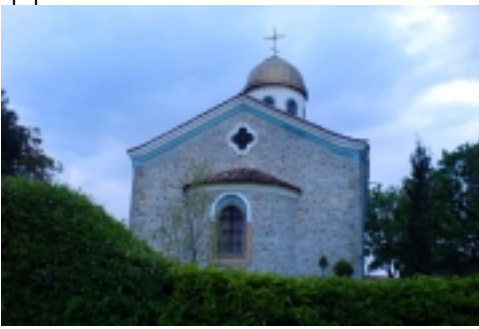


□□□□embassy :: Religion□□□□□



The main religion in Bulgaria is Bulgarian Orthodox. There are also Roman Catholics, Muslims, Protestants, Jews etc. Around twelve percent of the people are Muslim.

The Eastern Orthodox Church emerged as a result of disagreements between Greek speaking eastern churches and Latin speaking western churches over doctrine and ecclesiastical authority. During the Ottoman rule it was placed under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople. However, with the demise of the Ottoman empire many independent churches emerged in eastern Europe. Remaining in communion they retain their independence.

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church as an autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Church was established in 865 when Boris I was baptised by Greek missionaries. First religious centers - the monasteries - were established as soon as Christianity was adopted. Their role and importance grew during the 13-th and 14-th centuries and especially during the Ottoman domination. One of the oldest, largest and most beautiful monasteries www.bulgarianmonastery.com is the world famous Rila Monastery http://www.bulgarianmonastery.com/rila_monastery.html , known as the "Bulgarian" Jerusalem. In the centuries of Ottoman yoke the church was the only link with other Eastern Orthodox peoples and with European Christianity in the resistance to the Islamic invasion. It became independent in 1870 by a decree of the sultan and thus won the international juridical recognition of the Bulgarian nation before its political one.

During the communist era the church's property was confiscated by the state. The constitution of 1991 guaranteed freedom of religion while recognising Eastern Orthodoxy as "the traditional religion in Bulgaria". 88.5% of the population of Bulgaria belong to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church has an extremely rich history of icons which depict Biblical scenes, local saints, the Virgin Mary or Jesus. The icon is of particular importance for the Orthodox Church since it is seen as the dwelling place of God's grace, creating in the faithful a sense of the presence of God.

The orthodox churches possess the charm of art galleries with their unique mural paintings and woodcarvings.

The Tombul mosque in Shumen www.shoumen.bg is an exquisite example of the architecture of the Orient and the Synagogue in Sofia is considered to be one of the biggest in Europe.