

Dear University Representative,

While Sofia is a welcoming city, there have been a couple of horror stories from college representatives who have been ripped off in taxis, especially from the airport to their hotels. Also, representatives need to be aware that AAS is not located anywhere remotely near the US Embassy, although that address shows up on our business cards, letterhead, etc. Here is some valuable information to help you make your trip to Sofia a success.

1. Taxis: The very best idea is to only get into an "OK Supertrans" taxi that has the phone number printed on the hood and side, **973-2121**. The fake OK taxis will charge you about 4 times the normal rate – or more – and because this will be metered you will have to pay. These fellows can be sneaky, painting their cabs to look like OK taxis. For example, there are many "CK" cabs that look just like the "good" ones. Or they'll even paint "OK" but will have a *different* phone number from the one above emblazoned below the logo, keeping the 2121 phone number but with a different prefix! So look at the cab and make sure the phone number is **973-2121 is painted on the doors or hood**. It's obvious. There are other taxi services that appear to be legitimate, but we usually suggest the "real" OK taxi or the "Yellow Taxis" with "91119" painted in large, blue letters on the front doors. (You'll see fewer of these, though, and they are not at the airport.)

If everything checks out above, you should be okay. But if you want to go above and beyond to ensure you are getting a fair deal, check the costs on the outside of the taxi. In the daytime, the cost is, at this writing, .59 per km and .79 per km. at night. The going rate will be printed in the windows outside the back seats. A ride from the airport to town would be around 18 – 20 Leva. A ride from the airport to the American College or the Anglo-American School will not be more than 15 leva, more like 10.

At the airport, when you exit customs, make a RIGHT turn, and head out the side doors for the legitimate OK taxi line up. Never allow a person to take your bag to a taxi, and head out of the front of the building. These are always the rip-off cabs.

The "good" OK taxis will be at the airport. If you are elsewhere in Sofia, you can call OK Supertrans at 973-2121. If you don't speak Bulgarian, just say, "English please" and the operator will patch you in to an English-speaking colleague. They will ask where you are, where you want to go. Be sure to tell the operator that you want to go to the Anglo-American School in Pancharevo. The "Pancharevo" part is important, as our school is sometimes confused with the American College of Sofia.

After they hang up you will be sent a text message indicating the number of the taxi that will be picking you up and the time the taxi is expected to arrive. (So, if the text reads "1314", look to see that the taxi that pulls in front is actually of the same number. This is written on a sticker affixed to the passenger-side of the dashboard or on the front windshield.)

2. Money- Should you need to change money, there is a convenient place, with normal rates at the airport. As soon as you come out of the doors, again head right, and you will see a small money changing operation on your right. The exchange rate there appears to be within reason. Of course never use a money changer on any street! Of course there are many good ATM machines, especially at most of the banks. (In addition, we have a secure ATM at our school.)

3. Getting to the Anglo-American School. We are near Pancharevo, in the exact opposite direction of the US Embassy in town. We are in the foothills of the Vitosha Mountains. So, use the map and directions I've sent you. (Or find this on the website on the "High School" section.) Most taxi drivers don't speak English, so it's not a bad idea to print the directions and map and hand these over to the driver. If this isn't clear to the driver (but it should be), you can call our receptionist at 923-8810 to give an explanation of the directions to your cab driver in Bulgarian. We are only about 10 minutes to the American College, so you can easily set up two appointments within a reasonable time of each other.
4. You can always call (+359 2) 923-8810 or email me at dstephenson@aas-sofia.org if you have any questions about your visit to Sofia.
5. Lastly, while in town you may be interested in the other larger English-speaking schools here. Chances are you already have made contact with the American College of Sofia, the largest of the English-speaking schools in Sofia. If not, their counselor is Allison Davis a.davis@acs.bg. Another school that sends its students abroad is Zlatarski, a Bulgarian school with an IB program. Their counselor is Anna Joukivskaia counseling@zlatarskiskool.org.
6. If you are staying at the Hilton, you are within walking distance to one of my favorite restaurants in Sofia: Kohinoor, which is Indian. Nice ambience, excellent and friendly service, top quality food. (If staying at the Hilton, your concierge can tell you how to easily walk there.)
<http://www.kohinoor.bg/en/>

For Bulgarian food, my favorite is Izbata: <http://www.izbata.bg/> There won't be any touristy song-and-dance, hard-selling, etc. like you can get at other touted Bulgarian "mehanas." You'll be treated like a local and served great food. There are two locations, downtown and Lozenets, both of which aren't too far from any downtown hotel. (On the website, click on one of the locations and you will then be offered an English translation of the page.)

There is a lot of information here, and it gives the impression that this is a daunting place to visit. It isn't! We are just erring on the side of caution with regard to the cabs, and we need to drive home the message that our most visible address on our website (16 Kozyak Street) is NOT where we are located.

Have a great trip and we look forward to seeing you!

Regards,

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