

## Bansko ski apartments, to buy or not to buy

It used to be an isolated typical Balkan village known to Bulgarians as the place of birth of many national figures and the "banski starets", a dry spicy sausage. The history of Bansko goes back ages as one can tell by the high stone fences built to defend houses and households from the Ottomans. As with most mountain communities, the people of Bansko were "workaholics" before Wall Street coined the term and part of their earnings went out to bribe the local Pashas or to keep the bad guys at bay. There weren't any "magnificent seven" peasant lovers to protect them; they had to rely on themselves. And they did well.

Nowadays Bansko is a small town of 10,000 souls visited by more than 400,000 skiers and holiday makers in high season. A short walk around town will show to what extent things have changed in the last years. Construction is a booming business here with no less than 30 sites open over the last 18 months. You can get a piece of a potato farm land for 200 euros the square meter, if you're lucky, and the average price of a off-plan apartment is 1300 euros/sqm.

If you have the itch to jump on the next plane and buy the dream Bansko apartment you have seen on the net, make sure you know exactly where it is being built. We have maps on our site (Bansko map ) and you'd better get familiar with some street names and neighborhoods. As one can tell after visiting a dozen property web sites, very few publish maps but most claim they are located close both to the gondola lift and to the old Bansko. That's one statement that doesn't hold water when you go there and check the distances. Because the distance from the central Vaptsarov square to the lift station on my car's odometer is exactly 1840m. That's a little bit over a mile. Not that's a huge distance by Aspen standards but Bansko is not Aspen, the streets are narrow and the potholes tricky.

If staying close to the Gondola is a must look for the Gramadeto district . That's the name of a small area uphill from the Bansko center, where the local people used to grow onions and potatoes. There are no more onions and potatoes in Gramadeto. It's one big construction site with heavy trucks and cement mixers working to make new homes and bigger potholes. During high season however, all heavy work is banned. The happy residents who already bought there take a short horizontal stroll to the gondola while their new ski apartments quietly appreciate under the Bansko sun.

Meanwhile downtown, coffee shops and taverns are opening up and smoke of grilled meat starts to fill up the air. There are over 400 restaurants and taverns (mehanas) in Bansko but I don't think somebody took seriously to count them. The very pleasant pedestrian and cobbled streets are filled with them. The cuisine is very similar all over, the service varies, so when you find a place to your taste just stick with it. In another piece I'll pay tribute to my favorites.

Real estate listings located near the old Bansko center do have a story to tell. For starters, this is what makes Bansko Bansko- the old wood houses with the thick stone fences and the smoke filled dusk. Even after a tough night at the local Irish pub you can't mistake it for Tignes or Chamonix.

Then if you want to spend your summer time off in your brand new ski studio apartment or to rent it out in low season, being close to the gondola doesn't help much: the lift is shut for the summer, most hotels also. Gramadeto has this melancholic feeling about it like Brighton beach in December. At the same time the central square attracts the crowds with outdoor cafes, live music and flowers everywhere.

Bansko works hard to change its mountain and ski resort image and become a year-round destination. The annual jazz festival is getting good reviews; a Ian Woosnam-designed golf course is being built nearby. Not that I play golf but it's a nice feature to have on a sales brochure. And don't forget your bathing suit and sun lotions: the Greek Aegian Sea coast is now only 1 1/2 hours away. ©2007 NTC International, Inc.

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