

U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs
Washington, DC 20520

Consular Information Sheet

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Bulgaria

Americans planning travel to *Bulgaria* should read [Intercountry Adoption Bulgaria](#), [Avian Flu Fact Sheet](#) and [Worldwide Caution Public Announcement](#) available on the Department of State web site at <http://travel.state.gov>

March 28, 2007

COUNTRY DESCRIPTION: Bulgaria is a quickly developing European nation undergoing significant economic changes. Tourist facilities are widely available, although conditions vary and some facilities may not be up to Western standards. Goods and services taken for granted in other European countries may not be available in many areas of Bulgaria. Read the [Department of State Background Notes](#) on Bulgaria for additional information.

ENTRY/EXIT REQUIREMENTS: A United States passport is required for U.S. citizens who are not also Bulgarian nationals. As of September 1, 2006, U.S. citizens who enter the country without a Bulgarian visa are authorized to stay for a total of 90 days within a six-month period. This law is strictly enforced. Previously, Bulgarian law only allowed U.S. citizens to remain in the country for a total of 30 days within a similar six-month timeframe. An application to extend one's stay beyond the original 90 days can be filed for urgent or humanitarian reasons, but must be submitted to regional police authorities no later than five days prior to the end of the original 90-day period. Travelers who have been in the country for 90 days, and then leave, will not be able to reenter Bulgaria before the six-month period expires. Travelers using official or diplomatic passports must secure visas prior to arrival. Upon entering the country, Bulgarian immigration authorities request that all foreigners declare the purpose of their visit and provide their intended address.

U.S. citizens intending to live or work in Bulgaria for more than 90 days within six months (or more than six months within a year) must obtain a "D" visa prior to arrival. The practice of switching from tourist status to long-term status when already in Bulgaria is no longer allowed. Those wanting to do so must leave Bulgaria and apply for a "D" visa at a Bulgarian embassy or consulate. This procedure takes anywhere between two and four weeks.

American citizens who marry Bulgarian nationals technically have a legal right to switch to long-term status without leaving the country. In practice, however, applicants for residency are asked to leave the country also, present their marriage license at a Bulgarian embassy or consulate in a neighboring country, and apply for a "D" visa.

The Bulgarian authorities do not consider presentation of a copy of the passport sufficient for identification purposes. Visitors should carry their original passports with them at all times.

For further information concerning entry requirements, travelers should contact the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria at 1621 22nd St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008; <http://www.bulgaria-embassy.org>; tel. (202) 387-7969 (main switchboard (202) 387-0174), or the Bulgarian Consulate in New York City at 121 East 62nd Street, New York, NY 10021; <http://www.consulbulgaria-ny.org>; tel. (212) 935-4646.

See our [Foreign Entry Requirements](#) brochure for more information on Bulgaria and other countries. Visit the Embassy of Bulgaria web site at <http://www.bulgaria-embassy.org> for the most current visa information.

Traveling with Bulgarian minors: Bulgarian authorities are particularly strict in matters involving the travel of Bulgarian children. Adults, other than a children's parents, departing Bulgaria with a

Bulgarian national (including dual or multi-national Bulgarian) child, must present to authorities a certified/legalized declaration signed by the child's parents authorizing custody for travel purposes. This holds true even if the adult is otherwise related to the child. If the declaration is signed in Bulgaria, certification by a Bulgarian notary public is required. If signed in the U.S., the declaration must be certified by a notary public and the court in the jurisdiction where the notary is licensed. The declaration must then be legalized with an apostille issued by the individual state's Department of State or the Governor's office. Please note Bulgarian authorities do not require such documentation for minors who are not Bulgarian.

See [Entry and Exit Requirements](#) for more information pertaining to [dual nationality](#) and the prevention of [international child abduction](#). Please refer to our [Customs Information](#) to learn more about customs regulations.

SAFETY AND SECURITY: A series of bombings and shootouts have occurred in public places in Sofia. It is believed these shootings were the result of turf wars among organized crime groups. These groups often travel in convoys of late-model SUVs and luxury sedans, accompanied by armed men, and frequent expensive restaurants, hotels, and nightclubs. Travelers should use caution when near such groups.

For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the [Department's Internet web site](#), where the current [Worldwide Caution Public Announcement, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements](#) can be found.

Up-to-date information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S., or for callers outside the U.S. and Canada, a regular toll-line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

The Department of State urges American citizens to take responsibility for their own personal security while traveling overseas. For general information about appropriate measures travelers can take to protect themselves in an overseas environment, see the Department of State's pamphlet [A Safe Trip Abroad](#).

CRIME: Petty street crime, much of which is directed against persons who appear to have money or to be foreign, continues to be a problem. Pick pocketing and purse snatching are frequent occurrences, especially in crowded markets and public transportation, and on shopping streets. Con artists also operate in bus and train stations. Credit cards and ATMs should be used with caution (see the Special Circumstances section below). Travelers should be suspicious of "instant friends" and should also require persons claiming to be government officials to show identification. There have been incidents in which tourists have been drugged or assaulted and robbed after accepting offers of coffee or alcoholic beverages from "friendly" individuals met by "chance" at hotels, the airport, or at bus or train stations. Travelers should be wary of unfamiliar individuals who encourage them to drink or eat products as these may be tainted with strong tranquilizers (such as valium) that can lead rapidly to unconsciousness. Reporting a crime immediately to the police has helped recover money and valuables on more than one occasion and is recommended. To avoid becoming a victim of more serious crimes, including sexual assault, travelers should use the same personal safety precautions that they would use in the United States.

Travelers should pay special attention to the drink prices at high-end bars, casinos and nightclubs. There have been instances of travelers being charged exorbitant prices, especially for champagne and hard alcohol. Bills have been as high as several thousand dollars for drinks, and in some establishments the management may use force to assure payment. Those frequenting these venues should consult a menu and clarify exactly what they want when placing their orders.

Taxi drivers often overcharge unwary travelers, particularly at Sofia Airport and the Central Train Station. We recommend travelers use reputable taxi companies with cars that have meters and clearly marked rates displayed on a sticker on the passenger side of the windshield. Travelers should be aware that there is no official commission that sets taxi cab rates. Taxi drivers are within their full rights to charge passengers any price they want provided that it corresponds with the price shown on the windshield sticker. At the airport, there is a clearly marked booth within the arrivals terminal, which arranges for metered taxis at a fair rate. Finding reputable taxis at the Central Train Station is more difficult. We recommend trying to pre-negotiate a fare to avoid excessive payment if a metered taxi cannot be found. Because pilferage of checked baggage may occur at Sofia Airport, travelers should not include items of value in checked luggage.

Automobile theft is also a frequent problem, with four-wheel drive vehicles and late model European sedans the most popular targets. Very few vehicles are recovered. Thieves also

sometimes smash vehicle windows to steal valuables left in sight. Break-ins at residential apartments occur frequently. Persons who plan to reside in Bulgaria on a long-term basis should take measures to protect their dwellings. Long-term residents should consider installation of window grills, steel doors with well-functioning locks, and an alarm system that alerts an armed response team.

Travelers should also be cautious about making credit card charges over the Internet as recent experience has shown that some offers come from scam artists posing as legitimate businesses.

In many countries around the world, counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under local law. In addition, bringing them back to the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines. More information on this serious problem is available at <http://www.cybercrime.gov/18usc2320.htm> .

INFORMATION FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME: The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If you are the victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to local police, please contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance. The Embassy/Consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, contact family members or friends and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

See our information on [Victims of Crime](#).

MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION: While Bulgarian physicians are trained to a very high standard, most hospitals and clinics, especially in village areas, are generally not equipped and maintained to meet U.S. or Western European standards. Basic medical supplies and over-the-counter and prescription medications are widely available, but highly specialized treatment may not be obtainable. Pediatric facilities are in need of funding and lack equipment. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States may cost thousands of dollars. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services.

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via the CDC's Internet site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad consult the World Health Organization's (WHO) website at <http://www.who.int/en>. Further health information for travelers is available at <http://www.who.int/ith>.

MEDICAL INSURANCE: The Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. Please see our information on [Medical Insurance Overseas](#).

All foreign citizens traveling to Bulgaria should be prepared to present valid evidence of health insurance to the Bulgarian border authorities in order to be admitted into the country. The insurance should be valid for the duration of the traveler's stay in Bulgaria.

TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS: While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning Bulgaria is provided for general reference only, and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

The Bulgarian road system is largely underdeveloped. There are few sections of limited-access divided highway. Some roads are in poor repair and full of potholes. Rockslides and landslides may be encountered on roads in mountainous areas. Livestock and animal-drawn carts present road hazards throughout the country, especially during the agricultural season. Travel conditions deteriorate during the winter as roads become icy and potholes proliferate. The U.S. Embassy in Sofia advises against driving at night because road conditions are more dangerous in the dark. Some roads lack pavement markings and lights, and motorists often drive with dim or missing headlights.

Driving in Bulgaria is extremely dangerous. Aggressive driving habits, the lack of safe infrastructure, and a mixture of late model and old model cars on the country's highways contribute to a high fatality rate for road accidents. Heavy traffic conditions have led to a significant increase in "road-rage accidents. Motorists should avoid confrontations with aggressive drivers in Bulgaria.

In particular, drivers of late-model sedans (BMW, Mercedes, Audi) are known to speed and drive dangerously. Motorists should exercise caution and avoid altercations with the drivers of such vehicles, which may be driven by armed organized crime figures. In some cities traffic lights late at night blink yellow in all directions, leaving rights-of-way unclear and contributing to frequent accidents.

Heavy truck traffic along the two-lane routes from the Greek border at Kulata to Sofia and from the Turkish border at Kapitan Andre to Plovdiv creates numerous hazards. Motorists should expect long delays at border crossings. A U.S. state driver's license is valid in Bulgaria only when used in conjunction with an International Driving Permit. For information on how to obtain a permit, please see our [road safety information](#).

If pulled over by a police officer, motorists should remember that, under Bulgarian law, police officers may not collect fines on the spot; they may only issue a ticket with the fine to be paid at the motorist's local regional tax office.

Buses, trams, and trolleys are inexpensive, but they are often crowded and of widely varying quality. Passengers on the busiest lines have reported pick pocketing, purse slashing, and pinching. The use of seat belts is mandatory in Bulgaria for all passengers, except pregnant women. Children under 10 years of age may ride in the front seat only if seated in a child car seat. In practice, these rules are often not followed. Speed limits are 50 km/h in the cities/towns, 90 km/h out of town, and 130 km/h on the highways. For motorcycles, speed limits are 50 km/h in the cities/towns, 80 km/h out of town, and 100 km/h on the highways. Motorcyclists must drive with helmets and with lights on at all times. From November 1 through March 1 motorists must drive with lights on at all times. At crossings that are not regulated, the driver who is on the right has the right-of-way, but this rule, too, is frequently ignored. Drivers may be charged with driving under the influence of alcohol with a blood level as low as 0.05 percent. Right turns on red lights are not permitted unless specifically authorized. The penalties for drivers involved in an accident resulting in injury or death range from a 25 U.S. Dollar fine up to imprisonment for life.

The most generally encountered local traffic custom is a driver flashing high beams, which usually means that a traffic police post is ahead.

In case of emergency, drivers should contact the police at telephone number 166 and/or Roadside Assistance at telephone number 146. For an ambulance, please call 150. The fire department can be reached at 160.

For specific information concerning Bulgarian driving permits, vehicle inspection, road tax, and mandatory insurance, please contact the Bulgarian Embassy via the Internet at <http://www.bulgaria-embassy.org>.

Please refer to our [Road Safety](#) page for more information. Visit the website of the country's national tourist office at www.bulgariatravel.org and the website of the Bulgarian national authority responsible for road safety at www.kat.mvr.bg. [Note: the latter website is available in the Bulgarian language only.]

AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT: The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Government of Bulgaria's Civil Aviation Authority as not being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for the oversight of Bulgaria's air carrier operations. For more information, travelers may visit the FAA's Internet website at http://www.faa.gov/safety/programs_initiatives/oversight/iasa.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES: Bulgaria is still largely a cash economy. Due to the potential for fraud and other criminal activity, credit cards should be used sparingly and with extreme caution. There have been reports of false ATM fronts on bona fide machines that capture cards and PINs for later criminal use, including unauthorized charges or withdrawals. In connection with such scams, travelers should be extremely wary of friendly bystanders near ATMs who offer assistance. Any time a card is not returned the traveler should immediately report the card as lost/stolen to the card-issuing company.

Visitors may exchange cash at banks or Exchange Bureaus, but they should know that Exchange Bureaus sometimes post misleading rate quotations that confuse travelers. People on the street who offer high rates of exchange are usually con artists intent on swindling the unwary traveler. Damaged or very worn U.S. dollar bank notes are often not accepted at banks or Exchange Bureaus. Major branches of the following Bulgarian banks will cash travelers' checks on the spot for Leva, the Bulgarian currency, or another desired currency: Bulbank, Bulgarian Postbank, Biochim, First Investment Bank, and United Bulgarian Bank (UBB). UBB also serves as a Western Union agent and provides direct transfer of money to travelers in need. There are also many

Western Union branches in major towns and cities. Most shops, hotels, and restaurants, with the exception of the major hotels, do not accept travelers' checks or credit cards. Most local banks can cash U.S. Treasury checks but the payee may need to wait up to a month to receive funds.

Corruption remains an important concern of the Government. The Commission for Coordinating of the Activity for Combating Corruption manages the efforts of each government agency's internal inspectorate in fighting public corruption and engages in public awareness campaigns. Complaints of public corruption can be made to the Ministry of Justice, 2A Knyaz Dondukov Blvd., 1055 Sofia, Bulgaria, E-mail: acc@government.bg 359 2 980 9213, 359 2 923 7595, 359 2 940 3630, or to the Ministry of Finance hotline: 0800180018. Please see our [Customs Information](#).

CRIMINAL PENALTIES: While in a foreign country, a U.S. citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating Bulgaria's laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Bulgaria are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime, prosecutable in the United States. Please see our information on [Criminal Penalties](#).

CHILDREN'S ISSUES: For information on international adoption of children and international parental child abduction, see the [Office of Children's Issues](#) website.

REGISTRATION/EMBASSY LOCATION: Americans living or traveling in Bulgaria are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the State Department's travel registration website, and to obtain updated information on travel and security within Bulgaria. Americans without Internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy or Consulate to contact them in case of emergency. The U.S. Embassy is located at 16, Kozyak St., Sofia 1407; tel.: (+359 2) 937-5100; fax (+359 2) 937 5122; website - <http://bulgaria.usembassy.gov/>; Questions regarding consular services may be directed via email to: niv_sofia@state.gov (for non-immigrant visa matters); iv_sofia@state.gov (for immigrant visa matters); and acs_sofia@state.gov (for American Citizen Services matters).

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This replaces the Consular Information Sheet dated September 6, 2006, to update sections on Crime, Traffic Safety and Road Conditions, Special Circumstances and Registration/Embassy Location.