

THE CITY OF PLOVDIV: TREASURES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD



Dubbed as the 'Paris of the Balkans,' Plovdiv is a treasure in Bulgaria that is rapidly becoming a popular tourist destination. A city filled with numerous art galleries, stone buildings remains and cobblestoned streets, Plovdiv is a place with a distinctive cultural identity despite the influences of other civilizations. If you are planning a trip to this fascinating city, here are some of the sights that you should not miss during your visit.

The Old Town of Plovdiv is one of the most interesting places that you should visit while you are in the city. This is a historical and architectural reserve that is situated on the three-hill area of Bounardzhika, Sahat Tepe and Nebbet. Back in the 18th century during the Bulgarian Revival, this was the center of cultural, political and enlightenment activities.

Currently, this is a living museum that displays the architectural brilliance of the Bulgarians, who turned previous houses into museums, art galleries and some dormitories for tourists. When you are at the Old Town, go to Nebet Tepe at the top of the hill where you can witness an astounding view of the city and the surrounding mountains. You can also find here the ruins of a **Tracian temple** which was constructed by the Romans. During the summer, there is a bistro where you can have some drinks before trekking down the hill.

Discovered accidentally during a construction project back in the 1970's, the **Ancient Theatre** is the best preserved amphitheater in the whole Bulgaria. It was built during the 2nd century under the reign of Emperor Trajan. It is where numerous performances are usually held as it houses around 7000 seats. In the nearby areas, you can find merchants selling artwork and other items that you can buy for souvenirs.

In the center of Plovdiv you can find the **Roman Stadium** which is a replica of the stadium in Delphi, Greece. This architectural masterpiece was built by the Roman Emperor Hadrian during the 2nd century. It is located beneath the main street that passes from Dzhumaya Square going to Kamenitsa Square. At present, it is mostly hidden under buildings and the main street and only 12 rows of the marbled seats are visible when you are on the street.

Dominating the Jumiya Square is a magnificent **Statue of Philip II** who ruled the Thracian kingdom back in the 4th century BC. Plovdiv was previously known as Philippopolis, named after the great Thracian king. Next to the statue is a recently refurbished mosque that surely catches attention with its steely blue color.

The Roman Forum, located near the Tourist Information Centre and the post office used to be the city center of Plovdiv. Construction of the Forum began in the 1st century during the rule of Vespasian and was finished in the 2nd century.

If you want to know more about Plovdiv, you can gather lots of information at the various museums around the city. The **Archaeological Museum** houses a precious collection of Thracian art. The **Historical Museum** of Plovdiv is an institute that focuses on the research and collection of historical evidences about the city dating back to the 16th up to the 20th centuries.

At the **Regional Ethnographic Museum** located in the Old Town, you can find up to 40,000 objects. Meanwhile, the **Natural Museum of Science** focuses on collections that involve Mineralogy, Botany and Paleontology.

Churches and monasteries will surely be of interest to you once you are in the city. The **Church Sveti Konstantin and Elena** is the oldest Roman church in the city, built for Constantine the Great. Other marvelous churches that you should visit are the **Saint Nedelya, Holy Mother of God and the Saint Petka churches**. The **Djumaya Mosque** is the oldest European mosque that was built during the Ottoman rule. The **Sephardic Plovdiv Synagogue** is an Ottoman-influenced Jewish quarter that is truly a treasure.

These are but some of the places that you can visit in Plovdiv for there are a lot more of them. While you are relaxing during your holiday, you can also use your time to have fun and adventure while discovering the history of this splendid city.

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