Winery – village
of Pesnopoy

Wine Cellar „Tcherganovo“ –
village of Cherganovo

Karnaka Winery – village
of Zhitnitsa

Sopot Winery (4)



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EASTERN THRACIAN VALLEY



The fertile Thracian Valley will enchant you with its wine



The Thracian valley is one of the best wine regions of Bulgaria. The area between Stara Zagora and Karnobat attracts tourists with its selection of numerous quality red wines, modern wine complexes, and smaller boutique cellars.

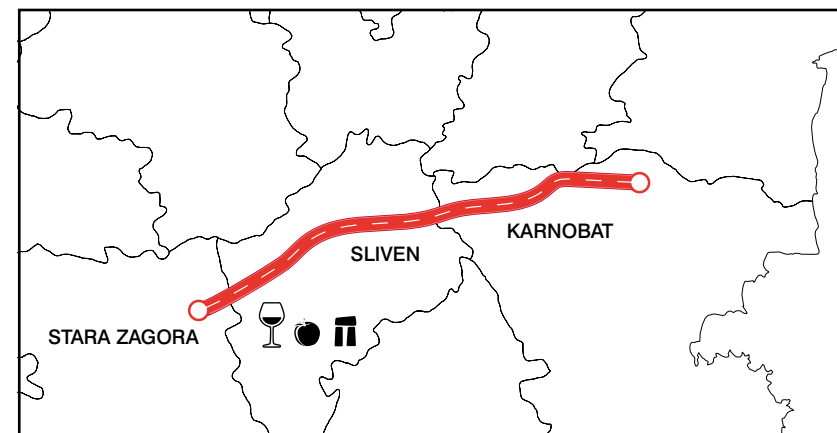
Besides large vineyards and bottling of first-class wines, the region also boasts a well-developed infrastructure for wine and culinary tourism.

And if the varieties Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon are still vying for supremacy in this region, the Pamid is certainly the oldest local variety that has been grown in these lands for 4,000 years.

It ripens in the first half of September. Oenologists say that because of its pleasant taste, this grape is also suitable for fresh consumption, but it produces light red table wines that are suitable for drinking immediately after fermentation.

Their characteristic feature is that they do not have the potential to mature, are not subject to aging and should be consumed within 1–2 years after production.

Pamid wine is said to be red or pink with a white soul. According to others, it can successfully be used as a substitute for beer and any concentrated alcohol at the table, because it is light and drinkable, fragrant enough and can be consumed in warmer weather.





Most of the cellars on the route from Stara Zagora to Karnobat offer wine tours and tastings

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The rich fertile soils in the Karnobat region, combined with a warm and dry autumn, are the basis for the excellent red wines for which the region is famous. Mavrud is one of the varieties in the famous vineyards near the Markeli fortress next to villages of Venets, Tserkovski, and Devetak.

According to legend, the Mavrud of Karnobat was the favorite wine of the emperors of Rome and Constantinople, and the Bulgarian kings brought it as a valuable gift to foreign rulers. Viticulture and winemaking provide for the livelihood of two thirds of the population in Karnobat.

In the Sliven region are located the larger plantations of the local late-maturing wine variety Shevka. The grapes ripen in the second half of September. The



variety is industrial, resistant to drought, cold, and fungal diseases. It produces original table wines.

Some of the largest vineyards in the municipality of Sliven are located near the village of Glushnik.

White varieties are also grown in the Yambol region – Sauvignon Blanc, Juni Blanc, Vionie, Glera, and Muscat Otonel. However, the region has a particularly good combination of soil and climate for the production of red wine varieties such as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah.

Some of the cellars and wineries in the Stara Zagora to Karnobat region offer excellent opportunities for wine tasting.

Try jujube fruit in the Stara Zagora region

If you go to Stara Zagora in the fall, try jujube fruit. This exotic tree or shrub is also called Chinese date and grows only in Southeastern Bulgaria.

Nutritionists claim that the fruits of the jujube are greatly beneficial – they help the body cleanse itself of cholesterol, toxins, and excess fluids. These fruits contain valuable nutrients, including albuminoids, proteins, sugars, propolis and pectin, and they are rich in iodine, phosphorus, cobalt, and iron.

They also have a remarkably high content of vitamin C – about 18 times more than a lemon.

Broad bean combined with sour plums is one of the traditional dishes of the region, which can be offered in the village of Yulievo near the town of Chirpan.

If you have the opportunity, try the Sliven *tyurlyugyuvech* (vegetable casserole). You may have eaten it elsewhere, but this one is special. No raw product is put in it, everything is first fried and then baked. You will lick your fingers. Once you begin eating, you would not stop till you have finished all of it.

Trienica is still prepared for breakfast in the Sliven region – a mixture of flour and water, rubbed knitted with hands to make small balls. They are boiled in fresh milk and sweetened with sugar or honey.

For dessert, do not hesitate to try the best *pestil* (porridge with boiled, then pressed plums) or drunken peach jam.

Tripe enthusiasts should try the delicious products of the Yambol masters. They do wonders with pork bellies. In this area they are also virtuosos in the preparation of lamb meatballs and mutton with leeks and potatoes. And in win-

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ter the traditional dish is the liver dish *dzhigernica* – prepared with liver, minced meat, onions and spices, baked in the oven.

We advise you not to miss the Yambol halva – it is made with flour, sugar, butter and rose water.

Eight thousand years of history

Stara Zagora is a city where tourists will never get bored. The Historical Museum has four exhibition levels with a total area of 1290 square meters. The arranged 1,700 artifacts trace the history of the region from the 6th millennium BC to the restoration of the city in 1879 after it was burned down during the Russo-Turkish War.

Nearby is the unique Museum of Religions, housed in the building of the Eski Mosque – the oldest building in Stara Zagora. It is the only fully surviving building after the burning of the city at the end of July 1877. In the outlines of the prayer hall during archeological excavations the foundations of a medieval Bulgarian church were revealed.

The area around it was used as a necropolis. It has been revealed that before the construction of the mosque the church was already in ruins. Nevertheless, the plan for the Muslim temple was fully consistent with the plan of

If you are in Sliven, be sure to take the lift to Karandila and explore the city from above. The views are amazing



the medieval church. Under this church there was a temple dedicated to the Thracian horseman, and under the eastern wall of the mosque a ritual pit was discovered.

The Neolithic homes are another must for every tourist in Stara Zagora. The remains of two Neolithic dwellings from the middle of the 6th millennium BC are exhibited in a special protective building in situ at the western end. Experts say that these are the best-preserved houses from the early Neolithic in Europe. They were discovered accidentally during construction works in 1968.

In and near the „City of a Hundred Voivodes“ – Sliven, there are many sights that are worth seeing. Start with the „Sinite Kamani“ Nature Park and the Futula Waterfall, which is 10 meters high.

Right next to the Museum of Textile Industry, you can visit the remains of the first textile factory in Bulgaria and on the Balkans, built in 1834 by the Sliven entrepreneur Dobri Zhelyazkov.

In Sliven are located the house- museum and the monument of Hadji Dimitar, and the house-museum of Dobri Chintulov. On the hill of Hisarlaka is the fortress of Tuida, which was in use during the Roman Empire.

One of the symbols of the city is the Old Elm. The tree is over 1300 years old and is located in the city center, close to the municipality building.

WINERIES:



Midalidare Estate – village of Mogilovo (8)

Minkov Brothers Wine Cellar – village of Venets (6)

Edoardo Miroglio Wine Cellar – village of Elenovo (7)

Angel's Estate S.A. – village of Banya, Sliven (4)

Domaine Boyar – Sliven

Alexandra Estate – Stara Zagora

Domain Menada – Stara Zagora

Château Windy Hills – near to Sliven mineral baths (5)

Balar Wines Estate – village of Skalitsa

Better Half Garage Wines – village of Zmeyovo

Villa Yambol – Yambol

Afuzov Wine Cellar – village of Kaloyanovo

Four Friends Winery – village of Gorno Botevo (2)

Domain Marash – Straldzha

Korten Winery – village of Korten

Château Botevo – village of Botevo

Château Trendafiloff – Chirpan

Oriachovitza Winery – village of Oryahovitsa

Roxs Winery – village of Vinarovo

Château Avli – village of Glushnik (3)

Zelanos Winery – village of Slavyantsi (1)

Konopane Winery – village of Mogilovo

Château Sungurlare – village of Sungurlare

Vinex Slavyantsi – village of Slavyantsi



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SAKAR



„The Bulgarian Napa Valley“



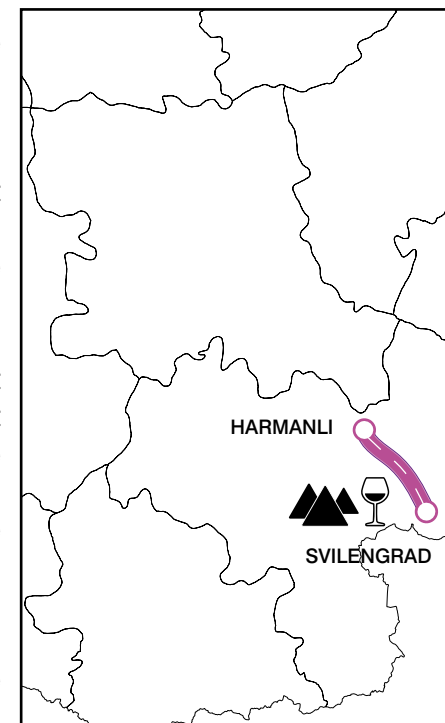
Sakar is a mystical mountain dotted with prehistoric monuments – a legacy of the Thracian tribes who inhabited these lands. The local wine here has been revered since time immemorial. The divine liquid originating from the local wineries has preserved the spirit and traditions of the ancient tribes that lived in this area.

The mountain is close to the rivers Maritsa, Tundzha, Sokolitsa and Sazliyka. The climate is similar to the Mediterranean. The air currents from the White Sea can be felt on the southern slopes of the mountain. The terroir in the Sakar region is extremely suitable for growing red varieties, with Merlot being the leader.

The region is home to some of the best Bulgarian red wines are made, with varieties such as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, which have received recognition from world-famous tasters. In the vineyards of Sakar are grown red varieties such as Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Marseille, and also white varieties Chardonnay, Muscat, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, Viognier, Tamianka.

The vineyards around the towns of Harmanli, Lyubimets, Topolovgrad have been famous for centuries for their magnificent red wines. It is no coincidence that some of the most popular wine tours are offered in this region and experts often compare it with the California Napa Valley.

There are four cellars in the almost uninhabited village of Kolarovo near the town of Harmanli. The area near the village, located on



the southwestern slopes of South Sakar, is famous for its fertile soil, thanks to which grapes have been grown here for centuries.

The village of Kolarovo is famous for its 40-year-old Merlot vineyards. The Kolarovo massif is one of the largest, oldest and most spacious vineyards on the territory of Bulgaria and on the Balkan Peninsula. It was established in the 70s of the last century – 1977 marked the beginning of planting with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon and by 1980 its size exceeded more than 700 hectares, which are preserved to this day.

Many of the country's wine cellars, which are not on the territory of Harmanli municipality, nowadays buy grapes from local producers or create new massifs near the villages around the town. One of the few modern nurseries for vine seedlings is located on the territory of the municipality.

The lands around the town of Topolovgrad, the villages of Oreshnik, the village of Kapitan Petko Voivoda, the village and Radovets are very favorable for the vineyards. Mountain tourism is well developed in the municipality, and the conditions for rural and ecotourism are very suitable.

Svilengrad is a small town, but there are many vine growers and winemakers. More than 1 400 hectares of vineyards are planted on the territory of the municipality, most of which are wine varieties and less dessert varieties. The young vineyards are growing thus changing the landscape of the area.



Border towers can still be seen near the vineyards of one of the wineries in the area of Mezek

Near the village of Mezek in the Svilengrad region is located one of the most modern wine complexes on the Balkan Peninsula. It is positioned in the former border area between Bulgaria and Turkey, where the towers of the border guards are still preserved.

Sakar is an excellent destination for adventure tourism

Sakar offers many opportunities for adventure tourism. One can start with the largest center of megalithic monuments – dolmens, menhirs, cromlechs, sacrificial sites, altars and other prehistoric monuments.

The largest dolmen in all of Bulgaria is located near the village of Hlyabovo, near the town of Topolovgrad, in Sakar Mountain. According to scientists, it dates from around 1050 – 500 BC.

The Sunny Thracian sanctuary Paleokastro is also in this region. The sanctuary consists of over 150 solar disks, made in high and low relief on the rock. Their diameter varies from 20 centimeters to 1 meter. It is believed that the sanctuary dates back to 1000 BC.

Situated about 12 km southeast from the town of Topolovgrad is the Ustrem





Sakar is full of megalithic monuments – dolmens, menhirs, cromlechs, sacrificial sites, altars and more

Monastery „Holy Trinity“. Many so called Hayduks – mountain warriors – found refuge in it during the 18th–19th centuries, which is why one of its names is Haydushki Monastery.

It is not so well known, but in the mountain near the village of Balgarska Polyana, above Topolovgrad, lies little known large metal circle – half-buried in the ground. According to scientists, it is a Thracian tomb. It is believed to date back to the Bronze Age. The plates are 25–40 centimeters thick.

Quite interesting is the fortress Kastru Rubra, discovered during archaeological excavations in 2007 on the territory of South Sakar, near the village of Izvorovo in the Harmanli municipality. It was used as a refuge by people travelling along the Great Diagonal Road – Via Diagonalis, which connected the eternal city of Rome with the capital of the East – Constantinople.

The bridge of Mustafa Pasha, which crosses the Maritsa River near Svilengrad, Bulgaria, is rather impressive. It has a masonry stone structure consisting of 20 arches with the largest opening of 18 meters. The bridge is 6 meters wide and has a total length of 300 meters. It was built in 1529 by the famous Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan.

In the vicinity of the village of Mezek, 6 km southwest of Svilengrad and only 1 km from the Greek border, on the Kaleto hill rise the remains of a me-



The bridge of Mustafa Pasha, which crosses the Maritsa River near Svilengrad, is a remarkable architectural monument from the Ottoman era

Bukelon Fortress near Svilengrad, close to the Turkish border





The medieval Byzantine fortress Neutzikon near the village of Mezek once guarded the lands between the rivers Maritsa and Arda

dieval Byzantine fortress – Neutzikon from the end of the 11th century. It is the best-preserved defense structure in southern Bulgaria. The fortress functioned as a border guard fortress. It guarded lands between the rivers Maritsa and Arda.

In the area of Svilengrad, close to Turkey, there is another fortress – Bukelon, and next to it are located the rock-hewn churches near the villages of Matochina and Mihalich.

The Thracian tomb near the village of Mezek is one of the largest on the Balkan Peninsula



Sesame, tahini and malebi – local specialties



Sakar's culinary traditions are just as impressive as the wines in this part of Bulgaria.

The women from the Harmanli village of Dositeevo, for example, prepare the famous *Dositeevski Kartalacheta* – delicious patties with cheese, baked on a sač.

The village is also known as the Capital of Sesame. Dositeevtsi have revived the forgotten sesame production and for several years now a Sesame Festival has been organized there. The Harmanli region managed to put sesame tahini and sesame halva back among the modern foods of the Bulgarians. In these lands, both products make them masters in the craft.

Golnik, the staple dish in the village of Oreshnik, is similar to liver casserole, minus the liver, instead it is made with spinach, green onions and rice.

Katak is a traditional dish with a sour-salty taste, which is prepared in the area in late August and early September. It is made with sheep's milk, which is thickened by boiling, with the addition of a little shredded cheese and a drop of rennet yeast.

The good red wine pairs best with a local homemade sausage prepared with three types of meat – beef, pork and horse meat.

Malebi is a must try dessert. It is an eastern cake, which in Svilengrad and the region is prepared by following a traditional recipe. The locals boast that their *malebi* is unsurpassed in taste.





WINERIES:

Zaara Estate Winery – village of Glavan (2)

Château Kolarovo Ltd. Winery – village of Kolarovo (1)

Malkata Zvezda Winery – village of Kolarovo (3)

Castra Rubra Winery – village of Kolarovo (5)

T-Wines Wine Cellar – village of Kolarovo

Katarzyna Estate – village of Mezek (6)

Mezek Winery – village of Mezek

Terra Tangra Winery – Harmanli

Bratanov Winery – Harmanli (4)

Villa Bassarea Winery – Harmanli

Rosalea Ltd. – Harmanli

Bisante Winery – Harmanli

Via Antika – village of Belitsa



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ZLATIA



Gamza is a late-maturing wine variety. It grows on airy hills, as there are many around the Danube

The northwest enchants its guests with the taste of Gamza



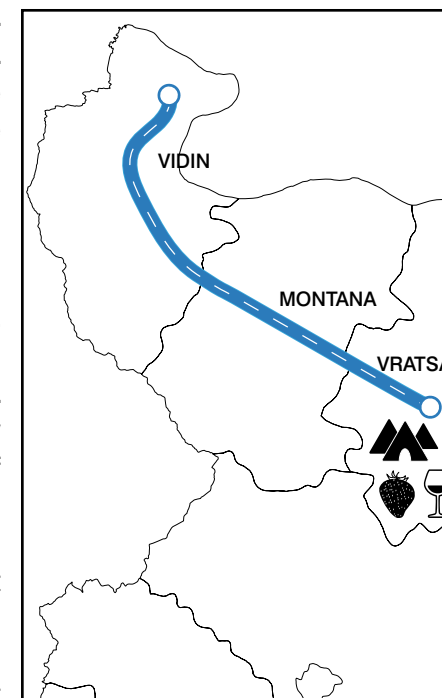
To taste wine from a vineyard on a hill is magical experience. This is what people say in the Northwestern Bulgaria. According to them, the local terroir gives the best wine – with a rich aroma and a pinch of mystery.

Wine tourism in this destination is still developing. The region from Vidin to Vratsa is already enjoying special attention because, thanks to persistent and extremely interesting new winemakers, it became clear that there are unique natural conditions for growing fine grapes of high quality.

Due to the lack of heavy industry in the region, there are no heavy pollutants in the soil, which is a favorable prerequisite for growing vines. In this part of Bulgaria there are still preserved old massifs with vineyards of almost forgotten local varieties, which brings true delight to wine lovers.

Many believe that the cooler climate naturally predisposes the region to be more favorable to white wines. However, this is a bias, experts say. The red wines of the Northwest are no less exciting – finer and more delicate, with interesting and even atypical varietal manifestations in taste and aroma, they can be real gems and surprise even the experienced and over satisfied wine fans.

The most common variety is Gamza, also known as Kadarka. This is a late-maturing wine variety that is harvested in the second half of September. It grows on airy hills, as there are many around the Danube. Varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Pamid, Cabernet Franc, Rubin, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Muscat



Otonel, Dimyat, Rkatsiteli and Aligote are also grown in the region. In recent years, new attractive varieties for the region have been planted, such as Petit Verdo, Game Noir and Carmener.

The Montana region has excellent conditions for the production of quality white dry wines, naturally sparkling wines using classic technology, and quality red wines. The soils are mainly chernozem and alfisol.

The Western Balkan Mountains as a territory with unique nature is a particularly good prerequisite for the production of ecologically clean wines. The characteristics of the sector have changed radically in line with the supply and demand of wine as a modern product. For this reason, wine cellars with limited capacity have been established for the production of quality and boutique wines. One of them is a unique tunnel dug into a rock, where the wine is stored at a constant low temperature.

The Vratsa region is famous for the old variety Vratsa Muscat. It is also known as Vratsa Violet. It is a medium-ripening white wine variety where the grapes ripen in the second half of September. The vines are overly sensitive to drought and low winter temperatures. The variety is suitable for the production of white wines, and only in some years – for high quality dessert wines.



The Balkan keeps its secrets

Every tourist who has been touched by the pristine nature of the Northwest, has stayed for a glass of wine and asked for local specialties. Vratsa specialty is the bread *Kemerka*, stuffed with finely chopped pork, onion and spicy herbs. Typical for this region is the chicken in brine dish.

Be sure to try the *Kapladisana Banitsa* (wrapped pie), pie with egg and cheese filling, which also has green-leaf vegetables added in the summertime. Also delicious is the stuffing of the *Zelnik*, which contains fried onions, cabbage, ground carrots, and dried peppers.

In Montana region, the most preferred red wine pairing is with oven-roasted stuffed lamb. The locals also prepare delicacies using every part of the pig – nothing is thrown away. The ears and legs are used to prepare a delicious *Pacha* (headcheese), as well as fried pork morsels, cracklings, stuffed cabbage leaves, dried peppers stuffed with beans, and homemade savory pudding.

Those who are not familiar with the traditions of this region should not be surprised if they are offered walnuts or homemade cheese as an accompaniment to the wine.

In Vidin, tourists can try the delicious Danube fish – grass carp, white fish or catfish, as well as fish soup, typical for the area.

The fresh Danube fish suits wonderfully with the local wine of the Vrachanski Misket variety

Spicy Danube fish soup with roasted vegetables is a local specialty





Baba Vida Fortress and Belogradchik Rocks are top sites

The biggest natural landmark of the region are the Belogradchik rocks. It is no coincidence that they were nominated in the ranking for the New Seven Wonders of the World. This is an extensive rock complex, which starts from Vedernik Peak and extends over a huge area around the town of Belogradchik, to the villages of Borovitsa and Belotintsi.

The rock formations have been sculpted by nature for 200 million years and impress with their bizarre shapes and reddish color, which is due to the high content of iron oxide. Some of the rock colossi rise to a height of 100 meters.

In the region of Vidin the biggest landmark is Baba Vida – a medieval fortress, which is almost perfectly preserved. It was first built by the Romans, then it was the castle of the local ruler in the Middle Ages and was in service even during the world wars.

Another interesting stop along the destination is the Klisurski Monastery, which has a spring with healing water, and is located in a picturesque area in the western part of the Balkan Mountains, at the foot of Todorini Kukli Peak and near the town of Varshets.

„Baba Vida“ is the best-preserved medieval fortress in Bulgaria. It was the castle of the local ruler in the Middle Ages



Belogradchik rocks were the Bulgarian nomination in the ranking for the new Seven Wonders of the World

The Lopushanski Monastery is located at 300 m above sea level in the Chiprovtsi section of the Balkan Mountains. It impresses with its architecture, proportions and stone sculptures, and visiting it leaves a memory of the beautiful mountain area around.

The fortress near Montana – Castra ad Montanezum, is at the north-western end of the town on the hill Kaleto. Its first inhabitants lived during the Stone-Copper Age. During this period, people made an important transition from being nomadic hunters to having a more sedentary lifestyle associated with cultivating the land and building permanent settlements.

Later the place was inhabited by the ancient Thracians. They built a fortress to protect themselves from invaders. There are stone walls left, one meter thick. The Romans settled in the area at the end of the 1-st century AD, attracted by the rich deposits of ore and gold along the Ogosta River. Besides grain production in the area, viticulture was developed.

WINERIES:



Bononia Estate Winery – village of Gomotartsı (3)

Château Burgozone Winery – Oryahovo (6)

Magura Winery – village of Rabisha

Novo Selo Wine Cellar – village of Novo Selo (4)

Dos Alamos Winery – village of Negovanovtsi

Borovitza Winery – village of Borovitza

Lopushna Winery – village of Georgi Damyanovo

Tipchenitza Winery – village of Tipchenitsa (2)

Vrachanska temenuga – near Vratsa (5)

Château ChaTony – village of Darmantsi (1)

Agrofitnes – village of Borovtsi

Lilyache Winery – village of Lilyache

Ahinora Winery – village of Selanovtsi



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MOESIA



Where wine is not just a passion, but a whole science



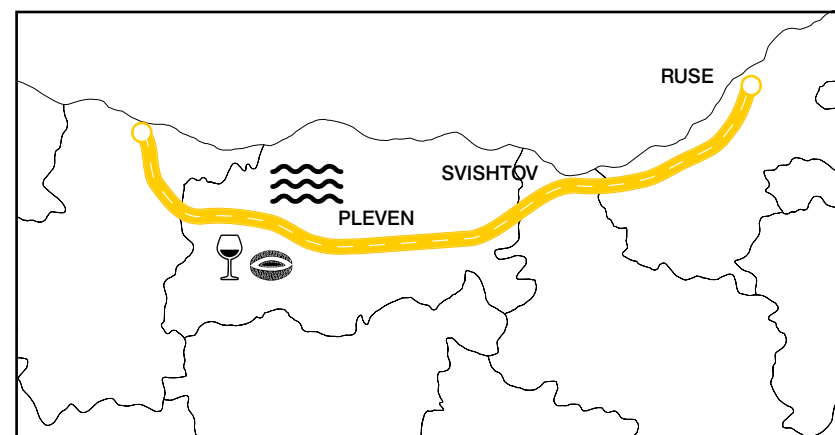
The region between Pleven, Svishtov and Ruse has been famous for centuries as one of the main wine regions of Bulgaria. It is no coincidence that the first Wine Museum on the Balkan Peninsula is located there, as well as the Institute of Viticulture and Enology – the oldest and most authoritative wine institution in the country.

Along the Danube River and in Central Northern Bulgaria the climate is typically continental – with cold nights and warm days, which is very favorable for the vineyards.

In autumn, when the grapes begin to ripen, daytime temperatures are above 30 degrees and nighttime temperatures fall below 15 degrees Celsius. The wide temperature range helps the vine to accumulate sugars. The play of the thermometer also affects the accumulation of aromas in the grapes.

Thanks to all these factors and fertile soils, the destination Moesia attracts tourists with its quality white and red wines, but also with historical and natural landmarks.

„In the Danube plain, as far as the eye can see – it is all vineyards, strewn with grapes. There is a wine barrel in each house. This livelihood can make us famous outside the country's borders if we solidify it with science.“





There are boutique wine complexes near Russe, which offer both tastings and accommodation

These were the thoughts of the leaders from Pleven and in 1890 they opened a wine school. Only four students were enrolled in the first class. The school has preserved the tradition and today it owns the richest enoteca in Bulgaria – over 12 000 bottles.

„Our varieties are not inferior to Cabernet in taste. The Kailashki Ruby created at the institute won a gold medal at the International Fair in Plovdiv in 2015. It is resistant to low winter temperatures – it can withstand up to minus 25 de-

The unique terroir influenced by the proximity to the Danube River helps the vineyards to accumulate sugars and aromas



grees Celsius without freezing. It is also resistant to fungal diseases – common and powdery mildew do not affect it at all,” explains Prof. Ivan Pachev, director of the Institute of Viticulture and Enology.

The institute is the gene bank of Bulgaria and has over 2 000 varieties from the country and transferred from abroad. Since 1990, twenty four new varieties of vines have been created in it, which are currently being implemented on farms.

The certified Pleven Favorite, Augustin, Naslada, and Druzhiba are white varieties with a dual purpose – they can be used both as dessert and as wine varieties. The reds are Pleven Muscat, Trapezitsa, Danube Muscat.

Recently, there has been a return to the old Bulgarian varieties. Among them is the Pleven Gamza, typical in the past only for Central Northern Bulgaria. The color of the Pleven Gamza is not dark red, but ruby. We call it the Bulgarian Beaujolais, say producers. In the Pleven region there is already an increase in new vineyards by 10–15%.

Near Oryahovo the vineyards are located on the carbonate chernozems formed on loess with geographical coordinates similar to Côte de Rhône and Bordeaux.

Specialists define them as the most suitable terrains for the development, productivity and quality of wine and dessert grape varieties.

The grapes for the Nikopol wine varieties are grown organically, among which is the wine from the rare Bulgarian variety Storgozia.



Most of the plantations with this variety are located in Northern Bulgaria. It ripens late, has strong growth, high fertility and yield. It is used for the production of table wines, which are characterized by intense color, dense body, freshness and pleasant fruity aroma.

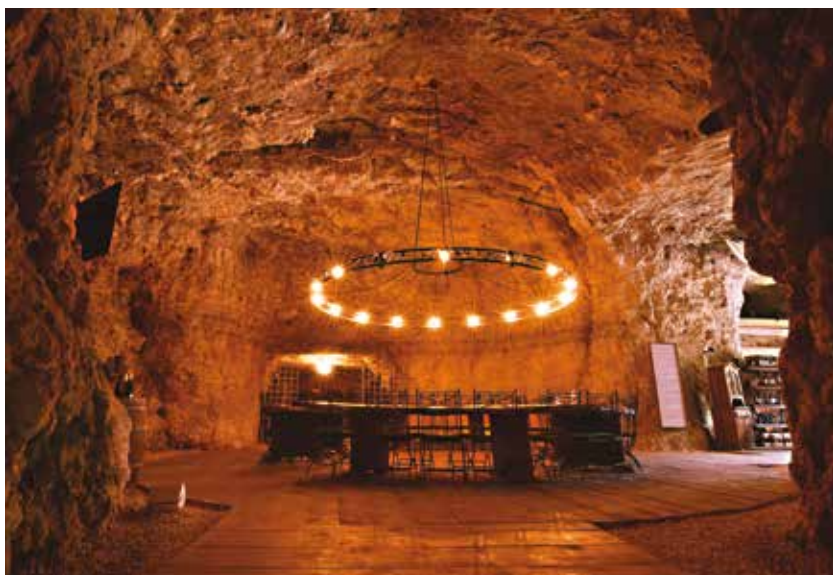
Wines for connoisseurs as well as quality organic wines are made by famous wine and boutique family wineries in the Ruse region, some of which are suitable for wine tourism, while others organize tastings on request.

The wine museum in Pleven

The Museum of Wine in Pleven, located in one of the caves in the „Kailaka“ park is one of the mandatory stops for tourists on the route of the wine tour Moesia. Over 7000 exhibits show how since ancient times people have grown vineyards and made wine in the Bulgarian lands.

The museum displays over 6000 wines from all regions, visitors can taste and buy bottles of their choice.

The karst in the Pleven Park is perforated by countless caves, some inhabited thousands of years ago. On a slope opposite the park are located the Roman fortress Storgozia from the first century BC and an early Christian Basilica, which is among the largest in our country.



At the Historical museum in Pleven one can see a copy of the Valchitran Golden Treasure, which has no analogue from this period in antiquity. It consists of 13 golden vessels, weighing 12.5 kg, dating from the 12th–13th century BC, and its secret remains unsolved till present day.

However, tourists first visit the memorial Panorama memorial, erected on the battlefield of 1877 during the liberation battles for the city during the Russo-Turkish War. The memory of those who died for liberation is immortalized in the Mausoleum in the city center.

The Kaylaka Park near Pleven





Ruse is remarkable not only for its beautiful architecture, but also for the magical city fountains that light up at night

We are taken back to the Revival Era of XVII–XIX century by a church without a bell tower and a dome, in the center of Pleven. In order not to be conspicuous, the walls of the church „St. Nikolay“ were dug 1.5 m below ground level. Nowadays, the current church accommodates the Museum of Christian Icons.

The town of Oryahovo surprises the tourists with beautiful views of the Danube, ancient and medieval fortresses in the vicinity and one of the first community centers in Bulgaria – Nadezhda 1871. (means hope)

Tourists in Ruse can see or use the Danube Bridge, they can enjoy the beautiful building of one of the earliest-built city libraries in Bulgaria, the Monument of Freedom of the famous Italian sculptor Arnaldo Zocchi, hear of the inspirational stories of Baba Tonka and Zahari Stoyanov in their home-museum and experience many more interesting sites.

Ruse Central Railway station is one of the symbols of the city during the 50s and 60s of last century and is one of the most frequently depicted buildings on the old postcards of the city.

It is also worth seeing the „House of Canetti“, which in the early twentieth century housed the shop of the grandfather of the Ruse-born Nobel Prize winner for literature Elias Canetti. An architectural landmark is the „Sava Ognyanov“ Drama Theater in the city center, also known as the „Dohodno Zdanie.“

Ruse is the home of the first railway station built in Bulgaria in 1866. Today it is the National Museum of Transportation.

The National Revival Park, the Pantheon, the All Saints Church, which was destroyed due to the Pantheon construction in 1975 and rebuilt with the funds of the citizens are also part of the rich history of the city. On the hill above it stays Levent Tabia – a unique military facility with nearly 200 years of history.

The red pepper has achieved a cult status

In the Pleven region, in addition to wine, people make their own appetizers – among which sausage and pastrami, and *Katino Meze* are most popular. They prepare it with tender pork fillet, cut into cubes, onions and mushrooms and stew it over low heat.

It is interesting that red pepper has achieved a cult status in the region. Locals put it in every dish, claiming that it protects from evil eyes. Stuffed red peppers also have a ritual significance as they bring fertility. People say that if you take a train along Cherven Bryag, the houses smell of roasted chili peppers. Drying strings with peppers hang on the balconies of almost every household.

Among the original dishes of the North is the *Lyutika* Chicken. Grandmas' old recipes describe how boiled and shredded peppers go into the longest-to-prepare dish, called this way because one can continue adding peppers and vinegar to suit his own taste.

It is no coincidence that the *Chushkopek* (a cylindrical oven for roasting peppers) was invented there. The idea of Nikolay Moinov from Pleven came to him while he was watching fires being lit in yards and around apartment blocks and women were arranging peppers on huge metal sheets under waves of smoke. Using the Plevan *Chushkopek*, recognized with a hitherto joke by Bulgarians as The Bulgarian Invention of the 20th Century, one can have about 100 backed peppers ready in an hour.

Authentic recipes from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, typical for the Ruse regional cuisine and for the different nationalities inhabiting the region, have been preserved for today's master chefs in the State Archives in Ruse. Among them are Stuffed Peppers with Chicken, Carp Stuffed with Walnuts.



WINERIES:



Seven Generations Winery – village of Mechka, Ruse (2)

Levent Wine House – Ruse (3)

Nissovo Wine Cellar – village of Nisovo (1)

Svishtov Winery – Svishtov

Wine Cellar Gabrovski – Svishtov

Lovico Suhindol Winery – Suhindol (4)

Haralambievi Family Winery – village of Petarnitsa

Gorun Winery – Iskar

Varbovka Winery – village of Varbovka

Dve Mogili Winery – Dve Mogili

Villa Grivitsa – village of Grivitsa



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**NORTHERN
BLACK SEA COAST**



Wine and sea – „an unexpectedly good combination“



The Northern Black Sea Coast does not consist only of beaches and umbrellas – it offers unique wines and seafood specialties, combined with an abundance of natural, cultural and historical landmarks.

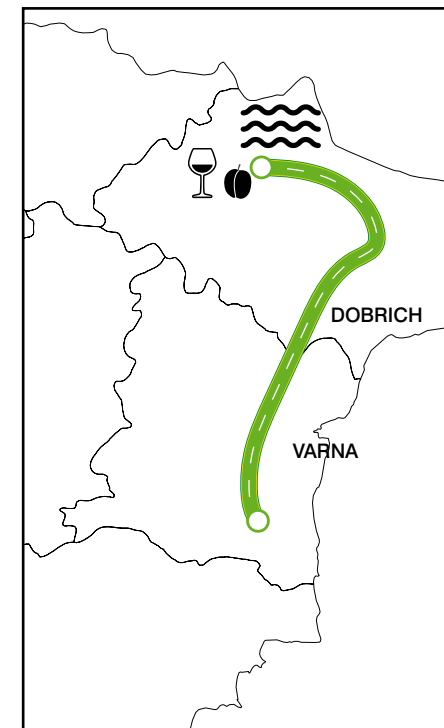
In the region of Varna and Dobrich wine has been produced since ancient times. As early as the time of the Thracians, vine cuttings were brought from Asia Minor and the planting of the hills by the sea with vines began. Varna was the city of the Thracian deity Darzalas, who patronized prosperity.

Nowadays, winemaking is widespread, with the predominance of Bulgarian wine varieties – Mavrud, Shiroka Melnishka Loza, Pamid and especially Dimyat.

The classic local varieties such as Vratsa and Varna Misket are present in the plantations of the winery in the village of Staro Oryahovo. Among the new plantings, however, there are Sauvignon Blanc and Alexandrian Muscat.

The combination in the local cellar, where besides the two types of Muscat are also represented varieties such as Traminer, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir, is quite intriguing. The vineyards, spread on an area of 130 hectares, near the village of Belogradets offer various modern white and red grape varieties such as Viognier, German Riesling, Malbec.

The former Dobrich winery continues the old traditions and defends its position on the market. However, the famous fragrant Dobrudzha variety Lipa – white and red, remains for domestic produc-





Winery Izba Varna is one of the largest in the region

ers only, who pay top price for grapes of this variety, even compared to the most luxurious imported grape brands.

There are four wine cellars in the Silistra region, and each of them has chosen to make wine not only from the familiar varieties but also from a certain specific type of grapes. In the village of Dobrotitsa the emphasis is on the Thracian Mavrud, which is planted on 23 hectares.

The old sentimental Tamyanka is made in the cellar in the town of Tutrakan. Glavinitsa offers wine from the Rhine Riesling, in addition to the other well-known modern varieties.

It is worth learning about the surprising technology of making white wine from the red variety Cabernet Sauvignon in the wine cellar of Glavinitsa.



Local specialties – stockfish and soup comprised of seven types of fish

Since we are close to the sea coast, logically the local cuisine is dominated by fish dishes. Fish and seafood are revered throughout the region, from Cape Emine in the south to Durankulak in the north. Varna is famous for its soup, prepared with seven kinds of fish.

The fish and the sea products are prepared following a variety of recipes – grilled or fried, baked on a tile, as fish soup, etc. Varna residents traditionally make stuffed carp wrapped in dough on St. Nicholas' Day on december 6. *Plakia* Fish is among the traditional dishes. The fish is cut into thin slices and is baked with onions and tomatoes.

Salamurica is also a staple throughout the region – a traditional hot pasta which is quite common for the Northeastern part of Bulgaria. It is a supplement for all kinds of seafood – mussels, fish, shrimp, even fish soup.

Many places also offer *Skordalia* – a traditional sauce that pairs mostly with fried fish. It is prepared with crushed bread, finely ground walnuts, oil, garlic, salt, yogurt and vinegar to taste.

In the Varna region since ancient times the best appetizer paired with wine is stockfish. These are the different types of air-dried Black Sea fish that are warmed before being served. The classic stockfish variety is the Black Sea mackerel, in more recent times its substitutes are horse mackerel and garfish.

The most popular mussel farms and restaurants, which offer a variety of seafood delicacies are located around the town of Kavarna and Kaliakra.





Exuinograd Palace was built in the French style of Louis XIII

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Start your wine tour at the Exuinograd Palace

Start your local landmarks tour with the winery at the Exuinograd residence. The palace lies on a 3 km long coastal strip along the Gulf of Exuinograd on a high plateau above the beach.

The Exuinograd complex has an area of 85 hectares, 55 of which are occupied by the palace and the park. The rest includes a port, beaches, farm buildings – fishponds, winery, greenhouses, arable land, orchards and vegetable gardens.

On the site of today's farm used to stand the Greek monastery St. Dimitar. There is a legend about its origin and the rescued ships of Captain Dimitar in the bay south of Cape Sovanlak. A chapel was built as a token of gratitude for the miracle. The monastery had its own vineyards and wine cellar.

Since May 1882, Exuinograd has been the official residence of the Bulgarian monarch Prince Alexander I Battenberg, who came on vacation, stayed there and remained fascinated by nature, orchards and vineyards. The palace itself was built in the French chateau style of Louis XIII as a summer residence of the prince. The royal cellar was built in Bulgarian Revival style on top of the remains of the monastic cellar, as the first official grape harvest commenced in 1891.

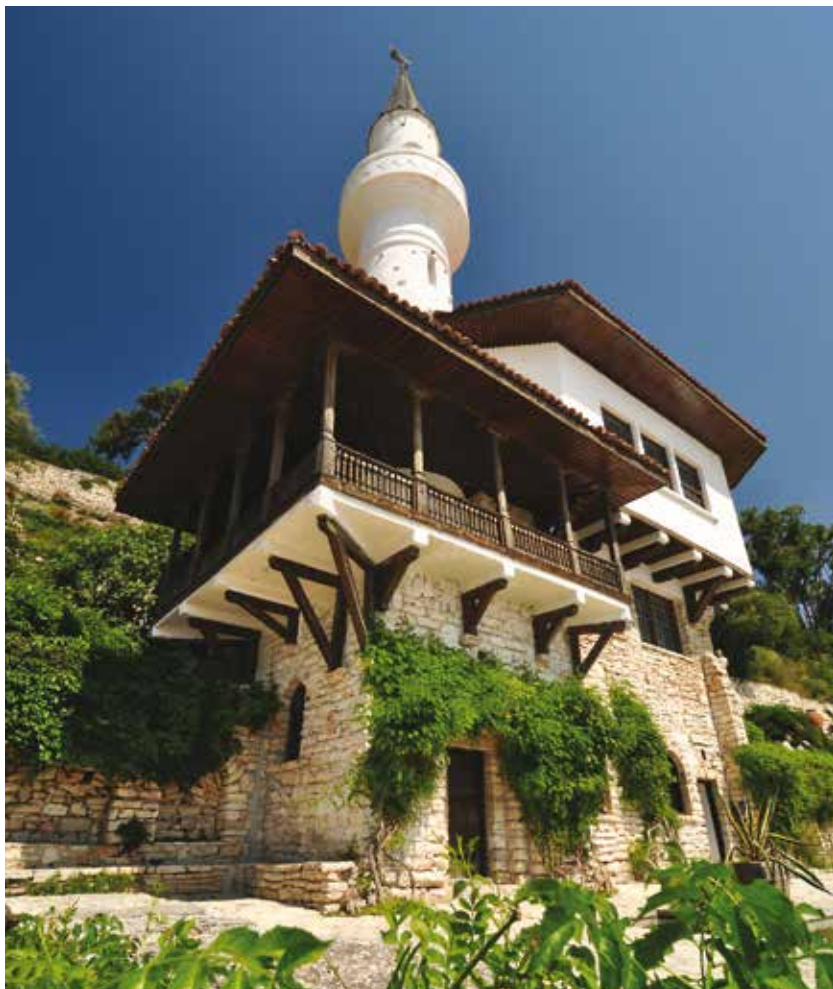


Exuinograd is the first wine cellar in Bulgaria, established way back in 1891 by Prince Ferdinand

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The oldest wine stored in the Exuinograd cellar is from 1878. It is from the Bordeaux region of France and was part of the royal collection



The palace of the Romanian queen in Balchik, together with the magnificent botanical garden next to it, are a must stop to visit along the way

The wine cellar occupies two underground levels and still produces high quality white wines and several types of wine brandy, including the famous *Euxynia*, which was patented in 1936, and the distillate for it stays in oak barrels for 10 or 20 years. During Socialism, the favorite to the communist leader Todor Zhivkov's wine variety „Vratsa Muscat“ began to be grown here.

If you are traveling north of Varna, be sure to visit the Palace of the Romanian Queen in the town of Balchik, along with the magnificent botanical garden



„Pobiti Kamani“ is an interesting natural phenomenon near Varna. It represents limestone columns of different heights and shapes, the origin of which scientists are still debating

next to it. Go a bit further to Cape Kaliakra – one of the most romantic places in Bulgaria, where you can enjoy beautiful sea sunsets.

In the Silistra region visit the Medzhidi Tabia fortress, the remains of the Durostorum fortress, the Roman tomb and the Danube park.

If you have more time available, take a trip to the Srebarna Reserve – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is located on the main migration route of migratory birds between Europe and Africa, called Via Pontica.

Among the natural landmarks near Varna, be sure to visit the Pobiti Kamani natural phenomenon. Take a trip to the Wonderful Rocks near Provadia.

WINERIES:



Euxinograd Winery – near Varna (5)

Varna Winery – village of General Kantardzhievo (7)

Salla Estate Winery Cellar – village of Blaskovo (4)

Château Polihronoff – Byala, Varna

Agrovin – Silistra

Wine Cellar Todor Opreff – village of Dobrotitsa

Wine Odessos – Varna (2)

Prisoe Winery – village of Slanchevo (6)

Château Boshnakoff – village of Ezerovo (1)

DeVina Vineyards – Devnya (3)

Jarava Winery – village of Mlada Gvardiya

Royal Wine Cellar – Balchik

Pobiti Kamani Winery – Ignatievo

Staro Oryahovo Winery – village of Staro Oryahovo

Mladen,s Winery – Tutrakan

Lozeto Estate – village of Sava

Kaliakra Wine Cellar – Kavarna



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**SOUTH
BLACK SEA**



Old Nesebar is a romantic place for walks not only in summer but also in other seasons

Welcome to the realm of white wines



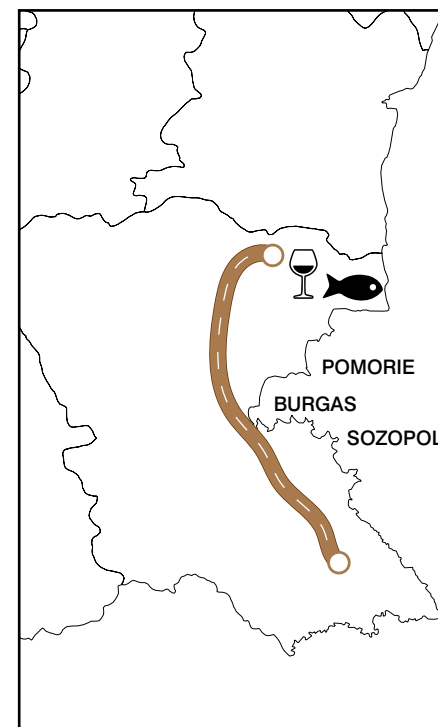
The coast south of The Balkan Mountain offers many opportunities for wine and culinary tourism.

In the Pomorie region there are excellent conditions for growing white wine varieties. Quality Bulgarian wines such as Chardonnay, Aligote, Dimyat, Riesling, Traminer, Muscat Otonel, Tamyanka, Juni Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc are produced here. There one can find aged brandies created by classic cognac technology are also produced.

Viticulture in this area has a thousand-year history and for centuries has been a main occupation for the locals along with fishing and salt-producing. To this day, the city has retained its key position as an established wine centre and its whose wines and brandies are famous far beyond the borders of the country.

Near Pomorie there are several wine cellars with their own vineyards, which have a fully completed technological cycle for the production of white and red wines. In organized tours, visitors can taste the wine at different stages of its maturation.

The largest winery on the Balkan Peninsula, built in 1932, is located in the Pomorie region. Logically, the region has the most planted vineyards – over 20 thousand decares. There are 5–6 thousand decares of vineyards just around Burgas and Nesebar according to the words of the Regional Chamber of Viticulture and Enology, which has twenty two members of grape and wine producers.



Thracian Mavrud also grows by the sea. This variety is known as Evmolpia, and is found around Burgas, Pomorie, Razboyna.

Until a few years ago, the South Black Sea coast was famous mainly for its white wines, but recently many of the wine cellars rely on red wines. The traditional merlot, cabernet and Syrah, as well as the more modern pinot noir are relevant.

Most of the current residential complexes in Burgas have emerged on vineyards. „Izgrev“ and „Slaveykov“ and parts of „Meden Rudnik“ appeared on old vines.

Initially, the plots were private farms, but after nationalization they were consolidated into cooperatives. The current commercial part on Transportna Street, where the malls, hypermarkets, car exchanges and office buildings are located, is entirely on vineyards.

Wine production in the Burgas region dates back to antiquity. It was made by the Thracians, and was the main livelihood of the inhabitants of these lands during the Roman Empire.

The various expositions of the museums in the district have on display different in shape and size antique vessels for storing the elixir. A large collection of damadzhani and glassware from the XIX and XX centuries is stored in Pomorie.

Archaeological excavations near Burgas have also uncovered vessels for wine made of black-figured ceramics, dating from the 5th century BC. These are jugs and craters, painted with scenes from Dionysian celebrations, which

St. Anastasia Island is known as the Bulgarian Alcatraz. In the 1920s, the island was used as a prison, and today is an attractive tourist destination. There is a restaurant serving delicious mussels and fish soup

were excavated in the area of the Sladkite Kladentsi. Seals of amphorae were also found on the southern Black Sea coast, which in ancient times played the role of a label from the region where the wine was produced.

The cultivation of vineyards continued during the Middle Ages and Ottoman rule. The Byzantine princess Anna Komnina mentioned the cultivation of many vineyards in her chronicles, and later in the 17th century Evliya Chelebi – Ottoman traveller and writer was amazed in his travelogues that the Bulgarians maintained huge vineyards, although the Islamic religion forbade wine.

Maritime municipalities – wine producers, do not fail to organize wine festivals, which extend the summer season. Masters reveal the intricacies of the craft, and tourists taste wines from selected varieties.

Take a romantic boat trip to St. Anastasia Island

The southern Black Sea coast is no longer just a destination for seasonal tourism. The sea is successfully combined with a spa, even outdoors and completely free of charge visit in the Burgas salt pans, combined with tours to the dozens of wineries that the region abounds in, as well as with attractive tours of archaeological and historical sites.

The route offers the romance of Old Nesebar and Sozopol – the City of Salvation, the modern vision of Burgas with the beautiful Sea Garden, the charm of the southern resorts of Tsarevo and Primorsko.

Boat trips are also available at the outfalls of the Ropotamo and Veleka Rivers



In the region are located the Deultom and Akve Kalide archaeological complexes with the famous bath of Turkish sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the Pomorie Tomb, the Thracian Rock sanctuary Begliktash near Primorsko, the Ropotamo reserve.

In the Burgas Bay is located the only inhabitable island in our country St. Anastasia, which the municipality turned into a tourist destination.

When you reach the City of Salvation, take a boat trip to the island of St. John – the place where archaeologists have discovered a reliquary with the relics of St. John the Baptist.

For most of the year, the southern Black Sea Coast is sunny and the winter is mild.

Pomorie is the city with the sunniest days and as a peninsula has longest coastal line on the Bulgarian Black Sea. Due to the salty Pomorie Lake and the dozens of modern spa complexes, the town is famous for its spa tourism and the most famous healthy mud used for the treatment of various illnesses.

The unique Salt Museum has preserved the ancient technology of salt production by solar evaporation of sea water. In Pomorie is located the only active male monastery in the country St. George the Victorious.

Try the Burgas Style Mussels and Strandzhansko Dyado

When it comes to wine, connoisseurs immediately think of the Strandzhansko Dyado. This is an ideal appetizer, especially for red wine, and over the years has become a trademark of the Burgas region.

Burgas Style Mussels is one of the most frequently ordered dishes in restaurants on the South Black Sea coast.



Fried saffron and grilled chernokop are also among the favorite dishes of the people of Burgas



Delicious fish soup is prepared with several types of fish



Strandzhansko Dyado is the most famous a local delicacy

It is produced in the Strandzha Mountain area, hence its name. The producers of the unique sudzhuk explain that it is best made there because of the specific climate.

Strandzhansko Dyado is made from coarsely chopped pork and raw bacon, which are stuffed in a belly, seasoned with salt, coarsely ground black pepper, paprika and savoury. The belly is then filled and must be stuffed very well so that no air remains.

The outside is rubbed with salt and left to dry for 5–7 days in a dry, ventilated and cool place, but in no case in a draft. Then it is removed and pressed between two wooden boards for about two weeks and hung again to dry. Its thickness should be as much as the vertical section of two sausages. It is usually prepared in late winter and dries in the spring. In some places it is left to dry for only 20 days, but according to masters it is good to stay outdoors between 30 and 40 days.

A walk through the sea pubs in the summer shows what goes the most with white wine. In addition to traditional appetizers and fish, wine is often served with mussels with rice – in Burgas or Sozopol. There are subtleties in their preparation. It is preferable for the mussels to be from the plantations, because they are cleaner.

First, they must be cleaned well and poured into a pot of hot water. This opens their shells and the mussels release their sauce. The mussels are then removed and boiled again together with onions, carrots and bay leaves. If desired, add a slice of lemon, but only at the end. Before mixing with the mussels, the onion is lightly stewed in hot oil. The rice is also stewed separately for 2–3 minutes, if desired, tomato paste can be added to it. Then mix with the mussels and pour over the broth, seasoned with salt and pepper. Leave on low heat.



WINERIES:

Stratsin Winery – village of Stratsin
(1)

Wine Estate Santa Sarah – village of
Goritsa (3)

DiVes Estate Winery – near Aheloy
(4)

Boiar Pomorie Wine Cellar – Pomorie

Tohun Wine Cellar – Pomorie (2)

Legend Estate – Pomorie

Black Sea Gold – Pomorie



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OLD CAPITALS





The old capital city of Veliko Tarnovo has preserved the greatness of the Bulgarian spirit, culture and ancient history

Feel like a boyar in Veliko Tarnovo

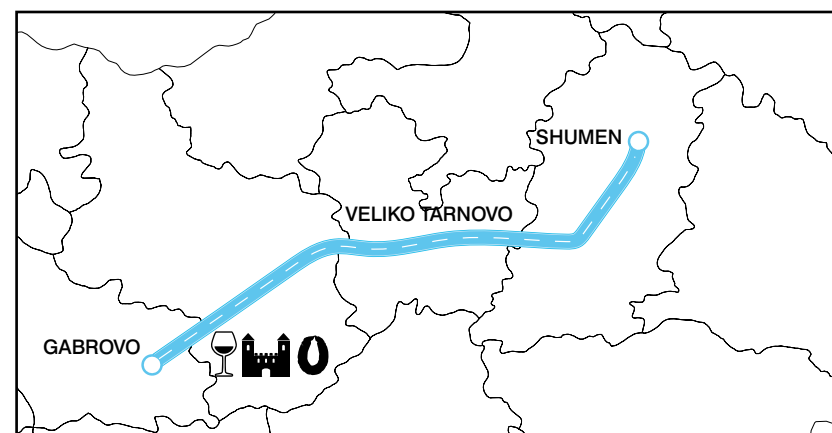


The old Bulgarian capitals are spread over a large area in Central Northern Bulgaria – from Gabrovo in the west to Targovishte and Shumen in the east. The borders of this region include the old Bulgarian capitals Pliska, Veliki Preslav and Veliko Tarnovo, which in addition to many cultural and historical attractions, also offer many opportunities for wine and culinary tourism.

The exploration of the region can begin from Suhindol, where the Devetashki Hills are located. The local terrain there is favourable for growing vines. The climate allows the grapes to accumulate sugars, as the differences between day and night temperatures are greater, the ventilation and air drainage of the vineyards are very good, the soils are light. The result is good, aromatic wines, and at the same time with sufficient freshness, and wines that also have the potential for aging.

Experts say „Global trends in recent years are towards the consumption of more mellow, lighter and more fruity wines“. In this region the Gamza variety is revered, which is bottled alone or as part of blends. There are many moments when Gamza goes well with Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Franc, which makes it possible to make more complex blended wines.

The larger vineyards are located in the northern part of Veliko Tarnovo region. Eight are the registered wineries in this region, which produce classy





The first Bulgarian capital Pliska

white and red dry wines. The most common varieties are Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Traminer, Aligote, Pamid, Rkatsiteli.

It is believed that due to the specific terroir, the harvest of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon is often superior in quality to that obtained in the vineyards of France. The region is characterized by a temperate continental climate with hot summers and very cold winters. The influence of the currents from the Danube River and the soils – black earth and grey forest earth, create excellent conditions for the production of quality white wines, naturally sparkling, according to the classic technology in the region of Lyaskovets and excellent red wines with a rich fruity aroma.

The wineries near Veliko Tarnovo are equipped with the most modern technique for wine production



The big producers, as well as the newly established boutique wineries in the region of Veliko Tarnovo, offer wine tours with tastings. Part of the production facilities are dedicated to guests. Tents have been set up in the vineyards themselves.

If you travel around the old capitals of Bulgaria, the Shumen region definitely has something to offer both to the wine-intrigued and history-hungry travellers. Temperature conditions and humidity in the region of Shumen, together with the soil characteristics, are particularly suitable for growing white varieties such as Chardonnay, Traminer, Muscat, Sauvignon Blanc and the local variety Dimyat, as well as red varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

The areas of Veliki Preslav, Novi Pazar and Khan Krum are famous terroirs for white varieties.

The vineyards near Tsarev Brod are in line with the cooler climate of the region and in addition to Sauvignon Blanc, Traminer, Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir are also grown. Interestingly, since 2011 the almost extinct white local variety Gergana has been revived here, an old and almost forgotten hybrid, selected by crossing the varieties Dimyat and Muscat Otonel in the 50s of the last century.

Once in this area, it will be a mistake not to stop in the village of Osmar. The wormwood wine, which has been produced there since the end of the 19th century, combines the aroma of forest herbs with the taste of the wine. It is mixed with more than 30 wild herbs and fruits, the producers claim. It is semi-dry and fragrant, with a balanced, harmonious, slightly tart and sweet-bitter taste.

If you find yourself in the area of the Shumen plateau, don't forget to try the slightly bitter Osmar absinthe



A lot of red wine is drunk with Gorno Oryahovski Sudzhuk and Elena Round

Gorna Oryahovitsa and Elena have been known for centuries for their unique delicacies – the sudzhuk sausage and the dried pork round. Litters of heavy red wine are drunk with both appetizers, locals say.

These culinary specialties have become an emblem of the Veliko Tarnovo region, because they are made because of the unique climate and specific air currents. Of course, craftsmanship is needed, and local sausage makers follow authentic recipes for more than 200 years.

Then, as today, the Gornooryahovski Sudzhuk is being made only from beef from Gorna Oryahovitsa, Svishtov, Targovishte and Omurtag, where the necessary animals were raised by dedicated shepherds.

It is prepared only from minced meat – thigh, breast, shoulder. The following spices are added to it: 22 grams of salt, 3 grams of black pepper, 1 gram of nitrate or sugar per 1 kg of meat. Everything is stuffed in the intestines and tied into „horseshoes“. It dries in a ventilated place and in a few days, it is



pressed and mashed. Its taste is so specific because currents enter the Balkan Mountain passes almost all year round, which favours natural ripening. It is our first protected geographical indication in Europe.

The specificity of the Balkan air gives value to the Bulgarian ham – the reindeer round. It is prepared

from a well-separated pork leg with bacon and skin. The pig should weigh between 160 and 180 kilograms and have been fed with nettle from the Elena Balkans and fodder mixtures.

The ham is salted while still warm. This is done in special oak pots, where it stays for 40–50 days. After mid-February it is taken out and wash with cabbage broth.

Then it is hung in a ventilated place. The ham must be protected from flies to prevent worms. According to the reindeer herders, it shall be cut thinly and eaten at harvest. Then it is completely ready.

On St. Dimitar's Day, Elena becomes narrow for all the ones that come for the traditional feast of Elena's round with desire to taste it.

You can't visit Gabrovo and miss the taste the „Gabrovo chocolate“. This is a special thick and hard jelly of prunes. The technology of its preparation is kept by the masters in Etnographic Village Etara and passed down from generation to generation.



Bulgarian spirit and unique nature

The former Bulgarian capital Veliko Tarnovo, based on its glories historicalpast is also called capital of Assenevtsi. The city in an integral part of the wine route. It is an incredible combination of Bulgarian spirit, culture and ancient history. The city radiates the greatness of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, the Revival Period and the foundations of statehood. In Veliko Tarnovo every stone is history, and in symbiosis with the unique natural resources, good food and wines the region is a preferred tourist destination.

To begin with, you can spend some time at the Tsarevets Fortress. From there, Bulgaria had been ruled for 208 years. It is among the most visited sights sites in the country. Part of the royal palace has been restored, and on the top of the hill rises the patriarchal St. Ascension of the Lord church.

On the way to the second capital fortress – Trapezitsa, the Holy 40 Martyrs Church is a great place to visit. The temple, built by order of Tsar Ivan Asen II in honour of his victory over the Epirus despot Theodore Comnenus, carries the spirit of one of the most glorious periods of Bulgaria, called the Second Golden Age. The church is also a sacred place for the Serbs, because in it lays the sarcophagus of St. Sava.

Take the funicular from Trapezitsa station or walk on the eco-trail to the Trapezitsa fortress. The relics of St. Ivan Rilski have been preserved in one of the churches here for almost three centuries. In fact, Tsarevets and Trapezitsa form the largest open-air museum complex in the Balkans.

The Samovodska Charshiya is the place where tourists can touch the authentic Bulgarian crafts and even try to make ceramics or kadaif in the old shops of the masters.



Located nearby is also the Revival and Constituent Assembly Museum. In the old Turkish konak, one of Kolyu Ficheto's masterpieces, the first lawmakers signed the Tarnovo Constitution. 140 years later, on April 16, 2019, the parliament had a meeting in Veliko Tarnovo again.

Be sure to take a walk in the architectural reserve Arbanassi, only 4 km from Veliko Tarnovo. The medieval churches in the village are shining examples of the Orthodox Christian churches from the Late Middle Ages.

A real discovery for the uninitiated is the unique Roman city of Nicopolis ad Istrum. The archaeological reserve is located 20 km north of Veliko Tarnovo. The city was founded by the Roman emperor Mark Ulpius Trajan (98–117) in honour of his victory over the Dacians. Nicopolis ad Istrum is organized similarly to the cities of Asia Minor – Ephesus, Nicaea and Nicomedia. It is planned according to the so-called orthogonal system, with straight streets, oriented in the directions of the world, and intersecting at right angles.

Saturated with impressions of history, the tourist can take the route to the breath-taking natural phenomena of the Emen Canyon and the waterfall of Hotnitsa.

It is a touching experience to visit the first school for teachers in the town of Elena, established in 1843, where one of the greatest Bulgarian poets Petko Slaveykov was a teacher in 1848. He has called it Daskalolivnitsa (derived from

The Madara Horseman is a remarkable monument from the early Middle Ages, which is under the protection of UNESCO



the word for making church candles by replacing the word „candle“ with „teacher“). The building is a cultural monument of national importance.

The walk in Targovishte should start from the archaeological exposition of the Regional Historical Museum. It keeps the treasure from the village of Kralevo – golden Thracian horse ammunition, discovered during excavations in 1979 in a tomb of a Thracian ruler from the IV–III century BC, which has not been looted by treasure hunters.

Part of this exposition is arranged in the Slaveykov school, for a short time Petko Slaveykov (the same one from Elena) himself was a teacher in it.

Local legend claims that Khan Krum did not win his victory over the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus in the Varbishi Pass in 811 AD, as the popular story goes, but this happened near the fortress Misionis near today's Targovishte. Historians do not unequivocally accept this hypothesis, but they are united around the idea that Misionis, an early Byzantine and medieval Bulgarian fortress from the IV–XIV century, is the prototype of Targovishte. Who would like to find a solution to this mystery, can visit the fortress, which is among the 100 national tourist sites.

Shumen and its surroundings have much to offer the tourists. In the town itself there are the houses-museums of national heroes, the monument of the Creators of the Bulgarian State, the largest mosque in Bulgaria, the Tombul Mosque.

One kilometre from the town is located the most beautiful and longest cave on the Shumen Plateau, Zandana, and 18 km to the village of Madara is the medieval rock bas-relief the Madara Horseman.

In the capital of the First Bulgarian State Pliska, in addition to the restored parts of the fortress, the museum and the Great Basilica, you can also visit the Court of Letters, dedicated to the Bulgarian alphabet.

If you reach Pliska, do not miss Veliki Preslav with the remains of the second Bulgarian capital.

WINERIES:



Tsarev Brod Winery – village of Tsarev Brod (6)

Chukara Winery – Tryavna (4)

Old school Wines – village of Yalovo (3)

Villa Ovcharovo – village of Ovcharovo (2)

Vinex Preslav – Veliki Preslav

Wine Cellar Osmar – village of Osmar (5)

Maryan Winery – village of Maryan (7)

Dragoshinov Winery – village of Natsovtsi (1)

Ruevit Estate Wine Cellar – Byala Cherkva

Hotul Bunar Winery – village of Gorsko Novo Selo

1



2



3



4



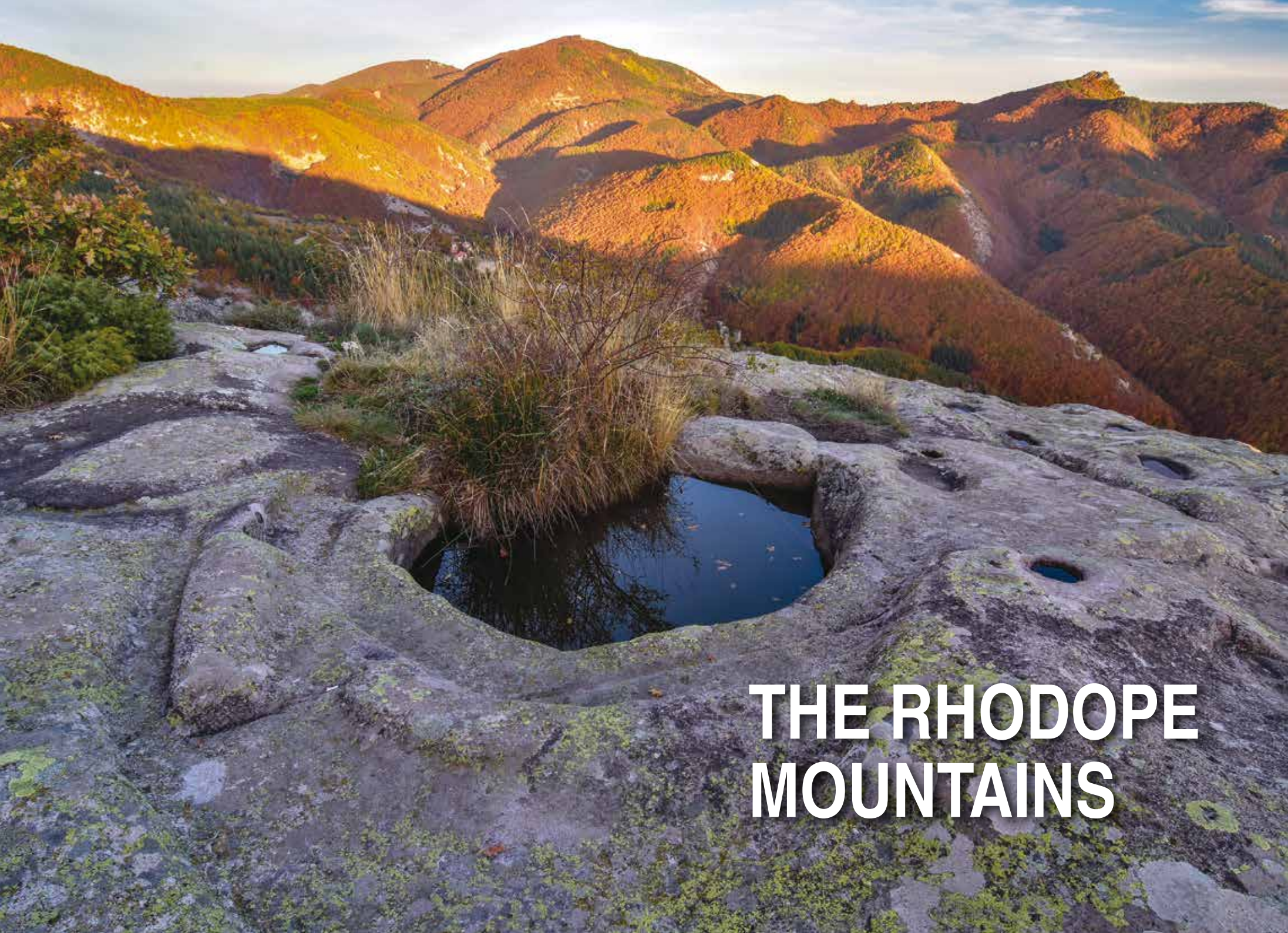
5



6



7



THE RHODOPE MOUNTAINS



Young girls mash grapes with their feet in a Thracian sharapana in the East Rhodopes

In the footsteps of the ancient Thracians



The Rhodope Mountains were once the land of the ancient Thracians. Traces of their presence are preserved all over the mountain – sanctuaries, dolmens, rock niches, tombs. Their largest concentration is in the Eastern Rhodopes. There are monuments from the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Early Iron Age at almost every step.

The Thracians were known to have worshiped wine. They not only produced wine, but also performed many rituals with it. Until present days, the cultivation of vineyards and wine making is a livelihood for the people of the Eastern Rhodopes.

The region is characterized by a temperate climate with a gentle Mediterranean influence. The favourable amount of precipitation, the warm summer and the large number of sunny days compared to the interior of the country contribute to the good quality of the cultivated grapes. Today you can try wines made from old varieties, as well as new for the taste Bulgarian ones.

The wines produced in the Haskovo region are not inferior in quality to the French and Italian ones. In recent years, vineyards with new grape varieties have been increasing. Among the most popular within the reds are Cabernet Franc and Syrah, and within the whites, Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier. Cabernet Franc is considered the father of the popular in the recent past in the Haskovo region Cabernet Sauvignon varie-



ty. It turns out that the cultivation of the older variety is more successful because it better fits the warm climate in the area. Cabernet Franc fits perfectly on local soils. Syrah is popular not only because of the favourable climatic and soil conditions, but also because it ripens earlier. Wines with fruity and rich taste are from this variety made.

The evergreen of the white varieties remains the Chardonnay. It is also called a chameleon because it fits all conditions and it produces different stylistic wines. In recent years there has been a revival of the old and forgotten Tamyanka.

Dimyat, popular in the recent past in the region, has almost disappeared. The few remaining grape massifs grown are mainly used for distillation. The reason is that Dimyat is a neutral variety and it does not produce rich flavours.

The low sugar content and lack of colour is the reason for the lack of interest among winemakers to one of the oldest varieties in the region – Pamid. The southern Bulgarian municipality of Ivaylovgrad is famous for its home-made wines.

The picturesque Rhodopean village of Gela is considered one of the three most energetic places in Bulgaria, along with Rupite and Krastova Gora



The most popular varieties here are Merlot, Rubin and Pamid. The mild climate is extremely suitable for growing grapes. Wine is produced in almost every home. The owners never refuse to treat tourists to homemade wine. It is also available in Ivaylovgrad taverns and restaurants.

The town is a particularly popular destination for the Greeks from the region of Dimotika, who never fail to buy homemade wine and sesame tahini produced in Ivaylovgrad using old technology in stone mills.

In the region of Ivaylovgrad and around the villages of Tankovo and Popovets there are small wineries that offer not only good wine but also wine tasting. Along with the famous Merlot from Stambolovo, rarer varieties are offered, such as Tamyanka and Kehlibar.

Cabernet Franc wine, which has a strong aftertaste, deserves attention.

Near Kardzhali you can see the oldest wine vessels

These are the so-called Sharapana, which are scattered in different places in the Eastern Rhodopes. They are hand-shaped rock troughs. They resemble round or elliptical pools, located at different heights and connected to each other like connected vessels with gutters.

The word Sharapana is used by the locals and comes from the Turkish words sharap – wine, and tash – stone. Archaeologists date the sharapanas to the Late Bronze or Early Iron Ages, but exact dating has not yet been made. According to the hypotheses, the sacred wine of the Thracians, used in the Orphic fire-wine rituals, was produced in the sharapanas.

The most popular among tourists sharapanas can be seen at the foot of the archaeological complex Perperikon near Kardzhali. In addition to the sharapanas, a large rock altar was discovered during archaeological excavations on the rock peak, on which fire and wine rituals were performed. According to one of the hypotheses of the Greek historian Herodotus, the temple of Dionysus was located here. Perperikon is one of the most famous archaeological complexes in Bulgaria.

It is located 15 km from Kardzhali on an area of over 10 acres on a rocky peak. During the different periods it was inhabited by Thracians, Romans, Goths, Bulgarians.





In its thousand-year history, Perperikon was inhabited by various peoples – Thracians, Romans, Goths, Byzantine Romans, Bulgarians

During excavations in Perperikon, archaeologists came across completely preserved pithos – huge jars in which the ancient Thracians stored wine.

The sharapanas in the Thracian Complex Harman Kaya near the Momchilgrad district village of Bivoljane are also extremely well preserved. The site, which has not yet undergone archaeological excavations, is one of the largest in the area.

Stone mushrooms are volcanic tuffs that formed about 40 million years ago. At that time, the Kardzhali region was the bottom of a sea in which a volcano erupted



The Stone Wedding is also a remarkable natural phenomenon. Most impressive are two 10-meter cliffs, resembling embraced newlyweds

Don't miss also:

The Alexander's Tomb near Haskovo with its unique frescoes and impressive architecture.

The Stone Mushrooms – rock formations that have the shape of natural mushrooms and are located east of the village of Beli Plast, on the road connecting Kardzhali with Haskovo. The protected area has an area of 3 hectares. They have been declared a natural landmark since 1974.

The Stone Wedding is a natural landmark located about 4 km east of the town of Kardzhali, near the village of Zimzelen. The rock formations reach a height of 10 m and are located on an area of 50 decares.

The Thracian sanctuary near Tatul, about 15 km from Momchilgrad, is one of the most remarkable megalithic monuments discovered in our country. In 2011 in the Wonders of Bulgaria campaign the site was recognised as one of the 10 wonders of Bulgaria.

In the area of Kovan Kaya, near the village of Dolno Cherkovishte – Madzharovo, is located one of the largest megalithic Thracian cult complexes in the Eastern Rhodopes.

The Devil's Bridge (Sheitan Kyupriya) is a medieval bridge on the Arda River. It is located in a picturesque gorge about 10 km northwest of the town of Ardino and 4 km east of the village of Galabovo (Banite municipality).



The Thracian sanctuary near the village of Tatul is one of the most magnificent megalithic monuments discovered in Bulgaria

The meanders of Arda are wonderfully beautiful curves of the riverbed in the form of a horseshoe. One of the most impressive and easily accessible bends are those at the entrance of Ivaylovgrad dam. The meanders in the area of the Kardzhali dam are also extremely fascinating. One of the most popular among them is known as the „Turn“. It is located on the southern slope of Kardzhali dam on the road between the villages of Ribartsi and Star Chitak.

Villa Armira is the pearl in the crown of the sights of the destination. It is located 4 km southwest of Ivaylovgrad and is one of the most interesting monuments from the era of the Roman Empire. In 1964, during the construction of a dam, the builders accidentally came across traces of an ancient building.

The Arda River forms beautiful meanders (turns) along its way. One of the most picturesque is known as the „Turn“ and is located on the west coast of Kardzhali Dam



Villa Armira is the richest private palace from the Roman era in Bulgaria

Subsequent archaeological excavations have uncovered the remains of a suburban villa. It became popular as Armira after the name of the small river, a tributary of the Arda River, on the banks of which it was built.

The villa is luxurious, with a remarkable layout, lavish marble decoration and original floor mosaics. It is one of the earliest and most accurately dated villa complexes from Roman times, studied so far in Bulgaria, and the richest private palace from this period, discovered in today's Bulgarian lands.

Don't leave without trying cheverme and Smilyan beans

The Rhodope Cheverme is one of the best wine appetizers. It is a trademark in the Rhodope mountain region. Its masters say that it goes best with red wines.

A successful cheverme is made from a lamb about a year old or a little goat.

The treated and cleaned animal, lamb or goat, is placed on a large wooden skewer, then attached to two wooden supports placed on the side of the hearth. Several nails are driven into the wooden supports at different heights.

The meat is salted in four places – pockets on the thighs and shoulders are made and salt is placed there. The hind legs are tied with wire to the skewer, and the front ones are tied to the body.

The skewer is rotated slowly and the meat is roasted by the heat of the fire, which is about 30–60 cm below it. It is oiled with tallow or oil so that not to burn,





The cheverme is a trademark of the Rhodope cuisine

especially in the groin area. Depending on the power of the fire and the size of the lamb, it is baked in 4 to 6 hours. The golden crust and slightly translucent ribs guarantee that it is ready.

In the Rhodope Mountains another emblematic specialty – patatnik is also prepared masterfully. It is among the popular dishes along with katmi, polenta and klin. The patatnik can be baked or fried, with and without the peel, with cheese and without cheese, with onion and without it, and it can still be a wonderful dish.

There is no single recipe for patatnik, but the most common requires grating peeled potatoes. One or two eggs are added the potato mixture, depending on the size of the patatnik. For the filling you can use boiled finely chopped meat or cheese. Then roll out the crusts according to the shape and size of the tray in which it will be baked. First, put the crust on the greased bottom, upon it put the grated potatoes mixed with the filling, seasoned with black pepper and spearmint. Put the other crust over the mixture and bake. After the upper side is baked, turn it over and bake the other side until obtaining a dark golden tinge.

The Smilyan Bean became an emblem for this part of the Rhodopes Mountain after the locals started growing it. The best conditions for it are along the upper reaches of the Arda River. Therefore, it is most certain that you will taste real Smilyan beans if you visit one of the guest houses there and the hosts who grow it prepare it according to their recipe.



If you have a way to Kardzhali Dam, do not miss to try fried carp or grilled sturgeon



The Smilyan bean is one of the emblems of the Rhodopes. An entire museum in the village of Smilyan is dedicated to it

In Zlatograd, with the wine tourists try kebabs and meatballs, lukanka sausage and sudzhuk sausage prepared by local masters. The best applause however goes to the Zlatograd Bacon.

Still there you can ask to have smidal – bread, broken into larger crumbs, drizzled with oil and sprinkled with sugar. In the past, they did it for a treat after the baptism of a child. It is now a local attraction as a dessert.

Incredible views, combined with white wine and perfectly prepared fish, are the attraction for tourists who will visit the Kardzhali dam. The region has been popular for its restaurants for years. Some of them are located on pontoons in the water of the dam. The area of the Kardzhali dam is one of the few places where sturgeon can be tasted in Bulgaria. This fish is bred in a the Sadkovov pond for caviar production. Males are unnecessary and after growing up they are caught and delivered to local restaurants.



WINERIES:

Yamantiev's Wine Cellar – Ivaylovgrad (1,2,3,4)

Stambolovo Winery – village of Stambolovo

Light Castle Winery – Ivaylovgrad

Moraliev Winery – Ivaylovgrad

Topolovo Winery – Topolovo

Trakia Winery – village of Popovets



1



3



2



4

WINE TOURS IN BULGARIA

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