**Bansko**

**Categories**

**Good For**

Beginners

Intermediates

Snowboarders

Families

Non-skiers

**Data**

**Beginner Runs**

5

**Intermediate Runs**

9

**Advanced Runs**

1

**Total Runs**

15

**Lifts**

15

**Chairs**

9

**Drags**

5

**Gondola Cable Cars**

1

**Parks**

1

**Pipes**

1

**Weather**

**Annual Snowfall**

2m (6.6 ft).

**Overview**

Bansko ski resort has hundreds of years of history with its old centre featuring traditional Bulgarian stone and timber houses, open public squares, cobbled streets and winding roads. A few years ago, however, the construction of a long gondola linking the old town to the ski area totally transformed the resort from a regional backwater to a major international destination.

Soon after the turn of the millennium, Bansko became one of Europe's fastest growing winter holiday destinations, fuelled by second-home investments from Western Europe. This has slowed since with the worldwide economic slowdown, and there has also been some controversy surrounding construction on national parkland designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

However, the many new fast chairlifts on the mountain and one of the world's longest ski runs back down to the village have made Bansko ski resort the leading Eastern European ski destination. As a consequence, Bansko has become a model most other resorts in the region attempt to emulate.

**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 (Ulitsa Pirin 96; tel: (0749) 88888; [www.kempinski.com](http://www.kempinski-bansko.com/)), where there is a luxury spa offering a range of treatments open to 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 shops 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 town.

**Apres Ski**

Instead of chic bars and clubs pumping out the latest club hits, après-ski in Bansko is more of an earthy, traditional Bulgarian night out. In addition to the plethora of traditional restaurants or *mehanas*, where the local wines flow with the food and music, a smattering of down-to-earth bars and clubs are located around Ploshtad Vazrazhdane in the old part of town.

Happy End (Ulitsa Pirin 94) next to the lift station is a large, animated bar with occasional live music, and attracts a wide range of skiers that have come straight from the slopes. Other popular venues include English Lion Pub (Ulitsa Pirin 90A), where live televised sport is a particular draw, and Amigo Bar, which serves cocktails.

**Eating Out**

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 striped hand-woven clothes, and menus are offer meats, decent salads, fish (in season) and traditional dishes.

Other options include Restaurant VIP Room (tel: (0885) 917 505) at the Banderishka station for Italian food, and the Sushi Bar & Teppanyaki Grill in the Kempinski Hotel Grand Arena Arena (Ulitsa Pirin 96; tel: (0749) 88888; [www.kempinski.com](http://www.kempinski-bansko.com/)) for Japanese delicacies.

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.

**Kempinski Hotel Grand Arena**

Bansko's only 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**

XXX

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

(0749) 88888.

**Website**

http://www.kempinski.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**

XXX

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

(0749) 88399.

**Website**

http://avalonhotelbansko.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**

XXX

**Country**

Bulgaria

**Telephone**

(0877) 433 333.

**Website**

http://biohotel-bg.com