

Part I: Famous Bulgarian traditions connected to some types of tourism

Our country is full of traditions and culture from decades ago. From good food, folklore music, traditional costumes to some very interesting traditions and I'm going to tell you about some of them.

In Bulgaria we have many traditional holidays. One of them is on the 1st of March where we make the famous Martenitsi and gift them to each other for happiness and health.

Another tradition that we are known for is the walking on hot coals or so called Nestinarstvo. It is an ancient tradition and it is performed at the night of St. Konstantin and Elena. In some villages the ritual continues two days.

We are also known for our production of sour cream and also our oil rose gardens. The good traditional food that is made in the small villages in our country is all natural and grown out. Unfortunately we can't say the same about the big cities here.

We have many more interesting traditions and there is a lot more to learn and see in our beautiful country. Breathtaking landscapes, more amazing food and a very long and interesting history. Many visitors come to Bulgaria and they never leave disappointed.

Part II: Christian monuments in north-western Bulgaria

Monastery 'saints Cyril ad Methodii'

It is located nearby Vratsa. It is supposed that this monastery is arising in XIII century. There you can find a room, go on a mountain picnic or ride a horse.

Cherepish Monastery

Also located nearby Vratsa. According to a legend, the name of the monastery came from one war, in which Bulgaria lost. There had been so many skulls, so natives call the place Cherepish (from Bulgarian word for skull) and the monastery Cherepish. Cherepish monastery is famous for its golden iconostasis.

Troyan monastery

Nearby Troyan is located Troyan monastery. It is one of the Bulgarian monuments and third by size in Bulgaria. There was opened a school in the middle of XVIII century. The mural paintings were made by Bulgarian painter Zachary Zograf. The monastery also has a hotel part.

The miraculous icon

You can find it in the main monastery church in the Troyan monastery. It is a copy of another famous Bulgarian icon.

Monastery 'St. George'

Monastery 'St. George' is located nearby Teteven. It is built on a rock terrace. According to a legend, the monastery was founded in the middle of XIII century by prince of Kiev. Interesting thing about it is the two stamps on which the monastery is named Kiev.

Rock churches and monasteries along the river Rusenski Lom

South of Ruse, along the river Rusenski Lom, amazing monasteries and churches are built in the rocks.

Ivanovski rock churches

The place in this region is called 'P'ismata'. It is supposed that the churches are drawn with the help of Bulgarian king Ivan Alexander. These mural paintings are considered for the best achievements of Turnovo` artistic school in the Middle ages.

Basarabov`s monasteries 'St. Dimitar Basarabovski'

Nearby Basarabovo is located one of the most interesting monasteries, excavated in the rocks. It is supposed that the monasteries are founded in the beginning of XII century, but the first written information is from XV century.

Part III: Religious buildings and their contribution to Bulgarian tourism

We just can't skip mentioning the beauty of the religious buildings and what's left of them that are located in the Northeastern part of Bulgaria. And what more appropriate to mention than the first ever Bulgarian Christian capital. The old town's name is Pliska and it's one of the most beautiful religious places in the country to visit. You can see the popular Great Basilica of Pliska on the pictures on the left.

The Basilica was actually the first and biggest monastery complex in the Bulgarian empire. It includes the cathedral, an archbishop's palace and a monastery.

It was constructed on the orders of the Bulgarian knyaz Boris the first after his baptism in 864 and the resultant Christianization of Bulgaria.

Completed around 875, the Basilica was 102.5 meters long and 30 meters wide.

On the other two pictures you can see the Round Church, or also known as the Golden Church. It's particularly reserved for a building created in the early 10th century.

Considered to be one of the most impressive examples of medieval Bulgarian architecture, the Round Church takes its name from the distinctive shape of one of its three sections, the cella, which is a rotunda that serves as a place of liturgy. The church's design also includes a wide atrium and a rectangular entrance area, or narthex, marked by two circular turrets.

The Round Church's rich interior decoration, which makes ample use of mosaics, ceramics and marble details, distinguishes it from other churches in Preslav. Its interior features hundreds of drawings depicting ships, fauna, and Christian figures. Medieval inscriptions on the walls range from names of saints in Byzantine Greek to separate letters and short texts in the Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets.

Church of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki, Veliko Tarnovo is also a religious tourist destination that's worth mentioning.

It's located in Northern Bulgaria and it's close to Veliko Tarnovo, a town I'll tell you more about in a minute.

According to the account of Niketas Choniates, the church was the place where the anti-Byzantine Uprising of Asen and Peter was proclaimed in 1185; it was this uprising that led to the reestablishment of the Bulgarian Empire and the proclamation of Tarnovo for its capital. It is theorized that it was a royal church in the early years of the empire and it received donations from members of the Asen dynasty. According to the legend, the nobles (*bolyari*) Asen and Peter announced that the patron of Thessaloniki, the warrior saint Demetrius, would desert his city and come to Tarnovo to aid the Bulgarian rebels. The brothers built and inaugurated a church in his honour.

The Church of St Demetrius was destroyed in the second half of the 13th century, probably due to an earthquake, but was reconstructed in the 1350s. A single-apse church was built nearby in the 1360s and existed until the 17th century; it used materials from the destroyed Church of St Demetrius. The monastery yard and the destroyed buildings became a predominantly Christian necropolis during the Ottoman rule of Bulgaria. During the Bulgarian National Revival, the church was associated with the leatherworkers' guild.

Another quite fascinating church in the area is the Holy Forty Martyrs Church.

It contains some of the Bulgarian Empire's most significant historical records, including Omurtag's Column, Asen's Column and the Border Column from Rodostro from the rule of Khan Krum. The columns of Khan Omurtag and Khan Krum are written in the Greek language. The inscription of the column of Krum "Fortress of Rodostro" has been turned upside down. The inscription of Omurtag is about the building of a new glorious palace on the Danube River, but its location is unknown. The second part of the inscription is a legacy for following generations to remember the deeds of Omurtag. These columns were placed in the church by Ivan Asen II as a tribute to his mighty ancestors.

And now a bit about the beautiful town full of destinations appropriate for religious tourism:

Veliko Tarnovo, often referred as the "City of the Tsars", is located on the Yantra River and is famously known as the historical capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire, attracting many tourists with its unique architecture. The old part of the town is situated on three hills, Tsarevets, Trapezitsa, and Sveta Gora, rising amidst the meanders of the Yantra. On Tsarevets are the palaces of the Bulgarian emperors and the Patriarchate, the Patriarchal Cathedral, and also a number of administrative and residential edifices surrounded by thick walls.

Trapezitsa is known for its many churches and as the former main residence of the nobility. During the Middle ages Veliko Tarnovo, the town was among the main European centres of culture and gave its name to the architecture of the Tarnovo Artistic School, painting of the Tarnovo Artistic School, and to literature. Veliko Tarnovo is an important administrative, economic, educational, and cultural centre of Northern Bulgaria.

Notable churches and monasteries around the town worth mentioning are the Transfiguration Monastery, the Kilifarevo Monastery, the Dryanovo Monastery and the Sokol Monastery, but that one is closer to

the town named Gabrovo, which is located in central Bulgaria, and it's also a very beautiful place appropriate for religious tourism.