**Belarus**

The Republic of Belarus is a small, beautiful country with the heroic past and interesting present. It is situated in Eastern Europe. The Republic borders on Russia, the Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. It has an area of 207 square kilometers and a population of more than 10 million. Measured by its territory, Belarus ranks 13th among the states of Europe. Two-Thirds of Belarus' population live in cities. There are 97 cities in the Republic. It's capital is Minsk, with the population of about two million people. Minsk is also the coordinating center of the commonwealth of independent States. The largest cities in Belarus are Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel, Grodno, and Mogilev, in which the administrative centers of the Republic are located.

Belarusian’s natural scenery is wide, lonely plains covered with hills, and many lakes and forests. There are nearly 3.000 rivers with the total length of over 51.000 kilometers in Belarus. The chief rivers are the Dnieper, the Nieman, the Zapadnaya Dvina, the Pripyat. In the past they were great trade ways from Europe to Asia and India and many towns appeared on their banks. There are more than 10800 lakes in Belarus. Most of them are situated in the northern part of the republic. The largest lake is the Naroch (80 sq km) and the deepest one is the Dolgoye (54 metres). One third of the Republic's territory is covered with forests. The largest of them are called pushehas. The most beautiful is the Byelovezhskaya.

The climate in the Belarus is moderately continental. The climate is mild and one can travel comfortably here at any time of year. The moderately continental climate of Belarus is a gift from the Atlantic ocean, and the winds that blow from the ocean make Belarus a zone of stable harvest.

It is a country of rich history and ancient culture. The name of Belarus or "Belaya Russ" was for the first time mentioned in the thirteenth century chronicles.

Belarus suffered greatly during World War II. It lost more than half its national wealth. The fascists destroyed and burnt its towns and villages, factories and plants, schools and hospitals. They killed every fourth person living in the Republic. Despite all this, Belarus has restored its cities, rebuilt its economy. Its industry produces tractors, big tip-up lorries, automatic lines, electronic computers and precision instruments, motorcycles, bicycles, refrigerators, television-sets, watches and textiles. Belarus exports its industrial products to more than 70 foreign countries.

Agriculture specializes in milk and meat production. The main cultures here are potatoes, flax, grain, herbs and vegetables. More than 30 minerals have been discovered nowadays in Belarus. Among them we have oil, natural gas, coal, rock salt, potassium salts, phosphorites, marl, iron ore, dolomites and others.

Belarus is a republic of well developed science and culture. There are 37 state higher educational establishments, the Academy of Sciences, about 400 professianal schools there. Secondary education is compulsory and free of charge.

Belarus is a sovereign independent state with its own government, constitution, state emblem, flag and anthem. The Declaration of State Sovereignty was adopted by its Supreme Soviet on July, 27, 1990. Belarus is a member-state of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and one of the UN (United Nations) founder-members.

There are three branches of state power in the Republic of Belarus – Legislative (Supreme Soviet), Executive (Council of Ministers) and Judicial (Supreme Court). According to the existing constitution (1996) the head of the state in the President.