Over the centuries many towns and cities have come and gone. Some cities no longer exist due to acts of nature. Pompeii and even the mythical Atlantis come to mind. Then there are some cities that no longer exist due to acts of man, such as Carthage of the Carthaginian’s which should not to be confused with Roman Carthage, the latter having been vindictively built atop the total destruction of the former. And then there are cities like Peru’s Manchu Picchu and Cambodia’s Angkor Wat that appears as if the population mysteriously vanished into the mountains or just walked away into the jungle. Great cities now long gone…and there are many more who shared the same fate.

The point is that when a city has been on the map for 2,500 years and it continues to thrive and grow into the 21st century, two reasons for such success become readily apparent. The first reason is that the founders obviously picked the right location from the beginning. They knew where to build the city and why. In other words, there was a viable economic engine that would fundamentally support the community. The second reason that a city would continue to prosper even after two millennia is that the first reason still exists today.

Modern Varna is a perfect example. Greek colonists established Varna (then called Odessos) upon the site of a far more ancient Thracian city for one reason … the sea. And it is the Black Sea that remains the economic backbone of Varna today.

Varna looks out over the water. As it was in ancient times, the city is ringed by rich and productive farm land. Depending upon whom you ask, it is Bulgaria’s 2nd or 3rd largest city. There is no doubt, however, that it is certainly Bulgaria’s most vibrant. The beautiful beaches of Varna and the many resorts that dot the coast make the city the most popular summer getaway location in the country. The city welcomes millions of visitors each season, both national and international.

As a busy port, Varna is home to the Bulgarian Navy and popular cruise destination. The port has a vital merchant fleet with all the accompanying marine industries and services that one would expect. The port makes Varna one of the most important trading and transport centers on the Black Sea. But Varna does not feel old. There is nothing dusty or musty about this town.

One of the reasons for Varna’s continued vitality is the many visitors that come to enjoy the beautiful beaches. With thousands of students from the city’s five colleges and universities combined with thousands more young people that come for fun, the club scene and night life have given the city a great “party-town” reputation. For all intents and purposes Varna is the summer capital of Bulgaria.

**HISTORY**

Miletus was an important Greek city and commercial center in 600 BC. Located on the southwest coast of the Anatolian Peninsula, for centuries merchant fleets sailed in and out of its busy harbor. Together with trade goods the merchant ships often carried Greek colonists and settlers from Miletus. On the west coast of the Black Sea, the trading post of Odessos became one such settlement. It was founded in 570 BC upon the site of an ancient Thracian town. By the time the Greeks arrived the Thracians had inhabited the area around Odessos and the Balkans for over 1,500 years. The new trading outpost of Odessos would eventually become the city of Varna.

Sharing the same fate as most towns and cities in that part of the world, Varna was attacked by King Philip II of Macedonia in 339 BC. Varna stood firm and though able to remain independent the city eventually developed good relations with the Macedonian king. At the passing of King Philip, Varna opened its gates to his son, Alexander. With the sudden death of Alexander the empire that he and his men had fought so hard to conquer and build descended into chaos. Alexander’s senior generals carved up his empire and each took a share. In this way, in 306 BC one of Alexander’s most trusted generals, Lysimachus, became king of Macedonia, Asia Minor and Thrace, which included Varna. There was great displeasure with the new king and chaos continued for a long time afterward.

Varna came into the Roman Empire late in the 1st century BC. The city grew and prospered under “Pax Romana”... the peace of Rome. Roads, port facilities, homes, aqueducts and large public baths were built in the thriving city. After Rome’s fall, Asparukh, ruler of the Bulgarian tribe, established the first Bulgarian kingdom in the late 600s AD. Over the next 800 years Varna would often prosper as a major Black Sea port. At other times Varna would come under at-
tack as the regional powers fought for control of the Balkans and the Black Sea. During the Crimean War (1854-1856) Varna served as a naval base and central command as the British, French and Ottoman Turks fought the Russians. In 1946, following World War II, Varna and the People's Republic of Bulgaria became part of the Soviet Union's communist Eastern Bloc. The country gained independence in 1990 and today is known as the Republic of Bulgaria. But perhaps the most important event in Varna's history took place in the mid 1400s.

As Roman Catholic popes had done for centuries, in 1443 Gabriele Condulmer, Pope Eugene IV, called for yet another crusade against Islam as the Turks were advancing into Europe. Pope Eugene IV offered twenty percent of his fortune to the Christian king that would stop them. Assured by the papal envoy, Giuliano Cesarini, that victory would be his, the young king of Hungary and Poland, Ladislaus III, picked up the gauntlet.

By the morning of November 10, 1444, twenty year old King Ladislaus and his army of 20,000 infantry and mounted knights had reached Varna. Preparations were being made for them to sail to Constantinople. As dawn broke, there on the plains outside the city stood Sultan Murad II and his Ottoman army of 60,000 arrayed for battle. Out numbered 3-to-1, and ignoring the advice of his great military leader John Hunyadi, King Ladislaus ordered Hunyadi and his crusaders to ride out from the city and bring the battle to Murad II.

Hunyadi followed the orders of his king and through superior maneuvers and tactics Hunyadi turned both flanks of the Muslim army and was setting about to destroy the Ottomans. Suddenly the impetuous King Ladislaus and 500 of his Polish knights, in an effort to reach Sultan Murad II, charged the center of their enemy's battle line. Hundreds of special guards to the sultan known as the Janissary surrounded Murad II. Though they were being slaughtered the Janissary never deserted their leader. Suddenly from out of the midst of the chaos of hand-to-hand fighting, the severed head of young King Ladislaus was raised, impaled upon an Ottoman spike. After the victory over the Christian army at Varna, Mehmed II, son of Murad II, would go on to conquer Constantinople and bring about the collapse of the Byzantine Empire. Varna, Bulgaria the Balkans and more would be ruled by the Islamic Ottoman Turks for the next 400 years.
1 The Cathedral of the Assumption was built in the late 1800s to honor the late and beloved Russian Empress Maria Alexandrovna, and commemorate the soldiers who fought for Bulgaria’s liberation from Turkey. Now standing in the center of Varna, at the time of construction the church was on the outskirts of the city. A number of the beautiful icons were donated to the church in the early 1900s by Russia’s Czar Nicholas II.

2 The Varna Archeological Museum is home to an interesting collection of artifacts dating back to the Copper Age (3000 BC). Over 10,000 selected pieces of the 100,000 artifacts in the museum are on display. The collection of finely crafted gold is one of the most amazing in all of Europe. All of the artifacts have been discovered over the past century through archaeological digs in northern Bulgaria and the region around Varna.

3 The Roman Baths (ruins) date back to the 1st and 2nd century AD. At that time Varna was called Odessos and was an important city in the empire. The stone and brickwork together with the layout of the buildings gives visitors a great insight into how the citizens of the town lived over 2,000 years ago.

4 The Ethnographic Museum has on display numerous artifacts, furnishings, household utensils, tools and fashions from Varna and the surrounding countryside. These objects show visitors the way of life of the people during the 19th century.

5 The Sea Garden is one of the most popular sites in all of Varna. There have been additions over the years such as the Dolphin Center but the park itself was completed in the late 1800s. Set along the shore of the Black Sea other attractions include the Nicolas Copernicus Observatory and Planetarium, the Varna Zoo, the Museum of Natural History, the National Maritime Museum, an amusement park specifically for children, an aquarium, the National Revival Alley (honoring famous Bulgarians), and of course the beautiful beach.

Beyond Varna

The Museum of the Battle of Varna relates the story and displays artifacts and weaponry from the historic battle of 1444. Here at Varna the outnumbered Christian army was defeated by the Islamic Turks. This helped lead to the fall of Constantinople and the collapse of the Byzantine Empire.

The Balchik Botanical Garden is located on the coast a short distance to the northeast of Varna. The garden is set on the grounds of the former summer palace of the granddaughter of Great Britain’s Queen Victoria, Romania’s Queen Marie Alexandra Victoria. The beautiful surroundings display a large collection of flowers, plants and trees from around the world. Horse-drawn carriages are available to take visitors throughout the 90 acre garden. The Rose Garden is especially popular with visitors.

Madara is an old village to the west of Varna. It is a UNESCO site (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). The town is famous for the giant 700 AD cliff carving known as the Madara Horseman. The carving depicts a rider on horseback with his dog while on a lion hunt.

The Euxinograd Palace was built in the late 1800s as a residence for Alexander Joseph of Battenberg, Prince of Bulgaria. The beautifully designed park is an oasis of specially selected plants and flowers from around the Mediterranean and other far off reaches of the world.

The Aladzha Monastery dates back to the 1200s AD. It is located a few miles north of Varna along the coast of the Black Sea. What makes the monastery unique is the fact that it is a collection of caves that were painstakingly hand carved into the solid rock of the terraced cliffs. Abandoned since the 1600s the monastery includes all the rooms and chapels that one would expect to find in a more traditional monastery including a kitchen and dining area, workshops and of course the private cells of the monks.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Varna and surrounding areas we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For Information concerning tour content and pricing, consult azamaraclubcruises.com or contact the onboard Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Some smaller vendors will bargain.

Tipping: 10% is usually acceptable

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

Bulgarian cuisine has had many influences. Listed here are some favorites. Banitsa is a baked cheese pastry. Rhodopean Moussaka is a baked meat and potatoes dish with onion and garlic. Kavarma Kebap is beef strips season with paprika, salt and pepper, fried with onions and served with potatoes. Tarator is a summertime cold soup made from yogurt, cucumbers and garlic.

Wine was produced in Bulgaria long before recorded history. It remains a vital part of the culture and strong contributor to the nation’s economy. Some of Bulgaria’s best wines include Mavrud, Gamza and Pamid. Rakia, sometimes called slivovitz, is a type of plumb brandy.

SHOPPING

Knias Boris Street is a pedestrian area, around Nezavisimost Square lined with restaurants, shops and cafes, and is opposite the Cathedral.

The Mall of Varna is located about 10km from port, on Vladislav Varnenchik Boulevard.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Bulgaria is the Lev (BGL). The smallest unit of Lev is the Stotinka. 100 Stotinka make up one Lev. Banks and exchange kiosks are widespread and ATMs are available.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

A Post Office is behind the Cathedral, on Vladislav Varnenchik Boulevard.

Pay phones may require a phone card or coin to dial the following access numbers.

AT&T: 00.800.0010
MCI: 00.800.0001

TRANSPORTATION

Varna is walking friendly. There are numerous taxis and they have very reasonable rates. Taxis at pier are not metered.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

Hello - Zdra-ve-jte
Yes - Dah
No - Neh
Thank You - Blah-go-dahr-yah
Good Morning - Do-bro oo-tro
Good Afternoon - Do-bir dehn
Good Night - Leh-ka nosht
Good By - Do-veezh-dah-neh