



Most sophisticated tourists are astonished by major attraction of Pripjatsky National Park: its safari park of wild animals

Fascinating safari in centre of Polesie leaves nobody indifferent

Unique park for wild animals and tourist complex on Pripjat River create new jobs for local villagers

By Viktor Korbut

Pripjat Polesie is among the most unspoilt natural landscapes in the Republic while the River Pripjat area is a true Belarusian Amazon, being the 'richest' region in Europe. "We aim to preserve this primeval beauty, while using the River Pripjat's basin to the full, developing tourism," notes the Pripjatsky National Park's General Director, Stepan Bambiza.

Every year, Pripjatsky is visited by dozens of thousands of tourists, with foreigners comprising half of this number. The latter are attracted by the chance to hunt and fish, with French, Italians, Germans, Americans and Israelis arriving. One Qatari sheikh has visited several times. Of course, this brings in significant revenue: in the first four months of 2011, Pripjatsky Park earned about \$1m, including \$400,000 from its tourist services.

Pripjatsky's head office is situated in the village of Lyaskovichi. Not long ago, this was a provincial village in the Gomel Region, on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. Now, it is a small town, with well-managed, clean houses and flowers are seen everywhere. "We've announced a contest for the best garden, with a \$1,000 prize for the winner," says Mr. Bambiza, adding, "When I took my post of director, I quickly restored a fence by the cemetery and built a church." The wooden church is now an attraction of Lyaskovichi, being neat and cosy, with storks nesting nearby. A Museum of Nature is being built and there are plans to establish permanent craft workshops.

Lyaskovichi is home to 2,000 residents, who have jobs with good salaries. Eve-



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ry year, 10-15 new cottages are built on privileged terms (with a 40 year mortgage, at a small interest rate). Moreover, the local infrastructure includes secondary and musical schools, a house of culture, a centre for public serv-

The MT's reference

Pripjatsky National Park (from 1969-1996, known as the Landscape Hydrological Reserve) is situated in the Gomel Region, 250km south of Minsk, in the Pripjat's flood plains. Up to 70 percent of the neighbouring territory can be covered with water during floods. Forests occupy 85 percent of the National Park's territory and, in 1987, aurochs were resettled there, from the Belovezhskaya Pushcha.

ices, a café, a restaurant and a swimming pool. Most district centres would envy its facilities. Unsurprisingly, people arrive with great pleasure. Its local river fleet has undergone reconstruction, with comfortable vessels now offering trips along the river. Not long ago, a modern three

star hotel was built, boasting a sauna, a swimming pool, a conference hall, a restaurant, a mini bowling, a pneumatic shooting room, billiards and a gym.

Meanwhile, the local safari park of wild animals is the

most impressive for sophisticated tourists. Launched not long ago, it uses a special train — driven by a 'Belarus' tractor, with Polish made carriages. The train travels at just 15km/h, to avoid frightening the animals and to allow tourists to better enjoy their surroundings.

Wild pigs can be seen feeding. They breed for 3 months, 3 weeks and 3 days and, in May, piglets are born. The breeding sow 'reigns' over her brood and, if she dies, all the others leave their habitat, becom-

ing 'homeless'. An excursion through the Park reveals many new facts about animals' habits — such as can hardly be found in books. It is a truly natural environment.

Majestic aurochs and deer are seen in the meadows. They are unafraid of the

tourist train, even appearing interested in it. The noise of its engine is similar to that of the sound of the tractor which brings them food. Accordingly, some animals approach from the forest.

Sergey Plytkевич, a famous photographer and traveller, asserts that he receives a similar impression from Pripjatsky's safari park as from the famous Kruger National Park, in the South African Republic. "However, our wild animals can also be viewed in the wilderness; there, they are found only in enclosures," he says.

After visiting the safari park, you can take a cruise along the Pripjat by motorboat; experts say that only the Amazon compares. Birds sing from the branches of hundred year old oaks,

sometimes soaring heavenwards, filling the air with their wings and cries. You almost feel that the river lacks banks and that the forest is endless; both smoothly transform into one another. Trees are braided with lianas, growing from the water, majestically spreading their leaves. The aroma of fresh grass, lily-of-the-valley and mint is wonderful...

Last year, Pripjatsky National Park initiated and hosted the first festival of ethno-cultural traditions — *Call of Polesie* — which is to be held regularly. Additionally, there are plans to build a craftsmen's quarter near the Museum of Nature, with tourists able to touch history and learn of the traditions and skills of true folk masters.

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