

Shiori Kiesawa:

‘It would be great if people in Japan knew more about your culture and arts’

Belarusian higher educational establishments become ‘alma maters’ of young people from all over the globe

By Marina Shumilo

In recent times, around 10,000 foreigners have been studying in the country annually. Though insignificantly, their number continues to grow. It's no secret that foreigners with Belarusian higher education diplomas tend to enjoy good careers in their home country.

“I've come to Minsk following the advice of an interpreter who has visited Belarus several times,” explains Tanaka Hitosi, from Japan. “Belarusian universities are very much admired in our country.” At present, Tanaka is improving his knowledge at the Belarusian State University's Summer School of Russian Language Studies. Already, his success is evident. The BSU is organising its Summer School for only the second time but already enjoys popularity among foreigners. This year, almost a hundred foreign students

have taken intensive courses, with most lessons organised as business and role play games.

Speaking to those in advanced level studies, their standard of Russian is quite high. Among them is Polish Matvey Martinek, who's come to the country to enhance his existing knowledge. “I knew Russian before coming to Belarus, as it's taught at our local schools. Belarusian is also taught in many Polish regions bordering your country. I want to become a diplomat, so I've come to Minsk to enhance my Russian. I've heard that your teachers are true professionals,” he says.

Chinese Din Shan has come at the advice of her aunt, who lives in Minsk. She dreams of becoming a philologist and explains, “After these courses, I'll be attempting to enter the Belarusian State University's Philology Department. I love learning Russian and Belarusian.”



Shiori Kiesawa comes to study in Belarus from Japan

Many of these youngsters will return home after completing courses but some — like Din — plan to enter Belarusian universities. Students are now choosing their future professions, as the Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs at the Belarusian State University's Pre-University Education Department, Alexander Zhuk, tells us. The most popular specialities

for foreign guests seem to be International Relations and Economics, he notes, adding, “Interestingly, enrollees from different countries choose different professions. For example, those from Turkmenistan usually prefer geography and engineering, while the Chinese and Japanese choose to study languages. The Institute of Journalism is also popular,

although we have foreign students in almost every department.”

Foreign students pay for their studies and it's cheaper for them to study in Belarus rather than at home. “In China, I would have paid much more,” admits a 3rd year student from the International Journalism Department, Haiyan Chzhan. “I chose the BSU's Institute of Journalism not only for its accessibility. I want to become a specialist in the field of Belarusian printed media — as you have so many different newspapers and magazines.”

Foreign students have an intense schedule of studies at the University. However, they also find time to travel through the country. “With my friends, I've visited Vitebsk; it's a very beautiful city,” Haiyan says, with admiration. “Your countryside is very impressive. Even before coming here, I'd heard much from my friends about the beauty of local nature and the kind-heartedness of people. My expectations proved true.”

The BSU's Summer School also acquaints students with local culture. “Studies offer the chance to learn more about Belarusian culture,” says Tamara Sushinskaya, a lecturer at the BSU's Department of Russian as a Foreign Language and General Disciplines. “We organise excursions to museums for students, while reading Belarusian classical pieces at lectures. They love hearing these.”

Shiori Kiesawa, from Japan, is attending the Summer School before entering the BSU's Philology Department. She already knows some cultural figures from Belarus, explaining, “I know such prominent Belarusians as artist Marc Chagall and poet Maxim Bogdanovich. I'd like to further study Belarusian culture, as it has a rich history. It would be great if people in Japan knew more about your culture and arts.”

Quite often, foreigners stay in Belarus after graduating from university. “Many are attracted by the calmness of the country and our attitude towards guests,” says Mr. Zhuk. “They learn about life here while studying, which inspires them to stay, setting up their own businesses or merely starting a family.”

Turkish lessons under incredibly strong heat

Belarusian Emergency Ministry aviators have been helping extinguish fires in Turkey for several seasons

By Mikhail Veresov

Summer is the most difficult season for Turkish forest-rescuers. There's so much sun and little rain, causing overheated sand to ignite spontaneously, causing forest fires. It's no surprise that Turkey invited the Belarusian Emergency Ministry to tackle fires for the third season in a row this year. In late April, a Mi-8 helicopter from the Emergency Ministry flew its seven crew members to Istanbul before being relocated to the Dardanelles area. Since then, the Belarusians have been working until 9pm (local time) each evening, with a 12 minute window response time in case of alarm.

Fortunately, May was unexpectedly calm, with few serious fires. One occurred in the area of Çanakkale, where a

bus driver carrying 45 tourists lost control and crashed. The vehicle burst into flame and, although the people escaped safely, the fire soon spread to the neighbouring forest, requiring the Mi-8 to respond rapidly. It soon flooded the forest area and the burning vehicle, placing the situation under control.

“In early June, the true Turkish summer began: +30 Celsius degrees at night and +40 Celsius degrees in the daytime,” notes Vitaly Baranov, the crew's commander. “We were relocated to the south-east of Western Anatolia, to the city of Denizli. The irony is that it translates as ‘maritime’, despite the sea being 170km away. It has lots of pine, fir and cedar groves, which are carefully cherished by the Turkish as natural treasures. From mid-June, the fires be-



Belarusian Emergency Ministry aviators prepare to set off

gan. The forestry calls us with co-ordinates when a fire breaks out and we usually deliver 15-20 foresters with petrol-driven power saws, hacks and rakes to the spot. If necessary, we're directed as to where we should shower our three tonnes of water. People revere their forests and mountain groves here in Turkey, viewing them along-

side Pamukkale and Troy in importance.”

The schedule of our Belarusian rescuers is tough, as they start work at 6am and finish after 9pm. The four pilots and three technician engineers have to remain ‘combat-ready’, able to be in the air within 720 seconds. Demerit points are given for delay.

Something unimaginable took place in Denizli from June 21st-26th, with fires appearing one after another. The helicopter would receive the co-ordinates of a new ‘hot spot’ immediately on returning from its previous mission. The pilots were spending 5-6 hours a day extinguishing fires — with those in Izmir's suburbs proving especially challenging, as power lines crossed the forested area. The rescuers had to perform aerobatic manoeuvres by throwing water from the side.

“It isn't the fires that are the most difficult thing, since the Turkish won't allow them to flare up seriously. The most complex aspect is the terrain, as there are so many mountains and canyons; height above sea level varies from 0.5 to 2km. Winds are also unpredictable,

so only experienced pilots can cope,” explains Mr. Baranov. “Water is a separate issue. As I've already said, we're rather far away from the sea, so must use small mountain glacial lakes to fill our reservoir, or the artificial fire-fighting water reservoirs which exist (10 to 15m in diameter). These can be easily distinguished, being surrounded by barbed wire and with the water dyed red or dark blue to deter locals from using it.”

The Belarusian crew are already used to 45 Celsius degree heat in the cabin. They keep mineral water on ice to cool them down and, by the end of each flight, will have drunk 10-12 litres to avoid dehydration. These professionals are ready to endure hardship in pursuit of their goal and keep themselves fit, ready for whatever is thrown at them.