**Bansko**

**Categories**

**Good For**

Beginners

Intermediates

Snowboarders

Families

Non-skiers

**Data**

**Beginner Runs**

8

**Intermediate Runs**

11

**Advanced Runs**

2

**Total Runs**

21

**Lifts**

13

**Chairs**

8

**Drags**

4

**Gondola Cable Cars**

1

**Parks**

1

**Pipes**

1

**Weather**

**Annual Snowfall**

2m (6.6 ft).

**Overview**

The Bulgarian ski resort of Bansko remained relatively unknown until as recently as the start of this century, but that all changed when a gondola was built linking the atmospheric old mountain village to the ski areas, creating one of the biggest lift-served verticals in eastern Europe. The international ski community quickly took note.

As popularity grew, huge investment followed and development was prolific. More than half a dozen fast quad and six-seat chairlifts were installed along with dozens of new hotels, including some of the region’s first 5-star offerings.

This construction boom has however since slowed, due in part to the economic downturn and in part to the controversy of illegal construction taking place on land designated within the Pirin National Park, a UNESCO world heritage site.

Today modern Bansko is a very unique ski destination, with a huge range of accommodation and a modern ski area, but also the attraction of an ancient village with 19th-century stone buildings, cobbled streets and a clock tower that’s been ticking for more than 150 years.

**Location**

Bansko is situated on the River Glazne in the northeastern foothills of the Pirin Mountains, 165km (103 miles) south of Bulgaria’s capital Sofia and 50km (31 miles) east of the border with Macedonia. It lies north of Pirin National Park and its highest mountain, Mt Vihren, peaks at 2,914m (9,560ft).

**Website**

http://www.banskoski.com

**Piste Map**

http://www.banskoski.com/bg/bansko/57/#

**Hit The Slopes**

The runs at Bansko are relatively evenly divided among ability levels – a third of the slopes are suitable for beginners, while intermediates and advanced skiers both have around 35% of the slopes to themselves.

Skiers can take the Bunderishka gondola up to the slopes from the town. At the top, there are nursery slopes for beginners to explore, while a blue run leads from here back to the resort base. Further up the mountain there is a greater choice of runs and a terrain park for freestylers. The longest run at Bansko is 10km (6 miles).

Bansko is in desperate need of a second gondola, as the success of the first has led to long queues at busy times. Construction was due to begin some years ago, however there has been no sign of work commencing as yet.

More than 40 snow cannons cover most of the slopes with artificial snow, boosting the resort's natural base and consequently improving its snow reliability. The ski season here is relatively comparable to most resorts in the Alps, with the slopes generally open from mid-December to mid-April.

The Ulen Ski and Snowboard School is the largest in the region, offering ski and snowboard lessons for all levels. For those without their own skis, equipment hire is available at many stores located near the gondola, on Ulitsa Pirin.

Other snow sports facilities here include cross-country trails and a rare biathlon training centre, which has played host to major international competitions.

**Bansko**

**Resort**

925

**Base**

990

**Top**

2560

**General**

**Beyond The Slopes**

Bansko's history comes to life in the Old Town. Worth visiting is the dark and peaceful Sveta Troitsa Church (Ploshtad Vuzhrazhdane), with its 30m-high (98ft) clock tower built in 1835, and the Icon Museum (Ulitsa Yane Sandanski 3), which houses works by local 19th-century painters. The magnificent Rila Monastery can be visited in a day trip by car or bus.

Back on the snow; those with a head for heights can undertake a spot of ski mountaineering, while snow mobile tours are also available from the ski school. There is also an ice rink in the town, which is open from 1800 to 2000 every evening.

For some post-ski pampering, head to the Kempinski Hotel Grand Arena (tel: +359 749 88888; [www.kempinski.com](http://www.kempinski-bansko.com/)), where there is a luxury spa offering a range of treatments available to both guests and non guests.

**Family Fun**

There are plenty of ski and snowboard schools suitable for children, including Ulen Ski and Snowboard School by the lift station. This school also has a kindergarten for four- to seven-year-olds, with drag lifts, a ski roundabout and fun facilities.

Adjacent to the Hotel Strazhite (Ulitsa Glazne 7) is a bowling alley, and there is also an ice rink near the Kempinski Hotel on Ulitsa Pirin. For younger kids, Babini (Ulitsa Bratya Veleganovi 14B) is a craft centre and café offering DIY pottery, painting and sock-knitting in a cosy atmosphere.

**Retail Therapy**

For inexpensive gifts, head to the Sunday morning market on Ulitsa Tsar Simeon, one of the liveliest in southern Bulgaria. Among its wares are clothes, shoes and souvenirs. Alternatively, browse the souvenir shops dotted around the town for distinctive hand-woven striped rugs, colourful cloth bags, hand-painted pottery, huge cow bells and wooden kitchen utensils. The street-stall in the middle of Ploshtad Nikola Vaptsarov also has a good selection of handmade items, and the Crafts & Textile Exhibition, adjacent to House-Museum of Nikola Vaptsarov (Ploshtad Nikola Vaptsarov), sells embroidered clothing and fabrics.

Although not the place for fashion-label hunting, there are plenty of clothes, sunglasses and jewellery outlets along Ulitsa Pirin.

**Splashing Out**

Leap off the mountain on a tandem paragliding trip and savour the views of Bansko, the River Glazne and the surrounding Pirin Mountains. Further information is available from the tourist office in the centre of town.

**Apres Ski**

Apres ski in Bansko is much more Costa Brava than Cote d’Azur with dozens of small bars competing for your business with drinks prices normally half that of the Alps, and sometimes even cheaper.

The London Pub (tel: +359 895 009 755) has rapidly established itself as a home away from home for the British community, and run a taxi service for patrons staying a considerable distance away.

if you are searching for an earthy, traditional Bulgarian night out, a smattering of down-to-earth bars and clubs are located around Ploshtad Vazrazhdane in the old part of town with The Baryakova Tavern (tel: +359 899 670 734) being one of the most popular.

Of the many other options, Penguins Bar (tel: +359 879 126 552) is always busy and has live music as well as karaoke evenings.

**Eating Out**

There’s an ever growing selection of eateries in Bansko.

Dotted around the town are over 40 *mehanas* – wonderful traditional eating houses, where fine local wine and sometimes live folk music (in busy seasons) accompany hearty Bulgarian food. There is little to choose between them; the décor usually features dark wood and menus stick to the staples of meats, salads and fish (in season).

But with Bansko’s growth there are many other international style options too. Le Retro (tel: +359 877 660 306) is a very popular French café, while The Irish Harp (tel: +359 899 956 667) only serves County Kildare beef imported fresh from Ireland. Victoria (tel: +359 291 100) is the most popular pizza option and does deliveries – useful for when tired legs mean you don’t want to leave the chalet.

For those who would rather eat on the hoof, occasional snack stalls serving pizza slices, burgers or freshly-made pancakes are dotted around the town.

**Transport**

**Getting There**

Nearest airport: Sofia Airport (SOF).

Distance to resort: 170km (106 miles).

Driving time: 2 hours 30 minutes.

**Getting Around**

Bansko is small enough to get around on foot, and the gondola can be reached easily from most parts of town.

**Hotels**

Most of the accommodation in Bansko consists of hotels that are nestled between homes and shops, with pretty ‘fairytale’ architecture a major feature. There is a good choice of upmarket hotels in Bansko, as well as apartments and newer hotels around the gondola station.

**Lucky Bansko Aparthotel**

The Lucky Bansko Aparthotel is located a fair distance from the main resort and slopes, but compromises with a free shuttle bus service and desirable amenities including a small spa, free Wi-Fi access and an on-site restaurant that serves a good selection of vegetarian dishes.

**Category**

Moderate

**Thoroughfare**

4-10 Kir Blago Todev Street

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Razlog

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

XXX

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

+359 28 066 178.

**Website**

http://luckybansko.com/en/

**Premier Luxury Mountain Resort**

Bansko’s newest luxury 5-star option is located a short walk from the resort centre and main slopes, and boasts extensive spa facilities and a highly regarded on-site restaurant to boot.

**Category**

Moderate

**Thoroughfare**

11, Karamanitza Str

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Bansko

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

2770

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

+359 74 950 500.

**Website**

http:// www.banskohotelpremier.com

**Pirin River Ski and Spa**

This very popular, family friendly, 3-star complex, features 44 spacious apartments in a complex with indoor swimming pool, fitness centre, restaurant and underground parking. A spa with steam bath and sauna is also available to guests.

**Category**

Moderate

**Thoroughfare**

74-78 Ikonom Chuchulain Stree

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Bansko

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

2770

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

+359 74 985 664.

**Website**

http://www.pirinriver.com

**Bio Hotel Moravsko Village**

This family-run eco hotel is located just off the main route from Bansko and Razlog to Simitli, 12km (7 miles) from the resort centre. Comfortable accommodation and friendly service abounds, and there is a focus on the use of organic produce in the on-site restaurant.

**Category**

Cheap

**Thoroughfare**

Blagoevgrad

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Razlog

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

2770

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

+359 877 433 333.

**Website**

http://biohotel-bg.com

**Avalon Hotel**

Nestled in a quiet part of Bansko near the Old Town, this medium-sized family-run hotel has simple rooms. The suites in this hotel include a balcony, living room and cable TV.

**Category**

Moderate

**Thoroughfare**

El Tepe 4

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Bansko

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

2770

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

+359 74 988 399.

**Website**

http://avalonhotelbansko.com

**Kempinski Hotel Grand Arena**

Bansko's first 5-star hotel is situated next to the gondola and has 132 spacious rooms and 27 suites, as well as a pool, sauna and well-equipped spa. Dining is available in three chic eateries serving Japanese, Mediterranean and international cuisine; there are also Bulgarian themed-nights to enjoy here.

**Category**

Luxury

**Thoroughfare**

Ulitsa Pirin 96

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Bansko

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

2770

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

+359 74 988 888.

**Website**

http://www.kempinski.com