

Authentic calling card evident for the country

Mir Castle throws open doors to guests

By Viktor Korbut

It has taken almost 30 years to reconstruct Mir Castle: the grandest architectural building in the country. The 16th century fortress joined UNESCO's World Heritage List in the late 20th century, becoming a national and world treasure. Belarus is known around the globe for its ancient castle, which is our true business card and the most popular tourist site. At last, the castle has fully opened to tourists, having only had one tower available previously.

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, was the first to enter the castle's courtyard after restoration, noting that 'the lost ties between times have been gradually revived, with centuries-old glory returning and the nation's historical self-consciousness restored'. He added, "The castle complex at Mir is opening before us in its entire beauty and magnificence. Looking at it, you feel the living succession of so many generations in your heart."

The Head of State exchanged Belarusian money for coins minted by blacksmiths at Mir Castle, using them to buy several souvenirs. He also cancelled a postal stamp, released on the eve of the holiday. The Belarusian President then chatted with several top ranking guests from Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden and other states, who had arrived to attend the castle's opening ceremony. Of course, Mir Castle is connected with so many events in European history.

The restoration of the architectural monument began in Soviet times and

lasted for 27 years, witnessed by several generations of Belarusians. Without exaggeration, it has been the long held dream of the whole nation to see it restored from ruin. I visited on over a dozen occasions, each time noticing a little more how the original image of the duke's residence was being revived. In 2000, the castle joined UNESCO's World Heritage List, being a unique



Bright and colourful ceremony of castle's opening after reconstruction

architectural monument. It boasts elements of gothic, renaissance, baroque and classicism in its construction and decorative interior, the details of which have been preserved during its reconstruction.

The fortress' 39 halls are each different, requiring the skills of various craftsmen. Restorers were especially careful with the ceiling painting in the

The Culture Ministry believes that the opening of Mir Castle will attract Belarusian and foreign tourists, with up to 200,000 visiting by the end of the year. "In 2011, our modest calculations are that around 400-450,000 people will visit. To attract increasing numbers of tourists, we'll be organising concerts and thematic evenings at the castle," promises Victor Kurash, Belarus' Dep-

Svyatopolk-Mirsky dukes and through the park. Tickets cost \$1 for adults and \$0.50 for students and schoolchildren. A guide costs \$5 for each group of at least ten people.

A hotel is available, with reproduction furniture created by Belarusian masters, as existed several centuries ago. The walls of the rooms are decorated with photos connected with the



Mir Castle gains a new look after grand reconstruction

Radziwiłłs' dining 'izba'. Dozens of specialists — artists and gilders — were involved in restoring the beautiful treasure, sometimes working seven days a week and in three shifts.

uty Culture Minister.

Two excursion routes are currently available through Mir Castle: one explores its towers and rooms while the other leads guests to the chapel of the

history of Mir Castle, enabling guests to embrace the medieval atmosphere.

A restaurant is located in the basement of the castle, seating several dozen and offering traditional Belarusian cuisine.

According to Belarus' Culture Minister, Pavel Latushko, although Mir Castle itself has been restored, works are to continue until 2013, with the Italian and English-style parks being restored, alongside ponds and other parts of the estate. So far, around \$30m has been spent on Mir Castle.

Romualdas BUDRYS, Director of the Lithuanian Art Museum:

I've visited this castle many times; I saw it in ruins in the 1970s and saw how its restoration began. This difficult work has finally finished. We now see that everything has been done well and this is a very great achievement for Belarusian restorers.

Stefan ERIKSSON, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Sweden to Belarus:

Each state preserves its history and culture. The restoration of Mir Castle is an example of how Belarusians take care of their heritage.

Witold JURASZ, Charge d'Affaires ad Interim of Poland to Belarus:

Mir Castle is a wonderful site, where the cultures of Poland, Belarus and Lithuania meet. I would love tourists to visit this attraction.

Evening hosts truly interesting Christmas party

By Galina Grishkevets

Traditional meeting of spouses of diplomatic mission heads takes place at Museum of Ancient Belarusian Culture

According to Margarita Martynova, the spouse of Belarus' Foreign Minister, 'acquaintance with the unique exhibits of the museum, which reflect the history and diversity of Belarusian culture, allows a glimpse at the soul of the Belarusian nation'. The foreign ladies were able to view national costumes,

ancient icons and bells, while a master of bell ringing demonstrated ancient ringing melodies.

The spouses of the heads of mission and international organisation offices also viewed two Slutsk sashes, of which there are only five in Belarusian museums. One, made in Leon in the 18th century, was donated to the museum by famous London collector Andrzej Ciechanowiecki. The Belarusian folk group *FolkRoll* presented their vision of traditional Belarusian music, combining classical form with acoustic improv-



Warm and relaxed meeting at the museum

isation and folk motifs. Although the band is young, it has already won awards from international festivals. Their performance was followed by a band of flute players, called *Nymphs*, from the Belarusian State Academy of Music. The meeting was friendly and cordial — a true Christmas festival, including fortune telling, fancy dress, songs and dancing.

The Museum of An-

cient Belarusian Culture is used by art historians, ethnographers and archaeologists, keeping about 20,000 exhibits. Most have been gathered during expeditions by museum staff, while some are donated as gifts. The museum began collecting its exhibits in 1967, with collection of old Belarusian artefacts beginning as part of *The Code of Monuments of Belarus' History and Culture*.

Nostalgia drives tourism

Israeli businessmen keen to invest in historic village of Radun (Voronovo district, Grodno region) creating a tourist centre

The area is a 'Jewish Mecca' in Belarus, since the Yeshiva (seminary) of Chofetz Chaim was located there. The latter was a spiritual leader of Poland and Russia in the late 19th-early 20th century. The building is currently used as a House of Culture but Israel wishes to re-

store the monument as a sacred place for all Jews.

On meeting Israeli businessmen from Mahash net, Belarus' Minister for Sport and Tourism, Oleg Kachan, suggested additional talks with local authorities. In his view, the realisation of this project should drive forward tourism development in Belarus. There are no problems relating to its implementation and Mr. Kachan has promised to render all possible help to the investors.

Embracing summer warmth during snowy winter season

Central Botanical Garden of National Academy of Sciences opens season for winter excursions

This is the first time that the Garden has opened its doors in winter, with guests able to ski and breathe fresh

air, walking through the pine garden and viewing tropical and sub-tropical plants in the special greenhouses. Over 15 varieties of orchids are on show, in addition to anthuriums, impressive ficuses and papaya trees in fruit.