

Do you want to visit an orphanage?

If you are interested in visiting an orphanage in Bulgaria, we can help make it possible! Orphanages in Bulgaria are not open to the public, even if someone just wants to volunteer to help out or play with the children. Foreigners are particularly turned away due to suspicion, fear of illness or disease, language barriers, and/or the staff's simple lack of time. There *are* some exceptions, however! If you are donating funds towards specific projects such as diaper funds, birthday parties, or sponsoring, (or considering sponsoring) an orphanage, the orphanage director will be more than willing to meet with you and show you the facility. She will even allow you to take pictures and interact with the children. This sort of meeting can be arranged through our executive director in Bulgaria, Nikolai Gavazov who would accompany you during such interactions and visits. Individuals considering visiting an orphanage in Bulgaria often have many questions and concerns. Below, we have listed the answers to many of the typical questions and concerns we receive. We hope it is helpful and encouraging.

How would I know how to find the orphanage and meet with the orphanage director? Who would translate for me?

We will put you in contact with Nikolai Gavazov, our executive director in Bulgaria would help you set up the meeting, take you to the orphanage, and translate for you.

Where would I stay while in Bulgaria?

If you don't know anyone you could stay with while in Bulgaria, the hotels are fairly cheap. If you have a tight budget, we do not suggest booking at the Hilton, Sheraton, etc., but there *are* other hotels for decent prices. You can find these, compare prices, and book your reservations all on line.

How much does it cost to fly to Bulgaria? When is the cheapest time of year?

If you travel between February-March or September-October, your ticket will be around \$950/person. Otherwise, your ticket could be close to double that amount.

What is the weather like?

During the Winter months, it is cold and snowy.

During the Summer, it is very warm-hot 89-102 degrees.

During the Fall it is cool and often rainy.

Of course during the Spring, it is fairly warm and often rainy.

How much would food and travel cost for one adult?

You can eat great meals three times a day for about \$10/day. Local travel is approximately \$5/day.

Is it okay to drink the water?

You should purchase bottled water in Bulgaria just to take precautions.

How much should I plan for travel once I am in the country?

To get to and from the airport by taxi and to get around in the city (by taxi), you should plan for about \$100-\$175/week. Do not give the airport taxi drivers more than \$25 USA cash one way into the city of Sofia and about \$35-40 USA cash to Plovdiv (most of our orphanages are located in these two cities).

Where do I exchange my money?

In the main cities you will find good places to exchange your money. Never exchange your money at the airport.

Do I need vaccinations?

If you are current on your vaccination requirements for the USA, you do not need any additional vaccinations.

Can my children come with me to visit the orphanage?

No. Orphanage directors are too worried about illness and diseases being transmitted.

Will I get lice?

Sometimes the orphanages have a breakout of lice. It is best to not touch their hair and to wash your hands before and after playing directly with the children. So far, no one in the organization has ever caught lice while in Bulgarian orphanages.

Can I bring toys, candy, and other gifts for the children?

Yes. In fact, it is a very good idea to have something tangible to leave at the orphanage. A gift of specifically offered to the director, herself, would also be impressive and very appropriate. For the children, the orphanage directors particularly appreciate gifts such as 20 packs of underwear in various sizes, laundry detergents, soaps, coats, shoes, etc. The kids love treats so bring enough for all. We do not suggest giving cash.

Will I be able to interact with the kids?

Yes, they will allow you to visit with the children and take pictures.

You may even ask permission to blow bubbles, sing songs, draw together etc. if you have made arrangements to do so beforehand. Where infants are involved, some directors may not allow you to hold the babies, but they will let you see them. Other directors will permit you to hold them.

We have enjoyed helping a few individuals visit the orphanage they sponsor and hope that many others will decide to do the same.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact Deborah D. Gardner at deborah.gardner@oneheart-bg.org

Family Christmas Projects and Gift Exchanges

Do you ever feel like your family's annual Christmas gift exchange is less than meaningful? Does trying to find the perfect, useful, and exciting gift for a parent, sibling or child leave you stressed, exhausted, and NOT in the Christmas spirit? How about trying something new this year...something that still involves your whole family and leaves everyone feeling like the gave and got exactly what they needed? One Heart-Bulgaria wants to help all interested individuals and families pool their efforts and Christmas budget to give Christmas away to orphanages this year!!!

Most orphanages at Christmas time will have a simple party. There may be some candy, a few songs, and some balloons but then it is over. Most of the orphans do not go home to a loving family and a cozy, sweat smelling house where stockings are hung, goodies are being baked, or a where a sparkling Christmas tree stands in the corner. They simply spend the holidays in a dismal orphanage like any other day. Below, we have listed meaningful projects you can sign up for as a family (or even as an office, business, etc.). While most of the projects have nothing to do with actually celebrating Christmas, each of them are things the children are in great need of year round in order to be comfortable in the orphanage. If you are interested in any of these projects, please contact Deborah D. Gardner at Deborah@oneheart-bg.org

Christmas party for one orphanage \$60

Annual birthday party budget for one orphanage \$200/year

Arts and crafts supplies for one orphanage \$75/year

Support Art and Drama programs at one teenage orphanage \$500-900/year

Educational supplies for one orphanage ages 7-18 years \$700/year

Feminine hygiene items for teenage girls in one orphanage \$150/month or one time gift of \$800.

Diapers for one infant orphanage \$200/month or one time gift of \$500-\$800.

Field trip budget for one orphanage ages 3-7 years \$200/year

Post-operative care on clubfeet, cleft pallets, crossed eyes, or harelips \$40/child

Bedding and hygiene items such as sheets, mattresses, toilet paper, toothpaste, shampoo, etc for one orphanage \$1,000/year.

*Note: Due to high shipping and transportation costs of the above mentioned items, we accept only cash donations so that supplies can be purchased directly in Bulgaria from Bulgarian factories.

For more tourist information and details about Bulgaria, please visit <http://wikitravel.org/en/Bulgaria>