

Hostels are definitely the way forward for budget travellers

Budget hotels gain increasing popularity among tourists

By Natalia Krupko

It's not enough to simply promote our national sights if we wish to see large numbers of tourists come to Belarus. Rather, accommodation needs to be affordable. Accordingly, budget priced hostels are opening, offering rooms for two or for larger groups, at a cost of around \$20 per night.

Indeed, how many can afford a 'four-star' hotel just to look at Mir Castle or the National Library? Will all the fans at the World Championship-2014 find an affordable bed for the night? It's unlikely that every second fan is a Rockefeller.

The first hostel opened in Minsk in 2011 and there are now eight in the capital, with one more found in Vitebsk. Of course, more are needed, as the Director of the Tourism Department of the Belarusian Sports and Tourism Ministry, Vadim Karmazin, emphasises. He tells us, "Belarus needs two and three-star hotels and hostels, otherwise individual tourism won't develop — only package holidays. Hostels are still a novelty to us so, like all things new, it takes time for them to find their way."

The Director of the first Belarusian Postoyalets Economy Hotel, Dmitry Narkevich, decided long ago to open a second but has spent a long time trying to find a suitable location. Naturally, hostels need to meet many of the same requirements as a hotel.

In fact, those opening hostels believe that particular legislation is needed to govern their work,

encouraging investment. Businesses need only modest amounts to start up but it takes time to see a profit. Mr. Narkevich explains, "It took us about \$50,000 to open our hostel from scratch. With an 'accompanying wind' and careful marketing, it takes about two seasons to become cost-effective. The main expenses are site rent and large utility bills."

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and Belarus is yet to see its tourist industry really take off. Of course, they will always attract a certain number purely on price, charging from Br87,000 per night in an eight-bed-room, up to Br500,000 for a luxury double. In comparison, the minimum price at a more upmarket hotel in the capital is Br600,000.

Co-operation with travel agencies brings in guests, including those travelling in large groups of foreigners for various events in the capital. To encourage business, it's important to



Budget hotels available for tourists of all ages

have a prime location, convenient for the centre, and to offer online booking: vital for international

guests. Our Belarusian hostels already offer these aspects and are being well promoted on the

Internet. Each room includes free Wi-Fi Internet access, tea and coffee, and pancakes for breakfast.

Of course, eight hostels won't be sufficient for the numbers expected for the World Ice Hockey Championship, hosted by Minsk in 2014. "We aren't relying on that niche," stresses Lyubov Soika, the Head of the Organisation and Development of the Hotel Industry at the Minsk City Executive Committee's Department for Communal and Hotel Services to Population. She continues, "20,000 beds are reserved for participants and fans: at 43 hotels (in the capital, as well as Minsk and in the Logoisk Districts), as well as in 12 university dormitories and the Student Village Complex. Existing hotels are being reconstructed and ten new Minsk hotels are being built, with another eleven at Silichi Ski Centre, Staiki Sports Complex and the Raubichi Republican Centre of Olympic Preparation for Winter Sports. By the end of year, all will be ready. The President Hotel and Garni Hotel (3 star) are already open. One of the most hotly anticipated launches is that of the second building of the Victoria Hotel, located next to the headquarters of the National Olympic Committee."

Two three-star hotels, as well as three 'one star' hotels are opening, with an average cost of \$50 per night. Naturally, hostels with a price tag of \$15 upwards won't be without guests during the championship and, perhaps, by 2014, more such budget accommodation will have opened.

Bison unafraid of fire

River Don sees unusual races on Belarusian tractors

The Rostov Region has hosted the 11th *Bison-Track-Show* tractor races, gathering 33 drivers from Russia and the CIS — including a woman — Olga Stebikhova — for the first time.

The route was full of spring-boards, steep corners and hills, as well as tricky high-speed places. Paired ring races gave the show more drama, with some vehicles overturned or making dangerous skids; on the high-speed runs, tractors reached 70km per hour.

Belarusian MTZ-80 and MTZ-82, alongside 'Belarus'-826, 892, 920 and 952 tractors took part, with three 'Belarus' tractors offered among the many prizes.

Thirty thousand spectators gathered along the 'Don 25' to enjoy the show, with



Tractor works wonders

more than a hundred from the USA, France, Spain, Holland and Brazil. None were disappointed. Additional fun was provided with contests for those watching between the laps.

During breaks between laps, various contests were organised for guests, including 'Car Races for Survival'

and a record breaking result for 'Rubber Tractor': 16 people squeezed into the cab of an MTZ and into a big-eared 'Zaporozhets'.

Olga Stebikhova, from the Pskov Region, was a novelty at the race, being the first woman to take part to date. Her tractor was decorated with rushes and a nice

cap but she faced the same challenges and had the audience on her side.

The ultimate winners were from the Rostov Region: Anatoly Bobrovsky, 32, from Kirov Stud Farm in the Tselinsky District took first place. This was his ninth show and fourth victory. Second place went to Roman Struk from Sovetinsky Collective Farm, in the Neklinsky District. Third place was taken by experienced 'showman' Ali Akhmetov, enjoying his eleventh competition and third prize to date, from Lenin Collective Farm, in the Veselovsky District. The three took home a modern tractor from Belarus. Naturally, the event promotes Belarusian tractors and encourages future sales.

Ancient folio in electronic format

Brest (Radziwill) Bible digitised and donated to country's largest libraries

The electronic edition has been released on CD, including a digitised copy of the Brest Bible, alongside scientific materials dedicated to the history of the book's creation and peculiarities. The Belarusian Scientific Research Centre of Electronic Documents completed the work, including layout, with copies soon to be donated to the country's largest libraries and scientific and cultural institutions. The *Masterpieces of 16th Century Book Printing* exhibition was presented at the same launch, displaying Belarus' only original copy of the Brest Bible.

The famous Brest (Radziwill) Bible was printed on September 4th, 1563, being the most fundamental and best illustrated edition of the Holy Writ in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Its initiator was one of the most influential figures of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Mikolaj Radziwill Czarny: a state and military figure, as well as an active supporter of reformation.

However, the book's fate was tragic; part of its circulation was destroyed, with only a few copies remaining today and only one copy in Belarus — kept at the Yakub Kolas Central Scientific Library.

