

Wide open doors of hospitality

From 2013, Belarus able to abolish visas for Europeans

By Viktor Korbut

The Sports and Tourism Ministry aims to abolish its visa regime for EU tourists from 2013, subject to approval by the Council of Ministers. Vadim Karmazin, Director of the Sports and Tourism Ministry's Tourism Department, is offering to simplify the visa regime this year, e.g. for Poland, to test the mechanism. From 2013, visas for tourists from other EU states would then be abolished. Belarus could become a major centre of cultural and sporting tourism in the region.

Border more transparent

The decision to abolish visas depends largely on the Foreign Ministry's position, with a final decision to be made by the Head of State. According to Mr. Karmazin, the move would be a major factor in attracting visitors from abroad. "On the eve of the 2014 IIHF Championships, to be held in Minsk, the issue has much significance," notes the official.

Steps are now being taken to attract potential guests, with the Foreign Ministry's website including a short film shot by Artem Pryadko showing his favourite views

of the country; it will be the tourist business card for all of Belarus. It begins early in the morning on the banks of a picturesque Belarusian lake, then travels to show everyday life, before heading to the lights of the city by night. It concludes with shots of the illuminated National Library. His lens takes in the Radziwill Palace in Nesvizh and Mir Castle — both registered on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Mir Castle is a unique architectural

Tourists can view unique examples of furniture, weaponry and armour, and ancient musical instruments. Dmitry Bubnovsky, one of the restoration leaders, tells us that the Italian garden, located near the fortress, is now being brought back to life, "It could date from the turn of the 16-17th century. Fragments remain but the garden design changed many times."

An English-type landscape park, originating from the early 20th century, is also to be restored. The final stage of reconstruction of the Svyat-



Bright Kalyady celebrations in the village of Molotkovichi (Pinsk District, Brest Region)

opolk-Mirskie dukes' palace, built in the late 19th century near medieval castle, will complete work on the estate, making a jewel in Belarus' crown. It is also of special significance as we mark the 200th anniversary of the 1812 War, as Russian and French troops fought beside the fortress walls.

This war is known as the Patriotic War in Russia and as the Russian Napoleonic campaign in European history. It changed the fates of nations and destroyed the dreams of those who hoped for independence — including those residing on Belarusian lands.

The National History Museum's *Minsk in 1812* exhibition includes information on the battle for Minsk by Russian commander Bagration and his French opponent, Marshall Davout. From July to November,

celebrated his birthday in the capital. Cold arms and guns, uniforms and other military items are on show, including maps and medals from 200 years ago — gathered from Vitebsk, Mogilev and Kobrin.

"The uniform of Alexander I is on show for the first time," admits Sergey Vecher, Director of the National History Museum, showing us the Russian Emperor's outfit.

Another exhibition dedicated to the 1812 War has opened in Gomel, at the Regional Museum of Military Glory, featuring weaponry, ammunition and medals: around 100 exhibits in total.

Mogilev is also marking the anniversary, explains the Director of the City History Museum, Alexey Batyukov. He tells us that the interior of the drawing room of a townsman — a contemporary of Napoleon — is being recreated, while visitors will be able to read ancient books, play patience, have their photo taken wearing costumes and take part in a tea ceremony.

monument featuring Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque elements. In late 2010, it was finally restored (with works having begun in the 1970s).



Abolition of visas for Belarus could inspire foreign tourists

over 80,000 Napoleonic soldiers passed through Minsk; the Emperor even cel-

Mushroom success for Svetlana Radivon

Resident of Volkovysk, in Grodno Region, gathers mushrooms for January Christmas celebrations: six chanterelles and six blewits

By Natalia Timokhina

"Usually, our forest is not rich in mushrooms. It's wonderful luck to find some in January. The blewits were slightly frozen but the chanterelles were young and strong; it was a pleasure to look at them," Svetlana tells us, showing her love for mushroom hunting. She plans to cook soup from them.

On New Year's Eve, reports of mushroom gathering arrived from various Belarusian regions, in ad-

dition to Sweden, Latvia, Finland and elsewhere. Those in the Grodno Region love to go to the forest to find mushrooms, as the Head of the Mycology Laboratory at the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences' Experimental Botany Institute, Olga Gapienko, tells us.

This year's unusually warm weather and high humidity have helped mushrooms grow especially well, despite winter. "This has happened in the past but mostly in Decem-



Mushrooms in winter forest, near Volkovysk

ber," she explains. "We've been on expeditions to study this phenomenon. These January mushrooms

will continue growing while the weather remains mild. Autumn was dry but it's rainy now, so the chan-

terelles and blewits are 'confused' about the seasons — failing to follow the calendar!" Meteorologists state that December usually marks true winter but no real shift has been seen in the average daily temperature, making it fall below zero degrees (as usually occurs in late November). Many Belarusian meteorological stations registered abnormally warm weather at the end of 2011 and, in general, December was warmer than usual

— exceeding the norm by 5 degrees Celsius. However, it failed to break the record of December 2006, when the average monthly temperature exceeded the norm by almost 7 degrees.

Warm Decembers happen once every 20-25 years in Belarus. On the warmest days, the temperature reached 8-14 degrees above zero, with average rainfall of 50mm (against the usual 44mm). A little snow was registered last month, although it only lasted up to five days.