

Haskovo

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Haskovo is one of the oldest settlements in Bulgaria. Its history dates back from the Neolithic – i.e. the habitation is about seven thousand years old. And the **town of Haskovo** celebrated its thousandth anniversary in 1985.

Haskovo is the capital city in the Haskovo municipality/province. Located in the central portion of southern Bulgaria, Haskovo is an area with reliable bus and train service. As Haskovo is near the Greek border, many tourists use this area as a central point to view more than one town and country.

History of Haskovo

Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of settlements dating back over **7,000 years**. Haskovo is believed to be one of Bulgaria's oldest residences. Traces of Thracian, Roman, medieval Bulgarian, and Ottoman/Turkish tribes were left behind. A 9th century **fortress** turned

the area that would become Haskovo into a busy town. It appears to have been an important religious centre.

The actual name Haskovo does not appear until late in the 14th century. It appears to have been a thriving market linking Plovdiv, Odrin, Tzarigrad, Ruse, and Greece. There is evidence that it was a booming trade centre. In the 1700s, the town fell under Ottoman rule and they renamed the town Marsa. The Turks held control until the 19th century.

Thing to do in Haskovo



The guests of Haskovo are mainly attracted by the healing Haskovo **mineral springs** and the picturesque “Kenana” – a splendid oak forest with a **spacious park**, restaurants, tennis grounds, and houses for recreation.

The remains of ancient fortresses and mineral pools from the Roman period in Mineralni Bani municipality are of special interest for tourists. Attractive tourist sights are also **Kaleto Fortress** and “Sharapanite” (with

the best kept “sharapani” – wine cellars dated from the ancient Thracian times – one millennium B.C).

1. The Virgin Mary Monument

The Highest statue of the **Holy Virgin Mary** with the Infant in the world was built to convey the respect, love and gratitude of the people to the Mother of God.

The monument was inaugurated by a traditional water-sanctifying ritual by Archbishop Arseny in 2003. In 2005 it was included into the book of Guinness World Records, and since 2009 it was also entered into the List of the Hundred National Tourist Sights in Bulgaria. The authors of the statue are Petyo Alexandrov, Nikola Stoyanov and team. It is made of polymer concrete and weighs 120 tons.

The overall height of the **monument is 32.8 meters**, and its attractiveness is supplemented by The Nativity of the Virgin chapel, which was built inside the base of the statue. The Yamacha Hill on which the Statue stands offers a fascinating breathtaking view over the city.

2. The Bell Tower

In the summer of 2010, next to the Monument of Virgin Mary in the city of Haskovo, the edifice of the Belfry was built up. In years of spiritual poverty and scepticism, Haskovo residents have once again gave way to their – let me say – Renaissance creative drive!

It took nearly half a million Bulgarian leva to build this enlightening Christian monument and, please note the fact that all the funding was

collected in less than a year entirely from donations! Rising to nearly thirty meters, the Belfry next to the Virgin Mary Monument in the town of Haskovo, is one of the highest on the Balkan Peninsula.

On top of it there are eight bells of varying size and total weight little over one tonne. The Belfry is open to visitors every day and due to the breathtaking views it offers from the top, it has been quickly beloved as a favourite destination of both residents and guest of the city of Haskovo.

3. The Aleksandrovo Tomb

The tomb in the vicinity of the village of **Aleksandrovo** dates back to the IV century BC, and is one of the most prominent monuments of the ancient Thracian culture. It was discovered in 2000 by the famous archaeologist Georgi Kitov (1943 – 2008).

Its impressive size ranks the tomb among the most monumental ones on the Bulgarian lands. The exceptionally wellpreserved frescoes enrich with new data our knowledge and notions of the Thracian religious rituals, cults, weapons, clothing and lifestyle.

In 2009 the **Thracian Art Museum** of the Eastern Rhodopes opened its doors in the immediate proximity to the tomb. The people of Japan had donated nearly \$ 3 million for the construction of this Museum. The huge museum complex was inaugurated personally jointly by the Japanese crown pri

nce's brother – Prince Akishino and the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov. Since 2011 the Alexandrovo tomb has become a part of the List of the Hundred National Tourist Sights in Bulgaria.

4. Museum Center „Thracian Art Of Eastern Rhodopes“

Thracian Art Museum of the Eastern Rhodopes is one of the most well-equipped and representative museums in the country, and since 2011 it is included in the list of the One Hundred National Tourist Sights. An important exponent in the exhibition hall is the exact duplicate of the original tomb.

The frescoes made by the hand of the Thracian artist are recreated in the tiniest details. They depict fighting and hunting scenes as well as the notorious feasts of the Thracian aristocracy. The abundant exposition reveals many more artifacts of the Thracian period found in the region of Haskovo. Many of them can be seen on the wall paintings in the tomb of Alexandrovo – arms, jewelry, pots, etc.

The brightest exhibit in Thracian Art **Museum of the Eastern Rhodopes** is undoubtedly the 98 golden pieces of jewelry (4500-4000 years B.C.) which were found in the northern part of the Sakar Mountain. Along with the jewels from the necropolis near Varna and the necklace from the village of Hotnica these are said to be the oldest processed gold in the world.

5. The Uzundzhovo Church

The Assumption is the largest **rural church** in Bulgaria. It combines in an amazing way various elements of Christianity and Islam. Built initially as a Christian temple, in 1593 it was destroyed by the Ottoman Empire.

A mosque was erected in its place – it was a part of a large estate of caravan seraglio, which according to the chronicles-writers resembled a fortress, whose central entrance is preserved until the present days. In the early 20th century the Turkish government returned the property back to Bulgaria and the reconstruction of the mosque into a church began at that time. In 2007 the church was thoroughly reconstructed by the Haskovo Municipality.

During the restoration works two medieval inscriptions in Arabic on religious-philosophical topics were discovered, but these latter inscriptions have not yet been accurately dated. All the icons and frescoes were restored. The Tryavna painter Master Darin Bozhkov carved a new iconostasis, which by its size ranks among the three biggest and most impressive ones in the country. The windows were decorated with fascinating stained glass works, depicting scenes from the life of the Mother of God.

6. The Old Clock Tower

The **Clock Tower** of Haskovo was built in the early 19th century as a symbol of the town and the economic upswing. Somehow, in 1913 the City Council adopted a resolution to destroy it ... On September 8, 2012 the Mayor of Haskovo Municipality Georgi Ivanov turned the first sod for the restoration of the old clock tower.

A year later, once again on the feast of the town – Nativity of Mary, Haskovo regains one of its symbols. The restored clock tower rises 23 meters and is built of hewn stone from Uzundzhovo.

There are three dials and electronic verification mechanism with GPS on the top and a chime clocks the hours. A curious fact is that the bell in the tower is from the Whitechapel foundry – the foundry that produced the bell of Big Ben, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, the bells of the Olympics in London and the bells for the Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II ... The Whitechapel foundry (founded in 1570) is listed in the Guinness World Records as the oldest in Great Britain

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