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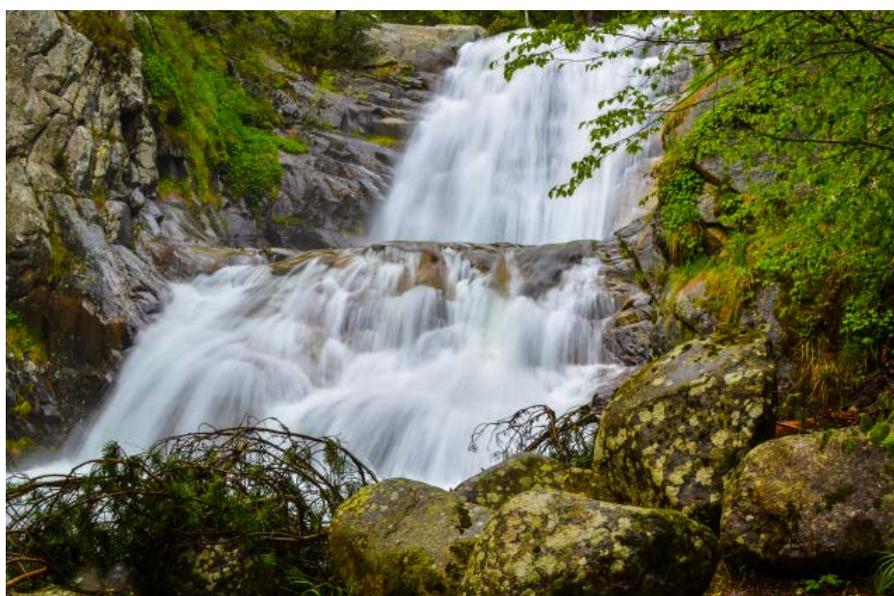
European Territorial Cooperation Programme
Greece - Bulgaria 2007-2013

Project „A complete approach for the joint management of natural resources in the cross-border area aiming at the promotion of ecotourism and the protection of ecosystems”

(NATouR)

Contract № B1.11.13

Plan for development of ecotourism in the Municipality of Sandanski



Developed by:

PBS LTD

Gotse Delchev, Bulgaria

34 Polkovnik Boris Drangov Str.

pibies@abv.bg

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The present document has been drafted within the framework of project „A complete approach for the joint management of natural resources in the cross-border area aiming at the promotion of ecotourism and the protection of ecosystems” (NaTOUR), implemented with the financial assistance of the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece – Bulgaria” 2007 – 2013 co-funded by the European Union through the European Fund for Regional Development.

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Developed by: PBS Ltd

Service Contract № 04 – NATOUR /B1.11.13/ GR-BG 2007 - 2013

Foreword

The present ecotourism development plan for the Municipality of Sandanski has been developed by a team of consultants of PBS Ltd, based in the town of Gotse Delchev by request of Association Business Information and Consulting Center – Sandanski within the framework of project „A complete approach for the joint management of natural resources in the cross-border area aiming at the promotion of ecotourism and the protection of ecosystems” implemented under the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece – Bulgaria 2007–2013”, co-funded by the European Union through the European Fund for Regional Development. The main purpose of the present plan is to analyze and define the essence of ecotourism and its priority in the overall strategic development of the municipality of Sandanski. Another major goal of the analysis is to increase the awareness of stakeholders on the various local ecotouristic resources in order to promote the region of Sandanski as an attractive ecotourism destination.

About the project

Project NATouR or „A complete approach for the joint management of natural resources in the cross-border area aiming at the promotion of ecotourism and the protection of ecosystems” is a 24 month partnership initiative funded under the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece – Bulgaria 2007–2013”. Lead partner of the project is the Greek municipality of Avdera. Bulgarian project partners include Association Business Information and Consulting Center of Sandanski and the Regional Forestry Directorate of Kardzhali. The main objective of the project is to promote new, alternative, innovative and thus sustainable approaches for tourism development (especially ecotourism) as well as to promote the cross-border cooperation in the field of ecotourism and human resource management. The implementation of the project aims to support local environmental organizations in their activities for environmental and natural resources protection along with raising awareness and mobilizing local communities through the development of a single integrated cross-border ecotouristic destination in the common cross-border region of Bulgaria and Greece.

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I. Ecotourism as a non-traditional form of tourism

Definition

Industrialization, globalization and technologicalization are responsible for the growing need among people to get in touch with nature. Its favorable impact on the psyche of people leads to their charging with positive energy and restoring their physical strength. With the increasing need for communication with and return to nature, man would use every free minute to rest. This trend from the recent years will continue in the future.

As general, industries have an impact on the environment and the tourism industry is no exception to this rule. Tourism is the world's largest industry. It accounts for more than 10% of total employment, 11% of global GDP, and total tourist trips are predicted to increase to 1.6 billion by 2020. The World Tourism Organization has recorded 924 million international tourists in 2008, an absolute record.

Tourism has a major and increasing impact on both people and nature. Effects can be negative as well as positive. Environmental impacts caused by tourism are known for many years. These impacts on the environment and ecosystems are almost incalculable, and their adverse effects are endless. Inappropriate tourism development and practice can degrade habitats and landscapes, deplete natural resources, and generate waste and pollution. In contrast, responsible tourism can help to generate awareness and support for conservation of the environment and local culture, and create economic opportunities for countries and communities.

Since ecotourism is a relatively new sector of the tourism industry, it has created substantial interest, as well as debates and discussions, many of which are still conducted on various issues.

One of the first definitions of ecotourism was made in 1983 by the Mexican architect Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin, and is defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as: *"That form of environmentally responsible tourism that involves travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the object of enjoying, admiring, and studying the nature (the scenery, wild plants and animals), as well as any cultural aspect (both past and present) found in these areas, through a process which promotes conservation, has a low impact on the environment and on culture and favors the active and socioeconomically beneficial involvement of local communities"*.

According to some authors, the term "ecotourism" is associated with Hetzer, who introduced it in 1965. Although references and definitions of ecotourism can be traced back more than 20 years ago, controversy on accurate, precise, and well formulated definition has not stopped all the time.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (TIES, 1990). Ecotourism is a set of principles that have been successfully implemented in various global communities, and are supported by extensive industry expertise and academic research. Ecotourism, when properly exercised, based on these principles is an example of the benefits of social and environmentally sound development of the tourism. Ecotourism is about *uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel*. This means that those

who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism principles:

- Minimize impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

The most significant effort to secure global agreement on the concept of ecotourism was achieved at the World Ecotourism Conference in Quebec in 2002 - a year under the auspices of the United Nations. The conference accepts that ecotourism embraces the principles of sustainable tourism, concerning the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism. It also adopted the following specific principles which distinguish ecotourism from the wider concept of sustainable tourism:

- Contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage,
- Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and
- operation, and contributing to their well-being,
- Interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors,
- Lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organized tours for
- small size groups.

Importance of Ecotourism

As we saw above the tourism industry is one of the main industries in the world and it is constantly growing. The largest share of this growth is accounted for ecotourism. According to the WTO of all costs associated with international travel, approximately 7% are due to ecotourism. If tourism as general marks an average annual growth rate of 4%, the increase of trips in the wild has a rate of 10 to 30%.

The more the public is aware of the fragility of the environment, the more it is aware of the environmental problems. The more society is aware of the environmental problems the more the people want to know about endangered habitats and seek to understand the challenges for the protection of ecosystems, through their experience. Over the years, tourism has proven to be an important tool for the protection and conservation.

With the introduction of this relatively new type of tourism a new type of tourist is born. The ecotourist is more demanding and attentive to the environment and local communities. World Tourism Organization and the International Ecotourism Society define the image of the eco-tourist:

- travels a lot and has a vast experience;
- travels in small groups;
- is well educated;
- has a higher income;
- prefers combination of traditional eco-services with culture and history of visited places;
- Prefers smaller hotels, guesthouses and hostels as accommodation.

For an ecotourist both natural and anthropogenic resources, accommodation and even people living in these places are important.

Ecotourism and environmental protection

Ecotourism can contribute to environmental protection in different ways: 1) It can generate funds to be used for the conservation of protected areas; 2) It can create jobs and thereby create economic incentives for the preservation of protected areas; 3) It can provide environmental education for the visitors 4) It can provide the necessary justification for the protection of particular natural areas or increase the allowances for them; 5) Ecotourism programs can lead to reducing the negative impacts of tourists on nature. Ecotourism can help areas that are not yet officially protected to obtain protection status. Ecotourism, like any other form of tourism, requires the development of infrastructure and the influx of people with different cultures, different values and needs. Therefore people, entrepreneurs and environmentalists must actively counteract the undesirable consequences because ecotourism can have negative effects on the environment.

Effects and limitations of ecotourism

Effects on ecosystems

Improper development of ecotourism leads to degradation of habitats and landscapes, distortion of natural resources and generation of waste and pollution. At the same time, exercising this type of tourism often allows the public to be informed about the problems of ecosystems. This in turn leads to understanding the need to protect these places and generates active behavior in this regard.

Effect on the economy

Ecotourism can generate significant revenue for both the population and the regions. Ecotourism also creates jobs for people who live in nearby areas to protect and preserve the parks, provide services to tourists, etc. Ecotourism can be an opportunity for regions to diversify their economic activities.

Social effects

The rapid increase in the number of visitors to a particular place has a social and cultural impact on communities at local level. Diversification of economic activities and generating additional income leads to improved quality of life in these areas. On the other hand the increase of visitors affects the traditions and customs of local communities.

Limitations of Ecotourism

Although ecotourism has many advantages in terms of protecting the environment, improving the quality of life of host communities and the preservation of culture, the sustainability of its development is often a problem. Profits realized in this business are relatively small, and this often leads to discouragement of investors which has negative effects on the sustainability of ecotourism.

In Bulgaria, although in recent years there is a strong movement in the field of ecotourism, it is still underdeveloped as there is no clear legal framework and good publicity to help tour operators, local authorities and population to develop it. Bulgaria is rich in natural and anthropogenic resources, which if maintained and used properly, will quickly help to

make the country one of the most attractive and popular tourist destinations.

Tourism is one of the main economic sectors, which employs the majority of the population in the municipality. Tourism development is considered as a primary objective in the vision of the municipality for future development, described in the "Strategy for Development of the Municipality of Sandanski". Balneology and SPA tourism are successfully developed due to the rich abundance of mineral springs. Such springs are located in the administrative center - the town of Sandanski, near the village of Rozhen, Hotovo, Lebnitsa, Katuntsi. Mountain, cultural and rural tourism are also very well developed. The area has a wide variety of natural and anthropogenic resources which are one of the main prerequisites for the development of the tourism.

The municipality falls within the Southwest ecotourism destination, which is characterized by rich biological and natural diversity. Within the municipal territory there are two landmarks, a reserve, and parts of the National Park "Pirin". The following goals, set in the national strategy for the development of ecotourism are defined as strategic for the southwest ecotourism destination: conservation of biodiversity; protection of natural and cultural heritage; development of ecotourism market; regional and local development.

It is important to note that a large part of the municipality is included in the Natura 2000.

Several protected areas are outlined:

- Areas for the conservation of birds: Pirin buffer, Kresna, Melnik Sandstone pyramids, Slavyanka, Rupite.

- Areas for protection of habitats: Pirin, Middle Pirin - Alibotush, Kresna-Ilindentsi, Ograzhden-Maleshevo and Rupite-Strumeshnitsa.

Other sites protected by national legislation are Melnik pyramids, Popina laka waterfall and reserve "Alibotus". In addition to protected areas the municipality also includes picturesque lakes, waterfalls and rivers. In the center of Sandanski and Melnik, and some of the surrounding villages can be found ancient trees, the oldest inhabitants of the region.

Municipality is rich in archaeological and architectural monuments. With great importance are the episcopal basilica and early Christian complex in the center of Sandanski, revival houses in Melnik Despot Slav fortress and Bolyar House in Melnik, many churches in Sandanski, Melnik and surrounding villages. Many crafts practiced in the past are still preserved, and each year a festival of crafts is held in Sandanski. The region is famous for its distinctive folklore figures, renowned throughout Bulgaria. Every year the town hosts the festivals "Pirin Folk", Balkan Youth Festival, " The songs of Bisserov Sisters " and many more not so famous events.

Why Sandanski needs to develop a sustainable ecotourism product? The abundance of tourist attractions, protected areas, good tourist infrastructure of the municipality - all this creates the need for tighter control and more attention. These resources are not unlimited. Nature has created a cycle that should not be interrupted. The state of water, soil and air has a direct impact on vegetation. This in turn affects erosion, floods, landslides. If we interrupt the natural cycle we harm not only the environment but also ourselves. Therefore, the best form of tourism that can be practiced in a region with high levels of protected areas is ecotourism as the its main elements, listed below, are not in conflict with any of the requirements for the maintenance of these sensitive areas:

- conservation of biodiversity;
- improving the welfare of local communities;
- protecting the environment;
- awareness and conservation of nature, traditional customs and culture;
- responsible behavior of tourists and tourism businesses to the natural and cultural heritage;
- provision of tourist services from small business to small groups;
- minimal use of natural resources that are not renewable.

1. Strategies and programs related to ecotourism in Sandanski Municipality

Tourism in the region, of Sandanski Municipality is one of the main sections set in the following documents:

1. National Strategy and Action Plan for ecotourism
2. National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development
3. Municipal Development Plan 2007-2013
4. Regional Strategy for Development 2005-2015
5. Management Plan for the National Park "Pirin"
6. Program for sustainable tourism development in the municipality of Sandanski

II. General characteristics of the municipality

1. Location

Municipality of Sandanski /998,4 km², 41,167 inhabitants/ is the largest territory in Blagoevgrad, with 54 settlements - the towns of Sandanski and Melnik and 52 villages. The municipality is located among the majestic Pirin Mountain and the borders with Greece and Macedonia. The

municipality occupies a great part of the large Sandanski-Petrich basin with a picturesque valley of the middle current of Struma River. The location of Sandanski Municipality at the same distances from the economic and transportation centers of Sofia and Thessaloniki (Greece) /160 km/ provides intensive traffic. Through its territory passes the international road E-79 and railway Sofia - Kulata - Athens. Administrative, economic and cultural center of the municipality is the town of Sandanski, which is situated in the southwest slopes of the Pirin Mountain, along the banks of the river Sandanska Bistritsa.

Under the modern city lie the ruins of the ancient city. Settlement near the mineral springs was established in II millennium BC. From the Thracian tribe Medi that inhabited its surroundings comes Spartacus - the leader of the largest uprising (74) in the Roman Empire. To VI century it was one of the first Christian bishop centers in Bulgaria. At the end of the VI century, it was destroyed by barbarian tribes. Since that time it carries the name Sveti Vrach ("sveti" means "saint", "vrach" means "healer") in memory of the brothers Cosmas and Damian - folk healers. City bore this name until 1947 when it was named Sandanski, in honor of Yane Sandanski.

Sandanski is proud of its unique city park named Sveti Vrach in 1981. On a territory of 344 decares there are over 200 Mediterranean plant species. Interesting site are the plane trees, 2 of which are natural landmarks - plane tree in the city center (550 yrs. old and 23 m. high) and plane tree at summer pool (500 yrs. Old and 26 m. high). The park provides excellent opportunities for recreation and entertainment. Here are the stadium, summer theater, swimming pool, pond.

24 km southeast of Sandanski is Melnik, 6 km further is the Rozhen Monastery. 18 km northeast is situated the resort Popina Laka and the 11-meter waterfall. The resort is a starting point for various hiking routes in the mountains.

22 km southeast of Sandanski in southwestern slopes of Southern Pirin is the smallest town in Bulgaria - Melnik. Melnik is one of the most important medieval and Renaissance cities in Bulgarian lands - large administrative, business and cultural center, with developed viticulture, wine making, crafts (goldsmith and homespun) and trade. Melnik wine is sold not only in neighboring and more distant towns in Bulgaria but also in Budapest, Vienna, Venice.

2. Climate and rainfall

The climate of Sandanski is characterized by diversity, due to the large difference in altitude of the mountain and valley areas - Pirin mountain is 3000 meters high, Belasitsa and Slavyanka are over 2000 meters, while the altitude of the Struma River and the administrative center, the town of Sandanski, is about 200 - 240 meters. In the lower parts the Mediterranean climate prevails and the mountain areas are characterized by a temperate climate.

Four climatic regions are differentiated in the municipality of Sandanski - Sandanski-Petrich climatic region; Maleshevo-Pirin mountainous climatic region; Mountain climate region – middle mountain area; Mountain climate region – high mountain area.

Winter in the area is warm, with temperature above 0 °C. Precipitation is predominantly rain. Snow cover rarely stays more than 10 days. This does not apply to high mountain areas where snow lasts from November to

April / May, which is about 150 days a year. The average height of snow in January reaches 100 cm, and in March due to accumulation it reaches 130-140 cm.

In summer the area gets the most sunlight in Bulgaria - 2506 hours. The average annual temperature is +14.7 °C, and the average relative humidity is 66% which is the lowest in Bulgaria.

The average number of days with precipitation exceeding 1 mm is about 69-70. Average annual rainfall is 536 mm for Sandanski, 562 mm for Melnik, 783 mm for the village of Pirin, 835 mm for Popina laka area.

3. Water resources

A number of rivers flow through the municipality of Sandanski. The largest of them and the most important is the Struma River. Part of its waters are used for irrigation of agricultural lands. Its waters are estimated to be relatively clean, as there are no large industrial plants near. It is suitable for fishing. Other rivers flowing through the municipality are: Sandanska Bistritsa (it flows through Sandanski and is one of the attractions in the city park), Pirinska Bistritsa, Bozhdovo, Sklave, Melnik and Lebnitsa rivers.

Other important water resources in the municipality are the mineral water springs. Their total number in the municipality of Sandanski is 80 with temperature from 42 to 81 °C. Only six of them are larger and fully exploited. They are characterized by low mineralization and rich chemical composition, and one of the springs in Sandanski supplies the city pool with mineral water. There are also mineral springs in the villages Levunovo, Hotovo, Katuntsi. In Levunovo there's a mineral water laundry and the water from one of the sources is used for bottling. Mineral waters in the municipality, combined with the climate are ideal for balneotherapy,

prevention of many diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, skin and joint diseases, and also for recreation. Main users of the mineral waters in Sandanski are the spa hotels, the sanatorium and the swimming pool.

4. Balneology

Among the famous Bulgarian resorts, the spa center Sandanski is the most popular and with international significance. Sandanski is known from antiquity for its wonderful climate and mineral springs. Because of the unique climate characteristics and healing properties of the water, Sandanski is recognized climatic and spa resort of national and international importance. Sandanski is ideal for modern climatotherapy on a scientific basis, spa treatment, rehabilitation, primary and secondary prevention and recreation. The following diseases can be treated here:

Nonspecific chronic and allergic respiratory diseases: bronchitis, asthma, allergic rhinitis, sinusitis, pharyngitis conditions after pneumonia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease / COPD /;

Chronic rheumatic diseases: Bekhterev's disease (AS), spondylarthrosis, after fracture state, rheumatoid arthritis;

Diseases of the peripheral nervous system: - neuralgia, neuritis, plexitis; rehabilitation after stroke.

III. Natural sites suitable for ecotourism

Below is a brief description of the most interesting natural sites with potential for ecotourism development in the municipality of Sandanski. Some of them are well known to Bulgarian and foreign tourists, and others need more publicity to become an interesting destination for tourists.

1. Rock and sand formations

Climate, weather and erosion are the cause for the formation of many rock sites in the municipality of Sandanski. Their interesting shape and legends about them are a good reason to be visited.

1.1 Melnik pyramids



The most famous rock formations in the municipality of Sandanski are the Melnik Pyramids. They are spread over Melnik and the villages of Karlanovo, Rozhen, Sushitsa, and are conditionally divided into Melnik, Rozhen and Karlanovo pyramids. The pyramids are natural sand formings, formed by the erosion activity of wind and water. With its different forms they look like sandstone mushrooms, minarets, swords, pyramids, cones. The highest are in the village of Karlanovo - about 100 meters. The whole beauty of the pyramids can be seen best from the Rozen Saddle. The sandstone formings are situated on altitude of 350-850 m and consist of fine sand and conglomerates of neogen-quarter age. Scientists believe that once this place was large but shallow lake on the bottom of which precipitated sandy loam material. At one point, however, Pirin, Belasitsa and Ograzhden rised up and the lake had to flow away in the south. It often happened that stone materials would fall in the dry valley of the lake and formed thick layers of poorly cemented reddish conglomerates. These new rocks blocked the path of rivers which making their new path formed what is now known as the Melnik Sandstones pyramids. The formation of the pyramids is not completed and it still continues under the effect of river erosion and rain. They are declared as a natural landmark in 1960 with a territory of 1165 ha.

1.2 Karlanovo pyramids

Karlanovo pyramids are landforms located above the village Karlanovo. They represent magnificent sandy scree and extend to Kresna. They are not a separate rock formation but a part of the Melnik Pyramids complex, which includes also the Pyramids of Melnik and Rozhen. They have the form of huge sand towers or obelisks, as some people liken them. Some of them reach 100 m. Unlike Melnik and Rozhen pyramids they are higher, homogeneous and lack the variety of forms. Along with the other pyramids in the complex they were declared a natural landmark in 1960.

1.3 Rozhen pyramids

Rozhen pyramids are located south of the village of Rozhen. They are part of the Melnik Pyramids complex. Rozhen pyramids are hundreds of small and large rock mushrooms.

1.4 Garvanova skala (Raven's rock)

The rock is situated near the village of Kashina in proximity of the "Skoko" waterfall. It is called so, because the local people had confused the nesting bald-headed eagles with ravens. Nowadays, this kind doesn't nest here anymore. The rock is impressively high - over 100 m and each stone block has its own weird shape. There is a legend for this rock which says that once upon a time there was a beautiful girl living in Kashina. Many young men wanted her for a woman, but she refused their proposals. Two dragons also saw her beauty and felt in love with her. They began to fight for her and black clouds hung over the village. With every collision of the two dragons lightnings whistled. Old and young were frustrated by this duel. One night, the young girl dressed in wedding dress went to the rock

and jumped from it with the words: "Dear peasants, sorry. I am going to get a sacrificial rite still young and unmarried".

1.5 Oblata skala (Round rock)

Among the rocks in the area Oblata skala (Round rock), with its specific form, emerges a rock that is located at the northern end of the wall whose top part has a rounded shape. It is located above the area Tremoshnitsa, 14 km from Sandanski, on the route to Popina laka. The region has a beech forest. The area is suitable for tourist hikings.

2. Caves

Caves in the municipality of Sandanski are about 40. None of them, however, is accessible for common tourists and therefore are unknown for most people. For people with good equipment and interest in rock climbing the following sites would be attractive:

2.1 Yavorova dupka

The cave is located 4 km from the village of Pirin, near another cave – "Zmeyova dupka". The name "Yavorova dupka" comes from a legend that Peyo Yavorov was hiding here to escape from the Turks. It is said also that he wrote some of his best poems here. The cave is difficult to access and requires good equipment.

2.2 Zmeyova dupka

The cave is situated 4.5 kilometers from the village of Pirin. It is situated opposite the Yavorova dupka (another reknown cave in the area). The route for the two sites is the same. The name of the cave is associated with a legend for a dragon that lived in it. Legend has it that the dragon

fell in love with the most beautiful girl in the village and every night came to her carrying a large rock to make a house for her. The girl's mother found out about it and to rid her daughter of the dragon, she prepared a poisonous herb and poured it on her daughter. The dragon understood about this and got very mad. His wrath made a big storm. The girl was by the river to fill water at that time. The river dragged her and when the dragon saw this he turned into a tree standing in the middle of the river. The girl grabbed it but the river took them both away and no one ever saw them again.

3. Rivers

3.1 Struma

The river originates from Vitosha. It is the largest river in Western Bulgaria and the fifth-largest in Bulgaria. The river flows south, and its end destination is Greece - passes through the municipality of Serres. The name of the river comes from the bay in which it flows. Its total length is 415 km. In Bulgaria the river passes mostly in high altitude areas. River rapids in the Kresna gorge, which is about 24 kilometers from Sandanski, have become an attraction for lovers of extreme sports (rafting). Riverbanks are convenient for picnics and tent camps. The river offers good conditions for fishing as possible catch are the following species: chub, barbel black, roach, bream, Nase, carp, catfish, pike, perch, bleak and more.

3.2 Sandanska Bistritsa



In the past, the river was known as Svetivrachka Bistritsa and is a left tributary of the Struma River. It is formed by the rivers Sarchaliitsa, Bashliitsa, Chairska, Mozgovitsa and Begovitsa (Kriva reka). Bistritsa passes through Lilyanovo, Sandanski, and flows in Struma river. The length of the river is 33 km and is one of the biggest tributaries of Struma. An interesting sight is Popina Laka waterfall, located in the upper stream. The average flow of the river is 2.9 m³/s.

3.3 Pirinska Bistritsa

The river is one of the longest tributaries of Struma river – 53 km. It is formed by the rivers Golenska, Bashmandra, Demirkapiiska, which are flowing consistently one after another in Pirinska Bistritsa. The upper and the middle flow passing through the village of Pirin are tumultuous. Along the river there's a road from the village of Pirin to Pirin hut. Pirinska Bistritsa is used for irrigation and hydroelectric power. High water is through March-May and low water through August-September. River catchment area is 507 km², with average gradient of 43 ‰.

3.4 Melnik river

The river is a left tributary of Struma river. It is formed by the rivers Dolenska and Sugarevska, flowing one in another between the village of Sugarevo and the town of Melnik. Melnishka river is one of the reasons for the formation of the popular Melnishki pyramids. Even nowadays, the river and the rain continue to form new pyramids. It flows through the center of the town of Melnik and often dries up in the summer.

3.5 Lebnitsa river

The river is a tributary of the Struma river. Its valley divides the mountains Ograzhden and Maleshevska and is a steep, deforested, eroded slopes. The length of the river Lebnitsa on Bulgarian territory is 50 km and its area is 318 km². On the left valley slope is "Sokolata" - a small reserve which contains the only one in the mountain forest of Hungarian oak (*Quercus frainetto*). Fish such as barbel, Nase, chub can be found in Lebnitsa river.

3.6 Dolenska river

The river is formed by the tributaries of the rivers Byalata voda (White water) and Chernata voda (Black water), passing south of the Village of Doleni. After merging with Sugarevska River it forms Melnik River. The length of the river is 13.5 km. High flow is in the spring. Coniferous and deciduous forests grow on both sides of the river.

4. Mineral waters and springs

The mineral springs of Sandanski Municipality are a priceless natural resource. Their total number is about 80, but only some of them are larger and are fully used. Because of their quality the mineral springs in Sandanski, Levunovo, Hotovo, Katuntsi can heal a very wide range of diseases.

4.1 Mineral springs Sandanski

Since ancient times the city is famous for its mineral springs. The ancient Romans appreciated their excellent qualities and used them for bathing and drinking, and folk healers Cosmas and Damian healed every disease with their water. Their number in Sandanski is 11 - 8 are located in the

area of the city park, and 3 across the river Sandanska Bistritsa. The water temperature is between 42 and 81°C. The most famous springs are Periloto, Turkish bath and Miroto, where deposits of mud are found. Water is also used by a number of hotels in the city, by the swimmers boarding school and the sanatorium in which people come from all over Bulgaria for the treatment of lung diseases. Mineral water in the town is clear, colorless and odorless, slightly mineralized. It has positive effect on diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, lungs and liver, kidney, heart and nervous system. Swimming pools in the town offer good conditions for swimming outdoors all year round, which makes Sandanski the perfect place for modern climatotherapy, spa treatment, rehabilitation, and recreation.

4.2 Mineral springs Hotovo

In Hotovo there are several mineral springs, mineral bath and mineral water laundry. The water temperature is 38°-40°C, with a low concentration of dissolved minerals. Water contains large amounts of fluoride and is not suitable for bottling as mineral water for daily use. The flow rate of the water source is about 6.4 l/sec.

4.3 Mineral springs Levunovo

Since ancient times, the people of Levunovo use water from the mineral water springs in the village. The water temperature varies from 40°C to 80°C. The old and new drilling are substantially different in temperature and amount of fluoride. Hypothermic water from the new drilling has a temperature of 36 °C and lower fluoride - 6.0-6.6 mg/l, while the water from the old contains almost twice as much - 10.2-11 mg/l.

4.4 Mineral springs Katuntsi

In Katuntsi there are several wells with different composition, but common to all is the low fluoride content. Mineral water is thermal, hydrocarbonate, sodium, with low mineralization and without signs of contamination. Because of these qualities the water is used for bottling - drilling 236 of spring "Razsadnika". Water from this spring comes from 280 m depth and temperature of 27.2°C. It is clear, colorless, odorless, and with excellent taste. General mineralization is 0.350 g/l.

4.5 Karst spring Petrovo

Near the village of Petrovo is the third in terms of water flow karst spring with water temperature around 20°C. It is located about 5 km from the village, in the area "Izvora" and only 15 minutes from the hut "Izvora". The water is clean and with excellent physical and chemical characteristics. Perhaps this is why the locals call it "Bistrets" (meaning clear). The purity of the spring is most likely due to the massive marble rocks around which it is formed. On the way to the spring, you go through a shelter with wooden benches, tables and playground. The spring itself is in a beautiful mountain setting. Every year on June 29 - St. Peter's Day, at this point, the residents of Petrovo organize their village feast.

5. Lakes and dams

5.1 Glavnishki (Bashliyski) lakes

This is a small lake group of four lakes in Pirin, belonging to the basin of Sandanska Bistritsa, a tributary of the Struma river. It is located in a large cirque between the peaks Bashliyski chukar, Banderishki chukar, Prevalski chukar and Tipitsite. Their size is quite modest - 19.4 decares, of which

the largest is only 7.8 decares. The highest lake of the group is 2,461 meters and is one of the ten highest Pirin lakes. They flow away through Bashliytsa river. Along Bashliytski Lakes goes unmarked trail from hut Yane Sandanski and shelter Spano pole to hut Vihren.

5.2 Demirkapiiski Lakes



This lake group consists of two lakes - Mitrovo and Argirovo, often referred to as Demirkapiiski for their location in the eponymous circus. Mitrovo lake is larger with an area of 34.7 acres and has a triangular shape. It is located at an altitude of 2291 m.

Argirovo lake is only 6.9 acres, has an irregular shape and is located 2,365 meters above sea level.

5.3 Kuklensko lake

The lake is situated in a cirque surface between the peaks Begova kapa, Zabat and Kuklite, at 2392 m. It has triangular shape, its length is 125 m, its width is 75 meters and its area is 7.5 decares. The lake is deep, surrounded by stone blocks. Its waters flow into Kozya Reka (Goat River).

5.4 Tevno lake

The lake is located in the circus Belemeto 2,512 m altitude. Its length is 450 m, it is 175 m wide, and its area is 60 decares. Its maximum depth is 3.9 m, its water volume is 116,570 m³. Tevno lake is the largest of Malokamenishka lake group and the eighth largest in the Pirin. It has elongated, slightly curved shape.

5.5 Chairski lakes



West of the main ridge of Pirin, in the circus Chaira, is a group of 9 lakes. Located between the peaks and Mozgovishki chukar and Prevalski chukar they can be easily found, as they are located on the ecotrail to the hut "Yane Sandanski". A relatively small lakes with a total area of 92 decares and a water volume of 16,000 m³. They are located at different altitudes. The highest one is 2430 meters and has an area of 1.2 decares. The next highest lake is 2,427 meters and covers an area of 9.2 decares. The third lake is situated at 2,416 meters above sea level and its area is 22.6 decares. The difference in altitude of the third and fourth lake is just a meter as the fourth lake is very small - only 1.2 decares. Fifth lake is located at an altitude of 2,413 meters and an area of 1.6 decares. Sixth lake from this group of lakes is situated at an altitude of 2,412 meters and has a very small area of 1.2 decares. Seventh lake, which is also called Dalgovidno, is at 2,355 m with an area of 18.9 decares. The eighth lake is the largest of these lakes and hence its name Golyamo ezero (Big Lake). Its area is 25,2 decares and is located at 2,235 meters altitude. The last, ninth lake, which is the lowest, at an altitude of 2,205 meters occupies an area of 11,8 decares. Chairski lakes are near the tourist trail leading from hut Demyanitsa to hut Yane Sandanski. The trail is marked in green.

5.6 Spanopolski lakes

Spanopolski Lakes are a group of nine permanent and two temporary lakes in the central part of Northern Pirin. Eight are located in the circus

Goliamo Spano pole and one of them – in the circus Malko Spano pole. Their average altitude is 2350 m. They have a glacial origin. Their geological base is granite. Summer water temperature is 10-12°C and is slightly mineralized. From these lakes start Spanopolska River (Sarchaliytsa) and Little Spanopolska River (Little Sarchaliytsa). From the great lakes in Golyamo Spano Pole the first lake (altitude 2,451 m) is elongated - length 75 m, width 25 m and area of 1,2 decares. The largest lake is at an altitude of 2,302 m. It is slightly flattened - length 175 m, width 120 m and area of 12,6 acres. The third lake is at an altitude of 2,402 m and has elongated shape - length 150 m, width 75 m and area of 8,4 decares. Fourth lake is at an altitude of 2,212 m has elongated shape - length 250 m, width 100 m, area 11,3 decares. It collects the waters from the upper three lakes. The fifth lake is at an altitude of 2,221 m, has a round shape, length 75 m and width 70 m. Other lakes in the circus have not been studied. Malko Spanopolsko lake is the only one in the territory of Sandanski Municipality. It is located in the area "Plitko" at an altitude of 2,368 m. and has elongated shape - length 125 m, width 75 m and area of 5,10 decares. All permanent Spanopolski lakes are stocked with trout.

5.7 Beli breg (White shore) dam

The site is built in a beautiful mountain area, ideal for walks and picnics. It occupies an area of 96 decares. It is suitable for fishing, which is not-prohibited even in breeding periods.

6. Waterfalls

6.1 Popinolashki waterfall



The waterfall is situated in the countryside known as Popina laka and is only 18 km far from the town of Sandanski and only 2 km far from the hut "Yane Sandanski". It is situated at an altitude of 1,230 meters and a hundred meters from the place where Bashliitsa is flowing into Sartshaliitsa river. It is high about 15 m and is abounding in water in all seasons. The Popinolashki waterfall is announced for a natural landmark on 11 of October 1965.

6.2 Kashina waterfall "Skoka"

The waterfall "Skoka" is 2 km far from the village of Kashina, 10 km far from the Rozhen monastery and 30 km far from the town of Sandanski. The road leading to it is not suitable for cars and the only way to reach the site is to walk. The trail is marked with signs, and even an inexperienced person would not get lost. Its name comes from the high 20-meter jump that the waterfall makes. Nearby is the "Garvanova Skala" - another interesting site that is worth to be seen. Local people believe that the air of this place gives strength to the weary, cheers up the unfortunate and helps the sick to forget their sufferings.

6.3 "Byala Reka" waterfall

The waterfall is situated 17 km far from the village of Pirin in the countryside known as Nishkov kamak. The name of the waterfall comes from the

river where it is situated on – Byala Reka. It is not a high one but captivates the tourist with its fresh, clean air and beautiful nature around it. The path for this object starts from the village of Pirin and meanders along the Pirinska Bistritsa. Some time ago in this place every year they held festivals organized by the Forestry. Today, it is perfect for picnics and relaxation.

7. Villages with tourist importance

For Bulgarian people villages have always been equivalent to hospitality and togetherness. Bulgarian villages are small and people know each other. When a stranger comes, he must be feasted with homemade banitsa (Bulgarian bakery product) and homemade wine that can't be bought from the store. Each village has its own culture and folklore, its traditional cuisine and crafts, and the fact that most of them are nestled somewhere in the mountains, away from the city noise, surrounded by beautiful nature, makes them more attractive. Some of the most beautiful villages in the municipality of Sandanski - Goleshovo, Kashina, Petrovo, Gorna Sushitsa, Bozhdovo, Hrasna, Rozhen, match the above description. Each has its own history, its own spirit and legends. The visitor himself may be convinced - in these villages there is something magical, something that makes you come back again!

7.1 Goleshevo



Goleshevo Village is located at the foot of mountain Slavyanka near reserve "Alibotush". It is situated 46 km from the town of Sandanski, 14 km from Petrovo, another village with rich history and beautiful scenery. The village is easy to

reach, and once man enters the village, he finds that time has stopped here. The ancient architecture is preserved and the streets are narrow and unpaved. Over the river in the village there are four stone bridges from the end of XVIII century. Several ancient settlements are found near the village, the earliest of which dates back to the Bronze Age. An ancient necropolis with stone tombs was found a few kilometers away, in the area Ezerishta. A settlement from the late period of the Iron Age was found in the areas Solishteto and Perinarski Iaki. More ancient settlements are found in the areas Tuchidol, Buza and Chereshar. A necropolis was discovered in the area Pazlak, and in Gradishteto – a fortress. Goleshovo is associated with the famous Bulgarian writer and poet Peyo Yavorov. The barn where Yavorov was hiding, along with his fellows, from the Turkish soldiers is still preserved. In his book "Haidushki kopneniya" the poet writes about the village and about his experiences there. The name of the village comes, according to some, from the word "Golesh" which means uninhabited place. According to another source, "Golyo" was the name of the first man who settled here. In 2009 Goleshovo won a BNT SAT competition for the most beautiful and little known place in Bulgaria. This contest gave the village a chance to develop its tourism activities. A special film, brochure and video to promote the unknown to most Bulgarians village were made.

7.2 Kashina



Kashina Village is located on the southwestern slopes of Pirin Mountain and 8 km from the village Rozhen. Near the village is the waterfall Skoka. The road to the village is unpaved but still there's a direct transport link to the

village. It is believed that the village was with Bulgarian-Vlach population, but with time the Vlachs emigrated and left the village entirely Bulgarian. However, there is no clear evidence of the creation and history of the village. The name of the village comes from the Turkish word "kashik" meaning "spoon". In the past people from Kashina had a reputation for their hand made wooden spoons, which they sold at markets and fairs. Buyers called them "kashitsi" but over the time they modified the word to "kashintsi". The fair of the village is on 28 August, when it celebrates the feast of the Virgin Mary.

7.3 Petrovo

Petrovo Village is located 35 kilometers southeast of the town of Sandanski, in the north fork of the mountain Slavyanka. Near the village is hut "Izvora", which is starting point for several marked paths to Slavyanka and the area Izvora, from where originates Petrovska river. There is no data about the occurrence of the village, but it is known that in this place there was a settlement since Roman times. Two kilometers from the village is the locality Peshteri, where there was a settlement from 14-17 century with developed agriculture and pottery. There are still traces of the old village and the residents of Petrovo partially restored the nearby temple. The village has three churches - "St. Peter and Paul," "St. Athanasius" and "Virgin Mary." Other sites suitable for tourism near the village are the cave Rupara and karst spring "Bistrets".

7.4 Gorna Sushitsa

The village is located 15 km from Sandanski and 4 km from Melnik, but it's really difficult to reach as the road to it is more like a forest path. It is not known when the village was founded, but it is believed to had been founded by migrants from the Nevrokop area. To preserve their faith and

their Bulgarian names, they were forced to flee to safety. The traditional festival of the village is on 14 October and the village's feast is on 29 June. Gorna Sushitsa is a starting point for routes to the hut "Pirin".

7.5 Bozhdovo

Bozhdovo is located in the municipality of Sandanski. There's no accurate data on its occurrence, but the name Bozhdovo is found in Turkish documents from 1660. In the past, residents of the village were mostly Vlachs. The village has a beautiful old church, built in 1850. Near Bozhdovo in the areas Garvan and Ogradata there are traces of ancient settlements from the Iron Age. Today the village is a holiday spot with a lot of villas.

7.6 Hrasna

The village is situated on the western slopes of the Southern Pirin between the villages of Gorno Spanchovo and Belyovo. It is located high in the mountains at 150 m altitude. Hrasna is one of the villages, formed by Bulgarians fleeing from the Turkish conquerors. First mentioned in Turkish documents from 1451-1481. According to local people its name comes from the many shrubs (in bulgarian "hrast") that were cut down to use the land for agricultural purposes. The inhabitants are Christians, thanks to the monks of Athos who reached this place and kept awake the Christian faith. During Ottoman rule Hrasna is a free village.

7.7 Rozhen

Rozhen Village is located 31 km from the town of Sandanski, 6 km east of Melnik and 1 km from Rozhen Monastery. Houses are almost entirely in the Renaissance style, around the center of the village is an architectural

ensemble. Eleven of the houses are declared monuments. There is intensive construction of hotels and taverns in the traditional Renaissance style. Because of its proximity to the Rozhen monastery the village enjoys interest from tourists. The famous grape variety – broad-leaved vine, which makes excellent wine, is grown only in this region. Ecotrails to Melnik and Zlatolist pass through the village.

7.8 Pirin

It is situated on both banks of the river Pirinska Bistritsa, at about 700 meters above sea level. From the village starts a third class road to the chalets Malina and Pirin. Near the village of Pirin are the caves Yavorova dupka and Zmeyova dupka, the chapel "Holy Spirit", where every year a festival is held.

7.9 Lyubovishte

The village is located 25 km southeast of Sandanski. It is situated on the slopes of South Pirin. There is a road link to Melnik and Rozhen. The houses are built in the typical for the area style. There are 5 houses declared cultural monuments. The school building, built in 1905, and Antilovichevata house are local landmarks. Near the village, in the area Chiflik remains of a settlement that probably dates back to the Bronze Age are found. Near the village is Rozhen monastery, only 1.5 km.

7.10 Lozenitsa

Lozenitsa Village is located 14 km southeast of Sandanski and 3 km southwest of the town of Melnik. It is situated at the foot of Middle Pirin at about 350 m. It is established at its current location in 1956. The old village was on the shore of river Melnik and often the ground would sink

along with the houses. Near the village are found remains of settlement from the New Stone Age – in the area Lozyata (Vineyards). In two other near areas are the remains of a settlement that existed during the Iron Age. Near the village can be seen the remains of a medieval church.

7.11 Zlatolist

Zlatolist Village is located 32 km southeast of Sandanski and 16 km from Melnik. North of the village is situated the natural landmark Melnik sandstone pyramids. The houses are built in Renaissance style and there is a strong influence of the Rhodopian type of houses. Eleven buildings in the village have been declared cultural monuments. Near the village there are preserved ruins of a medieval church and settlement that existed in the Middle Ages and the Ottoman period. The village is known with the church "St. George", in which the famous prophet Reverend Stoyana lived. In the churchyard is located one of the oldest trees in the municipality of Sandanski – 1300-year old platanus tree.

7.12 Gorno Spanchevo

Gorno Spanchevo is located 40 km southeast of Sandanski. The highway from Petrich to Gotse Delchev passes through the village. The village is situated in the western foothills of the Southern Pirin at an altitude of 340 m. Through it flows the river Pirinska Bistritsa and HPP "Spanchevo" is built near the village. Many remains of ancient settlements dating from different eras are found near the village in the areas Strashnik, Umni dol, Krech. An interesting site in the village is the fortress "Terziev chukar", located only 1.5 km north from the center of the village, at 622 m altitude. It occupies an area of about 1 decare. Better preserved is its southern part. Currently, the central part of the castle is overgrown with grass.

7.13 Harsovo

Harsovo is located 25 km from Sandanski and 9 km from Melnik. Through it flows the river Melnishka. The village is known for its good wine made by the locals. A total of about 1,200 decares around Harsovo are planted with vineyards. Another important attraction is the local church, built in the late 18th century in the highest part of the village. Harsovo is located close to protected areas of the National Park "Pirin".

8. Places of tourist importance

8.1 Deseti kilometer (Tenth kilometer)

The area is located 10 kilometers east of the town of Sandanski, 10 km from Popina laka, along the river Sandanska Bistritsa and presents a picturesque landscape with plane trees and pine forest. The region provides good conditions for fishing, walks in the nature, picnics and more.

8.2 Turichka cherkva



The area Turichka cherkva is above Popina Laka on the way to hut Kamenitsa. In the past there was a church (cherkva) built by the Vlach tribe Turi, but today there are no remains to remind of its existence. From Turichka cherkva you can go to Solishteto, where you will see a magnificent view of the surrounding peaks, as well as Vihren and Sinanitsa. Some years ago a chapel of St. Petka was build there.

8.3 Tremoshnitsa

Tremoshnitsa is an area in northern Pirin, three kilometers southwest from the hut "Yane Sandanski". It is located near the road leading to the town of Sandanski. Here is a chapel, dedicated to and named after St "Ivan Rilski", but people know it as "Holy Father".

8.4 Popovi livadi



Popovi livadi is a saddle between the Middle and Southern Pirin. Its altitude is 1,430 meters and it includes a number of smaller areas – Galabova polyana (Pigeon meadow), Vlashka cherkva (Vlach church), Vasilova mandra, Punkta and Seyryanlaka.

There are many tourist facilities: hut "Popovi livadi", vacation centers of Bulgartabac and the forestry, several hotels and numerous private villas, some of which offer accommodation. The base is located 12 km from the border with the National Park "Pirin". The area was declared a climatic mountain resort of great importance in 1967. Popovi Livadi is starting point for the ascent of Mount Orelyak and mount Sveshtnik and the huts Malina, Pirin and Slavyanka. Through Popovi livadi goes the international mountain trail E-4 (Pyrenees-Peloponnese).

9. Protected areas

There are five sites protected by law within the municipality of Sandanski, and their total area is 140 km², which is 14% of the municipality. These are the National Park "Pirin", Reserve "Ali botush", Melnik sand pyramids,

protected area Slavyanka and Popina laka waterfall. The role of protected areas is to conserve biodiversity by limiting human activity. These areas are a potential source of income for the local population because they are of eco-tourist importance.

9.1 National park "Pirin"



The history of the park began when in 1962 with Order № 3074 the National Park "Vihren" was created, which 13 years later was renamed to National Park "Pirin". The flora of the National Park is represented by about 1,300 species of plants, which is about 1/3 of

the Bulgarian flora. Besides these there are about 320 species of mosses and many types of algae. A special feature of the park is rich presence of endemic species. 18 local endemics, 35 Bulgarian and 86 Balkan endemics are found here.

Its area, which is located in the municipality of Sandanski is 12 354.4 ha and is divided into two park regions - Kamenitsa and Trite Reki (Three Rivers). Park Region "Kamenitsa" is located in South Pirin, along the valley of Sandanska Bistritsa river. On its territory there are many beautiful lakes like Spanopolski, Bashliyski, Chairski, Kuklensko and Tevno. In the park area "Kamenitsa" can still be seen wild goats, bears, wolves and deer. Of these species, particular attention is paid to bears and wild goats, as in recent years their number has dropped dramatically here. Of the rare birds Golden Eagles, Short-toed Eagle and Kestrel are of ornithologist and tourist interest. The other park region "Trite reki" neighbours with the area "Bezbog" to the north and "Kamenitsa" to the west. To the east and

south it neighbours with the state forestries of Gotse Delchev and Katuntsi. The park regions are guarded, to prevent abuse of the natural resources.

9.2 Melnik sand pyramids

The pyramids were declared a natural landmark in 1960 with a total protected area - 1,165 ha. The area is characterized by a wide variety of mosaic habitats with considerable Mediterranean influence. The main part of the territory is covered with grassland and scrub, with some deciduous forests of *Quercus cerris*, hornbeam, oak. 113 species of birds have been identified. Of these, 12 are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria, 49 are of European importance. The area provides suitable habitat for 32 species.

9.3 Reserve „Ali Botush”

The reserve “Ali Botush” is situated in Southwest Bulgaria in Slavyanka mountain. Its area which belongs to the territory of municipality of Sandanski is 939.7 ha. The remaining part belongs to municipality of Hadzhidimovo. Ali Botush is announced for a natural reserve by the General forest administration on 24 November 1951 in order to be saved the biggest deposit of Bosnian pine, which is Bulgarian endemism. This area is one of the regions with the most intense floral morphology in the country. The dominant species in the reserve between 1000 and 1450 m above sea level is the black pine. Over the black pine zones, to 1800 m above sea level start forests of black pine - a rare, protected and most interesting representatives of the Bulgarian dendroflora. Another rare plant that can be found in the reserve is white fir, common yew - Tertiary relic protected by law, Bulgarian fir – endemic, *Daphne kosaninii* - Tertiary relict and Balkan endemite. The diversity of the Mediterranean representatives of invertebrate animals is also extremely high - more than

1200 species. Of particular interest are the butterflies, among which are new species to the science. Due to the diversity of habitats Slavyanka area is also characterized by a variety of avifauna. There have been established 134 species of birds, 21 of which are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria. 53 species of birds are of European importance.

9.4 Protected area Slavyanka

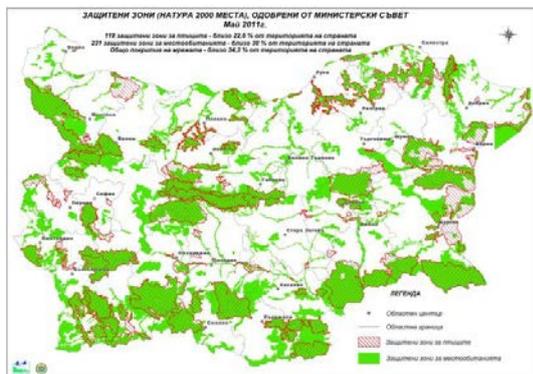
The protected area begins above the village of Goleshovo and has a total area of 701.3 ha. It was declared a protected area on 18.06.2007 by an order No.RD-425. Within Slavyanka following activities are prohibited:

1. Burning grass and shrubs;
2. Construction of new buildings, roads and cableways;
3. Opening of quarries, extraction of aggregates, ores and minerals and other activities which violate the natural appearance of the area;
4. Use of chemical pest control or fertilization of pastures;
5. Hunting;

9.5 Popina laka waterfall

It was declared natural landmark on October 11, 1965 to protect the natural waterfall. The overall protected area is 0.5 ha.

10. NATURA 2000 areas



Natura 2000 is a European ecological network composed of protected areas designed to provide long-term survival of the most valuable and threatened species and habitats in Europe in accordance with the main international agreements on the environment and

biodiversity.

Places within the ecological network are determined in accordance with the two major environmental EU Directives - Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (known as the Habitats Directive) and Directive 2009 / 147/ES on the conservation of wild birds (known as the birds Directive).

10.1 Protected areas for the conservation of wild birds in the municipality of Sandanski

10.1.1 Protected area - Pirin BG0000209

The protected area covers the whole territory of the National Park "Pirin". It includes 129 nesting bird species, 19 of which are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria (1985). 44 species are of European conservation concern (SPEC) (BirdLife International, 2004). As globally endangered in the category SPEC1 is included 1 species, and as threatened in Europe in the category SPEC2 - 13 species in SPEC3 - 30 species.

Pirin is of global importance as a representative area for alpine biome, because of the three (of 4 in Bulgaria) biome-restricted species that can

be found here - wallcreeper, Cory crow and Alpine Accentor presented here with endemic subspecies of *Prunella collaris subalpina*. It is one of the most valuable places in the country to protect the hazel hen pygmy owl, Boreal Owl, Three-toed Woodpecker, golden eagle, capercaillie, peregrine falcon, black woodpecker, white-backed woodpecker and gray woodpecker. Pirin is one of the most important areas in Europe for the protection of colorful rock thrush, Rock Partridge, Kestrel, Robin, Ring Ouzel, Song Thrush and Goldcrest.

10.1.2 Protected area Kresna BG0002003

In the region of Kresna are established 147 species of birds, mainly nesting. Of these, 22 are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria. 64 species are of European conservation importance, and one globally threatened species (corncrake), and as threatened in Europe - in the category SPEC2 - 22 species in SPEC3 - 40 species. Kresna is of global importance as an example of Mediterranean biome. 8 biome-restricted species are found here - Rock Partridge, the Olive Warbler, Masked Shrike, Black-headed Bunting, Spanish Wheatear, Subalpine Warbler, Sardinian Warbler and rock nuthatch. For the Levant Sparrowhawk Kresna is one the most important nesting sites in Bulgaria. There is a significant population of Rock Partridge, Ortolan Bunting, the Olive Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Masked Shrike, Wood Lark, Grey Bunting, Blue Rock Thrush, Sombre Tit, turtle dove, colorful rock thrush and European Scops Owl. Through the Kresna Gorge passes the ViaAristotelis migration route, which has regional importance for migratory birds - mainly raptors and songbirds species, but it is also important for migrating waterbirds.

10.1.3 Protected area – Melnik pyramids BG0002072

In the area of Melnik pyramids 113 species of birds are found. Of these, 12 are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria (1985). 49 species are of European conservation concern (SPEC) (BirdLife International, 2004). As endangered in Europe in Category SPEC2 - 19 species are included and in SPEC3 - 30 species. The area is of global importance as a representative of the Mediterranean biome. 5 species typical for this biome can be found here - Black-headed Bunting, Olive Warbler, Black-eared Wheatear, Subalpine Warbler, Sardinian Warbler. For the Calandra Lark the region of Melnik Pyramids is one of the most important nesting sites in Bulgaria with European importance. The area supports nesting populations of Honey Buzzard, Long-legged Buzzard, Short-toed Lark, Barred Warbler, the Olive Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Wood Lark and colorful rock thrush.

10.1.4 Protected area - Slavyanka - BG0002078

In Slavyanka there are 134 species of birds, 21 of which are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria (1985). 53 bird species are of European importance (SPEC) (BirdLife International, 2004). As globally endangered in the category SPEC1 is included 1 species - Corncrake / *Crex crex* /, occurring in the lower parts of the mountain and, as threatened in Europe in the category SPEC2 - 19 species in SPEC3 - 33 species. Slavyanka is one of the most important places in the country for Calandra Lark, capercaillie and Boreal Owl nesting here in significant quantities. Pygmy owl and Wood Lark have populations in the area. The endangered corncrake also nests in the area, although in lower numbers.

10.1.5 Protected area - Rupite - BG0002098

In the area of Rupite 141 bird species have been established. Of these, 33 are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria. 63 species are of European conservation concern (SPEC) (BirdLife International, 2004). Two species are included in category SPEC1 as globally endangered, and as threatened in Europe in the category SPEC2 - 19 species and in SPEC3 - 42 species. The area provides suitable habitat for 56 species listed in Annex 2 of the Biodiversity Act, which require special protection measures. Of these, 52 are also listed in Annex I to Directive 79/409 EU. Rupite is one of the most important places in Bulgaria to protect the Levant Sparrowhawk, Short-toed Eagle and the White Stork. The region supports populations of the Olive Warbler, Masked Shrike and Lesser Grey Shrike. During migration and wintering the endangered Pygmy Cormorant can also be found here.

10.1.6 Protected area – Pirin buffer - BG0002126

The zone "Pirin buffer" is located in the lower parts of the Pirin Mountain, covering mainly areas south and west of the National Park Pirin. The area has medium and low mountainous character.

In Pirin buffer nest 17 species listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive, and 20 species of migratory birds pass through the territory. The area supports nationally important populations of Pern, Peregrine Falcon, Boreal Owl, Black Woodpecker, and contributes greatly to the conservation of populations of short-toed eagle, golden eagle, long-legged buzzard, grouse, Nightjar, Wood Lark and Red-backed Shrike on the territory of Pirin mountain.

10.2 Protected areas for the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna

10.2.1 Protected area - Pirin - BG0000209

Pirin mountain is horst-block alpine structure that rises in the middle of the Rila-Rhodope massif between the valleys of the rivers Struma and Mesta.

Pirin is characterized by exceptional biodiversity, existing shape-forming processes and a high percentage of endemic component. 14 higher plant species are Pirin endemics, which is more than half of all Bulgarian endemic plants, 17 higher plants and 2 animal species are Bulgarian endemic species, 86 higher plants and six representatives of the vertebrate fauna are Balkan endemics.

Of all the habitats in Pirin, the rock habitat best represents the characteristics of the mountain. 35 cirque valleys, 118 glacial lakes, pyramidal and conical peaks, spectacular rock formations are shelter for a unique rock flora and fauna: 9 species of mammals, one reptile species, one amphibian species, one species of fish, 4 species of invertebrates one type of plant in Annex II of Directive 92/43/EEC and 25 habitat types of Annex I to Directive 92/43/EEC. By the criteria endangered species, endangered habitats and floristic richness, Pirin National Park has been identified as one of the 114 Important Plant Areas in Bulgaria.

10.2.2 Middle Pirin - Alibotush - BG0001028

The protected area covers the middle and southern part of the Pirin Mountains and the border mountain Alibotush (Slavyanka). It is a natural extension of Pirin National Park in the south.

The area is very low populated with well preserved nature. It contains two reserves: Alibotush and Orelyak, and a number of protected areas and natural landmarks. In the zone there's a transition from Alpine to Mediterranean pine vegetation and both habitat types are present. The area provides suitable habitat for 41 species listed in Annex 2 of the Biodiversity Act, which require special protection measures. Of these, 33 are listed in Annex I to Directive 79/409 EU. The area is the most important site for the conservation of habitat Hellenic beech forests with Bulgarian fir (King Boris-fir). It is one of the two places for protection of black pine forests. Transition from the Mediterranean to the Alpine mountain coniferous vegetation is being made in this zone and both habitat types can be found. South subtypes spread further north, while for the North Habitats this is southern limit of distribution. The area is one of two places in Bulgaria to protect habitat Mediterranean humid grasslands of tall grasses of the union Molinio-Holoschoenion. Habitat types are extremely varied. The area is one of the most important sites for conservation of habitat eastern oak forests. In many river valleys there's been hardly any human activities and there is a fully conserved zoning in natural forest communities starting from the lower zone of eastern oak forests, through Balkanic turkey oak-sessile oak forests, oak-hornbeam forests of type Galio-Carpinetum, beech forests, greek beech forests with Bulgarian fir (King Boris-fir), sub-Mediterranean pine forests with endemic subspecies European black pine, to the highest plant belt with habitats acidophilous forests of spruce in the mountain and subalpine belt, forests of Macedonian pine and Bosnian pine.

The area is of key importance for protection the bear, as this type is largely decisive in defining its boundaries and size. The area is also important for achieving the required coverage for a number of reptile species and natural habitats.

10.2.3 Kresna - Ilindentsi - BG0000366

The protected area has several independent cores connected by a river valley in a single zone: including a buffer zone of Pirin National Park, the higher parts of the mountains Vlahina and Maleshevska and between them the deep Kresna gorge in the valley of the Struma River. The area concentrates unique biodiversity.

The area holds 99% of the national area of priority habitat Endemic forests. It protects one of the three most important areas of habitat of plane trees around the Gorno Breznishki stream. In the mountains on the Macedonian border there are old oak and beech (180 years) forest. Some of the oak forests are of seed origin.

In the National Park Pirin buffer are located key summer habitats of all bears in this part of the mountain. It is an important corridor for fish species. In the gorge is the northern boundary of the distribution of habitats Endemic forests of juniper and forests of *Platanus orientalis* and species of leopard snake and four-lined snake. In the area is located the highest known living population of Spur-thighed tortoise living in dry light pine forests, juniper bushes, forest meadows to 1400 above seal level. Rarely found are giant turtles, longer than 30 cm. The world record for Hermann's tortoise, of 357 mm, is found here. Important bat colonies live in caves in the National Park and in rock crevices and abandoned buildings in the gorge.

10.2.4 Ograzhden - Maleshevo - BG0000224

The protected area covers most of the mountain Ograzhden and the southern part of mountain Malesh. In the ridge parts, there are old beech

and oak forests and low populated areas. Important are the valleys of the rivers Lebnitsa and Ribnik.

Ichtyofauna is rich and varied (an important source of food for the population of the otter). There are 11 species, 3 of which are included in Annex II of Directive 91/43/EES and 9 herpetofauna species, 5 of which are included in Annex II of the same Directive. This makes the area Ograzhden - Maleshevo one of the most valuable for the conservation of ichtyofauna, herpetofauna and natural habitats. The area keeps unaltered by human activity riparian habitats - forests Oriental plane which over 500 to 600 m go to alluvial forests with alder and black ash. Along the Lebnitsa river are one of the three most representative places in Bulgaria of venerable plane forests. The area is one of the few places in Bulgaria with seed oak forests. In the lower parts of the area in the past there were forests of juniper (priority habitat) that have been destroyed in the past (probably by fires and over-grazing) and now individual trees are met, but there are good conditions for recovery. Judging by modern vegetation through the valley of river Lebnitsa they were unique for Bulgaria with the participation of Balkan endemic *Amigdalus webbii*, the type that exists in the valley of the river Vardar (Macedonia) and different from today's forest types in Kresna Gorge. In open and low-lying habitats in the area are established one of the highest known densities of species of Spur-thighed tortoise (about 20 individuals per hectare), and in rich forest areas the Hermann's tortoise also reaches similar densities of large areas. The area is the place with the highest habitat of species of Hermann's tortoise in Bulgaria - 1,450 above sea level. Lower parts up to 500-600 meters, near the valleys, with presence of water, during the dry months are important for the protection of the leopard snake and four-lined snake.

10.2.5 Rupite - Strumeshnitsa - BG0001023

The area includes the valley of the Struma River with surrounding low hills, some of them of volcanic origin, before the entry of the river in Greece. The area includes the inflow Strumeshnitsa to the border with Republic of Macedonia and small tributaries connecting to the neighboring mountains.

The area itself carries important habitats, but it is also a constant biocorridor along the river connecting the surrounding mountains. In this area is located the most representative area of willow habitat throughout western Bulgaria, outside this area it is presented only by small fragments.

The area provides suitable habitat for 56 species listed in Annex 2 of the Biodiversity Act, which require special protection measures. Forests of plane trees, are protected here, growing in the upper stream of the river Strumeshnitsa and its smaller tributaries - one of the three most representative sites for the conservation of Oriental plane forests in Bulgaria. In many places, even in the lowest parts there are old black alder galleries. The area is one of two places in Bulgaria with the presence of Mediterranean wetlands habitat communities of tall grasses of the union Molinio-Holoschoenion. The area is the only place in western Bulgaria for conservation of the very rare species of Balkan pond turtle. Shrub and grassland habitats on the slopes of hills and valleys form a mosaic of natural habitats and wildlife passages for thermophilic fauna - leopard and four-lined snake, Spur-thighed and Hermann's tortoise.

11. Centuries-old trees

About 10 old trees are registered in the municipality of Sandanski by the RIEW - Blagoevgrad. With a long history are the plane trees in Sandanski and Melnik. Old trees are located in the villages of Harsovo, Vrania, Dzhigurovo, Leshnitsa and Zlatolist. Each centennial tree is an ecosystem by itself. It prevents erosion, prevents landslides and flooding as it drains moisture from the soil. In the past a centennial tree had been treated as a kind of temple. All important events for the locals used to happen around it and it often bore the name of a saint. A centennial tree does not grow to occasional location, in many cases it grows where there is a healing spring. The most famous ancient trees in the municipality are listed below:

11.1 Platanus in Melnik

In the center of Melnik near the river are located two very old plane trees. The first is with circumference 3.5 meters and height 15 meters. The second one is with circumference 7 m and height 25 m. Their age is about 500 yrs. They are declared venerable trees in 1950.

11.2 Platanus in Sandanski

In Sandanski there are two venerable trees. One of them is 4.3 meters in diameter and 26 meters high. It is 500 years old. The other tree is with a diameter of 4.6 m. and a height of 23 m. It is around 550 years old. They are declared venerables in 1950.

11.3 Platanus in Dzhigurovo

The platanus is located in the center of Dzhigurovo. The circumference of the tree is 14.5 m. and its height is 12 m. Its age is 650 yrs. It is declared a venerable tree in 1976.

11.4 Platanus in Zlatolist

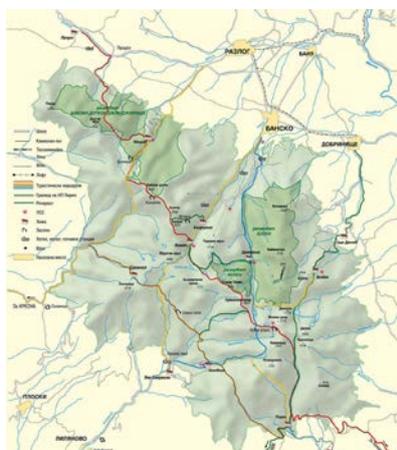


The tree - of the genus Oriental plane (*Platanus orientalis*) - is about 30 meters high and its circumference at the base is 6 m. Its age is approximately 1300 yrs. It is located near the church of Reverend Stoina and people think it has healing powers. Others

believe that it fulfills wishes. Whether a person has come here to heal or to share his unfulfilled wishes everyone has to swing on the two swings tied to the tree.

12. Tourist trails

12.1 Ecotrail "To Bashliitsa"



This trail is relatively new and little known to most tourists. It starts from the hut "Jane Sandanski" and ends at shelter "Spano pole". The trail is about 2.30 hours hike. It follows the valley of Bashliitsa river and the road passes through interesting sites like Popina laka waterfall. The trail is enriched with interesting information about the geological features, flora

and fauna of the Pirin Mountain.

12.2 "Sandanski – hut Yane Sandanski"

The ecotrail starts from Sandanski and ends at hut "Yane Sandanski", located in the Pirin Mountains. Along this trail are the hunting and fishing huts, water-power cascade "Pirin", Tremoshnitsa holiday resort, Popina Laka, the old and new hut Yane Sandanski, Popina laka waterfall (natural landmark).

12.3 Hut Yane Sandanski – hut Kamenitsa (Begovitsa)

This trail starts from hut Yane Sandanski. After that it passes through the area Turichka cherkva, where in the past there was a church. The trail passes also through the valleys of the rivers Begovitsa and Sarchaliitsa, the areas Dolen razkol and Mecha poliana, and then hut Kamenitsa. The trail is marked in blue. It is a 2 hour walk.

12.4 Hut "Yane Sandanski" - hut "Vihren"

The trail is marked in yellow. It starts from the hut "Yane Sandanski" and passes through the area Dushevadnika (soul-reaper), then enters the circus Golyamo Spano pole. The trail crosses the circus in a northeasterly direction. In Muratov peak passes through Banderishka porta, than down past Muratovi lakes, Ravnako and reaches the final point - hut "Vihren".

12.5 Hut „Yane Sandanski” – hut „Sinanitsa”

The trail follows the yellow mark that leads to hut "Vihren". In the southern part of the circus Golyamo Spano pole, at the junction with the trail marked in brown (for hut "Begovitsa" and hut "Pirin") it goes left

(northwest). After that comes the ascent of Sinanishka porta (Sinanitsa gate) and the descent to hut "Sinanitsa".

12.6 Hut "Begovitsa" – shelter "Tevno ezero"

It is about 3.5 hrs walk. The route follows the blue markings and after the Belemeto cirque – the green markings.

12.7 Hut "Begovitsa" - hut "Demyanitsa"

The trail is marked in blue and is about 6 hrs long.

12.8 Hut "Begovitsa" – hut "Sinanitsa"

The trail is marked in brown. The duration is about 5 hrs. Its denivelation is 882 m.

12.9 Hut "Pirin" – hut "Kamenitsa" – shelter "Spano pole"

The trail starts from hut "Pirin". The trail passes through Begovishki rid (hill) and the river Mozgovitsa in the area "Banski grob". Then goes around through Mozgovishki rid and passes through the areas Bashliytsa and Arnautski grobishta (cemeteries). Endpoint is shelter "Spano pole". The route follows the brown markings.

12.10 Hut Pirin – the valley of Demirkapyiska river – Mitrovo lake – left Kraledvorska gate - shelter Tevno ezero

The route can be taken in about 4 hours. Displacement of the route is 1048 m, 960 m of which ascent and 88 m descent. The trail is marked in red.

12.11 Hut Pirin – the valley of Bishmandrevska river – Kuklensko lake – ridge between the peaks Zabat and Kuklite – the valley of Begovishka river - hut Begovitsa

The route can be covered in 5 hours. Displacement of the route is 1750 m - 930 m ascent and 820 m descent. It follows the yellow markings.

12.12 Hut Pirin – Argirovo lake – Popovo lake – hut Bezbog

The route is marked in green. It's about 6 hrs walk. Elevation difference - 1480 m - 1040 m ascent and 440 m descent.

12.13 Hut Pirin – area Lopovo – Kelyava river – area Solishteto – hut Begovitsa

The route is marked in brown. It's about 5,5 hrs walk. Elevation difference - 1370 m - 740 m ascent and 630 m descent.

12.14 Hut "Izvora" – Goleshevo – Paril - Slavyanka

The tourist route starts from hut "Izvora". Walk up the paved road to the village of Goleshovo and then pass along a dirt road through the Paril's saddle to the village of Paril. Hut "Slavyanka" is 3.1 km from the village. The hike is approximately 15.5 kilometers long.

12.15 Hut "Izvora" – Suhoto ezero (Dry lake) – Gotsev vrah (peak)

The starting point for this hike is hut "Izvora". Marking starts 3.5 km east of the hut on an asphalt road leading to the village of Goleshovo. After the asphalt road there is a cart road that leads to the area "Livada". From there it goes to the peak Shabran on a well marked trail. Trail crosses Dry Lake area to get to the final point - peak Gotsev vrah. The route is marked in blue and lasts for about 4 hours.

12.16 Melnik – Rozhen

The trail starts after Melnik. From Melnik you go to Rozhen monastery and then to Zlatolist village where is located the church of Reverend Stoina. Possible option is to go first to the village Zlatolist and then to go to the Rozhen monastery. In places there are wooden forts, because of the risk of falls. Along the trail there are benches, bowers and fountains. The entire route can be walked for about 4 hours. The trail is marked in green.

12.17 Melnik - Zlatolist

The trail in the section Melnik - Zlatolist begins near the newest church of Melnik and passes through the area "Klyucha" ("the key"). At the end of the trail is the small village Zlatolist, in which the famous prophet Reverend Stoina lived and the beautiful church "St. George" - a national monument is built there.

12.18 E-4: Pyrenees – Alps – Carpathian Mountains – Vitosha – Verila – Rila – Pirin – Slavyanka – Olympus - Peloponnese

The trail was made and maintained by the Bulgarian Tourist Union. It starts in Spain, passes through France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, in Bulgaria and Greece - the island of Crete. Within the municipality of Sandanski enters the section Pirin - Slavyanka. Euro route points are Tevno Lake, hut "Pirin", hut "Izvora" which is former frontier post. There is a marking with a total length of about 650 km.

IV. Anthropogenic tourist resources

1. Historic and Archaeological Resources

Culturally and historically, Sandanski is located in a very interesting area. The location of the area between the Thracian, Greek and Macedonian territories makes it a contact area with great importance for the Mediterranean civilization. The archaeological heritage in the municipality is one of the richest and most diverse in Bulgaria with 5000 declared cultural monuments dating from the earliest times to the Middle Ages. Evidences for the rich heritage of the municipality are the prehistoric settlements in the villages Kovachevo and Damyanitsa, antique and late antique city Pratikopolis under today's Sandanski. Of special interest is the Episcopal basilica, the Basilica of Bishop Joan, Early Christian complex. Outside the ancient city an archaeological site is the tomb-mausoleum of a Roman aristocrat from (II-IV century), located 15-20 minutes northeast from the city center. One km from the town of Melnik is another historical landmark, which raises interest among visitors - medieval fortress (Despot Slav fortress) and remains of ancient monasteries and churches.

1.1 Episcopal basilica - Sandanski



The site is located in the city center, next to the Archaeological Museum. The Basilica is a classic Hellenistic three-nave building with interior architecture in Roman Corinthian style. There was a baptistery, which served for baptism, which is the only one of its kind in Bulgaria. It was a fairly large building at the time, and the richly painted walls and marble decoration suggests that the building was built for the Bishop of that area. The atrium (courtyard), where

according to some chroniclers, the early Christians gathered before the liturgy, is well preserved. The next object in the composition of the building is the narthex which is fully revealed in 1998. It is located next to the nave with size 22/4.5 m. Through it people have climbed to the second floor of the basilica. Its floor covering is well preserved and you can clearly see the floral motifs. The main object in the basilica, which underlies the whole composition of the building, is the naos. It has an unusual, almost square shape and its size is 22/23 m. It consists of three naves. In the early Christian period in the central nave a pulpit was put. From the IV century the pulpit is the place where singers and priests lead their preachings. From the pulpit the Gospel and other sacred books were being read.

1.2 Bishop Joan's Basilica - Sandanski

The basilica was discovered in 1960 by Prof. Teofil Ivanov and his team. The located in the Basilica mosaics with images of birds, fish, and their shapes indicate that the building was of great importance for its time and other facts lead them to the conclusion that the basilica was built by Bishop Joan. Remains from two construction periods are found, which proves that this city existed since Roman times. The site is of national importance and it is in a convenient location (in the Archeological Museum).

1.3 Early Christian Complex - Sandanski



The site is located in the center of the town, next to the Archeological Museum and near other historical and archaeological sites. The complex includes the basilica, stoa and the ancient street dating from the V-VI century. The whole complex is at open air and everyone can

walk around it. Notable are exquisite floor coverings exposed in the Archeological Museum. Another attraction is the Basilica of the V-VI century from which have been preserved mosaics of 100 square meters, but have not been well studied and their function is unknown. West of the Basilica is an ancient street, which probably was the main for this complex. The complex is of national importance and is one of the few at the same scale in Bulgaria.

1.4 Prehistoric settlement - Kovachevo

At about 1.5 km. east of Kovachevo in the place Kovachevski podini there are traces of ancient settlement - a marble sacrificial altar with a dedication of the Thracian horseman. 2 km southwest of the village is a Thracian burial mound. Remains of medieval settlements have been discovered in many places around the village. In the area Dabaya have been found remains of a medieval monastery, which has repeatedly been burned down and rebuilt.

1.5 Prehistoric settlement - Damyanitsa

3 km from the town of Sandanski, near the village Damyanitsa, in the area Asenitsa, remains of a large settlement from the late Neolithic period

and Chalcolithic Age were found. The area was inhabited during the Hellenistic and Roman times.

1.6 Despot- Slav fortress

1 km from the architectural reserve Melnik are located the remains of Despot Slav fortress. It is believed that it was built in the XIII century and later during the reign of Despot Slav, has been expanded and strengthened and became a well fortified fort, which kept the riches of the region. The fortress had an area of about 3000 square meters and had a shape of an irregular polygon. Today there are preserved only part of the east wall and small parts of the southern and western walls. The remains of this fortress were found in the foundations of the Church of St. Nicholas, which is another important historical and archaeological site. At the same place an archeological study found the remains of an ancient temple of Artemis.

1.7 Bolyarska kashta (Bolyar house) - Melnik



In the eastern part of the town right near the center is the best preserved Byzantine house on the Balkans. It is believed that the house was built as a residence of Despot Alexius Slav in the first half of the XIII century, when the town has been a thriving cultural center and capital of the principality of Despot Alexius Slav. As part of the Despot Slav fortress, the Bolyar house held important strategic position in the first level of defense of the fortress. Over the years, the house has been rebuilt several times. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance it was the most richly furnished building in Melnik and the area. The courtyard was paved with marble slabs and

there were built fountains with marble statues. Halls and rooms had mosaic floors, frescoes and stained glass windows. The Bolyar house was inhabited until the early XX century. Today, however, only impressive ruins stand - parts of the old northwest and southeast walls and front walls of the tower which possess remarkable brick decoration, a vivid example of medieval Bulgarian art. During archaeological excavations next to the walls of the tower were found a house, a water reservoir and a small church, dating from the beginning of the XIII century. The site is of national importance.

1.8 The old turkish bath - Melnik

It was built before the Liberation over old foundations. It is very likely that it was a public bath in the past. It consists of two sections - hot and cold. Water is heated in a huge vessel built in the eastern wall. The bathroom has worked on the principle of communicating vessels. The floor, made of marble slabs, was artificially raised to half meter stone pillars and in the wall were built special drainage pipes, to carry off the smoke from the fireplace under the floor to heat the room (hypocaust). There are no remains of the locker room and other facilities.

1.9 St Virgin Mary Spileotisa Monastery

The monastery, located on the hill "St. Nicholas" is one of the earliest examples of urban monastery construction in the Bulgarian lands. It was destroyed and reconstructed three times, lasted until the beginning of XX century. This is the only monastery in Bulgaria, which in 1220 received the status of "royal and despot's" with a special award by Despot Alexius Slav and becomes second of importance after Tarnovo monastery. Well preserved is the Western Wall, where excavations have found remains of two churches: "St Virgin Mary Spileotisa" and "St. Spiridon".

1.10 "Saint Nikola" church - Melnik

It was built at the beginning of the XIII century as a Metropolitan Church by Sebastocrator Vladimir, brother of Despot Alexius Slav and is a three-nave building, basilica with three doorways of eastern type. Its frescoes hold high artistic value. Some of them are still visible on the walls, while others are stored in the Archaeological Museum Sofia. Interesting artifacts found in the ruins are votive tablet of the Thracian goddess of hunting Artemis - Bendis, a Thracian gravestone with a dedication to the Roman Emperor Trajan, dating from 117 AD, and archaeological material from the early Middle Ages. Today there are only ruins left, but still the place is revered as sacred.

1.11 "Saint Varvara" church - Melnik



The church is located in the northeastern part of Melnik. It is not known for sure when it was built, but it was probably in the XIII - XIV century, during the heyday of Melnik. It was a large three-nave building. The church itself is not preserved today, only remains of walls, altar and apse. Locals have put icon of St. Varvara at the altar.

1.12 "Saint Haralampos" monastery - Melnik

Monastery "St. Haralampos" is located near Melnik in the hill St Nicholas, south of the city. It is a cultural monument of national importance. This monastery is connected to the earliest so far in Melnik, three documents from XIth century Gospel, which is located in the National Library of Greece in Athens. The first one shows the potential year of construction - 1206 and its presumed founder sebast Vasilij Vambulinos. The monastery

consisted of two rooms "St. Archangels" and "St. Haralambos" under the same roof. They were highly decorated with bilayer frescoes. Now only ruins can be found at the place. Only minor parts of the walls and foundations are preserved.

2. Museums

2.1 Archeological museum - Sandanski

The museum was founded in 1936 and was built over the foundations of the basilica of Bishop John, which was found later. It is one of the four museums specialized in antique archeology and has a unique collection of Roman marble tombstone plastics. The collection includes artifacts like plates of Julius Maximum and Asclepius, a collection of mosaics from the early Christian period, including a unique inscription in Greek, proving that beneath the museum building is the basilica of Bishop John. Other important items included in the museum collection are different votive tablets of Artemis, Aphrodite, Zeus and a local deity Theos Salenos. It holds over 5,500 archaeological and ethnographic materials.

2.2 Public Historical Museum - Melnik

Museum of Melnik is a branch of the museum in Sandanski and is included as an interesting landmark in "The hundred tourist sites". In the past, the exhibition was in Pashova house, built in 1815, but now it has been moved to a new building. In the historical museum can be seen the main occupation in the region of Melnik - wine making. The exhibition includes photos of Melnik wine cellars and equipment related to the handling and storage of Melnik wine. The museum has a rich ethnographic exhibition including objects related to the history of Melnik, from prehistoric times to modern times.

2.3 Museum "Yavorov" - Goleshevo

In Hadzhisimeonova plevnya (barn), where in 1903 a revolutionary poet Peyo Yavorov and a group of rebels were hiding from Turkish soldiers, is the museum Yavorov. Its exposition includes information board, photos of significant people and places, facsimiles, and a letter from Gotse Delchev to Peyo Yavorov. At present the exposition is neglected.

3. Architectural tourism resources

Valuable wealth of Sandanski Municipality are the preserved architectural monuments from antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, most preserved are antique and early medieval houses and castles. In some villages like Bozhdovo Vihren, Golem Tsalim, Goleshovo, Gorna Sushitsa, Dolen, Kashina, Kovachevo Krastiltsi, Karlanovo, Sugarevo the Renaissance settlement structure is almost completely preserved. Most houses - architectural monuments in this region are of the Rhodopian style. Modern architecture also has contributed to the colorful appearance of the municipality. Sandanski can also be proud of its modern and spacious park which is one of the biggest in Bulgaria.

3.1 City park – Sandanski



The most favorite place for residents and tourists of Sandanski is undoubtedly the city park, which is the second largest after Varna's "Sea Garden" and the only one with sandy paths. Its area is 400 decares and 275 decares are located along Sandanska Bistritsa River. The park starts after the shopping street. The first thing that attracts attention is the

swimming pool, which is behind a fence of colorful mosaics. At about 50 meters from the pool there's a modern, safe playground for children that does not remain unused even in the hottest or coldest days. At the park is the famous open-air theater, where every year the festival "Pirin Folk" takes place. Another attraction is the stadium "Spartak" where PFC "Vihren" trains and plays their home games. There is a picturesque pond. The park is home to over 200 rare plant species that are well arranged and well-kept.

3.2 Melnik architectural ensemble

Besides Melnik pyramids, another important feature of the city is the Renaissance houses that are declared architectural monuments. Houses, combined with other historical archeological and architectural monuments are arranged in several architectural ensembles:

The ensemble on the right bank of the River Melnik, located northwest of the center of the town covering the Roman bridge, "St. Joan the Baptist" church, Vodenicharova Vachkova, Vangelova, Lyoleva, Angova houses.

The ensemble on both sides of Rozhen dol, west of the center includes the Nikolaki Doctor, Garcheva, Chavkova, Kotseva, Sivova and Pashova houses and "St. Peter and St. Paul's" church (in restoration).

The ensemble on the right bank of the Rozhen dol, located in the northeast of the center includes Spandonieva, Poptasheva and Kamenova houses.

The ensemble on the left bank of the Zlatolistki dol, southeast of the center, includes "St. Nikolai" church, a destroyed Turkish bath, Kushkova, Kerezieva, Sandakchieva houses.

The ensemble of the hill Razklona, located east of the center includes Bolyar house, clock tower, churches "St. Mary" and "St. Anthony", Yankova, Kehayova, Mencheva, Kordopulova houses.

The ensemble at the foot of Razklona, located east of the center includes "St. Varvara" church, Kurteva and Filipova houses.

Besides these houses there are separate houses as Veleva, Panayotova, Deleva and remnants of larger early Renaissance houses as Markova and Kremenlieva.

3.3 Kordopulova house



Kordopulova house is the most famous Melnik house. It is built in 1754 by a rich family in Melnik – Kordopulovi. The house has been completely restored with its original interior architecture, decorated with murals, carvings and stained glass. The house consists of a ground floor, which has wine cellars with capacity - from 250 to 300 tons of wine. Entering the house the living room makes a big impression with its 24 windows in 2 rows. The top row is decorated by colorful murals, Venetian and oriental style. The ceiling of the room is made of wood. It depicts the sun with twelve tapered rectangles - the number of months in a year. Another remarkable thing is the hiding place where Yane Sandanski - a close friend of the owner - was hiding. Now the house is restituted and functions as a private museum, but the majority of the exhibits are located in the City Museum. It is №4 in the hundred tourist sites.

3.4 Pashova house

The house was built in 1815 by one of the richest sipahi in Serres and Melnik - Ibrahim Bey. It consists of a stone ground floor and flimsy. Western half of the basement was converted into a semi-basement with two rooms where the servants lived. A staircase leads to the hall of protruding bay floor. From there all eight rooms located on floor are accessible. The northern wall of the hall - all glass and wavy patterns from wooden lattice shows that the house was a harem of the Bey. In 1912, after the withdrawal of the Turks from this village, Yane Sandanski stays to live with his sister in the house. After his assassination in 1915, his sister continued to live there with the family Pramatarovi. In 1926 the house became the property of Yancho Pashov, hence its current name.

3.5 Turkish konak - Melnik

During the Ottoman era, the town has been a large administrative center and the Konak (town hall) served as the main building of the former regional government. It is assumed that it was built in 1821. Later used as a school building and then in 1972 after the new school was build, it became school boarding house. Currently, the Konak is an abandoned building.

4. Religious tourism resources

There are many religious sites in the municipality. In the past only in Melnik they numbered 70. They are a monument of art, expressing the development of unique arts known as Melnik arts school. There are churches of historical and architectural significance in the villages Vinogradi, Gorno Spanchevo, Belyovo, Goleshovo, Kovachevo, Vranja, Harsovo, Hotovo, Belevchevo, Bozhdovo, Malak Tsalim (legends say

that in a cave near the village lived as a hermit St. Ivan Rilski), Piperitsa, Zlatolist (where lived the nun Reverend Stoina). The largest religious site in the municipality, however, is Rozhen monastery - a unique attraction for tourists and pilgrims.

4.1 Rozhen monastery



The Rozhen Monastery is one of the largest medieval monasteries preserved. It is located in a picturesque area, 6 km east of the town of Melnik and just minutes from the village of Rozhen. In the past it was stauropegial, which means that it was under the direct jurisdiction of the Holy Synod and nowadays the Nevrocop diocese is responsible for it. It is believed that it was founded in 890, with the donations of people from neighboring places. In XVII century a fire burned the monastery archives and therefore not much information about the monastery is left. The earliest proof of its existence is a manuscript in the library of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos. In the 16th century the monastery was in its heyday - the south wing and the main monastery church adorned with frescoes were built then. After a fire in the 17th century, the monastery was almost destroyed. It was restored in the 18th century with the financial support of wealthy Bulgarians and it was fully completed in 1732. The monastery is in the shape of an irregular hexagon, and in the inner courtyard is the monastery church "Nativity of Virgin Mary", decorated with frescoes and stained glass. Extremely valuable work of art, located in the temple is the Great Virgin Mary Icon - an exact copy of the miraculous icon Virgin Mary – Portarnitsa. In the church "Rozhdestvo Bogorodichno" interesting icons

are "Virgin Mary of Tenderness," "St. Peter and St. Paul," "Christ Pantocrator" and others. Temple's holiday is on September 14 - Krastovden, when hundreds of pilgrims gather to attend the Rozhen fair. The monastery is included in "The hundred national tourist sites".

4.2 Monastery "St. St. Kozma and Damyan" - Sandanski

The monastery is situated 2 km far from the centre of the town of Sandanski, near the right shore of Sandanska Bistrica river. The place, where it is built is called Smilovo. There are no evidences when exactly the monastery had been built. It is believed that it happened in the IV-V century, but this is only conjecture. Legend tells that there had lived the brothers Kozma and Damyan, who healed people with the mineral water in the town. Old water pipes testify for an earlier existence of a holy place here. The present monastery is built over the remains of the old one from 1928 from the local people of Sveti Vrach (the old name of Sandanski). In 1998, the monastery was finished and a fence was built around it, as well as monastery gates and two chapels – one of St. Petka and one of St. Dimitar.

4.3 "St. St. Kozma and Damyan Church" - Sandanski

The church was built in 1861 as showed by the inscription above the front door. It is located in the area Smilovo next to the homonymous monastery. It is a three- nave basilica with apse. The church impresses with its beautifully carved iconostasis and frescoes made by the Zograph Andon of the Melnik arts school in 1900. Forms of birds, grapes, leaves are carved on the iconostasis. The ceilings are flat with applications over the central nave. The church is a cultural monument.

4.4 „St. Petka” chapel - Sandanski

The chapel is located near the Monastery “St. St. Kozma and Damyan”. It dates back to the IV-V century and evidences of this are the ruins of an old tomb and water supply system. Locals say that the chapel has miraculous powers and cures infertility.

4.5 Saint George’s Church - Sandanski



The church "St. George" is located near the city center. Its story starts with Nevrokop Bishop Boris. Bishop had the right to choose the land on which to build a church, and he chose the best land in the center of Sandanski area of 8 decares. A large two-storey building that served as bishop’s viceroyalty was built there. Its construction began in 1938 with the intention of being a small-scale replica of the temple-monument "Alexander Nevsky", but because of the war years and the high prices of materials, there was not enough money for its completion. It was completed in 1952. The church was painted by the artist Nikolai Shehelov and is the only building in the city, left over from the Bulgarian Revival period. Holiday of the temple is 6th of May, when a liturgy is administered and an offering is made outdoors.

4.6 Church of „St Nicholas the Miracle-Maker” - Melnik

Metropolitan church, built in the XIII century, located in the southeast of Melnik. Its initial state has nothing to do with what is now. In the Middle Ages it was small one-nave building, but over the years the church was rebuilt and expanded several times. In 1756 it acquired its final

appearance - proof of that is an inscription on the altar wall in the eastern part of the church. In 1895 it was burned, but in the early XXth century was restored by the National Institute for Cultural Monuments. The church was built of stone and thin brick. It was painted by Zograph Lazar whose image is still preserved in the old iconostasis. The temple preserves valuable icons like "Mary Odigitria", "Saint Anthony the Great", "Entry into Jerusalem" and other unique images of Melnik art school.

4.7 "St. St. Peter and Pavel" church - Melnik

The church is located southwest of the city center. It was built in 1840 and has very beautiful and historically valuable objects such as painted iconostasis, pulpit, bishop's throne, decorative frescoes, icons and more. Impressive are the icons "Introduction to the temple" from the second half of the XV century and "Nativity of Virgin Mary" from the XVII centuries. In the temple there is a marble slab on which are depicted the Apostles Peter and Paul. The Episcopal throne located in the church is the only one in Bulgaria metropolitan throne of XIX century. The church was declared a cultural monument of national importance.

4.8 Church of St Joan the Precursor - Melnik

The church is located in the northwest of Melnik and lies on the right bank of the river Melnik. It was built in XVIII-XIX centuries. The temple is richly decorated with colorful frescoes. Interesting site is the depicted ancient city of Nineveh with high palaces, painted by an unknown author. The collection of icons, some of which were done by the painters Lazar Argirov and Jacob Nicholas are of great artistic value. There is a gilded icon representing the baptism of Joan in the temple. The temple has two rows of balconies - one for married women and one for unmarried women, as

man were standing down, which is unusual for Orthodox churches. As part of the cultural and historical reserve "Melnik" it is a cultural monument.

4.9 Saint Anthony church - Melnik

It is called by locals "St. Anton" and is the only one with such a name in Bulgaria. It was built in 1765 and is today a cultural monument of national importance. There is a legend that St. Antony cured people with psychological problems. In the past, in the church came mentally ill, as evidenced by preserved trunk with iron chains with which the rampaged were tied. In the middle of the floor of the temple is placed a plate with the double-headed eagle of the Patriarchate - such plates were placed in places where healing powers are particularly strong. The church is decorated with flowers, angels, seraphims and cherubims.

4.10 Saint George's Church - Zlatolist



Zlatolist is a small village located between Sandanski and Melnik. Its inhabitants are few and most are elderly. Each of them can give you directions to the church and tell you its story. The church is called "St. George" and in it lived Reverend Stoina. When she was seven years old Reverend Stoina fell ill with smallpox and consequently became blind. Years later, St. George comes to her dream and tells her to dig in the yard of the house where she lived and there she will find his icon and a sanctuary lamp. A church was built at that place. During the Second Balkan War, the family of the prophet moved from her native town Haznatar (Serres) to Bulgaria. On the way to Petrich, Reverend Stoina decided that she should

remain in the church "St. George" in Zlatolist and spent the rest of her life there.

4.11 St George the Conqueror Church- Levunovo

The church was built before the First World War - in 1874, but during the war was burned to the ground. In 1916 it was restored by the Second Bulgarian Army in memory of those who died in the First World War. Unlike other churches that are decorated with biblical scenes, two of the walls of this church are inscribed with the names and birthplaces of the fallen soldiers in the area. The church is included in "The military cultural monuments".

4.12 Holy Trinity chapel - Levunovo

The chapel exists at this location since the Middle Ages. The very name of the area, where it is located "Kambanite" (Bells), confirms that this was a sacred place. In 2004, with donations from residents of Levunovo the chapel was renovated. The icons are also donated by local residents. According to legend, the place where the chapel was built is miraculous. Every year on the holiday of Holy Trinity an offering for health is given and traditional wrestling contest is conducted.

4.13 Chapel of Ivan Rilski - Tremoshnitsa

The name of the chapel "Holy Father" comes from the rocky saddle hanging over Sandanska Bistrica River, where it was built. There is a legend associated with the place that says that prior to retire in the Rila Monastery St. Ivan Rilski lived here. The chapel has a length of 8 m and is 6 m wide. The holiday of the chapel is 19 October, and every year on that

date, people gather here from nearby villages Lilyanovo, Golyam Tsalim, Vihren and from Sandanski to honor the saint.

5. Monuments

5.1 Spartacus monument



When entering the town of Sandanski you will see the monument of Spartacus, which is a symbol of the city. Spartacus lived in these lands, but was sold as a slave to gladiator school in Capua, and later escapes and becomes leader of the largest uprising in the Roman Empire. The army, which he led, numbered 7,000 people. They managed to defeat the Roman army and made their way to Gaul, from where they planned to return to their homes. The success of the rebel army frightened the Roman Senate, and they sent 8 legions to extinguish the uprising. The fate of Spartacus is unknown because his body has not been found, but it is believed he died along with the other rebels.

5.2 Yane Sandanski's grave

The grave of Yane Sandanski is situated 200 meters from Rozhen monastery in the church "Saints Cyril and Methodius". His tombstone inscription reads: **"To live is to fight. The slave - for freedom, the free man - for excellence"**. Yane Sandanski was born in 1872 in Vlahi, located in today's municipality of Kresna. In 1901 he formed a cheta (group), and began his revolutionary activities. He is also known as one of the leaders of IMRO. Yane Sandanski is one of the most controversial figures of the time. Loved and admired as a great revolutionary by some,

but seen as a criminal by others. He was killed in 1915 in an ambush on the way to Nevrokop.

5.3 Monument of Second Bulgarian Army - Levunovo



The fountain was built in 1916 by the Second Bulgarian Army in memory of soldiers who died in World War I. It is located in the village square near the church "St. George the Victorious". The fountain and the church are registered with the "War cultural monuments".

In 2011, it was renovated and restored to its former glory.

6. Cultural events

Municipality of Sandanski offers both locals and tourists a number of fun and unique events. In its cultural calendar we find events such as:

"Pirin folk" /rp. Sandanski/

The festival is held annually during the first week of September. The festival "Pirin Folk" was founded in 1993 by the municipality of Sandanski, Blagoevgrad Radio and Television Centre Blagoevgrad and already had 20 editions. After 2000, with the entry in the cultural calendar of the Ministry of Culture of Bulgaria, the forum is more developed and established itself as an international, with artists from Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Romania. With the involvement of the Bulgarian National Television and other national television channels from neighboring countries, the festival becomes indeed a stage for expression and cultural cooperation

between the Balkan countries - three of which are members of the European Union.

The Balkan Youth Festival (BYF)

The festival is held annually during the second week of September. The Balkan Youth Festival (BYF) is the largest international youth event in South East Europe. The main objective is to support the aspirations of young people from Bulgaria, the Balkans and Europe to explore, share information, expand contacts in a whole variety of interests and issues, skills and opportunities for performance and cooperation. Balkan Youth Festival includes the following festival activities: Festival Defile; Festival Concerts; Festival Competitions: Best young pop-rock singer, Most Attractive Festival Couple, Special Festival Moments Photography Competition "All different, but not indifferent"; Balkan Youth Party; Stage for Contemporary Street Art; Exhibition 'HEAT, THIRST, LIFE'; Youth Eco Happening; Picnic and Sports Day; Sintica - Traditions and perspectives; Youth round table discussion "Partnership now and in the future"; Understanding the historical, cultural, ethnographic and tourist attractions of Sandanski and the region.

Melnik Evenings of Poetry /Melnik/

The Melnik festival is held annually in October. Besides poets, this festival attracts artists, musicians, singers from Bulgaria and abroad. The number of participants in the poetry festival increases with each year and in 2003 they were 300. In 2005, "Melnik Evenings of Poetry" has become an international festival of poetry, because poets from the Slavic countries -

Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and others joined and thus "Melnik Poetry Evenings" became Slavic poetry festival.

Festival "Bread and wine" /Spatovo/

It is held annually in June. The festival provides stage for authentic performers of songs, music and dances along the Struma River: Belasitsa Ograzhden, Maleshevia, Pirin, Vitosha, Osogovo. During the festival competitions "Country Lunch" (for delicious meal) and "Beautiful girl" are conducted. The goal is to experience the atmosphere of "old-fashioned" gatherings that were celebrations of primary and unprejudiced communication through traditional arts - music, songs, dances, food. Participants in the event are required to be dressed in traditional costumes, to bring food for a picnic (artificial food, beverage, packaging, etc. is not allowed), to bring a rug – traditional (the use of blankets or contemporary textiles not allowed).

Sklave's fair /Sklave/

The fair is held around June 15, associated with the legend of Spartacus. This fair was a slave market, hence the name of the village "Sklave" from the Latin word for slave. According to some unofficial sources, at this market the leader of the largest slave uprising Spartacus was sold. According to some other unofficial sources Spartacus was born in this village. Nowadays the fair is one of the largest regional markets for animals.

Sandanski's fair

Traditionally, each spring on the Holy Thursday (first week after Easter) a solemn celebration honors the town of Sandanski. Many people gather on the beautiful green lawn near the monastery. The celebration begins with a liturgy and blessing for health. After the solemn liturgy and ceremony there's a festive program. The program for the festival includes wrestling, parade with brass band and cheerleaders and antique theatrical procession. The day ends with a concert on "Bulgaria" square, followed by celebratory fireworks.

Festival "Harvest in Melnik"

At the festival authentic Macedonian songs and dances for harvest and wine are performed. It is also recreated the ritual of stepping on grapes.

International Festival "With songs from sisters Biserovi"

It is held every year, traditionally in June, for three days in the villages Levunovo, Pirin and the town of Sandanski ("Bulgaria" sq.). The world famous sisters Biserovi invite groups from abroad to show their folk art. The festival is an occasion to bring together musicians, fans of Biserovi's family songs. Among the participants in the folk festival, are representatives of Italy, Finland, England, Japan, folk groups from different parts of the country that present authentic music and dance.

Festival of young red wine /Sandanski/

It is held annually at the end of the year (28-30 December).

The residents of the village of Pirin which organize their village fair on the Holy Spirit day, which changes every year, have an interesting tradition.

The fair is organized in the area around the chapel "Holy Spirit". Every oak there is a guardian of a family and every family stands by its eponymous guardian and spends the night there for health.

V. Infrastructure for tourism

1. Accommodation facilities

Sandanski Municipality has a well developed tourist infrastructure and can offer a variety of accommodation facilities. Disadvantage can be considered the fact that they are concentrated in the central parts and the potential of peripheral parts is not fully exploited. The overnight stay capacity of the municipality includes 2,760 beds.

Hotels are a good option for accommodation. The municipality has 41 hotels, 26 of which are family owned hotels. Melnik and Rozhen have three hotels each. Katuntsi and Karlanovo have one hotel each. One hotel is rated as a five star hotel, two have four stars, 20 have three stars, 11 hotels have two stars and 5 have one star.

Motels in Sandanski Municipality are 10. Seven of them are located in Sandanski, one in Rozhen, two in Levunovo. The total number of beds is 132 for Sandanski, 12 for Rozhen and 45 for Levunovo. All are rated one star.

Guest rooms are also an option in the municipality of Sandanski. Only in Sandanski the number of guest rooms is 73. Of these, 51 were categorized as five star rooms, 14 as two star and 7 rooms received one star. In Melnik their number is 12, and in Rozhen there are 2 rooms. 6 rooms in Melnik are categorized with one star, and 6 with 2 stars. Total bed capacity is 401 beds.

Vacation centers complement the diversity of accommodation facilities. Their buildings are old and do not offer many conveniences, but they are a good opportunity for tourist groups because they are cheap. There are 2 vacation centers in the municipality – 1 in Sandanski (1 star) and 1 in the area Popina laka (also 1 star). The same opportunities are offered by 2 bungalow complex – 1 in Sandanski (1 star) and 1 in Melnik (2 stars). The total number of beds in vacation centers and bungalow complex is 256.

The hotel houses in the municipality are nine. 3 are in the town of Sandanski, 3 in Melnik, 1 in Rozhen, 1 in Pirin and 1 in Popina laka. 2 hotel houses in Sandanski, 1 in Melnik and 1 in Rozhen are categorized with 3 stars. 1 hotel house in Sandanski, 2 in Melnik, 1 in Pirin and 1 in Popina laka are categorized with 2 stars. The total number of beds is 125.

Huts and shelters in the mountains are important for the development of ecotourism and therefore they are described in greater detail:

Hut Pirin

The hut is located in the area "Trite reki" (Three rivers) at an altitude of 1640 m. The building is massive, with three floors and a capacity of 80 beds in rooms with four and six beds. Toilets and bathrooms are outside. The hut is heated by solid fuel stoves, it has water and electricity. Near the hut there's a restaurant, which is seasonal. The starting point for the hut is Melnik.

Other tourist attractions near the hut are:

- hut Malina – 2hrs
- hut Popovi livadi – 7 hrs
- hut Bezbog – 6 hrs

- shelter Tevno ezero – 4 hrs
- hut Demyanitsa – 6.30 hrs
- hut Kamenitsa – 5.30 hrs
- Rozhen Monastery – 4.30 hrs.

Hut Yane Sandanski



Hut "Yane Sandanski" is located 18 km from the town of Sandanski, in the area Popina laka. It is located at 1,230 meters and is the lowest lying hut in Pirin Mountain. Next to the hut is the old building, built in 1931 by the tourist company "Elin Pelin". In 1977 was built the new, three-story building that is used up to now. The hut has 70 beds, bathroom on each floor, tourist kitchen and canteen. It has electricity and water. Near the hut are the following tourist attractions:

- Popina laka waterfall – 0.10 hrs
- hut Kamenitsa – 2 hrs on a market trail
- hut Sinanitsa – 5 hrs
- hut Vihren – 7 hrs
- hut Pirin – 7 hrs
- shelter Tevno ezero – 5 hrs

Hut Kamenitsa (Begovitsa)



The hut is located on the left bank of the Kozya (Begovishka) River, 1,750 meters above sea level. The building has three floors and has a capacity of 90 beds. Each floor has a bathroom and toilet. The hut has parking and is a

camping site in the summer. The ground floor of the hut has a tourist canteen and kitchen, while the first floor has a restaurant which is open year round. Near the hut there are three ski lifts. Starting point for the hut is the town of Sandanski. In the summer there's organized transportation to Popina laka, and then the hut can be reached in two hours along a marked path.

Nearby tourist sites:

- peak Kamenitsa (2822 m) – 2.30 hrs.
- hut Pirin – 5 hrs
- shelter Tevno ezero – 3.30 hrs
- hut Vihren – 7 hrs
- hut Demyanitsa – 5.30 hrs
- hut Sinanitsa – 6.30 hrs
- hut Yane Sandanski – 1.30 hrs
- hut Bezbog – 7.30 hrs

Hut Malina



Hut "Malina" is located in the area "Kalugera" at the foot of the peak "Boykov vrah". It has 40 beds, electricity and water. There is a tourist kitchen and canteen. Near the hut are the following tourist attractions:

- hut Popovi livadi – 5.30 hrs
- hut Pirin – 2 hrs

Hut Izvora

The hut is located in the area "Izvora", 6 km from the village of Petrovo. The building has two floors with 40 beds, with own bathroom and toilet. It is heated by solid fuel stoves. The hut has electricity and water. In the past, it was a frontier post and the area was inaccessible for tourists. Starting point for the hut is the village of Petrovo.

Near the hut are the following tourist attractions:

- Petrovo – 4 km
- Goleshevo – 8 km
- Karst spring "Bistrets" – 15 min
- hut Slavyanka

Shelter Spano pole

It is situated in the south part of the circus Malko Spano Pole. The shelter has 10 wooden bungalows with two beds. The toilets are outside, no bathrooms. The bungalows are electrified by aggregate. Camping is not permitted. The shelter is called "Gabkata" (Mushroom) because of the roofs that are red with white dots.

Nearby tourist sites:

- hut Vihren – 3 hrs
- hut Kamenitsa – 4 hrs
- hut Yane Sandanski – 3.30 hrs

- hut Sinanitsa – 3.30 hrs
- shelter Tevno ezero – 4 hrs

Shelter Tevno ezero

The shelter is located on the eastern shore of Tevno ezero (Tevno Lake). It was built in 1972. On the first floor there's a dining room (canteen), on the second floor is a dormitory room accommodating up to 30. In the rear there are additional rooms with a capacity of about 25. The shelter is electrified by aggregate, toilets are outside. The shelter is a part of the European hiking route E-4. Starting point for it is the town of Bansko. Nearby tourist sites:

- Mitrovo lake – 1,30 hrs
- Prevalski lakes – 1,30 hrs
- hut Demyanitsa – 3 hrs
- hut Vihren – 7 hrs
- hut Kamenitsa – 3 hrs
- hut Yane Sandanski – 4 hrs
- hut Pirin – 2,30 hrs
- hut Bezbog – 4 hrs
- shelter Spano pole – 4 hrs

2. Places for dining and entertainment

Sandanski municipality can offer its guests a variety of pubs, restaurants, pizzarias and cafés suitable for every taste. Because of the close border with Greece there are restaurants with typical Greek cuisine. In the town, cafés and fast food restaurants are generally located on the main street

and to a lesser extent in other parts of the city. Good opportunity for entertainment are night clubs (Sandanski), piano bars (Sandanski), many restaurants and taverns with live music. Lovers of authentic Revival atmosphere can visit taverns in Rozhen and Melnik offering Bulgarian cuisine.

The total number of dining and entertainment places in the municipality is about 280 with a capacity of 14,997 seats and the following classification: 1 Star - 128, 2 stars - 123, 3 Stars - 21, 4 stars - 11 .

3. Travel Agencies and Tour Operators

Companies that develop tour operator activities can be found only in Sandanski. These companies are:

- GG Holidays
- Kunchev tourist service
- “Mariana–C” SP
- Geo Holidays
- San Tours
- Gabi Tours

4. Tourist offices and centers

The municipality has two tourist centers that can help the tourists, give them the necessary information or directions. One tourist information center is located in the town of Sandanski, and the other in the town of Melnik. Activities other than helping tourists are advertising and marketing of tourism facilities and services in the municipality, as well as developing own products.

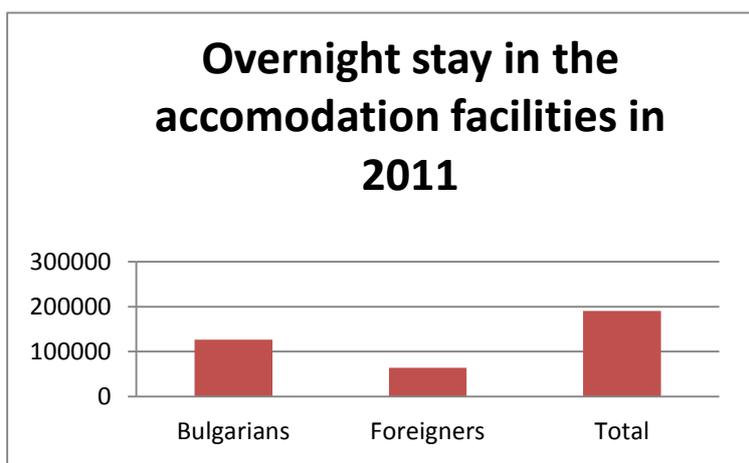
5. Tourist flow

According to data from NSI in 2011 Sandanski Municipality was visited by 88,351 tourists. Of course, this is not an exact figure, since it is the number of people who stayed overnight. The utilization of bed capacities was 21.9% in 2011, which is the highest value for Blagoevgrad region.

ACTIVITY OF ACCOMMODATION ESTABLISHMENTS IN 2011

Regions	Overnight stays			People that stayed overnight			Usage of overnight stays	Income from accommodation		
	total	by bulgarians	by foreigners	total	bulgarians	foreigners		total	By foreigners	By bulgarians
TOTAL	1885533	639405	1246127	5045332	2622808	2422524	32.0	733053423	521526830	211526593
BULGARIA	1	6	5							
BLAGOEVGRAD	752002	408578	343424	320428	193438	126990	17.9	32770497	17771757	14998740
Bansko	374138	133927	240211	140250	61272	78978	17.6	16082948	11190538	4892410
Blagoevgrad	41920	31592	10328	30448	23465	6983	12.8	1238192	340728	897464
Gotse Delchev	12610	9755	2855	9245	7777	1468	11.5	293017	75443	217574
Garmen	19434	18736	698	9341	8991	350	21.7	656768	22046	634722
Kresna	3135	3132	3	843	840	3	14.8	42572	60	42512
Petrich	13789	9398	4391	7878	5128	2750	13.7	562728	223086	339642
Razlog	79125	58433	20692	29397	22675	6722	20.1	3445693	1187887	2257806
Sandanski	193692	129601	64091	88351	58750	29601	21.9	10117255	4723346	5393909

The total number of overnight stay was 193,692, of which 64,091 were made by foreign tourists and 129,601 by Bulgarians. These numbers show that 1/3 of tourists who stayed overnight in the municipality of Sandanski are foreigners. The relative share of the total number of foreign tourists who visit the town (to the total number of tourists) is good. At the same time it should be borne in mind that the majority of foreign tourists pass through the municipality and don't spend the night here.



Bearing in mind that the ecotourism visits are associated with staying for more than one day, it can be said that the visits related to ecotourism goals are not many. An indicator for this is that of the total number of tourists in the municipality of Sandanski, which is 88 351, 86 515 stayed in hotels i.e. only 1 836 tourists spent the night in another means of shelter and those means of shelters are usually used by people practicing ecotourism.

HOTEL ACTIVITY IN 2011

Regions	Overnight stays			People that stayed overnight			Usag e of overn ight stays	Income from accommodation		
	total	By bulgaria ns	By foreigne rs	total	bulgaria ns	foreigne rs		total	By foreigne rs	By bulgarians
TOTAL - BULGARIA	17453606	5166787	12286819	4629386	2241959	2387427	34.6	708279365	515600865	19267850
BLAGOEVGRAD	722122	381381	340741	303846	178276	125570	18.6	32287288	17717246	14570042
Bansko	364027	124741	239286	136438	57646	78792	18.0	15894222	11169197	4725025
Blagoevgrad	34374	24651	9723	25432	18834	6598	14.7	1127095	329898	797197
Gotse Delchev	9971	7116	2855	7698	6230	1468	10.2	270180	75443	194737
Garmen	15954	15364	590	6890	6592	298	23.6	575125	19366	555759
Petrich	12806	8820	3986	7153	4699	2454	13.3	533538	210716	322822
Razlog	77164	56890	20274	28218	21775	6443	22.5	3430429	1183707	2246722
Sandanski	190548	126679	63869	86515	57136	29379	22.3	10082998	4720236	5362762

VI. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the development of ecotourism – SWOT analysis

Strengths

- Favorable geographical location and climate of the municipality
- Proximity to the two border areas
- Unique and conserved nature with diverse flora and fauna
- Presence of protected areas
- Presence of mineral waters
- Rich cultural and historical heritage: archeology, architecture, crafts, folklore, cuisine
- Long tradition in the development of tourism and spa
- Presence of local schools, educating staff to work in the tourism sector
- Well-developed accommodation facilities and availability of recreation
- Popular local lifestyle
- Tourist sites included in The hundred tourist sites
- Presence of mineral springs
- Presence of attractive villages in the municipality: Pirin, Petrovo, Goleshovo, Kashina, Rozhen
- Annual festivals and contests
- Competitive prices of tourism services
- Hospitable people
- Diversity of tourism resources for the development of all types and forms of tourism: health, cultural tourism, religious, rural and eco-tourism, hunting, adventure and more, which can be developed both individually and by effectively combining together

Weaknesses

- Insufficiently developed ecotourism products (unexploited market niches inadequate exposure of foreign experience and ideas)
- Lack of experience in ecotourism development at the municipal level
- Lack of legislation concerning tourism, mountain guides and tourist guides in the municipality
- Poor and inadequate use of natural and anthropogenic resources
- Inadequate marketing and promotion of the region as an ecotourism destination
- A relatively small number of travel agencies and tour operators
- Poor condition of road infrastructure and difficult access to some villages in the municipality
- Low qualification of staff - a large percentage of staff has no basic knowledge of the industry and insufficient training
- High staff turnover
- Small family businesses can't afford to invest in qualification
- Insufficient number of licensed mountain guides
- Overbuilding in the center of Sandanski and a large amount of accommodation facilities in Melnik and almost no tourist infrastructure in small, but with potential for ecotourism, villages
- Lack of funds for reconstruction and maintenance of some cultural and historical monuments (Turkish Konak, the old bathroom and churches in Melnik are just some of the examples)
- Lack of access to services in rural areas - health, information and communication
- Outdated marking of ecotrails, and occasionally even absent
- Lack of campsites

- Deepening tendencies of depopulation and aging of the rural population

Opportunities

- Optimal use of natural resources and environmental protection for sustainable tourism development
- Establishment of Sandanski Municipality as an eco destination and raise the competitiveness of ecotourism
- Use of EU structural funds and other funding sources for the development of ecotourism
- Increase the effectiveness of marketing and promotional programs and activities
- Improving the qualifications and skills of staff in tourism
- Opportunities for diversification of the offered ecotourism products and the development of new
- Changes in national policy to promote ecotourism
- Attracting investors in ecotourism
- Opportunity for creating jobs
- Opportunity to create a complete identity of Bulgaria through ecotourism

Threats

- Economic and regulatory changes that may lead to increase of the price of the tourist product and loss of competitive position and tourists
- Massive campaigns of competing destinations offering the same tourism packages and conditions with very large reductions

- Strong campaigns of competing destinations from Bulgaria and neighboring countries
- Due to limited advertising funds, municipality will likely not be able to create an effective advertising campaign for specialized products
- Inadequate use of natural and anthropogenic tourist resources of the municipality of Sandanski
- Negative impact of the financial and economic crisis on tourism in general
- Investors, including banks consider ecotourism as risk sector
- Deterioration of historical and archaeological resources due to untaken / untimely measures or lack of funds
- Environmental pollution and destruction of endemic species
- The trend of construction of new buildings in Melnik, and thus destroying the authentic look of the city
- High expectations for profits from ecotourism and a sharp decline in its supply
- Fluctuations in the intensity of tourism demand

VII. Plan for development of ecotourism in the Municipality of Sandanski

General goal

When planning the development of ecotourism the overall strategic goal of the municipality should be taken into account. Taking into account the realities of the municipality of Sandanski, especially the potential for development of ecotourism, the following goal can be offered as a general goal: **Increasing the supply of ecotourism products in the region as a tool for environmental protection and sustainable development of the municipality.**

Strategic goals:

1. Improvement and diversification of ecotourism infrastructure:

- Elaboration of site development plans for the places with potential for ecotourism;
- Repair and reconstruction of road infrastructure connecting the ecotourism facilities within the municipality;
- Restoration and renovation of mountain huts, shelters and safety facilities;
- Construction, renovation and maintenance of adequate complementary infrastructure to meet the needs of ecotourism businesses and eco-tourists - places for recreation, entertainment facilities, ecotourism trails and alleys, picnic areas, campgrounds, signposting, visitor centers, small waste collection facilities and more.;

- Development of center for ecotourism;
- Development of eco villages.

2. Establishing partnerships

- Activation and solidarity of all local stakeholders for the development of ecotourism;
- Encourage partners to join the selected program for development;
- Building a sense of togetherness for the development of homogeneous ecotourist concept
- Development of a policy of openness to the problems of ecotourism
- Raising awareness of local actors on issues of ecotourism and joint management of ecotourist resources;
- Creation of advisory councils and associations with the inclusion of local authorities, NGOs, schools, groups for nature conservation, private landowners, businessmen and citizens, in the name of successful ecotourism development.
- Developing partnerships between the public and private sectors in ecotourism;
- Building the capacity of local communities to be actively involved in planning and providing benefits of ecotourism to local communities;

3. Realization of professional marketing of ecotourism in the area.

- Developing a specialized website for ecotourism through which to promote natural resources and ecotourism opportunities and to motivate tour operators and tourists;

- Participation in fairs and trade shows in order to achieve better awareness; developing connections with tour operators, service providers, media; to attract potential customers;
- Creating tools for direct marketing of ecotourism - kiosks, guides, maps, brochures and more;
- Attracting the attention of the press, radios, televisions, TV and radio broadcasters to stimulate them to create broadcasts for the region; to publish articles; to develop films and informational materials;
- Organizing public activities - festivals, seminars and conferences;
- Networks and communities on the Internet (forums);
- Road signs;
- Analysis of tourism demand

4. Promoting environmental education

- Practical trainings on basic knowledge and skills needed to start a business in the field of ecotourism and additional tourist services;
- Informational campaigns to get acquainted with the value of preserved nature; richness and problems of the flora and fauna in the region; natural monuments and protected areas; historical and cultural heritage; legislation in the area of diversity, etc.;
- Training of local entrepreneurs; courses and advice on environmental protection; interpretation, identification, preparation and implementation of projects; customer care and other related to sustainable development of ecotourism.
- Demonstration initiatives - organizing events, training trips, joint production of materials and more.;
- Carrying out specialized training courses for mountain guides and tourist guides;

5. Development of ecotourism business

- Creation of ecotourism tour operators;
- Advising and assisting entrepreneurs from the ecotourism business in European programs, financial tools and resources for funding;
- Development of joint packages of ecotourist and cultural - historical products
- Development of small and micro-enterprises in tourism services and supporting industries - food, drinks, souvenirs,
- Development of reservations activity;
- Development of extreme sports such as rock climbing and paragliding;
- Creation of photo tourism and photo-fest;
- Development of mountain hiking and horse riding tourism

EXAMPLES OF OPERATION

ASSOCIATION „ECOTOURISM“

Concept: The association is a non-governmental organization for carrying out public business, whose main purpose is to encourage and promote integrated development of eco-tourism in a region by bringing all stakeholders. The organization coordinates the interests and activities of local government, private and non-governmental organizations and companies involved in the development or offering ecotourism products in a region. The association regulates the relationship between the various stakeholders in the formation and implementation of the ecotourist product and in this direction assists and participates in the development and implementation of local tourism policy. The organization coordinates the activities of tourist individuals in tourism in the formation and implementation of the marketing strategy of ecotourism product. The

organization works in partnership with similar organizations nationally and internationally.

Legal status: Non-profit organization for the public benefit

Participants: Local associations and professional organizations, tourism businesses, local authorities, natural parks' administrations, tourist centers, local and regional tour operators, government bodies and government authorities;

Funding: private funding (membership fees and donations); financing from the EU and other external donors; funding from local budgets;

ASSOCIATION OF ECOTOURISM COMPANIES

Concept: The association is created as a branch organization having public or most commonly private benefit. Main objective is to unify and coordinate the activities of private entities working in the field of tourism in a region offering a comprehensive tourist services, including key elements of ecotourism - minimizing the negative impacts; building environmental and cultural awareness and foster respect for the environment; offers a positive and unique experience and presents best practices for both visitors and hosts; promote local traditions, customs, nature and culture. The aim of the organization is to promote and unite its members in providing complete product combining tourism and conservation (including conservation and protection of the environment) and thus provides an economic incentive to protect the environment. In essence, the organization works to attract local and foreign tourists, offering them not just accommodation and consumption but experience. The main activities of the organization include: joint marketing and promotional activities; participation in national and international exhibitions, fairs and tourist exchanges; partnerships with similar organizations at local, national and international level; offering joint

tourism packages involving all participants in the association;

Legal status: Non profit association with private benefit; cluster; trade union;

Participants: private companies working in the field of tourism, travel agencies, other businesses related to tourism;

Funding: private funding (membership fees and donations); financing from the EU and other external donors

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL TOURISM

Concept: Information and entertainment center built by the joint efforts of the tourism business and local government or by private investors in an area. The main purpose and activity of the center is to offer activities and tourism packages focusing on ecotourism in a given community or region. Various activities may include ecological tours and trainings for tourists; adventure tourism; one-day hiking trips in the mountains; rafting and canoeing; visiting caves and organizing climbing; integration of local legends in tours; traditional food and alternative energy sources; memorable experience; awareness and involvement of tourists to local customs and traditions; promote communication between the group participants; improved interpersonal relationships between tourists. All proposed activities and experiences are consistent with the basic concepts of ecotourism.

Legal status: NGOs; private company; public-private partnership.

Participants: private companies working in the field of tourism, travel agencies, other businesses related to tourism, local government, nature parks.

Funding: private funding (membership fees and donations); public funding (from local budgets); financing from the EU and other external donors.

ASSOCIATION "GREEN HOTELS"

Concept: Trade association within which eco-friendly hotels and accommodation facilities from a region or country unite to the introduction and enforcement of uniform policies related to saving water, energy and waste. The main objective of the association is to bring together hotels with an interest to develop policies related to environmental protection. Within its activity the organization shall prepare specialized guidelines and collections of best practices from the activities of its members associated with the use of environmentally friendly materials and practices for the construction and renovation of hotels and accommodation facilities, water savings, energy efficiency and renewable energy, waste management, etc. The organization develops general marketing and promotional materials for its members and maintain a unified brand name "Green" hotel and organize formal certification.

Legal status: NGOs; trade union.

Participants: private companies working in the field of tourism.

Funding: private funding (membership fees and donations); bank financing.

ECO VILLAGE

Concept: Environmentally friendly village built in an environmentally sound manner, and having minimal impact on the surrounding countryside and situated in a picturesque area or near the destination. The village can be built with private investment or in partnership with local tourist companies, NGOs and local authorities. The goal is the visitors to be offered a different experience in harmony with the surrounding nature. Within the village there may be places for camping (tent and camping facilities), adventure centers, attractions, outdoor schools (climbing walls,

playgrounds, adventure trails, training centers), hiking opportunities (trails), etc.

Legal status: private company; NGO; trade union.

Participants: private companies working in the field of tourism.

Funding: private funding (membership fees); bank financing; public private partnership; financing from the EU and other external donors.

BICYCLE TOURISM CLUB

Concept: Established as a small business in a region or local community. The main idea of this kind of business is to offer tourists further experiences related to conservation and explore nature by organizing bicycle tours for tourists staying in hotels and accommodation facilities in an area. When establishing or managing this type of small business you should consider the following tips: research such services at local, national and international levels; promote your services among ecotourism companies offering similar products and services; use vehicles and choose routes that have the least impact on the environment; use the services of the local community; promote your services (brochures, banners, web tools) in hotels, tourist centers, travel agencies and other businesses related to tourism in this region; offer additional attractions and entertainment.

Legal status: private company.

Participants: relatives, friends, family.

Funding: private financing; bank financing; funding from EU programs to support small and medium businesses.

PHOTO TOURISM AND PHOTO-FEST

Concept: The main idea of this kind of business is to offer tourists further experiences related to conservation and explore nature by organizing a photo-fest, photo tours and thematic workshops for tourists staying in an area or destination. Tourists can use both rented and own photographic equipment. When establishing or managing this type of small business you should consider the following tips: promote your services among ecotourism companies offering similar products and services; use vehicles and choose routes that have the least impact on the environment; use the services of the local community; promote your services (brochures, banners, web tools) in hotels, tourist centers, travel agencies and other businesses related to tourism in this region; offer additional attractions and entertainment.

Legal status: private company.

Participants: relatives, friends, family.

Funding: private financing; bank financing; funding from EU programs to support small and medium businesses.

HORSE RIDING AND ECOTOURISM CLUB

Concept: The main idea of this kind of business is to offer tourists further experiences related to conservation and explore nature by organizing rides with horses and donkeys to a nearby destination. In order to increase the environmental awareness of tourists can be arranged additional activities such as: riding lessons; visiting villages with authentic architecture; picnics with local organic products; environmental seminars and other. When establishing or managing this type of small business you should consider the following tips: research such services at local, national and international levels; promote your services among ecotourism

companies offering similar products and services; use vehicles and choose routes that have the least impact on the environment; use the services of the local community; promote your services (brochures, banners, web tools) in hotels, tourist centers, travel agencies and other businesses related to tourism in this region; offer additional attractions and entertainment.

Legal status: private company.

Participants: relatives, friends, family.

Funding: private financing; bank financing; funding from EU programs to support small and medium businesses.

ECO GUESTHOUSES

Concept: Usually created in a small family business guest houses of this type are characterized by traditional and harmonious style, and fit well into the landscape of the surroundings. It is this landscape that attracts the tourists. Guest houses that are surrounded by such a nature have a competitive advantage over other tourist destinations. Besides the typical service that they offer, this type of ecotourism business can be supplemented with additional attractions, services and experiences. There are many ideas and examples of how to organize the interior and the surrounding environment, thus predisposing to environmental protection and education in environmental values. When managing this type of small business you should consider the following tips: promote your services (brochures, banners, web tools) in hotels, tourist centers, travel agencies and other businesses related to tourism in this region; combine the offered hotel services with additional services related to ecotourism; use environmentally friendly materials for construction and management of the guesthouse; continually encourage ecological way of recreation among the guests.

Legal status: private company.

Participants: relatives, friends, family.

Funding: private financing; bank financing; funding from EU programs to support small and medium businesses.

One of the biggest challenges for sustainable tourism is that it meets the increasing degree of diversification, experienced by the hospitality industry as a whole, in order to be competitive. In an effort to meet the growing demand in this fastest growing sector of the global economy new tourism activities are continuously developed and offered. Situation in Bulgaria is not different and must be assessed to what extent such a wide range of tourist activities can acknowledge elements of Bulgarian sustainable tourism.

Anyway, there is a significant niche market of visitors who want to experience nature and actively seek opportunities to contribute and participate in activities that generate benefits for nature and people. There are three categories of eco-tourists who can be held under common denominator of ecotourism, and each has its followers and practitioners in Bulgaria:

1. Ecotourist with an interest in nature, local traditions and customs, who prefers to experience these aspects of Bulgaria on foot, in modest accommodations, modern transport between destinations and ample information and interpretation to heighten his appreciation of the experience.
2. Ecotourist who seeks adventure, extreme situations, or sports, associated with unusual nature destinations. Often participation in such activities is in response to personal physical challenge. We are

talking about tourists who practice extreme forms of travel and / or sports, including hang-gliding, bungee jumping, mountain biking, hiking, trekking, horse riding, caving, climbing, rafting (rubber boats on mountain rapids) etc. For such tourists extreme experience is as much a pleasure as the contact with nature and local culture, but often these are mainly background for the core experience.

3. Ecotourist who likes some very specific aspects of the trip. They take their holidays to enrich their professional or semi-professional experience and knowledge. They focus entirely on one subject, look for very specific circumstances and experiences. This type of ecotourist takes specialized trips for culinary purposes, observations of winemaking, carving, textiles, essential oils, natural history studies, incl. bird watching, botany, insects, mammals, geology, spa, or specific music, musical instruments, etc.

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