

Museum visits fascinating, beneficial and educational

Foreign tourists are often surprised by the low price of tickets to Belarusian museums. You can even enter Mir and Nesvizh castles free of charge.

By Lyudmila Minakova

When it's cold outside, it's hard to keep amused indoors. If you're tired of cafes, there's always the cinema or theatre, but most people tend to choose a museum visit to pass the time. It may be less demanding to sit watching a film, and there's no shortage of new releases to keep us amused, while museums update their exhibitions less often. However, Belarus boasts a wealth of unique treasures and entry costs next to nothing... or can even be free.

Tickets cost less than one Euro

Probably, one of the most expensive museums in Belarus is the National Art Museum, in the capital. A recent price increase sets adult entry at Br40,000. If you wish to photograph Ivan Khrutsky's still life works or Yazep Drozdovich's cosmic paintings, the fee is Br57,000; you can record them on video for Br132,000. Students and schoolchildren pay Br25,000 and Br15,000 respectively. Some might consider this expensive, but its collection is the largest in Belarus and one of the richest in Eastern Europe. Recently, it launched its own café: the perfect rendezvous for meeting friends or business acquaintances, listening to music or discussing art. You could spend almost the whole day at the Art Museum.

It's much cheaper to enter other Minsk museums: the National History Museum charges Br10,000 for adults, Br8,000 for students and Br5,000 for schoolchildren. You can attend museum classes for a modest fee, learning to weave, make puppets or some other handicraft skill. The Museum of Modern Fine Art, the Great Patriotic War Museum, Yanka Kupala's State Literary Museum and others in the capital charge similar prices for entry.

When friends recently arrived from

abroad and asked me to accompany them to the Great Patriotic War Museum, they were taken aback at the modest entry price of Br10,000 (less than a Euro). They love to travel and know how expensive museum tickets can be: 10-15 Euros or more. It costs 10 Euros to see the permanent collection at the Louvre.

Entry to museum includes snack of bread and cheese

Entry to regional museums costs even less than entry in Minsk. A full ticket to the Museum-Library of Simeon Polotsky, in Polotsk, one of the most popular outside of the capital, costs Br5,000. The discounted rate is just Br3,000.

"Ticket prices are set by the Culture Department of the Regional Executive Committee, to which our museum is subordinate. We only recommend prices, taking into account electricity and other costs," explains a curator from Turov's Local History Museum, Yelena Baikovskaya. "Turov is mostly visited by tourists from Russia. Of course, they haven't complained about ticket prices but Belarusians often say that it's expensive. Local residents come rarely — only schoolchildren. Turov is a small town of three thousand inhabitants but we welcomed 10,000 tourists last year."

It usually costs a little more to visit folk museums, since they offer interactive experiences. The Dudutki Folk Museum (40km from Minsk) charges Br60,000 per adult and Br30,000 for schoolchildren. However, this includes a bread and cheese lunch, the opportunity to make a clay whistle and a cart ride. Similarly, it costs Br40,000 and Br60,000 respectively to visit the famous castles of Mir and Nesvizh (half price for children).

It's not uncommon to receive a discount when buying entry to multiple sites: a one day

Belarus' top 5 unusual museums
Museum of Money — at the National Bank of Belarus View rare Byzantine coins from the 10-11th century, a leather purse in which 127 Golden Horde coins were found, the Prague money collection, Western European thalers, Spanish reals and much more.
Museum of Samovars — 'Our Heritage' in Zhdanovichi Shopping Centre More than 260 ancient samovars of various sizes and shapes: balls, vases, glasses, cans, turnips and Easter eggs... There is even a samovar-satellite. In addition, the museum has about a thousand household items from the 18-20th century.
Museum of Items Confiscated by Customs in Brest The exhibits include valuable 16-20th century icons, a rock crystal set of toilette items, in a silver setting — made by world famous Faberge, Chinese and Japanese handmade vases, seascapes by Aivazovsky and other works of art confiscated by Brest customs officers.
Museum of Teratology (congenital deformities) at Grodno State Medical University This rather macabre collection of about a hundred exhibits has been gathered from Minsk, St. Petersburg and Grodno.
Museum-Wagon in Minsk Heaven for those with a love of trams, the exhibits include first tram driver Alexey Borisov's uniform, a rail fragment from a 19th century horse drawn tram and about two hundred historical photos.

ticket to Museum Island in central Berlin gives you entry to all its museums while a three day ticket gives entry to over sixty museums across Berlin. Belarus plans to adopt a similar scheme, offering a Br60,000 ticket for entry to all eleven of Polotsk's museums.

Entrance is free!

Certain citizens (preschoolers, 1st and 2nd degree disabled people and others) gain free entry to every museum in Belarus while, once a month, various select museums offer free entry. Mir Castle is free on the last Monday of each month; Nesvizh is free on the first Monday.

"Many of the country's museums are keen to start doing this, as it's world practice," notes the Head of Sightseeing at the Nesvizh National Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve, Marina Gurina. "It's hard to say whether we see fewer or more visitors on 'free' days; in fact, many are unaware of the offer until they arrive."

Whether you pay or come on a day of free admission, don't forget that entry usually ends half an hour before closing time. The Great Patriotic War Museum closes its ticket office an hour before the museum closes, explains Tatiana Shpakovskaya, who heads the Scientific and Educational Work Department. She adds, "The museum is open from 11am to 7pm on Wednesday and Sunday; on

other days it opens from 10am to 6pm and it is closed on Monday. We stop selling tickets an hour before the museum closes, to provide visitors with enough time to view the exhibition. As a rule, there are no complaints, especially as most visitors arrive in the morning. When necessary, we'll stay late to accommodate our visitors. Of course, we'll soon be moving to our new building, so we invite you to visit our old exhibition — on which a whole generation of Belarusians were raised."

Our museums await you. Choose whichever most appeals and enjoy!

