

Golf Courses

Golf is widely accepted as a sport that not only helps to relieve stress but is also a good way of improving the way in which people communicate. Meanwhile, experts reviewing the current levels of tourism in Bulgaria have assessed it as good but still not excellent, for one simple but vital reason – the country's current lack of golf courses. The main obstacle to introducing this sport to Bulgaria in the past appears to have been the fact that most Bulgarians had never played golf in their lives; however, this catch 22 situation may soon be resolved

At a Sofia forum earlier this year it was confirmed that Bulgaria has the potential to become a major golf tourism destination, the seasonal peculiarities in the country giving golfers from seven to nine months in which to enjoy their favourite game. Bulgarian experts claim it is realistic to envisage that a total of fifty golf courses will be constructed within a radius of 50-60 kilometres from Sofia, so that those interested in the

sport will never be more than 100 km away from a facility. Plans are set to construct 40 of these through until 2020, with maintenance costs for each one being set at approximately 40,000 euros.

At present the country has two main golf courses, near Ihtiman and in Sliven, the former the first to be built. The town of Ihtiman is situated 40 km from the capital city of Sofia on the Trakia Highway E-80, and the golf facilities (an 18-hole golf course) lie within a hotel complex which offers many other activities from horseback riding lessons to tennis, swimming pool, and basket- and volleyball courts. The 4583m golf course with a Par 71 rating is the centrepiece of the complex, however, and currently has about 80 members, half of whom are Bulgarian and half foreigners. The golf course in Sliven is an 18-hole facility which opened in 2004 and is situated 90 km from the Black Sea coast.

Of the many golf courses being proposed one will be located

at Razgrad, in the north-east, about 90km from the Black Sea area; of those scheduled to open in the next few years are two at Kavarna and one at Primorsko, near Sozopol. Mountain and ski areas will also be equipped with golf courses, including one near the ski resort of Bansko (construction due to begin next year) and a very large golf complex between Kostenets and Borovets (Bulgaria's most famous ski resort). It is hoped that the professional 18-hole golf course near Bansko, with a Par 72 rating, will be located in the Razlog Valley at the foot of the Pirin Mountains, just 3km from the ski resort itself; the plans comprise a holiday village to be built together with a hotel complex, spa and sports centres, villas, shops and a horse-riding centre. The Borovets project is scheduled for 2007 (the year in which Bulgaria is due to join the European Union) and will be located at Dolna Banya, near Bulgaria's first ever golf course at Ihtiman. The total amount of investment into these projects is estimated at about 62 million euros.

A new, luxurious golf complex will also be built near the town of Kableskovo, along Bulgaria's Black Sea coast; spread over 2,000 decares, it will cost approximately 53 million euros. Plans for building golf courses along the Black Sea coast also include a project at the Lighthouse Gold Resort in Balchik, again an 18-hole, Par 72 golf course to be built in conjunction with luxury residential areas, at an estimated cost of 56 million euros. Other projects in the coastal area include golf courses near the villages of Topola and Rudnik and the town of Biala.

It is hoped that with these new developments Bulgaria will soon become a favourite destination for golf players of all levels and that golf will be one of the main factors in improving the country's image and increasing its popularity, not only as a tourist destination, but also as an attractive investment spot in the Balkans.



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