

Medieval apartments for rent

UNESCO World Heritage site, Mir Castle, to welcome overnight guests this summer

By Viktor Korbut

Apartments under 16th century roof

Since April, Mir Castle has been an independent museum, with almost 17,000 people visiting in the first three months of the year. Apart from the fortress, the site boasts a family vault, parks and a pond, while uniting Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles.

In early summer, the Castle will open its former princely apartments to tourists, with guests able to stay overnight. Dmitry Bubnovsky, who is heading work on the site, explains, "The hotel will have 16 rooms of various levels of comfort: deluxe split level apartments, business apartments and economy class rooms. Each will be styled with individually hand-crafted reproduction furniture and decoration, painted in similar colours while having original names. The tiles, flooring and, even, the colour of each pair of curtains will be unique to each room, while the walls will be hung with photos of Mir Castle's previous owners." According to Mr. Bubnovsky, his specialists pondered the decoration of the rooms carefully before choosing the 20th century



Mir Castle soon to become major international tourist centre

Modern style.

Additionally, the Castle is to have its own restaurant (in the cellar) able to seat 50 guests. One hall will be decorated in medieval style, faced with brick, while the other will be called Bely (White) and be in the modern style. A conference hall for 200 is already operational, able to host international conferences and providing synchronous translation into three languages.

The restored original

interiors of the Castle are most intriguing, showing how residents lived in the past. 17th century furniture, ancient weaponry, reconstructed knights' armour and old musical instruments stand alongside art works and reconstructed artefacts (manufactured in Belarus three centuries ago). Belarus' Deputy Culture Minister, Tadeush Struzhetskyy, believes that Mir Castle will become a major international tourist

centre in coming years.

Delicate manners of Krasny Bereg

Reconstruction of another architectural site is to finish later this year: the 19th century former estate of Krasny Bereg (on the other side of the country, near Gomel). Its facades are now being restored, completing work begun three years ago; even the roof has been changed. Restoration of the interior is underway, with

each room being unique. According to historians, the manor boasted decorations and furniture in Gothic, Renaissance, Romanesque and, even, Arabian styles. Ogee window decorations and chimeras on water pipes are in the Gothic style, as are the entrance gates to the estate.

Rococo, Mannerism, Empire and French Classic styles are located around the property making it a true illustrative encyclopaedia of

architectural interiors.

Following in Adam Mickiewicz's footsteps

Novogrudok Castle remains in ruins, with cracks in its walls. Its position on a steep hill has taken its toll, yet its two toppled towers stood in the times of Adam Mickiewicz — a Belarusian and Polish literary legend. Happily, restoration works are soon to begin on the site as part of the Culture Ministry's *Castles of Belarus* programme, running from 2011-2018. It embraces 38 castles and palaces in all, explains Igor Chernyavsky, who heads the Culture Ministry's Department for Preservation of Historical-Cultural Heritage and Restoration. He notes that the castles in Lida (Grodno Region) and Nesvizh (Minsk Region) and the Sapegis' Palace in Ruzhany (Brest Region) are to be restored and opened as museums to the public. Forts such as those in Myadel (near Lake Naroch) and Minsk are also to be rebuilt, with castles in Krevo and Golshany (Grodno Region) on the projected list, to be agreed by the Government. As Mr. Chernyavsky stresses, these unique ruins 'must be preserved to be further exhibited'.

Hotels throughout the country await electronic booking

National hotel online reservation system operational in Belarus

By Anastasia Yanushevskaya

The system has been launched on the national tourist portal www.belarustourism.by with the aid of Belarusian Generation_P Consulting Ltd. as part of a project to create a single tourist information network. At present, the system unites around 40 hotels, including ten in the Belarusian capital. A hotel room can be booked using a bank card, from which a defined sum is withdrawn as a deposit, deducted from the balance on finally paying for the room. Two online reservation opportunities are envisaged: with instant confirmation and upon request. In the latter case, tourists wait some time to receive conformation from hotel staff.

According to the Head of the National Tourism Agency's Department for Marketing and Publishing Activity, Valery Boldyrev, the number of participants of the online booking system will be constantly expanded. In future, not only large hotels, but family-run smaller hotels in the countryside will join the system. In total, over 250 hotels and guest-

houses operate in Belarus; however, those located in the regions often lack the necessary technology to connect to the system. The national online hotel reservation system is to be integrated with that of an international system, enabling foreigners to book Belarusian hotel rooms online.

ices. The system will allow the booking of tours, excursions and transport services, as well as tickets for various cultural and sporting events.

The project to create a single tourist information system has been implemented since 2009, aiming to enhance tourists' ac-



Online booking to become customary

Specialists believe that the creation of the national hotel online reservation system and its further connection to world reservation systems will enhance Belarus' competitiveness on the world market for tourist serv-

cess to information. The network unites tourist operators and other representatives of the tourist market: hotels, national parks, museums and sanatoriums, as well as organisations distributing tourist information.

Avoid disturbing natural balance

By Olga Ovechkina

Belarus hopes to attract around \$3m from Global Environment Facility to preserve its wetland marshes

The Ministry for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection has already applied to the GEF for funding for a new project for 2012: restored damaged wetlands. A decision needs to be made as to how each marshland should be used. "Taking into account all factors, we'll decide whether to restore each marsh or whether to extract peat in line with definite criteria," explains Alexander Kozulin, a leading research officer at the National Academy of Sciences' Scientific-Practical Centre for Bio-resources. The Energy Ministry is currently involved in developing the schemes, while participation of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Ministry will allow specialists to make more informed decisions.

Measures are also planned to improve the system of specially protected natural territories. At present, peatlands in Belarus account for 2.4m hectares, with only 862,000 hectares (36 percent) preserved in their natural state by 2010. For more



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Marshes need protection

than half, their hydrological regime has been broken, as the land has been drained and peat extracted.

Belarus hopes to soon receive around \$9m from the GEF in total for new ecological projects used to preserve wetlands and develop wind power. In addition, energy efficiency in residential buildings is to be improved.