

As fast as the wind, travelling underground

Minsk underground, Belarusian produced trains, electronic card tickets and new platform doors on third line

By Natalia Sokolova

Next year, Minsk residents will bid farewell to traditional tickets, using electronic cards instead, explains Rostislav Yurenya, the Chief of Minsk Underground. He notes, "We aspire to making entrance to the underground easier. Next year, we'll introduce a universal electronic card for the underground and buses. Cards will be reloadable at underground stations, via self-service terminals. We've begun work and just need chips for the cards."

Mobile phone payments

Two underground stations are already equipped with experimental terminals, whereby card tickets can be loaded with credit via SMS. Mr. Yurenya cannot say when the service will roll out city-wide but emphasises that the underground is greatly subsidised, with fares paying just 44 percent of the actual cost: less than half.

Transcriptions to aid understanding

On the eve of the World Hockey Championship, the capital's underground stations are each being given a unique number, with their Belarusian names written in Latin script. Mr. Yurenya tells us that place names across the Minsk underground will be given in Latin, to help visitors navigate. He notes, "The State Committee on Property has decided that there's no



Minsk underground to be updated to meet international standards

need to translate place names into English, but we do need to use the Belarusian Latin alphabet, simply transcribing Belarusian words."

All work will be complete in time for the World Hockey Championship in 2014, with signs at Nemiga, Kupalovskaya and Oktyabrskaya stations already changed. Streets, squares and public gardens will receive the same treatment, while key cultural and social sites — such as hospitals, railway stations and theatres — will also receive an English translation.

Without stuffiness or noise

The underground is set to run trains made in Belarus, as Mr. Yurenya tells us. "By the first quarter of 2014, we should see an experimental five-carriage set, produced in Gomel.

We'll decide on further deliveries after this trial. If successful, it may hail a new era of using Belarusian trains on the underground." Each carriage will have LED lighting, air conditioning and air-cushioned suspension, reducing noise levels.

No injuries on disembarking

By 2017, Minsk's four new underground stations — on the third line — will open, connecting the southern and northern residential areas of the city with the centre. The route is being laid under the River Svisloch River. Mr. Yurenya explains that doors will be placed level with platforms, to stop people from falling as they disembark.

A system of automatic train operation is also to be introduced on the third line, although a driver will remain, controlling the train's systems.

Water heals soul and body

By Vladimir Samoilov

Mogilev Region is rich in unique springs

Many springs are church consecrated, being protected and developed. Two of national significance — Golubaya (Blue) and Polykovicheskaya — are found in the Mogilev Region.

The Golubaya spring, in the Slavgorod District, is truly unique — bringing huge volumes of water to the surface: around 5,000 cubic metres daily. This creates a small lake, 2m in depth, which feeds a stream flowing into the Goluba River (a left feeder of the Sozh).

Underground waters fight their way to the surface through chalk: a perfect natural absorbent, which gives water good drinking characteristics and a turquoise colour. On its path to the surface, water is enriched with fluorine, silica, vanadium, copper, barium, titanium and other elements.

The Golubaya spring was once called Siny Kolodets (Blue Well) and was worshipped for its supposedly miraculous and magical properties. In the early medieval ages, it was among the sacral centres, remaining so even after the arrival of Christianity. These days, it is honoured on August 14th (Holy Maccabee Martyrs' Day), when thousands of pilgrims come to pay their respects.

Polykovicheskaya spring is located in a North-East suburb of Mogilev, on the right bank of the River Dnieper (near the village of Polykovichi). The site has been worshipped since ancient times for its healing waters. St. Parasceve chapel has been restored over the spring and construction of Holy Trinity Church is soon to be completed nearby.

Wild safaris and unusual open air camping

What are domestic tourist agencies offering? We present Belarus' top five unusual excursions.

By Lyudmila Minakova

Splashing through marshes

Those who like to watch birds and animals and admire the countryside will love our ecological tours through such places as the 'Red Pine Forest' in the Vitebsk Region's Rossony District. It's home to rare species of animals and birds, many of which are listed in the Red Book, and has about forty lakes and picturesque marshes. You can admire the marshland habitat via raised boardwalks, viewing glacial lakes and wooded hillsides. You may even catch a glimpse of a lynx, wolf or elk. Owls, woodcocks and woodpeckers are also in residence. Some routes can be taken beyond the boardwalks, with campers given firewood and their rubbish removed carefully after their stay.

Sleep afloat the water

Tourists loving taking trips on the water and are just as delighted with river travel as crossing oceans! The Pripyatsky National Park offers

river trips on the beautiful Pripyat aboard steam-ships 'Kirill Turovsky', 'Auroch' and 'Elk' while those of an independent mind can rent paddle boats.

Tourists have the opportunity to take photos, fish, take supper afloat and, even, sleep overnight. In Turov, the Polesie Hotel is moored on the river, harking back to a bygone age, with its romantic wall lamps, small dining room with floor to ceiling windows and comfortable cabins upholstered in wood. How wonderful to fall asleep listening to the river lapping the side of the boat and be awoken by the cry of seagulls. The boat tours the Pripyat Reserve and, as staff have told *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, can even continue to Kiev!

Fitness with a scythe and the coronation of Mindaugas

Tourists also love activity programmes, such as that offered by Dortour. Its *King Mindaugas' Way* route takes visitors to the castles of Mir and Lyubcha, as well as to the churches of Novogrudok



Floating hotel awaits tourists

and to Lake Svityaz. *The Coronation of Mindaugas* is enacted, with knightly duels and medieval dancing. They also take in the Museum of National Architecture and Life, located in the village of Ozertso in the Minsk District, seeing 'festivities in old-Belarusian style'.

Meanwhile, those on the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve's *Secret Marshes* tour may see a

Bolotnik (marsh ghost). Many superstitions are associated with these mysterious locations.

Diving into an underwater world

To see the beauty of the underwater kingdom, there's no need to travel to Turkey or Egypt. The Narochansky National Park offers lake diving beneath the waters of the Naroch, Myastro, Rudakovo,

Myadel, Volchino, Bolduk, Glublya, Glubelka and Bolshoi Boltik. These lakes are so clear that it's easy to admire the world of fish and weed below the surface. Each differs in depth, water mineralisation and eco-diversity.

Belarusian Safari

For those keen to track wild boar and roe, the Pripyatsky Park is the ideal destination. The 4,800 hectare reserve opened its safari route in 2009, allowing guests to get up close and personal with more than a thousand wild boar, fallow and roe deer, elks, aurochs, beavers, foxes and hares. Its white-tailed eagles, black storks and white herons, among others, are listed in the Red Book. Don't forget your camera for the 30km route, as a herd of boar or deer can appear at any time.

There's no need to travel far to experience the extraordinary in Belarus, whether you are a lover of nature or a history buff. The country has something to suit every taste.