



Bulgaria

Rose valleys, painted monasteries and Black Sea beaches in the country where the Cyrillic alphabet was born.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Sofia

POPULATION

About 6.4 million

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Bulgarian, written in the Cyrillic alphabet

CURRENCY

Euro (€), since 1 January 2026. It replaced the Bulgarian lev

AREA

About 111,000 km²

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary republic

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Musala, 2,925 m, in the Rila mountains. It is also the highest peak of the Balkan Peninsula

LONGEST RIVER ENTIRELY IN BULGARIA

The Iskar, 368 km, flowing from the Rila mountains past Sofia to the Danube

NEIGHBOURS

Romania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Greece and Turkey by land, with the Black Sea coast to the east

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+359

A 45-minute trip to Bulgaria

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Bulgaria together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 4500 BC: The gold of Varna; 1878: Liberation; 2026: The euro arrives. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Banitsa and Shopska salad. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Dobro utro (Добро утро)" (Good morning), "Dobar den (Добър ден)" (Good day, hello), "Dobar vecher (Добър вечер)" (Good evening). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/bulgaria/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz

- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Bulgaria and its cities



- Sofia (Sofia City): The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Boyana Church on the city's edge, Hiking and skiing on Mount Vitosha
- Plovdiv (Plovdiv Province): The Roman theatre, The restored Old Town, Festivals such as Kapana Fest and Opera Open
- Varna (Varna Province): The Gold of Varna in the Archaeological Museum, The Sea Garden park, Roman baths
- Burgas (Burgas Province): The Burgas Lakes, home to hundreds of bird species, The Sea Garden and sand sculptures, The pier at the central beach
- Ruse (Ruse Province): The Friendship Bridge to Romania, Birthplace of the Nobel Prize winner Elias Canetti, The rock-hewn churches of Ivanovo nearby
- Stara Zagora (Stara Zagora Province): The Neolithic Dwellings Museum, Roman ruins in the centre, Its ancient names, Beroe and Augusta Traiana

- Veliko Tarnovo (Veliko Tarnovo Province): Tsarevets fortress, Houses stacked up the river cliffs, The place where independence was proclaimed in 1908
- Shumen (Shumen Province): The Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria, Shumen fortress, Its beer
- Kazanlak (Stara Zagora Province): The Rose Festival every June, The Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak, The road up to the Shipka Pass
- Nesebar (Burgas Province): Medieval stone churches, Wooden houses from the 19th century, Sunny Beach resort next door
- Bansko (Blagoevgrad Province): Skiing on Todorka peak, Pirin National Park next to the town, A base for hikes in the Pirin mountains in summer
- Blagoevgrad (Blagoevgrad Province): The American University in Bulgaria, A lively student life, Trips to the Rila Monastery

A short history of Bulgaria

Bulgaria's story runs from what is often called the oldest worked gold in the world and the Thracians, through two medieval empires and almost five hundred years of Ottoman rule, to rebirth in 1878, communism, and today's place in the European Union.

4500 BC **The gold of Varna**

People of the Varna culture buried their leaders with rich gold ornaments. The graves, dated to between about 4600 and 4200 BC, were found by chance in 1972 and hold what is often called the oldest gold treasure in the world.

AD 681 **The First Bulgarian Empire**

Bulgars led by Khan Asparuh moved south of the Danube and defeated a Byzantine army. A peace treaty of 681 recognised their state, the beginning of Bulgaria.

AD 864 **Boris I adopts Christianity**

Khan Boris I was baptised and made Orthodox Christianity the religion of his state. A shared faith and, soon after, a written language helped join Bulgars and Slavs into one people.

AD 893 **Simeon's golden age**

Simeon the Great began his long reign, a golden age of Bulgarian culture. Scholars at the Preslav Literary School developed the Cyrillic alphabet in the 890s, and the empire reached its largest size.

1185

The Second Bulgarian Empire

After more than 150 years under Byzantine rule, the brothers Asen and Peter from Tarnovo led a revolt and restored the Bulgarian state, with Tarnovo as its capital.

1396

The Ottoman conquest

Tarnovo fell to the Ottomans in 1393 after a three-month siege, and in 1396, after a Christian crusade was defeated at Nicopolis, the Ottomans took Vidin, the last Bulgarian kingdom. Almost five centuries of Ottoman rule followed.

1762

Paisius writes his history

At the Zograf Monastery on Mount Athos, the monk Paisius of Hilendar finished his Slavonic-Bulgarian History. Copied by hand and passed around, it helped wake a new national pride.

1876

The April Uprising

Bulgarians rose up against Ottoman rule. The revolt was crushed, and up to 30,000 people were killed. The massacres shocked Europe and led to a new war the next year.

1878

Liberation

After the Russo-Turkish War, the Treaty of San Stefano was signed on 3 March 1878 and created a Bulgarian principality. 3 March is now Bulgaria's national holiday, Liberation Day.

1885

Unification with Eastern Rumelia

The Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia, around Plovdiv, joined the Principality of Bulgaria. Bulgaria then defended the union in a short war with Serbia.

1908

Independence declared

On 5 October 1908 Prince Ferdinand proclaimed Bulgaria a fully independent kingdom at a church in the old capital, Tarnovo, and took the title of tsar.

1943

Deportations halted

Bulgaria was allied with Nazi Germany. In March 1943 it deported 11,343 Jews from the lands it occupied in Macedonia, Thrace and Pirot, and almost all of them were murdered. Protests by the deputy speaker of parliament Dimitar Peshev, other politicians and the Orthodox Church stopped the plans to deport the Jews of Bulgaria itself, who survived the war.

1946

Bulgaria becomes a republic

After communists took power in 1944, a referendum on 8 September 1946 ended the monarchy. The young Tsar Simeon II left the country, and a one-party people's republic followed.

1989

The fall of communism

On 10 November 1989 the long-time leader Todor Zhivkov was forced to resign. In February 1990 the Communist Party gave up its monopoly on power, free elections followed that June and a democratic constitution was adopted in 1991.

2007

Joining the EU

On 1 January 2007 Bulgaria joined the European Union, together with Romania. It had joined NATO in 2004.

2026

The euro arrives

On 1 January 2026 the euro replaced the Bulgarian lev after 146 years, making Bulgaria the 21st member of the euro area. A year earlier, on 1 January 2025, it had

become a full member of the Schengen area.

What people eat in Bulgaria

Bulgarian food shares much with its Balkan neighbours, Turkey and Greece, and is rich in vegetables, yogurt and white cheese. A meal usually starts with a salad and a small glass of rakia, followed by a soup or a stew, grilled meat or a vegetable dish, and ends with something sweet. Breakfast is often a warm pastry with yogurt or boza.

Banitsa (banitsa (баница))

All of Bulgaria

A pie of thin filo pastry layered with a filling of whisked eggs, yogurt and crumbled white cheese, baked until golden. It is eaten for breakfast, hot or cold, with yogurt, ayran or boza.

Shopska salad (shopska salata (шопска салата))

All of Bulgaria, named after the Shopi people around Sofia

Bulgaria's best-known salad: chopped tomatoes, cucumbers, onion and peppers under a thick snowy layer of grated sirene, a white brined cheese. It is often eaten as a starter with a glass of rakia.

Tarator (tarator (таратор))

All of Bulgaria

A cold summer soup of yogurt thinned with water, with chopped cucumber, garlic, dill and a little sunflower or olive oil. It is served chilled on hot days.

Kyopolou (kyopolou (кьопоолу))

All of Bulgaria

A smoky spread of roasted aubergine and peppers, mashed with garlic and parsley. It is eaten with bread as part of a spread of starters.

Mish-mash (mish-mash (миш-маш))

All of Bulgaria, a summer favourite

Peppers, tomatoes and onions stewed in oil, then mixed with eggs and crumbled white cheese until creamy, and finished with fresh parsley.

Кебапче (kebapche (кебапче))

All of Bulgaria

A long, sausage-shaped stick of minced pork and beef seasoned with cumin, black pepper and salt, cooked on the grill. It is often served with chips covered in grated white cheese, lyutenitsa and a cold beer.

Sarmi (sarmi (сарми))

All of Bulgaria

Cabbage leaves or vine leaves rolled around a filling of rice and minced meat and simmered slowly. Cabbage sarmi are usually a winter dish and vine leaf sarmi a spring and summer one.

Lyutenitsa (lyutenitsa (лютеница))

All of Bulgaria

A thick red relish of roasted peppers and tomatoes, often with carrots and garlic. It is spread on bread, sometimes topped with white cheese, and served with grilled meat.

Lukanka (lukanka (луканка))

Central Bulgaria, especially Panagyurishte, Karlovo and Smyadovo

A semi-dried salami of pork, veal, black pepper and cumin, dried for 40 to 50 days and pressed flat as it dries. It is sliced thin and served cold as a starter.

Bulgarian yogurt (kiselo mlyako (кисело мляко))

All of Bulgaria

Thick, tangy yogurt, whose Bulgarian name means 'sour milk'. It is eaten on its own, poured over pastries, stirred into soups and

saucers, and made into the cold drink ayran.

Sirene (sirene (сирене))

All of Bulgaria

A white brined cheese, similar to feta, made from cow's, sheep's, goat's or buffalo milk. It is crumbled into salads and pastries or served in slices with tomatoes.

Mekitsi (mekitsi (мекици))

All of Bulgaria

Flat rounds of soft dough made with yogurt, fried until puffed and golden. They are a breakfast treat, served with jam, honey, white cheese or icing sugar.

Boza (boza (боза))

All of Bulgaria, and across the Balkans and Turkey

A thick, slightly sweet and sour drink made by fermenting grains. It has very little alcohol, about 1%, and is a classic partner for banitsa at breakfast.

Rakia (rakiya (ракия))

All of Bulgaria

A strong fruit brandy, most often made from grapes (grozdova) or plums, and also from apricots. It is sipped slowly from a small glass with the salad at the start of a meal. Anyone who does not drink alcohol can politely say no.

Kozunak (kozunak (козунак))

All of Bulgaria, above all at Easter

A sweet, soft yeast bread enriched with butter, milk and eggs, often with raisins and citrus peel. It is baked above all for Orthodox Easter.

At the table

- When glasses are raised, people say 'Nazdrave!' (to your health).
- Salad and a small glass of rakia come first, and the main course follows later, so do not expect everything at once.
- Holidays have their own foods: vegetarian sarmi and stuffed peppers on Christmas Eve, fish on St. Nicholas' Day (6 December) and roast lamb on St. George's Day (6 May).
- At New Year, look out for a lucky charm hidden in your piece of banitsa, and bite carefully.
- Service is not added to the bill in restaurants. A tip of 5 to 10% is welcome if you were happy.

Banitsa

A pie of thin filo pastry layered with a filling of whisked eggs, yogurt and crumbled white cheese, baked until golden. It is eaten for breakfast, hot or cold, with yogurt, ayran or boza.

Ingredients

- 400 g filo pastry sheets
- 4 eggs
- 250 g plain yogurt
- 300 g sirene or feta cheese, crumbled
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 100 g butter, melted, or 100 ml sunflower oil

Method

1. Heat the oven to 200°C and brush a round or square baking dish with butter.
2. Stir the baking soda into the yogurt, then whisk in the eggs and the crumbled cheese.
3. Lay 2 sheets of filo in the dish, brush with butter and spread a few spoonfuls of filling on top. Repeat, loosely crumpling the sheets if you like, until everything is used, ending with a sheet of filo.
4. Brush the top with the rest of the butter and bake for 35 to 40 minutes, until deep golden and set in the middle.
5. Rest for 10 minutes, then cut into pieces. Serve warm with a glass of yogurt or ayran.

Shopska salad

Bulgaria's best-known salad: chopped tomatoes, cucumbers, onion and peppers under a thick snowy layer of grated sirene, a white brined cheese. It is often eaten as a starter with a glass of rakia.

Ingredients

- 4 ripe tomatoes
- 1 large cucumber
- 2 green or red peppers, raw or roasted and peeled
- 1 small onion or 3 spring onions
- 200 g sirene or feta cheese
- 3 tablespoons sunflower oil, a little red wine vinegar, salt and chopped parsley

Method

1. Dice the tomatoes, cucumber and peppers and slice the onion finely.
2. Put the vegetables in a bowl, season with salt and dress with the oil and a few drops of vinegar.
3. Grate or finely crumble the cheese over the top so that it covers the salad completely.
4. Scatter with parsley and serve at once, cold.

Tarator

A cold summer soup of yogurt thinned with water, with chopped cucumber, garlic, dill and a little sunflower or olive oil. It is served chilled on hot days.

Ingredients

- 500 g plain yogurt
- About 300 ml cold water
- 1 large cucumber, finely diced or grated
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- A small bunch of dill, chopped
- 2 tablespoons sunflower or olive oil and salt

Method

1. Whisk the yogurt until smooth, then stir in the cold water until it is as thin as you like.
2. Add the cucumber, garlic, dill and oil and season with salt.
3. Chill for at least 30 minutes and serve very cold, with a few ice cubes on hot days.

Kyopolou

A smoky spread of roasted aubergine and peppers, mashed with garlic and parsley. It is eaten with bread as part of a spread of starters.

Ingredients

- 2 large aubergines
- 2 red peppers
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- A handful of chopped parsley
- 3 tablespoons sunflower oil and 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- Salt and black pepper

Method

1. Roast the whole aubergines and peppers in a very hot oven at 220°C, or over a flame, turning them, until the skins are black and the insides soft, about 40 minutes.
2. Put the peppers in a covered bowl for 10 minutes, then peel them and remove the seeds. Peel the aubergines.
3. Chop the flesh finely or mash it with a fork. Do not use a blender: the spread should stay a little chunky.
4. Stir in the garlic, parsley, oil and vinegar, season with salt and pepper, and serve cool with bread.

Mish-mash

Peppers, tomatoes and onions stewed in oil, then mixed with eggs and crumbled white cheese until creamy, and finished with fresh parsley.

Ingredients

- 4 red or green peppers, raw or roasted and peeled, chopped
- 3 ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 4 eggs
- 200 g sirene or feta cheese, crumbled
- 3 tablespoons sunflower oil, a handful of chopped parsley and salt

Method

1. Warm the oil in a wide pan and cook the onion and peppers gently for 10 minutes, until soft.
2. Add the tomatoes and cook for another 10 minutes, until most of the juice has cooked away.
3. Beat the eggs with the cheese, pour them into the pan and stir gently over low heat until the eggs are fully set. Anyone who is pregnant, elderly or unwell should make sure the eggs are cooked through.
4. Taste for salt (the cheese is already salty), scatter with parsley and serve hot with bread.

Useful phrases

Dobro utro (Добро утро)

DOH-broh OO-troh · Good morning

Dobar den (Добър ден)

DOH-bur DEHN · Good day, hello

Dobar vecher (Добър вечер)

DOH-bur VEH-chehr · Good evening

Leka nosht (Лека нощ)

LEH-kah NOSHT · Good night

Zdraveyte (Здравейте)

zdrah-VAY-teh · Hello (polite)

Dovizhdane (Довиждане)

doh-VEEZH-dah-neh · Goodbye

Kak ste? (Как сте?)

KAHK steh · How are you? (polite)

Dobre, blagodarya (Добре, благодаря)

doh-BREH, blah-goh-dah-RYAH · Fine, thank you

Priyatno mi e da se zaroznaem (Приятно ми е да се запознаем)

pree-YAHT-noh mee eh dah seh zah-poz-NAH-ehm · Nice to meet you

Izvinete (Извинете)

eez-vee-NEH-teh · Excuse me

Sazhalyavam (Съжалявам)

suh-zhah-LYAH-vahm · I'm sorry

Govorite li angliyski? (Говорите ли английски?)

goh-VOH-ree-teh lee ahn-GLEEEY-skee · Do you speak English? (polite)

Ne razbiram (Не разбирам)

neh rahz-BEE-rahm · I don't understand

Kolko e tova? (Колко е това?)

KOHL-koh eh toh-VAH · How much is this?

Kade e toaletnata? (Къде е тоалетната?)

kuh-DEH eh toh-ah-LEHT-nah-tah · Where is the toilet?

Nazdrave! (Наздраве!)

nahz-DRAH-veh · Cheers! To your health!

Beshe vkusno (Беше вкусно)

BEH-sheh VKOOS-noh · It was delicious

Smetkata, molya (Сметката, моля)

SMEHT-kah-tah, MOH-lyah · The bill, please

Pomosht! (Помощ!)

POH-mosht · Help!

Things you might not know

1. The Cyrillic alphabet was developed in the 890s at the Preslav Literary School in the First Bulgarian Empire, by followers of the brothers Cyril and Methodius. When Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, Cyrillic became the EU's third official alphabet.
2. Because of Bulgaria, the newer euro banknotes spell the word euro in three alphabets: Latin (EURO), Greek (ΕΥΡΩ) and Cyrillic (ЕВРО).
3. Bulgaria's euro coins show the Madara Rider and two saints, John of Rila and Paisius of Hilendar.
4. Traditionally, Bulgarians shake their heads from side to side to say yes and nod to say no. If an answer confuses you, ask again in words.
5. In 1905, in a laboratory in Geneva, the young Bulgarian doctor Stamen Grigorov discovered the bacterium behind yogurt. It is now called *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*.
6. The Rose Valley around Kazanlak has grown roses for centuries, and Bulgaria is one of the world's leading producers of rose oil for perfume. Kazanlak has held a Rose Festival since 1903, on the first weekend of June.
7. The gold found in 1972 in a prehistoric cemetery at Varna, from about 4600 to 4200 BC, is often called the oldest gold treasure in the world. It was found by chance by an excavator operator.

8. On 1 March, Baba Marta (Grandma March) Day, Bulgarians give each other martenitsi, little red and white tassels or dolls, and wear them until they see a stork, a swallow or a tree in blossom.
9. In Nestinarstvo, a fire-walking ritual kept up in a few villages in the south-east, dancers holding icons walk barefoot over glowing embers. It is on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage.
10. Around New Year and before Lent, kukeri, men in huge animal masks and costumes with heavy bells on their belts, dance through villages to scare away evil spirits.
11. The Bulgarian State Television Female Vocal Choir, known from the album *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares*, won a Grammy Award in 1990 for its haunting folk singing.
12. The artist Christo, famous for wrapping the Reichstag in Berlin in 1995 with his wife Jeanne-Claude, was born in Bulgaria in 1935.
13. John Vincent Atanasoff, credited with inventing the first electronic digital computer in the 1930s in the United States, was the son of a Bulgarian immigrant.
14. The writer Elias Canetti, born in the Danube city of Ruse in 1905, won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1981.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Bulgaria, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Banitsa or Shopska salad? What is a dish you remember from a trip?

- Bulgaria becomes a republic (1946). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- The fall of communism (1989). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The Rila Monastery, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Bulgaria, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Bulgaria?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. Which city, close to the old capitals Pliska and Preslav, is home to the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria?

- A) Kazanlak
- B) Burgas
- C) Shumen
- D) Blagoevgrad

2. In which year did a peace treaty with the Byzantine Empire recognise the First Bulgarian Empire?

- A) 864
- B) 1396
- C) 681
- D) 1185

3. Bulgaria's monarchy was ended by a referendum in 1946.

- A) True
- B) False

4. What is the highest mountain in Bulgaria?

- A) Triglav
- B) Musala
- C) Vihren
- D) Mount Olympus

5. What is the capital of Bulgaria?

- A) Plovdiv
- B) Sofia
- C) Varna
- D) Veliko Tarnovo

6. Bulgaria shares a land border with Hungary.

- A) True
- B) False

7. What does 'nalyavo' mean?

- A) Tomorrow
- B) To the left
- C) Straight on
- D) To the right

8. Who discovered the bacterium behind yogurt in 1905?

- A) Christo
- B) Stamen Grigorov
- C) Elias Canetti
- D) John Atanasoff

9. The newer euro banknotes also spell the word euro in Cyrillic letters.

- A) True
- B) False

10. Boyana Church in Sofia is world famous for its wall paintings from which year?

- A) 1259
- B) 1878
- C) 1762

D) 1018

11. Which bacterium used to make yogurt is named after Bulgaria?

- A) *Streptococcus thermophilus*
- B) *Lactococcus lactis*
- C) *Bifidobacterium longum*
- D) *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*

12. In Bulgarian, 'da' means no.

- A) True
- B) False

Quiz answers

1. C) Shumen

Shumen, in the north-east. The huge Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria was built on the plateau above the city in 1981.

2. C) 681

681. After Khan Asparuh's Bulgars defeated a Byzantine army, a treaty of 681 recognised their state, the beginning of Bulgaria.

3. True

True. A referendum on 8 September 1946 ended the monarchy, and the young Tsar Simeon II had to leave the country.

4. B) Musala

Musala, 2,925 m in the Rila mountains, is the highest peak in Bulgaria and in the whole Balkan Peninsula. Vihren in the Pirin mountains is Bulgaria's second highest.

5. B) Sofia

Sofia is the capital and largest city, at the foot of Mount Vitosha in the west of the country. Veliko Tarnovo was the capital of the medieval Second Bulgarian Empire.

6. False

False. Bulgaria borders Romania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Greece and Turkey, with the Black Sea to the east. Romania and Serbia lie between Bulgaria and Hungary.

7. B) To the left

Nalyavo (наляво) means to the left. To the right is nadyasno, and tomorrow is utre.

8. B) Stamen Grigorov

Stamen Grigorov discovered it in a laboratory in Geneva in 1905. The bacterium is now called *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*.

9. True

True. Because Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, the newer euro notes show EURO in Latin, ΕΥΡΩ in Greek and ЕВРО in Cyrillic.

10. A) 1259

1259. The church owes its fame mainly to its lifelike frescoes of that year, among them the portraits of its patrons Kaloyan and Desislava.

11. D) *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*

Lactobacillus bulgaricus, discovered by the Bulgarian Stamen Grigorov in 1905. *Streptococcus thermophilus* is the other main yogurt bacterium, but its name has nothing to do with Bulgaria.

12. False

False. 'Da' means yes and 'ne' means no, even though a Bulgarian may shake the head while saying 'da'.

Bulgaria visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next steps

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

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<https://worldstroll.com/countries/bulgaria>