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## Preparing For Your Journey: Bulgaria

### General Information

**Passport/Visas:** A valid passport is required; visas are not required for US, Canadian, European, Australian, New Zealand, Israeli, Japanese or Korean citizens for stays under 30 days

**Vaccinations:** not required

**Location:** Bulgaria is situated in Southeast Europe and occupies the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. To the north it borders on Romania, to the west on the Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, to the east on the Black Sea, to the south on Greece and to the southeast on Turkey's European part.

**Area:** 111.000 sq km.

**Topography:** Extremely varied: large plains and lowlands, low and high mountains, valleys and lovely gorges.

**Climate:** Temperate continental with clearly marked four seasons.

A Mediterranean influence is felt in the country's southern regions. The average annual temperature is 10.5°C. The average January temperature is around 0°C. Average summer temperatures rarely exceed 30°C.

**Population:** 8,428,006

**Languages:** Bulgarian, English, German, French and Russian are spoken in the country's resorts, hotels and restaurants.

**Alphabet:** Cyrillic. Signs along international motorways, in airports and resorts are also spelled in Roman letters.

**Religion:** 86.6% of the population is Eastern Orthodox, 13% are Muslims. The Bulgarian Church is autonomous and headed by a Patriarch. The Jewish community in Bulgaria dates back to before the destruction of the second Temple (70 C.E.). Jews settled on Bulgarian soil during the Middle Ages and the Byzantine era, but the Jewish community grew most significantly after the expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492.

**Voltage:** 220 V only

**Currency:** lev. Banknote denominations include 1.00, 2.00, 5.00, 10.00, 20.00 and 50.00 leva. Coins of smaller denominations.

**Currency Exchange:** In banks, exchange bureaus, and ATM machines. Bulgarian currency cannot be exchanged back for dollars anywhere outside Bulgaria.

**Credit Cards:** Visa, MasterCard, Diners Club, American Express

**Laundry:** There are no laundry facilities outside the hotels. The hotels charge an arm and a leg. Often, the hotels are not using washing machines; they are dry cleaning. Ask at the hotel reception desk if it is unclear.

**Important Telephone Numbers:** Police - 166, Ambulance - 150

**Time Difference:** Winter: GMT +2 hours (October through March); Summer: GMT +3 hours (April through September)

### Getting There

**What to do if you miss your flight:** At the airport you can request assistance from the ticketing agent of your airline carrier to re-book on next available flight. Next, call the contact number on your ID card to inform them that your arrival date has changed. If you call us, by the time we get the message, it will be too late to inform our associate in Europe.

#### Travel Insurance

Trip cancellation/travel insurance is suggested. We use Travelex. The brochure/application is enclosed. Submit insurance application within 3 weeks of deposit to waive pre-existing conditions.

#### Packing Suggestions

The weather is generally pleasant with sunny days and moderate evenings; occasional showers. Evenings in the mountains can be chilly. Lightweight casual clothing, sun hat, a sweater, light jacket, rain poncho, umbrella and of course comfortable walking shoes. The cobbled streets mean uneven footing.

#### Arrival

You will be met at the airport and transferred to your hotel. After collecting baggage, follow the lines through customs and immigration to the exit. The Bulgaria/Romania airports are quite small. Outside the exit, your driver will be waiting holding a placard with the name

Original World.

### On the Journey

In Bulgaria you will have a driver and guide; two separate people.

**Calling Internationally** is a bit difficult. You can use a US calling card in the hotels, but they will add a surcharge so ask first to find out costs. For public phones you need to purchase two calling cards. There are international cards available that have very good rates for calling the US, Canada or other parts of the world. You need a local calling card in order to dial the access code for the international card. You may also use this local card at hotels as it will be a local call. Your guide can assist you in using the calling cards. Nowadays, most US mobile phone companies have fairly reasonable international rates. Do call yours to check in advance.

**Internet Cafes** are everywhere and they are open late sometimes until 2:00 am. Many of the internet centers are in bars so these can be smoke-filled. Cost is very inexpensive. Some of the hotels have free internet.

**Money Exchange:** Avoid changing a lot of money at the airport exchange office. Change enough for your arrival needs: tips, bottled water etc. There are ATM machines everywhere, even in the smallest towns.

**Tipping Suggestions:** Tips are not included on the bills and when meals are included in the tour, the tips are not. 10 - 15% depending on the place and service. Guide & Driver: Bulgaria \$5-6 per person per day to each of them.

**Meals:** Approximate cost of meals not included in your tour are \$10-15 lunch; \$15-25 dinner. Meals in Sofia will be much more than meals in the small towns.

**What to do if you need medical attention:** Ask your guide for assistance in finding a doctor or medical facility. If you have purchased travel insurance, be sure to save all receipts. If you have a serious illness or accident that requires extensive treatment or hospitalization or if you need to return home early, contact your travel insurance company for best instructions.

If you have purchased Travelex insurance, you may call collect 905-523-7066 (or call their London office which may be easier to reach 44-127-322-3000; fax: 44-127-332-7848). They have a list of approved doctors and facilities. They will also require you to obtain a 'fit to fly' letter from the attending doctor as well as a report on your medical condition. If there are major medical expenses, Travelex will handle payment directly to the medical facility provided you follow their instructions.

### Assistance Throughout the Journey

Please discuss with your guide any special needs or concerns that may arise during the journey. He/She will do everything possible to accommodate you.

**NOTE:** We suggest you carry with you a copy of the front page of your passport, our ID card with local contact numbers, your insurance benefits brochure and our preparation notes.