

## Sofia, Bucharest and Budapest | Small Group Tour

### Reading List

#### **Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe**

by Kapka Kassabova

In this extraordinary work of narrative reportage, Kapka Kassabova returns to Bulgaria, from where she emigrated as a girl twenty-five years previously, to explore the border it shares with Turkey and Greece. When she was a child, the border zone was rumored to be an easier crossing point into the West than the Berlin Wall, and it swarmed with soldiers and spies. On holidays in the “Red Riviera” on the Black Sea, she remembers playing on the beach only miles from a bristling electrified fence whose barbs pointed inward toward the enemy: the citizens of the totalitarian regime.

Kassabova discovers a place that has been shaped by successive forces of history: the Soviet and Ottoman empires, and, older still, myth and legend. Her exquisite portraits of fire walkers, smugglers, treasure hunters, botanists, and border guards populate the book. There are also the ragged men and women who have walked across Turkey from Syria and Iraq. But there seem to be nonhuman forces at work here too: This densely forested landscape is rich with curative springs and Thracian tombs, and the tug of the ancient world, of circular time and animism, is never far off.

*Border* is a scintillating, immersive travel narrative that is also a shadow history of the Cold War, a sideways look at the migration crisis troubling Europe, and a deep, witchy descent into interior and exterior geographies.

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#### **Bulgaria and Bulgarians A Brief History**

by Plamen Pavlov

Republic of Bulgaria is a state located in South-east Europe and covers the central and eastern parts of Balkan Peninsula. To the north it borders with Republic of Rumania; to the east, with the Black Sea; to the south with Republic of Turkey and Republic of Greece, and to the west, with Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Serbia. Bulgaria`s surface area is 110 993 sq. km. The greatest distance from the north to the south is about 330 km, and from the west to the east, about 500 km. The population of Bulgaria, according to the census of 2001 is 7 973 673. About 85% of it is ethnic Bulgarians, 11% are Turks, nearly 4% are Gypsies and less than 1% is of other ethnic groups: Jews, Armenians, Greek, Russians. Bulgaria`s capital city is Sofia. It is also the largest city of the country with a population of 1 114 476 people. The next largest city is Plovdiv (population of 341 374),

followed by Varna (population of 308 601), the main seaport of the country. Bulgarian is the official language. As regards religion almost 90% of the population is Christians and of these more than 80% are Eastern Orthodox. The second most numerous community, nearly 10%, is Muslim. There are also Judaists. As regards its state organization Bulgaria is a parliamentary republic with a single chamber parliament (People's assembly). It consists of 240 people's representatives of a 4-year mandate. The head of state is the President of a 5-year mandate. The central body of the top executive power is the council of ministers. The monetary unit of the country is the Lev (the international code is BGN). One Lev equals 100 stotinki. The value of notes is 2, 3, 10, 20, 50 and 100 Levs, while that of coins is 1, 2, 5, 10, 50 stotinki and 1 Lev. From AD 1999 the Lev has been tied up firmly first to German Mark and then to the Euro: 1 EUR = BGN 1,95583. March 3 is Bulgaria's official national holiday. Since January 1st, 2007 Republic of Bulgaria is a full member of the European Union.

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## **Bulgaria - Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture**

by Juliana Tzvetkova

Bulgaria, situated in southeastern Europe on the Black Sea, is one of Europe's best-hidden secrets. A haven for nature and history buffs, this beautiful sunny country welcomes the traveler with bread and salt, a red rose, and a wooden vessel full of sparkling wine. These three emblems of ancient treasures, rose oil, and natural beauty symbolize its distinctive culture. This youngest member of the European Union has been riding a roller-coaster of radical transformation since emerging from the Eastern Bloc and becoming a market economy twenty years ago, changing dramatically in many ways and yet preserving its own particular charm and slow-paced way of life. Invasions and waves of migration, dating back to neolithic and classical times, have contributed to a unique cultural mosaic. The country boasts the oldest hoard of gold treasure in the world. The seventh-century Bulgarian empire dominated the Balkans and was a powerhouse of Slavonic culture. Later, Ottoman conquest and Soviet influence left their mark on the national psyche. Culture Smart! Bulgaria provides a key to understanding the Bulgarian people. It outlines their long and complex history, shows you what everyday life is like there today, and offers advice on what to expect and how to behave in different circumstances. This is a small country of proud and persevering people. More than the golden sands of the "Bulgarian Riviera," the vast thickly forested expanses of the Rhodopes or the Rila and Pirin ranges with their snow-capped peaks and emerald-green lakes, the music and dances and the warmth and cordiality of the Bulgarians will conquer your heart and bring you back time and again.

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## **Romania: Culture Smart and the description is for Culture**

by Debbie Stowe

A land of mountains, hills, and fertile plains, Romania is a tourist destination waiting to be discovered. It is a rich and complex country: a place whose cities are home to beautiful parks and vibrant cultural scenes; whose people welcome guests warmly into their homes, sharing the best of whatever they have, and party into the night, suffused by Latin joie de vivre. Buffeted over time between three great powers—the West, Russia, and Turkey—Romania betrays the cultural influences of each, and it can be a difficult place to get a handle on. Culture Smart! Romania provides an indispensable tool for the foreign visitor, digging deep behind the clichés, explaining many of the behavioral quirks of the people, smoothing your path toward better understanding, and outlining the many attractions—cultural, social, and geographical—that await you in this underexplored part of Europe.

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### **A Concise History of Romania (Cambridge Concise Histories)**

by Keith Hitchins

Spanning a period of 2000 years from the Roman conquest of Dacia to the present day, A Concise History of Romania traces the development of a unique nation situated on the border between East and West. In this illuminating new history, Keith Hitchins explores Romania's struggle to find its place amidst two diverse societies: one governed by Eastern orthodox tradition, spirituality and agriculture and the other by Western rationalism, experimentation and capitalism. The book charts Romania's advancement through five significant phases of its history: medieval, early modern, modern and finally the nation's 'return to Europe'; evaluating all the while Romania's part in European politics, economic and social change, intellectual and cultural renewals and international entanglements. This is a fascinating history of an East European nation; one which sheds new light on the complex evolution of the Romanians and the identity they have successfully crafted from a unique synthesis of traditions.

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### **A Concise History of Hungary (Cambridge Concise Histories)**

by Miklós Molnár

This book offers a comprehensive thousand-year history of the land, people, society, culture and economy of Hungary, from its nebulous origins in the Ural Mountains to the 1988 elections. It tells above all the thrilling story of a people who became a great power in the region and then fought against--and were invaded by--Ottomans, Germans and Soviets. The Hungarian people preserved nevertheless a continuous individuality through their Ural-born language and a specifically Hungaro-European culture.

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**Budapest: A Cultural Guide**

by Michel Jacobs

Budapest, dramatically situated on the Danube, is a city that makes an immediate impression on a visitor. It exhibits all the scale, grandeur and excitement of a major capital, yet it is a city absorbed by nostalgia, and openly scarred by its history. A traveler's enjoyment of the city will no doubt benefit from a fuller understanding of Budapest's rich and idiosyncratic culture. *Budapest: A Cultural Guide* is a personal and informative introduction to Budapest, mingling history with anecdote, exploring past and present.

Travel writer Michael Jacobs begins his cultural guide with lively essays, interwoven with some of the author's own experiences, dealing with key aspects of the city's life, history, and culture. Jacobs also includes a series of six walks arranged by district, enabling visitors to experience the city's evolution for themselves, and featuring all the major sites and a personal selection of less well-known, often neglected ones. Rich photos provide an introduction to Budapest's beauty for the armchair traveler, and detailed maps plot out the nuances that make this Eastern European city one of the most popular tourist sites of the 1990s.

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