

Historical attractiveness of ancient land

Knightly festival returns ancient town of Mstislavl to bygone Middle Ages

By Svetlana Ivanova

We know the medieval holiday has come to the town when bus tickets to the district centre become scarce, the population swells considerably, the centre gains a cheerful fair and soldiers in chain mail, accompanied by fine ladies, promenade. Ancient Mstislavl is gathering contemporary knights for the sixth year running, seeing larger numbers each time and more festivities than ever.

The holiday will be held!

Vasily Vityunov, the Chairman of Mstislavl District Executive Committee, tells us, "Our town has a rich history. The Mstislavl District boasts 79 historical and archaeological monuments: each telling their own story. We have brought forth a whole galaxy of eminent people, who have written their own pages in the history of Russia and Belarus, making a great contribution to art and literature. We remember them at the festival, while expanding our circle of friends and discovering something new."

This year's holiday gathered about 500 representatives of 37 knightly clubs, from across Belarus and Russia. Among the guests of honour was a delegation from the Smolensk Region.

Naturally, the event is popular, entertaining visitors with jousts and medieval music. Every seat was taken

at the improvised hall on the town's main square; many also stood to view the festival's opening ceremony. A medieval wedding crowned the event, welcoming Maxim and Yulia Matyushkovy, who registered their marriage at a registry office in Gomel before attending the festival



Knightly festival transforms Mstislavl into medieval town

as part of their honeymoon celebrations.

Ringing of swords like that of wineglasses singing

The knights' camp in Mstislavl is traditionally located on Zamkovaya Hill: the town centre in medieval times. The '12-15th century' patterned tents present a joyful sight, with cooking undertaken over open fires. Damsels wear bright scarves in their hair and

it's easy to imagine yourself transported back through the centuries.

"We make dishes from clay or wood, either copying originals found from Grand Duchy of Lithuania times or reproducing from sketches in old manuscripts," notes Minsk resi-



dent Nikolai Mardovich. Roman Shamanov, from Gomel, dressed in armour similar to that worn by the Bavarian army in the 14th century, adds, "Clothing and footwear, including our modern hidalgo and caballero, are hand sewn with needle and thread: after all,



in ancient times, there were no sewing machines! Even the buttons are hand-made, creating an authentic feel."

Culture, history, economy

The Deputy Chairman of Mogilev Regional Executive Committee, Valery Malashko, emphasises, "We've worked

Bykhov District organised Big Bard-Fishing."

Soon, Dribin will be holding its Dribin Haggings, while Glusk is hosting a holiday of family creativity. Such events promote various aspects of our cultural and historical heritage, allowing people to show their talents,

turing skilled local craftsmen alongside larger enterprises.

Next year, the Mstislavl District is to begin a major restoration project for its historical and cultural heritage. Mr Vityunov explains, "A plan for the restoration of key buildings, historical monuments and architecture has been developed, with historians advising us on the original appearance of our district, and shedding light on the unknown pages of the town."

How old is Mstislavl?

Professor Igor Marzalyuk, a Member of the Council of the Republic, of the National Assembly, and a Doctor of Historical Sciences, tells us that Mstislavl is quite often named 'small Vilnius' or 'Belarusian Suzdal'. It's thought to be much older of its official age — which dates to the 12th century. He notes, "Next year, we'll organise digs on Castle Hill, expecting to find evidence of those who lived there in prehistoric times. The age of the town could then be officially changed."

Prof. Marzalyuk expects to find evidence of a 12th century stone church during his digs in Mstislavl and is keen to explore the Monastery of St. Onufry, hoping to find the tombs of Mstislavl princes: much spoken of but never located. He is convinced that sensational discoveries lie ahead, helping us learn more about the town's history and making it even more fascinating to tourists.



for many years to create festivals across various districts in our region, based on folklore, history and cultural traditions. These form a 'golden ring', bringing interest and colour. Each has its own flavour. Recently, we hosted the Shklov District's *Alexandria Gathers Friends*, and the

and attracting tourists to the Dnepr Region, supporting the local economy.

Over 150 million Roubles have been generated from the sale of tickets for the Mstislavl festival; the jousts, cockroach races and concerts have certainly proven popular. Trade stalls have also done well, fea-

Scheherazade is arriving in Minsk

Belarusian State Academic Musical Theatre gearing up for One Thousand and One Nights premiere

One Thousand and One Nights is considered the pearl of oriental choreography, based on the popular Story of *King Shahryar*. The Belarusian version of the legendary tale is produced by Medina Aliyeva, who has several times performed the role of Scheherazade.

A few years ago, Medina, a People's Artist of Azerbaijan, retired from dancing and became engaged in ballet production. The

show also involves conductor Ayyub Guliyev, from the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre.

The main roles are performed by Sergey Glukh, Igor Goncharik, Polina Garunovich, Irina Voitekunas and international competition winner Vitaly Krasnoglazov.

Fans will be able to see the oriental fairytale in December. The new show is the second joint project by Belarusian and Azerbaijani theatres. Three years ago, Minsk staged *The Cloth Peddler (Arshin Mal Alan)* — a comedy by Uzeyir Hajibeyov.

Confiscated treasures on show

Saved Art Values exhibition

The small showrooms of the palace are hosting the exhibition, organised by the Brest Regional Museum of Local History,

which receives all its exhibits from Brest's custom house and the 'Western Bug' custom house: confiscated art works attempted to be smuggled abroad. The col-

lection of Russian icons is the most valuable in the museum but other items include objects of applied arts, and 19th-20th century household treasures.

Showing yourself while learning from other people's experience

2nd Arts Festival of Belarusians of the World to take place 2014

Minsk will probably host the main forum although other Belarusian towns may take part, explains Mikhail Rybakov, the Head of the Republican Centre of National Cultures at the Ministry of Culture of Belarus. He notes, "We're relying on Minsk, since people who

come to Belarus for the first time tend to want to see the capital. We might also hold the festival in other cities. We will focus on big events, so that they can really show themselves to their best ability, as well as taking on the experiences of others.

The list of guests being invited is still being compiled but repre-

sentatives from Italy and Argentina are likely to join the event, which first took place in 2011. That last gathering saw almost 250 representatives of the Belarusian Diaspora, from 12 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Holland, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and the USA.