

Getting a Bulgarian bank card

Written by Tom

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A lot of the Bulgarian bank accounts have charges so if you just want a Bulgarian card so that you can spend money without having to pay UK bank charges then there is a simple way.

Lots of the banks offer card services so that you can just pre-pay a debit card without all the complications of an overdraft, interest rates etc which is great if you just want to have a bit of plastic to pay the odd bill and use in an ATM.

There are a number of banks but for our card we just picked the one which was closest and had the best online site (in English) which turned out to be Raiffeisen Bank. Raiffeisen is an Austrian bank which operates throughout a lot of Eastern Europe and it's also a co-operative bank which made us feel that it might be a bit more secure.

First you need to pick which type of card you want. We opted for the international visa electron which is free to have, has no charges when used in Bulgaria and can be used abroad. It isn't chip and pin but you do have to type in a pin at most merchants like to older magnetic strip cards.

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In the branch we found that one of the tellers spoke English which was a great help as you don't really want misunderstandings on this kind of thing. All we had to do was fill out a few details, (Name, Address and some passport details), let them photo copy my Passport and proof of address and that was it! Simple. All I had to do was wait 7 working days and come back to the same branch to collect the card.

You get given the card, pin number and another bit of plastic with your card details such as IBAN (International Bank Account Number) so that you can transfer money onto the card or go into the branch to pre-pay it if you have cash.

The beauty of this system is that you can make 1 transfer from a UK bank account to your Bulgarian bank card each month rather than being charged lots of times for using your card abroad. Raiffeisen convert international payments from GBP to BGN at no charge and at the bank standard rate which isn't bad at all. Unless you were transferring tens of thousands I think it would do. The limit on your spending is 6000 BGN (€3000) per week which considering the cost of living here, should be plenty. Plastic fantastic!