

WHERE TO GO IN SOFIA



14 WOMEN'S MARKET

Corner of Pirotska and Stefan Stambolov

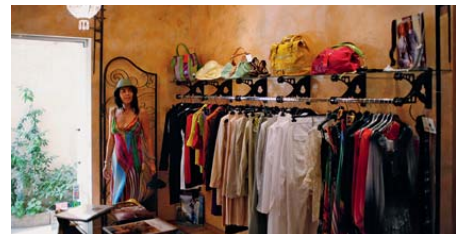
The Women's Market, Zhenski Pazar, is Eastern Europe for advanced students. It's pretty dirty between the booths and stalls, narrow and full of dubious figures. Here, it's easy to see that Bulgaria is the poorest country in the EU. But Zhenski Pazar is all the more exciting if you're not



put off by impressions of this sort. On sale are car parts, tools, T-shirts, towels, counterfeit cigarettes but also peppers, cucumbers and the best tomatoes in the world. Bulgarian vegetables come mostly from small gardens and taste as vegetables should do. Organic without the need for any label of origin. The high quality of Bulgarian food has a lot to do with this fantastic fresh produce.

15 ROSHAVATA GARGA

Aksakov 15
Phone: +359 2 9873050



Albena Alexandrova has called her boutique after her favourite animal, the black crow. This leading fashion designer (see City Talk) has received the Golden Needle award three times as Bulgaria's Designer of the Year. In addition to her own creations, Alexandrova also represents brands like YSL, Sonia Rykiel, Cacharel and Germano Zama. Her boutiques are frequented by both the cream of society and other fashion-conscious Sofia women.

SHOPPING / SIGHT-SEEING

13 DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES SHOP

Rotunda Sveti Georgi

You can buy richly adorned icons of all shapes and sizes at any of Sofia's sou-



venir shops. But we believe you should purchase your saints at the appropriate place and therefore recommend the little stalls that are to be found in virtually every Orthodox church. One particularly pretty shop is in the Rotunda Sveti Georgi, the city's oldest church, which dates back to the 4th century – though the kiosk is admittedly quite a bit younger. Why not buy a couple of candles at the same time, as they still use proper wax candles here.

16 ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

Saborna 2
Tues–Sun 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.



The Grand Mosque today serves as the Archeological Museum and is worth a visit for its wonderful domes alone. The individual exhibits from Thracian and Roman times are all the more striking thanks to the airy presentation space. Of special interest is the Anaxander Stelae, a gravestone from the 6th century BC which was discovered in the Greek Black Sea colony of Apollonia.

17 BOYANA CHURCH

www.boyanachurch.org



On no account, should you fail to visit tiny Boyana Church at the foot of Vitosha Mountain. This 13th-century treasure has been listed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. The frescoes dating back to 1259 are among the most important achievements of mediaeval Bulgarian culture. The three-dimensional representation and psychological depth of the biblical figures and saints anticipate the techniques of the Italian renaissance. Visitors are only allowed into the interior of the church in small groups for just 15 minutes at a time, so a little patience is called for at weekends.

18 RILA MONASTERY

Vitosha Blvd 45
Han Krum 2



Two hours' drive from the city, you will find one of the most significant sights in all Bulgaria. Lots of hotels and travel agencies offer day trips to Rila. Rila Monastery, located in the mountains of the same name, is still a magnet for pilgrims from all over the country and visitors from around the globe. Ivan Rilski withdrew here from the world to live the rest of his life as a hermit. After the saint's death, the hermitage became an important spiritual centre for Orthodox Christianity and the monastery was built a few kilometres away. The multilevel inner courtyard with its wooden projections and painted façade is an unforgettable sight; the church is so richly decorated that it's easy to spend several hours here. Look out for the realistically detailed depiction of the torments of hell.

19 TOURIST INFORMATION

National Tourist Information Centre
Sveta Nedelya 1
Phone: +359 2 9335845
www.bulgariatravel.org
Mon–Fri 9 a.m.–5 p.m.