#### ASENOVGRAD

TRAVEL GUIDE

**Historical Museum**. It was founded in 1971 in a building that was built in 1895 for the Officers' Club. More than 1000 exhibits are displayed in the museum exhibition on an area of 200 square meters in three halls and three departments.

The exhibition dedicated to education and culture in Asenovgrad in the late 19th century and early 20th century is located in the old **St. George’s School**. This is a large building with two exhibition halls on the first floor and four large rooms on the second.

The rich material and spiritual culture of Asenovgrad is attractively displayed in the exhibition "Representative urban life from the late 19th century and early 20th century."

The exhibition is located in the **Ethnographic House**, built in the 19th century, formerly owned by a rich local merchant of Greek origin.

**Paleonthological Museum** in the locality Badelema, founded as a branch of the National Academy of Science. It keeps skeletons and fossils, some of which are the only specimens of their kind in Bulgaria.

**St. John the Baptist’s Temple (13th-14th centuries**). This surviving medieval church is located on a high rock in the western part of town. It forms a kind of ensemble against the background of a picturesque landscape with the nearby chapels St. Barbara’s Chapel, Chapel of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin and St. George’s Chapel, and a fountain from the 17th century.

**Temple of the Assumption**. This church is considered the oldest parish temple in the city. It is also called Mesochora (central) or The Deep Church (because it has an underground part). Its unique bell tower with a clock was built by Bratzigovo masters. The church is impressive with its wealth of icons and its openwork carved iconostasis.

**St. Nicholas’s Temple**. This temple was mentioned as a parish church as early as 1720. Its present-day building dates from the beginning of the 19th century, when it was built anew after the *Kircali* brigands destroyed it. Of interest are the three-panel iconostasis and the bishop's throne. The architectural ensemble also includes the ossuary chapel in the churchyard, built in honor of St. Simeon the Stylite and St Tryphon, worshipped in the region as patrons of vine-growing and silk-weaving.

**St. Basil and St. Marina’s Chapel**. This chapel dates from the 17th century, but was rebuilt in 1859 after its burning by the Turks. When St. Marina’s Church was brought down in 1962, the chapel housed its beautiful carved iconostasis, church items and ancient icons, including the miraculous icon of St. Haralambos. Another relic of the destroyed temple is the bell tower with a height of14 and half meters.

**St. George’s Temple (of the monastery).** It is assumed that the temple was part of the monastery complex built by the Pakourianos brothers at the time when they founded the Bachkovo Monastery (11th century). The church building in its present form probably dates from the early 18th century. The central panel on the north facade, depicting St. George on horseback, was painted by the famous master Zahari Zograf.

**St. George’s Temple (of Ambelino Quarter)**. Today’s building dates from 1848. It was built in on the site of the monastery in Ambelino Quarter, which was made a separate parish, but was destroyed by the *Circali* brigands. The mural decoration in the temple and most of the icons are the work of masters from Edirne.

In the immediate vicinity is **All Saints’ Chapel-Tomb** - a single-nave single-apse building with a gable roof. It has a simple iconostasis with attached parts of an older fretworks iconostasis that depicts angels with fish tails. The icons are from the 18th- 19th centuries.

**Temple of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary (12th-13th centuries).** The temple was once property of the Bachkovo Monastery. Only part of the apse wall with two niches has survived until our day from the original structure. A new building was erected in the 1830s. The mural decoration of the church is the work of Zahari Zograf and icon-painters from Edirne. The icon of the Virgin Mary, which is believed to be miraculous, is extremely popular. Each year on the 25th day of Easter the icon is carried to the Bachkovo Monastery in a grand procession, with the participation of people from all over the country.

**St. Athanasius’s Temple** was called the “The Farm Workers’ Church” in the past due to the social status of its parishioners. The partly underground building had modest architecture. After several reconstructions, the church now has an entirely different appearance. Although the parish community in its majority was Bulgarian, it left the Ecumenical Patriarchate and joined the Bulgarian Holy Synod as late as 1891.

**Temple of the Holy Trinity**. This temple, built in 1865, also remained in the hands of the Greeks until the early twentieth century. Besides its beautiful murals and icons, and its impressive bell tower, the temple’s contribution to the local history is the fact that the first Bulgarian school in town was in its yard.

**St. Demetrius’s Temple.** It was built in 1866 at the height of Greek-Bulgarian struggles in town as the only temple in which service was conducted in Bulgarian since its very consecration. There was a Bulgarian school in its yard. The first Bulgarian cultural club was also here. One of the priests of the temple, Matey Todorov, was a member of the Secret Revolutionary Committee for the preparation of the April Uprising against the Ottoman rule, for which he was imprisoned.

**St. Paraskeva’s Chapel**. It is located on a high summit in the eastern part of town, above Temple of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary to whose parish it belongs. In its immediate vicinity were discovered a Thracian sanctuary, the ruins of a fortress wall from the early Middle Ages and an epigraphic monument of the Thraco-Roman era. Every year on Bright Friday the “Source of Life” Icon of the Virgin Mary is carried in a procession from St. John’s Chapel at the Temple of the Annunciation to this chapel.

**St. Stephen’s Chapel and Sts. Cosmas and Damian’s Chapel**. The year of their construction is unknown. They are in Ambelino Quarter, near St. George’s Temple, to which they belong. They are two separate chapels with their own entrances, attached to each other and connected through a portal in the shared wall. Their iconostases date from the 17th century, and their icons - from the 18th-19th century. According to legend, Father Paisius of Hilendar, the author of the first history of Bulgaria during the Ottoman rule, died here.

**St. Tryphon’s Chapel**. It also belongs to the spiritual parish of St. George’s Temple in Ambelino Quarter. The present form of its building is from the 19th century. The temple holiday - February 1st - is also the whole town’s holiday - with public celebrations, amateur wrestling contests, etc.

**Chapel of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**. It is in the spiritual parish of St. Nicholas’ Temple. The chapel is at the southern foot of the hill, on which the medieval St. John the Baptist’s Temple is located The icons are from the 19th century. The ritual *Kalinitsa* is recreated in this chapel on Midsummer Day – it is associated with entry of the Virgin Mary into the temple when she was 3 years old. All participants in this custom receive the priest's blessing.

**St. Elijah’s Chapel**. It belongs to the Temple of the Assumption and is located to the left of the direct road leading from Asenovgrad to Sts. Cyricus and Julita and St. Paraskeva’s Monastery. The church building acquired its current form probably in the early 1870s, when the nearby St. Nestor’ and St. Christopher’s were built.

**St. Demetrius’s Chapel**. It is property of the Bachkovo monastery. The chapel is located on a small terrace over the main street, which leads to the gorge and King Asen’s Fortress. There are no traces of murals. The iconostasis is a simple, made of boards of wood. There is also a fragment of a fretwork iconostasis that used in weddings. The icons are from the 18th-19th centuries and are the work of masters of different schools.

**Bachkovo Monastery of the Assumption Blessed Virgin Mary**. It is 11 km away from Asenovgrad. It was built in 1083 by the Georgians Gregory and Abasius Pakourianos (Bakuriani) on one of one of the properties, donated to them by the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus. After it was annexed to the Second Bulgarian Kingdom in the 13th century, it became one of the centres of the Bulgarian medieval spiritual culture. It flourished especially during the reign of King Ivan Alexander - donor of the monastery. After the capital Tarnovo fell under Ottoman rule, Patriarch Evtimius of Tarnovo was exiled to this monastery in 1393. Monks-writers gathered around him and continued the traditions of the Tarnovo Literary School. The monastery buildings enclosed a large rectangular courtyard. There churches inside – the Holy Archangels’ (12th century), St. Mary’s (17th century) and St. Nicholas’, have preserved a wealth of murals. The most sacred of the Bachkovo monastery - the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary from 1311 - is kept in St. Mary’s Church. The architectural ensemble is completed by the monastery dining hall (17th century) with its unique mural gallery. The oldest building, which dates from the very founding of the monastery, is the ossuary with valuable murals. The monastery museum keeps old church items, liturgical books, icons, decorations, church vessels and a numismatic collection.

**Sts. Cyricus and Julita and St. Paraskeva’s Monastery** - two medieval monasteries, united in a common architectural ensemble in the 19th century. It is located 3 km to the west of the town. In its present form it includes a Catholic church, monastery buildings, a holy spring and a chapel. The temple inspires veneration with its mural decorations, exquisite fretwork canopy, iconostasis and icons, but it needs major repair and maintenance.

**Muldava Monastery of St. Petka (Paraskeva).** It is 4 km away form Asenovgrad. The exact time of its construction is unknown. It was restored several times. Today’s monastery complex dates from 1836. The church collapsed in 1946 and was restored it in 1951. Some of the icons were painted by Zahari Zograf. The Muldava Monastery was a centre of revolutionary activity against the Ottoman rule and one of the strongholds of the Bulgarian consciousness in the past.

**Arapovo Monastery of St. Nedelya**. It is 6 km east of Asenovgrad, near the village of Zlatovrah. It was founded as a dormitory to Muldava monastery in 1856 by Hieromonk Sophronius, a former abbot of the monastery. Two- and three-storey residential and commercial buildings with bay windows and balconies enclose a courtyard, in which there is a large cruciform domed church. The monastery was an important educational and revolutionary centre.

**Asen’s Fortress,** 2 km away from Asenovgrad, built on a very high cliff over the road to Smolyan. The castle has existed since the Thracian era, but acquired strategic importance during the Middle Ages. When King Ivan Asen II defeated the Emperor of Epirus, Theodore Komnenos, in the battle by the village of Klokotnitsa (1230), he strengthened and expanded the fortress and marked his victory with an inscription carved in a rock above it. The church of the fortress, St. Mary of Petrich (12th-13th century), relatively well preserved, with valuable murals, is an active temple.

**The Thracian rock sanctuary Belintash** - a beautiful stone plateau, oracle shrine of the Bessi tribe, where a unique silver votive tablet of their god Sabazius was discovered.

**Eneolithic cult centre** near the village of Dolnoslav, in the locality Lopkite.

**Chervenata Stena (*The Red Wall*) Biosphere Reserve** 9 km away from Asenovgrad, where more than 600 species of higher plants grow. Among the cool forests of the reserve is **Slivodolskoto Padalo** - one of the highest waterfalls in Bulgaria (49 m).