

'Mirnyi's' roadshow

Family of famous tennis player to reveal mysteries and beauties of Belarus to television viewers

A new TV reality roadshow, entitled *The Mirnyi Tour Belarus*, starts this autumn on TV channels Belarus 2 and Belarus 24. The programme aims to show the 'real' Belarus behind the epithets of 'blue-eyed' and 'hospitable'.

Where do Belarusians spend the weekend and what family recreation possibilities do Belarusian towns and villages offer? Famous tennis player Max Mirnyi has taken the wheel to drive over 2000km through Belarus, together with wife Ksenia, children Melania, Petra and Demid, and father Nikolai Nikolaevich.

For a week, the Mirnyi family drove through almost the entire country, filmed visiting Vitebsk, Polotsk, Braslav, Grodno, Lida, Nesvizh, Mir and other Belarusian cities.

"I've always wanted to show Belarusians where they can go to relax and what to see: we have so many beautiful places here at home," says Max. "It would be difficult to show all this using just a photo camera, although, that week, with Ksenia, I took more than 2,000 photos: one for every kilometre of the journey. Everywhere, we were followed by the camera crew."

"At first, it was a little uncomfortable," confesses Max's wife. "After all, the children and I do not appear

as often before the cameras as Max. Soon, we began to enjoy it though, as we were sharing our knowledge of our beloved Belarus. First of all, we were doing it for the children. Max and I always try to share our experience and learning with them."

Meanwhile, the adult Mirnyis learned and discovered a great deal.

"We packed everything in two cars and fixed an extra trunk on the roof. We felt like real tourists," says Max, smiling. "We went without knowing the road so we were roaming, discovering new villages. When we drove towards Grodno, we were surprised to see a village called 'Bali' — just like the famous resort island! I already knew a lot about Belarus, having read about the history and sights, but had never seen them so close. I'd never visited the Belovezhskaya Pushcha, the Braslav Lakes or Brest Fortress. I discovered cities and villages and was surprised that all Belarus is so well-kept, clean and incredibly beautiful. In every village, there are painted fences and a church; many have a castle next to the church. Wherever we arrived, we were welcomed incredibly hospitably. In every city, we felt comfortable. If I didn't need to be close to the international airport, I'd happily exchange Minsk for some other city — such as Lida."



Max Mirnyi and his family

Besides walks, the family tried fishing, swimming and, even, skydiving. Max's father bailed out from a 9-storey building in Vitebsk.

"I'd always dreamt of skydiving," says Nikolai. "But had never done so. My doctor forbade me and Max was afraid, but it was an opportunity! I think my grandchildren were inspired by this act of bravery."

The Mirnyi family rode in a carriage, and tried boating and fighting with swords...

"Belarus is a country where you don't simply go on trips but really relax," says Max. "Wherever we stayed, there were beautiful stadiums and swimming pools. In the Belovezhskaya Pushcha, we even discovered a tennis court! At the residence of Father Frost, the children entered a world of fairy tales. If anyone doubts whether Father Frost exists, you'll be convinced here."

"It was important for us that the children saw the countryside and

their native culture," emphasises Ksenia. "Our youngest, three-year-old Demid, while riding in the car, learned how to distinguish corn from wheat in the fields. We even stopped and picked a spike to demonstrate where bread comes from. Demid learned a phrase written on the stones near the road: 'Take care of the forest'. Throughout the trip, he read the sign each time it appeared. He also promised Father Frost that he'd become a fire fighter, to defend the Belovezhskaya Pushcha."

Yuri Yaroshik and Konstantin Pridybailo, who came up with the idea for the show, feel sure that viewers will enjoy following the friendly family's journey. Filled with energy and good cheer, this is the first such Belarusian TV reality roadshow, promoting the country's most beautiful sites and giving a little insight into the famous family also.

During the trip, Max joined participants of the *Nike Junior Tour*,

taking place countrywide. Five years ago, Max Mirnyi initiated Belarus' membership of the prestigious international tennis tournament (won by such world stars as Rafael Nadal, Maria Sharapova and Gael Monfils). Since then, the best young tennis players of Belarus have had the chance to reach the finals of the competition, hosted by Florida, in the USA.

"Across the districts, children, coaches and sports managers should understand that we are paying attention to tennis: not only in the capital but everywhere. In every town, I saw thousands of enthusiastic children's eyes. We should be doing all we can to help them realise their potential," asserts Max. "History shows that champions are often born in the most remote villages. There is still much to be done but I'm sure that, if we direct our energy, money and time to promoting tennis, it will work. We'll find new champions."

Pearl appearing in all its glory

During a press tour of the Myadel District, journalists have seen the economic and cultural life of Naroch Lake area; a national pearl covering 98,000 hectares, it now offers not only fresh lakes and picturesque landscapes but roadside cafes, gift shops and good hotels

State injections to improve facilities have reaped obvious rewards over the past decade; in the last year alone, Naroch Lake area tourist revenue has increased by 52 percent, reaching \$13.4 million. Of course, there is still some way to go to realise the area's true potential, since the new facilities are extremely busy in summer.

Agro-estates are in demand with foreigners, spurring the establishment of 70 such tourist spots on the banks of local lakes. One of the most popular is the Landowner's Estate, which can accommodate 50, according to proprietor Gennady Boiko. He tells us that the building is more than 120 years old, having once belonged to the Pekutovsky family. During Soviet times, it was



Panski Mayontak agro-estate is the most popular in Myadel District

used as a collective-farm granary but was bought by Gennady ten years ago. Besides welcoming those seeking a bed for the night, the Boiko family have worked hard to set up a folk museum, full of fascinating artefacts.

An even larger folk museum complex is set to open in the village of Nanosy by September. Meanwhile, visitors can take a relaxing walk around the local arboretum, covering 16 hectares, which appeared 11 years ago. It

boasts five geo-botanical zones and about 400 species of plants (25 included in the Red Book). Several spas operate nearby, with an occupancy rate of at least 85 percent. The 'Lakeside' sanatorium accommodated about 11,800 tourists last year: about 6,500 from abroad. The cost is at least Br400,000 per night; it might seem pricey but guests say it's worth it. Facilities include a mineral water pool, a pump-room with mineral water and a herbal



'Antonisberg' is never empty

tea room with herbal infusions. Besides stone-therapy, ozone-therapy and electro treatment, you can enjoy a Thai massage. Every convenience is thought of, including guests using electronic tags to order extras — such as drinks at the bar.

Most children associate Naroch with Zubrenok Camp, which hosts thousands of youngsters each summer — from Belarus, Russia and Latvia. Those from Japan are soon to take part too.

Convenient route for every tourist

150km cycle route launching across Volozhin District

"The route runs through forest and along rather narrow roads of district significance," comments Alexander Bely, owner of the Martsinova Gus agrarian farmstead, through which the route passes. "This route is convenient for tourists because they can rest a while at our agrarian farmsteads. Meanwhile, there are railway stations are the start and finish."

In early July, a trial bike ride took place along the new route. Within the next few days, sign posting and marking are being added by volunteers from Minsk's Cycling Society. Construction of the western part of the road will be complete by the end of August and the eastern part is to be ready by 2014.

The cycle route has been designed by Volozhin's Tourist Cluster, which launched in 2009 to represent the area's tourist sites and promote co-operation in rendering services.