

Canal awaiting its investor

Avgustovsky Canal to be included within free economic zone of Grodnoinvest

By Yevgenia Smolskaya

The monument to 19th century hydro-technical architecture has already received a great deal of state funding for its reconstruction and is now awaiting an investor. The Avgustovsky Canal is among the most ecologically clean zones in Belarus, attracting tourists to see its rare ecosystem and its unique historical status. However, specialists consider that, for tourism to really take off along the Canal, further investments into infrastructure are needed in this picturesque corner of Belarus.

The Avgustovsky Canal was built as a water trading route connecting the Nieman and Visla rivers, constructed by the best architects in Europe. On both sides of the Belarusian-Polish border, visitors have been attracted by its unique situation and significance.

The part situated in Poland has been revamped over the past forty years and is now a favourite place for Polish tourists, generating revenue for the state. The city of Augustow, with its 30,000 population, annually welcomes up to 300,000 tourists. In turn, the Belarusian part of the

Canal was quite neglected during the post-war years, with nature creeping back to reclaim the site. Major reconstruction began in 2004, after much dispute as to the extent of repair required.

The Canal is now restored and is being entered for inclusion on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List, being among the most popular tourist routes in the Grodno region. However, the potential of this 'pearl' by the Nieman River is yet to be fully realised. Having studied the situation, the Grodno Regional Executive Committee has initiated the establishment of the GrodnoTurInvest Free Economic Zone (as part of the Grodnoinvest FEZ).

This would aid the attraction of funds into infrastructure development (new hotels, spas, recreation places and road repairs). Legislation governs tax privileges and preferences for FEZ residents, encouraging such investment. Specialists believe that the facilitated development of the tourism industry could aid other economic branches, such as agriculture, transport, public catering and services.



Avgustovsky Canal territory attracts tourists with its uniqueness

In a word, the Canal is now facing a new stage of its development.

"A package of documents regarding the establishment of the GrodnoTurInvest FEZ has already been co-ordinated with interested agencies and ministries," explains the Deputy Head for Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism at the

Grodno Regional Executive Committee, Mikhail Kazhuro. He believes that a change of status for the international Rudavka-Leznaya border checkpoint — from water to waterfoot, with use of bicycles — would also help attract tourists to the Canal and its environs. The Regional Executive Committee has al-

ready addressed the Sports and Tourism Ministry with a request to liberalise the visa regime for foreigners staying along the Canal for a period of up to five days, aiming to encourage tourism.

Infrastructure development is not an ultimate goal. The Avgustovsky Canal connects our three

neighbouring states, passing through Poland and Belarus before flowing into the River Nieman, which continues to Lithuania. Its opening along its whole route will allow cruises to the Baltic Sea, linking the resort areas of Polish Augustow, Lithuanian Druskininkai and Belarusian Porechie-Sopotskin.

Ancient giants appear on pedestal

By Nikolay Zhdanov

Unusual monument for Kalinkovichi city park

A monument has been unveiled to a legend of the local woods: two ancient oak tree stumps, each around 2m in diameter. They have long been a district attraction, nicknamed Tsar and Tsarina by locals.

The oaks began growing from acorns over 500 years ago, not far from the village of Velikie Avtyuki. They are the silent witnesses of the foundation of the settlement, which recently celebrated its 450th anniversary.

In 1963, the uniqueness of local flora sites was recognised at state level, with the gigantic

oaks acquiring the status of natural treasures of national importance. However, although the trees have survived the flames of war and revolution, as well as storms and other natural cataclysms, recently, as if by agreement, they fell.

Kalinkovichi residents decided to revive them by turning this natural miracle into a

monument. Specialists from Kalinkovichi Furniture Factory covered part of the trunks with a special solution, preventing rot, while employees from Kommunalnik Kalinkovichi enterprise installed them on a pedestal. 'Time passes, yet eternity is unchangeable' is inscribed on the monument's iron plaque.

Eternal Polotsk student

Polotsk State University — where 6,000 students study at its ten departments — celebrates International Student Day on major scale

The brightest moment of the holiday was the unveiling of the 'Polotsk Student' sculpture in the courtyard of the academic building which hosts the historical-philological and IT departments. The bronze man dressed in medieval clothes and a quadrangular academic cap on his head holds books and a scroll bearing the Uni-



'Polotsk Student'

versity's emblem. It represents every student while reminding us of the appearance of a Jesuit Collegium pupil. Minsk sculptor Alexander Prokhorov's work recalls the establishment of the college in 1581. Similar monuments exist at Harvard and at the elite universities of Moscow, Prague and elsewhere.

Characters personify winter

By Oleg Anufrienko

Belarusian Father Frost and Finnish Santa Klaus (Joulupukki) meet at Minsk Town Hall

"Santa Klaus' visit is a sign of goodwill, alongside being a symbol of the openness of our country and its tourist industry," notes Vadim Karmazin, Director of the Sports and Tourism Ministry's Tourism Department.

Joulupukki told the host of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha about the oncoming of winter in Finland, "We're already skiing and some people are even riding motor sleighs, although I personally don't like them."

In turn, our Belarusian Father Frost thanked his



Belarusian Father Frost and Finnish Santa Klaus

Finnish colleague for visiting and invited him to return in 2014, when Minsk will be hosting the IIHF World Championship. The Finnish guest stressed that he has

greatly enjoyed Minsk, being especially inspired by our local architecture.

Joulupukki regretted to say that increasing numbers of children are beginning to

ask Santa Klaus to bring them expensive foreign cars — such as Rolls Royces and Porsches. "I do give them to children, but only in the form of tiny car models," he explained. He also sometimes receives wishes which are impossible to fulfil — such as written requests from women to help them find love.

Responding to Santa Klaus' invitation to visit Lapland, Belarusian Father Frost explained that he has no free time. "Since representatives of various countries constantly visit me, I work all year round," he noted. Tourists from 93 countries worldwide have attended Belarusian Father Frost's Residence in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha.

Internet in the villages

By Fiodor Morokhovsky

Kobrin district's village of Divin boasts public Internet access centre, offering speeds of 1Mbit/sec — double that of Brest

Residents of this large, ancient village are the first rural dwellers in the Brest region to gain Internet access

via their local post office. Divin is among nine Belarusian agro-towns to have gained Internet access through a project jointly implemented by the International Telecommunication Union, Beltelecom and the Ministry of Communications and Information of Belarus, with foreign partners allocating 70,000 Swiss francs.