

Country of the Week: Bulgaria



Bulgaria, under communist rule for decades, is slowly catching on as a tourist destination.

BASIC

This week we travel to Eastern Europe to a little country called Bulgaria. It's a very beautiful country, with mountains, forests, and coastline on the Black Sea. **Can you locate the Black Sea on the map?** In the photo is Bulgaria's capital city, Sofia, a city full of grand buildings. Until 1990, Bulgaria was a communist country. Communism centers on the belief that the government owns all property. Since then, it has been struggling to find its own way

as a free country. Tourists are finally discovering its charms, especially the little villages in the countryside, with cobblestone streets and villagers dressed in traditional clothes like their ancestors wore. Bulgaria is a relatively poor country, compared with the rest of Europe, but things are slowly improving. **Would you like to visit Bulgaria?** NEXT

GENERAL

This week's country is Bulgaria, a small and little-known nation in Eastern Europe. **Have you ever heard of Bulgaria?** Bulgaria, which has about 7.6 million residents, is a very beautiful country. Much of it is mountainous, and it has dense forests where wildlife like bears and lynx, which are relatively rare in Europe, live. Bulgaria also has a long stretch of beautiful coastline on the Black Sea. Tourists are finally starting to discover Bulgaria's treasures. In the photo at top is Bulgaria's capital, Sofia. Set at the foot of a mountain, Sofia is home to some of the country's grandest architecture and is the country's cultural center. Tourists also love to explore the villages in the countryside, which often look like they are from another century, with cobblestone

streets and people in traditional clothes like their ancestors wore. **What do you think it would be like to live in a village like the one shown here?** For more than four decades, Bulgaria was part of the Soviet Union and under communist rule. Today, it is a less wealthy country than many others in Europe, but its economy is slowly improving. One big problem, though, is that powerful criminals have a lot of control. They control a lot of the country's wealth, and also have a lot of influence in Bulgaria's political system. Bulgaria was finally allowed to join the European Union in 2007, but faces losing millions in funding because its leaders have made little progress in cleaning up this problem. **Why do you think this is so?** NEXT

ADVANCED

This week we travel to Eastern Europe to a little-known country called Bulgaria. **What's your impression of Bulgaria?** Trapped behind the "Iron Curtain" during the Cold War, this small nation is now a democracy but is still a relatively poor country. It is rich, however, in geographic beauty; more than half of the country is mountainous, made up of several ranges, including the Balkans. The country has spectacular coastline on the Black Sea, and dense forests full of wildlife like lynx and bears. Tourism is finally beginning to increase here, as travelers discover the country's treasures: its stunning landscapes, Roman ruins, and storybook villages with their cobblestone streets and stone-and-timber houses. **What do these photos tell you about Bulgaria? Would you like to visit Bulgaria?** The main

photo shows Bulgaria's medieval capital city, Sofia. Bulgaria today has about 7.6 million residents. Its transition to democracy and a market economy hasn't been easy. During the 1990s, the country was shaken by political instability and strikes. Bulgaria finally was accepted into the European Union in 2007, but it risks losing millions in EU funds because of its lack of progress on battling the nation's intense corruption and organized crime. Powerful underground barons control as much as 25 percent of the country's economy and they have a grip on many of the country's political dealings. Bulgaria has seen some 150 mafia-style killings since the fall of communism in 1989, and not a single conviction. **Can you think of other countries, or U.S. cities, that are strongly affected by organized crime?** NEXT

Country of the Week: Bulgaria (cont'd)

For centuries, Bulgaria was controlled by outsiders.

BASIC

On the left is an item from Bulgaria's famous "Thracian Treasures." The Thracians lived here many thousands of years ago. They left behind many beautiful gold and silver items, which have only recently been discovered. **Would you like to see the Thracian Treasures?** The nation of Bulgaria became very powerful during the ninth and tenth centuries, but in the 14th century, it was conquered by the mighty Ottoman Empire. By the 19th century, Bulgarians were tired of being ruled by outsiders. Vasil Levski, in the photo, led a freedom movement. He is considered the country's national hero. After

World War Two, Bulgaria was ruled by a strict dictator. It wasn't until 1990

that this country got its freedom. Today, Bulgarians are very proud of their traditions and culture. The photo shows some girls in traditional Bulgarian dress, which Bulgarians often wear during holidays and festivals. **What do you think of their outfits? Does your community ever have cultural celebrations where people wear traditional clothing?** END



GENERAL

On the left is an item from Bulgaria's famous "Thracian Treasures." The Thracians were a group of people living in this part of Europe as far back as 3000 BCE. They were very skilled in working with silver, gold, and other precious metals. More than 80 priceless objects like this one have been found in Bulgaria. **Would you like to see the Thracian Treasures?** The state of Bulgaria was founded in 681 BCE; it is the oldest civilization in Europe. Bulgaria became a major European power in the ninth and the tenth centuries, but in the 14th century, it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. By the 19th century, Bulgarians were tired of being ruled by outsiders, and a freedom movement began, led by the man in the photo, Vasil Levski. The freedom movement was unsuccessful, but Levski is considered

Bulgaria's national hero. Russia finally helped Bulgaria break free from the Ottoman Empire in 1877. After World War Two, it became known as the People's Republic of Bulgaria, but it was effectively controlled by the Soviet Union. **Who knows what the Soviet Union was?** (*A large group of nations, centered by Russia, under communist rule. Communism centers on the belief that all property belongs to the government. The Soviet Union dissolved in 1991.*) Today, Bulgarians are finally free to practice their own religion and to cherish the traditional customs of their culture. The photo shows some girls in traditional Bulgarian dress, which Bulgarians often wear during holidays and festivals. **What effect do you think centuries of outside rule would have on a country?** END

ADVANCED

Bulgaria, founded in 681 BCE, is the oldest state in Europe. But civilization in this region dates back many thousands of years. On the left you see an artifact from Bulgaria's "Thracian Treasures." The Thracians were an Indo-European group who lived in this part of Eastern Europe as far back as 3000 BCE. They were skillful craftsmen who made ornate gold and silver objects, which they sometimes buried to hide them from enemy invasions. Most of the 80-some artifacts discovered in Bulgaria were only found in the last 30 years. **Why do you think it took so long to find these treasures?** Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman Empire for 500 years before gaining its independence in the 19th century. During that century, a Bulgarian nationalist movement began, led by the man in the photo, Vasil Levski. Levski

instigated a nationwide uprising against Ottoman rule. Levski was captured and executed in 1873. Today he is considered the national hero of Bulgaria, and monuments to him dot the country. Russia finally helped oust the Ottomans in 1877, leaving Bulgaria permanently in Russia's debt. That might be why Bulgaria put up little fight when the Soviet Union took over after World War Two. Bulgaria was ruled by a hard-line dictator until 1989. Today, post-communist Bulgarians are again free to cherish their Slavic culture and to practice the Orthodox religion that had been suppressed for four decades. The photo shows some Bulgarian girls in traditional Bulgarian dress. **Do you know anyone who practices an Orthodox religion? What effect do you think centuries of outside rule would have on a country?** END