

Monastery Frescoes by Day, a Black Sea Sunset by Night — A 7-Day Bulgaria Itinerary

Seven days across Bulgaria's capital, mountains, and coast — Sofia's mix of Roman ruins and Orthodox gold domes, a day trip up into the Rila mountains to one of Orthodox Christianity's most important monasteries, Plovdiv's 2,000-year-old amphitheater still hosting concerts, the hilltop fortress of Bulgaria's medieval capital, and a last stretch on the Black Sea's oldest continuously inhabited town.

DURATION

7 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

May – June & September

warm, dry shoulder-season weeks before and after the July–August peak (Sofia highs 75–82°F / 24–28°C; coast a few degrees warmer)

FROM

\$690 USD / person

for 2 people, excluding international flights

Day 1

Arrive in Sofia — Roman Ruins & Gold Domes

Land in Bulgaria's capital and spend the afternoon between Roman remains and one of the largest Orthodox cathedrals in the Balkans.

Airport Transfer — Sofia Airport (SOF) to City Center

~20–25 minutes · 15–20 BGN / ~\$9–\$11 USD by taxi

Sofia Airport sits about 10 kilometers east of the center — metro Line 1 runs directly downtown for under \$1, or a metered yellow OK Supertrans taxi from the official rank costs a bit more but drops you at the door.

Check-In: Sense Hotel Sofia

From \$155 USD / night, for 2 people

A five-star boutique hotel on Tsar Osvoboditel Boulevard with a rooftop restaurant looking straight across at Alexander Nevsky Cathedral — about as central as Sofia lodging gets.

Sense Hotel Sofia • sensehotel.bg

Alexander Nevsky Cathedral

~45 minutes · free entry (crypt museum ~10 BGN / ~\$5.50 USD)

A neo-Byzantine cathedral built at the turn of the 20th century to honor Russian soldiers who died freeing Bulgaria from Ottoman rule — its gold-plated domes are Sofia's defining skyline landmark.

Free Sofia Walking Tour

~2 hours · free (tip-based)

A guided loop past the Rotunda of St. George's Roman ruins, the Sveta Nedelya Church, and the Largo's

Dinner Back in Sofia

~1.5 hours · \$12–\$22 USD / person

A quiet last night in the capital — grilled kebapche and a glass of Melnik red at one of the mehanas around Slaveykov Square before tomorrow's train to Plovdiv.

Day 3

Sofia to Plovdiv — a Roman Amphitheater Still in Use

A short train ride east to Bulgaria's second city, where a 2nd-century Roman theater still hosts concerts under the open sky.

Train: Sofia to Plovdiv

~2–2.5 hours · 15–22 BGN / ~\$8–\$12 USD

BDZ regional and express trains run several times a day from Sofia Central Station directly into Plovdiv, arriving a short walk from the Old Town.

Check-In: Hotel Hebros

From \$103 USD / night, for 2 people

A restored 19th-century National Revival house inside Plovdiv's Old Town, with a courtyard restaurant and rooms furnished with antiques — a five-minute walk from the Roman Theatre.

Hotel Hebros • hotelhebros.com

Ancient Theatre of Philippopolis

~1 hour · entry 5 BGN / ~\$2.75 USD

A 2nd-century Roman theater carved into the saddle between two of Plovdiv's seven hills, seating 7,000 in its day and still hosting opera and concerts — the best-preserved Roman theater in the Balkans.

Dinner in Kapana Creative District

~1.5 hours · \$12–\$20 USD / person

"The Trap" is Plovdiv's grid of narrow lanes turned into a craft-beer-and-bistro district — grab a table on a pedestrian street for Bulgarian tapas and local craft beer.

Day 4

Plovdiv Old Town & Bachkovo Monastery

A morning among Plovdiv's Ottoman-era mansions, then an afternoon at Bulgaria's second-largest monastery in the Rhodope foothills.

Plovdiv Old Town on Foot

~2 hours · free to walk; house-museums 5–10 BGN / ~\$3–\$5.50 USD

Cobbled lanes climb past colorful National Revival mansions with overhanging upper floors — the Ethnographic Museum and the Roman Stadium's exposed seating at the north end of the pedestrian street are the two stops worth the detour.

Half-Day Trip: Bachkovo Monastery

~4 hours round-trip · monastery free; taxi/driver from \$45

Bulgaria's second-largest monastery, founded in 1083 in a river gorge 30 kilometers south of Plovdiv, with an ossuary chapel and frescoes that draw far fewer crowds than Rila.

Dinner: Pavaj Restaurant

~1.5 hours · \$15–\$25 USD / person

A modern Bulgarian kitchen tucked into a courtyard just off the Old Town's main pedestrian street, known for updated takes on grandmother-style regional dishes.

Pavaj Restaurant • pavajplovdiv.com

Day 5

Into the Old Capital — Veliko Tarnovo & Tsarevets Fortress

A drive northeast to Bulgaria's medieval capital, stacked in tiers above a bend in the Yantra River.

Drive: Plovdiv to Veliko Tarnovo

~3 hours, 200 km · rental car or private transfer from \$95

The road crosses the Rose Valley and the Balkan range before dropping into the gorge where Veliko Tarnovo's houses stack up the hillside above the Yantra River.

Check-In: Meridian Hotel Bolyarski

From \$95 USD / night, for 2 people

A four-star hotel a short walk from the old town, with a rooftop restaurant looking directly across the gorge at the floodlit walls of Tsarevets Fortress.

Meridian Hotel Bolyarski • hotelbolyarski.com

Tsarevets Fortress

~2 hours • entry 6 BGN / ~\$3.50 USD

The fortified hilltop seat of Bulgaria's Second Empire tsars and patriarchs, ringed by rebuilt walls and towers over the Yantra's horseshoe bend — the Patriarchal Cathedral at its summit has striking modern frescoes.

Optional: Tsarevets Sound and Light Show

seasonal evenings, check schedule • free on public holidays, private showings by request

Laser projections and music play across the fortress walls after dark on select evenings — confirm the current schedule with the fortress box office before planning your night around it.

Dinner: Mehana Hadji Nikoli

~1.5 hours • \$14–\$24 USD / person

A restored 19th-century inn built by master builder Kolyo Ficheto, now a traditional mehana serving Bulgarian classics under vaulted stone ceilings in the old town.

Hadji Nikoli Han • hadjinikoli.com

Day 6

To the Coast — Nessebar's UNESCO Old Town

A drive east to the Black Sea and one of Europe's oldest continuously inhabited towns, a tiny peninsula covered in medieval churches.

Drive: Veliko Tarnovo to Nessebar

~3 hours, 220 km • rental car or private transfer from \$110

The road drops out of the Balkan foothills toward Burgas before following the coast north to the narrow causeway linking Nessebar's old town to the mainland.

Check-In: Nessebar Beach Hotel

From \$78 USD / night, for 2 people

A beachfront hotel on the Sunny Beach side of the causeway, an easy walk from Nessebar's old town, with direct sand access and sea-view rooms.

Nessebar Beach Hotel • nessebarbeachhotel.com

Nessebar Old Town Walking Tour

~2 hours · free to walk; individual church entries 2–4 BGN / ~\$1–\$2 USD

A UNESCO World Heritage peninsula barely a kilometer across, packed with more than 40 medieval churches built in the distinctive banded stone-and-brick Bulgarian style, wooden Ottoman-era houses, and a working fishing harbor.

Sunset Seafood Dinner on the Harbor

~1.5 hours · \$16–\$28 USD / person

Grilled Black Sea turbot and mussels at one of the harbor-front tavernas, timed for the sun dropping behind Nessebar's church domes across the water.

Day 7

Sunny Beach Morning & Departure via Varna

A last morning on the sand before the drive north to catch a flight home.

Morning at Sunny Beach

~2 hours · free; sunbed rental ~10 BGN / ~\$5.50 USD

Bulgaria's widest Black Sea beach, a long arc of fine sand just north of the old town causeway — uncrowded and calm in the shoulder-season months this itinerary is built around.

Drive: Nessebar to Varna Airport (VAR)

~1 hour, 90 km

The coast road runs north past Burgas's salt lakes to Varna, Bulgaria's main Black Sea airport with connections to most major European hubs.

Departure from Varna Airport (VAR)

at your own pace

Build in extra buffer time in peak summer weekends, when charter traffic from Northern Europe backs up the single terminal.

