

The **Magura Cave** is located in north-western Bulgaria close to the village of Rabisha, 25 km from the town of Belogradchik in Vidin Province.

The prehistoric wall paintings of Magura have great resemblance with those of the Grotta dei Cervi in Italy, which are of exceptional expression and artistic depth and are considered the most significant works of art of the European Post-Paleolithic era.

Guided visits are conducted by the staff of Belogradchik municipality, to which the management of the cave was transferred in 2012 by the Bulgarian Council of Ministers.

In 1984 the site was induced into UNESCO's list of World Heritage.

Description

The total length of the 15 million year old cave is 2.5 km. The average annual temperature of the cave is 12 °C . The air humidity reaches 80% and the displacement - 56 m. The Magura cave was formed in the limestone Rabisha Hill (461 m above sea level). The cave consists of one main gallery with six various-sized halls and three lateral galleries around it. The main gallery is composed of six chambers, variously sized; the largest one, the so-called *Arc Hall*, is 128 m long, 58 m wide and 21 m high, including impressive natural vaults, spectacular stalactites and stalagmites, named *The Poplar*, *The Pipe Organ*, *The Oriental City* and *The Cactus*. The very spacious site also allows for music concerts to be held during Christmas and Easter.

The inner temperature is constantly 11-12 °C. During the summers of 1974 and 1975 the cave was successfully used for speleotherapy and asthma treatment by Dr Vassil Dimitrov. Thirty patients slept in the cave for twelve consecutive nights, taking advantage of allergens absence, constant humidity and temperature.

A part of the cave is now used for ageing sparkling and red wines, labelled Magura, thanks to conditions similar to those of the French Champagne cellars.

Fauna

Bones from different prehistoric species like cave bear, cave hyena, fox, wolf, wild cat and otter have been discovered in the Magura Cave. Today, constant inhabitants of the cave is the collembola, as well as four types of bats (greater and lesser horsehoe bat, greater mouse-eared bat and Schreiber's bat. Cave paintings dating from the Epipaleolithic, late Neolithic, Eneolithic and early Bronze Age decorate some of the cave's walls. The paintings have been estimated to be made between 10.000 and 8.000 years ago. The drawings represent important events of the society that had occupied the Magura cave: religious ceremonies, hunting scenes and depictions of deities which are unique on the Balkan peninsula. The *Fertility Dance* and the *Hunting Ceremony* rank among the most noteworthy paintings.

Access to the area of the paintings is restricted in an effort to preserve them. Before 1993, the cave wasn't protected and there was free access to all. For this reason, some of the drawings have been vandalised and there are scratches on the walls. The cave is now open to the public all year round although the drawings can be seen only with the presence of a tour guide and the payment of a fee.