

BULGARIAN CULTURE

The most famous Bulgarian meatballs are Kebapche (shaped like a sausage) and “kyufte” (round), made of minced meat with specific spices (setureja). Each area cooks all dishes in its own way using their own spices, so it is always worth tasting, for example, Tarator on the coast and in the mountains. Tarator is a very popular cold soup made mainly of Bulgarian yogurt and cucumbers. Local traditions may change the receipt and add a variety of vegetable oils, grated walnuts, chopped fresh herbs, garlic and so on. Whatever you add, this soup is incredibly useful and nutritious. In summer heat it can satisfy hunger and tone you up. Children are particularly fond of Tarator, because it is delicious, cold and not greasy. In various national restaurants called meyhanes it may have different but always reasonable prices: from 1 BGN (20 rub) to 5 BGN (100 rub) for a very big plate of 300-500 g.

Among hot soups Bulgarians offer a chicken noodle soup — Pileshka soup and a various soup Chorba. It is made of a lamb stomach and other pluck. For example, Shkembe Chorba is a fat, nutritious, flavorful soup, said to alleviate a hangover very well. Chorba can also be made of fish and vegetables — beans and herbs. The Bulgarian yogurt Kiselo Mlyako has an important place in the national cuisine. It is used to cook Ayran, Tarator, Kiselo Tsedeno Mlyako (a cultured milk product such as sour cream) and an incredibly delicious ice cream — Zamrazeno Kiselo Mlyako s Plodove. This is one of the healthiest desserts — a frozen yogurt with fruits.

Another popular and tasty Bulgarian dessert, which is reminiscent of Bulgaria and Austria close relations is Crem-Caramel pudding. Perhaps this is the most European dish that you can find in Bulgaria. However, Bulgarians cook it as good as nobody else does. Crem-caramel is served with various sweet sauces, and its price varies depending on the resort and the restaurant’s prestige. Bulgarians also offer a wide variety of Sirene — a kind of white cheese that can be compared with feta cheese. They eat Sirene in all kinds of dishes. Sirene can be baked, used to stuff vegetables and pies, added into salads and meat dishes and also coated with breadcrumbs. This dish is called Sirene Pane — a very easy and useful dish, perfect for breakfasts and snacks.

The most popular Bulgarian breakfast and snack is a layer pie Banitsa. It can be sweet and salty, with Sirene, apple jam, baked pumpkin or cheese. Everywhere in Bulgaria you can find banicharnitsas — place where they bake, sell and eat these incredibly delicious pies. They usually eat Banitzas with a cup of coffee, Ayran or Boza — a traditional fermented drink made of cereals.

It is necessary to remember that Bulgarians do not drink black tea, which is so familiar to us. The most common Bulgarian drink is coffee and then herbal teas — brewed dry herbs, such as peppermint, chamomile or rose hip. The herbal tea is called Bilko tea. If you want to drink black tea in a restaurant or cafe, then you must definitely say what you want “cheren chai”, otherwise by default you will get a brewed herbal tea, with lemon at best. By the way, in Bulgaria a cup of aromatic coffee costs from 0.4 BGN (8 rub) to 5 BGN (100 rub) and tea is even cheaper.

Bulgarians also have an incredibly tasty dish of foie gras and blueberry jam — Gyshi Drob, that costs around 10 BGN (200 rub).

Bulgarians eat lots of herbs and vegetables, both fresh and pickled. Of course, all this is served in restaurants. The most popular Bulgarian salads are Shopska Salata and Ovcharska Salata (both are translated as “shepherd’s salads”). Tourists often ask: how do they differ? Indeed, at first glance, both salads seem the same: a huge plate of fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, herbs and roasted peppers, topped with grated Sirene. However, there is a difference: Ovcharska salad includes boiled eggs, sausage or meat, which are hiding under the main ingredients, so this salad is more nourishing. It may replace the main course sometimes. The price of these salads starts at 5 BGN (100 rub) per pound. In our opinion, the most delicious salad is Snezhanka (Snow Maiden). This is the name of the mountain top of Pamporovo ski resort.

Snezhanka is a relative of the Greek salad Dzadziki, made of finely grated pickles, Kiselo Tsedeno Mlyako (a thick yogurt), garlic, fennel and walnuts with salt and vegetable oil. It is served in balls like ice cream and decorated with greenery.

What a Bulgarian meal can go without wine or Rakia? Bulgaria makes and sells a huge amount of regional wines, and only some brands are exported. Bulgarians and their tourists drink the rest of it. Therefore, to try a real Bulgarian wine you need to go to Bulgaria. It's worth it. The wines' taste strongly depends on the area where the grapes are grown. For example, Pomoriiska wines have a wonderful taste that Bulgarians call a salty sea kiss. Bulgaria makes red, white and rosé wines.

Rakia is a strong alcoholic beverage, which is vaguely reminiscent of Russian vodka, American brandy or Mexican tequila. The most common Rakia is Slivova (made of plums) and Grozdova (made of grapes). Industrial Rakia usually has 40% alcohol, but home-made Rakia is stronger — 60%. It's worth remembering if they offer you a home-made Rakia. The most delicious Rakia is of course the most expensive one. For example, a bottle of "Khan Krum 13 godishna" costs 25 BGN (500 rub), and you can enjoy its taste and also give it to your friends and colleagues. It will be a great present even for people who do not drink much, as few beverages can be airier and lighter than this Rakia.

Mastika also is a very interesting drink: it is an anise-flavored vodka, an analog of Greek Ouzo. Mastika is a summer beverage; it is greatly cooled to crystallize anise and served in a large tall glass. You can sip it and wash it down with Ayran.

Bulgarian cuisine is very rich and varied, there is no way to list and describe all its dishes in one article. We offer you to make your own food discoveries in Bulgaria and enjoy them. In conclusion we would like to say that the Bulgarian cuisine is known for simplicity, minimal heat treatment, minimal fat, a variety of vegetable oils, fruits and vegetables, prevalence of meat and cultured milk foods. It is healthy and useful.