

Painted carriages won't cause damage

Is advertising on the Minsk underground appropriate and safe?

By Mikhail Sentyaev

Last year, Minsk's metro gained its first carriage completely decorated with advertisements. Brewers from the Grodno Region were the pioneers, promoting bottled kvas. Another branded train appeared over the New Year, promoting a Swiss coffee manufacturer. Most of those leaving feedback on Belarusian Internet forums think the painted carriages rather smart but few are in favour decorating metro stations themselves. However, is it really safe to be painting the outside of carriages?

Where are the doors?

It's possible that someone — especially with bad eyesight

— may not see the location of the doors easily where carriages are painted. They could lose their step and fall — perhaps between the carriages. The traditional bright white line with characteristic zigzags on the doors currently makes their location obvious.

“Before giving permission for advertising on carriages, the issue was thoroughly studied by various institutions,” explains the chief inspector of Minsk's metro, Alexander Salei. “As you've seen, the trains look beautiful. From a theoretical point of view, it's possible to step between carriages even without advertisements. In fact, it does happen — usually when passengers are drunk.”



Electric train decorated with advertising is no novelty for Minsk metro

Tangible limits

Naturally, safety of passengers, including those with impaired vision, is a high priority. “From 2011-2012, in close co-operation with the Society for the Visually Impaired, we researched how best to make the metro safe for passengers with impaired vision,” notes the Deputy Head of Capital Construction, Alexander Timofeev. “Special relief tiles, produced by Keramin, have been laid along the edge of the platform, and information tables installed at stations are

being made more easily readable.”

Having inspected the Minsk metro, I can admit that the relief line at the platform edge is easy to feel, even in sturdy footwear. Moreover, wheelchair users are gaining special elevators at the stations of Institut Kultury, Oktyabrskaya and Pervomaiskaya.

My 'dear' metro

Passengers enjoy a good deal on the metro, only paying about half of the real cost, while avoiding the congestion and delay of road

traffic. “The cost of metro tickets is lower than any other type of urban transport,” notes Mr. Timofeev. So, perhaps we can't blame the metro for seeking to make up some of the shortfall through advertising revenue.

The metro transports around a third of all travellers in the capital. In 2012, Minsk underground transported over 281m passengers. Since opening in summer 1984, it has sold tickets to 5.5bn travellers — equivalent to quadruple the population of China.

Read and be greatly surprised

Most expensive Belarusian book costs Br5m while smallest can fit into a baby's palm

By Lyubov Notkina

The thickest book in the world is soon to be published in Denmark, with 23,675 pages, detailing the rules and regulations of budgetary funding for allowances for unemployed Danes. Its publisher, the Min A-kasse unemployment insurance company, seems to have its eye on *The Guinness Book of Records*.

How do Belarusian books surprise readers? We here detail the top five unusual books from Belarus, aided by the National Library and the State Museum of Belarusian Literary History.

The oldest

The 11th century Turov Gospel is a handwritten liturgical collection of Gospel readings, written with chestnut ink in legible geometrically adjusted handwriting (by charter). Unfortunately, only 10 pages of the Gospel remain, having been found in a box of coal in Turov in 1865. Now, the publication is stored in the library of the Academy of Sciences of

Lithuania in Vilnius.

The smallest

A collection of works by Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas, from 1967, measures just 3x4cm and is illustrated by popular Belarusian artist Vasily Sharangovich. The collection won a prize at the All-Union Contest *The Art of Books* and is currently held in the private collection of Yevgeny Ksenevich, who has been collecting miniatures for more than 30 years.

The most expensive

The book *The Effect of Holding*, by Alexan-

der Gavrilenko, costs nearly Br5m. This is the most expensive edition, detailing business practices across the CIS. The book examines the activities of holding compa-

The most sincere

Testaments of the Nobility and of the Burghers in Belarus in the Second Half of the 16th Century contains ancient wills: ‘mental (spiritual) letters’. The collection has been prepared by the National Historical Archives of Belarus and contains more than a hundred documents, each translated into modern language. The originals were written by representatives of the nobility and by well-



The most expensive book

known figures of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Wills of that time reflected the material state of the person, their family body and their degree of education.

The most unexpected

The Blue Book of Belarusian Alcoholics, by Anton Kulon (real name Anatoly Ostapenko) tells of his adventures while drunk and how he rid himself of the addiction. The word ‘blue’ in the title of the book does not relate to the traditional colour of the faces of those who drink too much alcohol but is the colour of the publication by American Alcoholics Anonymous, for those who want to stop drinking.



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Maslenitsa rich in pancakes

By Galina Kolesnikova

Maslenitsa is held in the last week before Lent, preparing us for a time of fasting and reflection. Sunday, March 17th, was the final day of Maslenitsa (also known as Shrove Sunday). Of course, its roots are pagan, saying farewell to winter and welcoming spring.

Thursday is the main day of celebration, featuring much eating of pancakes, as seen across other European countries. In Belarus, we also light cleansing fires and enjoy all sorts of japes and jokes,

whether in the town or countryside. There is the traditional burning of the Maslenitsa effigy, symbolising the destruction of past troubles and anxieties. Meanwhile, horseback riding and wrestling games create great fun for fine fellows.

Naturally, our countryside resorts and agro-estates offer programmes of entertainment; even our mountain skiing complexes have Maslenitsa activities and our folk museums organise special themed displays. Children are not forgotten and churches also organise events, while reminding parishioners to enjoy themselves sensibly.

Even more convenient

By Denis Amillov

Minsk to Vilnius by train to take only two and a half hours from May

Of course, some time must be spent crossing the border, notes a representative of the Lithuanian Railways, Dalius Zebrauskas. “Passengers will cross the border and go through customs not at the Lithuanian border station of Kena but directly at Vilnius railway station. Workstations are

being set up in the tunnels leading to platforms, as well as facilities for X-raying baggage; there will be surveillance cameras watching people's movements,” he explains.

Railway workers assure us that the changes are designed to cope with the growing popularity of the route; each month, about 22,000 people travel between Minsk and Vilnius, inspiring a third daily train over the summer period.