The „Activities for Sustainable Management of Nature Park Vitosha” is financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the state budget of Republic of Bulgaria through the Operational Programme „Environment 2007 – 2013”

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NATIONAL STRATEGIC REFERENCE FRAMEWORK 2007–2013

VITOSHA NATURE PARK DIRECTORATE
1303, Sofia, 17 Antim I Str., Bulgaria, Tel: (+359 2) 988 58 41, Fax: (+359 2) 989 53 77
e-mail: dppvitosha@iag.bg, www.park-vitosha.org; www.bg-parks.net

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Vitosha - the oldest park on the Balkans

For thousands of years the livelihood of people at the foot of Vitosha has been connected with the mountain. Old records reveal that a few centuries ago Vitosha was covered with remnants of the impenetrable Magna silva bulgarorum (the Great Forest of Bulgarians). Today, part of this ancient forest have remained only in few places in the park — along the upper currents of Bistrishka, Yanchovska and Vladayska rivers.

In 1934 due to the active involvement of the Bulgarian conservation community, part of the Vitosha mountain (6 600 hectares) was declared a Park. This is the first park not only in Bulgaria, but on the Balkan peninsula as well. Park boundaries have been changed numerous times and today they enclose the whole of the mountain covering an area of 27 079 ha. Forested areas cover about 60% of the mountain. Studies show that more than 1 500 species of higher plants, 500 fungi, 500 algae, 326 mosses, 360 lichen species and rock communities. 453 species of higher plants can be found here, 34 of which are included in the Bulgarian Red Data Book. Among them are protected and beautiful plants like the European globe-flower, narcissus anemone, Jankae’s lily, bitter root etc. The reserve has been announced a Biosphere reserve under UNESCO’s Man and Biosphere Programme. The Torpheno branišhte reserve protects communities of sphagnous mosses, sedges, rushes and low willows, which have exceptional water retaining qualities.

Douhlata - a natural monument is situated at the foot of the southern mountain slopes, in the Bosneshki Karst area. It is the longest and one of the most beautiful caves in Bulgaria. It has 7 floors and 6 underground rivers.

Vitosha Nature Park is part of the European ecological network NATURA 2000. Climbing up Vitosha was the aim of the first organised tourists in Bulgaria. The tourist movement in the country has its onset in the eminent climbing of Cherni Vrah (the Balck Peak) on 27.08.1895 initiated by the prominent Bulgarian writer Aleko Konstantinov. In 1901 the first tourist track signs were put, marking the path form the village of Dragalevtzi to Cherni Vrah. Today the park has a well established tourist infrastructure. The mountain offers good conditions for tracking, skiing, rock climbing, hang-gliding and other types of sports. Attractive in all seasons the mountain is the favourite recreation spot of the inhabitants of Sofia and Pernik - in spring and summer with its pleasant coolness and rich green vegetation, and in winter with its wonderful opportunities for skiing.

Vitosha Nature Park is the most visited protected area in Bulgaria with over 2,5 million visitors every year.