

Lake Naroch comes closer

The Lithuanian Government has approved an agreement to simplify the visa regime for those who reside within 50 kilometres of the border, wishing to pay a visit to Belarus

By Viktor Korbut

The document is now undergoing parliamentary ratification and could be ready later this year, coming into force in early 2012. The agreement was signed by the foreign ministers of our states on October 20th, 2010, during a visit by Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė to Minsk. From June 1st, it will become even easier to reach Vilnius from Minsk, with a train taking just three hours.

According to the Lithuanian Transport and Communications Ministry, two trains operate on the Minsk-Vilnius route at present. From June 1st, one shall reduce its travel time by 51 minutes, while the other — by 60 minutes. The saving is the result of fewer stops within Belarus (only three, of short duration). Moreover, customs clearance is to be cut by 10 minutes at the checkpoints of Gudogai and Kena. Last year, trains connecting these two destinations carried about 40,000 passengers. The route is being further updated technologically, with EU funding applied for to improve speeds. The plan was initiated in April 2010, when our prime ministers met.

The simplification of the border regime and acceleration of trains should allow Belarusians to visit Lithuania more often, while encouraging Lithuanians to travel to Lake Naroch (featuring the largest Belarusian resort). This year, a new excursion route is to be launched, with kayak and canoe travel offered from Myadel to Naroch, along the



Narochansky area's unique nature and well developed infrastructure attract increasing number of tourists

lakes of Myastro and Naroch. The route consists of several short trips, with stops. As a result, tourists will be able to visit the ruins of Myadel Castle, the Mother of God of the Scapular Roman Catholic Church, a Muslim cemetery, an ancient settlement and places connected with WW1 and 2.

A state programme is now being realised, focusing on the development of resorts around Lake Naroch, running from 2011-2015. About \$100m is to be spent on this major project over the coming

five years. As the Chairman of the Myadel District Executive Committee, Alexander Danilenko, says, "We'll grant serious preferences to investors."

Last year alone, the Myadel District was visited by around 120,000 people and it is expected that, by 2015, tourism-related revenue in the area should rise 2.5-3-fold. Its unique landscapes and well-developed infrastructure should definitely attract tourists from neighbouring Lithuania. Agro-ecotourism is also gaining

special attention in the district. Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister, Anatoly Tozik, believes that Belarusian villages and their wonderful scenery are unique. "A special lifestyle has been preserved, with wonderful people living here," he says. "They can make our country attractive to international tourism. Additionally, tourism should show that Belarus is not a young state. Its history is no 'poorer' than that of neighbouring states, dating back over a thousand years."

Lithuanians are likely to be at-

tracted by fortresses not far from Naroch: such as of Krevo and Golshany. In the late 14th century, an agreement was signed to unite Poland and Lithuania, in Krevo; meanwhile, Golshany was founded by a noble Lithuanian family.

Guests from Vilnius will be able to learn more about Belarus and its districts as soon as the Lithuanian Parliament approves the agreement; it was signed in late 2010 in Minsk and is already being co-ordinated with the neighbouring state's Government.

Green light for guests

Belarus to simplify visa regime for foreign tourists

The visa regime can be simplified for those countries whose residents most often visit Belarus for tourist purposes. "We need to analyse from which countries the greatest number of tourists arrive," notes Anatoly Tozik, Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister.

In turn, Belarus' Sports and Tourism Minister, Oleg Kachan, explains that, before opening its borders to foreigners, Belarus needs to prepare a tourist product, ensuring that it is attractive to foreign guests. He notes that, at present, a 30km border area is being created in a western direction, allowing residents to cross the border under a simplified regime.

Belarus has adopted a state tourism development programme, envisaging \$510m of tourist service exports by 2015. The simplification of the visa regime for foreign tourists should promote the development of inbound tourism.

Birch forest to become attraction

Open-air Birchwood Ecological Museum to open in Mogilev District

By Sergey Kulyagin

The Belarusian Geographic Society's Mogilev Department is joining the Public Council for Agro and Ecotourism in the Mogilev Region, with assistance from the German Federal Government's Belarus Support Programme in implementing the new project. A birch forest has been chosen, being picturesque and unique, to have juniper trees growing alongside its birches over its 20+ hectare territory.

"Creating an ecological museum, we aim to shape the eco-education of citizens while promoting a careful attitude towards nature. We're hoping to combine active

leisure with ecological education, regulating the recreational burden at natural sites. The site could become a model for how to develop local territories and agro-ecotourism," notes one of the authors of the project, Yuri Zhurov — a senior teacher at the Mogilev State University's Chair for Geography and Environmental Protection.

Last year, specialists from Mogilev's State University conducted much preparatory work to create a passport for the site and developed an experimental-ecological path. This April, the birch forest will be brought to order, with more young trees planted. An information sign will be installed near



Birchwood Ecological Museum located in picturesque spot

the car parking area, while a recreational zone will soon be equipped.

In summer, works will continue to develop recreational zones, with information boards installed and an ecological route laid and identified. This will begin at Lazenki agro-eco-estate, which is currently under construction. The World of Honey Ecological Museum

will be set up there, in addition to another, dedicated to rural life. Tourists will be able to view beaver dams, a garden of stones and other interesting attractions.

The route will also boast 15 camp sites, with observation and recreation facilities. The educational eco-path will cover up to 3km, while an informative hiking trail will be up to 4km long. The

route is to offer a two hour excursion for senior pupils or students while 30-40 minute excursions are to be organised for junior pupils on a 1km long section of the route.

Major works relating to the ecological museum are to be finished in August-September, with an opening ceremony scheduled for October 2011.