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BULGARIA IN FACTS

GEOGRAPHY

Location:	Southeastern Europe, bordering the Black Sea, Romania, Greece and Turkey, Macedonia, and Yugoslavia.
Area:	110,993 sq. km (42,672 sq. miles)
Climate:	Continental-Mediterranean
Terrain:	Mostly mountainous with lowlands in the north and southeast. Rila and Pirin are alpine mountains exceeding 2,900 m above sea-level. Stara Planina, also called <i>the Balkan Range</i> and origin of the namesake <i>Balkan Peninsula</i> , is the longest mountain range, dividing the country into Northern and Southern Bulgaria.
Highest peak:	Musala (2,925 m), Rila Mountain

POPULATION

Population:	7,385,367 (July 2006 est.)
Pop. Growth Rate:	-0.86% (2006 est.)
Capital City:	Sofia (1.2 million)
Large Cities:	Plovdiv, Varna, Bourgas, and Rousse
Ethnic Groups:	Bulgarian 83.9%, Turk 9.4%, Roma 4.7%, other 2% (2001 census)
Religions:	Bulgarian Orthodox 82.6%, Muslim 12.2%, other Christian 1.2%, other 4% (2001 census)
Adult Literacy Rate:	98.6%
Health:	Infant mortality rate – 19.85/1,000. Life expectancy – males 68.68 years, females 76.13 years (2006 est.)

GOVERNMENT

Government Type:	Parliamentary democracy
Constitution:	Adopted July 12, 1991
National Holiday:	Independence Day, March 3 (1878)
Administrative divisions:	28 regions and 262 municipalities

ECONOMY

Currency:	Bulgarian lev (BGL)
GDP Growth Rate:	5.5% (2005 est.)
Per Capita Income:	USD 3,265 (2005), purchasing power parity USD \$9,600 (2005 est.)
Private sector share of GDP:	79% (2005)
Foreign Direct Investment:	USD 2,324 million (2005)
Exchange Rate:	USD 1 = BGL 1.66 (2005), EUR 1 = BGL 1.9558
Annual Inflation Rate:	6.5% (2005)
Average Monthly Salary:	USD 167 (06/2005)
Unemployment:	10.7% (2005)
Budget Deficit:	1% (2005 est.)
Foreign Currency Reserves:	USD 9,581.32 million (15 September 2006)
Balance of Current Account:	USD 2,311.06 million (January – July 2006)
Gross Foreign Debt:	USD 20.15 (bn) (May 2006)
Debt to GDP ratio:	66% (May 2006)
Trade Deficit:	USD 3,291.33 million (January – July 2006)



HISTORY

Bulgaria's history dates back more than 3,000 years and includes periods of Thracian, Roman, and Byzantine influence. The state of Bulgaria has existed for more than 13 centuries. The name "Bulgaria" comes from the Bulgars, a Turkic people that migrated from the steppe north of the Black Sea, conquered the Slavic tribes, and founded the First Bulgarian Kingdom in 681 AD. The Bulgars assimilated into the larger Slavic population, a process facilitated by the adoption of Orthodox Christianity by King Boris I in the 9th Century. The creation of the Cyrillic script in 855 and the establishment of Christianity as a state religion in 864 gave a powerful impetus for the country's cultural development. Under King Simeon I, Bulgaria reached the height of its influence, and its capital, Preslav, was said to rival Constantinople in the vigor of its commercial and intellectual life. The First Bulgarian Kingdom fell to the Byzantines in 1018. The Second Bulgarian Kingdom, established in 1185 at Veliko Tarnovo, reinstated the borders and another "golden age" began, during which Bulgaria's territory bordered three seas: the Black Sea, the Adriatic, and the Aegean. In 1396, after a long war and fierce resistance, the country fell under Ottoman rule.

The early 18th Century marked the beginning of the Bulgarian Revival period, characterized by the flourishing of the Bulgarian church, literature, and culture. After an unsuccessful revolution in 1876, Bulgaria regained independence in 1878, as a result of the Russian-Turkish Liberation War. Following the Berlin Congress of 1878, the state was divided into three parts. After the successful unification uprising in 1885, the country restored its territorial integrity and started building its state institutions. As an ally to Germany in World War I and the Axis powers in World War II, Bulgaria had to bear the hardships of a difficult first half to the 20th century. In 1945 the Communist Party took power and proclaimed Bulgaria a "People's Republic."

In 1989, the country underwent a peaceful transition from autocratic communist rule to a democratic system of governance. A new Parliament was elected in June 1990, after the first free democratic elections in 50 years.

BULGARIAN CULTURAL TREASURES

- ✓ **The Rila Monastery** -- located in the heart of the Rila Mountain, the largest Bulgarian monastery founded in the 10th Century; listed by UNESCO for World Cultural Heritage
- ✓ **The Kazanluk Thracian Cupol Tomb** dating from the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd Century BC, containing unique murals - the only surviving monuments of Hellenic painting, also included in the list of World Cultural Heritage
- ✓ **Varna's ancient necropolis** which revealed evidence of the first European civilization and the world's oldest gold dated 4600-4200 BC
- ✓ **St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral** in Sofia -- the largest Christian Orthodox cathedral on the Balkan peninsula
- ✓ **The Rotunda of St. George** -- the oldest building in Sofia. Three layers of frescoes have been discovered, the earliest dating back to the 10th century.
- ✓ **St. Sofia Church** -- the oldest Christian Orthodox church in Sofia, built during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian between 527-565. In the 14th Century, the church gave its name to the city.
- ✓ **The Boyana Church** -- One of Bulgaria's most significant historical treasures dating back to the 13th Century. It is on UNESCO's World Heritage list. Most remarkable are the murals, painted by an unknown artist, which exhibit a new humanistic tendency in medieval art. A total of 240 realistic figures, depicting realistic figures of typical Bulgarian life at the time, are displayed in biblical scenes on the walls of the church.



FOLKLORE

The extended time technique is perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the Bulgarian folk song (most expressively used in the Rhodope region). Non-existent in the rest of European music, the diverse time combinations based on the extended time make Bulgarian music unique and entrancing.

Unique Bulgarian Musical Instruments:

Typical Bulgarian instruments are the *caval* (an end-blown flute), the *duduk* (whistle flute), the *kaba gaida* (bagpipe); the *gadulka* (bowed stringed instrument); and the *tupan* (double-headed cylindrical drum).

Did you know that... ***In addition to scientific information about the Earth and its inhabitants, both the Voyager-1 and Voyager-2 spaceships carry a Bulgarian folk song from the Rhodope region as a message to other civilizations.***

BULGARIAN FOLK FESTIVALS AND CUSTOMS

The Martenitsa: On March 1st, Bulgarians put on their clothes (or on their wrist) tiny red and white trimmings known as *martenitsas*, and wish each other health and happiness with “Chestita Baba Marta” (“Happy Grandma March”). Martenitsas are made of twined red and white threads, formed in various figures, and are named after the month of March (“Marta” in Bulgarian). This is an ancient Bulgarian pagan tradition that symbolizes the end of the cold winter and the arrival of the spring. According to an ancient legend, martenitsas bring health, happiness, and longevity. They are worn continuously until the sight of the first stork, and are then hung on a blossoming tree.

The Festival of Roses: The Festival of Roses is celebrated during the first half of June in the Valley of Roses (in Central Bulgaria around the cities of Kazanluk and Karlovo). It represents a festive folklore gathering, accompanied with mass rose-picking.

Did you know that...

- ✓ Rose picking starts before dawn, while roses are still glistening with dew, preserving the precious fragrance.
- ✓ 2,000 petals are needed for a single gram of rose attar.
- ✓ 70% of the rose attar on the international market comes from Bulgaria.

Koukeri (The Day of the Mummers): The Koukeri ritual is a pre-spring holiday held on the first Sunday before Lent. It marks the beginning of the spring calendar with mummers games performed only by men. The koukeri’s masks and garments are colorful, covered with beads, ribbons, and woolen tassels. They are sometimes made of hides. The mummers all wear bells around their waists, with wooden swords in hand. The ritual has the characteristics of a theatrical performance or a carnival. An important element is the symbolic plowing and sowing - a token of a rich harvest. The heavy swaying movements of the leading mummer are meant to represent wheat heavy with grain, while the bells tied around the mummers' waists are intended to drive away evil forces and sickness.

The custom of **Lazaruvane** is of Slav origin and its symbolic meaning is associated with fertility, love, and marriage. It consists of a string of ritual games and songs trained in advance by the young marriageable girls (*lazarki*) during the long days of Lent. Particular attention was paid to the dress: festive and beautiful, with heavy ornaments.

BULGARIAN CUISINE

Because of its geographical position and long history, Bulgarian cuisine is a mixture of the best parts of the Slavonic, Greek, and Turkish cuisines. National specialties include:



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Shopska Salad (sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and parsley, topped with grated sheep's cheese)

Tarator (a cold soup of chopped cucumber, walnuts, garlic, and yogurt) - just perfect for the hot summer days!

Banitsa (pastry layers with cheese in between)

Rakia (hard liquor traditionally made of grape, plums, or other fruit). It is Bulgaria's national drink.

Did you know that... Bulgaria is the home country of yogurt!!!

LEARN SOME BULGARIAN

ЗДРАВЕЙТЕ!	[zdra'veite]	Hello!
БЛАГОДАРЯ	[blagoda'rya]	Thank you.
МОЛЯ	[`molya]	Please.
НАЗДРАВЕ!	[naz'drave]	Cheers!
ДА	[da]	Yes.
НЕ	[ne]	No.
ДОБРЕ	[dobre']	Good. OK.
ДОБЪР ДЕН!	[`dobar den]	Good afternoon!
ДОВИЖДАНЕ!	[do'vizhdane]	Goodbye!
ЛЕКА НОЩ!	[`leka `nosht]	Good night!

Did you know that... Bulgarians shake their heads to mean “yes”, and nod to mean “no”.