



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Tour Notes

Belarus - Forgotten Europe

Tour Duration – 10 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●○○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●●○○○

Tour Pace

Moderate

Tour Highlights

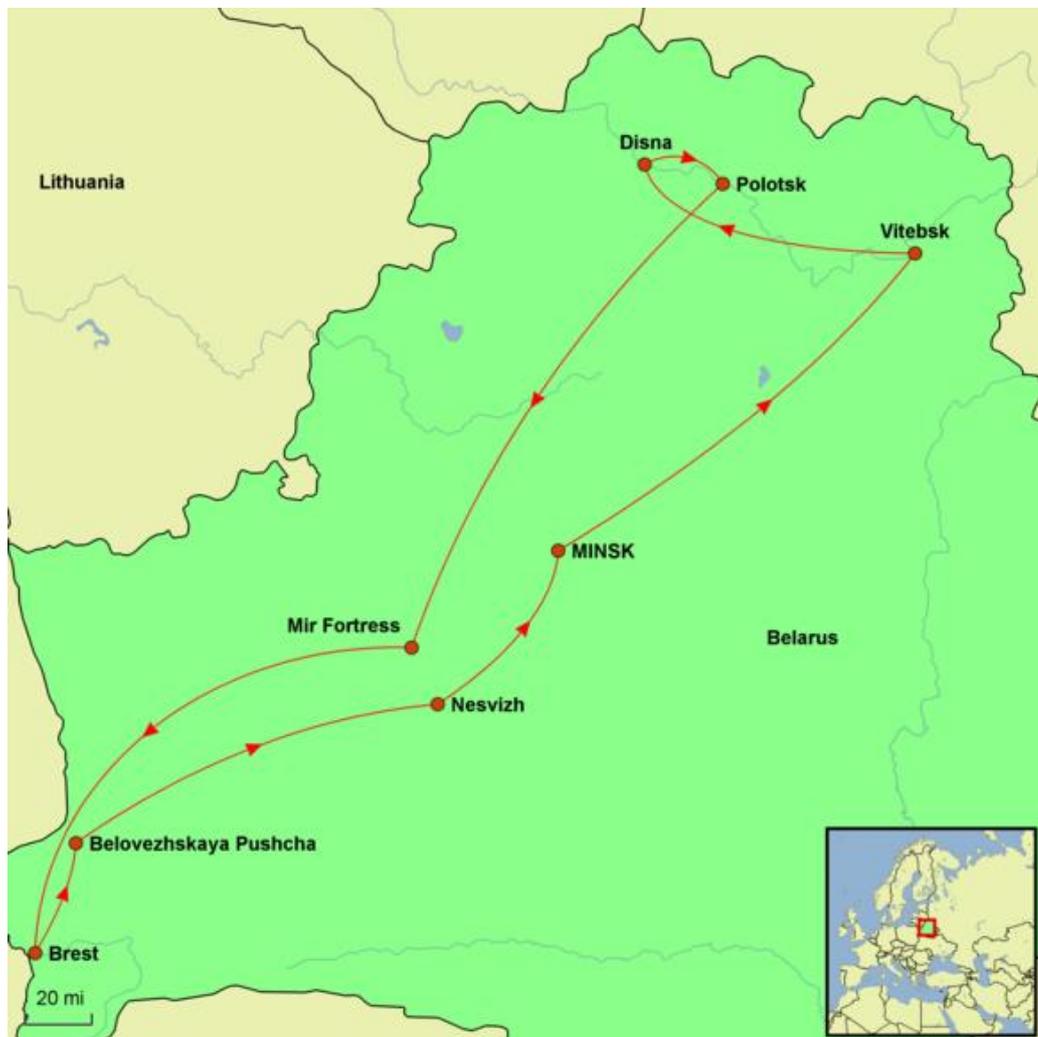
- ✓ Staying as a guest of a local family
- ✓ Mir Castle
- ✓ Brest Fortress
- ✓ Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park





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Tour Map - Belarus - Forgotten Europe



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mix of comfortable hotels and one night in a homestay.
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
Group Size: Maximum of 12
Start Point: Minsk
End Point: Minsk
Transport: Minibuses or Mercedes Sprinters
Countries: Belarus



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Belarus - Forgotten Europe

Belarus is an enigma, a corner of Europe that few have heard about and even fewer have visited. With only tiny numbers of travellers crossing the borders from better known Ukraine or Poland, Belarus has remained well out of the spotlight of international tourism, its secrets remaining hidden, its cities seldom visited and its countryside little explored. Too often associated with Soviet monotony, Belarus is slowly starting to reveal its subtle charms to the outside world. On this short tour we take in the best of its cities, from the sleepy capital Minsk with its fine churches and imposing Soviet architecture to elegant Vitebsk, laden with history and atmosphere. We also visit the fortresses at Brest and Mir as well as the historic town of Njasvizh, packed full of 16th century buildings. Delving into the more recent past we visit Khatyn, monument to the suffering endured by Belarus during the Second World War and essential for an understanding of this land. We also spend time exploring the charming Belarusian countryside – one of the last wildernesses of Europe – in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park, with wildlife that has long since disappeared from the rest of the continent, and we stay in local homes in Polotsk to gain a real insight into daily life. Through it all we meet the people of Belarus, exuberant, resilient and welcoming. Join us to explore the furthest reaches of Europe and be charmed by this fascinating land.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Minsk (40 kms, approx. 40 mins driving time)

Arrive in Minsk and transfer to hotel accommodation. Depending upon flight schedules there may be time to explore the city. Overnight Hotel Belarus or similar.

Minsk

Minsk is a fascinating city and almost unique in Europe. Although it has existed for almost a millennium, gaining prominence due to its position on the strategic trading route between the Black and Baltic Seas, it was almost destroyed during the Second World War. Most buildings were obliterated as Belarus was occupied by Nazi Germany, but since then it has been reconstructed in the typical Soviet style. Presenting almost a blank slate for designers, it represents one of the best examples of Soviet planning to be found, and although things are starting to change now it has very much retained this flavour, giving a glimpse into a way of life that has largely disappeared from elsewhere behind the Iron Curtain. As yet it has largely resisted the onslaught of western commercialism, making it an intriguing place to explore. With a number of pleasant parks and wide boulevards, Minsk is a good place just to wander around, taking in its monuments to fallen heroes and visiting its old churches.



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Day 2 – Minsk

This morning we take a tour of Minsk, visiting Independence Square with its collection of Stalinist buildings, Victory Square and the Island of Tears, the Red Army Afghan memorial, the State Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War, as well as the Old Town. The afternoon is free to explore independently, perhaps searching out the city's impressive churches and cathedrals. Overnight Hotel Belarus or similar. (BL)

Day 3 – Minsk - Vitebsk (300 kms, approx. 4 hrs total driving time)

Today we travel to Khatyn to learn about Belarusian contemporary history. Later we visit the cultural centre of Vitebsk and take a walking tour through its numerous churches and historic buildings. Overnight Hotel Luchesa or similar. (BL)

Vitebsk

The city of Vitebsk dates back to the 11th century, although local legend puts it even earlier. Its position between Lithuania and Russia has meant that it has been invaded and occupied many times, belonging to both powers at various times throughout history. Within Belarus it is noted as a centre of fine culture, being the home of the surrealist painter Marc Chagall, as well as many others. Vitebsk contains some impressive churches and historic buildings, and retains a slightly more cosmopolitan air than many other cities in Belarus.

Khatyn

A visit to Khatyn memorial complex may not be the easiest thing that you do, but one cannot truly understand Belarus without making it here. Khatyn was the site of one of the worst massacres in Belarus in the Second World War, when Nazi forces destroyed an entire village, burning almost all inhabitants alive in the barn as reprisal for supposed collusion in anti-Nazi resistance. Many Belarusian villages suffered similar fates, and the memorial here is a testament to the suffering that ordinary people went through during these terrible times.

Day 4 – Vitebsk - Polotsk (390 kms, approx. 5 hours total driving time)

This morning we drive to Polotsk, one of the most historically important cities in Belarus. We visit the cathedral of St Sophia, dating from the 11th century, as well as the 12th century Convent of St Ephrosinia, superbly preserved and with impressive frescoes. Afterwards we travel to our farmstead accommodation for the night. Overnight Nalibokskie Vasilky Farmstead or similar. (BLD)

Please note: *The farmstead has shared facilities. Even with a single supplement, single rooms are not always available. We will try and accommodate all requests, but they cannot be guaranteed.*

Polotsk

Polotsk is seen as the spiritual heart of Belarus, due to its once dominant position in the region, and is one of the oldest Slavic cities, packed full of history. The city is home to numerous important churches, some of which date back to the 11th century and are still very much in use today. It is still possible to see the 16th century fortifications built by Ivan the Terrible, and there are several old buildings of various architectural styles, including baroque cathedrals and wooden churches as well as museums and monuments which reward exploration.

Day 5 – Minsk (70 kms, approx. 1 hour total driving time)

Spend the morning at leisure at the farmstead. After having lunch and exploring the farmstead we leave it and arrive back in to Minsk in the second part of the day. Free time in Minsk. Overnight at Hotel Belarus or similar. (BL)



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Day 6 – Minsk - Mir Fortress – Brest (360 kms approx. 5 hours 30 mins total driving time)

After breakfast we set off for Brest, stopping on the way to visit one of the country's most important and beautiful sights, the 16th century fortress of Mir, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Afterwards we continue to Brest, situated on the border with Poland. Overnight Hotel Vesta or similar. (BL)

Mir Fortress

Mir Fortress looks like something from a fairytale dramatically situated next to a lake and with white plasterwork a striking contrast to red brick towers and roofs. The fortress was built over a number of years, beginning in the 16th century, and various additions to it have been made throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. It played a significant part in the Second World War when Russian and German forces fought nearby. The fortress is great fun to explore, full of winding staircases and with great views from its towers over the beautiful surrounding countryside.

Brest

Pushed up against the border with Poland, Brest feels slightly less Belarusian, and more western, than other cities. The city is rich in culture, with numerous influences making their mark felt here, from Orthodox to Russian to Polish, and like many other cities has a fine collection of churches – St Simeon's Cathedral is particularly beautiful. But Brest's main centre of interest is its fortress, dating back to the 19th century. The fortress was home in the Second World War to a regiment of Soviet forces who defended it against the onslaught of Nazi troops invading the region, and although they were eventually killed after a long siege they became renowned as heroes within the Soviet Union. Today the fortress stands as a reminder of Belarus's troubled past and the resilience of its spirit, and contains numerous monuments dedicated to the history of that period. Like Khatyn, Brest Fortress gives an insight into the psyche of Belarus today and is invaluable in understanding the nation.

Day 7 – Brest

Today we take a tour of the Brest's main sights, including the imposing fortress which played a significant part in WW2 and is notable in Belarusian history. After lunch there's free time to explore the town in more detail at your own pace. Overnight Hotel Vesta or similar. (BL)

Day 8 – Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park (55 kms approx. 1 hour total driving time)

This morning we travel into one of the largest forested areas in Central Europe, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Belovezhskaya National Park. Here we'll visit some of the park's most scenic areas and appreciate the splendour of the wilderness. We stay overnight in the park. Overnight Hotel Kamenjuki or similar. (BL)

Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park

First established as a national park in 1939, this wilderness area has existed since the middle ages. It entered the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1992 and gained Biosphere Reserve status in 1993. The park contains primeval forest and stretches across the border into Poland. The park is home to 212 species of bird and 59 species of mammal, including the iconic bison. Several hundred are known to inhabit the park after becoming almost extinct in the early 1900's.

Day 9 – Nesvizh – Minsk (390 kms, approx. 6 hours total driving time)

Leaving the national park, we travel to Nesvizh known for its beautiful buildings, monasteries and 16th century houses. After a short city tour followed by lunch, we visit Nesvizh Palace, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, once owned by the Radziwil famil along with everything else, the town included. Afterwards we return to Minsk for the night. Overnight Hotel Belarus or similar. (BL)

Day 10 – Depart Minsk (40 kms, approx. 40 mins driving time)

Tour ends with a transfer to the airport. (B)



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Tour Inclusions / Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers

All accommodation (*Single supplement available but may not apply to farm stay / homestead depending on availability*)

Transport throughout

Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader

Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)

Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights

Any airport taxes

Travel Insurance

Visas

Drinks

Tips

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to Belarus. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.





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Accommodation Rating

At Undiscovered Destinations we know our travellers prefer to stay in comfortable, mid-range accommodation. On this tour, with one exception, you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom. The farmstead at Polotsk has shared facilities. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration. At the farmstead in Polotsk single rooms cannot always be guaranteed.

Food & Drinks

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £4.00

Dinner £8.00

Drinks

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £1.20

Water £0.50

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping, although it is not as common in Belarus as it is elsewhere. If you were happy with the services of your guide and driver, then between \$100-130 for the guide, and \$80-100 for the driver, between the group, would be a reasonable amount.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATM machines are available in larger towns and cities and many will also dispense US dollars as well as Rubles

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are accepted in most hotels and better restaurants

Local Currency: Belarusian Ruble



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Recommended Currency for Exchange: Our advice is to travel with US dollars or Euros cash. Notes should be new or in a good condition

Where to Exchange: It's relatively easy, although often time consuming, to change money in banks and exchange booths. You'll find these in larger towns and cities

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Your Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

In August 2018 the visa requirements changed for UK citizens. All British national passport holders (except those entering on a diplomatic or official passport) can now enter Belarus for a maximum of 30 days without a visa (the day you arrive counts as day one, regardless of arrival time). Entry and exit will only be allowed at Minsk International Airport and you will need to show documentary evidence of medical insurance to the value of 10,000 euros and funds equivalent to 25 euros per day. This can be in the form of cash or credit card in any currency.

If you are travelling immediately from/to a Russian airport or entering Belarus at any other border point other than Minsk International Airport, this visa-free arrangement does not apply and you will need a visa. A maximum of 90 days stay in one calendar year is permitted.

Visa requirements can vary for other nationals. Please check with your nearest Belarusian embassy or consulate.

Please note that it is compulsory for all travellers to hold travel insurance including medical cover when entering Belarus – this will be checked at immigration.

As regulations frequently change it essential that you check the latest requirements with your nearest Belarusian embassy or consulate.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.



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We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

We strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A and B, Polio and Typhoid.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

It's possible to visit Belarus at any time of year, but it's significantly warmer from May / June to September. The winter months can experience significant snowfall and bitterly cold weather, while spring and autumn can be rather unpredictable.

Clothing

Our general recommendation is to bring light clothing with a couple of fleeces or jumpers for cooler evenings. You should also bring a waterproof jacket for any days that it may rain. You should bring at least one long sleeved top for any churches that you will visit.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must – you should not rely on being able to find it in Belarus. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will be useful to have.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable. We advise you to travel with a rucksack or soft bag rather than a suitcase.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Generally electrical supply is 200V AC (50 Hz) and uses European two circular pin style plugs.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 19th November 2019.