

Travel to
Bulgaria
broadens
one!

Jim Gold International Folk Dance Tours

Best of Bulgaria

Folk Dancing, Folk Music, Art, History, Culture, Adventure !

**Sofia, Bansko, Plovdiv,
Gela Folk Festival,
Nessebar, Varna, Black Sea,
Veliko Turnovo,
Koprivshitsa Folk Festival**



July 30-August 12, 2024

Led by Ventsi Milev

**Bulgarian folk dancing with Niki Enchev
and musician Ventsi Andonov**

- **Attend Gela and Koprivshitsa Folk Festivals**
- **Video of folk dancing at Koprivshitsa**
- **Meet and dance with Bulgarian folkdance groups**
- **Daily folk dancing with Bulgarian folkdance teacher, Niki Enchev; live music with gaida player, Ventsi Andonov.**
- **See villages, historic homes, and sites**
- **Enjoy traditional cuisine and wines.**
- **Visit 10th Rila monastery, a UNESCO site**
- **Price includes city tours, transfers, hotels, two meals daily, and our own private bus**

Itinerary

July 29: Monday: Depart on airline of your choice.

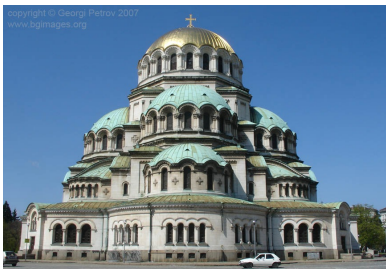
Day 1: July 30, Tuesday: Sofia

The magic adventure in Bulgaria begins: (As a prelude, watch some Bulgarian dances.) Check into our 5-star Grand Hotel Sofia. Orientation, meet-and-greet, followed by a welcome dinner.

Day 2: July 31 Wednesday: Sofia

A guided walking tour of ancient and contemporary Sofia. In the midst of busy cafés and imposing socialist buildings from the past century, you will come upon tranquil green squares and still active churches from Roman and Byzantine time. St. George Rotunda (a fully preserved structure from the 4th cent.) blends elegantly in the courtyard of the Presidency and the 5th cent. St. Sofia Basilica (which inspired city's coat of arms) lies next to Sofia's

greatest sight – St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral, the National Opera and a quaint Flea market. Sofia's unique yellow-brick road, paved in 1907 with Austro-Hungarian cobblestone, runs along Capital's most important landmarks – it starts with Sofia University, National Library, the Parliament and art galleries in the east; goes by the



ex-Royal Palace, Russian Church and National theater, and reaches the recently excavated Roman Forum and "St. Nedelya" Church in the west. The latter, along with the nearby "Banya Bashi" Mosque built in 1576, Sofia Synagogue (the largest Sephardic Temple in Europe) and "St. Joseph" Catholic Cathedral are spoken of as the "square of tolerance" among faiths!

Afternoon free for individual activities or visit at the National History Museum in the outskirts of the capital. Dinner with live Bulgarian folk dancing in "Chevermeto" (the Spit roast). (B, D) Overnight at 5***** Grand Hotel Sofia ,

Day 3: August 1, Thursday: Sofia – Rila Monastery – Bansko

Travel south to the 10th century Rila Monastery. UNESCO listed, It is one of the most impressive religious sites on the continent with its size, abundance of frescoes and unique architecture. Dine on a local specialty for lunch –fresh river trout and traditional Bulgarian bean soup – then continue south to the town of Bansko, a stronghold of Bulgarian revival architecture, culture and traditions.

In winter the town is a busy ski resort and in summer, a home to a popular International Jazz Festival. Enjoy a leisurely sightseeing walk in Bansko's cobbled-stone alleys and panoramic mountain views of the slopes of Pirin National Park – also in UNESCO's world heritage list (of natural sites).



A brief evening drive to the nearby village of Gorno Draglishte where baba grandma Deshka will welcome us in her house and to a homemade dinner which she herself and with the help of other local women has cooked during the day. Expect to be invited to some authentic for the region folk dancing and rituals. (B, L, D) Overnight at 5***** Premier Luxury Mountain Resort.

Day 4: August 2, Friday: Bansko – Dobursko – Batak – Plovdiv

Day in the deep countryside. After breakfast, carry on northeast through the Rhodopes, birthplace of mythological Orpheus. Visit the mysterious village of Dobursko, where the local choir “Doburski Babi” (Grandmas from Dobursko) will give us a private performance followed by a traditional homemade (by the grandmas) Bulgarian “Banitsa” pastry and yogurt snack. Continue east through some “Pumak” villages and stop for another fresh fish lunch on the bank of the picturesque Batak Lake. Then visit the nearby town of Batak.



One of the darkest events in Bulgarian history took place here in 1876. Ironically, it marked the beginning of the end of the 500-year Ottoman Rule in Bulgaria. Afternoon arrival in Plovdiv, Bulgaria’s second largest city and its artistic capital. In 2019 Plovdiv was granted the title “European capital of culture”.



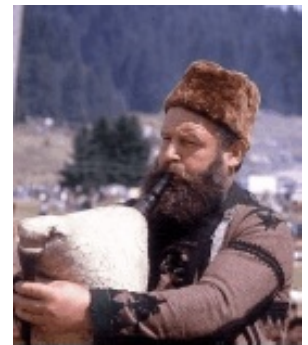
Plovdiv is also one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in Europe! (B, Snack, L) Overnight at 4* Hill House Hotel.

Day 5: August 3. Saturday: Plovdiv – Bachkovo Monastery – Gela Folk Festival– Plovdiv

It’s a festival day! Before driving deep into the Rhodopes mountain to the village of Gela and its famous Rhodopes “Kaba” bagpipe festival, we will visit the 11th cent. Bachkovo Monastery – second-largest in Bulgaria and known for its fine architecture, exquisite murals and a 14th century miracle-making icon of Mother Mary.



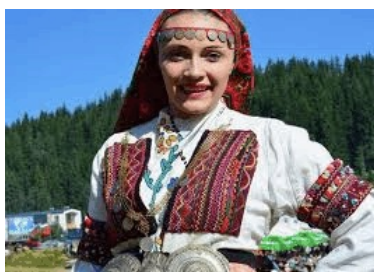
An hour and half later and for the rest of today – music and dancing at Gela festival – a happening with centuries old history and mysteriously no remembered beginning. NB! Be sure to bring sun cream, water, a big hat and plenty of your passion for authentic folklore!



Late afternoon departure to Plovdiv and a stopover at Bachkovo Monastery again - this time for dinner at an old traditional restaurant overlooking a scenic mountain river. A short drive to Plovdiv for a good night sleep! (B, D) Overnight at 4* Hill House Hotel.

Day 6: August 4, Sunday: Plovdiv

Morning sightseeing tour of Plovdiv Old Town, often compared to Montmartre Hill in Paris for its art galleries and antique shops. View masterpieces of 18-19th century Bulgarian Renaissance architecture, Thracian and Roman remains, orthodox churches and its highlight – a 2nd century Roman Amphitheater. We will visit the country’s richest Ethnographic Museum set in a gorgeous baroque house from 1847 and then stroll down Plovdiv’s lively pedestrian street offering more historic attractions and lovely cafés and restaurants.



We will see a Roman Stadium, a Roman Forum, a 15th century Mosque and the newly opened Bishop’s Basilica – in UNESCO’s tentative list. In the late afternoon come to the main square for tradition Sunday folk dancing or “Sunday horo” (B) Overnight at 4* Hill House Hotel.

Day 7: August 5, Monday: Plovdiv – Nessebar & Sunny Beach – Varna

Today we’ll travel east to the Black Sea coast where our first stop will be Nessebar, a beautiful old town set on a narrow peninsula and bursting with winding cobbled stone alleyways, timber houses, churches and medieval fortification walls. It is one of the oldest towns in Europe and a UNESCO World Heritage site. After lunch with a delightful view, we’ll continue on to Varna , sister city to Miami! Watch and learn Varnenski Horo, On our way north, watch out for amazing

panoramas from the easternmost altitudes of the Balkan Range, stretching all the way from Bulgaria's west border to the sea. Early evening arrival in Varna, the marine capital of Bulgaria.

This morning bagpipe player Ventzi Andonov and folk-dance teacher Niki Enchev will have joined our team and for the next 5 days! Bulgarian folk dance lessons will be the norm daily! (B, L) Overnight at 4* Panorama Hotel.

Day 8: August 6, Tuesday: Varna – Balchik – Dalboka Mussel Farm – Varna

With wide pedestrian boulevards, shady Sea Gardens and an expansive sandy beach, Varna has the tranquil air of a coastal resort, despite its being a major port, center of commerce and Bulgaria's third biggest city. Highlights of the city tour include 2nd century Roman baths (largest on the Balkan Peninsula and 4th largest in Europe) and the Archaeological Museum housing the "Oldest Gold" (from 4600 BC).



Late morning drive to Balchik. In 1913 the region around the town was annexed by Romania. It returned to Bulgarian sovereignty in 1940, but this short period of Romanian rule left the town the legacy of its greatest attraction – the Summer



Palace of Queen Marie – which we'll visit, together with Balchik's famous botanical garden.

Lunch of fresh mussels and fish at the Dalboka Mussel Farm and Restaurant, overlooking the beautiful Kaliakra Bay. Return to Varna and Bulgarian folk dancing with Ventzi and Niki! (B, L) Overnight at 4* Panorama Hotel.

Day 9: August 7. Wednesday: Varna – Madara – Veliko Turnovo

Today the Black Sea will stay behind as we carry on west to Veliko Turnovo – Bulgaria's medieval capital. En route stop at one of the country's 9 UNESCO sites – the Madara Rider. In the 8th century, at the time of the 1st Bulgarian Kingdom, a large figure of a horseman and his dog was carved in the rocky face of Madara Plateau. Nowadays it's known as the Madara Rider and is the only rock-cut relief in Europe. Lunch.



Arrival in Veliko Turnovo, built on the steep cliffs of the meandering Yantra river gorge. We'll walk around the remains of fortress walls, palaces and churches on the emblematic Tsarevets Hill, visit the Four-Horsemen monument and the famous Samovodska Street, where in the beautifully lined-up little shops, we will meet pastry cooks, master goldsmiths, potters and wood carvers willing to talk and sell their articles!



Today Veliko Turnovo is a fusion of romantic natural scenery, its distinctive historical ambience and vibrant student life. In the evening and during the day more Bulgarian folk dancing with Niki and Venzi! (B, L) Overnight at family-owned Gurko Boutique Hotel.

Day 10: August 8, Thursday: Veliko Turnovo & Arbanassi Village

Morning trip to Nikopolis ad Istrum, a Roman city founded in 106 AD by Marcus Ulpius Traianus (98 – 117 AD). An archeological gem for the fact that unlike places like Sofia and Plovdiv, and Varna where the roman city has long been buried and then built over, here the Roman city never became a modern city and was never "lost" underground.

Return to Veliko Turnovo and leisure time. Afternoon visit to the charming village of Arbanassi, situated a short drive away on a high plateau above the city of Turnovo. It's famous for its traditional 18th cent. architecture and beautifully decorated churches. One of them, the Church of Nativity, although extremely modest on the outside, has a most extraordinary interior and unique collection of 16-17th century



frescoes. Bulgarian folk dancing with Niki and Ventzi, dinner and return to Veliko Turnovo for a second overnight. (B, D) Overnight at family-owned Gurko Boutique Hotel.

Day 11 Aug 09 FRI: Veliko Turnovo – Etara – Shipka Pass – Rose Valley – Koprivshitsa

After breakfast enjoy a scenic drive south across the Balkan range and through the world-famous Valley of Roses and Valley of Thracian Kings (another UNESCO World Heritage Site!). En route, stroll around Etara – a Life open-air Village Museum displaying authentic housing and crafts traditions of the past three centuries.

Meet plenty of craftsmen and check their original goods.

We'll pay a visit to the exquisite, gold-domed Shipka Memorial Church and to one of the richest and best-preserved Thracian tombs in the area. Lunch.

A couple of hours later to the west, amid green meadows and pine forests, is situated the small, quaint town of Koprivshitsa.



Here in 1876 was fired the first shot of the April Uprising which marked the prelude to the end of the five-century Ottoman rule in Bulgaria. Miraculously, the town of Koprivshitsa survived the Uprising and is now one of the few thoroughly preserved architectural reserves from the Bulgarian Revival Period. Dinner. (B, L, D) Overnight at family-owned traditional country lodge.

Day 12: August 10, Saturday: Koprivshitsa Folk Festival

A whole day at the festival – included in UNESCO's list of immaterial heritage since 2016. The small town gets full of visitors from all parts of the world. (B) Overnight at family-owned traditional country lodge.



Day 13: August 11, Sunday: Koprivshitsa - Sofia

We will stick around Koprivshitsa a little longer to make sure we don't leave prematurely and miss any dancing and singing. Then travel west to Sofia for more exploration of the Capital, perhaps some shopping, a farewell dinner and last overnight. (B, D) Overnight at 5***** Grand Hotel Sofia.

Day 14: August 12, Monday: Sofia (departure)

After breakfast your guide will accompany you to the airport for departure flight. (B)

SERVICES INCLUDED:

- 13 overnights in selected, centrally located 5* hotels (4x nights), 4* hotels (5 nights), 3* boutique hotel (2x nights) and a traditional county lodge in Koprivshitsa (2x nights)
- Breakfast daily (B)
- 13 other meals (L) = Lunch (6 lunches), (D) = Dinner (7 dinners),
- 3+ dinners with Life Folk Entertainment
- Wine/Rakia with 4+ dinners
- 1 home-made pastry snack prepared by the Dobursko Grandmas
- Participation in 2x famous Bulgarian Folk Festivals
- Ventzi Andonov & Niky Enchev from day 7 to day 11 (5 days) – TO BE DISCUSSED
- Licensed English-speaking guide throughout the tour
- Private air-conditioned car/minivan/van throughout the tour
- Accommodation and meals for guide and driver (1-5 pax guide will also drive)
- Fuel, parking charges and road tolls



- Entrance fees to museums and sites (as per itinerary)
- All hotel taxes (portage and tips not incl.)
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure

SERVICES NOT INCLUDED:

- Drinks other than mineral water with meals except where wine/rakia is included
- Portage at hotels, - Travel insurance- Tips

About Ventsi Milev

Ventsislav Milev was born in Sofia, Bulgaria in a family of travel specialists. He lived in London for a decade, studying Business Administration at Richmond University and Photography at Westminster University. He worked for British photo libraries and travelled extensively. On return to his home country, he took over the family business and, for the last 13 years, he has been designing and managing preset and tailor-made tours in Bulgaria and most Balkan countries. He has been collaborating with Jim Gold International from Teaneck, N. J., Tradesco Tours from Woodland, CA, Sephardic Balkans from Philadelphia, PA, Inghams from the UK, and others. Ventsi also guides many of his tours, perfecting the entire travel experience of his clients from the initial contact, through program writing and meticulous organization, to the invaluable human interaction on the road!



Land Only: \$3995

REGISTRATION FORM: Enclosed is my registration deposit of \$200 per person.

Single supplement: \$795. Additional charges: \$185 hotel taxes and service. Gratuities and drinks during meals not included. Program subject to change without notice. Cancellations 90 days prior to departure: Total refund: Less than 90 days: No refund. Travel insurance always recommended. Total balance due May 1, 2024.

Name _____

Address _____

No. of people _____ Phone (_____) _____ email _____

Make checks payable to: Jim Gold International 497 Cumberland Avenue, Teaneck, NJ 07666 U.S.A. Phone (201) 836-0362. Web site at www.jimgold.com Email: jimgold@jimgold.com

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Air Transportation: International air not included except as noted.

Rates: Tour rates are subject to change in the event of currency fluctuations or increase in costs. Inclusive tour rates are per person in double occupancy. In case of computer or human billing errors, we reserve the right to re-invoice clients with corrected billing.

Reservations: Deposits and Payments: Deposit of \$200 per person is required at time of reservation. Balance is due 90 days prior to departure date.

Changes: Prices and program subject to change without notice

Baggage: One baggage per person and a carry on is allowed.

Cancellations: Cancellations 90 days prior to departure: Total refund. Less than 90 days: No refund.

Additionally, any cancellation fees imposed by the respective hotels, airlines, tour companies and cruise lines will be charged. Travel Insurance is non-refundable as are unused services.

Gratuities: Tipping to guides, drivers, transfer personnel and hotel staff is left to the discretion of the participants and is not included.

Insurance: Tour participants are strongly recommended to purchase insurance for trip cancellation, trip interruption, accident, sickness and/or loss of baggage and personal effects.

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