

Stamp as visiting card

Top 10 most interesting stamps issued in Belarus, and those soon to appear

By Lyudmila Minakova

We may rarely notice the stamps we attach to letters but they are often works of art! Just think how many people work on their creation. Naturally, stamps travel to even the most remote corners of the world, presenting Belarus to people far and wide. The first Belarusian stamp was issued in 1992 and over 900 have now entered circulation, depicting every aspect of life — from famous monuments and prominent personalities to flora and fauna.

Here are our top 10 Belarusian stamps already issued and soon to come.

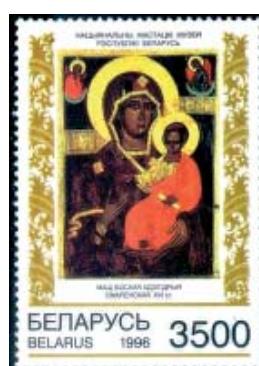
1. The first stamp in the history of independent Belarus depicted the 'Cross of Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya'. It appeared in March 1992 and coincided with the new millennium of the Belarusian Orthodox Church.

2. The 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Belarus and the People's Republic of China was celebrated last year, inspiring a stamp showing a Belarusian bison in the company of a Chinese panda.

3. Last year, the Ministry of Communications and Information issued stamps of the 'Eared Hedgehog' and 'White-breasted Hedgehog': a joint project by Belarus and Kazakhstan.

4. Since 1994, Belarus has issued a series entitled 'Birds', depicting golden eagles, mute swans, storks, martin, curlews and many others. The stamps have flown from Belarus around the world. Last year,

the Public Organisation APB-BirdLife Belarus declared the black swift bird of the year, inspiring a corresponding stamp.



— *Wojciech Ruszczyk — The Church* (held by the National Art Museum of Belarus) — was depicted on a



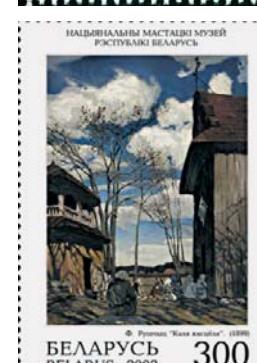
esting, dedicated to costumes from particular Belarusian regions. One stamp is devoted to the 19th century costume of the Bykhov Historical and Ethnographic District and was released in 1997.

7. Stamps have often portrayed well-known icons — such as 'Our Lady Hodegetria of Smolensk' from the 16th century. Other icons shown on stamps include 'Saint Paraskeva' from the mid-16th century and 'Saint Ilya' of the late 17th century. This year, a stamp is being issued with the image of the icon of the Mother of God of Budslav, marking the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the icon in Budslav.

8. A popular image for stamps is that of famous monuments: churches, castles and other buildings. These often become popular worldwide, being representative of a nation's identity. Just last year, 24 such stamps were issued, including depictions of Kamenets Tower, Lida Castle, the Red Church in Minsk and Kossovo Palace.

9. Every year, stamps dedicated to sports are issued. In 2011, a series dedicated to equestrianism proved popular.

10. Of course, no state holidays escape attention. That celebrating the New Year in 1996 is among our favourites.



stamp eleven years ago.

6. The 'Belarusian National Clothes' series is inter-

Visiting the Festival in Monte Carlo

Masters of the African savannah surprise audiences with new programme at Belarusian State Circus

The Belarusian State Circus has been liaising with the Monte Carlo Festival for several years. Of course, European circus lovers are already familiar with our Belarusian circus artists, who have been much awarded. The production director of the Belarusian State Circus, Serge Bondarchuk, has received a special prize from Princess Stephanie of Monaco, as have our ballet artistes — for their staging and costumes.

"Being friendly with our colleagues in Europe, we've began touring each other's countries more often," explains the new programme compere, Vitaly Makarevich. "This time, the Director of the Belarusian State Circus, Tatiana Bondarchuk, managed to invite the top artists to Minsk. The performance is already being hailed as a sensation."

The Masters of the African Savannah are majestic lions, who perform with Vlad Goncharov — the youngest animal tamer in Ukraine and the only one in Europe to work only with male lions. His dangerous and thrilling One among the Lions sees the beasts perform spectacular tricks as Vlad moves among them.



Performance in Circus

Master's heart and soul evident in craft souvenirs

By Olga Zakharievskaia

Returning from long trips we tend to bring back souvenirs, chosen to remind us of a country's culture or way of life. Often these are small, handmade pieces by local masters: clay statuettes of fairytale characters, tableware or textiles with folk patterns, costume jewellery or a shell or stone. What do tourists choose to bring home from Belarus?

"Our most frequent visitors are from China, who visit in large groups. However, we recently welcomed family from Italy and tourists from America," notes the Departmental Head of Minsk's Gallery of National Decorative-and-Applied Art, Valentina Shavel. "As a rule, foreign guests tend to buy linen items as souvenirs: rushniks, table cloths and napkins. Undyed pieces with embroidered Richelieu or Belarusian folk patterns are popular, all being handmade. You can see the heart and soul of each crafts-



Souvenirs by people's masters are Belarus calling card

man in their work."

Russians like Belarusian matryoshka nesting dolls, despite these being a typically Russian souvenir; they like our traditional wooden versions, complaining that cheap Chinese matryoshkas have appeared on their home

market.

These days, you can buy lovely souvenirs at any roadside cafe or hotel — even far from ancient castles and churches. The Trade Ministry ruled that all owners of roadside services must have set up the sale of souvenir goods by

the end of 2012.

One of Minsk's cosmetics shops tells us that those from Russia and Ukraine are eager to buy creams, lotions and shampoos made by Belarusian manufacturers, bringing long lists for themselves, friends and relatives.

Of course, the range of souvenirs available is ever growing, being unrecognisable from a decade ago. The word 'souvenir' can be translated as 'recollection' or 'memory' from French; there is certainly an argument for people making return trips based on their final feeling on leaving a country and the purchase of lovely souvenirs may be a deciding factor.

Minsk's stores are already selling souvenirs for the 2014 IIHF World Championship. All the capital's large shops and those of our regional cities have souvenir departments, although the Arts Gallery perhaps boasts the greatest choice.

Russian Sergey Rokashkov's acrobats are also sure to delight circus fans. At a world competition in Paris, his troupe won a gold medal and took the 'Bronze Clown' at another international event in Monte Carlo. Each year, circuses battle to sign up Rokashkov for the coming season. World famous Chris Cream, from Switzerland, also presents a thrilling performance, juggling with an incredible variety of items. Chris performs unbelievable tricks, and even features in the Guinness Book of Records. In 1977, he performed a quadruple somersault while juggling three cigar boxes.

Titled acrobats from France and the USA are also taking part in the unique programme.