

# Motol generously greets and treats guests with an open soul

Have you ever tried potato tarkavanka with dried apples and meat, baked in a loaf of bread, or porridge cooked in a pumpkin? I have. Not in a city restaurant offering extravagant cuisine but in an ordinary Belarusian village: Motol, in the Ivanovo District of the Brest Region.

By Lyudmila Minakova

You can try Motol delicacies in almost any village house. Back in 1555, when Motol was granted the Magdeburg Right, it was already famous for its authentic cuisine and generous affable people of all trades. They could reap, weave, build stoves and sew outstanding sheepskin coats. What's more, all worked hard to preserve their forefathers' traditions and language — old and young. Even the smallest still speak the unique Motol dialect which, in their opinion, can only be compared with the beauty of the French or Italian.

Foreigners often visit Motol, with the annual *Motol Delicacies* culinary festival, which takes place in August, proving especially popular. Belarusian customs, songs and folk dishes are presented, with recipes not only delicious but completely original throughout Europe. You might find meat shaped into a peacock or a king made from sausages...

"I love Motol dishes," confesses Italian food critic Renato Cucinotta, who this year attended the Motol festival. "Ordinary sausages were turned into a peacock!"

Local entrepreneurs keep their culinary traditions alive. Despite having only 4,000 residents, there are three bakeries, a fishmonger's and three meat-processing shops. Curiously, many food related businesses have been in families for generations. In the 1930s, one cooked meat factory belonged to Stefan Minyuk; today, his grand-grandson, Andrey, together with his wife and children, runs Minyuk's farm. They produce sausages and other meat products from ancient home recipes, using locally grown garlic, pepper and coriander.

Motol foods enjoy popularity among locals of course, who say that little has changed in their eating habits over the past few decades. "We might now decorate our dishes more," says Motol resident Maria Mikhovich. "I like adding green-



Motol well-known for its unique cuisine and hospitable and skilful chefs

ery, or birds and flowers made from food, but our cuisine remains unchanged. Guests from remote corners of Belarus and elsewhere often ask where we learnt to cook like this; naturally, from our grandparents! In the past, there were no recipe books, so we taught one another."

She shows me a large piece of baked pork. "To cook rulka, I first soak it in salted water for several

hours, then season it with spices and let it cook in the oven. There are no additives; it's very simple and very tasty. Motol kvass is just as easy. You merely boil water, adding 100 grams of yeast and 0.5 kilograms of sugar for every six litres. Another 100g of sugar should be caramelised until it turns almost black, to be used to colour the drink. Afterwards, let your kvass stand for about four hours be-

fore drinking. Try it!" and she hands me a cup.

It's far better than shop bought. It's so tasty that I have many more cups throughout the festival! You can't part from any local housewife without treating yourself to a delicacy. Everyone there would surely agree.

"We tried everything," smiles Mr. Cucinotta. "I most liked the

fish dishes. There are far fewer fish dishes in Minsk than here. Motol residents are lucky, as they eat better than we do in the capital." Obviously, the opinion of a food critic who has eaten in the best Minsk restaurants is worth listening to. Nobody can really deny the richness of Motol gastronomy though. Even the breakfasts are wonderful.

"We always ate pancakes on Sundays," says Motol housewife Uliana Minyuk. In the local dialect, she describes their festive breakfast dishes. "Father and granddad ate pancakes with bacon. Being men, they needed more energy. Mother liked thick and thin pancakes with milk while we children preferred sweet pancakes."

She still follows her mother's recipe for pancakes for her family. She tells us that, to make thin pancakes which won't tear, you shouldn't add salt. Do smear the frying pan with fat though, to add flavour and make them easy to flip. "We should never forget our past," she asserts. In her opinion, our past is like a torch lighting our way.

How wise are Motol dwellers, indeed! It's no surprise that they try to preserve their ancient customs, especially the merry ones, in their day-to-day lives. You can still see the 'Merry Loaf' rite, where dough is kneaded before being put into the oven; the cooks sing ancient songs as they work, and make flowers to decorate the loaves. The rite is being put forward for UNESCO's World Heritage List. While traditionally reserved for weddings, you can also see loaves baked in this way during demonstrations at the Motol Folk Traditions Museum.

Historian Tadeush Novogrodsky is one of the authors of *Motol Folk Cuisine*. He views Motol as a Klondike for folk historians, since so much has been preserved: customs, recipes and language. After spending a day or two in the village, you also start speaking with the local dialect, feeling closer to these friendly, generous people and our rich past.

## International significance of natural sites

Braslav Lakes National Park and Vygonoshchanskoe Wildlife Reserve seek Ramsar status for their territories

By Tatiana Nekhaeva

Specialists from the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Ministry and the National Academy of Sciences are applying to the Ramsar Bureau to gain status for these sites as wetlands of international importance. The Deputy Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Minister, Anatoly Lis, believes the move will help attract more tourists.

Currently, nine Belarusian sites

enjoy Ramsar status: Sporovsky, Srednaya Pripyat, Zvanets, Omlinski Bolota (Marshes), Osveyski, Yelnya, Kotra and Prostyr reserves, and Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve. Belarus and Ukraine have established a cross-border Ramsar area while Sporovsky Reserve was the first territory in Belarus to be included in the list of wetlands of international importance, celebrating its 20th birthday this year.

The Ramsar Convention (the Convention on Wetlands of In-

ternational Importance, especially Waterfowl Habitats) was signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, aiming to preserve and ensure the reasonable use of all wetlands. To date, 160 countries have become signatories, with Belarus joining in 1999.

As Mr. Lis notes, loss of wetlands could exacerbate global climate change. In Belarus, these territories occupy large areas, so the country is keen to ensure their proper preservation.



Braslav Lakes National Park attracting tourists