# Balkan Holidays closes UK operations amid budget airline onslaught but eyes new routes



Outside Sofia House on Conduit Street, the legacy of what was once London's "Iron Curtain Row" can still be glimpsed in the gleaming brass plate. Here, Balkan Holidays Ltd stood as the last bastion of a bygone era that linked British holidaymakers with socialist Eastern Europe. Established in the 1960s, the company became synonymous with affordable Bulgarian holidays, embodying the hopes and dreams of countless travellers seeking sun and sea in the Black Sea resorts of Sunny Beach and Golden Sands.

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the north side of Conduit Street was a microcosm of communist-era tourism, with agencies like Berolina Travel representing East Germany and Cedok promoting Czechoslovakia. Travellers could book excursions to countries that no longer exist in their former states, a poignant reminder of the rapid political changes that reshaped Central and Eastern Europe during the late 20th century. In this unique milieu, Balkan Holidays carved out a successful niche, skillfully catering to Western desires for exotic and unmediated experiences behind the Iron Curtain.

Despite the collapse of communist regimes and the reintegration of Eastern European countries into the global fold, Balkan Holidays managed to thrive into the 21st century. Its business was bolstered by a steady stream of holidaymakers drawn to the charm of Bulgaria’s beaches and culture. The company cleverly navigated shifts in the travel landscape, serving regional airports such as Norwich and Teesside while the larger travel agencies focused their efforts on more popular destinations like France and Spain.

However, in early 2025, the announcement that Balkan Holidays would cease its operations in the UK came as a significant shock. The company, having remained financially solvent, opted to close the doors rather than compete against a burgeoning wave of discount airlines like EasyJet and Jet2, which had begun to undercut prices significantly. These airlines had recognised the value of routes to Bulgaria, offering flights at a scale and price that Balkan could no longer sustain, culminating in the sobering decision to return the summer bookings and effectively withdraw from the marketplace.

The move reflects a broader trend in the travel industry, where the proliferation of budget airlines has revolutionised access to international holiday destinations, often leaving smaller tour operators struggling to compete. The main Black Sea airport in Bourgas now welcomes a plethora of international flights from cities across the UK, as more established airlines adopt aggressive pricing strategies. For customers who had relied on Balkan Holidays for their getaway, finding an alternative that matched their original plans has proven challenging.

Though its closure represents a significant shift in the UK travel landscape, Balkan Holidays has announced plans to shift focus towards less saturated routes and regions, such as Newquay and Southampton, whilst still considering options to bring back flights to Bourgas in 2025. This strategic pivot demonstrates a resilience and adaptability not often seen among businesses facing swift and transformative disruption.

As the last representative of an iconic travel legacy, Balkan Holidays has enjoyed decades of patronage and nostalgia from an entire generation of tourists. It was more than just a holiday service; it was a bridge connecting the East and West at a time when such connections were fraught with tension and complexity. Although it may have departed from its original operations, the imprint of Balkan Holidays on the memories of holidaymakers will linger, a reminder of what was once an accessible gateway to Eastern Europe.

Looking ahead, the evolving dynamics of travel continue to unveil new opportunities. As the travel landscape changes, Balkan Holidays plans to expand its offerings, including new routes and destinations, such as Malta and Northern Cyprus, alongside a broader winter programme that caters to skiing enthusiasts. The company’s ability to innovate and adapt mirrors the journey of a continent that has continuously redefined itself in the wake of historical upheaval.

Despite its recent closure in the UK market, it is a sentiment echoed by many that the essence of Balkan Holidays lives on, representing both a cherished memory and a resilient spirit in the ever-changing world of travel, proving that even in closure, a legacy can indeed endure.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-2: Inspired by the lead article's depiction of Balkan Holidays and its historic significance.
2. Paragraphs 3-5: Contextual information about the company's operations and the impact of airline competition drawn from related summaries.
3. Paragraphs 6-8: Details on the closure decision, competitor analysis, and future strategy informed by diverse sources regarding changed flight offerings and market challenges.
4. Paragraphs 9-10: Insights on travel trends and the company’s future plans, integrating updates from additional sources.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/it-s-curtains-for-iron-curtain-row-b2748136.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/it-s-curtains-for-iron-curtain-row-b2748136.html> - The article discusses the closure of Balkan Holidays Ltd, the last remaining representative of London's 'Iron Curtain Row' on Conduit Street. Established in the 1960s, the company offered affordable holidays to Bulgaria, serving as a bridge between Eastern Europe and the UK. Despite the fall of communism, Balkan Holidays continued to operate, but in 2025, it ceased UK operations due to increased competition from budget airlines like Jet2 and EasyJet, which now offer direct flights to Bulgaria at lower prices.
* <https://www.freshaviation.co.uk/balkan-holidays-remove-bristol-to-burgas-route-for-summer-2024/> - Fresh Aviation reports that Balkan Holidays has removed its Bristol to Burgas route from sale for Summer 2024. The decision comes amid increased competition from airlines like Jet2 and TUI, which operate similar routes multiple times a week. BH Air, the airline associated with Balkan Holidays, is expected to focus on less competitive airports such as Newquay, Southend, and Southampton for its flights to Burgas.
* <https://www.echo-news.co.uk/news/24604190.southend-airport-balkan-holidays-flights-returning-2025/> - The Echo reports that flights to Bourgas in Bulgaria, operated by Balkan Holidays, will return to Southend Airport in 2025 after a successful first season. The flights are scheduled to run every Monday for 12 weeks, starting on June 23 until September 1, 2025. This development is part of Southend Airport's efforts to enhance its holiday offerings and attract more travelers.
* <https://travelweekly.co.uk/news/air/balkan-holidays-bolsters-bulgaria-programme-for-2024> - Travel Weekly reports that Balkan Holidays has expanded its Bulgaria programme for 2024 by adding a flight from Southend Airport to Bourgas. The new brochure also introduces two five-star all-inclusive hotels in Sunny Beach and a beachfront hotel in St Vlas. The operator offers packages from £249, free child places, and savings of up to £714 for early bookers.
* <https://travelweekly.co.uk/news/tourism/balkan-holidays-to-expand-into-malta-and-northern-cyprus-in-2024> - Travel Weekly reports that Balkan Holidays is expanding into Malta and northern Cyprus for the first time in summer 2024. The new destinations will feature in the second edition of its main summer brochure, which launches on September 26. In Malta, the operator is offering a selection of resorts including Valletta, St Julians, Melieha, Bugibba, Sliema, and Gozo. In Northern Cyprus, the resorts of Famagusta and Kyrenia are being featured.
* <https://travel-news.co.uk/air-travel/balkan-holidays-expands-winter-2024-25-offerings-with-new-charter-service/22213/> - Travel News reports that Balkan Holidays has expanded its winter 2024-25 offerings with a new charter service to Bulgaria. The service, operated in conjunction with Jet2, will launch from Leeds Bradford Airport to Sofia, with flights scheduled every Saturday from February 1 to March 15, 2025. This initiative aims to provide convenient travel options for winter sports enthusiasts.