

# Guides in English and French to help enjoy rural sights

By 2015, Belarus' export of tourist services should exceed \$500m, with over a thousand new recreation sites built. This year, the visa regime for foreigners could be simplified

By Viktor Korbut

Minsk recently hosted an international fair for tourist services — *Leisure-2011*; twenty countries attended, with the Bulgarian delegation among the largest, taking part for the eighth time. In total, 15 Bulgarian tour-operators attended. However, proposals by Belarus caused the biggest stir.

"I'm convinced that many foreign tourists would prefer to holiday in Belarus this year," says Valeria Klitsounova, who heads the Country Escape Association. "Russian and European tourists have discovered Belarusian sanatoriums and homesteads so, this season, we expect high demand for rural destinations. New 'green routes' are being launched, while villages revive their traditional folk customs. Simultaneously, spa-procedures are being organised. In a word, we're a match for the best global resorts."

"In the near future, Belarus plans to simplify its visa regime for

foreign citizens arriving for tourist purposes," explains Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister, Anatoly Tozik. "It could be simplified for states whose citizens most often visit Belarus."

The Tourism and Sports Minister, Oleg Kachan, notes that a 30km zone is now being created along the western border, allowing its citizens to cross the border under simpler terms. He is convinced that Belarus can offer worthwhile tourist services to foreign guests. Not long ago, the Government approved a state programme for tourism development, running until 2015. By then, exports of tourist services should reach \$510m. Moreover, over 1,000 tourist sites are to be built or reconstructed by 2015. The simplification of the visa regime for foreign tourists could further inspire the development of our incoming tourism.

The Naroch area is among Belarus' most interesting tourist destination, with almost 120,000 visitors last year. The Head of the Minsk Re-



Rural idyll is affordable to most demanding tourists

gion, Boris Batura, believes unique possibilities have been created for business development, with investors receiving tax concessions (on profit tax, property tax and land tax). As rural tourism is the focus for most visitors, 18 investment projects (worth \$50m) have been chosen for development around Lake Naroch. According to the Chairman of the Myadel District Executive Committee, Alexander Danilenko, the state is to allocate over \$150m to realise a programme for the Naroch area's development over the coming five years.

Last year, a modern bus station was built in the district centre of Myadel and, in May, a revamped hotel will welcome its first guests to Naroch. Additionally, a medical block is being modernised at Priozerny sanatorium and Sputnik sanatorium is building a second accommodation block, able to sleep 136 guests. The latter is to boast

a spa-centre, a concert hall and a restaurant. Belarusian sanatoriums are especially popular among Russian tourists, as well as those coming from Germany, Lithuania and Israel.

This year, \$500,000 is being spent on promoting tourism in Belarus. The country will launch a system of tourist navigation, allowing easy access to information on the closest tourist attractions via a GPS navigator. The geo-information system is to include over 5,000 tourist destinations. Additionally, Belarus plans to install tourist information terminals in places such as railway and bus stations, allowing visitors to access details on where to go and what to see. Online booking is also being organised for most hotels, farmsteads and recreation facilities.

Belarus is also to open tourist centres abroad, to promote our country to potential visitors. The

Deputy Culture Minister, Tadeush Struzhetskyy, is certain that this will help us gain a reputation abroad, presenting the true beauties of our country. Co-operation with Belarusians living abroad is also to be extended. A centre has recently opened in Polish Białystok to aid such liaisons, while some states — like Ukraine and Azerbaijan — have centres of Belarusian language and culture. In the near future, Belarus is to launch cultural centres in Russia, Lithuania, Latvia and Germany, with state support.

Interest in Belarus is growing, as confirmed by the numerous guides being released in foreign languages abroad. With help from the National Tourism Agency, Bradt Publishing House released its second guide on Belarus this year, in English. Several months ago, the first French-language guide was published, by famous Petit Fute Publishing House.



Transport-logistics centre in Brest

## Movement gains speed

By Tatiana Burmistrova

**Belarus' Transport Ministry ready to expand co-operation with UNECE Inland Transport Committee**

The role of Belarusian transport complex within regional integration, including the simplification of transport procedures, has been presented at the 64th session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Special focus was placed on the integration processes within the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space (being es-

tablished). The report included details on Belarus' efforts to develop its transport system, transit potential, balanced transport and logistics system and various infrastructure, with the aim of significantly enhancing its quality and level of services.

Following the forum, the Transport Ministry plans to expand co-operation with the UNECE Inland Transport Committee. Keeping in mind the format of co-operation, the Ministry is to analyse the efficiency of its implementation of infrastructure projects, preparing proposals for ITC sessions.

## Hotel improving its services

Reconstruction of Minsk's Belarus Hotel to be complete by 2013

By Nadezhda Dvoryanova

Since April, the famous 22 storey hotel has been closed to guests, with two more floors being added and the façade undergoing modernisation. Additionally, all engineering communications are being updated and an observation platform placed on the roof, reachable by panoramic lift. A rooftop restaurant and café will allow visitors to enjoy the city from a bird's eye view. The hotel's

aqua-park and fitness hall are also being revamped and new interior decoration is underway. The hotel will retain its three-star category, as it is impossible to significantly change the layout of the building.

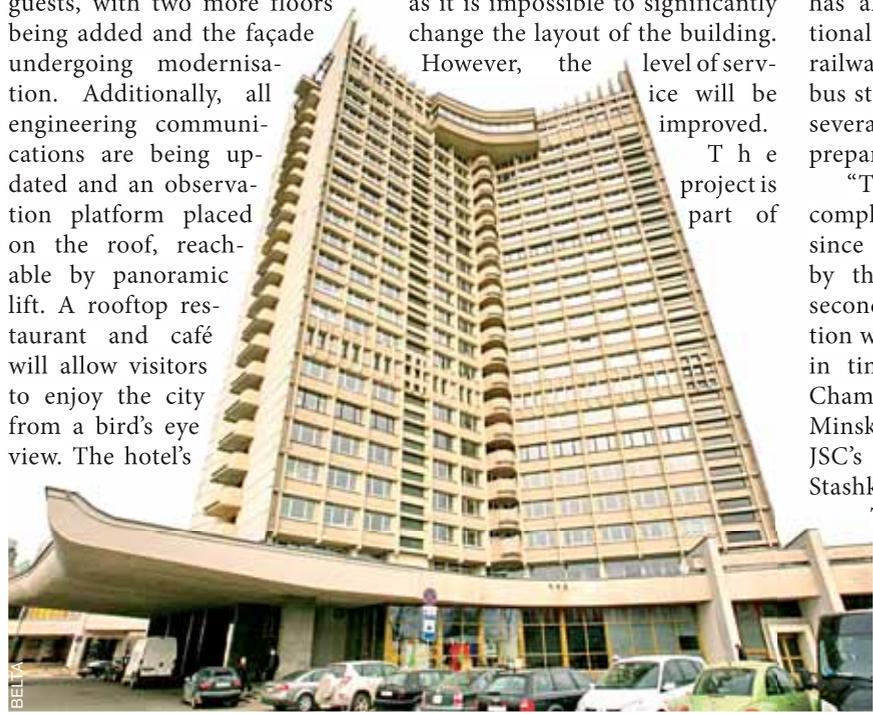
However, the level of service will be improved.

The project is part of

Minsk's investment programme, with the largest Belarusian contractor — Stroytrest #7 JSC — supervising these major works. It has already worked on the National Library of Belarus, Minsk's railway station and Vostochny bus station, the Europe Hotel and several other sites. Minskproekt is preparing designs.

"The preparatory stages are complete, with the hotel closed since early April, fully overseen by the general contractor. The second stage envisages construction works, with the hotel to open in time for the World Hockey Championship, being held in Minsk in 2014," explains Minotel JSC's General Director, Vladimir Stashkevich.

The Belarus Hotel is part of Minotel and was built in 1987. It is viewed as the country's calling card, being unique in the Republic as regards size (520 rooms of different classes) and in its engineering solutions.



Belarus Hotel was once viewed as the country's calling card