

Land of blue lakes, unique culture and hospitable people

What makes Belarus an exclusive destination?

By Palina Lakhmanenka

Belarus boasts wilderness landscapes and wonderful cities, technical progress and cultural achievements, as well as ancient traditions and wonderful history. Its list of advantages is long indeed while foreign visitors have always praised Belarusian towns for their clean streets, friendly residents and leisure opportunities. There is something to entertain everyone; our theatres, art galleries and museums can please even the most sophisticated art lovers. 'Confirmed' clubbers have plenty of choice while those keen on quiet relaxation can enjoy walking through the parks or sitting in a cosy café — there are so many to choose from. Around 700 tourist and excursion routes, including over 50 in Minsk, are operational countrywide.

Of course, in our contemporary technological world, many are tempted by the idea of 'getting away from it all'. In this respect, Belarus is ahead of those destinations which revolve around the beach and disco. At present, around 100 sanatoriums in Belarus offer a wide range of medical services, offering good value for money. Most spas are concentrated in popular and picturesque places: the Braslav Lakes and the Lake Naroch area. The first three star hotel recently opened on Lake Naroch, offering various levels of comfort, with al-



Belarus' rich cultural heritage attracts great numbers of tourists from CIS and beyond

most 60 percent of lux rooms and the remainder in the first category. All are equipped with household utensils and free Internet access. However, further development is planned, with a cultural and entertainment centre to be unveiled by the end of the year. It is to house a restaurant with three halls, a billiards room and casino, alongside a gym and fitness centre. The unified hotel complex should attract tourists and

businessmen.

Spas located on the banks of picturesque Belarusian lakes have long been popular with guests from the CIS and beyond, who praise the level of service and value for money. Agro-tourism is the latest Belarusian trend, combining folk traditions with a high level of service. Each rural guesthouse has its own flavour, with hosts keen to create a unique atmosphere. Tourists are invited to

experience the customs and rituals of the past, alongside the rural way of life — as has existed for centuries.

Many visitors are favouring comfortable cottages situated on the picturesque banks of lakes and rivers, offering fishing and swimming. With sauna facilities and cosy arbours, they're ideal for families and groups of friends, whatever the season. You can simply relax, or enjoy a true party.

The rapid development of rural tourism in Belarus has not gone unnoticed abroad. Several years ago, the Head of the World Tourism Organisation, Francesco Frangi-ali, contacted the Belarusian Country Escape Association of Rural and Ecotourism. He arrived in Belarus to view the development of rural tourism and deemed it to be promising, with real attractions for foreigners.

Another promising idea for Belarus is eco-tourism, which is supported by many well-known international organisations — including the UN and the Global Environmental Facility. Guests can photograph and shoot film of rare animals, birds and plants registered in the Red Book. Such memories are priceless.

International organisations have been working with Belarusian partners on joint projects for several years, aiming to preserve and restore our natural diversity, while attracting foreign animal lovers to the new eco-tourist complexes being built in our major reserves. The latest location to receive attention is Belarusian Polesie — an 'ecological paradise' known for its open bog lands. Often called Europe's 'lungs', these lands offer astonishing diverse flora and fauna.

Each year, the infrastructure of eco-tourism is improved, with new educational centres opening, new ecological routes appearing and tourism facilities improving. Belarus has no warm blue seas or high mountains, yet it boasts 20,000 rivers, 10,000 lakes, picturesque forests and national parks, rich history and unique culture. Most importantly, its residents are hospitable and friendly; their warm welcome awaits all those who wish to discover the wonderful treasures of our beautiful country.

Little witnesses of great events

By Andrey Novitsky

Gomel's Rumyantsev-Paskevich Palace and Park Estate hosts *Belphila-2011* philatelist exhibition

Such was the value of the 68 stamp collections on display at the show that no one could really estimate their monetary worth. Of course, enthusiasts are always a little less than truly objective...

One series of fifteen Lithuanian stamps from the early 20th century was not in the best condition, yet was believed to be worth \$16,000. A neighbouring stand contained an ancient, rather plain envelope bearing a British postmark dating back 350 years: the first postmark in history, making the envelope unique. On closer inspection, these postcards

and envelopes bearing postmarks and stamps become more fascinating — even to those without a passion for philately.

Remarkably, the *Belphila* fair has never before displayed the collections of local enthusiasts on such a large scale. Prominent local collectors took their place beside those from Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Azerbaijan and Germany.

One of the highlights of the show was presented at the opening: an envelope bearing an original stamp celebrating Gomel's status as Belarus' capital of culture was franked. Belpochta (the Belarusian post office) has also prepared an envelope dedicated to the exhibition. During the days of the fair, all outgoing mail will be marked with a special 'thematic' stamp.



By the exhibition stand

Holiday in line with ancient traditions

By Yelena Stasyukevich

Horse Festival organised at Karobchytsy agro-tourist homestead, near Grodno

Garadzenski Maentak Karobchytsy agro-tourist complex is inspired by the architecture of a noble 19th century estate and boasts 18 hectares of grounds. It has stabling for horses, a flora and fauna museum, workshops for a blacksmith and carpenter and a hunter's and fisherman's lodge. It even boasts artificial water reservoirs, open-air cages for animals and Zamak Zevany restaurant.

It is home to thoroughbred horses and is the only site in Belarus to breed Friesian horses. The Horse Festival dates back centuries, being a day on which



Exemplary show by equestrian riders at Horse Festival

the animals are bathed and groomed before having their tails and manes braided with ribbons. Exhibitions and horse races are then held, celebrating the beauty of the majestic equine species.

Guests at the event enjoyed a parade and horse

show, where the animals were judged on their beauty and grace, alongside performances and an exhibition of carriages. There was also an exhibition and trade fair of birds and animals and an entertainment programme featuring master classes, excursions and contests.