

Chapter 3

Geography of Tourism in Bulgaria

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Abstract Bulgaria is one of the most developed tourist regions in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2014, Bulgaria was visited by nearly 9.5 million foreign tourists, over 2 million more than the number of inhabitants. Bulgaria is situated in southeast Europe in a remote corner of the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula on the Black Sea. Despite the small area (110,000 km²), the country is distinguished by a great diversity of landscape, which represents potential for tourism development practically all year round. The most important role in tourism in Bulgaria is played by the coastal landscape. Regarding that, Bulgarian Black Sea Coast resembles the Mediterranean coast. There are also diverse mountain ranges in Bulgaria—the Rila, Pirin, and Rhodope—which are the highest mountains of the alpine landscape. Bulgaria is also a culturally attractive tourist region. Location of Bulgaria in southern Europe at the crossroads of Eastern and Western culture gave it a strong multicultural dimension visible today in the architecture, customs, religion, and even the cuisine of this country. Based on the natural and cultural assets, the development of several major forms of tourism can be considered in Bulgaria. The most developed are coastal and mountain tourism (winter and hiking) accompanied by health and spa tourism, which have the longest tradition. Since the times of political changes in the nineties of the last century, agrotourism and various forms of cultural tourism (e.g., religious tourism, wine tourism, and urban tourism) have become popular in Bulgaria.

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3.1 Geographic Study of Tourism in Bulgaria, Its Main Research Problems, Themes, and Research Centres

Bulgaria is a well-known tourist region in Europe. Its location by the Black Sea, varied landscape and rich cultural and historical heritage made tourism one of the most important spheres of life in this small country. Bulgaria is often considered to be a typically tourist country, which is also reflected in research, mainly geographical. Since the mid-1960s, when Bulgaria became a popular foreign tourist destination, tourism studies have been the domain of geographers. In between 1967–1968, the Tourism Geography Faculty was founded at the University of Sophia (Bachvarov 1984). It was one of the first research institutions dealing with tourism geography in post-communist countries. The geographical studies of tourism in Bulgaria regarded the territorial recreational system, devised by the Russian geographers, Preobrazensky et al. (1975). The main objects of the study included the division of the country into tourist regions (Dinev 1975, after Bachvarov 1984, 2006, Bachvarov and Apostolov 1982, Marinov et al. 2009), domestic and international tourism in Bulgaria (Vodenska 1979 after Bachvarov 1984, Vodenska 1992, Bachvarov 1997, 2006, Marinov and Dogramadjieva 2011), and the evaluation of Bulgaria's tourist potential (Daneva 1983, Popova 1982 after Bachvarov 1984, 2006). The focus of these studies was tourism in the best-developed tourist coastal regions. The works worth mentioning here include those by Bachvarov et al. (1974) (after Bachvarov 1984) and the later articles by Koulov and Marinov (2002) and Bachvarov (1997, 1999, 2003b, 2006), who presented the main problems of tourist development in Bulgarian coastal resorts, in the context of the changes on the global tourist market.

The studies in the field of tourism geography and recreation were initially conducted at two research centers, i.e., the Institute of Geography at the University of Sophia and the Bulgarian Academy of Science. Faculty of Tourism Geography at the Geology and Geography Department, University of Sophia, has been playing the leading role until the present day (2011). The tourism geography studies conducted at the Institute of Geography, University of Sophia, were initiated by Professor Lubomir Dinev and continued by Professor Marin Bachvarov, the author of numerous publications regarding the tourist regionalization of Bulgaria, as well as the sustainable development in the tourist regions of the country. He also wrote many important theoretical works regarding tourist space, tourist region, and the mutual relations between tourism and recreation. In 1980–1994, Professor Marin Bachvarov was the Head of the Faculty of Tourism Geography at the University of Sophia. Since 1994, he has continued his geographical research of tourism and recreation at the University of Lodz in Poland. Other Bulgarian geographers involved in tourism studies include: Professor Maria Vodenska and Vasil Marinov, the current (2011) Head of the Faculty of Tourism Geography at the University of Sophia. The studies conducted at the Faculty concentrate on sustainable development and tourism, as well as the use of GIS in the spatial analysis of tourism development.

3.2 Assessment of the Conditions and Factors of Tourism Development in Bulgaria

3.2.1 Geographical Location

One of the major factors of tourism development is the geographical location. In case of Bulgaria, it may be described as peripheral. Bulgaria lies at the remote southwestern end of Europe, in the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. Its area is only 111,000 km², but, despite that, Bulgaria has an exceptionally varied landscape, which results from its location in three European landscape regions. The plains in the north are covered with European forests and partly by Eurasian steppes. In the central, southern, and western part of the country, we find mountainous landscapes, with alpine, medium–height and low ranges of the Balkan Peninsula. The Black Sea coastline area in the east resembles Mediterranean landscapes. The wide variety of landscapes is the country’s potential for an all year round tourism development.

Due to its location in southeastern Europe, Bulgaria had a direct contact with ancient European civilizations, which left an imprint on the material and spiritual culture of the country. Thracian tribes settled in the area of the present-day Bulgaria as early as in the second millennium BC Greek colonization started in the seventh century BC and the Roman colonization followed in the second century BC After the fall of the Roman Empire, Bulgaria got under the influence of Byzantium. In the early Middle Ages, in the fourth century, Christianity reached Bulgaria. Moreover, the country was located on the route of the Ottoman Empire expansion. Ottoman influences are still visible today in Bulgarian architecture or cuisine. Generally speaking, Bulgaria’s location at the meeting point of the Western and Eastern European cultures resulted in a conglomerate of influences, customs, religions, and peoples.

The peripheral location of Bulgaria in Europe makes it less accessible by transport. It still has an underdeveloped network of road and rail connections with the rest of the continent, especially with the Western Europe. This is one of the major pull factors, slowing down the development of international tourism in that region (Bachvarov 2006).

Bulgaria also lies close to Central Europe, where most tourists in the communist times came from. Former communist countries are perceived as rising European tourist markets.

3.2.2 Natural Preconditions for Tourism Development

Bulgaria is a country with an attractive, rich, and varied natural environment, which is basic to the tourism development. Despite its small area, the country possesses most landscape forms found on the continent. First of all, Bulgaria is a mountainous country; two thirds of its area is situated at over 300 m a.s.l. and one eighth—at

Photograph**3.1** Belogradchik Rocks**Photograph 3.2** Golden Sands, popular Black Sea tourist resort**Photograph****3.3** Kovachevitsa, village in the Rhodope Mountains

Photograph 3.4 Madara Rider



Photograph 3.5 Nesebar—
Church of St John Aliturgetos



Photograph 3.6 Rila
Monastery



over 1000 m a.s.l. From the tourist's point of view, the most attractive are, the highest, Pirin and Rila ranges, as well as the Rhodope Mountains. The slightly lower Balkan mountain range (*Stara Planina*) extends over the middle part of the country (Photograph 3.1). The second most attractive landscape zone is the seaside area. The nearly 400 km long Black Sea Coast has a varied surface relief. Its northern part is rockier, with breathtaking cliffs. In the southern part, the coast is flatter, with sandy beaches. The area is highly insolated (240–300 h), and its mean temperatures of air (23–25 °C) and water (23–25 °C) ensure the comfort of stay in the summer.

The remaining areas in the north of the country are lowlands. This type of landscape is the least attractive as regards tourism development. The biggest attraction of the lowland part of the country is the Danube Valley. The River Danube is one of the most attractive water trails in Europe.

An element of the natural environment which is important for the development of tourism in Bulgaria is the climate. The variety of landscape and the geographical location of the country create favorable conditions for the development of typical recreational tourism in the seaside zone (subtropical climate with the Mediterranean climate regime) and active tourism in the mountain areas, where there are very good climate conditions for skiing, nearly all year round.

An equally important natural factor of tourism development in Bulgaria is water. Access to the sea and the abundance of mineral, waters are major tourist assets of the country, strongly rooted in ancient times.

A measure of attractiveness of a country's natural environment is the number and character of protected areas. In Bulgaria, there are different types of protected areas, which cover the total of 641,251 hectares, i.e., 0.57% of the overall area of the country. Nearly 1/3 of the protected areas are national parks. Bulgaria has three national parks (Table 3.1), situated in the mountains, in the central and the southern part of the country. Generally, they offer the widest range of natural conditions for the development of various forms of tourism. The Rila and Pirin National Parks are particularly well known as attractive areas for doing the most popular forms of active tourism, such as skiing or trekking, as well as more specialized forms, such as mountain climbing. The Central Balkan National Park is an area of typical recreational, individual tourism. It is estimated that Bulgarian national parks are visited by about 150,000 tourists every year, who stay at 57 hotels (chalets) (<http://www.moew.government.bg/ecotourismforum>).

Another form of protecting nature in Bulgaria is Nature Parks. In 2011, there were eleven nature parks, stretching over 275,445 ha (43% of the overall protected

Table 3.1 National Parks in Bulgaria in 2015 (<http://www.moew.government.bg>)

Name of the national parks	Area in ha	Characteristic features
Rila National Park	81,046.0	mountains
Pirin National Park	40,332.4	mountains
Central Balkan National Park	71,669.5	mountains

Table 3.2 Nature Parks in Bulgaria in 2015 (<http://www.moew.government.bg/ecotourismforum>)

Name of the nature parks	Area in ha	Characteristic features
Vitosha	26,606.6	mountains
Rusenski Lom	3408.0	lowland
Sinite kamani	11,380.8	mountains
Shumensko Plato	3895.8	mountains
Zlatni pyasatsi	1320.7	seaside
Vrachanski Balkan	30,129.9	mountains
Strandja	116,068.5	mountains
Rila Monastery	27,370.7	mountains
Persina	21,762.2	wetland
Bulgarka	21,772.2	mountains
Belasitsa	11,732.4	mountains

area in Bulgaria) (Table 3.2). The largest is the Strandja Nature Park in the southeastern part of the country, close to the border with Turkey.

Generally speaking, Bulgaria offers wide-ranging natural conditions for the development of various forms of tourism, which make it a highly attractive tourist destination.

3.2.3 Cultural-Historical Preconditions for Tourism Development

Bulgaria is perceived mainly as a seaside recreational tourism destination. Much less is known about its historical and cultural heritage, which is one of the major factors determining the development of contemporary tourism. A particularly valuable heritage is that which emphasizes the cultural identity of a given area. Due to its location and history, Bulgaria has rich cultural heritage, highly authentic, and original. The individualism of the Bulgarian cultural heritage consists of the mixture of European and Asian cultures, which left their traces in many aspects of life in the areas which currently belong to Bulgaria. The influences of Eastern and Western cultures have been overlapping for 5000 years. The oldest remnants of a man's presence are particularly attractive to tourists. In Bulgaria, we can find traces of material and spiritual culture, dating back to the ancient times (Photographs 3.4 and 3.5). Three out of nine structures, featured on the prestigious UNESCO List, represent well-preserved antique urban architecture (Nesebar) and Thracian tombstones (Kazanlak and Sveshtari) (Table 3.3) (Photograph 3.5).

Another historical period which left behind the most interesting examples of the cultural heritage of Bulgaria is the Middle Ages. The tourist attractions coming from that period include examples of the early Christian sacral architecture, picturesquely located against the mountainous background. Those are mainly

Table 3.3 Bulgarian Sites featured on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List (2015) (www.wch.unesco.org)

Name	Year	The criteria for selection
Cultural objects		
Ancient City of Nessebar	1983	The Ancient City of Nessebar is an outstanding testimony of multilayered cultural and historical heritage. It is a place where many civilizations left their tangible traces: Tracian, Greek, Byzantine, and others The Ancient City of Nessebar is a unique example of an architectural ensemble with preserved Bulgarian Renaissance structure, forming a harmonious homogenous entity with outstanding natural configuration of the rocky peninsular, linked with the continent by a long narrow stretch of land
Boyana Church	1979	Boyana Church is a pure example of a church with a Greek-cross ground-plan with dome, richly decorated facades, and decoration of ceramic elements. It is one of the most remarkable medieval monuments with especially fine wall paintings. The Boyana Church is composed of three parts, each built at a different period: tenth century, thirteenth century, and nineteenth century, which constitute a homogenous whole. This site is one of the most complete and perfectly preserved monuments of Eastern European medieval art
Madara Rider	1979	The Madara Rider is an exceptional work of art dating back to the beginning of the eighth century. It is the only relief of its kind, having no parallel in Europe. Madara was the principal sacred place of the First Bulgarian Empire before Bulgaria's conversion to Christianity in the ninth century
Rila Monastery	1983	A characteristic example of the Bulgarian Renaissance (eighteenth–nineteenth centuries), the monument symbolizes the awareness of a Slavic cultural identity following centuries of occupation. Rila Monastery is considered to be a symbol of the nineteenth Century Bulgarian Renaissance which imparted Slavic values upon Rila in trying to reestablish an uninterrupted historic continuity
Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo	1979	The fourteenth-century murals testify to the exceptional skill of the artists belonging to the Tamovo School of painting. The “Church” frescoes reveal an exceptional artistry and a remarkable artistic sensitivity of fourteenth-century painting and Bulgarian medieval art; they are an important achievement in the Christian art of southeastern Europe They show close ties with expressive Hellenistic art and a clear preference for the nude, the landscape and architectural background in a composition, as well as drama and emotional atmosphere—qualities, which combined, make an exceptional masterpiece. All of that set in a magnificent natural environment—confirm the value of this extraordinary historical grouping
Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak	1979	The Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak is the masterpiece of the Thracian creative spirit. The Kazanlak frescoes testify to high level of culture and pictorial art in Thracia The Kazanlak frescoes represent a significant stage in the development of Hellenistic funerary art

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Name	Year	The criteria for selection
Thracian Tomb of Sveshtiari	1985	It is a remarkable reminder of the culture of the Getes, Thracian people who were in contact with the Hellenistic and Hyperborean worlds, according to ancient geographers. The tomb has a unique architectural decor, with polychrome half-human, half-plant caryatids, and painted murals
Natural objects		
Pirin National Park	1983	The mountain scenery of Pirin National Park is of exceptional beauty. The high mountain peaks and crags contrast with meadows, rivers, and waterfalls and provide an opportunity to experience the aesthetics of a Balkan mountain landscape. The ability to experience remoteness and naturalness is an important attribute of the outstanding universal value of the property
Srebarna Nature Reserve	1983	The Srebarna Nature Reserve is a freshwater lake adjacent to the Danube, extending over 600 ha. It is the breeding ground of almost 100 species of birds, many of which are rare or endangered
		In total, the property provides critical habitat that supports 173 bird species, 78 species of which are of European conservation concern and nine being listed as globally threatened

Photograph 3.7 Veliko
Tarnavo, one of the historical
capitals of Bulgaria



Photograph 3.8 St.
Alexander Nevsky Cathedral,
Sofia



monasteries and Eastern Orthodox Churches. Inside we can find examples of mural painting. Some of these sites are also pilgrimage destinations.

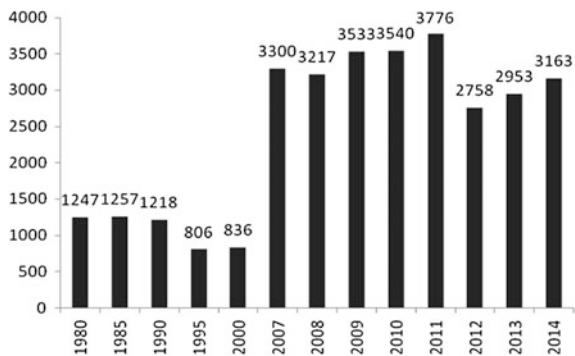
Bulgaria has nine sites entered on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List, seven cultural and two natural (Table 3.3). The cultural heritage in Bulgaria is concentrated in several tourist regions and large cities. The majority of sites can be found in the central-western part of the country (Sophia and its surroundings), the center (Plovdiv), the south (Veliko Tarnovo), and the east (Varna, Burgas, Nesebar). The most attractive cultural heritage sites in Bulgaria are situated in beautiful landscapes, which make it possible to extend and enrich the tourist offer regarding individual types of tourist attractions (Bachvarov 2003a).

3.3 Primary and Secondary Tourism Infrastructure

The tourist accommodation infrastructure is one of the most important elements of the tourist development of a given area. In 2014, in Bulgaria, there were 3163 different accommodation facilities (hotels, motels, mountain chalets, campsites, and other short-term accommodation facilities with more than 10 bed-places) (Fig. 3.1). That number was slightly higher than that in 2013 (an increase by 1.0%) and twice as high as before 2000. The recent rapid increase in the amount of the tourist accommodation infrastructure might have been caused by the fact that private accommodation was accepted as standard facility after Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007. In 2012, the number of accommodation facilities has decreased by up to 27%. This might have been caused by the global economic crisis. However, since 2013, the number of accommodation facilities has been steadily increasing.

Hotels, which constituted almost a half of all the accommodation facilities in Bulgaria (Fig. 3.2a), played the leading role in the tourist accommodation structure

Fig. 3.1 The number of accommodation facilities in Bulgaria (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)



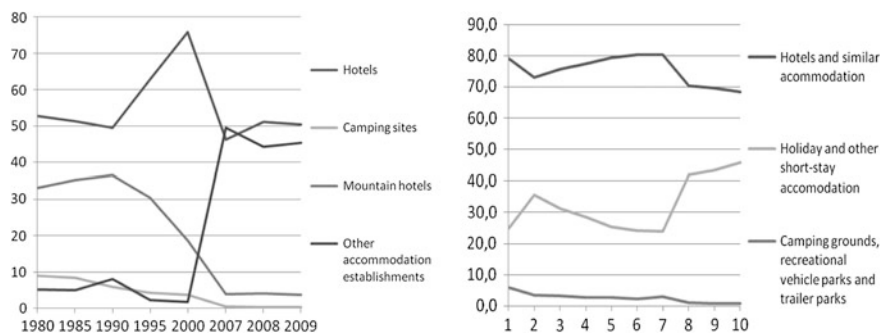


Fig. 3.2 Tourist accommodation structure in Bulgaria (%) (left **a** and right **b**) (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria, Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)

until 2010. Other types of accommodation have also gained in importance during this period. In 2009, they constituted 45% of all accommodation facilities in the country. The percentage of other types of facilities visibly decreased from 8.9% in 1980 to 0.3% in 2009 in case of campsites and from 33 to 3.7% in case of mountain hotels. According to the classification of accommodation facilities based on Eurostat, which was adopted also in Bulgaria, hotels and similar accommodations¹ still play a leading role (Fig. 3.2b). In 2014, they represented almost 70% of all tourist facilities. Accommodation linked to the leisure holiday was on the second place with a share of 30%. The share of campsite has not significantly changed and has remained below 1%.

The largest number of accommodation facilities was found in the most visited regions (Fig. 3.3). Two seaside regions (north-eastern and southeastern regions) concentrated 47.6% of the whole accommodation infrastructure in Bulgaria. The southwestern and southcentral regions, with the most attractive mountainous areas and the capital city, had 37.6% of all the accommodation facilities in the country. The remaining regions, situated in the northern part of Bulgaria, concentrated only 14.8% of the whole accommodation infrastructure.

In 2014, the accommodation facilities discussed above offered 314,157 bed-places (Fig. 3.4), which was by 11,724 bed-places more than in 2013 and only 635 more than in 1985, which saw the highest number of bed-places so far. The largest decrease in the number of bed-places in Bulgaria was recorded in the second half of the 1990s, which was connected with the collapse of the traditional foreign tourist markets. In the tourist accommodation structure, hotels constituted the largest group, with almost 90% of all bed-places (Fig. 3.5a). The biggest increase in the percentage of hotels and, at the same time, a decrease in the overall number of bed-places were recorded in the second half of the 1990s (Fig. 3.4).

¹This class includes hotels (and similar establishments, for instance those operating under the name “bed & breakfast”), resort hotels, suite/apartment hotels, and motels.

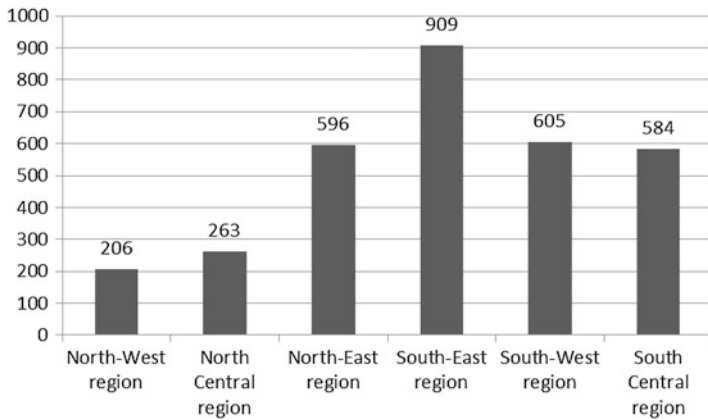
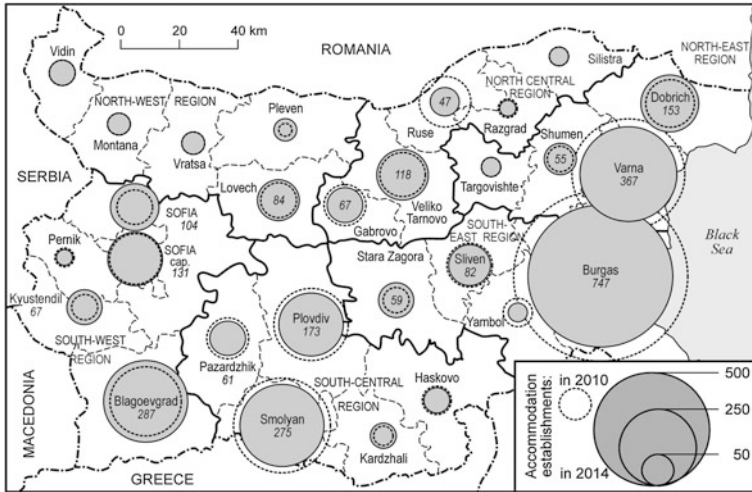
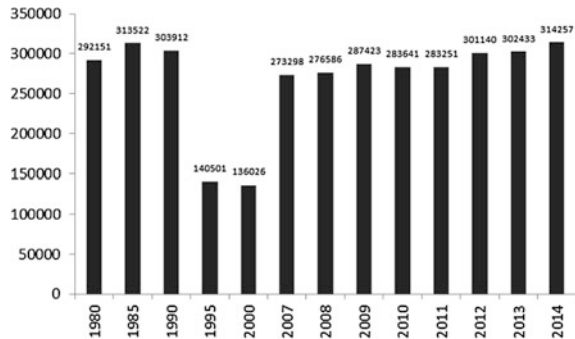


Fig. 3.3 The number of accommodation facilities in Bulgaria by regions in 2010 and 2014 (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

Fig. 3.4 The number of bed-places in accommodation facilities in Bulgaria (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)



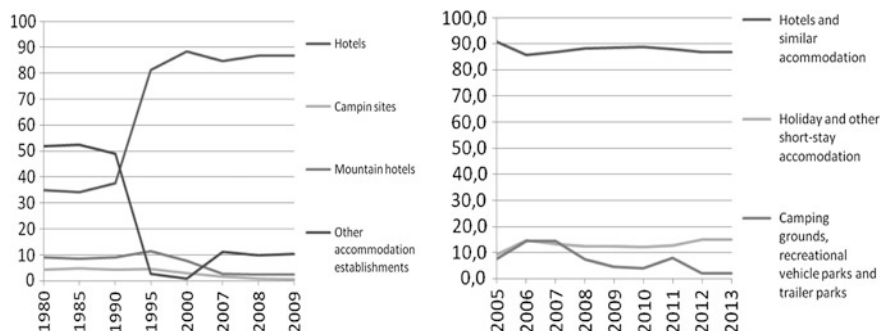


Fig. 3.5 Bed-places in accommodation facilities in Bulgaria (%) (left **a** and right **b**) (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria, Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)

Other accommodation facilities also played an important role in the tourist accommodation structure; their percentage has recently increased to 10%. The percentage of campsites and mountain hotels went down from 10%, in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, to 2% in 2009 (Fig. 3.5a). When it comes to changes in the number of beds in the recent period, it should be emphasized that the structure of accommodation was still dominated by the category “hotels and other accommodations,” which had a share of nearly 90% (Fig. 3.5b).

Other categories of accommodation infrastructure, as in case of the number of accommodation facilities, were on the level from about 10% (those related with leisure holiday) to less than 1% for campsites.

Disproportions in the distribution of bed-places were even greater than in the distribution of the accommodation facilities. In 2014, the two seaside regions (northeastern and southeastern regions) concentrated 70.5% of all the bed-places in Bulgaria (Fig. 3.6), while the mountainous regions and the capital (southcentral and southwestern regions)—23.1%.

Another element of the accommodation infrastructure is its standard. In general, the majority of the accommodation facilities in Bulgaria were of the lowest standard. In 2014, there were 1,835 one- and two-star hotels (48.6% of the overall number of the facilities) (Fig. 3.7), followed by three-star hotels (959 hotels—30.3%). Four- and five-star hotels formed the smallest group (368 hotels—21.1%). In 2011–2014, the number of accommodation facilities in all the categories of standard increased, except the hotels with the lowest standard, where a relatively large decrease in the number of accommodation facilities was noted in 2012 in comparison with 2011.

In 2014, the Bulgarian accommodation facilities offered 314,257 bed-places, i.e., 11,824 more than in 2013 and 31,006 more than in 2011 (Fig. 3.8).

The differences in the number of bed-places between individual standard categories were insignificant. The hotels with the highest standard predominated offered the largest number of bed-places (38.5% of the overall number). However, in the remaining categories, the number of bed-places was only slightly lower. In 2014,

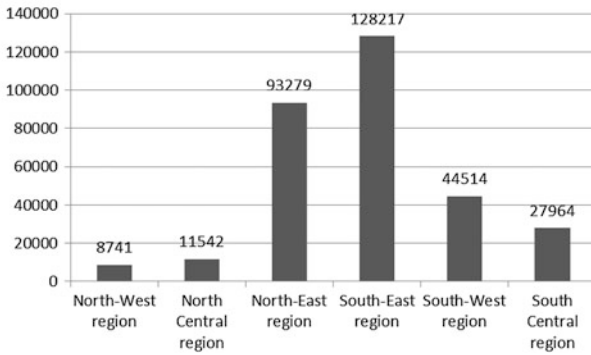
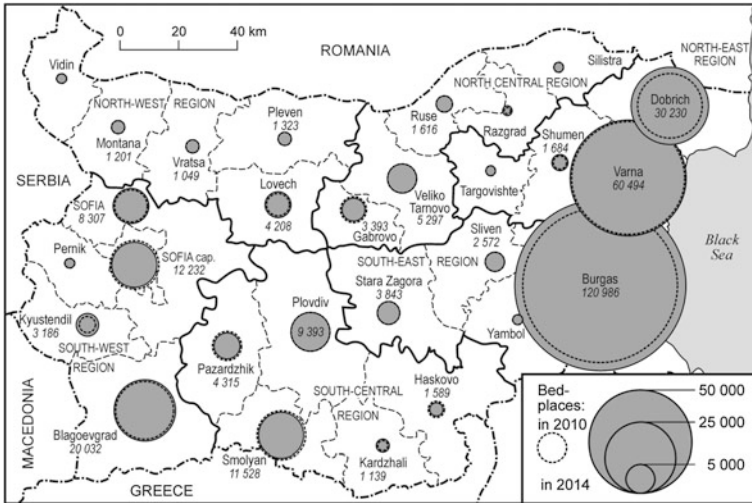


Fig. 3.6 The number of bed-places in accommodation facilities in Bulgaria by regions in 2010 and 2014 (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

Fig. 3.7 Hotels in Bulgaria by star rating categories (number) (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

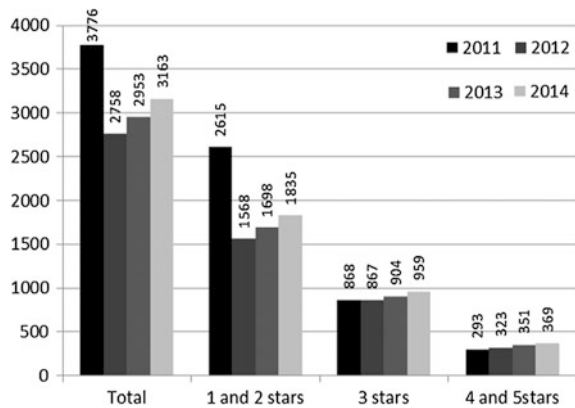
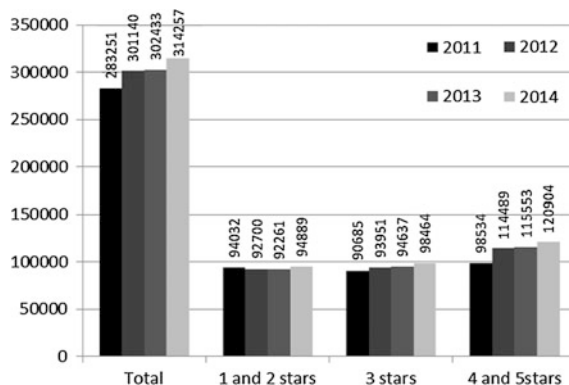


Fig. 3.8 Bed-places in hotels in Bulgaria by star rating categories (number) (*Source* National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)



three-star hotels offered 98,464 bed-places (31.3%) and the one- and two-star hotels offered 30.2% of all the bed-places. The tourist accommodation infrastructure in Bulgaria is typically concentrated in large tourist complexes, accommodating up to 10,000 people (e.g., Sunny Beach, Golden Sands on the Black Sea or Borovez in the Rila Mountains, and Pamporovo in the Rhodope Mountains).

Changes in the basic/primary Bulgarian tourist infrastructure were not only quantitative, but also qualitative. They concerned mainly the ownership structure of the accommodation facilities. Until mid-1990s, the majority of hotels and other types of accommodation had belonged to different institutions and state organizations. In 1995, 82.8% of the whole tourist accommodation in Bulgaria was state property (Bachvarov 1997). The monopolist was the state-owned Balkantourist, which organized foreign tourists' stays in Bulgaria. The most common were hotels serving the purposes of typical recreational tourism of the lowest standard (with one or two stars). However, they satisfied the modest needs of the tourists arriving from former communist countries, who constituted the majority of foreign visitors. After 1995, the privatization of the tourist accommodation began. Private hotels appeared mainly in large cities and seaside resorts and near them (Bachvarov 2006). At present (2014), nearly the entire tourist accommodation is private property. The privatization and commercialization of tourist accommodation have led to its improvement. The last ten years have brought more hotels of the highest standard (four and five stars). The main aim of the tourist infrastructure development is to match the standards to the expectations of the tourists from Western Europe.

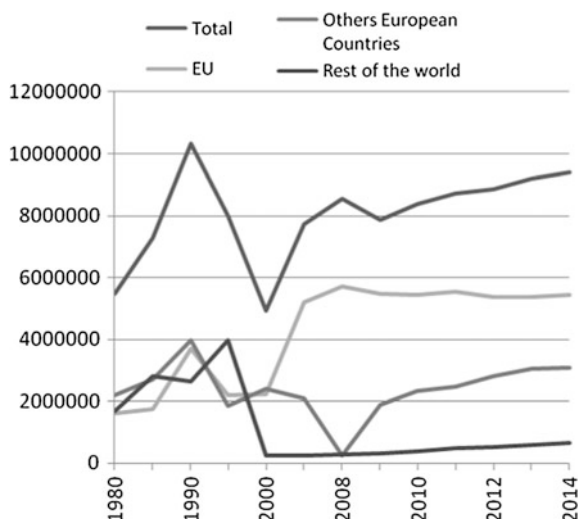
3.4 Visitors and Number of Visits (Selected Factors of Tourism)

In 2013, Bulgaria was visited by 9191.782 people, 6898.000 (70.4%) of whom were tourists (Table 3.4). Compared to 2012, the number of visitors increased only by 1.0% and of tourists—by 1.1%. However, it was over two million visitors less than in the late 1990s (Fig. 3.9). In 1990, Bulgaria was visited by more tourists than

Table 3.4 Foreign arrivals to Bulgaria (*Source* National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria, Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	13/12 (%)
Total	7282455	7499177	7725747	8532972	7872805	8374034	8712821	8866552	9191782	1.0
Tourists	4837150	5158117	5151283	5779828	5738873	6047013	6328000	6541000	6898000	1.1

Fig. 3.9 Foreign arrivals to Bulgaria (number) (Source: National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria and Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)



in the previous 20 years. After the political and economic transformations in the early 1990s, Bulgaria recorded the largest decrease (by a half) in the number of visits from abroad, which was connected with the decline of the most important foreign tourist markets, mostly the post-socialist countries. For instance, the tourist traffic from Poland, one of the most important foreign markets, decreased by nearly 100% in 1995, in comparison with 1990 (Table 3.5).

Since the end of the 1990s, the number of foreign tourists has been steadily growing (Fig. 3.10). A slight decrease in arrivals was noted in 2009. The large majority (57.7% in 2014) are visitors from the European Union countries (Figs. 3.9 and 3.10). The growth tendency in tourism continued in Bulgaria until 2009, when the country was visited by fewer tourists because of the global crisis (Fig. 3.10). The largest increase in tourist traffic in 2014, in comparison with 2013, was recorded among visitors from Japan—by 70.9%, Portugal—by 41.5%, Israel—by 28.4%, Canada—by 13.2%, Italy—by 11.2%, Germany—by 10.7%, Switzerland—by 9.5%, Belgium—by 9.5%, Spain—by 9.1%, and Austria—by 8.3% (Table 3.5). As regards the volume of tourist traffic, Bulgaria was placed 35th in the World and 20th in Europe (2014).

Most visitors arrive in Bulgaria from the neighboring countries. Romania has been the leader for a long time, with 1,439,853 visitors in 2014 (15.3% of the overall number) (Fig. 3.11, Table 3.5). Another significant group of visitors are Greeks (1,100,789 persons, 11.7%) and Turks (1,094,985 persons, 11.6%). Another traditional market is Germany; in 2014, Bulgaria was visited by 898,791 Germans, who made 9.1% of the overall number of visitors. Countries of Eastern Europe such as Russia (666,538 persons, 7.1%), and Ukraine (341,524 persons, 3.6%), and Southern Europe such as Serbia (453,891 persons, 4.8%) and FYROM Macedonia (441,107 persons, 4.7%) have become important markets in recent years. Among the remaining foreign tourist markets, we should mention the United Kingdom,

Table 3.5 Foreign arrivals to Bulgaria by the country of origin (number) (*Source* National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

Country of origin	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014/2013
Total	5,485,787	7,295,244	10,329,537	8,004,584	4,922,118	7,725,747	8,532,972	7,872,805	8,374,034	8,712,821	8,866,552	9,191,782	9,408,821	2.3
EU	1,604,008	1,753,880	3,709,788	2,178,030	2,220,265	5,193,458	5,722,712	5,458,030	5,425,737	5,540,949	5,350,622	5,362,776	5,431,145	1.3
Austria	29,388	46,239	33,712	10,383	29,839	141,123	157,027	182,075	181,577	186,438	185,242	192,298	208,344	8.3
Belgium	6,631	12,226	12,901	4,799	23,354	88,203	93,269	96,334	91,183	91,947	95,678	94,735	103,754	9.5
United Kingdom	42,865	73,350	90,262	51,063	64,001	360,651	370,908	316,928	309,482	306,939	282,076	269,656	256,932	- 4.8
Germany	368,674	466,888	235,387	202,401	308,619	691,596	759,660	898,352	833,430	836,845	784,678	812,189	898,791	10.7
Greece	206,883	98,657	220,449	230,767	422,062	868,153	881,458	924,220	1,017,914	1,120,640	1,087,260	1,105,437	1,100,789	- 1.6
Denmark	5,931	6,326	7,835	11,271	18,038	94,678	122,364	90,672	84,172	81,860	72,216	70,915	55,924	- 12.2
Ireland	.	.	.	.	3892	62,594	67,090	46,102	33,089	29,941	26,722	18,405	12,739	- 30.8
Spain	13,716	5732	6106	3216	6620	39,977	40,869	54,847	58,499	60,026	59,322	59,972	65,407	9.1
Italy	25,807	17,655	27,534	23,608	33,732	93,591	104,931	126,108	125,683	130,259	128,851	129,115	143,561	11.2
Cyprus	.	.	.	.	.	24,561	24,324	22,557	22,050	21,157	18,689	17,785	17,231	- 4.2
Malta	.	.	.	.	.	6073	10,757	7479	6370	4178	4369	2988	1808	- 395
Netherlands	14,562	16,516	22,074	19,019	52,099	152,040	165,231	157,485	156,436	149,449	144,382	134,638	143,793	6.8
Poland	372,391	477,653	830,798	37,324	93,195	221,593	257,713	304,659	294,131	289,742	286,267	283,498	282,105	- 0.5
Portugal	.	.	.	.	1116	12,149	11,536	9339	9381	9099	7325	6944	9825	41.5
Romania	251,193	207,653	1,809,537	1,509,601	833,716	1,541,006	1,769,194	1,398,694	1,445,342	1,499,415	1,468,179	1,465,600	1,439,853	- 1.8
Slovakia	.	.	.	.	85,493	140,692	161,621	104,243	95,380	94,355	90,076	81,488	81,883	0.5
Slovenia	.	.	.	.	.	16,277	20,055	22,871	22,550	22,140	22,459	22,002	20,178	- 8.3
Hungary	163,388	252,107	348,172	32,379	48,086	137,033	151,237	137,195	124,438	123,735	120,883	115,205	103,068	- 10.6
Finland	21,109	17,860	14,613	5339	20,759	76,477	77,021	57,057	45,527	43,570	38,926	37,812	32,696	- 13.6
France	67,134	39,546	29,827	19,637	32,279	138,380	148,417	196,174	181,317	182,407	180,060	180,114	169,581	- 5.9
Czech Rep.	-	-	-	-	96,956	141,595	167,738	197,863	184,440	176,135	173,739	171,315	182,948	6.8
Sweden	14,336	15,472	20,581	17,223	46,072	112,278	118,913	65,148	48,992	49,492	44,038	39,826	40,259	1.1
Other countries from EU	.	.	.	.	.	32,738	41,379	41,628	34,354	31,180	29,185	27,657	33,932	22.7

(continued)

Table 3.5 (continued)

Country of origin	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014/2013
Other European countries	2,186,917	2,694,033	3,978,223	1,843,443	2,379,525	2078,661	2,315,605	1,896,055	2,344,871	2,474,735	2,796,737	3,047,582	3,064,915	0.5
Norway	1044	10,057	18,926	13,842	11,731	79,041	87,362	59,598	55,414	48,707	28,993	30,768	33,050	7.5
FYROM ¹ Macedonia	.	.	.	.	879,784	241,358	323,400	310,113	409,970	439,679	424,182	429,008	441,107	2.8
Russian Fed.	.	.	.	.	154,790	249,128	296,918	295,713	389,864	469,772	609,630	695,853	666,538	-4.3
Serbia ¹	.	.	.	.	512,497	270,770	311,666	217,940	307,838	365,644	396,448	428,582	453,891	5.9
Turkey	2,177,313	2,674,546	3,951,758	1,825,061	629,358	1,089,684	1,116,680	816,660	943,137	860,654	984,212	1,053,046	1,094,985	4.0
Ukraine	.	.	.	.	184,304	123,848	150,818	154,701	199,080	251,803	325,944	379,444	341,524	-10
Switzerland	8560	9430	7539	4540	7061	24,832	28,761	41,330	39,568	38,476	27,328	30,881	33,820	9.5
Other countries	16,326	24,168	18,293	24,853	75,483	206,068	201,435	191,251	218,155	229,519	192,118	202,181	248,340	22.8
Israel	3374	3390	3919	5292	34,886	109,588	105,882	106,825	131,144	138,951	95,586	101,222	129,961	28.4
Canada	2266	3152	2272	2154	6584	13,266	14,228	13,262	14,260	14,849	16,061	17,082	19,339	13.2
USA	10,686	17,626	12,102	17,407	34,013	71,060	71,495	62,706	62,782	65,483	69,323	72,609	79,788	9.9
Japan	.	.	.	.	.	12,154	9830	8458	9969	10,236	11,148	11,268	19,252	70.9
Rest of the world	1,678,536	2,823,163	2,623,233	3,958,258	246,845	247,560	293,220	327,469	385,271	467,618	527,075	579,243	664,421	14.7

¹Incl. Serbia and Montenegro before 2006

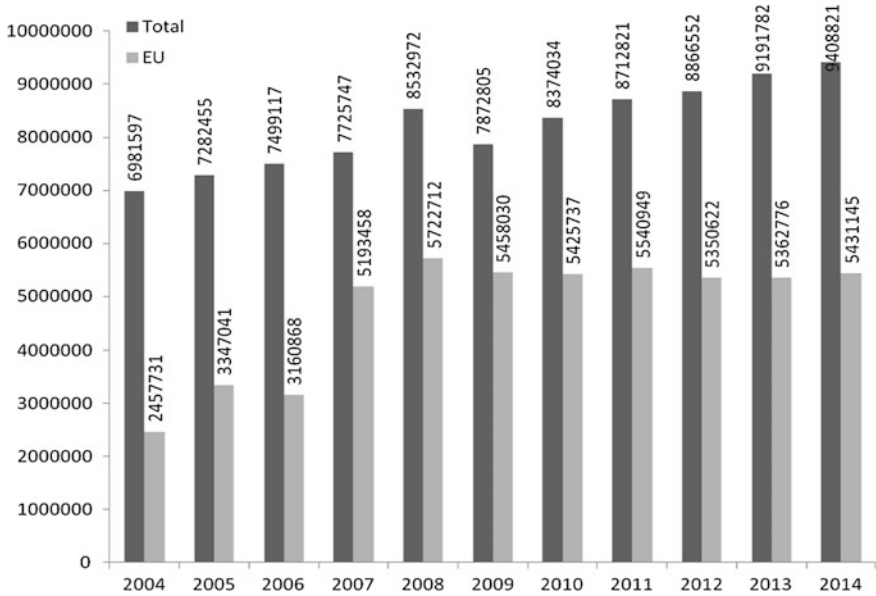


Fig. 3.10 Foreign tourist arrivals to Bulgaria (number) (*Source* National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

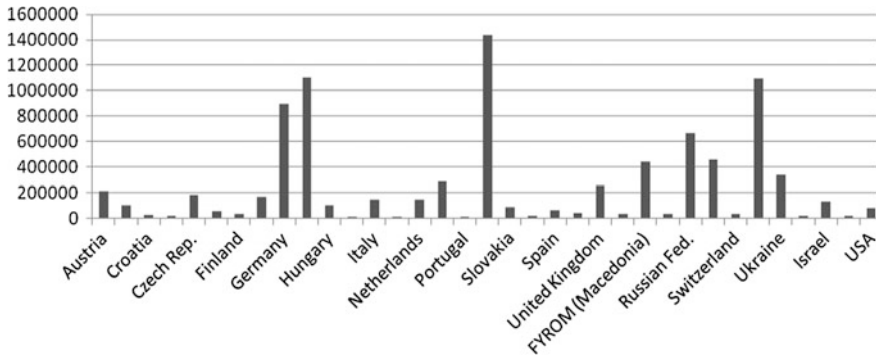


Fig. 3.11 Foreign arrivals to Bulgaria in 2014 by country origin (number) (*Source* National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

Poland, Austria, France, as well as other traditional markets, such as Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. In general, recently we have recorded an increase in the number of arrivals from Central and Eastern European countries, which used to be Bulgaria’s largest foreign tourist markets in the 1980s and 1990s. and also from highly developed countries, which are the biggest tourist markets in the world.

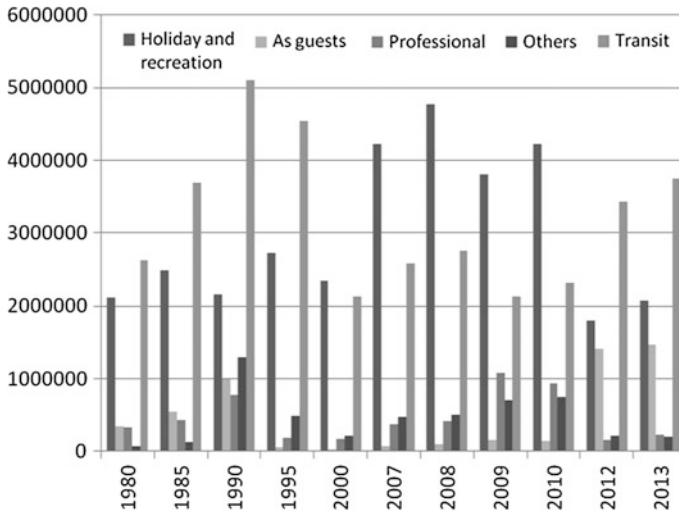


Fig. 3.12 Foreign arrivals to Bulgaria by the purpose of visit (number) (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria and Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)

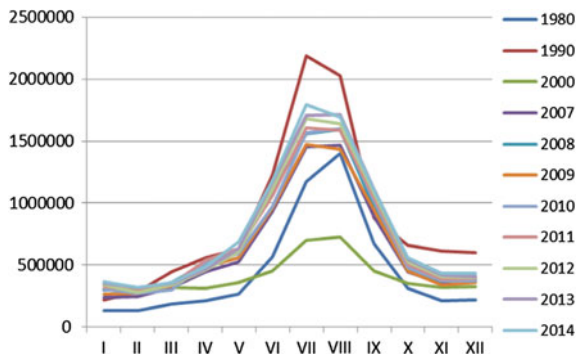
Due to its location and tourist assets, Bulgaria is a country visited mainly for recreational or transit purposes (Fig. 3.12, Table 3.6). Until mid-1990s, the most important motive of arrivals in Bulgaria had been transit (56.7% in 1995).

At that time, recreation was the purpose of 34.0% of arrivals. Bulgaria is mostly associated with seaside recreation, called 3xS (Hall 1998, Bachvarov 1997, 2006, Hughes and Allen 2005).

Table 3.6 Foreign arrivals to Bulgaria by the purpose of visit (%) (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria and Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)

Year:	Purpose of visit:				
	Holiday and recreation	As guests	Professional	Others	Transit
1980	38.7	6.2	6.1	1.2	47.8
1985	34.2	7.6	5.9	1.7	50.6
1990	20.9	9.6	7.5	12.5	49.5
1995	34.0	0.7	2.4	6.2	56.7
2000	47.8	0.7	3.6	4.4	43.4
2007	54.6	1.0	4.9	6.2	33.3
2008	55.8	1.2	4.9	5.8	32.3
2009	48.4	1.9	13.7	8.9	27.1
2010	50.5	1.7	11.1	8.9	27.8
2012	25.8	20.1	2.2	3.0	48.9
2013	26.9	19.0	2.9	2.7	48.6

Fig. 3.13 The number of foreign arrivals to Bulgaria by months (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)



After 1995, typically recreational arrivals were the most frequent. In 2010, they made 50.1%, while the significance of transits visibly decreased to 27.8%. After 2010, there was a quite significant decrease in arrivals for holiday and recreational purposes in favor of other purposes such as “as guest” and transit. This could have been caused by a lower competitiveness of the holiday offer of Bulgaria on the European market, as well as a greater interest in attractions other than the typical holiday tourist destinations of the country.

Other purposes of arrivals in Bulgaria include business trips—2.9% in 2013, which was still 11% less than in 2009.

Tourist arrivals in Bulgaria are clearly seasonal. In between 1980–2014, the tourist season lasted from June to September (Fig. 3.13). In the 1980s, in the summer season, Bulgaria was visited by over 60% of the total number of visitors during the year (Table 3.7) and, in the second half of the 1990s, that number went down to slightly over 42%.

During the last ten years, the tourist traffic in the summer season exceeded 60% of the annual number of foreign arrivals. The larger inflow of tourists in the summer, especially to the seaside resorts, often exceeds the capacity of the available tourist accommodation (Bachvarov 2006). Tourists’ arrivals in Bulgaria in the remaining months of the year play a rather marginal role, and it is difficult to identify other distinctive tourist seasons here.

It is worth noticing, however, that the tourist traffic in individual summer months tends to be distributed more evenly, which may lead to a more effective exploitation of the tourist infrastructure during the high season.

In 1980–2014, the number of tourist overnight stays visibly changed as well, decreasing by nearly 100% in all types of accommodation facilities (Fig. 3.14).

After 2000, it started to increase, in 2009 it dropped by 19.7% in comparison with 2008, and in 2010 it increased again by 5.8%. In 2014, most overnight stays were sold to the citizens of Russia (18.9%) and Croatia (18.5%) (Fig. 3.15). An important role was also played by Netherland (9.5%), Lithuania (8.0%), and Luxemburg (7.4%). We should also mention that the traditional and most significant tourist markets of Central (Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary) and Western

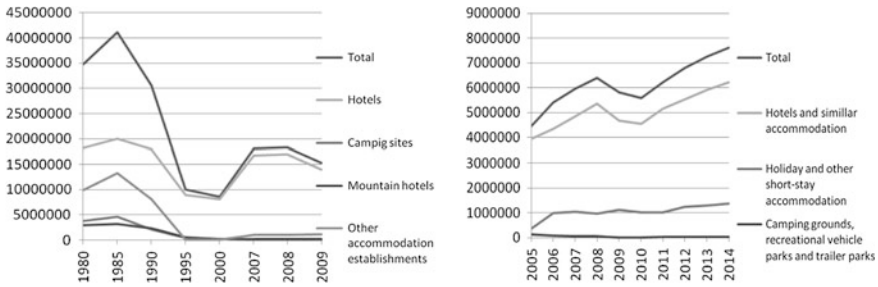


Fig. 3.14 Number of overnight stays at accommodation facilities in Bulgaria (left a and right b) (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria and Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)

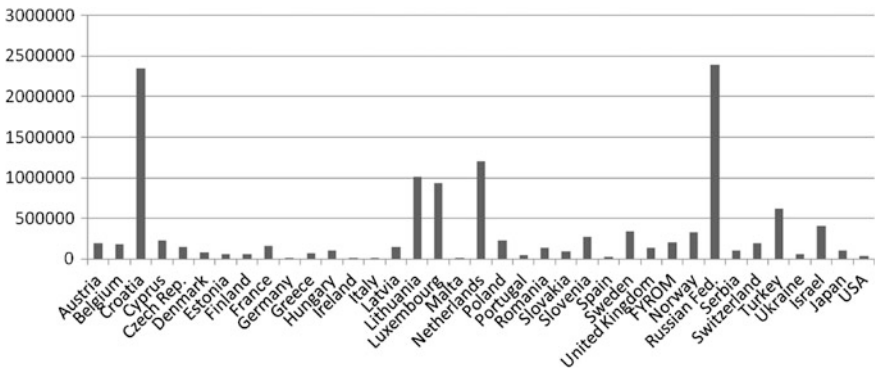


Fig. 3.15 The number of overnight stays in accommodation facilities in Bulgaria by the country of origin in 2014 (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

Europe (Germany, United Kingdom, and France) today play a smaller role in this aspect.

The neighboring countries, except Turkey, Romania, Serbia, and FYROM Macedonia, where a great number of visitors came from—showed a relatively low rate of tourist overnight stays (below 2%), which proves that the main purpose of their arrivals in Bulgaria was transit.

In 2014, the average length of stay in Bulgaria was 3.5 days (Fig. 3.16). The tourists who stayed the longest came from Russia, Norway, Luxemburg, Croatia, Poland, Turkey, Hungary, Denmark, Greece, Lithuania, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. The average length of their stays was over 6 days. Tourists from Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Romania, and Austria stayed relatively long (4–5 days on average). The countries belonging to the European Union dominate among the states listed above. The long average stay certainly proves that recreation is the dominating purpose of visit in Bulgaria. The shortest average length of stay (below 2 days) was recorded in case of tourists from

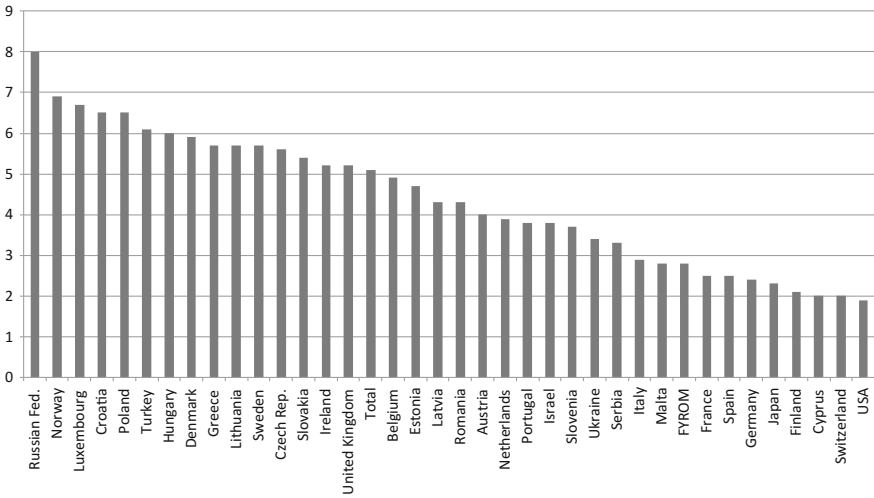


Fig. 3.16 Average length of stay in accommodation facilities in Bulgaria by the country of origin in 2014 (number of days) (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

Cyprus, Switzerland, and also the USA, which proves the transit character of their arrivals.

The average length of stay also depended on the type of accommodation—in 2009, it was 3.5 days in hotels, 1.7 days in mountain hotels (chalets), and 4.5 days in other accommodation facilities (Fig. 3.17a). In 1980, the average length of stay started to decrease, from 4.1 to 3.5 days. It was particularly visible in alternative types of accommodation (e.g., private accommodation), where in the 1980s, an average stay lasted over 10 days.

The rapid decrease in the length of stay was recorded in the mid-1990s. In 2009, an average stay in those types of accommodation lasted for about 4 days (Fig. 3.17a). In the remaining types, the largest decrease in the average length of

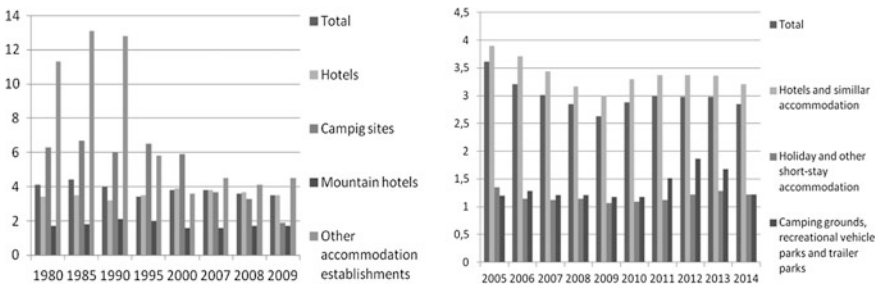


Fig. 3.17 Average length of stay in accommodation facilities in Bulgaria (number of days) (left a and right b) (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria and Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)

stay was recorded at campsites. In the 1980s, an average stay there lasted 6 days. Since 2007, it has been shortened by a half. The average length of stay in hotels was 3–3.5 days. The shortest stays, under 2 days, were recorded at accommodation facilities situated in the mountains. This situation changed slightly after 2009 (Fig. 3.17b). Using the classification of tourist accommodation by Eurostat, it should be noted that the average length of stay was highest in hotels and similar accommodations; in 2014, it amounted to 3.2 days. In other types of accommodation, the average length of stay was 1.2 days. Different average lengths of stay confirm the variety of tourism forms in Bulgaria. In fact, the indexes refer to both the longer recreational stays and the shorter ones connected with transit or business.

The spatial structure of the tourist traffic in Bulgaria has remained unchanged for a long time, despite the significant socio-economic and political transformations which took place at the end of the twentieth century. (Bachvarov 2006). Tourism in Bulgaria was generally concentrated in three regions (Figs. 3.18 and 3.19). Most tourists visited the areas in the east of the country, by the Black Sea. The south-eastern and northeastern regions were visited by over 69.1% of the overall number of visitors registered at accommodation facilities in 2014 (29.6 and 39.5%, respectively). The majority of them were foreigners. The third most visited area was the southwestern region, with Sophia and the most attractive mountainous areas of the Vitosha, Pirin, and Rila massifs. In 2014, these regions were visited by 15.8% of the tourists staying in Bulgaria. The proportion of foreign and domestic tourists in this part of the country was 50–50%. The remaining three regions played an insignificant role in the distribution of tourism in the country—only 5.3% in 2014. On the other hand, domestic tourists visiting these regions clearly dominated (over 80%) over the foreign ones (Fig. 3.18).

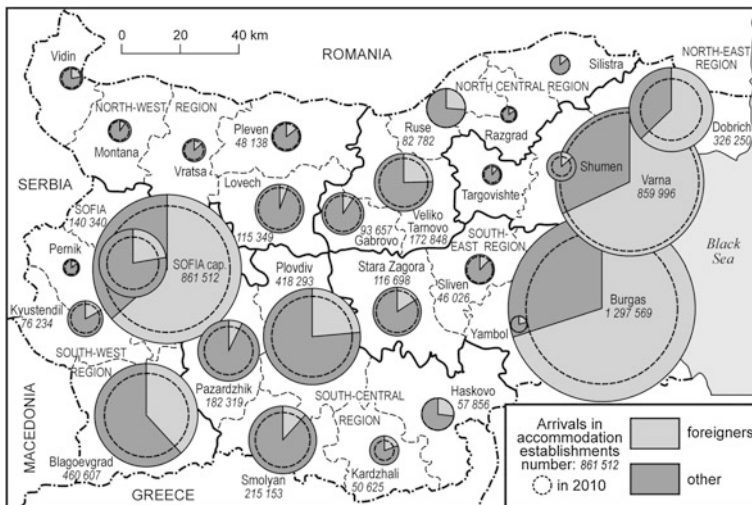
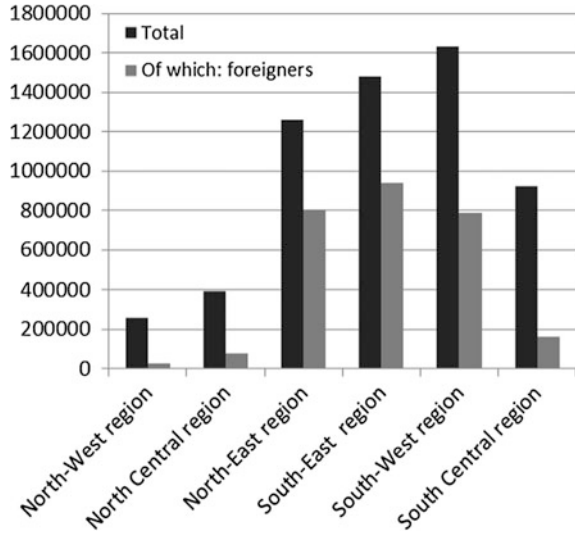


Fig. 3.18 The number of arrivals at accommodation facilities in Bulgaria in 2010 and 2014 (Source Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)

Fig. 3.19 The number of arrivals at accommodation facilities in Bulgaria by regions in 2014 (Source Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)



The regions of eastern Bulgaria recorded the highest number of tourist overnight stays (Figs. 3.20 and 3.21). Both Black Sea regions recorded 46.1% of all the overnight stays in the country. The next region, with the capital city and the Pirin and Rila massifs, recorded similar value of 42.9% of the overall number of

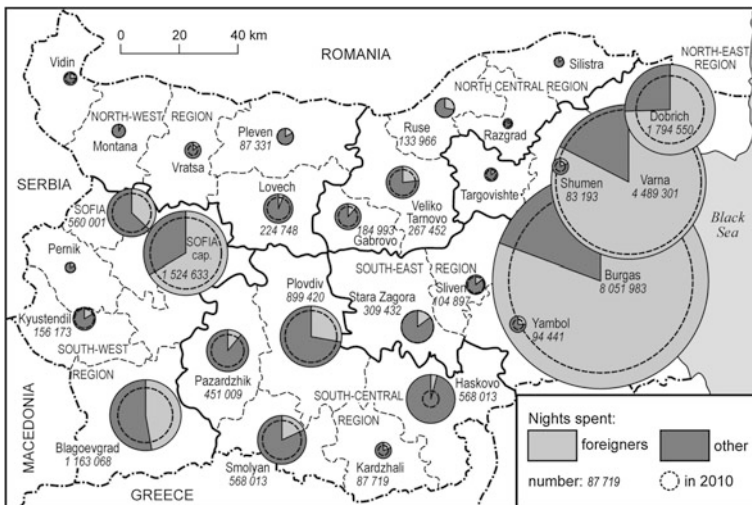
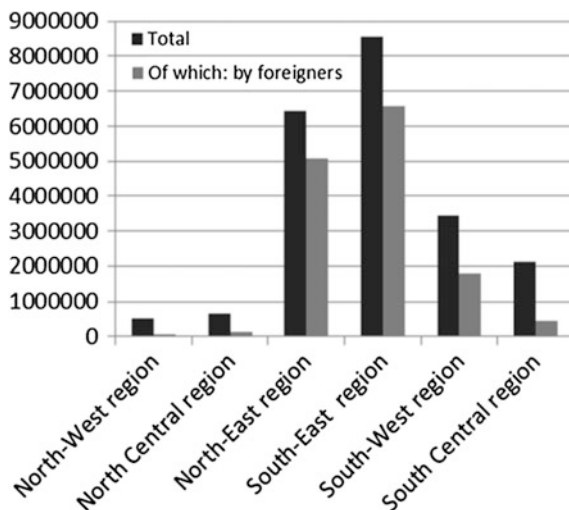


Fig. 3.20 Overnight stays in accommodation facilities in Bulgaria in 2010 and 2014 (Source National Statistical Institute, the Republic of Bulgaria)

Fig. 3.21 Overnight stays in accommodation establishments in Bulgaria by regions in 2010 and 2014

(Source Eurostat—<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/data/main-tables>)



overnight stays. The domination of foreign tourists in these regions (over 96% of all overnight stays) was much stronger than in case of the general tourist traffic. In the southeast region, the tourists used slightly more than a third of the available accommodation (33.6%). The least visited were the northcentral and northwestern, as well as the southcentral regions of Bulgaria. The percentage of these regions in the structure of tourist overnight stays did not exceed 10%. Moreover, the percentage of foreign tourists in these regions was much smaller; in 2014, it was 13.4% in the northcentral and 19.8% in the southcentral region.

To sum up, Bulgaria is one of the more visited countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Recently, the role of tourism in this country has grown, which is proved by the increasing number of foreign visitors. The main role on the tourist market of Bulgaria is still played by former communist countries, i.e., Russia, Romania, Poland, and Hungary. The Western European markets are also important, mainly German and British ones. Their role has evidently increased over the last ten years, as they have partly filled in the gap left by the reduced number of arrivals from the post-communist countries. Tourism in Bulgaria is oriented toward typical seaside recreation, less toward mountain recreation. The recreational character of stays is proved by the long average length of stays. Moreover, the arrivals are mostly recreation-oriented. Tourism in Bulgaria is strongly seasonal, the summer season being the most important. The number of arrivals in the winter season has been slightly increasing recently, and the winter arrivals increase rate is higher than in case of the summer arrivals (Bachvarov 2006). The spatial structure of tourism in Bulgaria has remained unchanged; tourism is still concentrated on the Black Sea Coast, due to the deeply rooted tradition of seaside recreation in Bulgaria, clearly dominating other forms of tourism, such as cultural, winter, or spa tourism.

3.5 The Main Forms and Types of Tourism

Bulgaria is traditionally identified not only with typical recreational seaside tourism, but also with other forms of modern tourism. The main forms of tourism in Bulgaria are the following:

- seaside tourism,
- winter tourism and recreation,
- cultural and business tourism (urban tourism, religious tourism, and food tourism—wine and gastronomic tourism),
- mountain tourism—hiking and trekking,
- rural tourism,
- spa and wellness tourism.

Black Sea resorts—seaside tourism (3xS)

The Bulgarian Black Sea Coast stretches from Romania in the north to Turkey in the south along 378 km of coastline. Beautiful sandy beaches, covering 9 million km², cover approximately 30% of the coast (Mishev et al. 1983, Vodenska 1992, after Bachvarov 2006). The main urban centers in the region are Varna and Burgas. The seaside region is one of the best-developed tourist regions in Bulgaria, offering 50–60% of the entire tourist accommodation in the country (Bachvarov 2006). There are 20 resorts of different sizes located on the coast. The majority of the tourist infrastructure is situated in the northern part of the region, near Varna, as well as in the central part of the region, north of Burgas. The largest resorts are Sunny Beach, Golden Sands (Photograph 3.2), St. Constantine and Elena, Albena, Dyuni, Elenite, and Primorsko. In 2014, the three coastal districts—Burgas, Varna, and Dobrich—concentrated 40.1% of all the tourist accommodation facilities and 67.4% of all bed-places in Bulgaria. The Black Sea Coast is also one of the major tourist regions as regards foreign tourism. The seaside districts mentioned above were visited by 60.8% of the overall number of foreign tourists, who bought 81.9% of overnight stays available in the tourist accommodation facilities in Bulgaria. Tourism in the seaside zone is strongly seasonal. In the summer season, from June to September, 60% of all overnight stays in Bulgaria are sold out there. Recreational tourism on the Black Sea Coast has a long tradition, dating back to the early 1960s. The tourist infrastructure of the seaside resorts took the form of large, high standard hotel recreation complexes, built mainly with foreign tourists in mind. The largest seaside resorts—Golden Sands and Sunny Beach—were created before 1970, and Albena—one of the most modern tourist complexes in Bulgaria—after 1970. It has 14,900 bed-places in 43 two-, three- and four-star hotels, situated near the beach. The remaining elements of the tourist accommodation are numerous swimming pools, courts, and other sports facilities.

Winter tourism—snow sports

Apart from sandy beaches, Bulgaria also has mountains, which offer favorable conditions for developing different forms of tourism. They include the Vitosha, Pirin, Rila, and Balkan massifs, as well as the Rhodopes. Their height exceeds

2000 m above the sea level, and the snow cover duration is 4 to 6 months, from October to March, despite the close vicinity of warm climate areas (Bachvarov 2006). Out of all the European countries, Bulgarian mountain areas are protruding furthest to the south, where different forms of winter tourism are developing. The area offers splendid, nearly alpine, skiing conditions. Winter tourism is the second most important form of tourism in Bulgaria. In each of the mountain ranges mentioned above, there are international skiing centers. The oldest and the largest one is Borovets situated in the northern part of the Rila Mountains, at the foot of the highest peak—Balkan (2925 m.a.s.l.). Another famous winter sports center in Bulgaria is Vitosha, situated in the suburban zone of Sophia. The skiing infrastructure in the Vitosha massif is very well developed. The location of Vitosha close to the capital has a great influence on the volume of the tourist traffic. Every year the Vitosha massif is visited by up to three million skiers and tourists (Bachvarov 2006). The third largest winter sports center is Pamporovo, situated in the central part of the Rhodope Mountains, about 80 km south of Plovdiv. The newest and the fastest developing skiing center in Bulgaria is Bansko, situated in the Pirin Mountains. The aforementioned biggest tourist centers located in the mountains comprise about 40% of the bed capacity, 56% of the overnight stays, and 72% of the total income generated in the mountain centers (Kazachka and Dogramadjieva 2006, 2007). Apart from fantastic skiing conditions, both the localities mentioned above and the areas surrounding them offer attractive conditions for the development of other forms of tourism, such as mountain hiking, cultural (folk culture), religious, and rural tourism, particularly in the other seasons of the year (Stoykova 2009a).

Mountain tourism—hiking and trekking

Mountain tourism has a long tradition in Bulgaria. In 1895, the Bulgarian Tourist Climbing Association was founded (Bachvarov 2006). The mountainous landscape of Bulgaria is varied, which results in the development of different forms of mountain tourism (Kroumova 2011). The most attractive mountainous landscapes in Bulgaria are found in the Rila and Pirin massifs. They are the highest mountain ranges and the only ones to represent the alpine type of landscape. The Rhodopes, situated more to the east, represent the landscapes found in low, medium–height, and high mountains. The situation is similar in case of the remaining mountainous areas in Bulgaria. The natural environment in the mountains has remained mostly intact, not only due to the nature preservation policy that has been implemented (Yordanova and Mateeva 2011). This situation creates favorable conditions for the development of ecotourism. The mountains of Bulgaria are attractive for mountain hiking, primarily in the summer season (Hall 1998). Including winter tourism, the tourist season in the mountainous regions of Bulgaria lasts much longer than in the Black Sea region. Like in case of the ski tourism, mountain landscapes create beautiful scenery for attractive cultural heritage sites, where different forms of cultural tourism can be developed throughout the year (Stoykova 2009a). The development of mountain tourism is possible due to the network of over 130 mountain hotels/chalets built in the higher parts of the mountains (Evrev 1987).

Rural tourism

The proximity of Bulgaria to the highly developed and urbanized Western European countries, its rich natural and cultural heritage, as well as the national traditions² create a huge potential for the development of rural tourism (Hall 1998, Bachvarov 2006). The cultural heritage of rural areas is an important and integral element of the overall cultural heritage of this country (Hall 1998). It is estimated that there are about 480,000 homes in the countryside (Bachvarov 2006). Rural tourism may be seen as counterbalance for the well-developed mass seaside tourism (Bachvarov 1997, Hall 1998). In the communist times, due to the inflow of capital and people, some rural areas were transformed into huge sport tourist centers in the mountains or hotel recreation complexes on the Black Sea Coast (Hall 1998). At present, they have a large potential for the development of different types of tourism forms based on recreation in the countryside. Rural tourism flourishes in many regions of Bulgaria, e.g., in the mountains (the Rhodopes) (Photograph 3.3). Well-known rural localities include Borino, Devin, Dospat, Sarnitsa, Trigrad, Yagodina, Shiroka Laka, Gela, Bukata, Mogilitsa, Arda, Progled, Stoykite, Ezerovo, Smolyan, Sokolovtsi, Hvoyna, Orehovo, Chepelare, Zlatograd, Smilyan, and Ivaylovgrad. Another area known for rural tourism is the region of the Rila and Pirin Mountains. Rural tourism is also well developed in the areas between the Balkan Chain and the Sredna Gora mountains in the south of the country. Localities such as Kalofer, Enina, Koprivshtitsa, Brestovitsa, and Debrashitsa are famous mainly for their traditional rural buildings. The most popular rural tourism localities in the northern part of the country include Arbanasi, Bozhentsi, Elena, Zgalevo, Koshov, Lovech, Tryavna, Beli Osam, Cherni Osam, and Yamna (northcentral region), as well as Belogradchik, Berkovitsa, Vratsa, Pavolche, Zgorigrad, Gavril Genovo, Ribaritsa, and Chiprovtsi (northwestern region). Rural tourism in Bulgaria is strongly related to the other forms of tourism. Mountainous rural areas are visited mainly by tourists practicing mountain and ski tourism, as well as cultural tourism involving exploration of folk culture heritage. In the seaside areas, rural tourism develops far from large hotel recreation complexes, close to the attractive natural areas, which results in different forms of ecotourism.

Cultural and business tourism (religious, urban, wine tourism etc.)

Cultural tourism is an alternative to mass seaside and winter recreational tourism. Arrivals in Bulgaria for cultural purposes are still in minority when compared with the recreation-oriented arrivals. In the summer season, a large majority of overnight stays are sold on the Black Sea Coast. Tourists rarely leave that region in order to visit major cultural attractions in other parts of the country, which proves the domination of the recreational tourism in Bulgaria (Bachvarov 2006).

Cultural heritage sites are situated in the central, southern, and western parts of Bulgaria. Cultural tourism is concentrated mainly in cities, first of all in Sophia with its numerous museums, art galleries, and architectural historical monuments, which

²Rural tourism is deeply rooted in tradition as the majority of Bulgarian population is of rural origin (Bachvarov 2006, p. 245).

are the symbols of the tradition and history of the whole country (Photograph 3.8). Other Bulgarian cities which are attractive for cultural tourism include Plovdiv and Veliko Tarnovo (Photograph 3.7). Relatively many cities which have become cultural centers are found in the mountainous and sub-mountainous areas, e.g., in Rila, Bachkovo, Rozen, Trojan, and Preobrazhenski. The situation is similar in the coast, dominated by recreational tourism. Tourist localities with considerable cultural heritage in the seaside area include Nesebyr, Sozopol, Varna, and Elena.

Cultural tourism in Bulgaria, like in other post-communist countries, is also perceived from the point of view of the latest history. In the 1990s, these countries underwent a transformation in all aspects of social and economic life. The changes also concerned tourism and culture. After communism was abolished, they gained a new quality. The revival of cultural identity after the period of communist isolation coincided with the growing significance of the cultural heritage in European tourism and started to attract tourists, especially from the Western European markets, to former socialist countries, including Bulgaria. The quality of the tourist product connected with cultural tourism is generally described as good and meeting the standards expected by foreign tourists (Hughes and Allen 2005).

Cultural tourism in Bulgaria takes different forms, such as religious, urban, or wine tourism.

Religious tourism

Bulgaria has a lot of easily accessible religious sites and events, which give religious tourism an opportunity to develop (Stoykova 2009a). The main religion-related tourist attractions are Eastern Orthodox monasteries, usually situated in magnificent mountain landscapes. They are not only pilgrimage destinations, but also they are visited by tourists interested in the rich cultural heritage connected with the art (architecture, mural painting, icons, and sculpture) and history of these buildings. There are about 160 Eastern Orthodox monasteries in the mountains, the most famous of which is Rila Monastery, put on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List (Photograph 3.6). It is the largest center of spiritual and cultural revival in Bulgaria. The Trojansky and Rozhen monasteries are also worth mentioning. Some Eastern Orthodox monasteries are situated outside the mountains, like the Aldzha Monastery in the seaside region, carved in the rock near Golden Sands. Religious tourism is slowly becoming a part of the tourist market of Bulgaria. This has also been noticed by the authorities of the Bulgarian Church, who started to see the role of religious tourism in terms of a spiritual mission (Stoykova 2009a). Despite its high tourist attractiveness, religious tourism in Bulgaria is still poorly developed, due to the lack of a nationwide development strategy, a comprehensive system of tourist information and advertising at international fairs, as well as a disregard of the fact that religious tourism is a part of cultural tourism (Stoykova 2009a).

Urban tourism

Urban tourism in Bulgaria, similarly to the other forms of cultural tourism, is limited to the largest cities and a few smaller localities, which attract tourists with their architectural historical monuments, culture, history, and high standard of tourist infrastructure. Apart from typical cognitive tourism, the three largest cities in

Bulgaria attract business tourists. The main center of urban tourism is Sophia. Apart from accumulating many cultural attractions, Sophia performs the function of a conference and business center. The other important centers of urban tourism in Bulgaria are Plovdiv and Veliko Tarnovo, which, unlike the capital, attract tourists with historical heritage. Veliko Tarnovo is the second most visited Bulgarian city, after Sophia. Urban tourism develops also in smaller towns, e.g., in Koprivshitsa, considered to be one of the most charming Bulgarian towns, Nesebyr, entered on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List, Melnik, associated mainly with wine production, or Triavna (Bachvarov 2003a, 2006).

Urban tourism in Bulgaria is still poorly developed, although the development potential is high and based mainly on the interesting history of the cities, dating back to the ancient times.

Food tourism (wine and gastronomic)

Traditional cuisine, local, and national dishes are currently one of the attractions preferred by tourists. Bulgaria has long vine growing and wine production traditions, dating back to the ancient times. Wine tourism in Bulgaria is still at the early stage of development, because the significance of this type of tourism for the area and the whole country is underestimated. As only a small number of tourists are interested, the profits brought by related tourist service are modest; there are no places near vineyards where wine could be tasted, etc. (Stoykova 2009b). Annually, 2% of the global wine production takes place in Bulgaria, that is why it is not considered equal to the famous traditional European producers, such as France, Italy, Hungary, or Germany. At present, there are attempts to popularize Bulgarian wines through tourism. Bulgaria is particularly well known for its dry red wine (Bachvarov 2006). Recognized vineyard areas include the regions of Orayahovits and Melnik, which produce the best known and most popular types of Bulgarian wine.

Spa tourism

Mineral and thermal water resources in Bulgaria are the largest on the Balkan Peninsula. There are 600–800 different types of mineral water springs, known already in the ancient Thracian and Greco-Roman times (Shterev and Zagorchev 1996). Famous spas, such as Kyustendil (ancient Pautalia), Sophia (ancient Serdica), Hisar (ancient Augusta), Sapareva Banya (ancient Dzhermanka), Sandanski (ancient Desudava), Ognyanovo (ancient Nicopolis) functioned in the times of the Roman Empire, and early Byzantium. The ruins of Roman mineral baths discovered around Stara Zagora prove the ancient traditions of using mineral and thermal waters. Today, Bulgaria is still a country with a considerable potential for the development of spa tourism, recognized on the international tourist market. The natural potential and long traditions are conducive to the development of this type of tourism all year round. Mineral waters in Bulgaria are used in both spa medicine and recreation following the trends of modern treatment.

Spa tourism generally develops in three regions of Bulgaria. One of them is the mountainous region in the south of the country. The thermal water it offers is among the warmest in Europe. The spas situated at the foot of the main mountain massifs have a particular microclimate with medicinal properties. The best known spas in the

Southern Bulgaria include Kyustendil, the most famous Bulgarian resort. The Thracian name of the spa “Puteos” means “baths.” Other spas in this region include Sandansky, Gorna Banya, and Knyazehovo in the suburbs of Sophia, as well as Kostenets, Sapareva Banya, Blagoevgrad, Ognyanovo, Dobrinishte, Banya, Rupite, Hussar, Strelcha, Welingrad, The Narechen, Devon, Beden, Banite, Haskovo, Merichleri, Pavel Banya, Stara Zagora Mineral Baths, Sliven Banya, and Korten.

Another region of spa tourism is the Northern Bulgaria, with numerous mineral springs of unique chemical composition, unlike the waters in the south of the country. We will find here spas with highly mineralized waters, e.g., Vidin or Montana, and with less mineralized ones in Pleven. The best known and oldest balneology center in the Northern Bulgaria is Varshets, situated at the foot of Western Balkan. The newest spa in the northern region is Ovha Mogila, based on thermal waters.

Many spas are situated along the Black Sea Coast. Seaside spa resorts exploit mineral and thermal waters, as well as therapeutic mud, brines, and the maritime bio-climate. Spa tourism in this region is complementary to the popular recreational tourism. The waters in the seaside zone are low-mineral waters of various chemical compositions. The most valuable ones are the brine waters with high mineral content, found near Kamchiya and Tyulenovo. Other spas in the seaside region include Albena, Saints Constantine, and Elena, Albena and Kavarna, situated in the north of Varna.

Spas used to play an important role in the health care system in Bulgaria, but their significance has decreased. The number of sanatoriums was drastically reduced from 184 in 1990 to just 30 in 2000 (Bachvarov 2006).

3.6 Tourist Regionalization in Bulgaria (Spatial Organization)

Tourist regionalization is one of the most important study areas in tourism geography. A tourist region is commonly understood as an area displaying similar tourist assets, infrastructure, and other factors of tourist development, on the condition that there is a spatial continuity between them. It is known as a formal tourist region, delimited on the basis of objective criteria. Establishing formal tourist regions was the main aim of tourism geography for many years. Due to the globalization and general development of tourism, the approach to delimiting tourist regions has changed. Nowadays, detailed spatial analyses of the conditions of tourism development are conducted for specific purposes, such as administration, marketing, management, and policy. Tourist regions have become more functional in comparison with the formal regions. A new feature of the functional tourist regions is seasonality, which means their spatial changeability in time. The formal approach to defining tourist regions in Bulgaria including functional elements is presented on the Fig. 3.22.

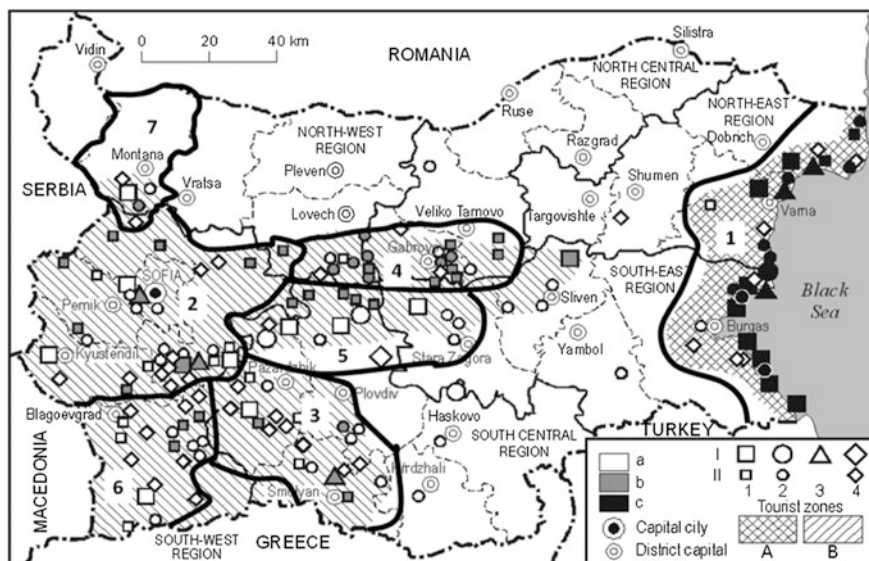


Fig. 3.22 Spatial–functional structure of Bulgarian tourism (tourist regions) (Source Bachvarov (1997, 2003b, 2006). I National resorts, II Regional resorts; 1 towns, 2 villages, 3 tourist complexes, 4 designated resorts outside permanent settlements; a spa resorts, b mountains resorts, c seaside resorts; A Black Sea Coast, B Interior (South-West and Central Bulgaria); Regions marked with number in the map: 1 Black Sea Coast, 2 Sofia region, 3 West Rodophe, 4 Central Stara Planina (Central Balkan range and mountains valley), 5 Sredna Gora (Anti-Balkan range and Valley of Roses), 6 Pirin, 7 Northwest

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