

Belitsa, Blagoevgrad region (Bulgaria)

In 1912, Belitsa gained independence from Turkish rule and joined the Bulgarian Kingdom. The town is said to be named after a beautiful maiden named Bela Itsa, who chose death by jumping off the steep cliff-tops in her town, rather than marry a local Ottoman ruler.



A part of history that cannot be missed in Belitsa is the Thracian territory. Some of the oldest traces of human civilization, dating back to Neolithic times, were discovered in this region. There is also an ancient burial ground that sits atop the high-mountain sanctuaries north of Belitsa, in an area called Babiachka Chukka.

For history buffs, the Cultural Centre of Belitsa maintains one of the largest ethnographical museums in Bulgaria, ranging from Thracian and Roman occupation, to the 1944 Soviet

Declaration of War on Bulgaria.

With a rich history in sports, such as skiing and hiking, Belitsa is an ideal area for alpine enthusiasts. The mountain resort Semkovo, located 17km from the town, rises 600 metres above sea level and draws visitors year-round. The government has also set up a number of nature trails that lead through some of the most unspoiled passages in the country.

The Dancing Bear Park is truly one of the special "feel good" attractions in Belitsa. It is the largest of its kind in Europe and is home to a growing population of rescue bears being prepared for re-introduction into the wild. The park receives monetary support from the Bridget Bardo Foundation and the local Belitsa municipalities



No trip to Belitsa is complete without tasting the enticing local cuisine and enjoying the festivities that follow dinner. A stop at one of the town's quaint restaurants to try the hearty, Mediterranean-influenced food ends with a night of Belistisian songs, which are sung around the tables.

Belitsa is an area steeped in history and the town's municipalities have taken the necessary steps to preserve this. Environmental issues are always on the agenda and new measures such as eco-friendly conservation are constantly being improved.

With a calendar filled with festivals and events, Belitsa stays vibrant throughout the year. The region is

home to Muslims and Christians alike, whose religious rituals keep the area lively throughout the holidays.

<http://www.belitsa.com>

<http://ec.europa.eu>