Hiking in Bulgaria
Hikes in the Pirin and Rila Mountains

June 17-25, 2019
Plan your arrival in Sofia for June 16
Plan your departure from Sofia for June 26

Come to the edge of Europe and discover remarkable Bulgaria! The trails of the Rila and Pirin National Parks will take you into the heart of some of the wildest mountain scenery left on the continent. Follow paths through streamside meadows and groves of pine, fir and spruce. Ascend to gem-like lakes cupped in mountain basins, and revel in the joy of a ridgetop walk where you can let the mountain breezes sweep your cares away. Deep in a forested valley, contemplate the frescoes that grace the walls and ceilings of the Rila Monastery, a testimony to the pride and faith of the Bulgarian people. Savor the pleasure of an overnight stay in a traditional village kâshta (inn) in a Bulgarian mountain village. In a Bulgarian mehana (tavern), fine food, drink, and music cap off your adventure-filled days. Introduce yourself to Bulgaria; a warm welcome awaits you!

Back in 2002, we launched our first hiking trip to the mountains of Bulgaria making Mountain Hiking Holidays one of the very first U.S. based companies to do so. John and Amy Osaki, the founders of Mountain Hiking Holidays, fell in love with the landscapes, food and people of this country and in the years since they helped to fund the construction of a five-bedroom inn in the mountain village of Kovachevitsa (an architectural reserve) in southern Bulgaria’s Rhodope Mountains. The inn was constructed in the traditional manner but features modern conveniences. You’ll have a chance to experience it (along with special musical performances) on the 2019 Bulgaria trip! We hope that you’ll be able to join us!

Day 1
Overnight in Govedartsi
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

From central Sofia, the bulk of Mount Vitosha (whose name means “twin peaks”) dominates the view to the city’s south. The sub-alpine zone of Mount Vitosha is known for its “stone runs” (linear, ribbon-like accumulations of boulders), a geologic feature whose finest representations can be found on Vitosha and in the Falkland Islands. Travel up the northern flanks of Mount Vitosha to Goli Vrh from where you’ll set off on your choice of high country hikes. Hike to the area known as Stenata (“the wall”), or continue further to the summit of the mountain at the peak of Cherni Vrh (“Black Peak”). At the conclusion of the hikes, travel by vehicle to the Rila Mountains and the village of Govedartsi, your base for three nights.

Day 2
Overnight in Govedartsi
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Enjoy a choice of hikes in the Rila Mountains from your base in Govedartsi. A three-mile long cable car line lifts you 3,400 vertical feet into the Rila Mountains from its lower station in nearby Borovets. From the cable car’s upper station at Yastrebets Chalet (7,710 feet) enjoy a panorama of Rila’s high peaks. Looking south, you’ll gaze upon the summits of Deno, Irechek, Malka Musala, Musala, and Aleko. A gentle walk through alpine meadows and groves of stunted mugo pines brings you to the still waters of the Musala Lakes. Continue further along a well-built trail to the Aleko Lakes tucked away in a higher basin. A more challenging hiking option continues up the ridge past Ledenoto Ezero (“Icy Lake”) eventually gaining the summit of Musala at 9,597 feet, the highest point in Bulgaria and the entire Balkan Peninsula! From the summit, sweeping views extend to Mount Vitosha to the north and the Pirin Range to the south.
Day 3
Overnight in Govedartsi
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Enjoy your choice of hikes in the Rila Seven Lakes Basin (Tsirkus Sedemte Rilski Ezera), one of the most splendid high country areas in Bulgaria. Starting from the Pionerska Chalet, hike through woods and meadows to reach the lip of the basin at the Rila Lake Chalet. From here, ascend a grassy, open ridge to the sweeping, “Sound of Music-style” meadow called Suhija Rid. Below you lies the lake-spangled Seven Lakes Cirque carpeted by flower-filled meadows. All around you rise the snow-flecked ramparts of the Rila Mountains. A gentle walk brings you to the cobalt-blue waters of **Bubreka Ezero** (“Kidney Lake”). From this point, energetic hikers can ascend further to reach **Okoto Ezero** (“Eye Lake”), and **Sûlçata Ezero** (“Teardrop Lake”), time and weather permitting. Otherwise, descend into the main part of the basin passing beautiful **Bliznaka Ezero** (“Twin Lake”), **Trilistnika Ezero** (“Three Leaf Lake”), and **Ribno Ezero** (“Fish Lake”). Loop back to the Rila Lake Chalet and continue through meadows and woods to return to the trailhead.

Day 4
Overnight in Bansko
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Travel to the Rila Monastery nestled in a deep valley on the western flanks of the Rila Mountains. Portions of the monastery, which was inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1983, date to the 14th century though a large portion of the monastery was reconstructed in the 19th century after a devastating fire. The monastery’s five-domed Sveta Borgoroditsa church dates from 1834 and is dedicated to the Birth of the Virgin; the walls and domed ceilings of its external gallery are graced with brilliant frescoes that will take your breath away! You can wander through the impressive 19th century monastery kitchen and beneath the multi-storied, arcaded verandahs that ring the interior of the monastery compound. After lunch, hike to the chapel of St. John of Rila set in lush, deciduous woods on the slopes of the valley. From the chapel, the path descends easily through flowering meadows and woodlands passing the chapel of St. Luke en route. After the hike, depart for the town of Bansko at the foot of the Pirin Mountains. Tonight, a splendid Bulgarian meal awaits at a traditional **mehana** (“tavern”).

Day 5
Overnight in Bansko
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Start your exploration of the Pirin Mountains with a choice of hikes in the Bunderitsa Valley. Green meadows accented with clumps of pine and picturesque boulders make for joyous walking at the start of the day. After about an hour of walking, arrive at the shores of the **Ribno Ezero** (“Fish Lake”), the largest lake in the valley nestled against the headwall of the lower Bunderishki Cirque. Proceed further into the mountains heading for the set of lakes that adorns the floor of the upper valley. Perhaps the most beautiful of these, **Dûlgo Ezero** (“Long Lake”), is edged by granite boulders and clumps of mugo pine. Its cobalt waters reflect the grandeur of surrounding peaks including the brilliant limestone summit of Vichren, highest in the Pirin. For a longer hike, continue to the saddle known as Todorina Porta for far-ranging Pirin vistas before retracing your steps to the trailhead.

Day 6
Overnight in Bansko
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Today you have the option of hiking to the top of the striking pyramidal limestone peak of Vihren, the highest summit in the Pirin Mountains and second highest in Bulgaria. The ascent of Vihren is strenuous, steep in portions and often rocky, but it is not technically difficult. If you take your time and pace yourself, you may find yourself atop the fourth highest summit on the Balkan Peninsula. Perhaps you’ll agree that the views from this lofty summit are more than adequate compensation for the effort! For a less challenging but no less beautiful option, you can enjoy the hike to meadow-ringed Muratovo Ezero (“Pine Lake”) whose still alpine waters reflect the peaks of the upper Bunderistas Valley.
Day 7
Overnight in Bansko
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included
Travel by vehicle from Bansko to the Gotse Delchev Chalet in the mountains south of the village of Dobrinishte. From there, a chairlift lifts you through conifer-clad Pirin foothills to the Bezbozhko Ezero Chalet set on the shores of a lovely mountain tarn of the same name. On a serene summer day, the beauty of this little lake reflecting the surrounding mountain ridges belies its name, Bezbozhko Ezero, meaning “without God,” or “godforsaken.” Magnificent mountain vistas accompany you on the walk from Bezbozhko Chalet to the Popovo Ezero (“Priest Lake”), one of the most beautiful of Pirin high country lakes whose crystalline waters sparkle in a splendid mountain setting. If you desire, continue up the grassy valley to the south of the lake and ascend steadily to the pass of Zhelezni vrata (“Iron Gate”). From the pass wonderful views extend over the Popovo Cirque (Popovoezeren Tsirkus) to the north while to the south, the small mountain tarn of Argirovo Ezero (“Argir’s Lake”) shimmers below you.

Day 8
Overnight in Kovachevitsa
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included
From Bansko, travel by vehicle following the course of the Mesta River which separates the Pirin Mountains from the Rhodope Mountains. A winding road leads to a ridge top trailhead near the village of Osikovo. From here, the view of the Pirin Mountains stretching across the horizon to the west is delightful. A path leads through mountain farm fields and meadows before dropping gradually into the gorge of the Kanina River. Cross the river on a footbridge and ascend to the well-preserved mountain village of Kovachevitsa (elevation 3,500 feet). Kovachevitsa village is filled with fine examples of National Revival architecture and has been named an architectural and historical reserve by the Bulgarian government. Enjoy an overnight stay at a traditional inn. Before dinner, wander through the streets of the village and soak up the ambiance of this magical place. A special music performance for our group has been arranged for this evening.

Day 9
Overnight in Sofia
Breakfast, lunch and dinner included
Enjoy a quiet, leisurely morning in Kovachevitsa before beginning the journey by vehicle back to Sofia. En route to Sofia, enjoy a short walk in the Gradishteto Landscape Park. Paths lead to curiously shaped rock formations in an area believed by some to be an ancient Thracian sacred site. After the visit, continue by vehicle to Sofia. This evening, enjoy traditional Bulgarian cuisine at a farewell dinner! Tomorrow, your breakfast is also included as is your transfer to Sofia airport for your departing flight.

Other Details about this Trip
Dates: June 17-25, 2019
Price: $4,495
Single room for entire trip: $375
Lodging: 10 nights in 4 or 3 star hotels and inns. Note: Your hotel in Sofia on the evening of June 16 is included.
Meals: 10 breakfasts, 9 lunches, 9 dinners included
Meeting Point: Hotel in Sofia, Bulgaria (airport code SOF) after breakfast on the morning of June 17. Please plan your arrival in Sofia for June 16 at the latest. There are no non-stop flights to Sofia from the U.S. but connections to Bulgaria’s capital city are available from most major gateways in Europe. If you want to do some sightseeing in Sofia, we suggest planning your arrival for June 15 so you have all of June 16 to explore Sofia. We can assist with packaging a guided sightseeing tour of Sofia’s highlights, if you desire. Just let us know! Please note that your lodging in Sofia on the evening of June 16 is included in the price of the trip.
Trip Ends: Hotel in Sofia, Bulgaria on the evening of June 25. Please plan your departure from Sofia for June 26 at the earliest. Transfers from the Sofia hotel where you’ll spend the evening of June 25 to the airport on June 26 are included in the trip price.