

Provinces attracting visitors

The Belarusian towns of Pogost, Gorodnaya and Motol are much spoken and written of, being guardians of tradition. Minsk's *Tourbusiness-2011* fair recently tackled the challenge of how best to use our national customs, traditions and crafts to attract tourist.

By Yekaterina Medvedskaya

Dribin's felt hatmakers surprised all those at its workshop with their mastery. Delighted spectators watched boots being made from pressed wool (once the most popular form of winter footwear). Amazingly, the youngest craftsman is not even ten years old. The tradition is passed down from generation to generation; every house in the Dribin District (Mogilev Region) produces its own felt boots, caps and mittens. In fact, they have their own language associated with the craft: of 905 words. A glossary of the vocabulary was presented at the seminar, allowing everyone to understand the secret lexis which once guarded their techniques. "The craft is

difficult, requiring physical strength and patience," stresses the oldest felt hatmaker from Dribin, Lyubov Tikhonova. "Young people aren't in a hurry to turn their skills into a profession."

The felt workers tend to show their talents at their local house of creativity and at folk crafts fairs. Recently, the Belarusian Association of Rural and Ecotourism — Country Escape began to organise excursions to allow tourists to see the craft first hand, from the shearing of sheep to the working of the wool and final sewing. You can even make your own felt boots to take home.

So far this year, seven tourist tours have been organised to various corners of Belarus, allowing people to see unique customs. The



Maslenitsa at Krupenino recreation centre, in the Beshenkovich District, celebrated with horse riding

Association now has some idea of how regional festivals and crafts can be used in tourism. For example, in May, 'Yurauski Karagod' — a round dance on Yuri's Day — is organised by the residents of Pogost village (Zhitkovichi District). Meanwhile, those in the Lyuban District go in search of mermaids in spring and summer. Legend tells us that the water beauties emerge to walk through fields and meadows at that time, hoping to meet villagers. Potters in the village of Gorodnaya (Stolin District) have their own holiday while Motol (Ivanovo District) is known for its food festival and 'wedding

karavai' tasting (a karavai is a special round loaf baked for the occasion). You can try on a Tsar's costume in the village of Semezhevo (Kopyl District) or find a sweetheart at the 'Tereshka's Wedding' Kolyady game.

Interestingly, the village of Semezhevo became known worldwide a few years ago for its 'Kolyady Tsars' customs, which date back several centuries. These are now registered on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List, and are considered a national treasure — like Japanese Kabuki theatre, Argentinean tango and Lithuania festive songs. Each year, the number of tourists coming to Se-

mezhevo before Christmas rises; it's quite fashionable now to spend your winter holidays there.

Dribin's felt crafts may also soon join the prestigious list, as its application has already been submitted to UNESCO's headquarters. Belarus' State List of Historical and Cultural Treasures currently boasts 53 folk customs and traditions: all popular with tourist agencies, and included on tours.

Folk customs continue to live on in Belarusian villages. "The unique habits and way of life of villagers, as well as their distinct dialects, attract tourists to rural areas," notes Natalia Borisenko, a project man-

ager with the Belarusian Association of Rural and Ecotourism — Country Escape. "Many take part in customs with great pleasure, learning about crafts and really immersing themselves in the way of life of a certain location for a time. Meanwhile, agro-estates are restoring forgotten recipes of Belarusian cuisine, while organising holidays relating to the farming calendar."

Valeria Klitsounova, the Chair of the Association, is confident that many rural customs are worthy of being registered on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List, being unique and authentic in our contemporary world.

Moscow to meet New Year in Belarusian style

By Yulia Yevstigneeva

Novopolotsk's Anna Lukashok charms Russian capital

Anna has taken second place at the 1st open contest to design New Year decorations for the Russian capital. Within the next few weeks, her large family of snowmen will appear on the snow-covered streets of Moscow.

In all, 65 people from across the CIS and beyond took part in the competition — organised by the News Outdoor Advertising Agency, assisted by the Moscow Government's Mass Media and Advertising Department. Some even hailed from the USA. First place went to Russian Tolyatti.

"I read an advertisement on the Internet and decided to enter," she recalls. "Within a couple of days, I'd created drawings and sent them in, later receiving an email congratulating me on second place." Besides the honour of having her idea brought to life, Anna has won a prize of 35,000 Russian Roubles.

"Undoubtedly, it's a great idea, which immediately stood

out from the others; it will be even more interesting after adaptation," notes advertising expert Vladimir Yevstafiev, the Deputy President of the Russian Communications Association and official representative of the *Cannes Lions* International Advertising Festival in Russia.

Anna's family of snowmen comprises a father and mother with several babies; she admits that it was close to her heart, as she is a young mother herself. Her son Petya inspired her creativity. "The plot is simple, showing that the New Year is a family holiday. I have two sisters, so I know how wonderful it is to gather a group of children around a fir tree," she smiles. "My husband and I hope that our own family will be large."

Anna has no plans to travel to Moscow to look at the finished sculptures; rather, she's spending the New Year holiday in Grodno with her grandparents. However, the News Outdoor Agency assures us that her design will soon grace the Russian capital, for the enjoyment of everyone passing by.

The Hunter definitely hits festival's target

Belarusian game keeper Mikhail Barskovich plays major role in *The Hunter*, by Russian film director Bakura Bakuradze, awarded Grand Prix at Minsk's International *Listapad* Festival

The film tells of a respectable family man, a farmer, who suddenly finds himself caught up by passion. Mr. Bakuradze was keen to shoot in Belarus, at the Braslav Lakes, but Belarusfilm 'lost' the

project, resulting in the director taking his crew to Russia. Mikhail Barskovich, who works as a game keeper at the Braslav Lakes, was chosen to play the major role.

Mr. Barskovich, how were you chosen for the role?

Mr. Bakuradze asked me to help him find a location for the film; this is how we met. Belarus wasn't chosen in the end, so he left our country, but called me a month later, inviting me for a

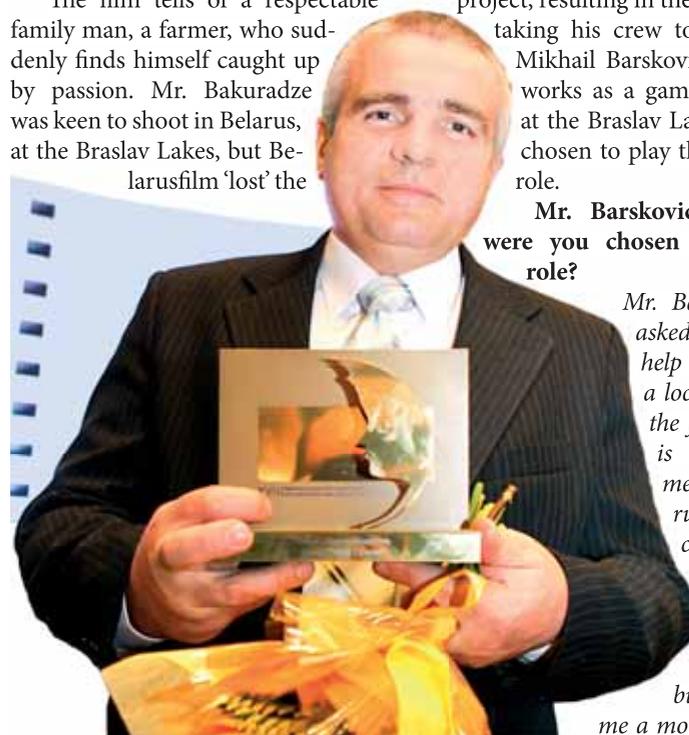
screen test. He was keen to use amateurs for the major roles.

Was it easy for you to 'make friends' with the camera?

It was very difficult. I remember shooting a scene where my character, Ivan Dunaev, eats an egg. We had five or six takes and it's not easy eating six eggs in a row! It was even more difficult to separate my own identity from that of the role. Returning home after shooting, it took a while to find myself again. In life, I'm chatty, easily expressing my emotions, while Dunaev only uses gestures.

The *Listapad* Festival success must be an added bonus.

Absolutely. Actually, it wasn't my first festival, as we'd already been to the Cannes International Film Festival and Sochi Open Russian Film Festival, bringing home awards. It's great to have won the major prize at the Belarusian festival though.



Mikhail Barskovich becomes cinema hero