

BOROVETS, Bulgaria

History

In the 19th century the ruling Prince Ferdinand Saxe-Coburg-Gotha built a hunting lodge at Borovets and was followed by various their wealthy family and friends. Thus was born one of Europe's earliest ski resorts. The modern resort was built in the 1960's to cater for package ski holidays.

Location

Borovets is the oldest and the biggest mountain resort in Bulgaria clustered in pine forests. Situated at 1350 m above sea level on the northern slopes of Rila Mountain among age-old pine woods, Borovets is located at the foot of peak MOUSSALA (2925 m) - the highest one on Balkan Peninsula. BOROVETS is easily accessible, being at a distance of 73 km from Sofia and 126 km from Plovdiv. The town of Samokov is only 10 km down the road from the resort.

Mountain facts

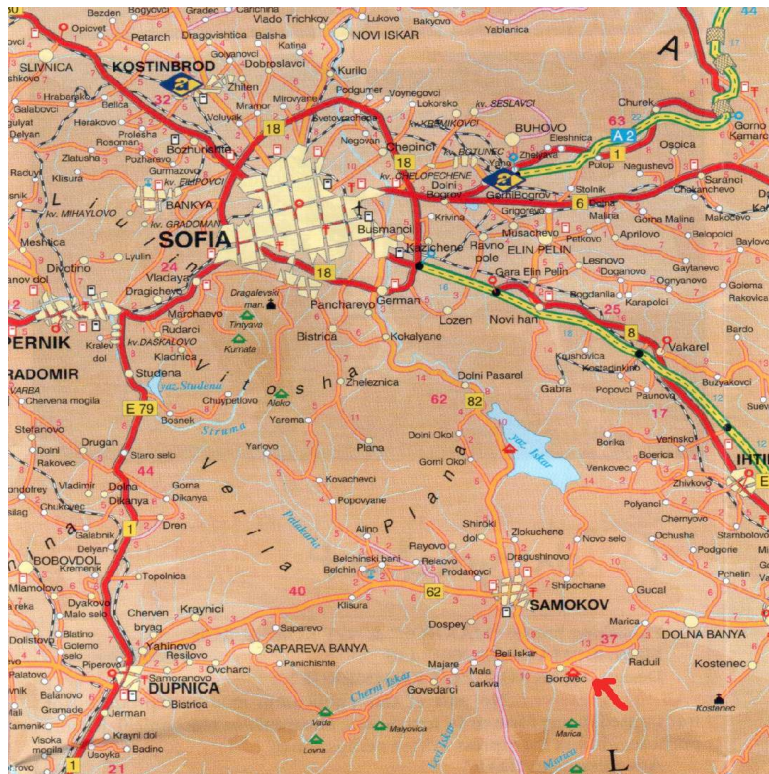
Resort elevation: 1,300m (4,265ft).

Top elevation: 2,543m (8,343ft).

Base elevation: 1,337m (4,387ft).

Number of lifts: 14.

Number of runs: 20.



Beyond the slopes

The hunting lodge Bistriza Palace, adorned with woodcarvings (1km/0.6 miles northwest of the **Rila Hotel**), is the main reminder that Borovets was a royal hunting ground a century ago.

Within the resort, a bowling alley at the Samokov Hotel and swimming pools in all the major hotels can be used by non-guests. Horse riding can be arranged, either with or without a guide, from Butch Riding School (on the track from the road between the Rila Hotel and Tyrol bar).

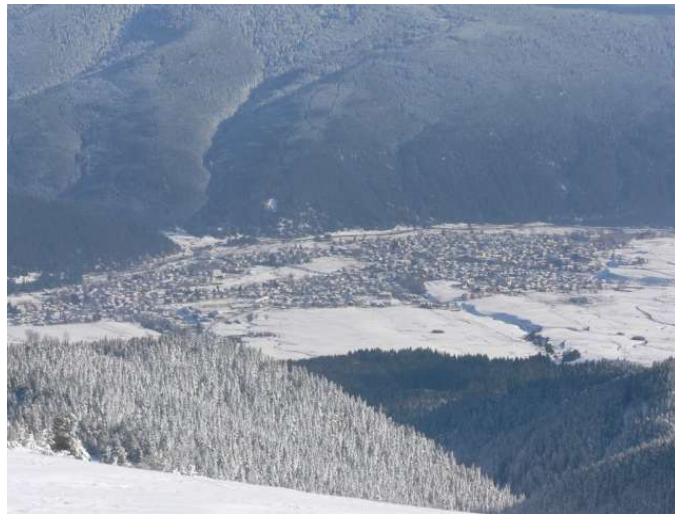
The nearby town of Samokov (15 minutes via the hourly minibus) was once the woodcarving capital of the region and has well preserved paintings in its churches. Most major hotels can arrange trips to the 10th-century Rila Monastery, and further afield to Sofia and Melnik.

Retail therapy

Aside from a handful of small supermarkets, most of the shops are those dedicated to ski gear, with the best selection in the basement of the **Rila Hotel**. The hotel also has a couple of souvenir shops, selling Russian dolls with amusing caricatures of Russian presidents. Art Gallery Bissera (next to **Hotel Moura**) has a decent collection of locally made pretty ceramics and paintings.

Places of Interest

Borovets offers scores of scenic routes including many guided ski routes. The organized trips lead to picturesque spots in the Rila Mountains such as the **Seven Rila lakes**, **Malyovitsa Peak**, **Moussala Peak**. A photo safari and a visit to the former **Bulgarian Tsar's residence of Bistriza** are also attractive options. Trips to Melnik with its unique pyramids and famous wines as well as to Plovdiv and the Rila Monastery are among the most interesting ones.



The **Rila mountains** seem to be a piece of the Alps thrown into the heart of the Balkans with their many peaks above 2,000m, glacial valleys and lakes. The snow cover on the parts that are of equal altitude to the Alpine heights often exceeds two metres. Eastern Rila is the highest part of the mountain and is where one can visit Rila's highest peak - Moussala (2,925m) - and the 10 top peaks, and glacial lake (2,709m). Northwestern Rila is home to some of the symbols of Bulgarian alpinism and mountaineering - the Malyovitsa and Kупenite peaks, and the biggest and significant lake groups, the most famous and scenic of all being the Seven Rila Lakes. Many marked tourist hiking trails and high-mountain rock-climbing tours start from here.



In the northwestern part of the Rila mountains, **Rila Monastery** is the biggest and most famous of Bulgaria's monasteries, and one of the most significant monuments on the Balkan Peninsula. It was founded by a hermit, St John of Rila, in the 10th century, and eventually became a monastic complex, which played a primary role in the spiritual history of medieval Bulgaria.

Having survived fire, abandonment and plunder, the monastery fascinates visitors today with its exquisite architecture, rich murals and icons, and valuable museum collection, including old manuscripts, jewellery, textiles, church treasures and a library containing thousands of books. The monastery is also the burial place of the Scot James Burchier, correspondent of The Times, who was based in Sofia during the turbulent latter part of the 19th century. He lived in Bulgaria, and after sending home many reports of Turkish atrocities helped to stir up public opinion in Victorian Britain that something must be done to stop further oppression of the Bulgarian Christian population under the Ottoman yoke.

Malyovitsa is a small resort but there is no other Bulgarian resort which can compare with its beauty and grandeur. It is situated at about 1,700 metres above sea level. There is good road access from the nearest village of Govedartsı (13 km) and the town of Samokov (27 km). Malyovitsa is a natural base for alpine sports. The highest Alpine walls and the most difficult rock tours are located here.

The **Pchelin spa** complex is located in a picturesque mountainous area not far from the city of Sofia. It lies 9km from the well-known Kostenets spa resort, 30 km away from the Borovets ski resort and just 70 km away from the capital city which make it an increasingly popular destination. The Pchelin spa is nestled in the woods of the Ihtimanska Sredna Gora, surrounded by a gorgeous wreath of oak and pine trees. The popularity of the Pchelin mineral springs dates back to ancient times. According to legends, soldiers of the Bulgarian King Samouil, as well as Bulgarian rioters during the Ottoman rule later on (so-called "haiduti") used to come here to have their wounds healed. Moreover, local people tell stories of childless women who gave birth to long-cherished children after taking a bath in the mineral waters of Pchelin.

Summer activities

Borovets is an experience of beauty, nature and Old Bulgarian culture. It's worth taking a short reconnaissance walk around the streets before sitting down in one of the more high-profile restaurants. The choices are plenty and most offer time-honoured delights from salads to lamb on the spit. If the latter makes your mouth water, just make sure you ask for it directly off the spit or else you might not get what you expected.

Borovets is at the foot of peak Moussala (2925 m), the highest on the Balkan Peninsula. In summer, one can do a one-day hike to [Moussala](#), using the lift from Borovets to Yastrebets and then walking for 8 hours. Pleasant walks for less ambitious tourists are possible as well, without special touristic equipment.

Taking a walk on the Rila Mountain is considered the number one summer activity. The name Rila descends from the Slavic word "rula" which means "full of water". The mountains are filled with more than 200 lakes and surrounded by wild mountainous terrain containing more than 2000 different species of flora.

The signature hiking route to Chernata Skala, commonly known as Black Rock, takes visitors through century-old pine forests, passing flower-covered green meadows and across small picturesque streams. After the leisurely two-hour trek, you will find there are plenty of places to picnic while admiring the wonderful view. If the four-hour walk sounds like a bit much then adventurers can go on horseback or by horse drawn carriage.

The hiking enthusiast can find a wide range of trails from easy to difficult and all generally well sign posted. Some of the more famous walks are to Mt. Moussala – six hours, and from the upper station of the Gondola – three hours, to Sitnyakovo Palace – 1.5 hours, to Chakur Voyvoda Chalet – 2.5 hours, to Saragyol Palace – three hours, to the Maritsa Chalet – 4.5 hours, to the Zavrachitsa Chalet – six hours.

Map: <http://www.visitbulgaria.net/en/mapof/borovets/>