

Made in Bulgaria

What makes Bulgarians proud?

Since the beginning of the year, Bulgaria is a full member of the European Union. West Europeans have a rather limited and generally negative perception of the oldest European state with the youngest EU membership. For those Europeans who have got to know Bulgaria, it is a collective image of East European charm and Balkan exotics.

For Bulgarians, their country is the most beautiful, their mountains – the most magnificent, the sea – the bluest (even though it's called the Black Sea); and their culture – the richest.

None of this is an expression of a naïve national chauvinism, but rather a self-esteem boosted by natural beauties and great civilisations' achievements. Under the Bulgarian Association for Business and Tourist Information's initiative, in August was launched a national poll on Bulgarian Symbols.

The suggestions are divided into 3 categories: Natural Sites, Cultural and Historic Heritage; and Food and Drinks. The nation's interest toward the initiative exceeded the boldest of the organisers' expectations. Thousands of people vote daily for a symbol of Bulgaria and the proposals vary from the epicurean come sentimental ones such as the famous rakia and wines to the summarising images of Bulgarian hospitality like bread and salt. Among the current top proposals in the first category ratings are the Belogradchik Rocks, The Fossil Forest, the Vitosha Moraines, the Seven Rila Lakes, the Stob Pyramids, the Trigrad Gorge, the Habitat Reserve of Srebarna, the Melnik Pyramids, the Erma River Canyon, and the Cape of Kaliakra. We are going to tell you about all of these natural phenomena in our subsequent issues. In terms of culture and historical heritage, Bulgarians, and even Bulgarian politicians are particularly jealous. Among the ones indicated as having the greatest contribution to the European cultural treasury are: the Slavonic Cyrillic alphabet, the rose and the rose oil, known across the world, the Panagyurishte gold treasure, the Madara Horseman, the holy city of Perperikon, the greatest monastery complex on the Balkans – the Rila Monastery, the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, rising in the heart of Sofia, the historical ridge of Tsarevets over the old Bulgarian capital of Veliko Turnovo. A place in this group was also allocated to some of the favourite local traditions of fire dancers (nestinari) and kukeri. The Bulgarian is a man of an open heart for the others and the different ones. Everyone feels welcome in a Bulgarian house and the laden table is a symbol namely of the generosity and hospitality, that could compete successfully with the rest of the sources of national pride.

For this reason, the group of “Food and Drinks” finds a place of merit in the Bulgarian Symbols rating. After the famed yoghurt, a place of honour is dedicated to the hot Rakia, the heavy Mavrud and Melnik wines, the irresistible Banitsa, the Smilyan beans, the invariable Shopska salad, the meat delicacies Sudjuk and Lukanka, the juicy kebabche’s and burgers, the Radomir Boza and of course the Bulgarian white brine cheese. The race between the all-people’s favourite symbols will continue until 24th December this year. The finalist and its runner-ups are to be handed to the head of state and ministers, as well as to the Bulgarian EP deputies. The official ceremony marking the end of the initiative and announcing the Symbol of Bulgaria is expected to take place towards the second half of January, 2008.

Until then, keep an eye on our Made in Bulgaria Column in which we will acquaint you with the main participants in this unique patriotic race.