

Belogradchik (Bulgaria)

Myths, legends, even traces of ancient Thrace are waiting to be discovered by visitors to Belogradchik, or small white town, situated in the foothills of the Balkan mountains in north west Bulgaria.



The place has an abundance of intriguing and natural features due to its geology to which it owes a network of interesting rock formations including what is described as the jewel in the crown, the Magura cave. Situated near Rabisha village, 25 km away from Belogradchik, this is Bulgaria's biggest cave and home to galleries and halls that will appeal to the most experienced speleologist or caver.

The triumphal hall, the bat gallery, the stalactites' hall, the drawings gallery, the fallen pine hall, the poplar hall, the throne hall, the ceremonial hall, the fjords corridor – all evocative names that call the visitor under ground. This cave of the paleolithic era is important, having unique stone



drawings painted with bat manure dating from the epipaleolithic age (10 000 B.C.) to the early bronze age, and fossils of wild prehistoric animals. Open all year round, the cave is well lit and the paths that meander through the underground world are well maintained and fitted with safety rails. The paths are open to both walkers and cyclists.

If claustrophobia looms, then an escape is offered in the form of star-gazing at the astronomical observatory, situated among the Belogradchik rocks. For those preferring life sciences to geology and astronomy, Belogradchik also houses the only museum of natural science in north west Bulgaria.

An important highlight of the year is the folklore festival “From Tymok to Iskar – along the steps of the Thracians” which lasts for three days in September. The festival kicks off with the Thracian procession which takes place at the famous Belogradchik fortress to the sound of shepherd's pipes and other musical instruments, as participants dressed in traditional Thracian clothing walk through the town. The scene takes on an eerie quality with participants dressed in costume, wearing masks and bearing torches. People wishing to join in can do so as masks, costumes and torches are handed out freely. The festival involves other sporting competitions – the throwing of the javelin and the disk, archery, horse racing and fire jumping.

Historical architecture and the reflection of the lives of those that lived in the dwellings of a past epoch can also be explored in the Anishte grounds – excavated ruins of an ancient village, artifacts collected from which include pottery fragments, ornaments and coins from the 3rd century.

The Hadji Husein mosque is also a site worth visiting, boasting the best of Bulgarian woodcarving and is the only mosque with a Bulgarian fretwork ceiling.

The region is celebrated for its wine and local inhabitants involve wine tasting as an important part of their traditions. One of the most interesting formations to be found in the Magura cave is the “cave milk”.

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