ABOUT STONE & COMPASS

Stone & Compass is an education and cultural retreat center in Stolat, Bulgaria. Located in the foothills of the Balkan Mountains, the idyllic natural setting of our Center encourages people of all ages and backgrounds to create cultural understandings and connections. We are a company founded upon the principles of community and outreach.

We believe everyone is human first and human-to-human contact begins one on one. The mission of our global center is to connect people and cultures together by fostering friendships, ideas, and inspiration.

The “Stone” symbolizes the wisdom that the land, people, and culture bring to the present moment. We desire to preserve and honor this wisdom through our programs and activities. The “Compass” symbolizes building a path forward where the land, people, and culture can see a future full of hope, financial security, peace, and happiness. It is the mission of the Stone & Compass to help preserve the past while looking towards and building a vibrant future.

Although we all may be different, engaging in authentic interactions with one another around culture and heritage allow us the opportunity to appreciate the differences and experience the similarities. Our goal is learning how to coexist peacefully and take inspiration from one another to create value in the lives of ourselves and our environment.
Welcome Traveler,

All of us at Stone & Compass would like to offer you a heartfelt welcome to our family. This is a family run business, co-founded and run by the husband and wife team of Julie Kiernan & Robert Goodwin. What makes us different and stands us apart from other companies is our commitment to treat each guest as if they are a member of our extended family, always focusing our efforts on creating unique experiences based in cross-cultural education and understanding. We offer a warm, relaxed, and welcome environment to explore the amazing country, culture, and people of Bulgaria.

We are also committed to giving back to others and as thus all profits from any programs are reinvested to support a multitude of non-profit work around education and cultural preservation. These range in scope from supporting an archeological dig that found the oldest hand wrought gold in the world to running high school cultural exchange service learning programs. When traveling with Stone & Compass you can rest assured that your experience will continue on after you leave to help another project and another person to also have a transformational experience.

This packet includes travel tips as well as information about Bulgaria and some of the locations you will be experiencing on your trip.

Rob Goodwin is a graduate of California State University, Dominguez Hills (2007) with a degree in anthropology.

Looking forward to meeting and traveling with you all!

Julie & Rob
Communication
To communicate with the U.S. from Bulgaria, we recommend setting your smart-phone to “airplane mode,” which turns off cell service, and use WiFi (available at hotels, most restaurants, and The Center) to connect using web-based applications such as Skype, Facetime, Email, or Facebook Messenger for the duration of the trip. We advise checking with your carrier to ask about your situation, as some carriers do have international cell plans, but these can be expensive.

Safety
Bulgaria is a relatively safe country but you should always be cautious when traveling in a foreign country. You may stand out as a tourist. Take precautions that you would normally take in a new place or city - keep your belongings close to you, and watch your wallet.

Language
Most young people in Bulgaria speak fluent English. Most clerks in shops in the major cities also speak English. However, the older population still mainly speaks Bulgarian, and once you are out and about in villages, English is spoken much less. A member of our Bulgarian team will travel with us and help with the language barrier when needed. One unique Bulgarian cultural mannerism is shaking one’s head to signify “yes” and nodding one’s head to signify “no,” the opposite what is customary in the United States.

Money
Your trip is all-inclusive! But in case you want to do some shopping or grab an occasional extra cappuccino or gelato, it is best to bring US currency and exchange it once in Bulgaria for Bulgarian LEV (1 U.S. Dollar = 1.76 Bulgarian Leva). We recommend exchanging $100-$200. This will be more than enough for extra snacks and gifts for friends and family. You can change this right after you get off your flight at a kiosk at the airport. Stone & Compass staff can assist you in this process. This kiosk is reputable and usually has reasonable exchange rates. There are other locations to exchange dollars to lev in the main cities but not in the villages or smaller cities. Many places use credit cards now, but some of the best bargains for gifts are found in local bazaars etc. where cash and haggling over prices is expected. Your guide will teach you the best way to get a good price.

Lodging
In most cases, rooms will be double occupancy unless you have specified single occupancy. Most Bulgarian/European hotels have what is called a “wet” bathroom where the shower head is on the wall and all of the bathroom gets wet when showering. This can be easy to adjust to, but is something to consider when planning your shower experience. Electrical outlets are type C “europlugs”.

Ground Transportation
Travel throughout Bulgaria will be in comfortable 9 person luxury vans which allow for maximum comfort to enjoying the amazing views of the countryside and mountains.

Weather/Packing
The weather will be in the 70-80’s. Packing for typical spring/summer temperatures in the 70-80’s in the days and 60’s in the nights should be expected. Suggested to pack a light rain jacket and good walking shoes in addition to any other items you may desire. Restaurants and outings are casual with regard to clothing. However, hats, sunglasses, short shorts/skirts etc. are frowned upon when going into churches and monasteries. Don’t forget to save room for souvenirs!
Traveler’s Information Packet

SOFIA

Sofia, Bulgaria’s capital city, is located in the western part of the country at a major crossroads between both Western Europe and Turkey as well as the Near and Middle Easts. First settled by the Thracians in the 8th century BCE, the city was originally known as Serdika, and was an important city for the Roman, First Bulgarian, and Ottoman Empires. At the end of the 14th century, the city gained its current name in honor of the city’s major symbol, the Saint Sofia Basilica. Along with this basilica, Sofia is home to many historic churches and other architecture that reflects its long history, as well as the National Archaeological Museum, the National Art Gallery, National Museum of Ethnography, Sofia History Museum, and Natural History Museum.

VELIKO TARNOVO

Veliko Tarnovo is a city in northern Bulgaria whose archaeological history dates back 5,000 years. During the Second Bulgarian Empire, the city served as a capital, leading to rapid development. The medieval fortress Tsarevets is one of the city’s most notable landmarks, which itself was a smaller city in its heyday, with houses, a church, reservoirs, and battle towers. A nearby hill, Trapezitsa, is the location of a current archaeological excavations where new finds are constantly being discovered. VT is also home to several Orthodox temples, and numerous monasteries are located in the vicinity. There are many museums in the old part of the town. VT is well-known as a capital of Balkan culture, and is rich with the history of the area.

ETAR

Etar is an ethnographic museum outside of Gabrovo, established in 1964. The museum’s focus is displaying the architecture, lifestyle, and economic past of the Gabrovo region during the Bulgarian Revival period of the 18th and 19th centuries. The open-air aspect of the museum puts the visitor in direct contact with the past, with 50 sites of historic culture available to explore: crafts such as woodcarving and pottery; machinery such as mills and grindstones; and exhibitions and workshops for a truly immersive experience. Open year-round, there is always something to pique a wide variety of interests.

DRYANOVO MONASTERY

Dryanovo monastery, founded in the 13th century and rebuilt in the 17th century, was used as a preparation site by revolutionaries for liberation from Ottoman rule.

There is a restaurant and traditional craft shopping within the complex. A short walk offers views of a waterfall and the picturesque cliffs of the Dryanovo river gorge, as well as an opportunity to explore the caverns of Bacho Kiro Cave.
Located on 2000 acres of land outside the village of Stolat, the Stone & Compass Center is an expansive complex designed to welcome visitors from around the world. A fully renovated three-story house includes eight furnished bedrooms, six full bathrooms, lounge areas, a tavern space with a brand new kitchen, and a spectacular view of the surrounding area. A second two-bedroom one bath bungalow is also on the property. The property also includes a 300 m²-restored barn for hosting events such as yoga classes, weddings, and other large gatherings. With a garden, vineyards, and nearby forests, there is plenty of opportunity to explore and revel in nature as well.

We are excited to welcome you to Stone & Compass, your home away from home in beautiful Bulgaria.
500 BC  Thracian tribes settle modern southeastern Bulgaria. They are subsequently subjugated by Alexander the Great and later by the Roman Empire.

681 AD  First Bulgarian Empire is established.

890  Early Cyrillic script is developed by Bulgarian scholars.

1018-1185  Bulgaria is part of Byzantine empire.

1396  Ottoman Empire completes conquest of Bulgaria.

1878  Treaty of San Stefano between Russia and Turkey, ending their war of 1877-78, recognises an autonomous Bulgaria.

1878  Treaty of Berlin reduces Bulgaria’s geography. Eastern Rumelia (modern southern Bulgaria) remains under Ottoman rule, and merges with Bulgaria in 1886.

1908  Bulgaria declares itself an independent kingdom.

1914-18  Bulgaria allies itself with Germany during WWI.

1944  Soviet army invades German-occupied Bulgaria during WWII.


1947  New Soviet constitution establishes one-party state.


1984  Communist government tries to force Turkish minority to assimilate and take Slavic names. Many resist and in 1989 some 300,000 flee the country.

1989  Multiparty system introduced. Opposition party Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) formed.


1991  New constitution proclaims Bulgaria a parliamentary republic. UDF wins elections.

1994  BSP returns to power in general election.

1997  Mass protests over economic crisis. Interim gov’t installed until elections, when UDF wins control.


2004  Bulgaria is admitted to NATO.

2005  Socialist Party led tops the poll in general elections.

2007  Bulgaria and Romania join the EU, raising membership to 27 nations.


2012  Bulgaria becomes the second European country to ban fracking for shale gas.

CURRENT FACTS:
Capital city: Sofia
Official language: Bulgarian
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1061402.stm