



It is located on Bulgaria's western border, a major trade route that connects Europe and Asia and serves as a cultural and economic link for Bulgaria and the Balkan region. Sofia nestles at the foot of Vitosha Mountain which dominates the skyline and acts as a constant reminder that the beauty of Bulgaria's nature is never far away.

Sofia, the Bulgarian capital, has a history of nearly 7000 years and is the second oldest city in Europe. It is one of the fastest growing cities, attracting major international investment and boasts one of the fastest internet connections speeds in the world!

Welcome to
SOFIA

Bulgarians are very hospitable to foreigners and go out of their way to be helpful. English is widely spoken, particularly by younger Bulgarians. A wide variety of modern amenities such as quality stores, restaurants, bars, clubs, museums and recreational activities are available and conveniently located around the city.

Sofia International Airport is relatively small by international standards. There are two main ways of getting from the airport to the city centre and the conference hotel.

GETTING TO

FROM THE AIRPORT

You can take the metro - the station is just outside Terminal 2 and a ticket costs 1.60 lv (0.80€). The nearest metro station to the conference hotel (Marinela) is "James Boucher", which is only a 2 minute walk away from the hotel entrance. You will need to switch lines at "Serdika" station.

Taxis are also an affordable option when travelling from the airport. Look for the "OK Супертранс" (OK Supertrans) cars lined up just in front of the terminal. The price of a trip to the AAS campus and Marinela hotel is under 20 lv/10€. The tariff should be clearly displayed on the side window of the taxi and should be around 0.80 lv/km. Beware of drivers that approach you in the terminal and try to offer you a ride, their service is 2-3 times more expensive. If not sure, you can call OK Supertrans at + 359 2 973 21 21 and ask for English.

GETTING AROUND

Sofia is a very easy city to travel around. The city centre is compact and so it is easy to get around on foot. The metro is clean, cheap and large parts are very new and runs from 05.00-24.00. Public buses and trams are safe, frequent and inexpensive (1.60 lv per ride). The yellow taxis are also very affordable - but check the tariff and make sure it is about 0.80 lv/km before getting in. You can also download the TaxiMe App which is very useful.



KEEPING SAFE

Sofia is a safe city, yet, like any heavily populated area, pick-pockets are active, particularly around tourist sites and morecrowded public areas - "Vitosha" blvd for example - so stay vigilant. You are required by law to carry a photographic ID document such as a passport or identity card with you at all times.

MONEY & CREDIT CARDS

The official currency of Bulgaria is the LEV (лeв) which is made up of 100 stotinki. One lev is approximately 0.50 euros. ATM cash machines can be found everywhere in Sofia. If you want to exchange money you will get the best rates at a bank or a reputable bureau de exchange which you will find in the larger shopping malls. Most restaurants, cafes and shops in the city accept credit and debit cards.



WEATHER & TIME

The month of March is the time of 'Baba Marta' - Grandma March - when it is said the weather cannot make up its mind :) Temperatures are usually between 0 and 15 degrees Celsius, but they can drop suddenly below 0 and it is not uncommon to have some snow. Be sure to carry an umbrella or raincoat just in case. Bulgaria is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

LANGUAGE & ALPHABET

Bulgarian is the official language in the country however, a lot of people speak good English and although you'll see street signs written in Cyrillic - the Bulgarian alphabet - you'll also see them written with Latin letters so it isn't a problem getting around.



ELECTRICITY

Bulgaria's electrical system operates on 220 volts, 50 Hz, with European-style plugs. A voltage converter and a plug adapter are required in order to use U.S. appliances.

FOOD



Traditional Bulgarian food is diverse and is influenced by its history and nearest neighbours. You can find something delicious to your taste, no matter if you're vegetarian or eat meat. Various pastries with cheese or other fillings (banitsa) are popular for breakfast, as well as mekitsi (similar to doughnuts), which are eaten with jam, honey or cheese. Other traditional dishes include Tarator (cold cucumber and yoghurt soup), Shopska salad, Stuffed Peppers, Bob Chorba (Bean Soup) Kavarma (a slow-cooked stew), and skara (grilled meats) served with lyutenitsa (a tomato and pepper puree). Rakia is the strong, locally produced alcoholic drink (around 40% proof) and is traditionally drunk with salads. Bulgarian wine is really good, particularly the reds, and very affordable. Sofia offers a huge number of good restaurants with local and international cuisine, where you can eat at an affordable price.



SHOPPING



Sofia boasts 11 shopping malls, most of which have been built in the last 5 years! Here you can find most popular and many premium brands. The Paradise Centre is the biggest mall in Bulgaria and the Balkans and together with the compact Park Centre are the closest to the conference hotel. Like The Mall of Sofia, they have metro stations very close by. For a more unique and individual shopping experience, explore the boutiques and smaller shops in the little streets off Vitosha Blvd. Here you will get a more authentic taste of Sofia.

MAJOR SITES

Sofia has a wealth of history and attractions including some excellent examples of Byzantine architecture. Most of the major sites are accessible on foot or by metro. Some of the major attractions include:

National Palace of Culture -
Built to celebrate 1300 years of the establishment of the Bulgarian state in 1981, the Palace (a.k.a. NDK) is an example of socialist architecture. It is used for exhibitions and concerts and is surrounded with a nice park.



Alexander Nevski Cathedral -
The impressive cathedral - the main symbol of the city - is 76m long and 53m wide and is said to hold up to 7000 people, the belfry is 52 metres high and houses 12 bells. The cathedral was built between 1904-1912 in the Neo Byzantine style, typical for Russian churches in the 19th century.



Sofia History Museum -
The permanent exhibition covers the period between 6th century BC up to 1940s. The halls include: Antiquity, The Strength of the Spirit, Links with European Dynasties, A Sofia Street, State and Municipal Institutions, Sofia Home and Clothing, Culture and Leisure. There are also two rooms for temporary exhibitions.



Roman Remains at Serdika -
Explore the recently excavated Roman remains around the Serdika metro station and behind the The Balkan Hotel in central Sofia. The excavations are still ongoing and are revealing more about life in the city under Roman rule 2000 years ago.



National Gallery of Art -
is housed in the former Bulgarian National Palace, which was built immediately after the proclamation of Bulgaria's Independence in 1878, the National gallery is an opportunity to see contemporary Bulgarian art as well as some international exhibitions.





St. Sofia Basilica -
is a three-nave, early Byzantine basilica. Built in the VI century it is one of the oldest operating churches in Europe. The underground museum, housing remains of three earlier churches that stood at the same spot, is also worth visiting.

Boyana Church -
It is worth a bus or taxi ride to one of the southern suburbs of Sofia to see the stunning murals at this UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Flea Market -
situated just opposite the St. Sofia Basilica, the market offers a selection of antique objects, icons and jewellery at reasonable prices.

Vitosha Boulevard -
is a lively, pedestrianised shopping street. Starting from NDK and stretching to Sveta Nedelya church. "Vitoshka" as we call it, has a lot of cafes, bars and restaurants, where you can sit and enjoy a drink and absorb the atmosphere of downtown Sofia.



Also worth exploring are the areas around the Sofia Mosque, the Indoor Market, the Synagogue and Women's Market (Jenski Pazar).

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

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Fire
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