

News Bulletin

Minister Angelkova: We expect more than 1.2 million tourists during the 2015/2016 winter season

During the last winter season our country was visited by 1.2 million tourists, and we expect this winter to have an increase and to make this figure even higher. This is what Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova said in a TV interview on **11th December 2015**.

“The outlook for a strong winter season has been confirmed by the data provided by the Bulgarian airports”, said Nikolina Angelkova. According to the data presented by her, Sofia airport alone has over 80% increase in flight bookings and their total number reached 178. There is a considerable growth in one of our most important markets for winter tourism – the United Kingdom; flights from London have increased from 24 of 69. Nearly seven times more seasonal flights from Kiev have been requested and Copenhagen has been included as a new destination. Optimistic is also data from Plovdiv airport where they expect a greater number of flights and passengers from Israel (14 new flights), the Netherlands (13 new flights), Great Britain (5 new flights), as well as from Russia. The two seaside airports have also reported growth – planned scheduled and charter flights during the winter months show an increase of 25% of the flights to Varna Airport and an increase of over 40% of those to Burgas Airport.

“This shows that Bulgaria has become not only a recognizable tourist destination for winter tourism, but also a popular one”, said Minister Angelkova. This is confirmed by a study of the consulting company to the European Travel Commission, which ranks Bulgaria among the top 6 of the most popular European destinations for winter tourism.

According to the outlooks of the Ministry of Tourism for the 2015/2016 winter season, an increase in tourist numbers can be expected from near and adjacent markets such as Greece, Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia. Bulgaria will be attractive for tourists from the United Kingdom, for whom the country has traditionally been an advantageous ski destination. An increase in the tourist flow from Israel, Moldova, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway and Switzerland is also expected. The domestic market is also expected to achieve growth, continuing the trend of the last winter season, when all three major ski resorts registered an increase in overnight stays of Bulgarian citizens.



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During the Christmas holidays most Bulgarian hotels boasted full occupancy

370 thousand tourists have visited Bulgaria's winter resorts during the holidays

An inflow of 370 thousand tourists has been registered during the recent winter holidays, which has generated overnight revenues of over 19 million euro. "This makes for a 3% increase compared to the same period of 2014", said Minister Angelkova during a live interview for the Bulgarian National Television on the **7th January 2015**.

The three biggest Bulgarian winter resorts have dubbed this holiday season a success with a majority of bookings from Great Britain, Moldova, Russia, Turkey and Israel. International and domestic tourists have been equal in number.

The Minister also noted that the upcoming winter season is expected to be very strong. The airports have announced an increase in ticket reservations.

Bankso has also been ranked "a most accessible location for family vacations" by TripAdvisor in a poll of 42 popular European destinations.

"Our goal is to expand Bulgaria's presence on all our generating markets and we have ", said Minister Angelkova. A greater tourist inflow is also expected from other of Bulgaria's important markets including Turkey, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Bankso has also been ranked "a most accessible location for family vacations" by TripAdvisor in a poll of 42 popular European destinations.



Nikolina Angelkova: “The last season was very successful for all ski resorts in Bulgaria – tourism revenues were nearly 1 billion BGN for the period December 2014 – March 2015, and over 1.2 million foreign tourists visited Bulgaria. We as administration, and the business, hope that in the new season these results will be exceeded”.



During the ceremony, Mayor Georgi Ikonov awarded Ministers Nikolina Angelkova and Krassen Kralev the sign of Bansko for their consistent efforts to develop the winter resort.

Minister Angelkova gives the go-ahead of Bansko 2015/2016 winter season

*Ministers Nikolina Angelkova and Krassen Kralev were awarded the sign of Bansko for their consistent efforts to develop the winter resort on the **30th December 2015**.*

During the last winter season Bansko was visited by nearly half a million tourists. “I am sure that with joint efforts we can improve these figures in the 2015/2016 season”. These were the words of the Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova at the opening ceremony of the new winter season in Bansko. The event was also attended by Minister of Youth and Sports, Krassen Kralev, the Mayor of Bansko, Georgi Ikonov, the ski legends Marc Girardelli, a five-time World Cup Champion, Marcus Vasmayer, the double Olympic Champion, and the multiple Champion of Bulgaria and FIS, Peter Popangelov, and representatives of the local tourist industry, awarded for their activities, etc.

“The last season was very successful for all ski resorts in Bulgaria. We as administration, and the business, hope that in the new season past year results will be exceeded”, said Nikolina Angelkova. The same data has been provided by the tour operators regarding early bookings for the season, as well as by Bulgarian airports regarding flight bookings.

During the ceremony, Mayor Georgi Ikonov awarded Ministers Nikolina Angelkova and Krassen Kralev the sign of Bansko for their consistent efforts to develop the winter resort. The double Olympic champion Marcus Vasmayer was also awarded the sign of the Mayor. The official opening ceremony ended with fireworks and a festive programme, which lasted until late evening.

New Winter Season Kicks off in Pamporovo



The Deputy Minister of Tourism Irena Georgieva participated in the opening of the 2015/2016 winter season in Pamporovo on the **19th December 2015**. The event was also attended by the Minister of Youth and Sports Krassen Krlev, the Mayors of Smolyan and Chepelare, Nikolai Melemov and Slavka Chakarova, the Regional Governor of Smolyan, Nedyalko Slavov, the Member of the European Parliament, Vladimir Uruchev, the majority owner of Pamporovo AD, Tsvetelina Borislavova, the Executive director of Pamporovo AD, Marian Belyakov, etc.

“The resort’s 2014/15 winter season was very successful. Official data shows that *overnight* stays in *tourist* accommodation in Pamporovo were nearly 73 thousand in the period from December to March which is an increase by over 10% compared to the previous season”, said Deputy Minister Georgieva. She noted that about 77% of the resort guests were Bulgarians. “At the same time we should congratulate Pamporovo that it has been attracting more and more tourists during the green season – in the period April-October 2015 they were over 40 thousand. This is a confirmation that Bulgaria can successfully develop as a year-round tourist destination”, she added.

At present, Pamporovo boasts *bed occupancy* as high as nearly 70%. Both organized and individual tourists from Greece, Turkey, Serbia, Great Britain, Romania, Macedonia, Moldova and Bulgarians with their families are expected. The new markets are the Netherlands, Moldova and Slovakia. There are good chances for attracting tourists from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Israel. The interest of the Turkish tourists continues to be high and the peak sales on this market are expected in late January and early February. According to forecasts of the local authorities, around 10% growth in the total tourist flow in Pamporovo, compared to the previous season, can be expected.

Ministry of Tourism to introduce a regulation on the activities of ski instructors



Bulgaria will introduce for the first time a regulation stipulating the rules on practicing the profession of ski instructor. The requirements are set out in the draft Regulation on the education, practical training and qualification needed for obtaining a license to practice the profession of "ski instructor" published on the **30th December 2015** on the website of the Ministry of Tourism for public discussion. Albeit the introduction of such a by-law is provided for in the currently effective Tourism Act as well as in its previous editions, no such regulation has been drafted or adopted so far.

The document defines the criteria that have to be met by those willing to take exams for obtaining a license to practice as ski instructors in Bulgaria. Ski instructors are required to have specialized in alpine skiing, cross country skiing and snowboarding for which they will receive a certificate awarding A, B or C level of competency (upward gradation). The training of persons willing to acquire qualification for practicing the profession of ski instructor will be conducted in the framework of training courses. They will be organized by professional tourism associations, members of reciprocal international organizations, and other legal entities authorized, under special laws, to carry out such training.

Training will be conducted under the terms of a curriculum and a plan developed by professional tourism associations, in their capacity of training organizations, in accordance with the standards, norms and recommendations of the International Association of Professional Ski Instructors (ISIA) and approved thereby. Training will be also performed in accordance with the plans and programs developed by other training organizations approved jointly by the Minister of Youth and Sports and the Minister of Education and Science. Exams in theory and practice will be taken before the training organizations to acquire competency by specialty and level. Candidates who have passed both exams will receive a certificate of competency issued by the training organization.

It is further provided for a list of qualified ski instructors to be kept as part of the National Tourism Register that will be available online. Thus everyone will be able to check the qualification of their ski instructor and be sure of his/her competency and skills. The register will contain the names and contact details of ski instructors (address, telephone, e-mail address); changes in the registered circumstances; the number of identity card; the order on data entry or deletion respectively. After inclusion in the register, the Minister of Tourism shall issue to the registered person an identification card. In exercising their profession, ski instructors shall be required to wear their ID cards prominently. Ski instructors who have acquired competency shall offer their services through the ski schools that have employed them.

The team of the Ministry of Tourism has already launched a series of meetings and discussions and is currently in the process of discussing the regulation with non-governmental stakeholder organizations in this field. Today's publication of the text aims to attract attention to the regulation and get a greater number of feedback posts from the NGO sector.

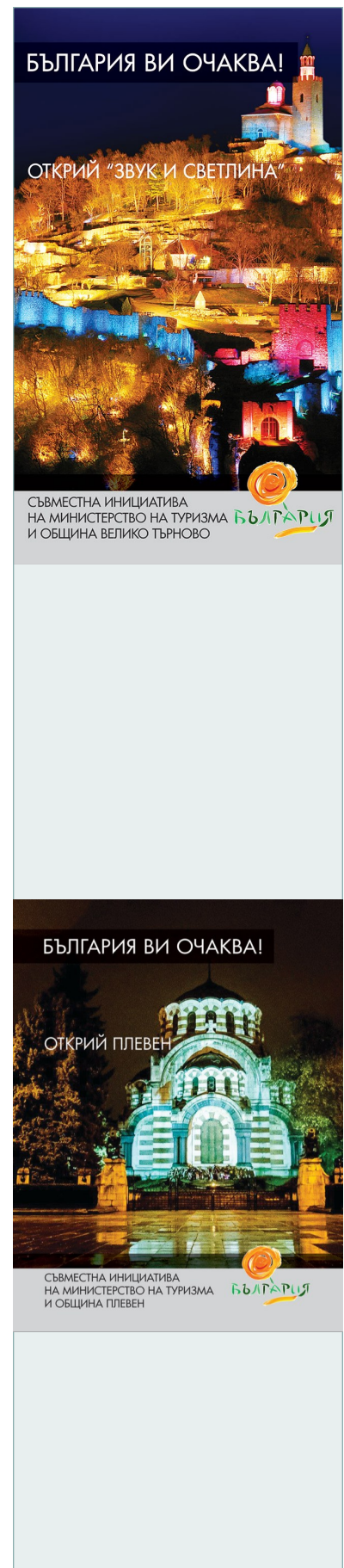
The Ministry of Tourism and the Bulgarian municipalities launch a joint billboard campaign to promote domestic tourism

The Ministry of Tourism and the Bulgarian municipalities have launched on **29th January 2015** a joint billboard campaign to promote domestic tourism. The campaign will cover all major municipalities and will promote tourism opportunities by regions. Advertising visuals will be displayed in central locations on the territory of a given municipality to advertise tourism opportunities offered by another municipality. Thus iconic historical sights of a region will be presented in another. The visuals are with a strong cultural and historical focus and reflect a number of iconic landmarks such as the medieval castle Baba Vida, the archaeological complex Perperikon, the ancient fortress Hisarlaka, the Besarbovski rock monastery, the Alexandrovo tomb, to mention but a few.

The Ministry of Tourism is committed to the development of more than 40 billboards, whereas the municipalities will provide free advertising space in key locations where advertising visuals will be displayed for a period of about six months. With campaign already launched, billboards will be progressively installed in 11 major municipalities, namely Razgrad, Ruse, Silistra, Haskovo, Vidin, Veliko Tarnovo, Burgas, Kardzhali, Gabrovo, Montana and Pernik. Other municipalities will be also included at a later stage.

The initiative is the first of its kind and is a natural continuation of the efforts of the Ministry of Tourism to promote domestic tourism and opportunities for year-round recreation in the country. The campaign aims to raise the awareness of Bulgarians for their country and to diversify the national tourism product. It builds on the results achieved under the completed project "Communication campaign to promote domestic tourism", which managed to reach about 2 million people.

Within the period January-October 2015 the number of overnights spent by Bulgarian citizens in the country exceeds 7 million which represents an increase of 6.2% as compared to the same period of 2014. The number of accommodated Bulgarians was over 2.8 million which is 8.9% more than in 2014, while revenues from their overnight stays amounted to over 132 million euro, an increase of 6.9% as compared to the same period of the previous year.



Tomb of Thracian King Seuthes III dubbed one of Bulgaria's newest miracles

Deputy Tourism Minister Irena Georgieva and Deputy Minister of Environment and Water Atanaska Nikolova presented the award in the category "Spa Destination" at the annual ceremony of the "Wonders of Bulgaria" campaign on **21st December 2015**. This is the fifth consecutive edition of the campaign which is a joint initiative of the Standard newspaper (one of Bulgaria's high-circulation newspapers) and the Bulgarian National Television. The campaign aims to promote the country's natural, historical and cultural assets and is open to public voting.



It is through mobile voting that the general public determines the winners in a number of categories. Three major categories were identified for 2015 – “treasures”, “cultural and historical sites”, “discoveries”. Winners in the respective categories were the Panagyurishte Gold Treasure dating back to Thracian times which was also showcased this summer at the Parisian Louvre, the Tomb of the Thracian King Seuthes III (the exquisite bronze head of Seuthes III was also displayed at the Louvre and caused quite a stir) and St. Anastasiya Island in the Black Sea which during socialism was used as a political prison.

The award which the two government officials presented is handed for the first time and this year it went to the five-star hotel "Pirin" Park Hotel – Sandanski which was started as a pilot Europe project by the European Spas Association and has been granted the EUROPESPA WELLNESS seal of approval. The event was broadcast live on the Bulgarian National Television.

"The Ministry of Tourism supports this campaign not only because it is aimed at promoting domestic tourism, but also because it helps promote cultural tourism", said Deputy Minister Georgieva. She went on to say that the Ministry of Tourism works consistently for the promotion of cultural tourism, stressing that with its 40,000 registered artifacts and objects, dating from seven eras, our country is among the richest on the continent and has much to offer to its visitors.

The event was attended by Tsetska Tsacheva, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, Margarita Popova, Vice-President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Yordanka Fandakova, Mayor of Sofia, Ivan Portnih, Mayor of Varna, Todor Tanev, Minister of Education and Science, Boni Petrunova, Deputy Minister of Culture, etc.

Ministry of Tourism of the republic of Bulgaria

1 Saborna Str., Sofia 1000

Phone: +359 2 904 6809

Fax: +359 2 4470 899

E-mail: press@tourism.government.bg