

# Sofia, Bulgaria

Presentation by  
Paul Pacter  
Collier County Library

Copyright © Paul Pacter  
All Rights Reserved



### Bulgaria - Intro

- Capital - largest city: Sofia
- Official language: Bulgarian
- Official script: Cyrillic
  - Bulgaria was the birthplace of the Cyrillic alphabet in the 9th c AD.

**Area:** 42,855 sq mi (Virginia).

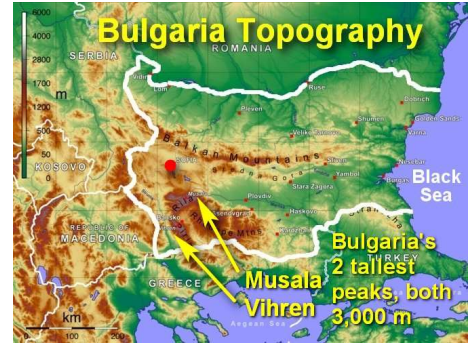
**Borders five countries:** Greece, Turkey, Macedonia, Serbia, Romania.

**West and South (including Sofia):** Mountains.

**North and East:** Plains.

**Black Sea Coast:** 220 miles.

**Winter:** Considerable snow.



### Bulgaria

**Population:** 7,000,039 (2018)

**Ethnic groups:**

- Bulgarian: 85%.
- Turks: 9%.
- Romani: 5%.
- Others: 1%.

**Median age:** 43 (US 38).

### Religion:

- Eastern Orthodox: 75%.
- Sunni Muslim: 10% (but mostly non-observant and against veils).
- Other Religions: 3%.
- No religion: 12%.

### Government:

Unitary parliamentary republic.

Unitary = central control, limited local powers.

- **President:** Rumen Radev (elected 2016, next 2021).
- **Prime Minister:** Boyko Borisov (last parliamentary election 2017).

**President Rumen Radev**  
Directly elected. 5-year term.



**Prime Minister Boyko Borisov**  
Leader of major party in Parliament. Now in 3rd 4-year term.



### National assembly

- Unicameral.
- 240 directly elected members called Deputies.
- Four year terms.
- Proportional representation.
- Power to pass laws, dismiss Prime Minister, call elections, declare war, ratify treaties.

### Democracy Monitoring:

**Freedom House:** "Continuing deterioration of democratic governance".

**Democracy Index:** "Flawed democracy".

**Transparency International:** Most corrupt EU member state.

**World Press Freedom Index:** Lowest of all EU and candidates.

**28 Provinces**  
Called: Oblasts.  
Divided into: 264 municipalities.  
But central government:

- Appoints Governors of provinces (not elected).
- Provides all funding.

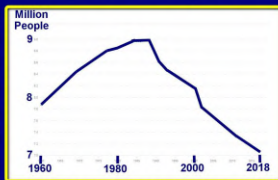
So: Very limited local power.

Provinces have no official names: Referred to by their capital cities.

### Population

Wikipedia: "Bulgaria is in a state of demographic crisis".  
Declining population for 30 years.

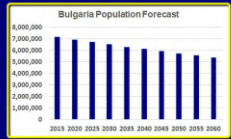
1990	8,718,000
2000	8,170,000
2010	7,534,000
2015	7,154,000
2016	7,102,000
2017	7,050,000
2018	7,000,000



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Bulgaria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Bulgaria)

### Population forecast by National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria.

2015	7,159,819
2020	6,950,436
2025	6,734,989
2030	6,519,217
2035	6,311,454
2040	6,115,526
2045	5,929,267
2050	5,748,061
2055	5,567,060
2060	5,384,040



**Net Decrease of 1 person every 10 minutes**



### Why?

- Emigration by young people seeking work and better life.
- One of the lowest birth rates in the world.
- Very high death rate due to a combination of:
  - Ageing families.
  - Poverty.
  - Weak healthcare system.

### Population growth rate 2018:

Minus 1% (#225 out of countries in the world).  
**UN says Bulgaria is the world's fastest shrinking nation.**  
Bulgaria is one of only two countries (Latvia is the other) with a lower population today than in 1950.

### Economy:

**GDP (PPP) 2018 estimate**  
– Total: \$163 billion.  
– Per capita: \$23,207.  
**GDP (nominal) 2018 estimate**  
– Total: \$64 billion.  
– Per capita: \$9,080.  
**Per-capita income remains the lowest among EU members.**

### More population facts:

- More than half of children are born to unwed mothers.
- A third of all households consist of one person.
- 76% of families do not have children under age 16.

### Currency: Lev (BGN).

**Lev pegged:**  
At 1.95583  
Lev for one Euro.  
**1 lev = 58 US cents.**



### History- 1

**1st c AD:** Romans took control of entire Balkan Peninsula.

**5th c AD:** Byzantines control entire Balkan. Bring Christianity.

**6 c AD:** Slavs took control. Christian.

### History - 2

**681–1396:** Bulgars from Ukraine take control. Bulgarian empire.

**14th c.:** Invasion by Ottomans.

- 15th-19th c:** Under Ottoman rule.
- Bulgarian culture suppressed.
  - Christianity suppressed.
  - Islamisation.
  - Heavy taxes.

### History - 3

**1876:** Rebellion against Ottoman rule. 30,000 Bulgarians killed.

**1877-1878:** Russo-Turkish War. Expelled the Ottomans.

**3 March 1878:** But remained a principality in Ottoman Empire.  
**National holiday:** Liberation Day – 3 March (1878).


### History - 4

**5 October 1908:** Declared Independence from Ottoman Empire.

**WW 1:** Allied with Germany, Austria, Hungary (losing side). Lost 100,000 soldiers plus territory plus heavy reparations payments. Economy ruined.

### History - 5

**1918-1943:**

- Dictatorship under Tsar Boris III. → 
- Rise of Communist Party, anarchist groups and coup attempts.

**WW 2:** Bulgaria entered in 1941 as a member of the Axis.

### History - 6

**But:** Tsar Boris III refused to deport Bulgarian Jews.

- **Died suddenly 1943.**
- **Presumed poisoned by Nazis.**
- 1944:** Communists took power.
- Post WW2:** Soviet satellite "People's Republic". One-party rule. Planned economy.

### History - 7

**1954-1989:** Todor Zhivkov was Communist Leader of Bulgaria



With Brezhnev in Sofia 1967



With Castro in Sofia 1976

"A good journalist is not the one that writes what people say, but the one that writes what he is supposed to write."

I was so sure you would like that Todor Zhivkov quote that I found some others:



General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party 1954 – 1989

"The police belongs to the people and the people belong to the police."

"We must make a radical turn, at 360 degrees."

"This year - a factory of semiconductors. Next year a factory of whole conductors!"

### History - 8

**1989:** Communists gave up power after the fall of the Soviet Union. But...

**1990:** ...The same people renamed themselves the Socialist Party and won Bulgaria's first free election.



## History - 9

**1991:** New constitution.  
Parliamentary republic. Broad range of freedoms.

**2004:** Joined NATO.

**2007:** Joined EU.

**Continuing Social Problems:**  
Inflation, unemployment, corruption, population decline.

# SOFIA

Population: 1,300,000.  
Wikipedia: "Nice parks; vibrant city center; many bars, restaurants, and nightclubs; 250 historic landmarks and monuments; healthy mineral springs, hiking, and skiing."

**Alexander Nevsky Cathedral**  
1882-1912  
Sofia



Built in memory of the 200,000 Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and Bulgarian soldiers who died in the Russo-Turkish War 1877-1878.  
Alexander Nevsky saved Russia (including Bulgaria) from Swedish troops in 1240.



One of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in the world. 34,000 square feet. 5,000 people.



Gold-plated dome is 148 ft high. Bell tower 166 feet.



Sofia's most photographed monument. Understandably.



Darkened interior with vast domes covered with delicate murals.

Icon Museum in the crypt. Late 9th century up to the end of the 19th century.



**Alexander Nevsky Cathedral**



**National Assembly (Parliament)**  
Established 1879 with the Constitution of Bulgaria.  
Building built 3 stages 1884-1928.



National assembly is unicameral. 240 directly elected members called Deputies.  
Four-year terms.



Notice the yellow-gold paving bricks. Viennese yellow cobblestones.



Sofia's central boulevards are all paved with Viennese yellow cobblestones.



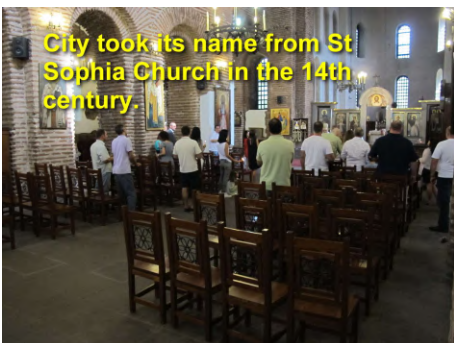
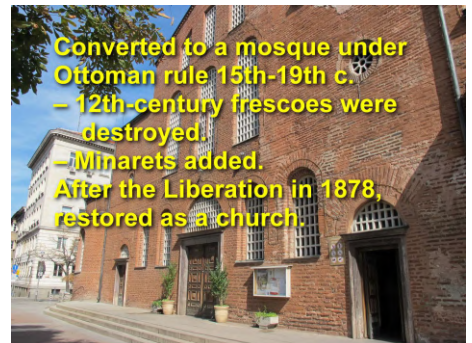
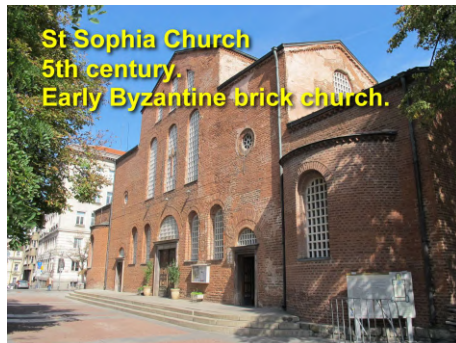
**President's Office Building**  
– President is Head of State.  
– Commander in chief of armed forces.  
– Can veto legislation, but veto can be overridden by simple majority.



**President's Office Building**  
Hourly changing of the guard.















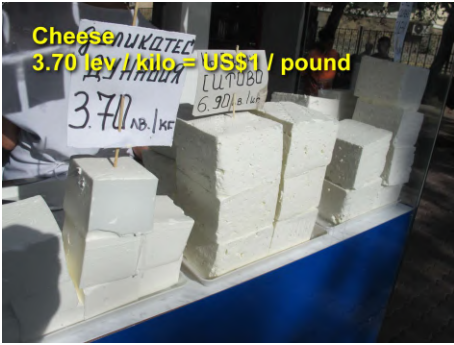
"Lower End" section of Ladies Market



Ladies Market - Zhenski Pazar



Kufteta - Traditional Bulgarian meat patties. 60% pork, 40% beef.



Cheese  
3.70 ley / kilo = US\$1 / pound  
3.70 лв./кг



Ladies Market - Zhenski Pazar



Ladies Market - Zhenski Pazar



Ladies Market - Zhenski Pazar



Ladies Market - Zhenski Pazar



Ladies Market - Zhenski Pazar



Ladies Market - Zhenski Pazar



Ladies Market - Zhenski Pazar



Shops near the Ladies Market

РИБА = FISH  
ПАЗАР = MARKET



Shops near the Ladies Market



"Newsstand" sells only alcoholic beverages (especially vodka) and cigarettes"



Ladies Market Neighborhood





Ladies Market Neighborhood



National Art Gallery  
Began in 1873  
Building dates from 1880s



National Art Gallery  
Bulgaria's largest art collection –  
around 60,000 works  
Mainly Bulgarian art 4th to 20th  
centuries

Notice the yellow cobblestones



National Art Gallery

Not My Photo



National Art Gallery

Not My Photo



National Gallery for Foreign Art  
Building 1882–1884  
Former Royal Printing Office.



National Gallery for Foreign Art  
Museum Founded 1985  
Collection of 10,000 items



National Gallery for Foreign Art  
Russian Lada Car  
Produced 1970 to 2012

Typical Internet comment: "Shoddy  
construction and infamous unreliability".



National Gallery for Foreign Art  
No Photos

- Halls 1, 2, 3: Indian art.
- Hall 4: Japanese woodblock prints.
- Hall 5: African sculptures and masks.
- Hall 6: Buddhist art from Southeast Asia, primarily Burma (10th-13th c).
- Halls 7, 8, 9: European fine arts 15th-20th centuries. Includes Correggio, Goya, Renoir, Rodin, Chagall, Picasso, Miro, Dali.
- Halls 11-19: Special Exhibitions.



National Opera and Ballet  
First opera company in Bulgaria  
was founded in 1890.  
– First opera performed 1909.  
– First ballet performed 1928  
– Building built 1947-1953.

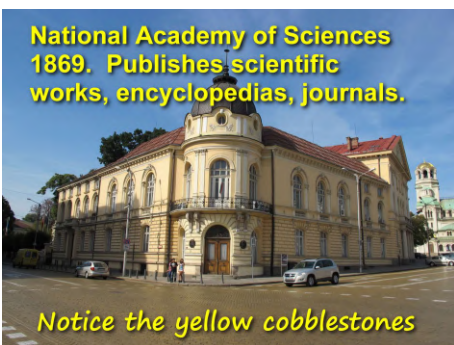


Opera - Ballet Tickets  
20 to 50 leva (US\$12-30)  
English subtitles

Not My Photo



National Palace of Culture - 1981  
Multifunctional: Concerts,  
conferences, exhibitions.



National Academy of Sciences  
1869. Publishes scientific  
works, encyclopedias, journals.

Notice the yellow cobblestones



Ivan Vazov National Theatre  
1907



Ivan Vazov National Theatre  
Bulgaria's national theatre.  
Built 1907.





**Ivan Vazov National Theatre**  
**Main stage: 750 seats**  
**Smaller 120-seat 70-seat theatres too**



**Sofia Metro (Subway) System**  
 – 2 lines.  
 – 35 stations.  
 – System length 25 miles.  
 – Began 1998.  
 – Daily ridership 350,000.  
 – Third line, 12 stations, under construction.



**Exhibitions of Roman antiquities unearthed during station construction**



**Sofia Metro**



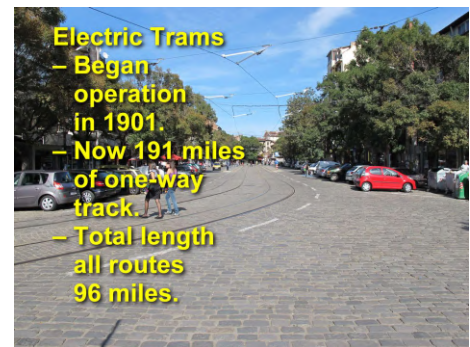
**Sofia Metro**



**Sofia Metro**



**Sofia Metro**



**Electric Trams**  
 – Began operation in 1901.  
 – Now 191 miles of one-way track.  
 – Total length all routes 96 miles.



**14 tram lines**  
**165 stops**  
**176 cars. Locally hand made.**



**No new tram lines since 1995. Focus now on expanding Metro.**



**Banya Bashi Mosque**  
**Coming up**



**1.60 lev (US\$1) exact change from driver or machine at stop.**  
**1.60 regardless of distance.**

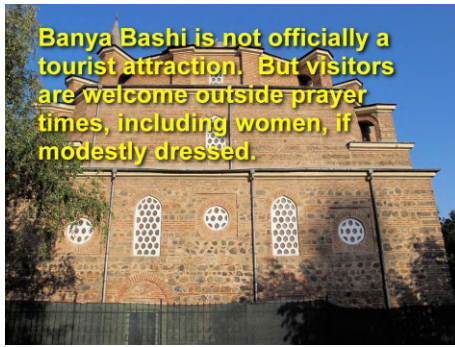
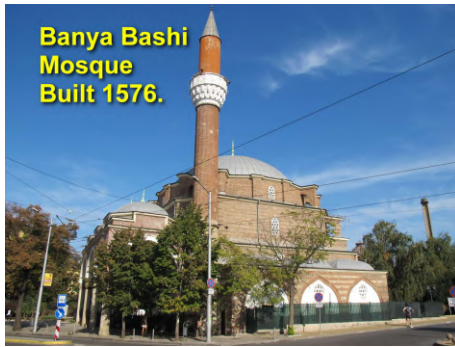


**Route signs only in Bulgarian**



**Central Bus Station**  
 – Buses to most cities and towns in Bulgaria. Frequent to seaside resorts.  
 – Buses to international cities including Thessaloniki, Bucharest, Skopje, Belgrade.









**Lions' Bridge and Tram**



**One of the lions is on the 20 Lev note.**



**Electric bus**



**Central Mineral Baths  
Traditional Turkish bathhouse.  
Opened 1913. Closed in 1986.  
2015 Became Regional History Museum.**



**Regional History Museum  
Eight halls.  
Over 1000 exhibits about Sofia history from 6000 BC to present.  
Including:  
- Marie Antoinette's 18th c carriage  
- Clock presented to Prince Ferdinand by Queen Victoria.**



**Regional History Museum**



**National Archaeology Museum  
15th c former Büyük Mosque**



**National Archaeology Museum  
- Prehistory Hall.  
- Treasures from the late Bronze Age to late Antiquity.  
- Main Hall: Diverse collection of items from ancient Thrace, Greece and Rome to the late Middle Ages.  
- Medieval Section.**



**National Archaeology Museum  
Funerary mask of Thracian Ruler  
5th c BC  
Thrace was what is today part of Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey**



**National Museum of Natural History:  
- Recent and Fossil Mammals.  
- Recent and Fossil Birds, Fishes.  
- Amphibia and Reptilia.  
- Insects.  
- Non-insect Invertebrata.  
- Fossil Invertebrata.  
- Minerals and Rocks.  
- Plants.**



**All displayed the old-fashioned way**



**Ancient Roman Complex of Serdica  
- Serdica is Roman name of Sofia.  
- Romans occupied 29 BC.  
- Huns sacked 447 AD.**



**Serdica ruins were discovered digging a Metro line 2010-2012.  
Building foundations, baths, public toilets, roads, water systems, part of an amphitheatre.**



**My pictures were taken in 2012, shortly after the discoveries.**





Ancient Serdica as discovered in 2010-2012

But then came "restoration" 2013-2016. Or is it "renovation"? Or is it simply "kitsch"?

News reports (edited for length):  
 "Controversy over reconstruction of parts of the buildings and walls, which protesters dismissed as kitsch".  
 "Citizens and experts protested against the methods and materials used in the reconstruction works".

April 21, 2016: "Bulgaria's Cabinet and Sofia Municipality have opened the long-delayed open-air museum of the Ancient Roman city of Serdica, which has been much criticized over the past 7-8 months because of the quality of the archaeological restorations.  
 Sofia Mayor Yordanka Fandakova said: "Part of the construction did not comply with the requirements of the project... demanded their removal".



The ruins of ancient Serdica went from this in 2012 to what's on the next few slides.



2nd c AD Roman Ruins? Or kitsch? 2018



2nd c AD Roman Ruins? Or kitsch? 2018



Maybe these two stones are Roman ruins. Seems to me, that's about it!

Not My Photo



Crafts and Antiques Market - Two rows of tables. - Alexander Nevsky Sq. (near cathedral)



Monument to the Bulgarian volunteers in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878

Crafts and Antiques Market



Daily 10:00 to 18:00.

Prices increase if buyer is foreign. Must haggle!

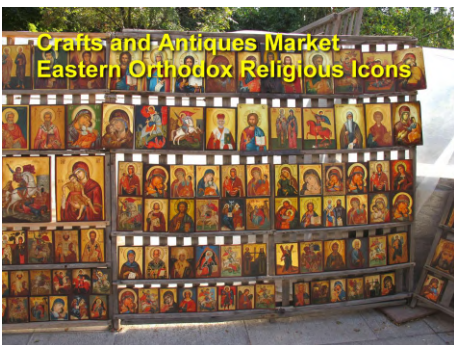


No English. Haggle by calculator.

"Treasures" include music records, daggers, Russian military helmets, communist memorabilia (questionable authenticity?), old violins, silver jewelry, religious icon paintings.



Traditional embroidery, fabrics, and rugs



Crafts and Antiques Market - Eastern Orthodox Religious Icons



Embroideries etc.

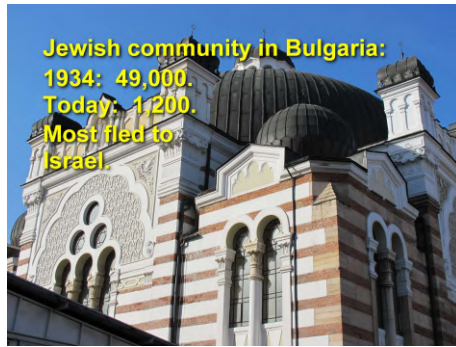


Sofia Central Synagogue Built 1905-1909. Largest Sephardic synagogue in Europe. Austrian architect. Resembles a former Vienna synagogue.





Built to hold 1,200 worshippers.  
Today 50 or 60 people attend  
Sabbath services.



Jewish community in Bulgaria:  
1934: 49,000.  
Today: 1,200.  
Most fled to  
Israel.



Sofia Synagogue Interior



**Synagogues Remaining in Bulgaria**

- Burgas Synagogue 1809 Now art gallery
- Dobrich Synagogue 1887 Theatre
- Gotse Delchev Syn. Early 20 c. Charity
- Pazardzhik Syn. 1850 Empty
- Plovdiv Synagogue 1887 Functioning
- Samtokov Synagogue 1860 In ruins
- Shumen Synagogue 19 c. In ruins
- Silistra Synagogue 19 c. Preserved
- Sofia Synagogue 1909 Functioning
- Varna Sephardic Syn. 1890 In ruins
- Vidin Synagogue 1894 Being rebuilt

Only two still functioning.



Interior of Sofia Central Synagogue  
1905-1909  
Still in use

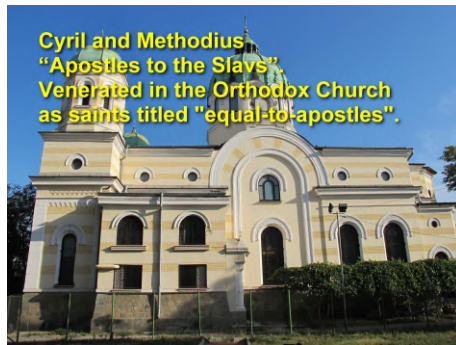
Not My Photo



Church of St Cyril and St Methodius  
Reconstructed 1901-1903 from an  
Ottoman Mosque



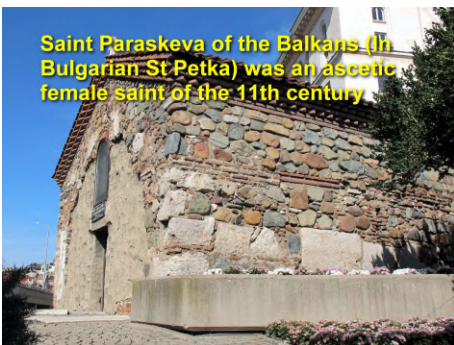
Sts Cyril and Methodius were brothers  
who were Byzantine Christian  
theologians and missionaries.  
9th c.



Cyril and Methodius  
"Apostles to the Slavs"  
Venerated in the Orthodox Church  
as saints titled "equal-to-apostles".



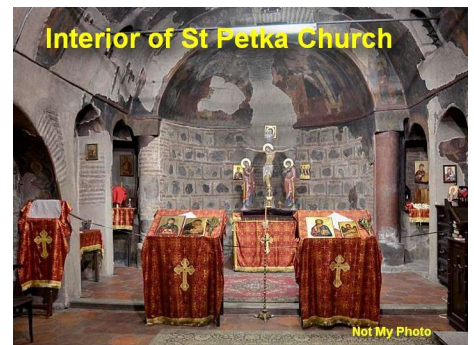
Church of St Petka  
14th century



Saint Paraskeva of the Balkans (In  
Bulgarian St Petka) was an ascetic  
female saint of the 11th century.



Church of St Petka - 14th century

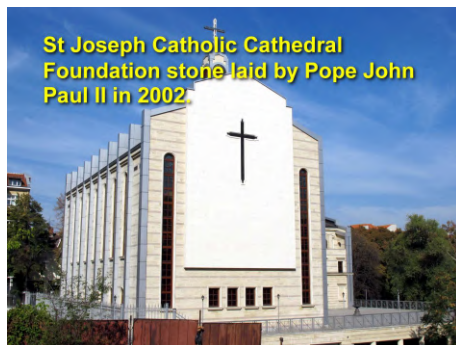


Interior of St Petka Church

Not My Photo



St Joseph Roman Catholic Cathedral  
2006  
Replaces cathedral destroyed in WW2

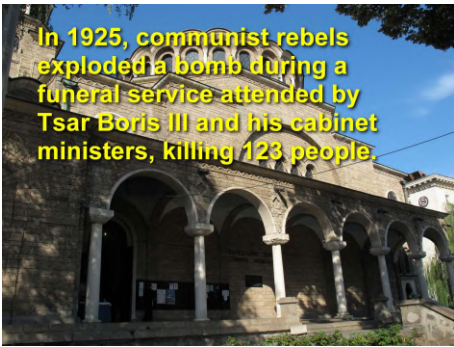


St Joseph Catholic Cathedral  
Foundation stone laid by Pope John  
Paul II in 2002

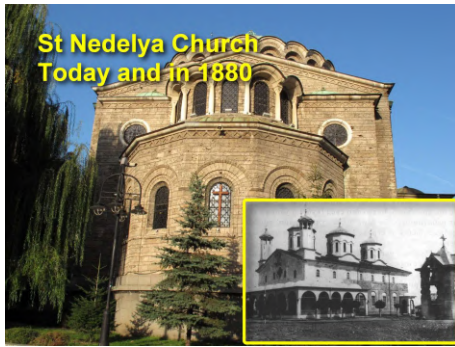


Saint Nedelya Church  
Eastern Orthodox  
Opened 1867





In 1925, communist rebels exploded a bomb during a funeral service attended by Tsar Boris III and his cabinet ministers, killing 123 people.



St Nedelya Church Today and in 1880



St Nedelya Church Interior



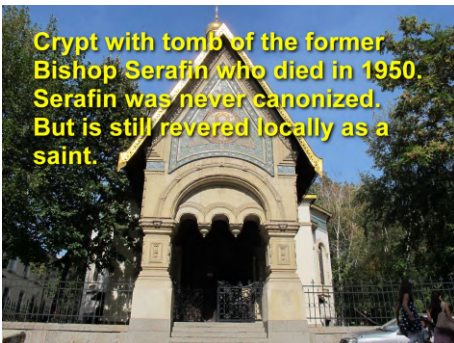
Church of St Nicholas the Miracle-Maker (The Russian Church) 1914



Official church of Russian Embassy and Russian Community in Sofia



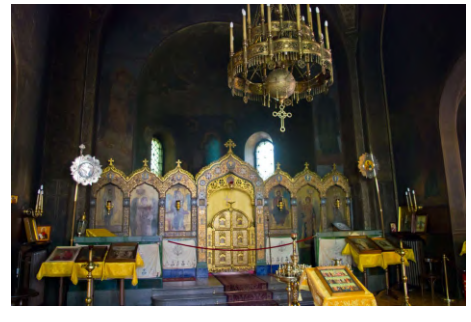
Church of St Nicholas – 1914 Roof is covered with green majolica tiles and Crowned with five gold-plated onion domes



Crypt with tomb of the former Bishop Serafin who died in 1950. Serafin was never canonized. But is still revered locally as a saint.

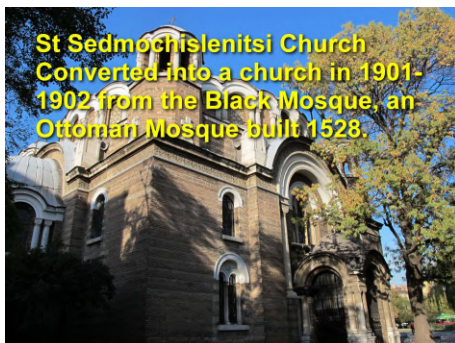


Interior of Russian Church



St Sedmochislenitsi Church

Hands-down winner of the award for least pronounceable site in my presentation!



St Sedmochislenitsi Church Converted into a church in 1901-1902 from the Black Mosque, an Ottoman Mosque built 1528.



St Sedmochislenitsi Church



Nezavisimost Square

Statue of St Sophia goddess-protector of the city.



St Sophia Statue was erected in 2000 to replace a statue of Lenin removed in 1990 after the fall of USSR.



Owl = Wisdom

Crown = Authority

Laurel wreath = fame





The Largo  
3 government  
office buildings.  
Early 1950s.



Council of Ministers Building  
Part of the Largo



Council of Ministers Building.  
Council is the main executive  
power in Bulgaria. It consists of  
the Prime Minister and all the  
specialized ministers.  
Like the Cabinet in USA.



Entrance to Council of Ministers

РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ  
МИНИСТЕРСКИ СЪВЕТ



Former Communist Party HQ.  
Now offices for National  
Assembly. Part of The Largo.



National Assembly Offices.  
Part of The Largo.



President's Office  
Council of Ministers



Notice the yellow paving bricks



National Bank of Bulgaria  
Central Bank  
Like US Federal Reserve Bank



Supreme Court of Bulgaria



Sofia University  
More precisely: The St. Clement  
of Ohrid University of Sofia



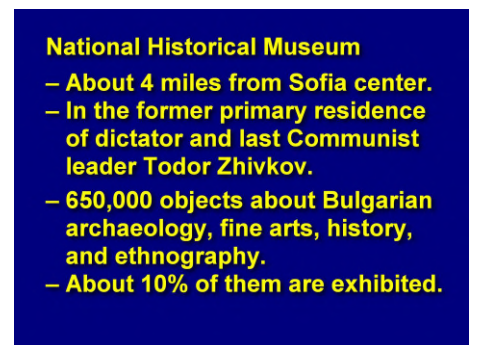
Sofia University Founded 1888.  
Oldest higher education  
institution in Bulgaria.



Sofia University  
Constructed 1924 to 1934.  
Today around 24,000 Students.

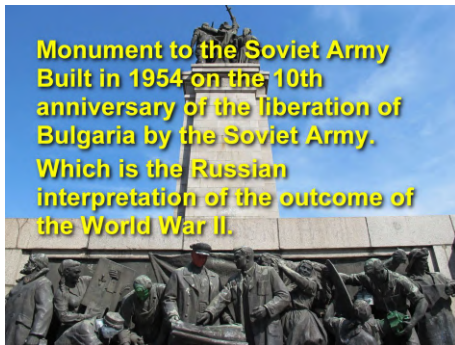
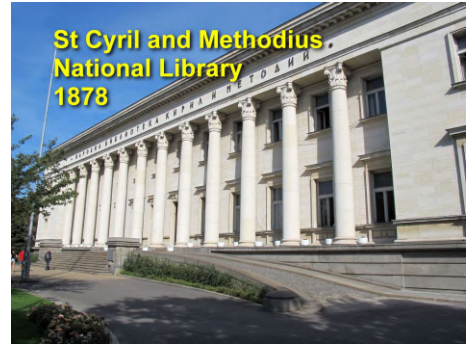


National Historical Museum  
Bulgaria's Largest Museum



National Historical Museum  
– About 4 miles from Sofia center.  
– In the former primary residence  
of dictator and last Communist  
leader Todor Zhivkov.  
– 650,000 objects about Bulgarian  
archaeology, fine arts, history,  
and ethnography.  
– About 10% of them are exhibited.









**Tzum Dept Store**  
Constructed 1955-1956  
as part of The Largo.

In 1990s proved to be too large.  
Converted to offices and  
boutique shops.



**Sofia Hotel Balkan**  
No longer Sheraton



**We conclude**  
with a few  
miscellaneous  
photos from  
Sofia.



**Newsstands carry Western**  
and local magazines



**Some "newsstands" just sell**  
alcohol and tobacco.



**Bulgaria has the 27th-highest**  
alcohol consumption per capita  
(11.4 liters) in the world. Top 10  
countries are: Belarus, Moldova,  
Lithuania, Russia, Romania,  
Ukraine, Andorra, Hungary, Czech  
Republic, Slovakia.

USA is #48 at 9.2  
litres per year  
per person.



**Chinese grocery store in Sofia**

Ming Lung Trading Company



**Postbox (Mailbox)**

**Pickups:**  
M-F between  
8 and 10 am  
2 and 4 pm  
Saturdays between 9 am and 1 pm



**Around 8 McDonald's in Sofia...**



**...and another 15 or so in other**  
parts of Bulgaria.



**Outside the central government**  
area, the sidewalks often need  
repairs.



**History of poor maintenance**  
during the Soviet era.  
Still a lot of catching  
up to do.



**There are nice cafes all**  
around Sofia.



**Banitsa Bulgarian Pastries -**  
Sweet or Savory



**Mall Food Court Lunch**  
Kebabche  
Kufeta  
Rice  
Potatoes  
Meatballs  
Pepsi  
Lev 12.5 = US\$7.





**Lamb Meatball Salad**



There are 22 KFC's in Bulgaria.  
**Chicken Wrap**



**Many interesting buildings in Sofia**



**Many interesting buildings in Sofia**



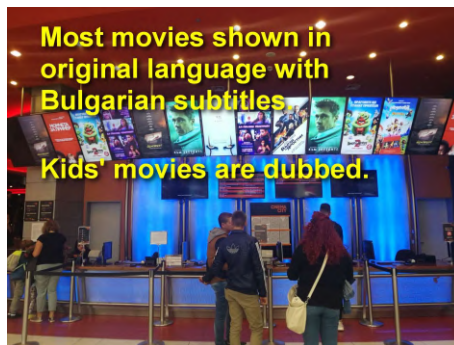
**Many interesting buildings in Sofia**



**UniCredit Bulbank is the largest bank in Bulgaria. Owned by the Italian bank UniCredit.**



There are 25 banking companies in Bulgaria. UniCredit is one. 15 are foreign-owned.



Most movies shown in original language with Bulgarian subtitles.  
Kids' movies are dubbed.



And we conclude with a couple of pictures I just couldn't resist



I will resist commenting about Holy Water.



**Day Trip from Sofia: Plovdiv Better: Spend a night or two. 2 hours from Sofia by bus.**

Sofia  
Plovdiv



**Plovdiv is an ancient and historic city. Bulgaria's second largest.**

**What to see in Plovdiv #1:**

**Roman Theatre**  
1st c. AD.

**Roman Odeon**  
2nd c. AD.  
Small theatre.

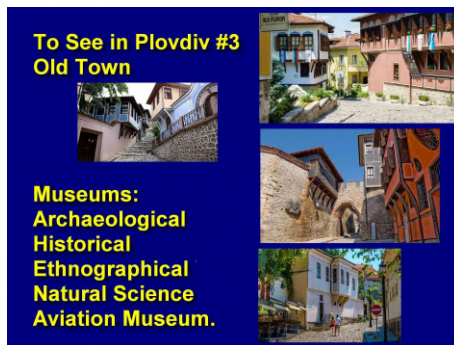


**To See in Plovdiv #2**

**Roman Stadium**  
2nd c. AD.  
30,000 spectators.

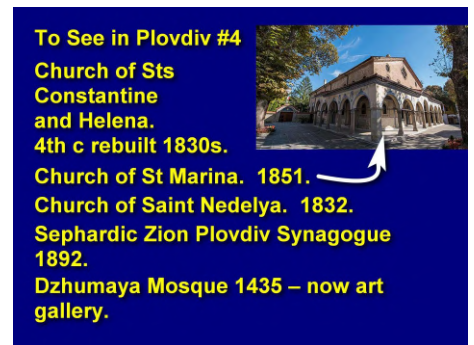
**Roman Forum**  
1st c. AD.  
Shops and public buildings.

**Roman Residence**  
3rd c. AD.



**To See in Plovdiv #3**  
**Old Town**

**Museums:**  
Archaeological  
Historical  
Ethnographical  
Natural Science  
Aviation Museum.



**To See in Plovdiv #4**

**Church of Sts Constantine and Helena.**  
4th c rebuilt 1830s.

**Church of St Marina.** 1851.

**Church of Saint Nedelya.** 1832.

**Sephardic Zion Plovdiv Synagogue** 1892.

**Dzhumaya Mosque** 1435 – now art gallery.



## Paul's Presentations

### Upcoming Through End of 2019

**Ukraine:** Nov 5, 3pm, Downtown.

**Bulgaria:** Nov 13, 2pm, Lely.

**Barbados:** Nov 19, 3pm, Downtown.

**London:** Dec 3, 3pm, Downtown.

**Albania:** Dec 11, 2pm, Lely.

**Cambodia:** Dec 17, 3pm, Downtown.

**2020** →

### Upcoming 2020

**China—Chaozhou:** Jan 8, 2pm, Lely.

**China—Shantou:** Jan 15, 2pm, Lely.

**China & HK:** Jan 16, 2pm, Golden Gate.

**Gibraltar:** Jan 21, 3pm, Downtown.

**China—Shenyang:** Jan 22, 2pm, Lely.

**Nagasaki:** Jan 28, 3pm, Downtown.

**Xinjiang and Gansu:** Jan 29, 2pm, Lely.

**Korea—Gyeongju:** Feb 4, 3pm, Downtown.

**Guam:** Feb 12, 2pm, Lely.

