



STRATEGIC ANALYSIS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE CROSS-BORDER REGION: DUPNITSA – KYUSTENDIL – KRIVA PALANKA – KRATOVO

I. The Region as a Unified Destination

The region is taking shape as a large-scale **Cultural Area** offering a comprehensive experience: from cultural layers of different historical periods to European urban modernity, through spiritual centers and mountain landscapes.

While the project's primary thematic focus is on the traditions of the National Revival period and the emergence of European influences on local life, the team’s approach remains broader when exploring the tourism potential of the Cultural Area.

II. Breakdown by Municipalities: Strengths, Weaknesses, Potential and Recommendations

2.1 Municipality of Kyustendil

2.1.1 Strengths

Cultural Heritage

- **Rich Cultural and Historical Heritage:** Features monuments from all historical epochs and iconic landmarks of national significance.
- **Protected Heritage Sites:** Includes the Pautalia-Velbazhd-Kyustendil National Architectural and Archaeological Reserve, showcasing in-situ **Roman Thermae** (2nd–3rd century), sections of the ancient city walls and the Late Antique and Medieval fortress on **Hisarlaka Hill**.
- **Multi-layered History:** Presence of significant artifacts and sites ranging from the Neolithic to the Late Middle Ages and the Modern Era. Notable locations include:
 - Asclepius Archaeological Hall (Regional History Museum - Kyustendil);
 - St. George Church (10th century);
 - Pirgova Tower, Dervish Bath and Ahmed Bey Mosque;
 - House-museums of Ilyo Voyvoda, Emfiedzhieva House and Dimitar Peshev.
 - Vladimir Dimitrov – The Master Art Gallery.

Natural Resources & Geography

- **Natural Endowments:** Proximity to mountains, healing mineral springs, nature reserves, coniferous forest parks and fertile soils.

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Contract RD 02-29-380 of 22.04.2025, Interreg VI-A IPA Bulgaria-North Macedonia 2021-2027,

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- **Geographic Diversity:** Fertile valleys combined with the proximity of the Osogovo, Lisets, and Konyavska mountains.
- **Favorable Climate:** A moderate transitional-continental climate suitable for year-round recreation.
- **Strategic Location:** Proximity to the capital (Sofia) and situated along international transport corridors at the borders of North Macedonia and Serbia.

Tourism & Infrastructure

- **Wellness & Health:** Presence of luxury a 5-star SPA hotel, guest houses with thermal water, a state rehabilitation complex (Kyustendil Specialized Hospital for Rehabilitation) and public thermal baths with outdoor thermal pools.
- **Winter & Active Sports:** Developed winter tourism with two ski runs; professional racing at *Pautalia Karting Track*.
- **Accommodations:** A diverse range of lodging including mountain huts, forest-park hotels and city-center hotels.
- **Established Routes:** Existing thematic cultural-tourism itineraries and a functional Tourist Information Center.

Governance & Community

- **Administrative Capacity:** As a developed regional center, Kyustendil boasts an experienced municipal and district administrations with specialized urban planning and environmental departments.
- **Strategic Planning:** Implementation of the **Plan for Integrated Development** and a specialized Tourism Development Program (2021–2027).
- **Active Partnerships:** Ongoing joint projects for urban improvement with neighboring municipalities like Dupnica and Kriva Palanka.
- **Social Vitality:** A network of active cultural institutions (Chitalishta, Theatre, Library, Art Gallery, etc.) and an annual calendar of international festivals, competitions and city celebrations.

2.1.2 Weaknesses

- Presence of a dilapidated and poorly maintained building (a former hotel) located in the prime city center.
- A lack of developed attractions specifically tailored to diverse age groups and social demographics.
- Insufficient tourist orientation and information boards.
- A shortage of street name signs throughout the urban area.
- Inefficient or insufficient utilization of the region's mineral (both therma and cold) water potential.
- A shortage of SPA hotels.
- Lack of sufficient facilities and equipment for winter sports development.

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- Limited accommodation capacity (beds) in the mountain areas.
- A general shortage of investment in the region.
- A deficit of qualified personnel and skilled labor within the tourism and hospitality sector.
- Ongoing demographic challenges (e.g., aging population, migration).

2.1.3 Potential and recommendations:

- **Diversified Tourism Development:** Leveraging natural and cultural assets to expand **Eco, Ski, SPA, and Cultural tourism.**
- **Expansion of Balneology:** Developing specialized medical and health-related thermal treatments to capitalize on the region’s mineral springs.
- **Archaeological Valorization:** Further excavation and exhibition in-situ of the cultural heritage within the Pautalia-Velbazhd-Kyustendil National Reserve.
- **Strategic Integration:** Integrating local cultural and thematic routes into broader national and international tourism itineraries.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Active participation in European funding programs for projects focused on the restoration and valorization of cultural monuments and the enhancement of surrounding tourist infrastructure.

2.2 Municipality of Dupnitsa

2.2.1 Strengths

- **Rich Cultural and Historical Heritage:** Features monuments from all historical periods and iconic cultural landmarks of national importance.
- **Diverse Accommodation Options:** A wide range of hotels and guest houses in **Dupnitsa** and its surrounding villages, complemented by extensive lodging options in the neighboring municipality of **Sapareva Banya** and the **Panichishte** mountain resort.
- **Favorable Climate:** A moderate transitional-continental climate suitable for year-round recreation and tourism.
- **Strategic Geographical Location:** Proximity to the capital (Sofia) and access to international transport corridors near the borders of North Macedonia and Serbia.
- **Active Community Life:** Well-functioning cultural institutions and traditional community centers (*Chitalishta*).
- **Urban Recreation:** Availability of a city public pool facility (non-mineral water).
- **Event Tourism:** Annual organization of municipal holidays, international festivals, and competitions.
- **Established Wellness Infrastructure:** Availability of SPA hotels and guest houses utilizing mineral water in the neighboring municipality of **Sapareva Banya.**
- **Three-star hotels** and various smaller-scale accommodations.

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- The **Sapareva Banya Specialized Hospital for Rehabilitation** located within the neighboring Sapareva Banya municipality.

2.2.2 Weaknesses

- **Limited Target Attractions:** An insufficient number of developed attractions tailored to diverse age groups and social demographics.
- **Wayfinding & Signage Deficiencies:** A shortage of tourist orientation and information boards. An inadequate number of street name signs.
- **Human Capital Gaps:** A deficit of qualified personnel and skilled labor within the tourism and hospitality services sector.
- **Demographic Strain:** A shortage of young people (youth out-migration).

2.2.3 Potential and recommendations

- **Integrated Tourism Development:** Utilizing natural and cultural assets to further develop **eco-tourism, ski, SPA, and cultural tourism** products.
- **Strategic Integration:** Incorporating local cultural-tourism routes into broader national and international travel itineraries.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Active participation in European funding programs to finance the valorization of cultural monuments and the modernization of surrounding tourist infrastructure.
- **Heritage Preservation:** Continued development and restoration of cultural-historical monuments of national importance within the city and its surrounding areas.
- **Event Marketing:** Leveraging the annual cycle of city holidays, international festivals, and competitions to boost regional visibility.

2.3 Municipality of Kriva Palanka

2.3.1 Strengths

- **Natural Resources:** Abundant forests, trails, biodiversity, rivers, waterfalls and streams.
- **Pristine Environment:** An ecologically clean area.
- **Recognized Protected Area:** The Osogovo Mountain.
- **Cultural & Historical Wealth:** Significant heritage including monasteries, churches, archaeological sites and traditional crafts.
- **Excellent Connectivity:** Located on a main highway with proximity to international airports in both Skopje and Sofia.
- **Established Hospitality:** Well-known catering and tourism complexes.

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- **Versatile Tourism Potential:** Ideal conditions for excursion, mountain, sports-recreational, rural, cultural, adventure and transit tourism.
- **Authentic Gastronomy:** Organic, ecological food and traditional local specialties.
- **Cross-Border Cooperation:** Joint events and meetings with neighbors in Bulgaria and Serbia.
- **Visual Appeal:** Attractive "photo points" and a well-maintained urban center suitable for event-based tourism.
- **International Relations:** Active twinning and strengthening of cooperation with foreign municipalities.

2.3.2 Weaknesses

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Unfinished road infrastructure leading to key tourist and recreational sites.
- **Accommodation Shortage:** Lack of lodging capacity, especially for large-scale events and manifestations.
- **Urban Logistics:** Insufficient parking space.
- **Human Capital Issues:** Shortage of human resources and a "brain drain" of young professionals.
- **Institutional Absence:** Lack of a dedicated tourism organization or local tourist bureaus.
- **Underdeveloped Product:** A lack of engaging, multi-day tourism packages and weak marketing/promotion.
- **Service Deficit:** A shortage of certified mountain and tourist guides.
- **Civil Society:** Weak capacity within the NGO sector.
- **Seasonal Accessibility:** Limited access to certain locations due to weather conditions.

2.3.3 Potential and Recommendations

- **Infrastructure Completion:** Prioritize the construction of roads to tourist hotspots.
- **Fundraising:** Proactively secure funding from European and other available grants.
- **Logistics Improvement:** Provide new parking areas and invest in diverse accommodation facilities.
- **Product Innovation:** Urbanize tourist potentials and create "richer" tourist products and packages.
- **Cross-Border Synergy:** Develop joint attractive travel arrangements with border partners.
- **Strategic Marketing:** Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy.
- **Economic Impact:** Focus on generating revenue for the local economy.
- **Regional Integration:** Connect cultural-historical and tourist sites within the **Northeastern Region** to form a unified tourism offer for visitors.

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2.4. Municipality of Kratovo

2.4.1 Strengths

- **Cultural & Natural Uniqueness:** Kratovo is a premier destination combining cultural, natural and gastronomic appeal.
- **Architectural Legacy:** A rich tapestry of heritage spanning the Medieval, Ottoman, and National Revival periods.
- **Geological Heritage:** Dominance of a specific volcanic relief (notably the Stone City of Kuklica nearby) and the presence of mineral springs.
- **Gastronomic Identity:** Home to the recognizable "Pastrmajka" (traditional savory pie) and ancient, indigenous grape varieties for unique wine production.
- **Regional Connectivity:** Favorable access to the M/A2 (E871) highway; situated within a short distance of Skopje (93 km), Kumanovo (54 km), and Shtip (52 km).

2.4.2 Weaknesses

- **Management & Promotion:** Insufficient marketing, lack of a formal tourism organization, and a missed opportunity to leverage resources for economic growth.
- **Visitor Services:** Absence of a Tourist Information Center and a lack of organized hospitality management for guests.
- **Fragmented Industry:** No existing initiatives for the association or networking of local tourism and catering entities.
- **Skills Gap:** Inadequate training for hospitality workers and a lack of community education regarding **alternative tourism** (eco/rural/sustainable).
- **Infrastructure & Accessibility:** Poor access and inclusivity at key sites, lack of traffic and tourism signage, shortage of parking, and a lack of public facilities (restrooms).
- **Accommodation Standards:** A shortage of modern hotel or hostel services that align with current global hospitality trends.

2.4.3 Potential and Specific Recommendations

- **Digital & Integrated Marketing:** Develop a marketing plan featuring a mobile app, digital promotion, and fair campaigns to sell comprehensive tour packages.
- **Infrastructure Modernization:** Install modern info-boards and signage (both physical and digital/GPS-based), develop parking areas, and improve public amenities.
- **Product Bundling:** Create tourist packages that combine cultural-historical tours with gastronomic experiences in local establishments.
- **Investment & Restoration:** Incentivize investment specifically for the sanitation, restoration and revitalization of Kratovo's unique architectural heritage.

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- **Capacity Building:** Implement continuous training for tourism sector staff and educational workshops for citizens to foster local tourism development.

III. Interdisciplinary Diachronic Study of European Influences on Balkan Traditions within the Cultural Heritage of the Project Scope.

The project seeks to bridge interdisciplinary scientific research with applied results in the tourism sector. Its goal is to discover and develop the untapped potential found within the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the region.

The Research Focus

The heritage is examined as a synthesis of local traditions and various external influences during the 19th century, a period that transformed the aesthetic details of homes and everyday lifestyles. The proposed solution envisions a strategic transition from general European cultural influence toward its specific regional and local expressions.

Strategic Objectives

- **Creation of a Shared Cultural Calendar:** Aligning regional events into a unified schedule to increase visitor stay.
- **Route Integration:** Connecting existing and newly established cultural routes based on both cultural and natural heritage.
- **Formation of a Unified "CULTURAL SPACE":** Merging individual municipal assets into a cohesive regional identity.

Research and Development Goals

The project focuses on exploring the latent potential of the region’s tangible and intangible heritage, specifically analyzing the intersection of Balkan traditions and external 19th-century influences that redefined the local way of life.

Comparative Analysis (Matrix of Resources)

| Characteristics | Dupnitsa | Kyustendil | Kriva Palanka | Kratovo |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Architecture | Urban secession | Antiquity and baths; Medieval (Byzantine) and Late Medieval (Bulgarian and Ottoman); National | Monastery and mountain | Medieval towers and bridges |

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| Characteriscs | Dupnitsa | Kyustendil | Kriva Palanka | Kratovo |
|---------------|--|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | Revival; Urban Secession. | | |
| Accomodation | Urban | SPA, Balneo hotels, hotels, guest houses, mountain huts, apartaments | Apartments and villas | Hotels and ethno-houses |
| Gastonomy | Dupnitsa <i>kebabche</i> | Fertility; Kyustendil <i>zelnik</i> | Monastery dishes | Kratovo Pastrmajka |
| Strenghts | Geographic location; cultural and historical heritage;,, festivals | Geographic location; rich natural and cultural-historical heritage; cultural, festival, and ski tourism. | Mountain relief | Authentic city–museum |
| Weaknesses | Digital nerrative | Marketing and advertising | Accessibility and parking places | Infrastructure and stairs |

IV. Addressing specific target groups

| Target group | Approach based on culture and connection |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Uoung people / digital nomads | Development of strong digital connectivity and Wi-Fi zones in cultural sites, creation of interactive (AR/VR) content and promotion of culture through social media. |
| Adults/people with | Ensuring physical accessibility to sites (CONNECTED), as |

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| Target group | Approach based on culture and connection |
|--|---|
| disabilities | well as providing easy-to-use digital tools and adapted tours. |
| Special tourists (e.g. cultural and natural heritage, art) | Creation of thematic trails and platforms for direct communication with experts from Cultural and Educational institutions. |

V. Development Potential and Common Solutions for the Cross-Border Region

The successful development of tourism and the region requires integrating cultural heritage with modern principles of Connectivity to attract diverse target groups. Approaches must focus on creating accessible, personalized and engaging experiences.

Common Cross-Border Solutions:

- **Digital Map:** An integrated mobile application providing real-time data on bed availability in Kriva Palanka and Kratovo, synchronized with the shared cultural calendars of Dupnitsa and Kyustendil.
- **Infrastructural Synchronization:** Coordination of transport links between municipalities through active collaboration between local authorities and the NGO sector.
- **Cooperation and Co-creation of Experiences: Establishment of Smart Cultural Routes.**

Implementation Steps:

- **Digitalization of Heritage:** Creation of virtual tours, 3D reconstructions and online archives to expand access and allow for pre-trip research (for both tourists and educational institutions).
- **Personalized Connectivity:** Utilizing mobile apps and geolocation services (**Smart**) to provide multi-language content with varying levels of detail, targeting specific interests (e.g., history, architecture, gastronomy).
- **Integrated Logistics:** Connecting sites via efficient transport and logistics information, covering both main hubs and local communities to encourage dispersed tourism.

Integrated Path of Traditions and Nature – Proposed 3-Day Itinerary:

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- **Day 1:** A cultural tour of **Secessionist Dupnitsa** (Art Nouveau architecture) followed by **SPA relaxation in Kyustendil**.
- **Day 2:** A visit to the **Osogovo Monastery** and a traditional lunch in **Kriva Palanka**, concluding with an evening walk in **Kratovo**.
- **Day 3:** Exploration of the medieval towers and bridges of **Kratovo**, a tour of the underground tunnels and a final stop at the **Stone Dolls (Kameni Kukli)** natural phenomenon in Kuklitsa.

Educational-Tourism Packages (CONNECTED): Developing joint programs between **Cultural and Educational Institutions** that offer specialized seminars, workshops, or summer schools tailored for niche groups, such as students and researchers.

Public-Private Partnerships (GOVERNANCE & GREEN): Engaging the **Business Sector** (e.g., hoteliers, restaurateurs) in the creation of sustainable (**Green**) and locally-focused products that emphasize the authenticity and cultural traditions of **Local Communities**.

NGO Engagement (SMART & CITIZENS): Integrating NGOs into the **Governance** process to develop social tourism initiatives or projects for the restoration of abandoned sites, leveraging their expertise in addressing local needs and working with vulnerable groups.

Shared Cultural Calendar with events (Appendix 1)

VI. Tourism Infrastructure

6.1 Accomodation

6.1.1 Kyustendil municipality

Structure

- **Hotels (10 objects):** Although fewer in number, they form the backbone of organized tourism.
- **Apartments and Studios (13 objects):** A growing segment focused on individual tourists and short-term stays.
- **Guest Houses (12 objects):** Preferred for family and rural tourism in the city's outskirts.
- **Huts and Shelters (4-5 objects):** A specific segment in OsogovoMountain.
- **Others/Unspecified (25 objects):** This includes smaller properties or those without a clearly defined type in the database, often private rooms.

Categorization (Quality)

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The region offers services across a wide range, but with a clear focus on the middle class:

- *Luxury Segment (4 and 5):*** 2 objects in total. Kyustendil has one 5-star hotel ("Strimon Garden"), which positions the city as a destination for high-quality balneo and SPA tourism.
- *Middle Class (3):** This is the largest category (22 objects), offering a good balance between price and quality.
- *Economy Class (1 and 2):*** Very few establishments are officially categorized in this segment, suggesting that cheaper accommodation options prefer to operate as "guest houses" or "apartments" without a strict star rating.
- **Uncategorized (25 objects):** Almost half of the properties do not have an explicit star rating in the table, which is typical for the private sector (Airbnb/Booking style apartments).

Strategic Advantages of Kyustendil

- **SPA and Balneology:** A strong concentration of 3-star objects, some of which with thermal water, which is the primary magnet for tourists.
- **Mountain Hinterland:** A unique combination of an urban environment and the high-mountain base of Osogovo (the huts), allowing for combined tourism (cultural + active recreation).
- **Flexibility:** The large number of apartments and guest houses makes the destination accessible to various budgets.

6.1.2 Municipality of Dupnitsa

Structure

- **Mountain Huts (35% of the capacity):** Dupnitsa controls key access points to the Rila Mountains (via the villages of Samoranovo and Bistritsa). Huts such as "Otovitsa," "Skakavitsa," and "Rilski Ezera" (Rila Lakes) are primary assets.
- **Guest Houses and Villas (40%):** These are concentrated in the peripheral villages (Samoranovo, Bistritsa, Resilovo). This indicates a focus on family and weekend tourism.
- **City Hotels (25%):** The capacity within the city itself is more limited (e.g., Hotel "Rila"), relying more on transit flow from business tourism and travelers along the "Struma" Motorway.

Hotels and Holiday Bases in the City of Dupnitsa

- **Hotel "Rila"** – The central hotel in the city of Dupnitsa.

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- **TEC Bobov Dol Holiday Base** – Located within the city territory.

Villas and Guest Houses (Villages Around Dupnitsa)

- **Alexandra Family Estate (Samoranovo village)** – A luxury complex at the foot of the Rila Mountains.
- **Karadzova House (Samoranovo village)** – A traditional type of accommodation.
- **"Orehite" (The Walnuts) Villa (Bistritsa village)** – Situated in a picturesque area near the city.
- **Alpine Villa and "Kashtata" (The House) Villa (Resilovo village)** – Popular for recreation near the Resilovo Monastery.
- **"Planinski Ray" (Mountain Paradise) Guest Houses (Resilovo village).**

Mountain Huts (Rila Mountains – Accessible from Dupnitsa/Samoranovo)

- **"Otovitsa" Hut** – Located above Samoranovo village.
- **"Skakavitsa" Hut and "Rilski Ezera" (Rila Lakes) Hut.**
- **"Ivan Vazov" Hut** – Situated in the Pazardere area.
- **"Malkata Yurta" (The Little Yurt) Hut and "Zeleni Preslap" Hut** (Sapareva Banya/Panichishte area).

All objects feature links to Booking.com or specialized tourism websites (such as Vila.bg and Pochivka.bg).

6.1.3 Municipality of Kriva Palanka

Active hotels:

- **Noble House Apart-Hotel:** Medium capacity (34 beds), located in the city center. Offers 12 family rooms with kitchens and is fully accessible (elevator available).
- **Hotel Manastir (Varovishte Village):** Large capacity (68 beds) near nature. Features a restaurant and a summer garden but is rated inaccessible for people with disabilities (stairs only).

Non-operational hotels:

- **Hotel Turist:** The largest potential resource in the city, but it has been **closed** for a long time.
- **Motel Macedonia:** Excellent location on the road to the Deve Bair border crossing, but also **currently closed**.

Apartments and Villas (Small-Scale Accommodation)

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This is the most dynamic sector, offering modern amenities and a presence on platforms like Booking.com.

- **Sirion (26 beds):** 6 rooms and 1 modern apartment in the center.
- **Ana Marija (30 beds):** Located in Durachka Reka village; features a children's playground.
- **East Gate (8 beds):** Modern apartments with a summer garden and private parking.
- **Tomato (8 beds):** Centrally located apartment with a terrace overlooking the city.
- **Home Luxury Suites (6 beds):** Three high-end, well-equipped apartments.

Mountain and Alternative Accommodation

- **Trnovski Vetar (Trnovo Village):** Hostel (20 beds) with rooms, 3 bungalows, and an outdoor pool.
- **Studenac (Metzevo Village):** 4 mountain huts (16 beds) with a pool, ideal for summer retreats.
- **Osogovski Biser (Kalin Kamen):** Small facility (8 beds), accessible **only during summer**.

6.1.4 Municipality of Kratovo

- **Hotel Kratis:** The leading accommodation facility in the city. It features 23 compact rooms and 2 luxury suites. Amenities include air conditioning, mini-bar, Wi-Fi, and private parking. It is fully accessible for people with disabilities (ramps and elevator).

Traditional Houses and Ethno-Lodging

- **Etno House Shancheva:** Located in the city center, offering three bedrooms with terraces, a shared kitchen, and a garden. It is only partially accessible due to steep terrain and stairs.
- **Sokolovi House:** Situated in the old part of city, fully equipped for up to 6 people. Accessibility is difficult due to the narrow, steep streets.

Villas and Rural Tourism

- **Villa Ferrovia:** Located in the Zheleznica area (4 km from the center). Offers two bedrooms with private bathrooms and a large garden. It is rated as fully accessible.
- **Villa Sara:** Located 1.7 km from the center, suitable for 6 people with a spacious yard and summer kitchen.
- **Ethno Complex Kuklica:** Located in Kuklica village near the "Stone Dolls." It has 4 rooms (12 beds) integrated with an ethno-restaurant. Fully accessible with private parking.

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6.2 Restaurants and Gastronomy

6.2.1 Municipality of Kyustendil

There are **52** dining places related to the twon of Kyustendil and its nearby villages (such as Slokoshtitsa, Zhilentsi and Kopilovtsi).

Main restaurants and Taverns (Mehana)

- **Ramira Restaurant:** 12, Han Krum Str. (located within the hotel).
- **Aleyata Restaurant:** on the main pedestrian city’s alley (Bulgaria Blvd.)
- **Tihiya Kat (The Quiet Corner) Restaurant:** located in the village of Slokoshtitsa
- **Mihalkov’s House Mehana:** 62, Hadzhi Dimitar Str.
- **Lovna Sreshta Mehana:** 1, Han Asparuh Str.
- **Vrattsata Mehana:** 25, Tsar Osoboditel Str.
- **Panorama Restaurant (Velbuzhd Hotel):** 46, Bulgaria Blvd.

Pizzerias and Fast Food

- **Friends Restaurant-Pizzeria:** 28 Bulgaria Blvd.
- **Napoli Pizzeria:** 22 Bulgaria Blvd.
- **Royal Pizzeria:** 2 Vlasina St.

Restaurants in the Outskirts

- **Ray (Paradise) Restaurant:** Zhilentsi village.
- **Kashtata (The House) Restaurant:** Kopilovtsi village.
- **Andzhi Tavern (Mehana):** Konyavo village.

Additional Information

- **Links:** Most establishments have attached Facebook pages or official websites for menus and reservations.
- **Locations:** Exact addresses are included; however, for some sites, it is noted that current information is missing online, suggesting a more traditional or seasonal character.

6.2.2 Municipality of Dupnitsa

Key objects that combine traditional cuisine with modern social spaces:

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City Restaurants:

- **"Rila" Restaurant** (part of the hotel of the same name) – traditional Bulgarian and European cuisine.
- **"Continental" Restaurant** – known for its quality cuisine and suitability for events.
- **"Vardar" Restaurant** – a classic establishment located in the city center.

Pizzerias and Fast Food:

- **"Classic" Pizzeria** and **"Enigma" Pizzeria** – popular spots for lunch and dinner.

Surrounding Areas:

- **"Ezerata" (The Lakes) Complex** – located in "Rila" Park, offering a pleasant atmosphere by the water.

6.2.3 Municipality of Kriva Palanka

Urban Facilities (City Center)

- **Lunch Bar Mint:** Capacity: 80. Offers international and Macedonian cuisine. Fully inclusive with a dedicated elevator.
- **Lunch Bar Royal:** Capacity: 70. Luxury setting featuring Italian food and traditional *pastrmajlija*.
- **Pizza Kus:** Capacity: 60. Specializes in Italian cuisine and local snacks.
- **Pastry Shop "Sport":** Capacity: 32. Famous for traditional desserts (boza, tulumba, eclairs) made by old recipes.

Traditional and Ethno-Restaurants

- **Ethno Guest House Vodenica 3:** Capacity: 80. Traditional Macedonian cuisine in a unique ethno-ambient.
- **Restaurant Borche:** Large capacity (160). Specializes in oven-roasted meat and grilled dishes. Fully accessible.
- **Konak Kalin Kamen:** Capacity: 70. Offers smoked meats and local specialties in a mountain atmosphere.

6.2.4 Municipality of Kratovo

- **English Pub Corner:** Combines the style of an English pub with antique stone architecture. Known for "Kratovska Pastrmajka" and over 30 types of beer.

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- **Kaeana Gurman:** Located in the "Ajducka Charshija." Offers a traditional atmosphere and local dishes like "mezalak."
- **Restaurant Panorama:** Large capacity (350 seats), ideal for celebrations, offering a panoramic view of the entire city.
- **Kratovska Kukja – Kaj Kuze:** A long-standing tradition in the city, specializing in pizza and pastrmajka.
- **Restaurant Alexandria:** Located in the center, featuring a summer garden and providing access to one of the city's underground tunnels.
- **Gostilnica Kaj Spiro:** Situated among 500-year-old pines, offering local spreads (makala), cheeses, and a great view.

6.3 Attractions

6.3.1 Municipality of Kyustendil

Cultural and Historical Sites

- **Vladimir Dimitrov – The Master Art Gallery:** One of the most significant galleries in Bulgaria (20 Patriarh Evtimiy St.).
- **Acad. Yordan Ivanov Regional History Museum:** Located at 55 Bulgaria Blvd.
- **House Museums:** Includes the Emfiedzhieva House, the Dimitar Peshev House Museum and the Ilyo Voyvoda House Museum.
- **Ahmed Bey Mosque –** Museum exhibition hall
- **Pirgov Tower –** Late Medieval defencive tower, a Museum site
- **St. George Medieval Church –** a Museum site
- **Late Antique and Medieval fortress on the Hisarlaka Hill**
- **Second century Roman Thermae**
- **Dervish Banya:** A historic Turkish bath and a protected monument of culture.

Nature and Recreation

- **Hisarlaka Forest Park:** Home to the "Hisarlaka" Fortress, the Kyustendil Zoo, and the Alley of Love
- **Ezerata (The Lakes) Ecopark:** A dedicated zone for recreation and walks.
- **Waterfalls:** Nearby attractions include the Polska Skakavitsa waterfall and the St. Anna waterfall (Smolichano village).
- **Osogovo Mountain:** Featuring the Tsarna Reka (Black River) Reserve and numerous hiking trails.
- **Alay Banya – Recreation House** at old Turkish Bath with indoor and outdoo thermal pools.
- **Chifte Paublic Bath – Thermal baths.**

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Sports and Entertainment

- **Pautalia Karting Track:** One of the best racing tracks in the country.
- **Sports Complexes:** Information regarding stadiums and sports halls within the city.
- **Cinema in the Theater:** A venue for contemporary cultural events and film screenings.
- **Drama and Puppet Theatre**
- **Aerial Sports:** Opportunities for paragliding, skydiving and airplane or hot air balloon flights (via partners like SkyVision).

These sites are accompanied by GPS coordinates and links to official websites or Wikipedia for additional information.

6.3.2 Municipality of Dupnitsa

Natural sites

- **Rila Nature Park:** The largest urban park in the region, featuring lakes, playgrounds, swimming pools, and a chapel.

Cultural and Historical Heritage

- **Historical Museum – Dupnitsa:** Located in the renovated "Mosque" (an architectural monument).
- **The Clock Tower:** One of the symbols of the city.
- **"Okoliyska Kashta" Art Gallery:** A venue for exhibitions and cultural events.

Religious Tourism

- **Church of St. George the Victorious:** The largest church in the city.
- **Resilovo Monastery "Pokrov Bogorodichen":** Located just a few kilometers from the city, in the direction of Sapareva Banya.

Nearby Natural Landmarks

- **Bistritsa Waterfall:** Situated above the village of Bistritsa, accessible via an easy hiking trail.
- **The Stob Pyramids:** Located about a 15-20 minute drive from Dupnitsa.

Sports and Activities

Project ID: BGMK0200027

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- **Tennis courts and swimming complexes** in Rila Park.
- **Mountain trekking:** Routes to Kabul Peak, Otovitsa Peak, and the Seven Rila Lakes (via the "Zeleni Preslap" area).

6.3.3 Municipality of Kriva Palanka

Cultural and Spiritual Heritage

- **Monastery of St. Joakim Osogovski:** The most significant spiritual center in Eastern Macedonia (12th century). Includes two churches and lodging quarters.
- **St. Nicholas Church (Psacha Village):** A 14th-century (1358) gem of Byzantine art.
- **St. Demetrius Church:** Built in 1833, a key 19th-century monument in the city.
- **City Museum of Kriva Palanka:** Showcases ethnographic and archaeological treasures. Fully accessible.

Natural Landmarks

- **Stanechki Waterfalls:** The highest fall is 10 meters, located in untouched nature (accessible via a 20-30 min hike).
- **Tsarev Vrv (2,085m):** The highest peak in the area, offering panoramas of Macedonia and Bulgaria.
- **Gradechki Chuki:** A natural rarity with unique relief forms from paleo-volcanic eruptions.
- **Kalin Kamen Lake:** Located at 1,600m altitude, ideal for picnics and photography.

Ethno-Attractions

- **Valavnici and Watermills (Stanci Village):** Traditional 19th-century facilities using water power for washing wool and grinding grain. One is converted into a tasting and relaxation area.

6.3.4 Municipality of Kratovo

Kratovo is a "museum-city" located in the crater of an extinct volcano.

Architectural Heritage

- **Medieval Towers:** Six preserved stone towers (out of the original 13). The **Clock Tower (Saat Kula)** houses a small museum exhibit.
- **Stone Bridges:** Famous for its bridges over the Tabachka River, with the **Yorkshire Bridge** being the oldest and most decorative.

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- **Underground Tunnels:** A network of secret passages from the Ottoman era. Two are currently open to tourists.

Cultural Sites

- **Museum of the City of Kratovo:** Located in an old Turkish house with a former prison in the basement. Features archaeological and ethnographic collections.
- **Turkish Prison:** A renovated site on the riverbank awaiting further tourist promotion.

Natural and Archaeological Landmarks

- **The Two Pines in "Karshi Bavcha":** A natural rarity, over 600 years old and 20 meters high.
- **Volcanic Bombs:** Nearly perfectly spherical stone balls formed millions of years ago near Gorno Kratovo village.
- **Tsocev Kamen:** A volcanic rock used in prehistoric times as a megalithic observatory.
- **Stone Dolls (Kuklica):** A natural phenomenon over 50,000 years old, consisting of 150 earth pyramids formed by erosion.
- **Golemo Gradishte (Tranupara):** An archaeological site near Konjuh village with remains of an ancient 5th-6th century city.

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