

Tourism in Belarus 2018

On September 24, 2018, Deputy Minister of Sports and Tourism Mikhail Portnoy gave press conference. The Minister indicated that on July 27, 2018 the visa-free stay in Belarus was *expanded* from 5 to 30 days. Over the time the number of visa-free tourists has gone up 42 percent. The biggest number of visa-free visitors comes from Germany, Poland, the UK, **the United States** and Italy.

Belarus' export of tourism services exceeded \$126 million in January-July 2018, up 17.5 percent from the same period a year ago.

According to the State Border Committee, in January-June 2018 Belarus was visited by 2,14 million foreigners (1.98 million in January-June 2017).

In June 2019 Belarus plans to host the second European Games. Minsk is getting ready to receive thousands of foreign tourists. Special comprehensive tourist packages are planned to be prepared for guests and sports fans. Round the clock call center will be set up during the games. About 6 thousand volunteers plan to consult tourists at city streets, cultural objects, border checkpoints. The work is being done also as part of preparations to 2021 World Ice Hockey Championship which Belarus and Latvia will co-host.

The Ministry of Sports and Tourism and travel agencies forecast that by the end of 2018 the market of tourism services will show growth against 2016 and 2017. The forecast takes into account efforts put in to liberalize visa procedures, expand borders of visa-free zones in Grodno region and Brest region, and intensify marketing events. Since the start of the year, the Ministry of Sports and Tourism has held together with public organizations and business more than 20 marketing events in Europe, the United States and Asia.

Belarus actively promotes programs of heritage tourism for Jews with Belarusian origin residing in Israel, U.S. and other countries. Tourists are coming to all regions of Belarus as part of organized and individual programs visiting objects of Jewish historical heritage, places related to famous historical figures of the State of Israel, sites of former ghettos and death camps.

The year 2018 has been announced the Year of Belarusian Tourism in China. Mutual visa-free entry for citizens of Belarus and China was introduced on August 10. Familiarization tours for the Chinese mass media are held to increase the number of visitors from China. Belarusian hospitality facilities are being adapted to the China Friendly services. The program includes training of guides with Chinese, the production of promotion and informational materials and the provision of navigation around Minsk and regions in the Chinese language. Belarus expects that the number of tourists coming from China will rise by at least 15 percent every year taking into account the visa waiver agreement.