

# Show me the sunny

Bulgaria's Sunny Beach resort appeals to more than just bargain-hunters, finds Jeannine Williamson on a Balkan Holidays mega-fam

**S**unny Beach is the central hot spot - in every sense of the word - of Bulgaria's Black Sea Riviera. The country's largest resort has built its reputation on cheap fun in the sun and ticks all the boxes for bargain breaks.

As the tumbling pound hits clients' purse strings, it's a more affordable but no less sunny alternative to the Med. It appeals to sun-seekers looking for other destinations in the wake of terrorist attacks in countries such as Turkey, Tunisia and Egypt, and also offers options for an alternative audience, including those keen on five-star properties and secluded hideaways.

*Travel Weekly* joined a mega-fam celebrating the 50th anniversary of Bulgaria specialist Balkan Holidays to discover what Sunny Beach has to offer and how to sell it.

▶ **VALUE**

The Black Sea's season runs from May to October, and with more than 800 hotels and countless bars and restaurants, competition for business is keen.

Many hotels offer all-inclusive packages, but as eating out is so inexpensive, suggest clients try local restaurants, where they'll find it hard to spend £25, even on a three-course meal with wine.

To tempt visitors into bars and eateries, there are two (or occasionally four!) for one cocktail deals and free cuppas with a full English breakfast. Another strong selling point is that Bulgaria is outside the eurozone, so it regularly tops the Post Office Money Survey as the best-value holiday destination.



**Agent verdict:** "I have been blown away by the value. It is amazing value for money and the food is really good. Sunny Beach exceeded my expectations."

**Julie Mickevicius,**  
[verycheapholidays.co.uk](http://verycheapholidays.co.uk)

▶ **EASE OF ACCESS**

With a flight time that averages fewer than three-and-a-half hours, Sunny Beach is easy to reach, with two airports - Burgas and Varna - serving the Black Sea Riviera. This year, Balkan Holidays is flying from a record 18 UK airports, including a new weekly service from Liverpool to Bourgas and additional airlift from Newcastle.

UK-wide flights are a boon for families who want to cut down on travel time with youngsters. The transfer time to the resorts is just 40 minutes.

Other operators featuring Sunny Beach include Thomas





**RIGHT:**  
Neptun Beach



**FAR RIGHT:**  
Agents on a  
Balkan Holidays  
mega-fam,  
Nessebar



**BELOW:**  
Barcelo Royal  
Beach



## ASK THE EXPERT



**Chris Rand,**  
sales and  
marketing manager,  
Balkan Holidays

"Sunny Beach is the ultimate summer holiday resort for families. The Blue Flag sandy beach stretches for five miles and there are two aquaparks, alongside plenty of sports activities, and a buzzing seaside promenade with shops, restaurants and bars. Burgas, the nearest airport, is just 40 minutes away and there are weekly flights from 18 UK airports during the summer season. Bulgaria also has a strong cultural heritage, and for a day out, you cannot beat the nearby Unesco-protected town of Nessebar, with its quaint cobbled streets, traditional architecture and quality restaurants."

➔ Cook, Thomson and First Choice, and agents can dynamically package breaks with low-cost carrier Wizz Air, which flies to Varna and Burgas from regional airports.



**Agent verdict:** "Clients often ask which destinations they can fly to from regional airports and smaller airports. Sunny

Beach is fantastic for accessibility and the choice of departure points."

**Sarah Harding,**  
[verycheapholidays.co.uk](http://verycheapholidays.co.uk)

### ▶ BEACHES

The clue is in the name. The resort is set on a sweeping five-mile crescent of sandy beach that enjoys 12 hours of sunshine a day in summer, when temperatures peak at 30C. Sunny Beach is a Blue Flag resort and each



**The clue is in the name: the resort is on a five-mile crescent of sandy beach that enjoys 12 hours of sunshine a day**

morning, the sands are cleaned and groomed to perfection.

Minimal tides and gently sloping waters provide safe bathing conditions that are ideal for families and just as attractive to watersports enthusiasts who can windsurf, water ski, parasail, jet ski or ride on a banana boat.

For 120 days a year, the air and sea temperatures average a pleasant 18C,

while during the summer, the water temperature is 22-24C, reaching 26C close to the shore.



**Agent verdict:** "The beaches are better than many in Spain and other beach destinations. They're clean and there is a good choice of hotels on the beachfront."

**Joy Purkins, East of England Co-op**

### ▶ HISTORY & CULTURE

Perched on the edge of a peninsula which was once an island and known as the 'Pearl of the Black Sea', Unesco-listed Nessebar is a 15-minute drive from Sunny Beach. In contrast to the modern resort, Nessebar is one of the oldest towns in Europe, with a history dating back more than 3,000 years.

Famous for churches adorned with brightly coloured stones, and the







**Balkan Holidays** offers seven nights' all-inclusive at the four-star Neptun Beach from £526, or at the five-star Sol Nessebar Palace from £593. Both packages include flights from Gatwick and transfers, based on a June 4 departure. [balkanholidays.co.uk/agents](http://balkanholidays.co.uk/agents)

→ ruins of the fifth-century St Sophia church, its narrow streets are lined with small cafes and shops. Clients can take day trips to Pomorie, which is home to Roman tombs and a medieval monastery. It's also famous as a spa centre, with treatments using mineral-rich mud extracted from a nearby lake.



**Agent verdict:** "The trip really opened my eyes, as most people would not associate Sunny Beach with culture. Places like Nessebar are really close by. There are plenty of things to see and do."

**Richard Penny, Central England Co-op**

**FAMILY-FRIENDLY HOTELS**

Family fun comes thick and fast at the four-star Iberostar Sunny Beach Resort, which has four children's pools, water slides and a mini-club.

The Hotel Laguna Park is in a quieter location, a five-minute walk from the centre and main promenade. The hotel offers a choice of family rooms



**Pomorie is home to Roman tombs and is a famous spa centre, with treatments using mineral-rich mud**

and an impressive mini aquapark.

Although the four-star Hotel Neptun Beach doesn't boast as many children's facilities, it occupies a fantastic spot right on the beach.

On the outskirts of town lies the top family attraction, Action Aquapark, which operates a free shuttle bus service from Sunny Beach.



**Agent verdict:** "I would recommend Hotel Laguna Park for its waterpark, as children and families will love it."

**Lisa Robbins, Holiday With Us**



ABOVE: Khan's Tent

**HOTELS FOR COUPLES**

With beautiful landscaped gardens, a shopping mall and one of the largest pool areas in the resort, Barcelo Royal Beach is a stylish retreat that's still close to all the seafront action.

An affordable option on the main waterfront is the friendly Hotel Bellevue, which stages a weekly barbecue and Bulgarian-themed dinner.

Ideal for clients who want a quieter break are the adjoining five-star Sol Nessebar Palace and four-star Nessebar Bay, offering excellent restaurants and a host of facilities, including a lazy river and aquapark.



**Agent verdict:** "The Barcelo Royal Beach is ideal for young couples. I would recommend the Sol Nessebar Palace for couples who want to chill out."

**Lauren Kirby, Holiday With Us**

**NIGHTLIFE & RESTAURANTS**

Sunny Beach is famous for its party-central nightlife, much of it

concentrated in and around the entertainment hub of Flower Street, with wall-to-wall bars and restaurants.

Inexpensive places to eat cater for all tastes, from fast-food outlets to Italian, Chinese and Mexican cuisine. Bulgarian restaurants showcase traditional dishes including shopska cheese salad and a rich pork casserole.

Night owls can dance from dusk to dawn at clubs such as Lazur, which can be found on the main strip.

Nestled in the hillside above Sunny Beach is Khan's Tent, hosting a fabulous nightly dinner show with live entertainment including jugglers and dancers. It is suitable for everyone, including families.



**Agent verdict:** "The nightlife is situated close to the hotels, within walking distance or a cheap taxi ride away. Khan's Tent is an amazing show for everyone to watch, with amazing acts that will leave you speechless."

**Neil Jones, Westgate Travel TW**

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