

## Students choose girl friend for bronze student

**A mobile phone and book accompany 21st century student sculpture commissioned by Polotsk State University via its recent contest**

A bronze girl with a mobile phone and a textbook is to 'sit' on a bench near the entrance to Novopolotsk University's main building from the beginning of the next academic year. The work was chosen by public vote from six entries reflecting the spirit of modern studentship. The winning design shows our aspiration to learn more and keep in touch.

Polotsk University is perhaps the only Belarusian educational establishment to have departments in two cities: Polotsk and Novopolotsk. With this in mind, it was decided to add another sculpture honouring studentship. The first (of a medieval student) was erected in late 2010, near the IT Department's entrance in Polotsk. This honours the first Belarusian higher educational establishment, founded in 1581 by Stephan Batory: the Polotsk Jesuit Collegium. The second sculpture in Novopolotsk is to be devoted to modern students.

## Cultural ties strengthen

**Club of Belarusian language lovers to appear in Kiev**

The Centre of Belarusian Language and Culture opened at Kiev National University's Philology Institute eighteen months ago (as part of Belarus-Ukraine bilateral co-operation in the sphere of higher education). It immediately began receiving calls from Kiev city residents requesting language courses and decided to allocate a special building for this purpose. Once a week, it hosts lectures in Belarusian, attracting listeners of all age groups.

# Access to hotel rooms via Internet

38 hotels from 14 Belarusian cities unite within hotel.by portal, selling rooms online

By Viktor Korbut

These pioneers in the field of modern technologies know what they're doing. According to Marina Kondrashova, who co-ordinates the hotel.by project, a third of all tourists and businessmen book rooms from their home or office. Importantly, discounts can also be offered for Internet bookings (compared with paying directly at a hotel's reception).

It takes just 10-15 minutes to book any hotel in the city, with all prices listed. Such e-systems actually inspire hotels to offer discounts, explains Ms. Kondrashova, "If a cli-

ent sees four hotels online and only two can immediately confirm the booking, the traveller is likely to choose those over the others: in 98 percent of cases, people will choose a hotel which offers immediate confirmation."

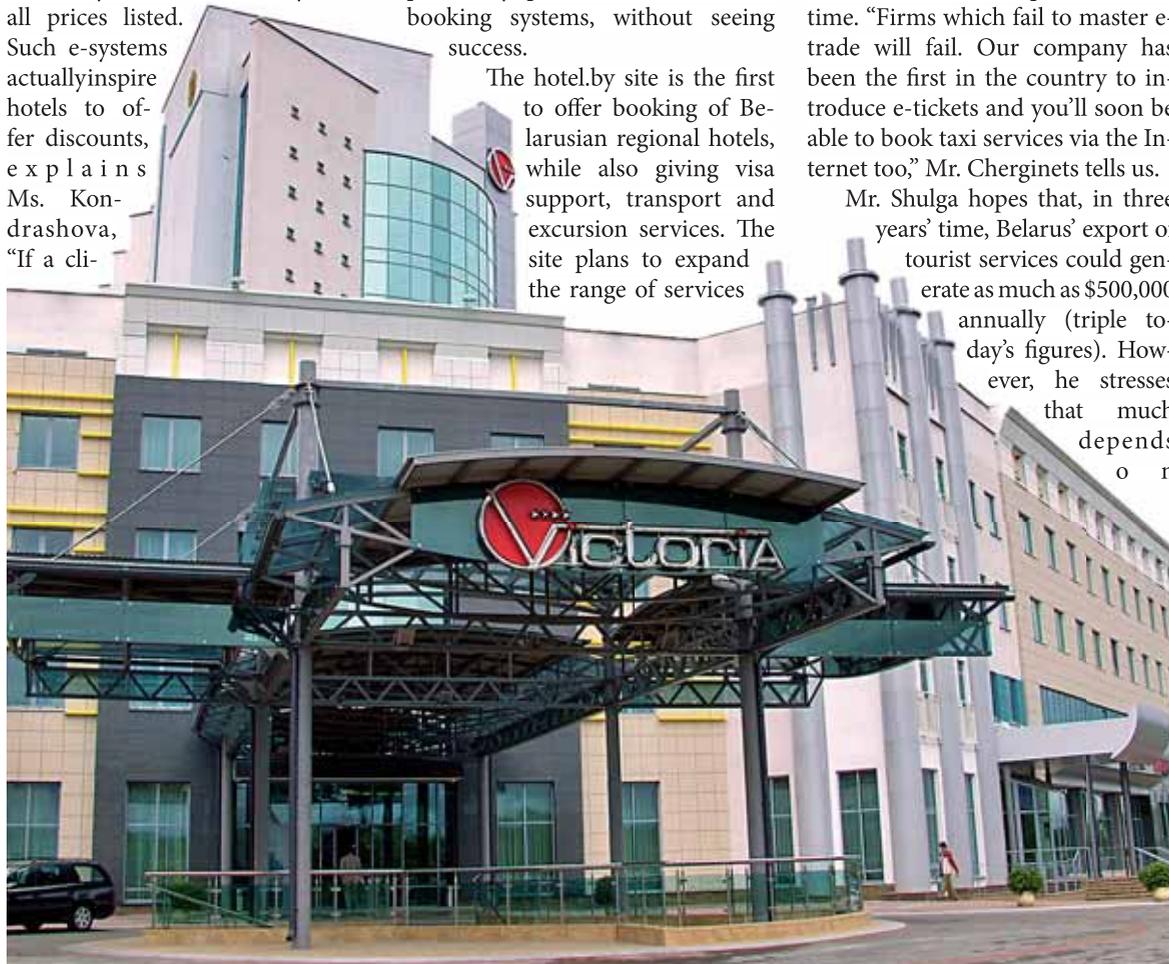
The new website's designers admit that it took several years to launch the project. Meticulous calculations were made before the site went online. The Deputy Sports and Tourism Minister, Cheslav Shulga, notes that three or four firms have previously planned similar online booking systems, without seeing success.

The hotel.by site is the first to offer booking of Belarusian regional hotels, while also giving visa support, transport and excursion services. The site plans to expand the range of services

offered in future, integrating with global TransHotel, to allow information to be automatically displayed across the company's partners. The significant advantage of this step would be the portal's integration with the sites of other companies.

Belavia National Airline is the first to support the new service, offering e-tickets and the chance to book a hotel. Belavia's Deputy Director, Igor Cherginets, notes that Europeans now prefer e-services, with the London-Minsk route being booked online 95-97 percent of the time. "Firms which fail to master e-trade will fail. Our company has been the first in the country to introduce e-tickets and you'll soon be able to book taxi services via the Internet too," Mr. Cherginets tells us.

Mr. Shulga hopes that, in three years' time, Belarus' export of tourist services could generate as much as \$500,000 annually (triple today's figures). However, he stresses that much depends on



Booking rooms at Minsk's four star Victoria Hotel now possible online



ARTUR PRUPAS

Pleasant interior

which new hotels open in the capital and in our small towns. At present, Belarus has over 300 hotels, with 33 having been certified and classified (using the 1-5 star award system). The Europa and Crowne Plaza have five stars, while the capital's Victoria and Minsk and Vitebsk's Luchesa have four stars. In all, 24 hotels have three stars and 3 hotels have two stars. Just one hotel has a single star. About half of these 'star' hotels are situated in Minsk, including the privately owned five star Crowne Plaza — part of Princess Group International, which also owns the Princess Casino and Rock House Café. Other private Belarusian 'star' hotels are situated in the provinces.

Investors are already showing interest in Belarus' hotel business, with Russian chain Amaks Hotels & Resorts recently arriving in the country. Its representative, Victoria Yermolayeva, tells us that the hotel chain is known throughout Russia, having 17 hotels in the provinces, in addition to five sanatoriums. Amaks Hotels & Resorts already owns hotels in Bobruisk and Mogilev. In early 2010, co-owner of Amaks Hotels & Resorts, the General Director of Bobruisk's hotel, Dmitry Zlatkin, commented on their first acquisition. He notes that negotiations on the privatisation of hotels are already being concluded in the Gomel, Grodno, Vitebsk and Minsk regions. He views the Belarusian market as 'underestimated and very promising'.

GEORGE SHABLIUK

# Tourists listen to echo of past wars

Over the past two hundred years, Belarus has been involved in several devastating conflicts. In the early 19th century, the Napoleonic army attacked and, a century later, our territory was cut by the WWI frontline. The Great Patriotic War followed, with the battle between the USSR and Germany fought across our territory as part of WWII. Of course, the events of the past have left their material legacy: hundreds of defensive constructions, fortresses and monuments honouring those who died.

By Yevgeny Grudanov

Amateur historians find much of interest in Belarus and, naturally, wars not only separate nations, they also unite us. A historical-cultural complex near Minsk provides full information on the engineering constructions and military vehicles of the 20th century, including those used during WWII. A battlefield has been reconstructed and those who like to re-enact regularly organise realistic shows there. The 'soldiers' who participate

in these performances personally restore their own weaponry and uniform. In late February, when the complex was hosting a re-enactment of a winter battle, I met a visitor from the USA who said, "Americans and Belarusians have many differences but our hatred of fascism, no doubt, unites us."

This year, in June, we mark the 70th anniversary of the start of the Great Patriotic War. Thousands of guests are to arrive at Brest Fortress, in the west of Belarus. In summer 1941, its

defenders fought against German troops, restraining a whole division. Of course, almost every Belarusian city has its own sites relating to war. Sadly, we experienced deep tragedy. One of the most tragic is Khatyn Memorial Complex, to the north of Minsk, located on the site of a village burnt by the fascists — one of so many from that time. Its once busy paths have been replaced by concrete, with visitors viewing obelisks which resemble chimneys; each rise from the ground like excla-



ARTUR PRUPAS

Teenagers visit historical and cultural complex

mation marks, marking the former homes of villagers.

For the memory of the past to be honoured, we must carefully preserve the graves of our soldiers

while also keeping our enemies' remains. Dozens of military cemeteries are now maintained, cared for by organisations and local residents, without distin-

guishing between 'ours' and 'theirs'. Often, the graves of German and Soviet soldiers border one another. Meanwhile, the search for remains continues, as does the challenge of finding the identity of the killed soldiers. The Defence Ministry's 52nd specialised battalion is involved in this task on a regular basis.

Some unearthed relics will find a worthy place in the new Museum of Great Patriotic War History, being built on Pobediteley Avenue, near the Minsk — City-Hero Monument. The older building, constructed in Soviet times, no longer meets requirements.

Evidently, Belarus shall never forget the tragic events of its past, as must be apparent to those with a passion for history.