



BANSKO BLOG

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO BANSKO



by Lance Nelson

Thank you to James Hughes & Vanya Maneva for their advice and editing work.





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What you need to know before going

Bansko

Bansko (see Wikipedia link) is a ski and mountain resort in the southwest region of Bulgaria. It is located at the foot of the Pirin Mountains not far from the borders of Greece and Macedonia.

Over the last nine years, Bansko has become an international destination for summer and winter recreation and tourism. The Pirin National Park is a protected **UNESCO** site.

With warm, sunny weather from May to October, Bansko is also an ideal resort for summer holidays.

Bansko benefits from being central in the Eastern European landmass and easily reached from many great cities of the world by road. For example:



- Sofia to Bansko is 168 kms
- Thessaloniki to Bansko is 225 kms
- Skopje to Bansko is 256 kms
- Belgrade to Bansko is 539 kms
- Bucharest to Bansko is 552 kms

Most major airlines and many 'low-cost' airlines service Sofia.

Flight times:

- London to Sofia is 2 hours 50 minutes
- Moscow to Sofia is 2 hours 16 minutes

Transfer time from Sofia airport is 2 hours and 35 minutes.

Bansko town altitude is 925 m above sea level. A mild mountainous climate and clean and fresh air are found.

In 2003, a Gondola lift was constructed linking the town with the primary ski base area at Banderishka Poliana.

The ski area has 75 kms (47 miles) of ski runs, 14 lifts lifts, serving up to 24,500 persons per hour. The summit rises to an elevation of 2,600 m (8,500 ft) above sea level.

It is served by high speed quad chair lifts.

The vertical drop is nearly 1,000 m (3,300 ft) to the base meeting area at Banderishka Poliana. For most of the season it is possible to ski down to the town.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria is an EU country in Eastern Europe, located between Greece to the South and Romania to the North. It has a population of just over 7 million with an average age of 41.9 years, slightly older than the UK and France (both around 40 years) and much younger than that of Germany (44.9 years).

The local language is Bulgarian which uses the Cyrillic alphabet. Many residents and most staff in Bansko speak good English. Signage on major roads is good, with names written in both Cyrillic and English.

If you are exploring off the main roads you are advised to carry a good map and have your route planned in advance. Driving from



Sofia Airport to Bansko is very easy, mostly on the trans-European route numbered E79.

The local language is Bulgarian and the writing is in Cyrillic. Most staff in Bansko speak good English.

Main road signs have both Cyrillic and English, but be prepared with a map and your route in advance.

Currency

Bulgaria's currency is called the lev (BGN) (or leva in the plural)

1 Euro = 1.95 leva (This is the mid rate provided by most banks)

Approximate exchange rates: (xe.com for up to date rates)

- 10 Euro = 19.55 BGN
- 10 UK pound = 23.96 BGN
- 10 Russian Ruble = 0.51 BGN
- 10 Turkish Lire = 8.37 BGN
- 10 Romanian Leu = 4.47 BGN

Exchanging money

Foreign currency is not accepted in most shops, bars, cafes and restaurants. Paying by credit / debit card is accepted in some shops and restaurants, but not everywhere.



Make sure you have some local cash - it is best to use banks or ATMs to exchange / withdraw cash. Never change money on the street.

Exchange booths open only in ski season. Best rates are found in Sofia, where exceptionally good conversion rates are offered on Vitosha Street, towards the NDK (National Palace of Culture), on Vasil Levski (City Exchange) and Graf Ignatiev Street (opposite the market).

ATMs near the gondola lift in Bansko:

- Gondola lift
- Investment Bank (iBank) Bansko Royal Towers, "BRT"
- Kempinski Hotel, by main door.
- Opposite Happy End on Pirin Street
- Along from Euphoria on left towards "BRT"
- Piraeus Bank (up hill from Kempinski hotel)
- First Investment Bank (just 30 metres down from Strazhite hotel)

Most ATM's are marked within the places section in the **Bansko App**.

NOTE: First Investment Bank is open until 22:00 on Friday and Saturday evenings, in the ski season. In peak New Year times it is open on a Sunday too.

Local food, drink and public transport are inexpensive compared with other European countries.

Imported and genuine brand goods and international brands cost the same as anywhere in Europe. VAT (TVA) is 20%.

Bansko, all seasons mountain resort, has a season that typically starts around the 15th December and runs until the 14th April (approximately).

Actual lift times may vary according to the season's snowfall and temperature.

Snow cannon cover the vast majority of the pistes.

After good snowfall, many new ski areas open up amongst the trees, and also under some of the lifts.

Bansko has some dangerous areas subject to avalanches. Always ski and snow board off piste with an experienced local.

Language and Culture

Bulgarian language is a Slavic language and the alphabet is Cyrillic. It's difficult to learn unless you speak another language from the Slavic group (Serbian, Russian, Slovenian, etc).



If you speak English or Russian you will be generally well understood. Many Bansko locals use a very peculiar dialect; known as Banski.

Knowing some useful phrases is appreciated.

Top phrases to use in Bulgaria:

- Hello/Hi – Здравейте! [Zdraveite]
- Yes / No – Da / Ne
- Good afternoon/evening – Добър ден/вечер [Dobar den/vecher]
- Good bye – Довиждане / Чао [Dovijdane] [chao]
- How are you? – Как си? [Kak si]
- Thank you! – Благодаря/ Мерси [Blagodaria] [Mersi]
- Excuse me - Извинете [Izvinete]
- What is your name? – Как се Kazhavash
- Do you speak English? – Говорите ли английски? [Govorite li angliiski]
- I don't understand – Не разбирам [Ne razbiram]
- The bill, please – Може ли сметката [Moje li smetkata]
- Can you help me? – Можете ли да ми помогнете? [Možete li da mi pomognete]



You will not find any unusual cultural habits or etiquette very different from the rest of Europe, apart from the nodding of the head to mean No (rather than Yes)

Bulgarians generally **nod** for "Yes" in the same way we nod for "No" -- and vice versa.

Emphatic nodding may mean "No" and therefore disagreement!

An expressionless facial appearance is normal. Smiling is usually reserved for friends.

A lack of a facial smile on a Bulgarian should not be interpreted as being impolite.

Getting there

Most major European airlines have direct flights to the capital of Bulgaria – Sofia. Sofia is 169 km north of Bansko. Use the E79 route from the southern ring road. Follow signs to Kulata. Turn right signposted to Bansko and Razlog after the town of Simitli.

Airlines from UK: British Airways (LHR T5); Bulgaria Air (LHR T4); Whizz Air (Stansted) and EasyJet (London Gatwick and London Luton) and Manchester. Try charter airlines too, Balkan Holidays, Thomson etc.

Low cost and charter airlines land at the old Terminal 1; schedule airlines land at Terminal 2

Flying to Plovdiv Airport (Ryanair for now) or Thessaloniki (EasyJet, Wizz Air) in Greece are two other options.

Driving from neighbouring Greece, FYRO Macedonia, Serbia, Romania and Turkey is straightforward.

Smoking ban

No smoking is enforced in all bars, restaurants and public spaces in Bulgaria.

Visas

From outside Schengen area you need a visa: Turkish and Russian citizens need to apply for a Visa **before** travelling to Bansko. A signed stamped certificate to show where you are staying should be requested from your accommodation provider.

Travelling to Bansko

From the airport, you can use public transport, private transfer or hire a car. Taxis are covered under bus below:



1. Bus

Take a **taxi** to one of two bus stations in Sofia. Note the times of the last bus are 16:45 and 17:30 respectively. The bus stops at Blagoevgrad and its ultimate destination is Gotse Delchev.

- Central bus station (tel +359 90021000)
Departure times: 7;30; 08;30; 09;45; 14;00; 16;45
- Ovcha Kupel bus station (tel +359 2/955 5362)
Departure times: 7:00, 9:20, 10:30, 11:50, 12:30, 13:05, 13:55, 15:10, 15:28, 15:49, 16:20, 16:30, 17:30.

A one-way ticket costs 15 lv and takes 3 hours 15 mins (160 km) as it stops in all major towns on the way.

A fifteen minute comfort break stop is made at Blagoevgrad. The journey is reasonable, suitable if you are without children and luggage, time is not critical, or you are on a tight budget.

The taxi to any of the bus stations will be 17 to 25 leva depending on the traffic, and the taxi company.

When emerging from airport arrivals at Sofia Airport, be very careful which taxi you choose. There are taxi tricks –



so **avoid** anyone inviting you to their taxi. Always check rate per kilometer in passenger side windscreen (0.59 – 0.69 BGN is day rate as of 2012).

Head straight to the exit where the taxis of the official **OK Supertrans** company are queued. Try to find one of the following taxi companies (watch out for fakes):

- OK Supertrans: tel **+359 2/ 973 2121** - office at the Sofia airport and Central bus station. The new Volkswagen caddy vehicles are best for luggage.
- Yellow taxi: tel. **+359 2/ 91119**

2. Private transfer or self drive

You can order a hire car, or book a private transfer, in advance via BanskoBlog.com. Free in vehicle WiFi and free Bansko town and piste map, by hand is presented to all passengers

If you decide to self drive, buy a map from any petrol station. Cheapest petrol can be found just after first Shell garage on E79 after Pernik. 10 stotinki cheaper per litre is the normal discount. It is the same petrol as the other petrol stations.

Warning: Bulgarian drivers are amongst the most dangerous in Europe. Expect impatience, tailgating and



possibly aggressive driving. Most drivers of motor vehicles and buses do not like to follow each other. Expect to be overtaken, even when least expected.

YouTube video for directions and **speed** camera locations from Sofia airport to Bansko:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2VjYaJAgtg>

Observe the speed limits:

- 50 km/h in towns;
- 90 km/h intercity roads;
- 130 km/h on most highways (140 km/h on Stara Zagora to Burgas section when travelling to coast)

Just because a road has **four** lanes, this does not make it a highway

If stopped by traffic **police**, make sure you produce all the necessary documents (driving license, car documentation, passport).

Proper winter tyres are essential. Snow chains, for back up are a legal requirement in winter.



Headlights should be turned on during daylight hours as well as night time between during all the months of the year.

When planning your transfer back to Sofia airport, allow at least three hours before check-in. If weather conditions are poor, then longer is advisable.

Roads are usually well maintained.

Heavy snow can make the journey longer, albeit roads are generally kept clear.

Bansko taxis

Local taxi try DINKO: lygnal1963@abv.bg



Accommodation

There is a good choice for accommodation in Bansko catering for every taste and budget – luxury hotels, apartment hotels, family hotels and chalets. Arrange your accommodation well in advance. Many hotels and aparthotels are listed on major booking sites.

For hassle-free skiing, stay in a hotel or apartment near the piste, or within 300 metres of the lift. Booking widge on BanskoBlog.com

The Kempinski Hotel Grand Arena is a more expensive 5-star choice for luxury, and convenience.

St. Ivan Rilski provides 4-star luxury and service, but you may need transport to the lift.

Avalon hotel – a family hotel. Trip Advisor's top rated hotel. Hospitality from James and Vanya Hughes. Avalon curry nights on Thursday and Friday are popular.

Large two and three bedroom luxury apartment booking at BanskoBlog.com.

Large groups, work trips and special corporate ski trips arranged.



Skiing in Bansko

Officially, the ski season starts around the 14th to 18th December and ends mid-April. The actual dates vary from year to year. The resort is generally "snow sure" due to much of the ski domain covered by snow canons.

The busiest times in Bansko are around the New Year, first week of January and UK half term weeks in February (around 5th to 23rd Feb.) If without school age children, avoiding these periods is a sensible choice.

March and April can provide excellent skiing -- often in sunshine, and with few people on the slopes.

In the last few years, there have been World Cup events held in Bansko, which is also a busy time with some piste closures. However do not be put off as the World Cup atmosphere at the stands is superb and it is worth buying a ticket, which includes transport up the mountain.

Bansko will not be hosting a world cup event until 2015 – but still may host a European Cup event.

Ski equipment rental

If you are not bringing your own equipment, it's preferable to book a ski package in advance for a hassle free first day. Look out for the prepaid online discounted booking of ski/board hire and lessons, lift passes as well as transfers at BanskoBlog.com

In BanskoBlog.com booking widget, there are options for ski and snowboard hire, group lessons, private lessons, friends and family lessons, lift passes.

Transfers from Sofia airport, Sofia city as well as Plovdiv and Thessaloniki airports all need to be booked in advance to avoid over payment.

Lift passes

A lift pass is required for using the lift system. Keep your pass in your left jacket pocket or left arm pocket. The turnstile gates will open automatically as you approach the card read on the left.

NOTE: No printed photograph is required for lift pass



... all you need to know about Bansko



You can prebook 6-day and 13-day lift passes through [BanskoBlog](http://BanskoBlog.com). Have in mind that there is a 7 day notice period for lift pass orders.

If you plan 27+ days skiing in Bansko, then buying a season pass is an option. For 2012/13 the price is 1,450 leva.

The VIP pass gives access to a priority "VIP" lane to the gondola lift.

If you do not have a prepaid lift pass, buying in the resort is easy. Buy lift passes at the gondola kiosk at the bottom of the ski zone. Cash desk opening times:

08:30 to 17:30 Monday to Sunday all season.

A digital photo is taken at the booth for each lift pass owner. (Not required for prepay passes). You can buy a lift pass anytime the previous day for the following day's use. This saves time queuing for a pass in the morning. In busy times cash desk opens from 18:00 until 22:00.

Before departure, give your card back at the kiosk or the lift pass refund machine.



This machine is located opposite the gondola and the **5 leva** ski card deposit is refunded.

High season lift pass prices (in leva) are found at BanskoBlog.com. Summer lift pass prices and time are found there too

*Valid documents have to be provided for the discounted passes

Do not be surprised if there is a queue at the base gondola lift station. Often people go at the same time. On peak days you may have to wait for thirty minutes, or occasionally longer. Watch out for the minibuses that are in operation during peak periods.

Be patient, or, to avoid queues, use the [BanskoBlog Live Web Cam](#) overlooking the gondola kiosk.

The New Year period and mid February weeks often see a lift queue. This may start form from around 08:15 to 09:00.

A good idea to avoid peak morning left queue is to reserve a taxi or minibus to take you up to Banderishka Poliana.



Pistes

Download the Bansko mobile app in App store for iOS and Google Play for Android mobile devices. The app has live information on lift operation and piste opening and an interactive map for restaurants, bars and businesses. Regular updates increase the range of info available.

Insurance

NOTE that prepaid lift passes do not include mountain insurance. Please arrange adequate winter sports cover at the time of booking. Lift passes bought at the gondola include mountain insurance.

As it is impossible to always predict weather, it is highly advisable to buy insurance that covers lift closure and holiday cancellation.

Off piste skiing and snowboarding is often excluded on policies. Read the terms carefully.

Arrange medical insurance cover in advance of travel.

(NOTE for property owners in Bulgaria: Watch out for the insurance terms that typically exclude long periods where the property is not occupied, unless water systems are totally drained.)

Ski pistes

The pistes are located in two main areas - Chalin Valog (1100-1600m) and Shiligarnika (1700- 2500m). They are approximately 10 kilometers above the town.

The resort offers 75 km of maintained ski runs: 30% Beginners, 45% Intermediate and 35% Advanced. The colour convention for the piste scale of difficulty is as follows:

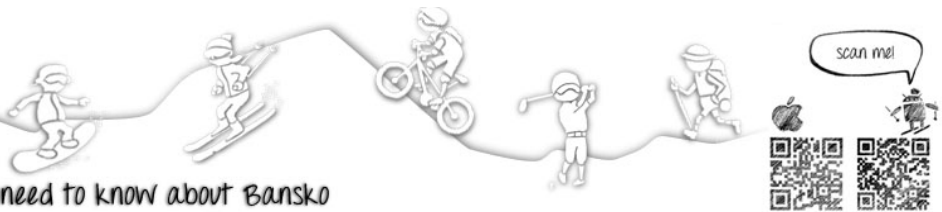
Blue = easy: Bansko; Plateau 1; Shiligarnik 1; Shiligarnik 2, Ski road 1 and 2

Red = hard: Banderishka; Balkaniada; Todorka; Stara Pista; Ulen, Plateau 2; Strazhite, Cerna Mogilla (not open); Chalin valog (note black section here too).

Black = difficult: Tomba; Chalin Valog

Beginners can be comfortable on the **16 km** blue run down from the top to the base station.

Intermediate and advanced skiers will be happy on the Tomba black run and Chalin Valog.



First day itinerary

After a good night's sleep an early night and hearty breakfast, if you have not already, then book your après ski **massage** time for the early evening.

Get to ski / snowboard hire shop by 08:15 to collect boots and skis / snow boards if you are due a 10:00 lesson.

Warm up and stretch. Make the most of your day.

Watch this snowboard and ski warm up exercise plan on YouTube:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2FuOXM-BIY>

Pistes may be best in the morning if temperatures are above freezing during the day.

Preferably, you already have your lift pass at 18:00 the day before; or buy one at the gondola kiosk the day before).

Bansko town map, by hand (pick up for free



in resort) or go to this link and print out your own town and piste map:

<http://banskoblog.com/2012/12/bansko-town-map-by-hand/>

If you are skiing for less than six days, then you cannot pre pay your pass. (Only 6 and 13 day passes may be prebooked) Buy yours at 08:30. Sometimes there is a queue.

Your lift pass should be safely tucked away in your ski jacket arm pocket. It can stay there all week. When your skiing is over for the week, you reclaim 5 lev at one of the ticket machines outside the cash desk.

So all set, strolling past any lift pass queue at the kiosk you arrive at the gondola lift station.

The gondola lift takes ten minutes to reach Chalin Valog at 1467m, and a further 22 minutes for the cable car to climb to Bundersishka, which at 1635m.

If you are a confident snow boarder, or skier you can get out at the first Gondola stop (Chalin Valog) then spend an hour or so on slopes 15 and 16. These are both quite demanding pistes, so if not yet feeling confident, just wait until later in the week before attempting them.

Slope 16 is the easier, starting as a red and then reducing to a blue nearer the chair lift. Slope 15 starts as a black and can be quite challenging all the way down.



Both of these slopes take you to either Slope #1, the ski road, which takes you back to the Gondola base at Bansko, or to a chair lift to take you back to the top of Chalin Valog.

Stay on the gondola lift at midway station if not trying Chalin Valog.

Take a coffee or chocolate at the **VIP Room** at Bandersishka Poliana. The base for most of the piste skiing.

If you're a confident boarder / skier then you'll be itching to see the view from the plateau (Plato) area. So take Banderitsa 1 and then Banderitsa 2 lifts to the highest point at 2,600 metres.

From here you can tackle the World Cup Tomba run or enjoy the blues 11 and 3 on the Plato. Look for the chair lift Plato on 11 to take you up again.

If you are not an early riser, do not worry – lifts on the mountain stop at 16:15.

After 12:30 buy a half-day pass. Take some sunrays and watch the sun go low. From mid March onwards the long days in Bansko can be felt. This is a distinct advantage over ski resorts further to the North.

If it is a powder snow day, then explore routes under the lifts and through the trees. Take advice before undertaking off piste riding and skiing. That said, Bansko offers tremendous backcountry terrain. More backcountry skiing is available at nearby Dobrinishte. The Bezbog chairlift is not covered by the Bansko ski pass. Worth a visit in good snow conditions.

Lunch

Take lunch at one of the mountain restaurants. You will be hungry. When the weather is cold, we burn more calories than normal

See mountain restaurant section for my favourites.

Afternoon

Plan to take the last lift to the very top and then make your way down to Shilgarnika (1725metres) where there are panoramic views down to Bansko town below.

Then pick the winding easy routes taking you all the way back home. The famous 'ski road', Piste #1, is slightly easier than Piste #2, but neither will present any challenge. Both runs take you through superb scenery as they wind down the 10.2 kms to the base of the mountain.

To finish the day, meet up with friends and stop at the **Peshterite** bar, both just off the ski road. An après ski atmosphere often develops at both places. Particularly good food is served at the Peshterite.

Evening

Go to a Spa, take a Jacuzzi, have a massage.



Get ready for dinner. Decide on a mehana. There are over two hundred to choose from. For fine Italian dining try the Kempinski Come Prima or Soprano's.

For pizza, pasta and general international, Victoria is always popular. Book Victoria at busy times). For a local mehana, try The Log House, Boyanova, Dedo Kotse, Motikata and others.

For a budget meal, try Bistro Pirin.

For a good steak, try The Steak House, opposite the Lion pub or Chateau Antique. All these are marked on the Bansko app.

Reliable salads including the famous shopska salad can be found in most places. Rakia is the local spirit that traditionally accompanies the salad starter.

Second day itinerary / Friday & Saturday nights

Go skiing and snow boarding at Chalin Valog. Perfect area for mixed abilities. Take the easy button drag lift. Two blacks and a red run for the confident riders and skiers.

HINT: From Chalin Valog cross the button lift on to a road to take you across to the ski road and the Peshterite bar.

Ski down later 17:30 / 18:00. Most of the way is floodlit. Enjoy the peace. Warning: some hire shops close at 17:30.

Advanced riders and skiers should explore routes through trees when conditions allow (take advice first before venturing off piste)

Dinner: In ski season try curry night at the **Avalon** (Thursday's nights). Or regular Burger available every evening.

Euphoria Bar & Grill: A good après ski place that usually better lively as the night goes on. Bog screen. Live bands

Happy End Bar & Night Club at 20:00. Live band and DJ Shark.

Penguins: Good après ski, good food and live band.

Sing Sing (at the Kempinski) at 22:30, live band (Taboo + others

Euphoria: live band Wednesday / Thursday nights (check)

2012/13 bar reviews added 31st December 2013

What Bansko restaurants and bars do you recommend? This is one of the most often asked questions I receive.

And this year more than ever it's good to pick off a Bansko stay knowing what and where it is.

So read on for the places and for the changes that regulars will find.

Victoria

Pirin Street opposite the Kempinski Grand Arena. I wrote about this branch of this small Sofia chain back in 1999 and the

immediate success of Victoria has continued and its popularity has never waned.

Victoria is open all year.

It's convenient and reliable. But this year has seen some frantic last minute building work going on.

The revamped entrance is one thing to see... but it's the building of a dining area annex that is different. This new area opens up on to the side terrace. Large glass doors here will make Victoria a fine place to soak up some rays on those sunny Banskó days.

I really like the job they have done here. It harks back to the Swiss mountain chalet feel – a touch of Verbier style. There's plenty of wood and stone and a deer antlers "chandelier". A warming corner fireplace. We were there on when there was a large gathering of where the tables are joined together.

The new "handmade" pizzas, with the option of real mozzarella are a reliable fall back option good. The pork with mash potato and mushroom sauce was passable. Some reasonable vegetarian options were tried in the special Advent (no meat) menu including respectable stuffed peppers.

The wine selection has been totally overhauled and in some respects for the better. Whilst we have seen the departure of the Midalidare Grand Cuvee which for me was the nest wine of the

list, we are seeing a selection of the Fabulous Light Castle wines. Mark ups are fair. Angelus Estate wines including their white and red (Stallion) are all recommended.

I only wish more places, including Victoria, would offer half bottles.

Service with a smile

Victoria deserves a lot of the credit of introducing a smile, instead of a sneer, to guests. I was expecting to be disappointed with the departure of Svetlana, the manager who did so much to make guests feel welcome.

But I should not have feared, all the staff, both old and new, was attentive.

Plus points

Service, wide menu, nice décor, unobtrusive music

Minus points

A draught in the annex. Our window seat could not be recommended for cold nights. Cold air comes through the cracks. Pick the table by the fire.

An over long menu. Choose carefully.

Sushi and Teppanyaki Bar & Grill, Kempinski

There is a new third Teppanyaki table in the Kempinski and those who have not been should make this I must do visit.

Teppanyaki is a skilled chef performing in front of where you sit. As knives twist and tricks are performed your grilled fish, shellfish, meats, rice and noodle dishes are assembled with great skill. This is quality and makes a fine upscale evening.

The Sing Sing piano bar next door is my favourite nightclub in Bansko, but prices reflect the setting.

Kempinski Lobby bar

This lobby bar has to be mentioned. I never recommend places I do not enjoy – but please bear in mind some of the places discussed sponsor Bansko Blog. It's here in the Lobby bar I can relax, the music is unobtrusive and the range of tea here is wonderful.

On my last visit, the Darjeeling tea came in a pot kept warm with the flame of a candle.

Kempinski Come Prima

One of the best steaks I have had in Bansko. The wine list is excellent but some prices are a little over inflated. Pasta is served al dente – the way it should be.

Bring the plastic or a good amount of leva if you like wine -- and if you like wine and steak you will need around 110 lv per head

Amvrosia restaurant at the Premier Luxury Mountain Resort

I had the great pleasure to attend the Gastronomy festival, and whilst this special event was hugely enjoyable.

Amvrosia dining room is one of the finest in Bansko.

But I can say that, without exception, service standards are amongst the best to be found in Bansko. And that includes a welcoming smile.

Full review:

<http://banskoblog.com/2012/11/bansko-calendar-2013-by-hand>

Euphoria

If you walk down to the lights from the Kempinski and turn left you will see the popular sign of Euphoria. This has undergone some reworking of the oval bar area. This small change seem to have made Euphoria a nicer place to be.

A slightly overlong menu, with pictures, has been winning praise from some friends. Be warned that the music can be loud here. On the plus side the DJ is excellent as is the sound system.

We wait to see what the live band will be like when they start their regular performances.

Service from both the bar staff and the waiting staff was friendly and attentive. Quick service too.

Like **Penguins**, and **Lions Pub**, the owner of all three has kept this a "Free House" and therefore can supply beer from breweries other than the big multinationals (Carlsberg etc).

Surveying the bar area I see a good selection of beers including English beer Fuller's London Pride, Wychwood's Hobgoblin and real English cider (all supplied by beers.bg).

With Bulgarian beer quality following the UK's in the early 70's (i.e. reduce money on quality of product increase the budget for marketing); this makes a nice dive to quality.

The upper terrace is the best après ski sun deck in Bansko. Lots of people watching and its hard to justify moving from here once planted after coming off the hill. (open in winter ski season only)

The large projector screen has all the football as well as some splendid winter ski and boarding videos.

The numerous large screen TV's mean none of the Sky sporting action need be missed.

Penguins Bar & Diner

Penguins is located 100 metres across the lights we come to the new Penguins. Regulars will see it is the old Friendly pub, but completely extended and renovated.

The style is a little New England and with a colourful light shades is pleasingly different.

A nice bar area sees a good selection of beers including English beer from Fuller's London Pride, Wychwood's Hobgoblin and real English cider (all supplied by beers.bg).

Service was good in my last visit, which was for a beer and some nachos.

Queen's Pub

A huge new sign adorns the entrance and what looks like an outdoor grill area.

With some competitive prices and a live band every night and resident magician this place is set to be popular.

At the moment, untested food.

The 100 lv New Year party looks like excellent value.

Bistro Pirin

Opposite the ice skating rink, this has become a firm favourite of mine for good local pricing and reliable simple local dishes.

The roaring log fire makes this a top après ski destination.



The Log House

Great value, large portions. Located opposite Euphoria. Try the pork knuckle.

Pirin 75

The expatriate favourite has received a very nice refit and expansion.

There is often a buzzy vibe here and for this season the Greek owners have taken care to make some nice design detailing.

Service is always friendly, prices are competitive for the area; the best coffee in town. Their frappe is the best in town.

Pirin 75 serves best as a daytime café but even better as the after dinner meeting spot. The DJ plays stuff you'll know and love. For a late night in a convenient location, Pirin 75 comes recommended. Be warned, the music is loud.

Lions Pub

For many regular Bansko visitors the Lions Pub is the original. Located on the corner of Glazne street and Pirin Street, opposite Pirin 75 it is very easy to find. Whilst its Sky TV is an attraction in its own right, I have always been rather reluctant to go there.

But this was in the days pre June 1st 2012.

This was a time when many of Bulgaria's bars resembled one huge smoke fest.

Lions Pub has been transformed. A new lick of paint and the no smoking clean air will make this more popular for the coming season. The efficient bar staff have helped make this a reliable place to both start and end an evening.

It's open at 08:00

Lions is a good place to go for full English breakfast and stays open till the early hours. DJ Shark will often build up a good buzz and a merry crowd will probably be dancing in the lower bar area.

Food is not been mentioned simply because I have not tried an evening meal here. Recent reports have been favourable – but please comment below if you have anything to say.

How to find the bars and restaurants of Bansko

All of the above restaurant and bars may be found in the Bansko app.



Free to download for Apple iOS and Android mobile devices. Just click on the places/bars and restaurants button and you will see both an interactive map and listing.

Clicking on a pin will give you more detail including booking. The best of the mountain restaurants are also shown

Finding WiFi

Bulgaria is in the top three most connected places in the whole of Europe.

Free WiFi is normal and all the mentioned bars have wifi. In the resort your location is marked by a Green pin and this will help you navigate around the town.

Key places such as the gondola lift, pharmacies and ATM's are also marked.

Once in resort, or even from your transfer driver if you book vis Bansko Blog, you will receive a free town and piste map. Drawn by hand, Or you can go to this page to download you free copy.

Special occasion itinerary

Snowboard / ski in the morning.

Book a helicopter flight or snowmobile session in the afternoon.



Fine dining at the Kempinski's Come Prima restaurant. Try the rib of beef at Come Prima or the sushi and Teppanyaki bar and grill where the show from your chef will impress.

Try the chocolate spaghetti desert. Sing Sing piano bar, at the Kempinski, is a superb end to the evening.

Safety

Never forget that keeping safe on the slopes is completely your responsibility. Assess all the risks starting from weather conditions and weather forecast.

Make sure you are fit and relaxed. Do not ski if you are over tired, ill, unduly stressed or under the influence of alcohol. Some exercise before coming out on will help extend your skiing hours.

Both snowboarding and skiing are demanding physically. If you start to feel very tired, stop.

More injuries happen when tired.

Have good equipment. Helmets are sensible, comfortable and inexpensive. Helmet hire options on BanskoBlog online booking form. (Children, 11 and under, are free when hiring children's equipment).

Observe piste etiquette. Learn how to fall safely.

Never go off piste without a fully qualified guide and only with all the gear such as shovel and transponder.



If a piste is closed, do not go on it.

What if an injury still happens?

If you suspect you are badly hurt, stay still and call Bansko mountain rescue on:

The pan-European emergency number **112**

There is a medical centre at the gondola base with X-ray facility where you can receive first aid. Make sure you have medical insurance, and a credit card on you.

The doctors here are considered professional. However, anything serious and you should go to Sofia.

Of course, none of the above will happen to you and you will enjoy a perfect day first day out.

Tired or hungry? Head to a café or restaurant. Warm up and relax.

Food and drink in the mountains



Five areas on the mountain.

- **Plateau (Plato) :** The Goat (nice fire; food okay)
- **Bandersihka Poliana:** Ulen restaurants and fast food + VIP Room (recommended)
- **Shiligarnika:** Bla Bla: Hotel Shiligarnika (100m down road from Bla Bla)
- **Chalin Valog:** Izvorite (Wednesday afternoons from 14:00 are party days – watch snowboarders do tricks); BBQ
- **Ski Road:** Peshterite; recommended.

Blue and white tent bars are fine. Service sometimes indifferent. Hot chocolate is good as are the hot (mulled) wine, beer and spirits. Hot dogs are just okay, when hungry.

Après Ski

Food & Drink

If you are staying in an apartment and prefer to cook, you can stock up well at the two major supermarkets:

Valan – the big supermarket opposite the petrol station as you enter Bansko.

Winter supermarket – above Queen’s pub on Pirin street, next to the ice rink. Preferred option. Open is ski season only.

NOTE: In Razlog town Penny and LIDL supermarkets make good alternative supermarkets for food shopping.

All have all the ingredients for your home cooking. Many have hot dishes for you to take away and eat at home. There are small supermarkets all over the town that offer the basic range of foods, but prices are generally higher than those listed above.

For fruit and vegetables, go down Pirin street walk past the Church square and below the main square to the local open market.

The market has seasonal local vegetables that will make for a great meal. There are a couple of **butcher** shops on Pirin street selling fresh local meat. Greek shop on Glazne street is great for proper Olives, olive oil and great produce.

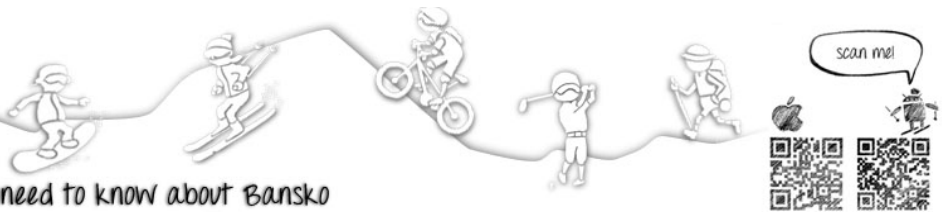
All are recommended.

Do not hesitate to buy a bottle of Bulgarian wine or Bulgarian beer to go with your meal.

Wine the choice of high-quality Bulgarian wines at reasonable prices is stunning. Depending on your preference, look for wines of the following brands:



... all you need to know about Bansko



Light Castle: all wines

Enira by Bessa Valley winery;

Katarzhyna Estate (Question mark; Contemplations; Seven Grapes; Mezzek);

Midalidare: Eric Moro & **Silver** Angel (whites) and all reds by Midalidare Estate;

Santa Sarah **Black C** by Santa Sarah; Nobile and Hypnose by Logodaj; TerraTangra and many more.

Avoid the cheapest ranges and drinking the 10 -20 leva range upwards will bring the most wine pleasure.

Beer

Bulgaria has quite a number of beer brands. Most of the local breweries are owned by foreign brands and produce Pirinsko, Stella Artois, Beck's, Heineken, Kamenitsa, Staropramen, Tuborg, Amstel, Carlsberg, Staropramen, Starobrnno, Bolyarka, Ariana, Bolyarka, Zagorka.

There are some very good local beers that have been changed to the international standards and are not as good as they used to be, but are still good value for money:

Zagorka (moderately strong lager, best in bottles);



... all you need to know about Bansko



Stolichno (ok dark beer, caramel, chocolaty -- and a little smoky in taste);

Pirinsko (the most popular beer in Bansko – a pleasant light lager at 4.2% probably the best);

Shumensko (a tasty creamy light lager).

Staropramen (higher quality than most mass market beer).

Bolyarka Lighter option

Ariana ok and cheap

Real **British** beer, such as Robinsons, **Trooper** ale, Fuller's London **Pride**, Fuller's **Honey Dew** (Organic) and Fuller's **Porter** are available at Euphoria, Penguins, Queens Pub, Lions Pub,

Harry's bar (Kandahar apartments), Cobra lager at Mr Singh's. There are other good dark beer options from Shumensko, Kamenitsa and Staropramen, of varying quality.

Most are stocked by bars in winter only.

If buying from a supermarket, buy glass instead of plastic bottle for better taste (1.25-3.00 leva a bottle).

Restaurants

The Bansko restaurant scene is diverse.



Fine dining and cheap eats and street food are numerous. **Take away** and home delivery ensure that food and drink are never far away.

With more than 500 places to eat and drink, ask for tips and read online the places that others are enjoying.

Mehanas

The local traditional restaurants are called "mehanas".

Mehanas are the most ubiquitous type of restaurant in Banskó. Expect a more casual tavern/pub-like atmosphere and sometimes live loud folk music. Food can be excellent value too.

Some traditional mehanas target the unwary foreigners with tourist prices -- that do not justify the quality.

A good mehana though should offer cosy atmosphere, big tasty dishes and prices that reflect the quality and level of restaurant

Salads and starters are generally nice, homemade flat bread recommended, local beans (bob) and potatoes particularly tasty.

For the main course, local specialties usually comprise of different kinds of meats cooked on charcoal / barbeque, or, in a pot with vegetables.

Zehtindjieva Kushta

Marked some 50m off Pirin street. Great prices and sound food

Bistro Pirin

95 Pirin St.; a favourite après ski place. Warm log fire, good prices and simple food. Try the dish of the day for lunch.

Dedo Kotse

On the main square; open all year round. Review:
<http://banskoblog.com/2012/03/dedo-kotse-mehana/>

Momini Dvori

2 Nikola Vaptsarov Str; +35974988076, +359885406595

Molerite

41 Glaze Street, +359 888 844 944

Vakanova Kashta

2 Pirin St; +359 898695228

Dedo Pene

1 A. Buinov St., next to the church

Todeva House

7 Neophit Rilski St.; +359 888 496 025; +359 896 665 409



Banski Han

2 Vassil Kanchev St.; +359 899 533334, +359 888 990663

International

Victoria Restaurant - one of the most popular in Bansko, part of a chain in Sofia. All kinds of Italian and Bulgarian dishes, salads, soups, pizza. Perfect for after-ski lunch. Suitable for children too. Reasonable prices and excellent service. Reservation and home delivery:

119 Pirin Street — opposite the Kempinski, close to the gondola

Open All Year: 10:00 to 24:00;

Tel: +359 887 761 500

Boyanovi Pizza – 22 Pirin St. Low prices and open all year.

Indian cuisine

Avalon Hotel – curry nights every Thursday and Friday in ski season. Booking essential for James and Vania's popular, and completely curry nights. Excellent food, value and service. Family friendly, children eat for free; +359 749 883 99

Mr Singh's Under the Lion hotel. Great curry, fair prices.

Fine dining

Come Prima, Kempinski Grand Arena. Tel: +359 749 88888.

Chateau Antique Excellent cuisine, wonderful surroundings. Full review <http://banskoblog.com/2012/12/chateau-antique-more-than-another-restaurant/>

Amvrosia, at the Premier Luxury Mountain Resort...
<http://banskoblog.com/2012/12/amvrosia-restaurant-premier-luxury-mountain-resort-fit-for-the-gods/>

Moderato, St Ivan Rilski hotel. Tel: +359 749 87400

Soprano's 94 Pirin Street. In the Happy End by gondola. Review <http://banskoblog.com/2011/12/sopranos-restaurant-ski-chic/>

Burgers at Avalon Hotel: +359 749 883 99 Best burgers in town.

Sushi

Sushi bar and Teppanyaki grill at the Kempinski Grand Arena Bansko – excellent food and service, live cooking by Asian chefs, fine atmosphere and corresponding prices; +359 749 88888

Sushi bar at St. Ivan Rilski Tel: +359 749 87400

Sushi at Vila Roka, 37 Glazne Street Tel: +359 749 99337

Night life and bars

There is a late bar, and night club, in Banskó for all music tastes and ages, usually open till the morning.

Here are some favourites:

Sing Sing piano bar, in the Kempinski Grand Arena – excellent piano bar for live music acts Friday and Saturday nights (in ski season). Tabbu are the resident live band. Be prepared to be impressed.

Pirin 75 – open all day, great coffee, well priced drinks, party after 9 p.m. with great DJ mixes, relaxed atmosphere.

No. 75 Pirin street next to Lion pub. Open all year.

Happy End Bar – live bands and DJ on Friday and Saturday nights; opposite the gondola lift. Open all year. 94 Pirin Street.

Harry's bar – at the Kandahar hotel. "The Lizard" plays guitar to great acclaim. British craft beer stocked. 4 Kraleov Dvor Street.
Tel: +359 878 33 3344

Euphoria – live band Wednesday / Thursday nights. Chinese and international food. Nice interior. Popular après ski sun deck. Nayden Gerov street (turn right main light when going up hill towards the gondola).

Lion Pub – English food and atmosphere. Football on SKY; Glazne St. opposite Strazhite hotel



Friendly Bar – English food and atmosphere, football on SKY;
Glazne St. opposite Strazhite hotel

Oxygen – party for the clubbing crowd; +359 899 130490

Nai club – pop folk club atmosphere; Florimont Hotel

Queen's pub – very large, live bands; up from ice rink on Pirin street

JJ Murphy's – Irish pub just round the corner from the Lion hotel

Child care and children's playground

(click on links for more details)

Ice Age Kids center – for hourly or longer stay (half-day; all-day, a week), including food, animation, birthday parties, entertainment; 37 Glazne St, Villa Roka; +359 888 705097

For a kindergarten including ski lessons, use Ulen's Kindergarten (4-7 year). See link for details, booking only available in resort.

Mall Bansko has a children's unsupervised play area (8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.)

SPAs and swimming pools

Some of the new hotels and complexes in Bansko have really modern and luxurious SPA centres with sauna, steam room, relax room, Jacuzzi, swimming pools and sitting out areas for relaxation.

Even if you are not staying in one of them, they usually allow visitors to pay to go in the SPA for the day.

Book a massage or another beauty treatment at a good price.

[Kempinski Grand Arena Bansko Zaleg SPA](#)

[Premier Luxury Mountain Resort](#)

[St. Ivan Rilsky Wellness and SPA](#)

[Victoria SPA and Gym at Premier Luxury Mountain Resort](#)

[Pirin Golf Club Hotel and SPA, Razlog](#)

[Katarino Hotel and SPA, Razlog](#)

Try the "communist era" local hot spring public bath in Dobrinishte (7km away). Naked bathing only.

Wearing a swimsuit is not the etiquette here. Expect pure, clean and hot spring water.

Separate men's and women's hot spring pools.



Shopping

Bansko is not yet a shopping destination like Sofia, but you can still find everything you need for your stay and Pirin street has an Italian clothes shop. Beware replicas.

Some famous brands have arrived in Bansko, especially when it comes to sports and ski clothes.

Conte of Florence, Head, Rossignol, The North Face, Billabong, Rip Curl, Roxy, Salomon, Burton, Fischer and more can all be found in the shops down Pirin street. German designer brand Bogner, has its own shop.

A full listing with addresses is here:

<http://banskoblog.com/2009/11/ski-fashion-2010/>

Be warned, some shops sell fake branded goods. Max Sport, Conte de Florence and SLS shops recommended for genuine high quality goods.

You can find a couple of very good shops offering jewelry as well. Fur and leather goods shops popular too.

There are many souvenir shops scattered around Bansko that offer colourful memories of Bulgaria.

Mall Bansko – property owners who need electrical appliances for their flat can find a full range in Technomarket (now located near town square). Ski gear and clothes may be found here also.

The mall is located just across the river (next to BanskoRoyalTowers) and 150 metres from the gondola

Day trips

There are some day trips that you can make to two nearby towns – Razlog and Dobrinishte. Both are interesting, local small towns. For a local village then Godlevo has a fine mehana and nice views. Taxi required. Expect to pay 15 lev approx. each way.

If you fancy a more city like experience, go to the administrative centre of the area –

Blagoevgrad. This regional town is just 56 km away from Bansko and has a youthful atmosphere due to its two major universities. Take the bus to Blagoevgrad from Bansko bus station located at the bottom of town. 8 Lev each way

Enjoy people watching the pedestrian on the main streets. They're full of restaurants, cafes, and boutiques.

Other entertainment

Ice rink – 1,200 square metre ice rink on Pirin Street. Open until 22:00 in main ski season only. It generally closes from around 20th March – but may be earlier depending on temperatures.

Pirin Golf club for a session of golf, or for the club house for a fine dining restaurant. Located 10 km outside Bansko. On the main road to Sofia.

Pirin Golf hotel restaurant and luxury Spa worth visiting.



Narrow gauge (760mm) **Septemvri to Dobrinishte railway** --
Nine trains a day. Four hour journey time from one end to the other.

Highly recommended. Avramovo station is the highest in the Balkans at 1,267 metres.

Useful article on the Dobrinishte to Septemvri narrow gauge railway is here:

<http://www.andrewgrantham.co.uk/bulgarian-narrow-gauge/>

Time table: <http://www.bdz.bg/>

Stations on the route: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septemvri-Dobrinishte_narrow_gauge_line

Useful telephone numbers

Emergency – 112

Police – 160

Fire - 166

Bansko medical centre (Gondola lift): +359 747 80780



Razlog Hospital: +359 747 89723 (1 St. Kiril and Metodii Str, Razlog)

Doctors in Bansko

DR ROSKOF	0887208413
DR DOOZMANCHINA	0886434236
DR DJOPANOF	0887335306
DR TERZIEV	0898778700

The Gondola emergency centre is recommended most for typical emergency treatment. Only call a doctor if absolutely necessary.

Pharmacists (recommend Sanita on North West corner of main square) stocks most medicines. Others located on Pirin Street and by the Winter Supermarket (in ski season). Bansko app has most pharmacies marked.

British Embassy in Sofia

9 Moskovksa St. Sofia; +359 2 933 9222;
e-mail: information@british-embassy.bg
www.british-embassy.bg

British Embassy Bansko representatives:



James Hughes tel: 089 44 88 224

John Sutton tel: 088 65 43 262

Sofia Airport - +359 2 937 2211

General tips

- Bansko App on your iPhone, ipad, ipod touch. Go to itunes and type "Bansko". Interactive map
- Bansko App for Android. Interactive map
- Avoid restaurants with touts.
- Is the restaurant popular with Bulgarians?
- Bulgaria and Bansko town are generally safe. Crime, including theft, happens from time to time. So common sense should prevail.
- Whatever happens, do not panic, this is a European country and there is always a way out of a situation. Locals are friendly and ready to help tourists.
- Before getting on a taxi in Bansko, check the sticker with the prices per km on the back window, or negotiate a price for your destination
- If you stay for a longer period it's cheaper, and more convenient, to use a local prepaid phone card with one of the main providers: Globul, Mtel or Vivacom
- Free WiFi is available in most big hotels, and almost all Bansko's cafes, bars and restaurants



More tips:

BanskoBlog.com

twitter [@bansko](https://twitter.com/bansko)

facebook.com/banskoblog (events and photographs)

youtube.com/banskoblog (snow and weather reports)

Top four FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions)

1. Where is the best place to change currency?

Typically at a bank in Bansko (not the airport)

2. Can I leave my skis at the ski hire?

Most ski hire places you can. Be sure to check opening times.

3. Where do lessons start from?

Most lessons start at Banderishka Poliana by the big PISTE MAP; i.e. at the top of the gondola lift walk straight ahead and you will see it.

4. How Long Should I Allow To Get To The Airport / To Bansko?

Allow **two hours thirty minutes**, each way. If weather conditions are really poor, then we may advise longer. Journey time early morning or late evening is 2 hours 30 minutes (without stop).

Summer activities and excursions

In the summer, Bansko provides a shelter from the heat in the cities.

Summer lift timetable

Go to BanskoBlog.com for times

Summer bus to Vihren hut. 6 lev (€3 approx one way) is an excellent option as most hiking routes start from Vihren hut

The summer bus service (from 15th June) starts at the bus station (located next to Florimont hotel at the bottom of town) at 8.30AM.

The bus also stops opposite the Glazne Hotel and the **Strazhite** Hotel (opposite Lion pub) on the way up. It comes back at 6pm and there are also some times during the mid afternoon it comes back. There is a timetable on the side of the bus.

Hiking (it's FREE)

The Pirin and Rila mountains are said to be best for hiking and peak climbing. Many mountain walking routes start from the region. Make sure you have a map (or guide). Check weather first. Safety is your responsibility, so consider your ability, fitness and equipment.

Be prepared but hire a personal guide for longer hikes as some paths are not so well marked. Contact BanskoBlog for details.

For downloadable Pirin hiking **map**; click link:

<http://www.banskoski.com/bg/bansko/60/>

Details of **FREE** guided hiking day trips in BanskoBlog.com

<http://banskoblog.com/2012/07/free-hiking/>

NOTES:

- Family friendly
- starting locations vary
- tip your guide 20 lev adult (5 lev child)

Free hiking days are suitable for all the family. The day's hike is determined by ability of weakest in group.

=====

Vihren (2914) is the highest peak you can climb in Pirin. The scenes of the gorgeous marble peaks are unbeatable. There are about twenty huts where you can find shelter on the main routes.



However, unless you are a seasoned hiker, hiring a guide for longer treks makes sense. See Banskoblog to book popular hiking tours.

Long 2/3/5 days' routes in the Pirin are not suitable for everybody. You have to be fit and ready to experience some tough conditions. The huts are very basic. But most sell food and drink.

However, there are great one-day spots for having a picnic in the mountains.

For example, you can drive up the ski road from Bansko and keep going up until you see a café. From here you can stop and take the obvious route up to a lake. A short, but pleasant, 20 minutes walk.

FREE hiking tours

Look out for dates and meeting times on banskoblog.com in August for **FREE hiking**. Just turn up, no prebooking required. Please tip your guide.

Hiking routes and tours

- All prices include mountain guide, lunch and transportation.
- All tours may be booked via banskoblog.com
- Free guided hiking: <http://banskoblog.com/2012/07/free-hiking>



One day tour (easy level)

Bansko to Vihren hut by bus. Walk from Vihrin hut to Okoto lake and then back (1/2 hours). Visit Baikusheva mura (the oldest tree in Bulgaria. Claimed to be 1,300 years old!

45 lev per person

One day tour (easy level)

Bansko to the chair lift at Dobrinishte. Chair lift to Bezbog hut and walk to Popovo lake and back(3/4 hours).

65 lev per person

One day tour (easy level)

Bansko to Demianitsa chalet by bus. Walk from Demianitsa to lake Vasilashko and then back (4/5 hours).

50 lev per person

One day tour (easy level)

Bansko to Vihrin hut by bus. Walk from Vihrin hut to Muratovo lake, Ribnoto and Okoto lake and then back (3/4 hours).

50 lev per person

One day tour (Medium level). The Five Lake tour

Bansko to Vihrin hut by bus. Vihrin to Muratovo, Ribnoto, Dalgoto, Jabeshko and Okoto lakes (3/4 hours)

55 lev per person

One day tour (Medium level)

Bansko to Dobrinishte by bus. Dobrinishte to Bezbog by chair lift hut, From Bezbog to Demianitsa through Popov and Valiavishki lakes (6/7 hrs)

65 lev per person

One day tour (Medium level)

Bansko to Vihrin hut by bus. Vihrin to Demianitsa hut, through Banderishki and Vasilashkite (5/6 hours)

60 lev per person

One day tour (Advanced level)

Bansko to Vihren hut by bus. Vihren hut to Vihren peak (2,914m). Be warned this hike has some steep sections and sharp drop offs. Not for the faint of heart. (5/6 hrs)

60 lev per person

Three day tour

Day 1: Bezbog to Tevnoto lake (5/6 hrs) Overnight

Day 2: Tevnoto lake to Vihrin hut (6/7 hrs) Overnight

Day 3: Vihren hut to Yavorov hut (8/9 hrs). Bus to Bansko



175 lev

Rafting

Rafting on the Stresdna river gorge, some thirty minutes from Bansko. A highly recommended activity. Best May to July.

The Mesta river provides a calmer place to practice and enjoy the nature.

50 lev per person.

Microlight flights

Flying high around the Pirin and Rila mountains is a breathtaking experience. A fully qualified pilot will take you up high. Bring your camera.

120 lev per person

Horse riding

Through lush forest, and open pastures on the Rila mountain horse riding lets you get up close to the unique nature of the Bansko region. Mountain lakes and crystal clean air. Perivolass

(<http://www.perivolassbg.com>) provides horse riding lessons for both adults and children

80 lev per person

ATV tours

ATV (All Terrain Vehicles) are huge fun and provide much adrenalin. The 4x4 vehicles climb and descend steep slopes with ease. These tours include all protective clothing and helmet, transportation and lunch box.

You will see the real Bulgaria -- shepherds, sheep and mules. Forests and streams unfold – for good reason that ATV action is one of the favourite adrenaline activities.

Easy 80 lev per person

Hard 140 lev per person

Off road safari

An 4x4 enables you to explore the scenery that would without hiking for hours. The tracks in the Pirin and Rila mountains make for a fast, safe and fun way to see the mountains.

65 lev per person

Rock climbing

The Pirin mountain highest peak is 2914 metres. Quite alpine in feel. Plenty of faces to keep the advanced climbers happy, there are one day rock climbing days suitable for beginners and intermediates. **70 lev** per person

Canyoning

This takes place on the Kosovska river, close to the foot of the Pirin and close to the village of Vlahi. Descending the 25 metre Vlahi waterfall in a seat, held by secured ropes, will be an experience you'll remember.

90 lev per person

Bear Park

The dancing bear park is a refuge for abused bears in Belitsa. Run in association with Four Paws, it takes around an hour to get to from Bansko.

Be prepared for a bumpy track on the way. A beautiful experience and well worth it. Info here: <http://www.four-paws.org.uk/website/belitsa>

Enquire for price for one day transport to Park. Take a picnic, as food choice in the café there is limited.

Mountain Biking

The town has a skill dirt track in the main park.

www.mtb-bansko.com and for info on mtb in Bansko.

Download MTB route maps such as Foxy Lady, Dead Dog, Perfect Day, Road to Nowhere, and more at mtb-bansko.com.

“Road to Nowhere” annual **MTB race** (end of July) www.mtb-bansko.com for 2013 dates.

“Three mountain ultra” 120 km mtb race. See www.mtb-bansko.com for more.

Video and article on race:

<http://banskoblog.com/2011/08/mountain-biking-video>

Tours

Mountain bike tours will take you to Dobrinishte and Bania and are suitable for families with children. Ride is geared for ability. A great way to explore the area and appreciate the surrounding nature.

55 lev per person

Bansko to Rila Monastery

A UNESCO world heritage site not to be missed. A masterpiece of Bulgarian revival architecture. 8,800 m² with an inner yard of 3,300 m².

Rila Monastery is the most famous of Bulgaria’s Eastern Orthodox monasteries. in a rectangular form.



75 lev per person (including lunch box)

Bansko to Melnik and Rozhen monastery

A popular trip, not least due to the opportunity to taste some fine Melnik wine. The Mavrud grape that is unique to Bulgaria is grown in this region. It produces some fine rich and strong wines.

The natural sand pyramid rock structures are impressive – like giant obelisks. Melnik is the smallest city in Bulgaria with a population of just 385 people.

75 lev per person

For customized MTB tours of Rila, Rhodopi, Stara Planina (Including Vratsa) and Belogradchick contact BanskoBlog.com

Fishing

A fishing license is required to fish in Bulgaria. This licence is issued by the ministry of forestry (outlet in Dobrinishte and Razlog). However you need a permanent residence card for this. It may be possible to find someone in town to get one for you.

Warning; fishing without a **licence** could mean confiscation of all your equipment and a fine.



The safest way is to go fishing at the private lake of the local fishing association ("Vasilak") to the West of Bansko (located after the army barracks). Fish for trout and carp. Pay 10 Leva plus the weight of the fish caught you take home.

A simple restaurant is located there for sustenance. Open, usually, from June 1st.

Bansko Jazz festival

The Bansko International Jazz Festival Every year from 8th to 13th August.

Read more on Bansko Blog about [Dr Iliev](#), the Festival organizer, whose passion for Jazz has kept the annual festival going for so many years.

banskojazzfest.com for programme

Jazz Fest is one of the very best weeks to be in Bansko.

Apart from main stage performances, there are often sessions from 22:30 till the early hours at the Kempinski Hotel Grand Arena Bansko. Check before arriving.



The Good Beer Show @ BRT (Bansko Royal Towers). 3rd August 2013 and 10th August 2013

- Beer tasting
- Food
- DJ music
- Free use of swimming pool
- Free entry
- Starts midday

Free guided hiking

<http://banskoblog.com/2012/07/free-hiking/>

- 4th August to 11th August. 2013 – see BanskoBlog.com for more
- Take gondola lift around 08:30
- 10 lv return
- Meet at 09:30 top of gondola, Banderishka Poliana by big piste map
- Bring family (children 7+).
- Walk around three hours

[facebook.com/banskoblog](https://www.facebook.com/banskoblog) for updates

With lots of daytime activities, as well as plenty of restaurants to try, this Jazz Fest period is a perfect time to come for hiking, mtb'ing, horse riding, fishing, spa relaxation and tours.

Opera Festival

Held in **late August** the Bansko Opera Fest is a joy.



More info for 2013 dates and programme:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bansko-Opera-Fest/>

Subscribe at BanskoBlog.com for newsletter and updates to “The Essential Guide to Bansko” (it’s free) for more

Sofia events

(combine Bansko with Sofia)

Bansko Film Festival

Every November the Bansko International Film Festival screens some of the most acclaimed adventure films.

<http://banskofilmfest.com/> for dates and info.

Visiting Sofia

Accommodation: [Sofia apartments](#)

Restaurants: sofiarestaurants.bg

<http://www.freesofiatour.com/> for a most interesting tour of Sofia. Don’t miss learning about this fascinating capital of Bulgaria.

A combined Summer (Bansko) mountain and city (Sofia) break is easy to arrange -- and good value for money.



Thank you for reading **The Essential Guide to Bansko.**

We update and expand this guide regularly. Your comments help us do this.

If you have any recommendations of places for inclusion then please contact lance@banskoblog.com

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Do you spot any inaccuracies or omissions? Or do you disagree with a recommendation? Then please email your comments. We will update this guide.

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