

Home of Adam Mickiewicz's muse is a place worth seeing

On the way from Lida to Ostrovets, tourists can make many interesting discoveries and meetings

By Yuri Chernyakevich

You can learn about Belarus simply by watching television programmes like *Journeying with a Dilettante* but many choose to experience life first-hand: by bus, train, car or bicycle. In fact, cycling is a wonderful way to see the country, keeping you fit and allowing you to enjoy the fresh air as you go. Of course, bicycles can also travel where vehicles cannot, allowing you to seek out the most tranquil spots. Certainly, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Accordingly, my friends and I put our cycles on the 'Minsk-Grodno' train one warm day, alighting at Lida station to begin our bicycle tour.

In fact, more people than ever are choosing cycle holidays, as was evident on our train! Besides our own party, there were seven others with the same idea in our carriage — all headed for Lida. The conductors were hardly surprised, quietly helping us lift our bicycles onto the train, as if they did so every day.

Our fellow travellers included an American called John, who has been working for a foreign company in Belarus for several years. He speaks Russian and loves to explore our 'blue-eyed' country by bicycle. He thinks it's the only way to travel.

In the morning, on arriving in Lida, we cycled through the town's streets and viewed its architectural 'pearl': the ancient castle. Joined by our new friends, we couldn't help but be impressed by the early 14th century fort, created by Duke Gediminas to protect the town from crusaders. Naturally, photographs were taken from every angle possible.

We then headed north, through the Grodno Region's Voronovo District, before cy-



Voronovo and Ostrovets districts offer tourist sites: 1. Ancient church in Voronyany, 2. Neo-Gothic Cathedral in Gervyaty, 3. Unique fortified house in Gaityunishki

cling along the Lithuanian border for 30km. There were so many sights to see: castles and churches, antique manors and ancient mills on riverbanks. Most of all, we were impressed by a unique fortified house, located at the entrance of Gaityunishki village, which once belonged to the famous families of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania — the Khreptovichs, Sakkenys and Rimshys. Its ancient walls, built in the early 17th century, now house a state hospital but tourists still drop by. Yevgeny Sobol, one of the guards, showed us the visitors' book: several hundred names have been registered in the past month alone — from Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine. Of course,

most visitors are Belarusian.

We then viewed 17th century chapel ruins a few kilometres from Gaityuneshki and, as it was already midday, went to the famous village of Boltiniki, in the Voronovo District. Admirers of world famous Belarusian poet Adam Mickiewicz love to pay homage here. His well-known muse, Marylya Vereshchako, lived at Boltiniki manor house, under her married name of Countess Puttkamer. As well as welcoming Alexander Pushkin, 'the singer of Lithuania' met her former beloved, Adam Mickiewicz, within its walls.

Boltiniki manor remains, reconstructed in the late 19th century, as do the *Marylin Gai* area, drawing the eye as soon



as you enter the village. Family portraits once hung on the walls, above gilded sofas and armchairs in Louis XV style. Marylya also kept an extensive library. Appropriately, the manor now houses a rural library.

Voronovo District Executive Committee tells us that Puttkamers' Estate will be hosting a theatrical performance involving actors from Belarus and Lithuania in August, exploring the love affair between Adam Mickiewicz and Marylya Vereshchako. This will be followed by an international open-air art workshop,

ending in an exhibition in Belarus and Lithuania. The event is part of a co-operative agreement between the Voronovo District and the Lithuanian city of Alytus. The District Executive Committee hopes that similar events will encourage tour operators to organise more visits to Boltiniki.

After spending the night at the local agro-manor, we cycled southwest, eventually crossing the border into the Ostrovets District. Its sights include a village called Vorona, and St. Yury's Church. The original stone sign near the village of Novoselki has

stood since Napoleonic times, while St. George's Church is — a magnificent architectural monument of the 18th century Vilnya baroque style — is found in the village of Vornyan.

The Ostrovets District also boasts early 20th century St. Trinity Church in the village of Gervyaty, in beautiful Neo-Gothic style. Its 61m steeple is the highest in Belarus, bringing fame to the modest settlement far and wide. Lithuanians, Poles and Russians visit, alongside tourists from other countries. Its majesty is notable inside and out, not least because of its beautiful arboretum, featuring figures of the 12 apostles.

Gervyaty offers the chance of a tasty meal and a night spent in a small hotel near the church, where Father Leonid Nistyuk sometimes organises evenings of organ music, welcoming professional musicians from beyond the Grodno Region. These concerts always sell out, since performances of ancient folk music and 19th century classical works are not regular events.

Our last stop was the village of Dubok, where local resident Nikolai showed us its 1,000-year-old oak. I don't know whether it's truly this old but it's certainly a huge specimen: too large even for all three of us to unwrap with our arms. It must be at least 500-600 years old.

After drinking spring water from near the oak, surely having been flowing since the times of Gediminas and Vytautas, we pedalled to Gudogai station to board the train to Minsk, using the well-maintained cycle path. Several such paths are found across the District, helping cyclists pass safely. Everyone should embark on a similar adventure at least once in their life.

Students to paint entrance lobbies

Minsk's high rise apartments will be receiving a 'make over' in August, thanks to students from the Belarusian State Academy of Arts, with entrance halls and lobbies painted

"This summer, we launched the *Cosy House* project, by which students will be working with housing-and-municipal services to paint at least 10 entrance halls in residential

tower blocks," explains Yuri Chechukevich, First Secretary of the Minsk City Committee of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union. The apartment blocks have been chosen, with contracts signed. About 30 designs are available — including fairy tale themes and natural landscapes; residents can also add their own suggestions.

Each lobby will take about two days to paint, ensuring that all work is concluded by late October.

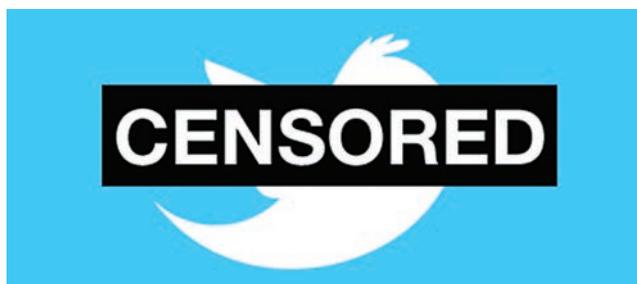
When paying for bad behaviour

By Maxim Svetlov

Belarus sets unique precedent for imposing first penalty for using obscene language on Twitter

Most people realise that it's an offence to utter foul language in a public place but the concept now also applies to online missives. The move will please many, who are displeased at seeing inappropriate language used in online forums.

The case in question involves a schoolboy from



Minsk who has described a conflict with his class teacher in a personal account, using obscenities. The teacher filed a police report and, having tried the case, the Commission on Juvenile Affairs in the Moskovsky District of

Minsk has delivered a penalty judgment.

It remains questionable whether teachers are wise to read the personal accounts of their pupils and, furthermore, to react to them but the Education Minister,

Sergey Maskevich, is unequivocal. He notes, "Each teacher should be a pupil's educator, psychologist and social model, knowing all about the life of children inside school and out. This is impossible without chatting with pupils and their parents so, in my opinion, modern teachers also need to embrace new forms of communication, using social networks to help promote the educational process. They can interact with families through participating in forums and blogs."