



NATBIOT PROJECT - "NATURAL HERITAGE - NATURAL/ BIO RESOURCES' SERVICES"

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NATBIOT 1- ME-VI TRAVEL PACKAGE Mehedinți, Romania - Vidin, Bulgaria (7 days)







We invite you on a 7-day cross-border vacation, exploring Mehedinți County in Romania and Vidin District in Bulgaria, between the localities Dr. Tr. Severin - Orșova - Vidin - Belogradchik.

The main objective of this travel package is to give you the joy of discovering spectacular natural beauty, new, interesting cultural objectives, but especially to give you a pleasant, picturesque atmosphere, quality services, enjoying the traditional, natural and organic culinary delights, thus getting to know the hospitality of two neighbouring, befriended peoples.

WHO IS THIS TRAVEL PACKAGE MEANT FOR?

NATBIOT 1 - ME-VI is meant for:

- tourists who want to experience new, less known destinations;
- "healthy" tourism enthusiasts who love exploring nature, who love "movement", who want to discover new cultural goals and traditions and who want to stay in a friendly environment, benefiting from quality services, understanding by quality also healthy, traditional, natural and / or organic food, both for those who have already approached this lifestyle in their daily life and for those who want to approach a healthy lifestyle at least while on vacation;
- individual tourists or in tourist groups families with and without children, seniors or young people, formally or informally organized, companies or other organizations for group activities.

WHAT BENEFITS YOU HAVE IF YOU CHOOSE THE NATBIOT 1- ME-VI PACKAGE?

- Changing the traditional destinations with some new ones, which will open you new horizons and will get you out of the routine, as the objectives proposed for your stay in Mehedinți County and Vidin District are particularly offering;
- You can have a stay away from the pollution and crowding of the usual destinations, exploring parts of the territory of two neighbouring countries, some less known to the general public;
- Invigorate your body and soul by moving in nature and by visiting the cultural places that bear the spirituality of two peoples;
- You get to rest in hospitable conditions, benefiting from quality services, being able to choose from a wide variety of accommodation units, hotels, modern and/or rustic guesthouses, rooms for rent in local people's houses, chalets; you are provided with an updated database of these accommodation units, the number of rooms available and their quality level;
- The easy degree of accessibility at the starting points, namely Dr. Tr. Severin and Vidin: on the road the European route E70 and the connection with the Rhine Main Danube Canal, the bridge from the Hydropower and Navigation system Porțile de Fier, the bridge Calafat-Vidin; Road distance to the nearest international airports: Sofia- Vidin 196.6 km/about 3h, Craiova Dr. Tr. Severin 110.6 km/about 2h. The travel package may also include the airport transfer;

- Delight your senses with delicious but healthy dishes, benefitting from the local advantage: the use of natural / organic/ traditional agricultural products;
- You will have the opportunity to benefit from as many organic products taking into account the fact that both Bulgaria and Romania have registered a spectacular growth in organic agriculture (between 2010 and 2016 Bulgaria recorded the highest growth of organic cultivated areas in the EU, 35%, and Romania is the ninth largest producer of organic products and ranks among the top ten producers with organic production increases, according to the latest FIBL report in 2019. Thus, the latest FIBL report indicates a 14.2% increase in the ecological surface, the 6th place in Europe in terms of growth dynamics and in terms of the collection of ecological honey from the wild areas, Romania occupies the 4th place in the world in terms of collection areas (1.8 mil. hectares in 2014).

Tour operators are taking advantage of the opportunity to capitalize on organic production.



From the tourist's point of view, here are some of the advantages conferred by the consumption of organic products:

- no herbicides, pesticides, hormones were used in their production;
- they do not contain any additives or other chemicals;
- they do not contain any additives or other chemicals;
- they do not contain any additives or other chemicals;
- they are healthy products, free of toxic residues;
- they have a balanced content of bioactive substances and minerals:
- the taste of organic foods is superior to the conventional ones

Natural products have almost the same advantages as organic ones, with the mention that they do not present quality assurance, and their certification is not regulated, relying in most cases on "trust". In smaller communities, however, trust is based on mutual acquaintance between community members, reducing the risk of consumer deception.

In order to access the travel package NATBIOT 1 - ME-VI, resort to a tour operator because:

- it organizes the entire stay according to your preferences for the accommodation, meals, program, without you looking for the optimal options by yourselves, making sure that the established program is complied with:
- it ensures full-time transportation, including pick up and return from your locality;
- it ensures reservations and negotiates the best price for you;

Joined by the Danube River, Mehedinti County and Vidin District are the hosts of your vacation!

For the tourist's convenience, security and to ensure the observance of the vacation schedule, consider the purchase of the package from a tour operator, road transport insurance (car, minibus, coach), providing assistance, guide (on request), for groups of tourists, differentiated, according to their number.



Mehedinți County is located in the south-western part of Romania, on the left bank of the Danube at its exit from the defile. The relief of the county offers a particularly valuable and spectacular natural setting, and here two biosphere reserves recorded, national or natural parks: Biosphere Reserve - Domogled National Park - Cerna Valley (also extends in Caraș Severin and Gorj counties) and Biosphere Reserve - Porțile de Fier National Park. There are also 32 natural reserves recorded, which makes the area particularly attractive for people loving nature, hiking and so for those who choose the NATBIOT 1 - ME-VI travel package.

The route NATBIOT 1 - ME-VI has as <u>its</u> starting point Dr. Tr. Severin or Vidin.

Now we shall take you on a stay starting from Dr. Tr. Severin. On the 4 days of your stay in Mehedinți county, we propose routes in 2 directions:

a) to the north of the county - Ponoare Karst Complex is the first destination, having as main tourist objectives Ponoarele Cave, God's Bridge, Câmpul de lapiezuri and b) to the east - to the Danube Gorge - Clisura Dunarii - Orsova, Esalnita, Dubova, having as main tourist objectives Decebal's statue, Mraconia Monastery. Vodita Monastery. Several tourist attractions in the city of D. Tr. Severin will complete the stay in Mehedinti County. You can spend the night in Dr. Tr. Severin where you have 9 hotels, 12 guesthouses, 5 hostels, 3 motels or you can try the accommodation in Orsova - you have 2 3-star hotels, 2 hostels, 4 guesthouses, rooms for rent, 1 campsite with cottages or in one of the many guesthouses in Eselnita, Dubova, Ilovita for the route to the east and / or Baia de Arama for the route to the north where you have 1 hotel, 1 hostel, 1 guesthouse and rooms for including rent. villa.





The entire database with accommodation possibilities, quality standards and availability for natural / organic food is at your disposal. You just have to choose!

a) to the north of the county - Ponoare Karst Complex, having as main tourist objectives Ponoarele Cave, God's Bridge, Câmpul de lapiezuri

Starting from Dr.Tr. Severin to Ponoare (67km) - Baia de Aramă (72km) we will enter a specific plateau landscape - Mehedinți Plateau. We will make stops in order to visit and admire some of the representative sights of the area.



The Ponoare Karst complex is located on the administrative territory of Ponoarele township, 5 km SW from Baia de Arama, with an area of 100 ha. The access is achieved on DJ 670 Tr. Severin - Balta - Baia de Arama - Ponoarele. Predominantly, we find limestone rocks that form the most diverse karst forms: dolines, potholes, caves, channelled limestone fields, galleries.

The vegetation is specific to the mountain area, where the forest occupies 50%. Here we find a variety of species: beech, gorse mixed with lilac bushes, horn, flowering ash, dogwood, oriental hornbeam. Turkish cherry, common hawthorn, wild vines, ivv. The fauna is specific to the plateau and hill area and you can meet if you go hiking in the area; foxes, rabbits, wolves, dry land turtles, horned vipers, salamanders. Located in the Mehedinti Plateau, the climate is temperate-continental, characteristic of the high hills, with weak sub-Mediterranean influences, respectively with autumn rains and mild winters. In the Mehedinti Plateau we can find the most numerous nature reserves in Romania. Paleontological reservations: Bahna - fossil point; Speleological reservations - Epuran Cave; Landscape and flora reservations at Ponoarele - "Natural Bridge" and "Lilac Forest" - the largest wild lilac forest in the country. The lilac forest is also made up of other rare plant species, such as flowering ash, Hungarian oak, oriental hornbeam or the Turkish cherry. The waters of the rivers are populated with trout.

The proposed hiking takes you on marked roads to the main objectives of the area.

God's Bridge or the natural bridge as it is also called is located in the centre of Ponoarele, near the town hall, being a huge stone archway through which the road Baia de Arama - Drobeta Turnu Severin passes, crossing the Prag Valley. It was formed by the collapse of the upper wall of the cave and is stands out in the landscape by its massiveness: 30 m long, 13 m high, 22 m wide and 9 m wide. The bridge can be admired in all its grandeur from Crovul Peşterii, from where the opening to the Prag Valley and its layered structure consisting of superimposed limestone blocks exposed to erosion and weathering are revealed. Viewed from the opposite side, from the Turkish Valley, the Bridge imposes itself like a huge, stony arch, below which you can admire the Cave Hill and the clear sky. The locals have kept numerous legends about the formation of the Bridge that explains the name God's Bridge or the Bridge of the Giants. One of them is:

"God was merciful to the people of Ponoarele who could not cross the Prag Valley and chased away the devil who was sheltering in the cave near the Bridge. The devil fled and then the ceiling of the cave collapsed, and God made the bridge for the people. The devil went out to the Zătonul Mare, scratching the cliffs of the Cave Hill. There he sat on a stone that bears his name (Devil's Rock) now.".

Ponoarele Cave, also known as the God's Bridge Cave, the Bridge Cave or the Stone Bridge Cave, is accessible to tourists and it can be visited throughout the year, although you may discover a large number of broken stalactites and stalagmites displaced from the fossil gallery. The cave is located at an altitude of 337m. Its length is 734m and there is a hydrogeological hole made by the waters that gather in Zăton Lake. It has two large entrances. The main gallery is subfossil, at a higher level there is a fossil gallery. Inside, the cave has an pothole and a doline that have an overflow function, because, when the water level in Lake Zaton rises, the water rises flooding the cave, so that it will gradually drain as the level of Zăton decreases. The fossil gallery presents large spaces being richly concreted with stalagmite domes, stalagmites, stalactites, very long drapes and fistular stalactites. Ponoarele Cave is the work of the waters of Zăton, which once drained through the galleries as under the arch of the Natural Bridge, now detached from the rest of the cave after a collapse. Numerous bats of Myotis, Miniopterus and Rinolophus species are found in the cave. During the April-August period, in the cave you can find a birth colony consisting of approx. 3000 individuals, and between October and April, a hibernation colony of approx. 1000 bats. Because bats are not only not dangerous to humans, but they also play an important role in maintaining ecological balance, they must be protected. The cave is protected within the nature reserve of God's Bridge from Ponoarele. Apart from the Cave, in the area of the bridge, also noteworthy, are: the Zaton Cave, located in the

area of Zaton Ponor, which is also an overflow cave (105 m long). We recommend that you have equipment adapted for visiting the cave: boots, jumpsuit, helmet, at least one light source per person, groups of minimum two and maximum ten people. In the area you will find Câmpul cu Lapiezuri.



Channelled limestone fields are special karst forms that water has encrusted in limestone. They are shaped like grooves as real wrinkles furrowed in time on the limestone surfaces. The ditches sometimes exceed 4-5 meters long and have a depth of up to 30 cm, resembling corridors cut in rock in which the vegetation appeared: mullein, Breckland thyme, nettles. Within the fort in Ponoare we find three such channelled limestone fields. At the entrance to the commune, on the right side, there are the channelled limestone fields from Brăzişori, presenting massive and rounded shapes "limestone heads that resemble haystacks". The channelled limestone fields on Cornetul Mare have simpler and less spectacular forms. The most well-known and most interesting are the channelled limestone fields in the Cave Hill that form two distinct fields: Cleopatra's Field and Aphrodite's

Field, named after the two beauties of antiquity. They stretch out like two white, gray and cold flowered hearths on the surface of several hundred square meters. Cleopatra's field is just above the exit of the cave and it is the most compact and fascinating of all. At a distance of 200 m to the south is the Aphrodite Field, of smaller dimensions and with deeper channels in which some vegetation forms represented by a dwarf beech bush, round in shape. These fields are truly unique at European level, formed below the altitude of 600 m: "Known in literature as Lapiezul de la Ponoarele, this is the most impressive karst phenomenon of its kind in Romania."



On the way back from Ponoare Cave you can make a stop in the village of Sisești, the only place in Mehedinți county where the pottery tradition is still practiced, to admire the pottery of Sisești, a brand that has gained fame. The documents indicate the presence of the pottery from the time of the Dacians. The craft has been perpetuated ever since, from generation to generation. Pots, small pitchers, bowls, jars or tiles made with love and dedication are still coming out of the hands of

craftsmen. What makes the ceramics of Şişeşti so valuable? Simplicity, elegance and ornaments made with a special brush called "boielnic".

The decorations are geometric or typical motifs of the folklore of the Coşuştei Valley - the fir tree, the spiral, the snakes and the sun. If you arrive in May you can participate in the "Oale şi Sarmale" ceramics festival, which is held annually when exhibiting and selling various types of ceramics, steamed cabbage rolls and polenta are served in clay pots and the performers and folk music ensembles from the county and the surroundings entertain the festive atmosphere.

b) to the east - to the Danube Gorge - Clisura Dunarii - Orșova, Eșalnița, Dubova, having as main tourist objectives: Statue of Decebal, Mraconia Monastery, Vodița Monastery.

Clisura Dunării (or Danube Gorge) is between Moldova Nouă and Gura Văii, the most picturesque part being Orșova and the "Cazanele Dunării", located in the area of the towns of Eșelnița and Dubova. "Cazanele" are divided - coming from Orșova - into Cazanele Mici (on the Eselnița radius), in the middle of them there is a picturesque valley of Mraconia, dominated by the bust dug in the rock of the Dacian king Decebal, and Cazanele Mari, beyond the Bay of Dubova, dominated by the heights of Ciucarul Mare. Everywhere, on the Clisura territory, you can stop to admire the paradise. On one side, rocky hills, with parks and natural reserves, with secular forests protected with plant varieties and birds unique in the world. And on the other, the lazy thread of the Danube. Nature lovers will be delighted by the rare trees and shrubs. by the martin colonies.

At 8 km east of Orşova you will find the **Vodiţa Monastery**, the oldest documented and voivodal foundation, and at the same time, the first monastic settlement in our country administered autonomously, according to the specific rules of the Orthodox Church, established in canons by Saint Basil the Great. The

monastery was erected between 1370-1372, by Saint Nicodim of Tismana, at the expense of the prince Vladislav I - Vlaicu Vodă.



The history of this monastery has been shaken, going through different stages of reconstruction. In 1995, the construction of a wooden church in Maramureş style began. The iconostasis and the chairs were sculpted by master Vasile, from Sighetul Marmației, and the painting in the fresco, on the plaster, was worked by the masters Eugen and Florica Papici. The Vodița Monastery was sanctified on July 29, 2001, by Înalt Preasfințitul Teofan, the Metropolitan of Oltenia. On the way to the current monastery, on the left side of the road, today we can see some ruins from the oldest Orthodox monastery in Wallachia.

At a distance of about 12 km from Orşova, between the villages of Dubova and Ieşelniţa we find the Mraconia Monastery - in the most spectacular part of the Danube called "La Cazane". The

monastery of Mraconia was founded in 1523 by the Ban of Severin, Nicolae Gârlișteanu. Because it was located in the path of the Ottoman army, the church suffered quite a lot, being rebuilt several times over time. In 1967, the Mraconia Monastery is demolished by the communist regime, and after 1990 the foundation stone of the new church is laid, which can still be admired today. The new church of the Mraconia Monastery was erected between 1993-2000, on the left bank of the Danube, in the place called "La Balon" - an observation point and steering of the vessels point at Cazane, where, by the narrowness of the river, no two vessels could pass simultaneously.

The church has the form of a "cross" with a narthex, a tabernacle and an altar. The holy place has the open porch towards the Danube and the abutment towards the abrupt Almaj Mountains. If you see it from the water, you will feel that you are in front of a monastery on Mount Athos, built on a rock and a stone foundation that stops the waves of the Danube without moving anything from the ground," the people from "Banatul Montan - Ghidul tău turistic" wrote on Facebook. Since 2008, the Mraconia Monastery is a nuns' monastery. It is said that the prayers that are said here bring good luck to the believers all year long. All thanks to the "four-leaf clover" beneath the ruins of the old church when the Danube waters fall.



An emblematic objective of the area is the Statue of Decebalus, the last king of the Dacians, located between the towns of Dubova and Eselnita, just 20 kilometres away from Orsova, when the river Mraconia flows into the Danube, being framed by a breath-taking natural landscape, where Carpathians plunge into the Danube. Decebalus' statue can be seen from DN 57, which connects Eselnita with Dubova and can also be seen from the Danube (here the Danube reaches its greatest depth, 120 meters). It is located here as a replica of the Tabula Traiana monument, which is a few hundred meters downstream, on the Serbian coast of the Danube. With a height of 55 meters and a width of 25 meters, this is the tallest stone sculpture in Europe. The construction of Decebalus' statue lasted about 10 years (1994 - 2000). The son of Scorillo and successor of Duras-Diurpaneus, Decebalus (87-106) occupied the throne of Dacia at a time when the expansionist tendencies of the Roman Empire, which had established its border on the Danube line, were rapidly increasing. At the beginning of the 3rd century, almost 150 years after Decebalus' assertion, the historian Dio Cassius portrayed him as follows: "This man was shrewd in his understanding of warfare and shrewd also in the waging of war;

he judged well when to attack and chose the right moment to retreat. He was an expert in ambuscades and a master in pitched battles; and he knew not only how to follow up a victory well, but also how to manage well a defeat. Hence he showed himself a worthy antagonist of the Romans for a long time."

During the hikes you will have the opportunity to stop for fishing, you will be able to collect single berries, strawberries, wild strawberries, blackberries, mulberries. On request, you can benefit from a cruise on the Danube.

But do not hesitate and go visit at least some of the sights of interest of Dr. Tr. Severin: The Palace of Culture "Theodor Costescu", named "Uriașul" in front of the famous Kinetic Fountain, the symbol of the Severin culture, the Medieval Fortress of Severin, Trajan's Bridge, the Water Castle and a cruise on the Danube.



The Palace of Culture "Theodor Costescu" - symbol of Severin, declared a historical monument protected on the UNESCO list, was designed by the architect Grigore Chechez. Its construction

began in 1912 at the initiative of Theodor Costescu, the director at that time of Trajan High School and president of the Company "Turnu Severin City Theater". Interrupted during the First World War, but also due to funding based largely on donations, the Palace of Culture entered the public circuit in 1924. The building has a very special plan and was designed to include seven large rooms: three rooms superimposed with the purpose of library, cinema and restaurant, the north wing; three other rooms, which are located in the same shape, form the sunset wing where the Museum "Dr. C.I. Istrati" was located, the hall of celebrations and the auxiliary hall; and the seventh in the middle between the two wings shown above, is the great Theater Hall which was completed later. In the twentieth century, it housed the city's library, cinema, theatre hall and city museum. Nowadays, after its total rehabilitation, the Palace of Culture looks impeccable and weekly exhibitions are held, ceramics workshops, exhibitions, concerts, plays and movie evenings are organized.



The Medieval Fortress of Severin - is a historical monument that is part of the national cultural heritage. Its founder was King

Ladislau I (1040-1095) and it was built as a fortress against Pechenegs and Cumans in the region, near the ruins of the Roman Fortress of Drobeta. Built on the border between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, from the beginning the fortress was a military and religious dispute between the Hungarian crown, Bulgarians and Wallachia voivodes, between the Catholics and the Orthodox. In 1524, after a devastating attack by the Turks of Suleiman the Magnificent, only one tower remained in the fortress: the fortress has not been restored. The ruins that stand as witnesses today come from two enclosures - one inside and one outside, which was surrounded by a deep ditch. The excavations revealed square towers flanking the inner courtvard. From the tower that is in the northeast, there is a wall, 3 floors high - 11 meters high, 9 meters long and 2.5 meters wide. The gate of the fortress was in the south-east corner. Later, during the rehabilitation through a European project, 2 more walls of enclosure were found, a thesaurus formed of 160 coins, remains of bow and crossbows, fragments of cannon pipes, remains of link chain shirts, a fountain full of ceramic debris, but also human remains. Drobeta was the first stone fortress erected in Dacia (103-105) by Emperor Trajan, a Roman defence fortress and an important military and political centre, initially being built to house 500 soldiers guarding the bridge.

Trajan's bridge - of which only one foot remained - was built by Apollodorus of Damascus - the architect of Trajan's Column - between the two wars (103 - 105). The ruins of the other pillars are still under water. The bridge was built to facilitate the transport of the Roman troops led by Trajan and of the necessary supplies for the second military campaign to conquer King Decebalus' Dacia. A model of a fragment of Trajan's Bridge is in the roundabout way from the entrance to the city (from Orşova, on the E70).



The Water Castle - was built according to the project of engineer Elie Radu, with the purpose of supplying the city with water. The construction was inaugurated in 1914 when the entire water supply system of the city was put into operation, the supply being made directly from the Danube. With a 27m height, the castle is a medieval type building, with 4 turrets. In 1980, the Water Castle loses its utility, the basins are emptied and it is used as offices and workshops. Currently, the Water Castle belongs to the category of historical monuments and after the rehabilitation works, it was introduced in the tourist circuit. The building houses a tourist information centre, an exhibition space and an art gallery, a museum "The history of water supply of Drobeta Turnu Severin, an exhibition of photographs and sculpture, a literary café and a belvedere space.



Depending on the period chosen for your stay, you can enjoy the cultural-artistic events organized in Mehedinţi County. We mention only a few of these: in August - the "Fereastra spre noi" ethnic festival - the commune of Sviniţa, the inter-ethnic festival of traditional songs and dances "Otto Alscher" - Orşova, in October "Cântecele românilor de pretutindeni" - competition of young folklore performers - Dr.Tr.Severin.

Traditional, natural, unique and especially tasty culinary preparations specific to the Mehedinți area, it will complement the beauty of your stay in Mehedinți County. Here are some of them: Oltenian rolls pumpkin seed, rice and leeks; pie with spinach and eggs; acacia flower rattles, beekeeping seasonal food; corn cake in "țest"; păcele saci/scăzute - broth with rice or noodles, seasoned with egg whipped with cream; eggplant pies; broth and marinated fish from Dubova, fish rolls, nettle food; bread in "țest"; pepper stuffed with rice; chicken brine; mushroom broth.

From Dr. Tr. Severin you will be led to destinations in the neighbouring country,

Vidin district, passing the Calafat-Vidin bridge (98.8 km - 1h 27 min), inaugurated in 2012 (road and railway bridge).

The city of Vidin can be your host, where sixteen 2-star and 3-star hotels can offer you a pleasant atmosphere. However, you also have options for accommodation nearby, at guesthouses. The database of accommodation places in Vidin is accessible to both tourists and tour operators marketing the tourist package, so that accommodations can be chosen according to the demand of tourists, but also according to the quality of the services, including "healthy" meals with natural / organic/ traditional products.

We propose some of the most attractive tourist destinations that can be visited: The Vidin Regional History Museum that unites three iconic buildings - the "Konaka" Museum, the "Krastata Kazarma" Museum and the "Baba Vida" Fortress, which, all, are monuments of culture, places of worship: the churches of St. Pantelimon, St. Mare Mucenic Dimitrie, St. Parascheva, erected by Matei Basarab (all dating from the seventeenth century), a Jewish synagogue (1894), a mosque and a library of Osman Pazvantoglu, a section of Turkish police.





The Vidin Regional History Museum unites three iconic buildings - the "Konaka" Museum, the "Krastata Kazarma" Museum and the "Baba Vida" Fortress

In the building of the "Konaka" Museum, the "Archeology" section is arranged, where you can admire rich and diversified collections of objects from the big Roman cities Ratiaria (Archar village), Bononia (Vidin) and the Roman castle Castra Martis (Kula city), richly decorated Roman sarcophagi, funerary and votive plaques, statues, among which the famous marble statue "Heracles resting" (2nd century, Archar village), ceramic objects, clay lamps, jewellery and household items, republican and imperial Roman coins.



The "Krastata Kazarma" Museum - was built at the order of the local leader, Osman Pazvantoglu in 1801 for the needs of the Ottoman army in the city. In its place, in the past there was the garden of the Old Palace. There is also a wooden covered bridge that connects to the nearby gun shop. After it was vacated, it has served as court and barracks of the Bulgarian army. From 1969, the building houses the ethnography section presenting the

traditions of the population of Vidin District from late 19th century until 1920, and among the most interesting are the ritual and traditional costumes of the region. The clothing and the elements of urban life illustrate the links between Vidin and other European countries.



The fortress "Baba Vida" - is the main attraction of Vidin. It is one of the oldest and best-preserved castles in South East Europe. Located on the banks of the Danube, due to its strategic positioning, it has been disputed by different empires since Roman times. Over the years, Baba Vida has been fortified several times, so that the fortress has not been conquered since the 14th century. After the independence of Bulgaria in 1878, Baba Vida was still intact, but irrelevant from a military point of view, having no defensive role. Although the legend positions it during feudal Bulgaria, the castle dates back to the time of Ancient Rome, from the 1st century and bore the name of Bononia. It was part of the system of fortifications along the Lower Danube and Via Istrum of the Roman army. Also called Babini Vidini Kulu, the legend says that it was built by Vida, the eldest daughter of a Bulgarian king who ruled over Vidin and had three daughters. Before his death, he divided the kingdom between the three daughters. Vida received Vidin and the northern Carpathian lands, Kula inherited Zaječar and the Timok

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Valley, and Gamza was to rule over the western territories as far as Morava. Disappointed by the marriages of her sisters, who were married to drunken nobles, Vida decided not to marry and dedicated her life to her subjects, fortifying the castle and defending the port and city. Today, Baba Vida acts as a museum and it is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Bulgaria. In the summer, there are open air shows or plays at the fortress. The churches of St. Paraschiva and St. Pantelimon are built by the ruler of Wallachia, Matei Basarab, in the seventeenth century and are evidence of the continuity of the Romanians in this place and of Christianity over time. With a simple architecture, built of river stone, these churches still retain some of the warmth of the faith once lived here.

The church of St. Pantelimon is located in the castle fortress, in the courtyard of the Metropolitan complex. St. Parascheva Church - or Sveta Petka (17th century), the second founding of the ruler Matei Basarab, also known as the "buried church", is located on Str. Cneaz Boris I, near Krastata Kazarma. Being built during the Ottoman rule, it has a modest appearance, it is short (partially built below ground level) and has no turret. It is renovated, and the interior paintings are special.



Osman Pazvantoglu Mosque is a representative mosque in Vidin. In addition to the mosques, a library is included in the architectural ensemble, which has been declared a cultural monument of national importance. It is located in the Danube Park in front of the Metropolitan complex of Kale (Old town). The minaret of the mosque and the complete library are stylized. It is probably the sign of the military unity that belonged to Osman Pazvantoglu, or (according to another version) it presents an inverted heart as an expression of the shared love between Osman Pazvantoglu and the Bulgarian Christian, due to different religions.



From Vidin you go to Belogradchik (Vidin - Belogradchik 52.85 km) to spend 2 days. The accommodation can be done in the hotel in Belogradchik but also in the guesthouses in the locality or in the surrounding area to offer you a "natural", "healthy" stay. There is also the option of staying in Vidin and travelling by car to the destinations in Belogradchik during the other 2 days of the stay.



We invite you to walk 1 km to the "Kaleto" Fortress or optionally by car and visit the fortress and Museum of Natural Sciences. Belogradchik "Kaleto" Fortress is one of the 100 tourist sites of national interest and it is the most visited tourist attraction in the area, next to the Belogradcik Rocks. The fortress is located at the foot of a spectacular rock formation, some of the rocks reaching up to 200 meters high and exist from the 1st - 3rd centuries AD, being built by the Romans who made several roads through the Balkan peninsula with the role of controlling and guarding the path of invaders. The walls are over 2 meters thick and measure up to 12 meters high.

The fortress has a total area of 10,000 square meters, and over time it has been used by the Byzantines or Ottomans. In the 14th century, the Bulgarian Tsar of Vidin, Ivan Stratsimir, extended the old fortress, building fortified garrisons in front of massive rocks, making it one of the most important cities in the region. The Belogradchik fortress continued to be used for military and defensive purposes until the 19th century. The last battles fought here were during the Serbian-Bulgarian War of 1885.



The Museum of Natural Sciences is unique in North-western Bulgaria. The idea that led to its creation was that all direct knowledge about the flora and fauna of the region be explored and serve the protection of the environment. The exhibition includes 520 exhibits, of which 39 are European and global protected species included in the Berne Convention and 128 exhibits (fauna and flora) have the status of "endangered" in accordance with the Law on Biological Diversity. All this makes the collection extremely valuable. On a rather small surface, some of the most attractive representatives of the wild and inanimate nature, specific to the northwest of Bulgaria, from the past to the present, can be seen, samples of rocks, species of stuffed animals (insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals), bird eggs, herbarium specimens arranged on ecological principles (according to the biotope in which they live), which allows a clearer picture of the relationships in nature. Within the exhibition there are also pictures with wonderful landscapes of the unique natural phenomenon "Belogradchik Rocks".

Starting from the fortress, along the route a pedestrian crossing follows, to the village of **Panairishteto** and to **Subashik Cheshma** and from there it goes on the main road to the center of Belogradchik. The view during the route is incredible. It

passes through canyons and rocks with amazing shapes.

Next, there is a visit to the History Museum, which is housed in the Panovata Kashta (Panov's House) building, a model of Renaissance-era architecture. The museum ranks 15th on the list of 100 tourist sites of national interest. The building was erected in 1810. It has two floors, with walls lined with planks, two porches with tall laurel, and the first and second floors are built of stone. This architectural gem of Belogradchik is remarkable for its popular culture and lifestyle, the search for the beauty and the desire for freedom of the Bulgarians during the National Renaissance in Bulgaria. The exhibition introduces you to the socio-economic development of Belogradchik and the region in the 18th-19th centuries, focusing on objects and images that highlight the development of crafts, including gold processing (see spectacular exhibits). You can also admire the collection of icons, documents and artefacts that talk about Belogradchik's troubled history.



All this easy route, approx. 3 km does not require special equipment.

Depending on the period chosen for your stay, you can enjoy the cultural-artistic events organized, which are plenty and interesting, of which we recall: October / November

International festival of folklore, songs and dances of Wallachia - Vidin; "Podul Tineretului" Festival - a festival of youth art organized in Vidin every summer, for one week. The streets of the city are full of music, smiles and positive emotions, over 10 workshops of visual arts, music and dances and various events. Participants in the festival can be young people between 14 and 21 years old, who love art. Also worth mentioning is the Vidin Fair established in 1896 organized every autumn for 9 days (30.08 - 8.09) dedicated to agriculture (including organic) and cattle breeding, as well as consumer goods.

Traditional, natural, unique and especially tasty culinary preparations specific to the Vidin District, it will complement the beauty of your stay in Vidin District. Here are some of them: Mekitsi:- preparation of eggs, yogurt, flour and a little salt formed in a kneaded dough with a filling of cheese and eggs inside and arranged in the form of an envelope; Tripe soup or soup made of lamb or pork tripe minced and boiled in milk or water, served with chilli and garlic puree in vinegar; Vidin salad: it is made from green peppers and fried tomatoes spiced with chopped garlic, salt and vinegar and arranged around a deep salad bowl, covered with slices of onion-dressed tomatoes and garnished with parsley. Another variant of this typical Vidin salad is roasted peppers with tomato sauce garnished with chopped garlic and parsley. Both options go perfectly with white cheese and toast; Yak Balak of the Danube - typical Vidin fish, marinated with lemon juice, olive oil and herbs, left in the fridge for an hour to cool, then fried; The roast lamb - The lamb is stuffed with a mixture of rice, fennel, onion, pepper, peppermint and parsley, covered and baked slowly and served with potatoes baked with garlic and fresh salads.

Enjoy the travel package NATBIOT 1- ME-VI!







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