

A big slice of the tourist pie

This year, tourism will add about \$250 million to the country's budget. Experts are convinced that this is not the peak of the tourist trade and that the potential for growth is huge.

By Yuri Chernyakevich

Everyone knows that the word 'tourism' can relate to both the holidaymakers, and the revenue it produces. Today, the tourist market is huge and has a significant influence on the development of the world's economy, with tourism accounting for about 5 percent of GDP, 7 percent of global investment, 6 per cent of world export and 11 percent of the world's consumer expenses. Belarus also has its slice of the tourist 'pie' and, to augment it, the development of tourist services has been carried out in the country for several years.

At a recent press conference in Minsk, Cheslav Shulga, the Deputy Minister for Sports and Tourism, said that it is already possible to speak about success in this sphere. The number of 'green routes' has increased considerably across the country this year. The number of steamships shuttling about on the rivers and lakes has doubled, about 30 small hunting shacks have been built and travellers are now able to use their mobiles in even the most remote corners of the country. The network of roadside services has also been considerably extended recently; new hotels, hostels and camping sites have appeared on the main roads of Belarus. According to the Deputy Minister, all this is only the beginning.

"I consider \$250 million, which we expect to earn from our tourist services this year, to be a rather modest figure. We have big potential in this sphere. I think we can increase tourism in 2014 by at least 2-3 times," he stated.

The Deputy Minister added that the decision to develop combined travel excursions with neighbouring countries, especially with Russia, had been made.

According to Mr. Shulga, new ideas are also needed to



Visitors to the agro-tourist complex at Korobchitsy master the blacksmith's trade

encourage younger visitors. "The youth are more serious about the organised recreation compared to the older generation. Frequently they choose to go to Poland or Lithuania. It is necessary to create such conditions that will encourage young people to spend money and stay in Belarus," he says.

The Deputy Minister also said that 70 percent of visitors to the country are Russians. This news will hardly surprise anyone. Because of the absence of language barriers, the open borders and our low prices, our eastern neighbours love this country. Out of all the other post-soviet territories, only Crimea can compete with Belarus. Russians are mostly interested in Belarusian health resorts, but many come to the country to celebrate the New Year. Mr. Shulga also noted that Russians like to visit Belarus for the local cultural events like *Slavianski Bazaar*

in Vitebsk. Pilgrimages, the visiting of sacred Christian places, are also very popular.

According to Mr. Shulga, agro-eco-tourism is also developing in the country, and entrepreneurs who choose to work in this sphere are offered unprecedented tax privileges. And this, according to the Deputy Minister, bears fruit. So, agro-tourism is being actively developed in Belarus, especially in the Vitebsk, Minsk and Brest regions.

Anatoly Ganets opened the Ganka agro-estate in the Minsk Region six years ago. Today, this is one of the most famous vacation spots in the countryside. Tourists from many different countries of the world have visited the estate of this hospitable owner. Another group of agro-estates has been created recently in the Kobrin District of Brest. The Paleskiya Tradytsyi (Polesie's Traditions) estate allows



Horse riding on offer in Korobchitsy

its visitors to plunge into the romanticism of village life, to try traditional dishes, to listen to ancient folk songs performed by authentic groups from this corner of Belarus. The Studinka agro-estate, in the same area, specialises in weddings, corporate 'gatherings' and the organisation of family activities. According to owner, Vasily Novik, there are a lot of people who want to visit this estate.

All this certainly shows that agro-eco-tourism is popular in Belarus. But according to experts, there is still a lot of work that should be done in this sphere. "The most important thing now is to define a uniform strategy for the development of tourism. After all, if we talk about historical and cultural values, about the development of cultural tourism, we have fewer possibilities here than

in comparison to, say, France or Italy, for example. Therefore it is necessary to search for our own ways. To develop agro-eco-tourism, base it on the revival of traditions and ceremonies, to attract people with our original national product and so on. It is necessary to open, for example, ethnic cuisine restaurants (especially in the Belarus regions), to install English signs on roads across the country, to update the information on tourist sites. Only the complex solution of all these issues, in my opinion, will promote the successful development of tourism," noted Valeria Klitsounova, the Chair of the Board of the Belarusian Country Escape Public Association.

In conclusion, we can safely say that, if we take into account the dynamics of recent years and available forecasts, the prospects for international tourism are optimistic. This truly global market is interesting, not only for its size, but

Chinese language becoming more accessible

Belarusian capital hosts Joint Conference of Confucius Institutes in Europe

By Andrey Bely

The Confucius Republican Institute of Chinese Studies is to open rooms at the Belarusian State Economic University, at Grodno State University (named after Yanka Kupala), at Gomel State University (named after Frantsisk Skorina) and at Minsk's Gymnasium #23. Anatoly Tozik, Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister, made the

announcement after the forum, noting that young people are increasingly keen to learn Chinese.

Five Belarusian schools and gymnasiums are already teaching Chinese as a separate language and more would like to follow suit, were teachers available. Mr. Tozik asked the Head of the Office of Chinese Language Council International, Xu Lin, to assist in this issue, offering to send teachers of

Russian language to Chinese educational establishments in return.

Mr. Tozik is contented by the level of co-operation in the educational sphere between Belarus and China, as ever-increasing numbers of Belarusian students are going to China to study the language. Meanwhile, around 2,000 students, post-graduates and Master's Degree students from China are studying at Belarusian universi-

ties. "There's no doubt that the two branches of the Confucius Institute operating in Belarus are playing a great role in developing our humanitarian collaboration. At present, 640 people study Chinese at the Confucius Republican Institute of Chinese Studies, which opened at the BSU in 2007, while around 200 are studying Chinese at the Confucius Institute, located at the Minsk State Linguistic Uni-

versity," said the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Joint Conference of Confucius Institutes in Europe, hosted by Minsk, was attended by over 250 representatives from 77 Confucius Institutes of Chinese studies, from 19 European countries — including Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Latvia. Employees from China's five leading institutes also attended.