



# USAID | BULGARIA

FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

## FIRST PERSON Traveling To Share and Preserve

### Company encourages sustainable model of developing tourism



Photo: Hristo Badakov

Outdoor tourism promoter Lubomir Popiordanov climbs the rocks along the Iskar River gorge near the Bulgarian town of Lakatnik.

***“I’m very appreciative of how Americans have supported small projects and initiatives,” Lubomir Popiordanov said. “The results are tangible, and the assistance is transparent.”***

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Paintings of Bulgaria’s mountain scenery decorate the offices of Odyssea-In, a special-interest travel company based in Sofia. Owner Lubomir Popiordanov is the artist responsible for some of the landscapes. It’s impressive that he has time for painting given all his other pursuits. Besides running his own company, he presides over the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism, is an avid mountain climber, and is currently launching an informational campaign about preserving Bulgaria’s monasteries.

Odyssea-In organizes adventure and cultural tours, conducts educational and tourism development activities, and operates two outdoor stores in Sofia. A portion of its profits supports environmental initiatives, which has earned the company awards for corporate philanthropy. Since founding Odyssea-In in 1990, Lubomir has worked with several USAID programs. An MBA volunteer sponsored by USAID helped his company develop its business plan and mission statement in 1999. “She was the best consultant we ever had,” he said.

In 2003, USAID provided support to the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism for a guide to bed-and-breakfast inns in Bulgaria; the guide is now in its fourth edition. In 2005, USAID provided funds for editing a handbook for mountain guides. Lubomir proudly describes it as the best tourism book in Bulgaria, containing extensive information on the country’s nature and geology. “Our landscape — the mountains, the coast — belongs to all Bulgarians, and to humanity,” he said.

His mission is to help his fellow Bulgarians appreciate their country’s wealth of historical and natural treasures. While mountain resorts such as Bansko attract increasing numbers of foreign tourists, Lubomir considers them negative examples of tourism development. He wants to see greater sustainability and development of the local labor market, with creation of more jobs for young people. His company introduced to Bulgaria mountain guiding as a profession, creating training materials and certification courses. He has also traveled to villages all over Bulgaria to conduct trainings on operating guest houses.