

WONDERS OF MACEDONIAN NATURE

TEXT: **PETRA BOIC PETRAC**



WITH NUMEROUS PROTECTED AREAS, MACEDONIA IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL COUNTRIES IN THE DINARIC ARC REGION, BOASTING A WEALTH OF BIODIVERSITY. ALL THREE NATIONAL PARKS – MAVROVO, GALIČICA AND PELISTER – ARE PART OF THE DINARIC ARC PARKS NETWORK, WHICH WAS CREATED BY THE WWF (WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE) AND PROMOTES THE DINARIC ALPS AS A NEW EUROPEAN TOURIST DESTINATION

Foto: NP Mavrovo

Mavrovo National Park

The perfection of untouched nature you can discover in Mavrovo National Park, located in the south-western part of the Balkans, is hard to describe. This great mountain chain that stretches along the western edge of the Balkan Peninsula, crossing the borders of Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo, is famous for its deep gorges, blue lakes and snowy peaks.

One of the biggest protected areas was proclaimed a national park 64 years ago. The majority of its territory is covered in forests that provide a home for deer, chamois, bear, lynx, horses and other species. Radika Gorge, one of the most beautiful in Europe, offers many spectacular landscapes, including the highest waterfall in the Balkans (121 metres).

Those who climb the mountain of Bistra are rewarded with beautiful scenery, including a half-submerged church in Mavrovo Lake. The mountain is known for its rare karst relief and beautiful caves, which are open to the public. Bistra is not,

however, the most famous peak in Mavrovo – that distinction is held by Mt Korab, which reaches a height of 2,773 m and is the highest mountain in Macedonia.

Hidden away in Mavrovo is one of the most fascinating villages in Macedonia, Galičnik, where the national cheese kačkavalj was first made. The perfect setting of the village, its beautiful church and a Macedonian folk tradition that has been cherished for centuries make Galičnik a favourite place for weddings: the record is 92 weddings on one day!

The wooden iconostasis in the monastery of St Jovan Bigorski is one of the finest examples of traditional woodcarving in Macedonia.

The flora in Mavrovo National Park is a mosaic of different plants. The wealth of flora is reflected in more than 1,000 different species of trees and shrubs. More than 140 species of birds can be seen in the forest areas of the park.

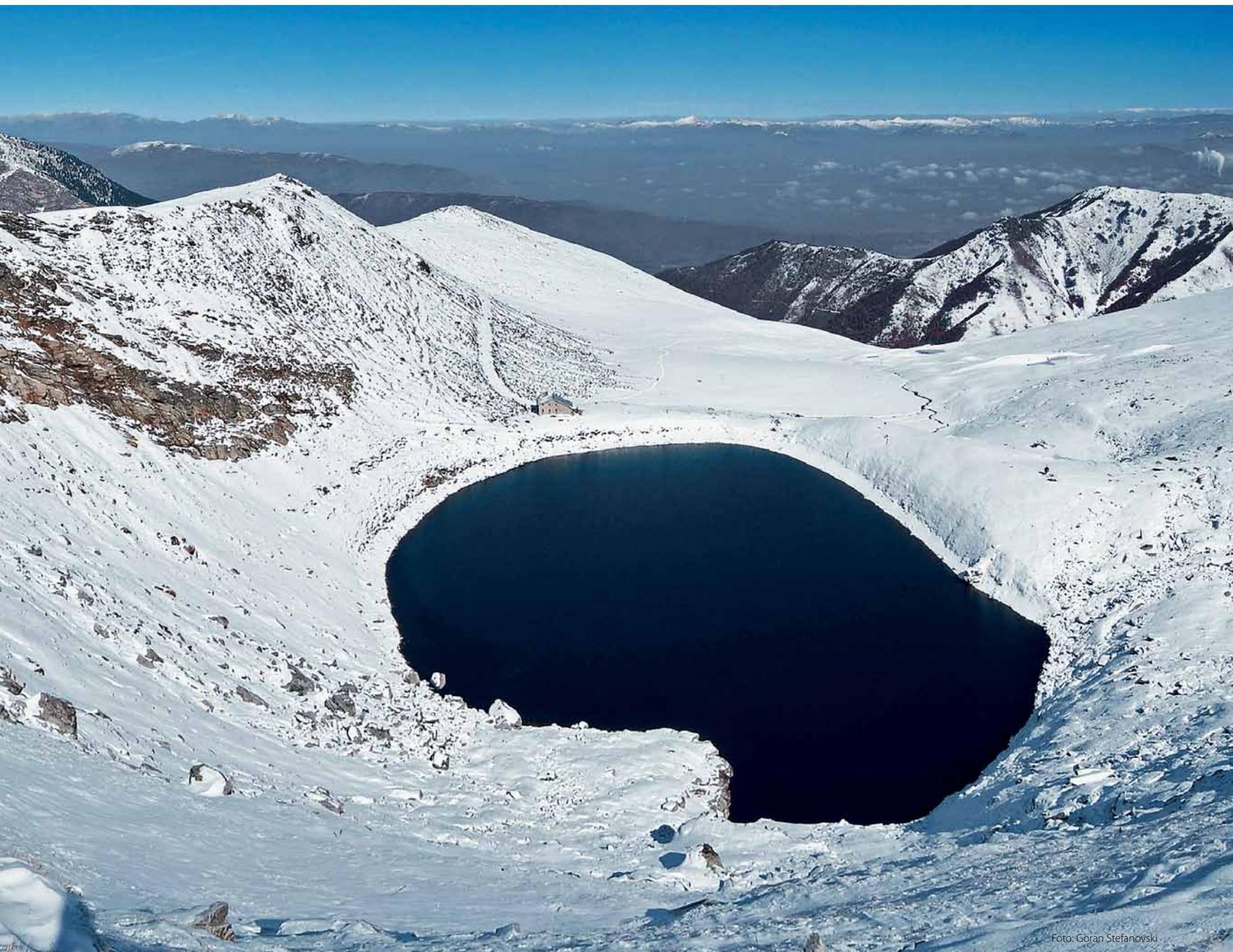


Foto: Goran Stefanovski

Pelister National Park

PELISTER IS LOCATED IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF MACEDONIA. **THE PARK IS VERY CLOSE TO THE CITY OF BITOLA, MAKING IT A PERFECT WEEKEND GETAWAY FOR FAMILIES.**

Thanks to its extremely rich biodiversity, Pelister is a favourite destination for school nature trips.

Pelister is known for its clear spring water, rivers rich with Pelister and Pelagonia trout, waterfalls and two glacial mountain lakes – the Big and the Small, also known as Pelister's Eyes. However, this national park would not be so special without its most characteristic feature, the Macedonian pine (Pinus peuce), a five-needle pine which accounts for a large part of Pelister's forest vegetation. This pine has a light-coloured trunk, soft needles and coarse bark, and lives for a long time. Walking in Pelister you can find trees over 230 years old. The beauty of the landscape is enhanced by the diverse wildlife: roe deer, wolves, deer, wild boar, chamois, rabbits, several species of eagles, the endemic Macedonian Pelagonia trout and the symbol of the park – the brown bear.



Foto: Petra Boic Petrac



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Galičica National Park

In 2008 the route through Galičica National Park was named by Forbes magazine as one of the top 20 scenic drives in Europe. This alone is a great reason to visit the park. But Galičica is also bounded by two wonderful lakes, Lake Prespa and the UNESCO world heritage site Lake Ohrid, so there is no doubt that this park will leave you breathless.

The park has 1,600 plant species, 176 endemic tree species, 3,200 animal species, 1,597 species of butterflies... It is a perfect place for birdwatchers and for sports lovers, particularly cyclists. A boat trip from Ohrid in the direction of the monastery of St Naum offers views of the Ohrid forest, numerous fishing spots and a beach of a kind you would normally expect to find at the seaside. The monastery itself boasts the oldest iconostasis in Macedonia. Galičica is also famous for its Snake Island, home to several species of snake and other reptiles.