**HISTORY OF HASKOVO**

The first data about settlements on the territory of the town of Haskovo dates back to the 5th century BC. There are dozens of artifacts such as stone cannons, various idols, amulets, strings and necklaces, etc.
In the iron age, the region was inhabited by the Thracians. They left their mark in a number of tombs, shrines and strongholds. One of the most significant testimonies of their culture can be found in the unique murals of the tomb near the village of Alexandrovo.

In the middle of the 6th century, Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians began to settle in Thrace and on the Aegean coast. The relics of this time are a medieval settlement in the Hissarya area and the fortress wall in Haskovo. At the end of the Xth and the beginning of the XIth century, the fortress witnessed many battles and was almost completely destroyed.
At the time of the Second Bulgarian State, Haskovo was associated with the famous Battle of Klokotnitsa in 1230. Then the troops of the legendary ruler and Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Assen II destroyed the numerous army of the Byzantine despot Teodor Komnin.
During the Ottoman Empire Haskovo meets the names of Haskioy and Marsa. In the middle of the 19th century, the traditional crafts flourish such as furriery and tannery, and the city has craft and shopping streets with more than 200 workshops and shopping centers. One after another new Bulgarian schools emerge in Haskovo. At the beginning of the 20th century Haskovo became the centre of the tobacco industry.

Haskovo municipality is situated in the hilly plains of Southeastern Bulgaria and occupies the western part of the Haskovo region. The town is strategically located between the Rhodopes and the Stara Planina Mountains.
Territory: 740.22 sq. km.
Settlements: 37 settlements, 1 town and 36 villages
Climate: moderate continental, with a strong Mediterranean influence
Population: 89 342 people (in the town of Haskovo – 72 336, in the villages – 17 006 people)

PLACES TO VISIT IN OUR TOWN

**THE MONUMENT OF VIRGIN MARY**

 Haskovo has the world’s highest statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Child. The monument was unveiled in 2003 with a ceremony held by Metropolitan Arseniy. Two years later the statue was recorded in the book of *Guinness world records*, section *Religion* with its impressive 32.8 meters height.

In 2009 the monument was enlisted in *The 100 National Tourist Sites of Bulgaria* under number 72.

The architects who made the statue were Petyo Aleksandrov, Nikola Stoyanov and а team. It was made of polymer concrete and weighs 80 tons. The monument stands on a 17 meter high pedestal. A chapel named *Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*  was built in the base of the monument.

The symbol of Haskovo wasn’t chosen by chance – God’s mother has always been considered saint patron of the city. Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated on 8th of September, is one of the greatest Christian feasts and is acknowledged as a holiday of the city.

**THE BELL TOWER**

 Just a few meters from the Monument of Virgin Mary, there is the almost 30-meter high Bell Tower. It was built in 2010. The Bell Tower quickly took its place in the architectural ensemble located in Yamacha Park and became an attraction for locals and tourists.

The Bell Tower gives a unique view of the beautiful city landscape. It takes 135 stairs to reach to the top.

There are eight bells of different sizes on top of the Bell Tower. Their total weight is more than 1 ton, and their ringing can be heard every day at 12:00 and at 6:00 p.m.

**THE OLD HASKOVO CLOCK TOWER**

The Clock Tower of Haskovo was built in the early 19th century as a symbol of the town. Somehow, in 1913 the City Council adopted a resolution to destroy it.

On September 8, 2012 the Mayor of Haskovo Georgi Ivanov turned the first sod for the restoration of the old clock tower. A year later, again on the feast of the town – Nativity of Mary, Haskovo regained one of its symbols. The restored clock tower rises 23 meters and is built with hewn stone from the village of Uzundzhovo. On the top, there are three dials and electronic verification mechanism with GPS, and the bell rings every hour. A curious fact is that the bell in the tower is from the Whitechapel Foundry – the foundry that has produced the bell of Big Ben.

The Old Clock Tower of Haskovo was entirely restored with donations.

**THE KIRKOV'S SCHOOL**

 In the beautiful Renaissance house, also known as *the Kirkov’s School* the exhibition *Haskovo enlighters* is presented. In the house you can see pictures, documents and other things, which belong to some citizens of our town. They contributed to the spiritual growth of the national culture in the second half of the 20th century.

Among the exhibits are things, that belonged to the famous Bulgarian violinist Nedyalka Simeonova,works of the famous drama specialist Prof. Lyubomir Tenev, the composer Prof. Alexander Tanev, Ivan Nikolov’s books and manuscripts, who was a poet and a translator, Hristo Forev’s photos and awards, etc.

### **PASCAL'S HOUSE**

 It was built in the middle of the 19th century and is declared a monument of culture of national importance. In the house we witness the transition from the traditional rural customs to the urban and European ones.

The display in Pascal’s House is a collection of articles of wealthy families who lived in Haskovo immediately after the Liberation by the end of the 19th century. Opened in 1971, it is the first house in Bulgaria, which shows urban lifestyle.

**THE SUNDIAL IN HASKOVO**

In ancient times, when people did not have clocks, calendars, and compasses, the sun was the basic indicator for time and space. Then the nations of Mesopotamia, India, Egypt and Ellada invented sundials.

In addition to telling the time, the sundial in Haskovo also shows us the Compass Rose. For centuries, the symbol of the rose was connected with the maps and led people in the right direction. Painted on almost every map, The Compass Rose pointed north and south, east and west.

The sundials are the oldest known devices for measuring the time.

**THE MONUMENT OF CAPTAIN PETKO VOYVODA**

Petko Kiryakov Kaloyanov is one of the brightest figures in the history of the national liberation movement in Thrace, the main Thracian rebel, revolutionary and voivode, for whom the people have preserved unforgettable memories and he has been chanted in songs and legends. A peak on the island of Livingston, Antarctica has been named after the distinguished Bulgarian – Petko Voyvoda. Many Bulgarian cities and villages have streets named after the hero.

 A curious fact: The monument of Captain Petko Voyvoda in Haskovo is the largest sculpture of the Voivode in the world. “But why in the world?” – you will ask, and we will answer: “Because his monuments are not only everywhere in today’s Bulgaria, but also in Esimi (Greece), Kiev (Ukraine), Chicago (USA) and Rome (Italy)”.

**PARKS**

**YAMACHA PARK, HASKOVO**

Yamacha Park was established in the period 1958-1970. Its area is about 500 decares in the southern part of Haskovo, one of the first hills of the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. At the beginning of the park is The Virgin Mary Monument, as well as the chapel next to it. Inside the park there is a second chapel – Ascension of Jesus. Next to Monument stands the newly built bell tower – the newest pride of Haskovo. The bell tower is 29 meters high and has three levels that allow the city’s residents and tourists to admire the beautiful city landscapes.

One of the historical monuments of the city is located in the Park. The Haskovo stadium was built here, with a separate children’s playground. Wonderful view of the entire city and the surroundings opens up from the central part of Yamacha Park. The area of ​​the park is mostly forested. Yamacha is extremely rich in tree species. It is an attractive point for all citizens and guests of the city who want to admire beautiful scenery and impressive views. The area and the sports facilities here predispose to sport and stroll. Yamacha Park is a beautiful creation built with the efforts of the entire Haskovo community.

**URBAN FOREST PARK KENANA, HASKOVO**

Kenana is the largest park at the territory of Haskovo municipality with area of 236,6 ha, and is located southeast of the city. Its main area is forested. Many tree species could be found here. A wide pedestrian promenade, 2.5 km long, passes through the park. It leads to the center of the park composition – an artificial lake. Specialized bicycle lane, parallel to the pedestrian, was also built.

There are many pubs, hotels, swimming pools, children’s playgrounds and sports facilities in the park. The tennis courts are located here, whose 8 equipped playgrounds and professional coaches provide great conditions for tennis and squash. Our fellow countryman Grigor Dimitrov has started his career from here as a Wimbledon World Champion in his youth. Kenana Park is also the home of the zoo, which has a terrain of 9 decares and a huge number of different animal species. The Sivata Voda dam is also located at the Urban Forest Park Kenana.

**CITY GARDEN PARK, HASKOVO**

 The foundations of the modern City Garden Park in Haskovo were laid in the late 19th century. The Government of Haskovo at that time invited Marin Penchev – the creator of the Boris Garden, who studied gardening in Hungary. He designed the construction of the urban network of the City Garden and managed the planting of the first ornamental trees, shrubs and flower beds.

In 1910, his son finished his father’s work. He extended the area of ​​the park and it reached 41 decares, and large similar size trees were planted. The garden next to the theater, the Mersito Park and the European Park were created at the same time.

In 2011, a complete reconstruction of the City Garden Park began. On November 21, 2011 the entirely renovated Haskovo City Garden was opened. The alleys of the old park were entirely changed, playgrounds were built and rest areas, too. Some of the vegetation was preserved, however new types of trees, shrubs and grasses and a variety of seasonal plants were planted.

**CHURCHES**

**THE CHURCH ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY OF GOD, HASKOVO**

The Church ***Assumption of the Virgin Mary*** is the oldest and the most impressive one in Haskovo. It was consecrated in an extremely festive atmosphere on August 15, 1837 on the day of saint Mary .The Church was built on the place of an ancient chapel, in a spacious courtyard fenced by a stonewall, higher than 4 meters. The iconostasis was made by master-painters from the Debar School and it fascinates with its rich wood carving. The most remarkable mural of all is the image of The Blessing God.

**ST. ARCHANGELS MICHAEL AND GABRIEL CHURCH**

***St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel*** church was built in 1861. It is the second in the city and is known as the Greek Church or the Church of The Rich. The frescoes are wonderful, especially the arch of the church. The compositional distribution of the figures in the scenes of the arches and the patronal cycle is very well thought out. In 1972 the church was declared a cultural monument. The dome of the bell tower of the church ***St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel*** was gilded in 2003.