

Bulgaria in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Sofia and transfer to Krumovgrad.

Day 2 Krumovgrad.

Day 3/4 Pomorie.

Day 5/7 Kavarna.

Day 8 Sofia.

Day 9 Fly London.



Departs

September

Focus

Birds

Grading

Grade A. Easy day walks only

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code BGR02) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.



Highlights:

- Explore one of Europe's migration hotspots.
- Beautiful mountain & coastal scenery.
- Vultures & raptors at Studen Kladenats.
- Coastal migrants on the Kaliakra Headland.
- Wader-rich saltpans near Burgas.
- Around 180 species typically recorded.
- Masked Shrike, Rock Nuthatch & Imperial Eagle all possible.
- Expert guidance by Naturetrek ornithologist & local guides.



From top: White Pelicans, Isabelline Wheatear & Studen Kladenats, Images courtesy of Geoff Carr, Paul Stanbury & Shutterstock



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Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Krumovgrad

We depart London this morning on the scheduled service of British Airways to Sofia. Upon our arrival in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital, we will transfer by road to our rural hotel close to the town of Krumovgrad in the eastern Rhodope Mountains. The journey, which will take about five hours - including brief stops for refreshments and birds - will take us south-eastwards via Plovdiv and will provide us with a good introduction to the varied Bulgarian landscapes. We will overnight at the at a comfortable, but simple, hotel on the edge of the town of Krumovgrad with good birdwatching along a nearby river including Black Stork, Bee-eaters, Cirl Bunting and a variety of migrants.

Day 2

Krumovgrad

This morning we explore the rocky hillsides around Studen Kladenatz, approximately a one hour's drive from our hotel. The surrounding area is a crater of an ancient (and now extinct!) volcano and presents a very rugged landscape indeed with huge jagged peaks, towering cliffs and sparsely vegetated, boulder-strewn slopes. This eastern part of the Rhodope Mountains is famous for its birds of prey and we will spend the whole day here looking for such spectacular species as Golden, Imperial and Short-toed Eagles, Black, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Long-legged Buzzard and Peregrine Falcon. Black Storks may also make an appearance and smaller birds may well include Rock Nuthatch, Blue Rock Thrush, Sombre Tit and the elusive Chukar.

Day 3

Pomorie

Today we will make the journey north-eastwards to the town of Pomorie on the Black Sea coast (just to the north of Burgas), passing through the town of Svilengrad and close to the confluence of the borders of Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. This interesting drive will take us through another cross-section of Bulgarian landscapes and, as we travel across wooded hills, fertile valleys and stony plains, we will look out for a range of exciting birds. Raptor passage could be much in evidence, especially as we approach the coast, and we can hope to see Lesser-spotted, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Egyptian Vulture, Honey Buzzard, all four European species of harrier, Levant Sparrowhawk and both Red-footed Falcon and Hobby. We will keep our eyes open for any other birds of interest along the way: Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes or a late Roller on the roadside wires perhaps, or migrant larks and wheatears in the more open areas.

Day 4

Pomorie

Before hopping into our vehicle, we will walk the short distance from our hotel to the Pomorie Salt Pans. These shallow saline lagoons attract an interesting variety of migrant waders passing southwards along the Black Sea coast at this time of year. Almost any European wader could turn up here including Marsh, Curlew and Wood Sandpipers, Temminck's and Little Stints, Spotted Redshank, Ruff, Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilt and Avocet. Broad-billed Sandpipers are also seen from time to time.

To the south of Burgas are the reed-fringed freshwater lakes of Mandra and Vaya, set in a picturesque area of flood meadows and oak covered hills. Here we can expect a rather different range of birds than those we have seen earlier at the Pomorie Salt pans. Highlights may well include both White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Pygmy Cormorant, Squacco, Night and Purple Herons, Slender-billed, Mediterranean and Little Gulls, Gull-billed Tern and the mighty White-tailed Eagle. The scrub and woods nearby hold Sombre Tit and both Grey-headed and Middle-spotted Woodpeckers, and passerine migrants such as Red-breasted Flycatcher and Common Redstart could be much in evidence. A sea watch from one of the pleasant beaches here could produce an interesting grebe, tern or gull.

Day 5

Pomorie

After a second look at the Pomorie Salt Pans we will head back towards Mandra Lake, focusing our attention on a series of pools and marshes where two rivers join the main body of the lake. Species to look out for here include Squacco and Purple Herons, Ferruginous Duck, Garganey and Whiskered Tern, plus a variety of migrant passerines in the fringing reedbeds and scrub.

We will then continue to the Poda Nature Reserve for lunch, and afterwards explore the surrounding freshwater pools and coastal habitats in search of a selection of the 265 species of bird that have been recorded here to date. The Poda Protected Area was established by the 'Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds' in 1989 and is home to such species as White Pelican, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Marsh Harrier, Osprey and Caspian Tern, plus passage waders including Wood Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper and Ruff. After a full day's birding we will return to our hotel in Pomorie for a third night.

Day 6

Kavarna

Today we transfer northwards to the town of Kavarna. En route we may stop at Nesebar, a quaint old Byzantine port with numerous churches and ruins, which sits on a narrow peninsula jutting out into the Black Sea. Lunch will be taken at a restaurant deep in the forests of the Goritza Hills where we will also look for Great Spotted, Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted, Green, Grey-headed and, if we are very lucky, Black Woodpeckers. We will arrive at our comfortable hotel near Kavarna in the late afternoon with plenty of time to settle in before dinner.

Day 7

Kavarna

We will spend this morning exploring Durankulak Lake which lies to the north of Varna, just in from the sea and only five kilometres from the Romanian border. This is a freshwater lake with extensive reedbeds and a reputation for the rare and unusual. We can expect large numbers of birds to be present, and amongst them we may find such exciting species as Dalmatian Pelican, Glossy Ibis, Black Stork, Pygmy Cormorant, Great and Little Bitterns, Common Crane, Ruddy Shelduck, Ferruginous Duck and Gull-billed and Caspian Terns. Waders, too, should be much in evidence and we will search the fringing scrub, reedbeds and woodland for migrant warblers, shrikes and other southbound species. In the afternoon we will visit other nearby birdwatching sites including Shaba Lake and the attractive Bolata Valley.

Day 8

Sofia

To the north of Kavarna lies the Kaliakra Steppe Nature Reserve and the village of Kamen Briag. The countryside here is wide open treeless steppe cut by steep scrubby valleys running down to magnificent white limestone cliffs towering up to 100 metres above the sparkling turquoise sea below. On the cliff-top lies the ancient and picturesque fortress of Kaliakra. In this spectacular setting we can expect to see an exciting range of birds. Both Stone Curlew and Calandra Lark are resident here and migrants might well include flocks of Bee-eaters, Pied and Isabelline Wheatears and a range of larks, pipits, shrikes and buntings. Raptors could once again include Imperial and Spotted Eagles, Levant Sparrowhawk, Saker and Red-footed Falcon. Offshore we might find an interesting gull, some passing Yelkouan Shearwaters or the Black Sea race of Shag and, if we are really lucky, a pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphins. The critically endangered Mediterranean Monk Seals still occasionally frequent the area but are very rarely seen.

In the early afternoon we will drive south for around an hour and a half to Varna Airport in time to catch our late afternoon flight to Sofia. On arrival back into the Bulgarian capital we will transfer to a comfortable hotel on the edge of the city close to Vitosha Mountain.

Day 9

London

Since our return flight to the UK departs in the early afternoon we will have a few hours this morning to visit the pine-clad slopes of the Vitosha Mountain National Park, the very first national park to be designated in the Balkans. After winding our way up to the summit we will search for a final few species including Nutcracker, Crossbill, Firecrest and Water Pipit. Finally we must make our way back to Sofia Airport to catch our British Airways flight to London Heathrow arriving around 1600 hours.

Tour grading

This tour is graded A, consisting of day walks only. We will travel to each site by minibus, then take leisurely walks to explore the area, generally over easy terrain, although some paths can be steep and rough in places. The holiday is therefore suitable for anyone who enjoys walking in the countryside and is of an 'average' level of fitness.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. Unfortunately, the choice of hotels in Bulgaria is extremely limited and you should not expect luxurious accommodation on this tour! Hotels are comfortable, but simple. Rooms have en-suite facilities, but often lack character and can be somewhat spartan in nature.

Optional extensions

For those of you wishing to see more of the city of Sofia we would be happy to arrange a couple of nights accommodation in the Bulgarian capital at the end of the tour. Please call us for more details.

Bird, mammal & plant lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Bulgaria. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/bulgaria or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051. Alternatively, you are very welcome to book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or telephone us and make a booking with a credit or debit card.

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