

Versatility in Hospitality Industry around the Globe to Study and understand the Culture, Traditions and Ethnic Cuisine of Bulgaria

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research is to understand BULGARIA and explore the cultural and culinary aspects of the country Bulgaria. Bulgaria is a country located in Southeast Europe. Bulgaria is a culturally diverse country with a rich and intangible history. Being an integral part of the past cultural heritage, the traditional Bulgarian folklore festivals, carnivals and celebrations are the epitome in terms of diverse culture, tradition and ethnic cuisine that a country can offer. The food in Bulgaria is influenced by Turkey, been under Ottoman rule, One will find similarities with Geek, Persian and Mediterranean Cuisine. Because of being in the geographic epicentre of different sides of the world, Bulgarian food is a fusion of Eastern and western culture is evident in its cuisines, its architecture and its religious heritage. This research gave me an opportunity to know so much about the less spoken and unknown country in terms of its rich culture and cuisines and how it is steadily gaining more tourists because of its back-dated and deep-rooted history, which has remained unhindered for generations..*

Keywords: Product, Industry, Service, Guest.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Bulgaria is a country in Southeast Europe occupying the eastern portion of the Balkan Peninsula. The name Bulgaria is derived from the Bulgars, a tribe of Turkic origin that founded the First Bulgarian Empire. Besides ethnic Bulgarians, there are several ethnic minorities, the most numerous being Turks and Gypsies, with smaller numbers of Armenians, Jews, and others. Its national language is Bulgarian. Like other nations of the Balkan Peninsula, Bulgaria claims a mix of Eastern and Western cultures, and the mingling is evident in its cuisine, its architecture, and its religious heritage. The Bulgarian writer Yordan Radichkov has placed the capital along the axis of two major transnational routes: the historic Silk Road that connects China and the West and a major natural path of migrating birds known as the “grand route of Aristotle.” According to Radichkov, “The universal core of Bulgaria is to be found at the crossroads between Europe and Asia”



Founded in the 7th century, Bulgaria is one of the oldest states on the European continent. It is intersected by historically important routes from northern and eastern Europe to the Mediterranean basin and from western and central



Europe to the Middle East. Before the creation of the Bulgarian state, the empires of ancient Rome, Greece, and Byzantium were strong presences, and people and goods travelled the land with frequency.

Bulgaria gained its independence in the late 19th century As communist governments fell in eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bulgaria was suddenly released from the magnetic field of the Soviet giant and drifted into the uneasy terrain of post communism.

Bulgaria is located on the Balkan Peninsula in south eastern Europe. It is bordered on the east by the Black Sea, on the north by Romania and the Danube River, on the south by Greece and Turkey, and on the west by Macedonia and Serbia. Bulgaria covers a territory of 110,994 square kilometres. The capital city, Sofia, lies in a mountainous basin in the west. It is now made up of 28 different provinces.

Most of Bulgaria has a moderate continental climate, which is tempered by Mediterranean influences in the south. The average annual temperature is 51 °F (10.5 °C), but this conceals a wide variation; temperatures as low as -37 °F (-38 °C) and as high as 113 °F (45 °C) have been recorded.

Bulgaria is remarkable for its variety of scenery; its rugged mountains and relaxing Black Sea resorts and the Bansko Ski resort for skiing and snowboarding and winter sports centres such as Borovets in the Rhodope Mountains, historic centres such as Sofia, Plovdiv, and Rila Monastery and Pirin National Park, which was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983.

Bulgaria claims a mix of Eastern and Western cultures, and the mingling is evident in its cuisine, its architecture, and its religious heritage.

II. CULTURE OF BULGARIA

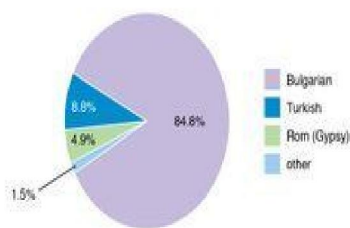
The culture of Bulgaria is based on an interesting blend of Thracian, Slavic and Bulgar traditions, along with the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many ancient customs remain, such as Thracian fire dancing, which is recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Bulgaria also has a strong folkloric tradition that pervades many aspects of art, literature, music, celebrations and daily life.

Amongst other powers, Bulgaria has been conquered by the Roman, Ottoman and Persian regimes, and many of these attempted to repress local culture. However, a strong linguistic base and resilient and determined outlook allowed Bulgaria to preserve and retain its identity, emerging as an independent nation with unique food, traditions, habits and beliefs, of which the people are justifiably proud.

The people of Bulgaria has kept their old traditions , culture and beliefs alive depending on the Religion they follow and also to some extent a number of ancient civilizations, including the Thracians, ancient Greeks, Scythians, Celts, ancient Romans, Slavs, Varangians and the Bulgars have left their mark on the culture, history and heritage of Bulgaria. Due to this great variety of influences, Bulgaria has adopted many unusual traditions and cultures.

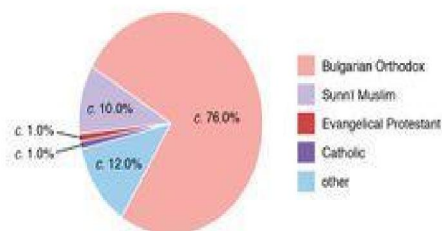
With the reforms of the 1990s, following the communist period of state-sponsored atheism, full freedom of religion was established. There is no official religion, and the majority of religious Bulgarians are adherents of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church Religious groups include Muslims, Protestant Catholics, Jews and Georgian Americans. Within the Protestant minority are Great Commission Christians, Pentecostals and Evangelicals. The Catholic minority are followers of the Bulgarian Catholic Church, which is in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church.[1]

Ethnic composition (2011)



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Religious affiliation (2011)**



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**Unofficially, in 2006, up to 40% of the population was estimated to be atheist or agnostic.

The population is fairly homogeneous, with Bulgarians making up more than four-fifths of the total Followed by the Turks, Bulgaria’s largest minority, comprise about one-tenth and Rom, Muslims and other minorities, yet the people



and the Religion followed in Bulgaria has its unique impact on its culture as each one has its own tradition, beliefs and customs

Bulgarians are understandably proud of their distinct gastronomy, customs, habits, and beliefs. Bulgaria has a fascinating cultural influence from the Thracian rule, Slavic language, and Bulgar traditions, as well as the eastern Orthodox Christians.

Bulgarians organise festivals and even participate in many International festivals, to promote their national customs like the International Folklore Festival, held early in August in Burgas; the Varna Summer International Festival, primarily a music festival, held in July; and Sofia Musical Weeks, a springtime celebration of classical music. Historical plays are popular, particularly when staged outdoors in summer against the backdrop of important monuments or buildings associated with events in the country's history. Local festivals provide an opportunity for new musical and literary works to be performed.[1]

III. CULTURES AND TRADITIONS FOLLOWED BY THE BULGARIANS

In order to understand the country, you need to understand some extraordinary Bulgarian traditions and cultures. Getting up before daybreak, getting muddy, dancing in ice-cold water, rose festival and ascending a mountaintop for a music festival are just a few of the amazing Bulgarian customs.[1]

Festival of Roses that takes place in the town of Kazanlak every May and June. For more than a month, everybody is invited to wake up before sunrise and to take part in the traditional rose picking process. Everything is done in the good old-fashioned way. Each flower is handpicked and used to produce one of the best rose oils known to the cosmetic industry, used in most French perfumes. There are annual rose festivals in which towns display their beautiful roses and choose rose queens.

According to the Orthodox Christian tradition, on January 6 the priest throws a metal cross in the ice-cold waters of the local river, while the bravest men try to fetch it first, bare chested and seemingly unaffected by the freezing temperatures. In one particular town, the ritual goes even further with men performing a traditional dance (horo) in the cold water.[1]

Bulgarian hikers are so fascinated by their favourite mountain routes and peaks, that they organize summer music festivals high up there. One of the most popular summer mountain festivals is the Blueberry Festival, held at 5000 feet in the Stara Planina Mountain, near Amrimsar mountain chalet. There is no vehicular access which means that everyone who wants to attend the event has to carry their food, tent. The fact that thousands of people do this every summer.

The custom called July Morning is celebrated only in Bulgaria. On June 30, Bulgarian people flock to the Black Sea shore to set up camp on the sand, play guitar, sing, and drink socially around a campfire. They sing the Uriah Heap song '*July Morning*' when the sun rises in the morning to honour summer, freedom and friendship and simply enjoy camaraderie.

In Bulgaria on March 1 the street vendors sell red and white threads in all shapes and varieties, and that everyone has tens of these tied around their wrists or pinned on their jackets. This is martenitsa, the magical thread supposed to provide a healthy and prosperous year to its owner. The holiday is called Baba Marta (Grandma March) and is a celebration of the coming of spring. Bulgarian children are taught that Grandma March is the one who brings the spring together with their martenitsa.

The Kukeri in Bulgaria are distinguished by their frightening costumes, which appear to have originated from an extravagant horror production. The Kukeri parade is held around New Year's Eve or on Cheese fare Sunday, right before Lent, as an old ceremony to ward off bad spirits.

It is customary in Bulgaria to splash a copper pitcher of water in front of the entryway when someone leaves home for a significant event in their life, such as the first day of school, a crucial test, or a major competition.

IV. FAMILY CULTURE

The people here are very hospitable to friends and strangers alike, offering food or drinks to anyone that happens across their doorstep. [2]

Family life is very important in Bulgaria as a result most families try to spend as much time enjoying a meal together as possible, usually at least one meal a day.

Bulgarians tend to have a traditional view of familial life. Many generations live together in one household, and share responsibilities in taking care of finances and children. Children become incredibly close to their cousins and their grandparents, sometimes even closer than they are with their own parents.[2]

V. BULGARIAN FOOD AND ITS HISTORY

Bulgarian Cuisine is similar to that of the surrounding Balkan countries as well as Turkey and Greece, yet they put their own little twist on their dishes. It's typically fresh, hearty and contains a variety of mild spices.

Bulgarian cooking traditions are diverse because of geographical factors such as climatic conditions suitable for a variety of vegetables, herbs, and fruit. Beside from the vast variety of local Bulgarian dishes, Bulgarian cuisine shares a number of dishes with Persian, Turkish and Greek cuisine, indicating the influence of people and religion on it.[2]

Bulgarian cuisine shares a number of dishes with Middle Eastern Cuisine, including

Popular dishes like moussaka, gyuvetch, kyufte and baklava. White brine cheese called "sirene", similar to feta, is also a popular ingredient used in salads and a variety of pastries.

The Bulgarian cuisine began to have an identity of its own in the 18th century. Until that moment, people consumed the usual foods that were cooked across Europe: bread, fruits and vegetables, fish and various meats. The 19th century marked even a stronger development of the Bulgarian cooking style. Since then, people have created traditional recipes while enhancing others, by using local ingredients and their style.

Bulgarian food often incorporates salads as appetizers and is also noted for the prominence of dairy products, wines and other alcoholic drinks such as rakia. The cuisine also features a variety of soups, such as the cold soup tarator, and pastries, such as the filo dough-based banitsa, pita, and the various types of burek.

Bulgarians take much pride in their yogurt and eat it every single day. It is generally made from cow milk or sheep milk or buffalo milk, however the last two variations are more appreciated and in fact, Bulgarians credit their longevity to their yogurt, which is more nutrient-rich than most other yogurts on the planet.

Cheese is also loved and consumed here. Cheese has major 2 variations first being fetta cheese made which is white and made either out of sheat or cow milk and the second variation is that of Kashkaval cheese which is the name given to the yellow cheese

Most cattle are bred for milk production rather than meat, veal is popular for grilling meat appetizers (meze) and in some main courses.

Their meal generally includes dishes made with lamb, goat meat, veal, chicken, Pork and fish are widely used depending on the location and the Religion.

Vegetables are used in Bulgarian recipes in large quantities and in number of combinations. The ones that are used most frequently are cabbage, cucumbers, green peppers, zucchini, celery, cauliflower, lettuce, radishes, gumbo garlic, mushrooms, spinach, green onions, eggplants, potatoes, Pumpkins and others.

Fruits are enjoyed by the Bulgarians either raw or are the ingredients of their deserts The most often consumed fruits are plums, apricots, peaches, melons etc.

Foods are flavoured by paprika, parsley, mint, thyme and milfoil.

People have created their unique beverage and traditional drinks, the most important are rakia, mastica, menta, boza, ayran and various types of bears and mineral waters.

There are also some distinctive wines in Bulgaria mainly, Mavrud, Pamid, Gumza, Meinik, Misket, Pelin and Muskat.

Family life is very important in Bulgaria as a result most families try to spend as much time enjoying a meal together as possible, usually at least one meal a day.

Out of all the meals that the Bulgarians consume, Breakfast tends to on the lighter side when compared to their lunch or dinner which is a much larger affair, consisting of typically water-based stews either vegetarian or with lamb, goat meat, veal, chicken or Pork. Deep-frying is not common, but grilling – especially of different kinds of sausages – is very prominent. Pork is common, often mixed with veal or lamb, although fish and chicken are also widely used.

Most Bulgarian cuisines do not require any special kitchen tools or utensils except for the coffee grinder, which helps with roasting and grinding spices and maximizes their volatile oil, which in turn provides their food with more fresh flavours.

Since the very beginnings of the Bulgarian cuisines, people have prepared the food by either boiling, stewing or roasting the ingredients. The others are the ones used across Europe and Northern America

There is one thing that differentiates the Bulgarians from the others. It is a tradition to eat the food in earthen ware dishes. This habit is only maintained by the elders of the family today. In the modern cuisines, people serve the foods in normal plates.

VI. FOOD IN DAILY LIFE

The everyday diet is based largely on local, in-season products. Bread, an important staple, is often purchased rather than home baked. Dairy products are widely consumed, particularly yogurt and white-brined cheese.

Home-cooked lunches and dinners often include soups, salads, stews, grilled meats, or stuffed vegetables, while meals away from home may consist of foods such as bread, cheese, sausage, and vegetables. *Banitsa* is a popular pastry filled with cheese and eggs, pumpkin, rice, spinach, or leeks.

For snacks and breakfast, it is accompanied by a grain-based drink, *boza*, or yogurt-based *airan*. Popular alcoholic beverages include *rakiya*, a potent fruit-based brandy, and wine.

Many people use can fruits and vegetables and make sauerkraut for winter when fresh produce is unavailable or unaffordable.

Regional culinary variation reflects local environmental conditions, for example, fish along the sea, vegetables in the plains, and dairy products in mountain areas. Some observant Muslims avoid eating pork.

In response to post socialist conditions, meat and dairy product consumption has declined relative to the less-expensive bread. Typical restaurant offerings are more limited than home cooking, with menus based around salads, soups, grilled meats, and perhaps a meatless offering. Coffee bars, pubs, and sweet shops are popular meeting places for a drink, coffee, or snack.

VII. FOOD CUSTOMS WITH FESTIVAL DELICIES

Bulgarians organise festivals to promote their national customs. However, displaying the traditional dishes is often their secondary goal. Holidays in Bulgaria are frequently celebrated in combination with certain foods.

Kurban chorba is a classic nutritious soup in Bulgaria that is typically served during family gatherings or religious feasts.

St. Trifon Zarezan is a wine festival which is organized each year on the 14th February which gives wine growers the best opportunity to show their best products

One of the other oldest traditions in Bulgaria is celebrating Saturday before Saint Paraskeva's Day as Chicken Church. The Trademark of this holiday is represented by dishes based on Poultry.

The Christmas and New year table includes numerous, predominantly meatless dishes, including stuffed cabbage leaves (*sami*), stuffed peppers, beans, lentils, boiled wheat, dried fruit, and nuts. However vegetarian stuffed peppers, as well as cabbage leaf *sarmi*, are a must on Christmas Eve.

Cozonac is a classic Romanian sweet bread, known in Bulgaria as *kozunak* that is typically served on holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

Special holiday breads include Easter's braided *kozunak*, which is sometimes decorated with dyed eggs.

Nikulden (Day of St. Nicholas, December 6) involves fish.

Roast lamb is traditionally served during Gergyovden.

Some Orthodox Christians observe a Lenten fast before Easter,

The observant Muslims avoid eating and drinking during daylight hours during Ramadan. Within Islamic tradition, numerous dishes are served and sweets are exchanged on Ramazan (Ramadan) Bairam, and a ram or calf is ritually slaughtered for Kurban Bairam. Kurban means sacrifice and also refers to a meat dish prepared for ceremonial occasions. Another popular celebration dish is spit-roasted sheep or goat.

VIII. TRADITIONAL BULGARIAN DELICASIES

Bulgarian cuisine is representative or symbol of Southeast European cuisine.

Salads are frequently served as appetizers in Bulgarian cuisine.

A range of soups, like the cold soup tarator, plus pastries, including the filo dough-based banitsa, pita, and several varieties of Borek, are also available.

Tripe soup is the English equivalent of “*shkembe*”. The soup is flavoured with garlic, fiery red peppers, and vinegar in addition to tripe.

The Bulgarian yogurt *kiselo mlyako* is usually served with Bulgarian traditional dishes. Due to the two types of bacteria, it contains, it is considered to be one of the best forms of yogurt available.

Drob po selski, or village-style liver, is a classic Bulgarian meal created by boiling liver in a clay pottery pot with vegetable pieces and mushrooms.

Elenski but is a native Bulgarian dry-cured pork product from the town of Elena and its surrounding settlements.

Oshav is a simple meal of stewed dried fruit such as prunes, apples, and pears that is traditionally served on Christmas Eve in Bulgaria.

Kazanlak donuts are a delicacy of Kazanlak, a Bulgarian town.

Cubed pork, tomatoes, dried peppers, and onions make up *drusan kebab*, a classic Bulgarian meal.

The traditional Bulgarian meal *chushki burek* is produced by filling and frying peppers.

Karnacheta is a special type of Bulgarian sausage which is normally created by putting groundhog meat inside a sheep casing with a blend of traditional Bulgarian spices.

Moussaka, *gyuvetch*, *kyufte* and *baklava* are only a few of the dishes that Bulgarian food has in common with Middle Eastern cuisine.

IX. SPECIALITY TOURIST CUSINES IN BULGARIA

Tourism in Bulgaria has grown markedly since the 1960s. Bulgaria is known for its beautiful landscape, with each turn in the country providing a new surprise. It is remarkable for its variety of scenery; its rugged mountains and relaxing Black Sea resorts and the Bansko Ski resort for skiing and snowboarding and last but not the least the opportunity to feast on the Bulgarian food attract many Tourists each year.

Few of the Bulgarian food not to be missed and is must try for the tourist are:

Banitsa

This tasty dish is a traditional Bulgarian pastry made by layering a combination of beaten eggs and bits of cheese amongst filo pastry. It is then baked in the oven until it is cooked on the inside and crispy on the outside.

Tarator

Tarator, a super refreshing and very tasty cold soup especially for the summer months is generally served as a first course. It is commonly made with fresh cucumbers, walnuts, garlic, Bulgarian yoghurt, dill, herbs and vinegar or lemon. It is.

Meshana Skara

Meshana Skara or mixed grill in English, is ideal for meat lovers this is ideal. It is a combination of grilled meat in various forms and versions.

Sarmi

Bulgarian Sarmi are cabbage leaves stuffed with a tasty mixture of rice, spices and mince, for meat lovers or just with rice which is served as a starter. This Bulgarian speciality is one not to be missed and is a must try.

Shopska Salata

Shopska salata or shopska salad is a traditional Bulgarian salad made with chopped cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, peppers, fresh parsley and topped with grated white cheese is what makes the salad different exuberant in flavour and taste.

X. CONCLUSION

Bulgaria is an atmospheric country with a long and sometimes difficult history that has produced a modern, vibrant civilization that retains its most charming elements of the past, including ancient rituals and folklore. The influences of different cultures and the Eastern Orthodox Church have also shaped the nation, particularly in terms of festivals and food.



The culture of Bulgaria is based on an interesting blend of Thracian, Slavic and Bulgar traditions, along with the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many ancient customs remain, such as Thracian fire dancing, which is recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Bulgaria also has a strong folkloric tradition that pervades many aspects of art, literature, music, celebrations and daily life.

Amongst other powers, Bulgaria has been conquered by the Roman, Ottoman and Persian regimes, and many of these attempted to repress local culture. However, a strong linguistic base and resilient and determined outlook allowed Bulgaria to preserve and retain its identity, emerging as an independent nation with unique food, traditions, habits and beliefs, of which the people are justifiably proud.

While writing and researching on my topic of "Studying and understanding the Cultural, Traditions and Ethnic Cuisine of Bulgaria", I as a writer and a researcher, truly fathomed and appreciated the diversity of this humble little country and what it has to offer to the world, in terms of diversity of its culture, tradition, festivals food and places that one can visit.

For me it was a movement of epiphany when I learnt about its rich culture and cuisines and how it is steadily gaining more tourists day by day, because of its diversity and its influence from other neighbouring countries in art, culture, traditions & cuisines and because of its back dated, deep rooted history and cultural practices which has remained unhindered for generations.

As a writer and a researcher, it was my absolute honour and privilege to have had this opportunity to write about Bulgaria.

I sincerely hope you have fun reading about Bulgaria and Bulgarians as much as I had, in writing about this humble beautiful country & its people.

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