

Another must-do activity is the free walking food tour, where they take you to three or four restaurants to taste the local cuisine. Being a vegetarian, I must say the cuisine has a lot to offer. *The Sun and Moon* restaurant is a vegetarian restaurant that has local Bulgarian cuisine as well as International food on offer.

One must, however, visit the cultural restaurant called *Hadjidraganov* or 'The Summer Garden' in English. It's absolutely stunning with wine barrels in the walls, a table that has chains hanging from the top to keep food and an amazing selection of Bulgarian food and wine.

For the shopaholics, the main street of Sofia is bustling with activity. There are plenty of shops with leather products, rose soaps and cosmetics. Great shoes with cool designs at reasonable prices are aplenty.

In my four day trip, I made a day trip to the old historical town of Plovdiv. A three to four hour bus ride away from Sofia lies the second-largest city of Plovdiv.

The old town in the city is very quaint and beautiful, all the more so as it is a walking town and no cars are allowed in here. One can see 6BC ruins in the old town with parts of the Roman stadium still there. I took the free walking tour here as well, which in about two hours covered the main historical sites of the town. The guides can recommend restaurants and modes of transport to reach your destination. Free walking tours are a great way of seeing a city here and



Erstwhile bath house now turned into an art museum

Alexander Nevsky church



depending on how good your guide was and how much you enjoyed, you need to tip the guide at the end of the tour.

Plovdiv has some great shopping too. The handmade soaps and rose cosmetics are highly recommended, as they are authentic and inexpensive.

Another place to visit in Bulgaria is Rila monastery. Like Plovdiv, this is also a UNESCO World Heritage site. It can again be done as a day trip from Sofia.

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Traditional Bulgarian food mostly features cheese, yoghurt, spices and herbs. Some of the most popular items are *Shopska* – a salad with tomato, cucumbers, onions and white cheese, Potato salad and *Snejanka* with yoghurt. There are also various kinds of pastries stuffed with cheese and meat that are popular for breakfast. And then there soups like *Bob Chorba* which is a bean soup and some lentil soups.

As a solo female traveler, I felt absolutely safe in Bulgaria. I didn't go out post 10.00 pm though, and regret not taking the free pub-crawl. It is on the list of to-do things for my next trip here, as is their wine region. If you are looking at spending some time in Europe this year, I highly recommend Bulgaria, as it's beautiful, friendly and easy on your wallet. ■