**Minsk**

Minsk is the capital of Belarus and the largest city of the republic. Its population exceeds a million (1,4 million). The city is more than 900 years old. It was first mentioned as a town in the Principality of Polotsk in a chronicle in 1067 in connection with the battle on the Nemiga. The former city’s name was Mensk from the word <metyat> which means <to barter>.

But in spite of its age, Minsk has very few historical monuments because during World War II Minsk was nearly one hundred per cent destroyed. Only a few ancient buildings and cathedrals of the 17-18th centuries and several buildings in the classical style can be shown to a tourist. In order to look at Belarusian antiquity one has to go deeper into the province.

After the war Minsk was rebuilt mostly by the construction of new factories and houses. It attracts visitors with its public buildings, large squares and boulevards. Minsk is beautiful and attracts visitors with its treelined streets and numerous parks and gardens. Nowadays Minsk is growing rapidly and constantly changing. Up to now, the central Scorina Avenue is eight kilometres long and fifty meters wide.

Minsk is a political, cultural, educational and industrial centre. It is also a big traffic centre with a large network of railways, roads, airlines and two Metro lines. The government of the Republic of Belarus has its seat in Minsk. In 1991 Minsk became the headquarters of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose confederation of nations that were formerly republics of the Soviet Union.

Minsk is a city of industrial giants. A lot of new plants have been built in Minsk. Tractors and lorries, machine-tools and furniture, motorcycles and bicycles, radio sets and TV sets, watches and computers are produced in Minsk.

There are a lot of secondary schools, technical colleges and institutions of higher education in Minsk. Thousands of students study at the Belarusian State University, the Politechnical Academy, the Medical Institute and others. The Academy of Science is made up of more than 30 research institutes and other organizations.

The cultural life of Minsk is quite varied. In Minsk there are 6 theatres of which the Opera and Ballet Theatre, the Gorky Russian Drama Theatre and the Yanka Kupala Academic Theatre are extremely popular with the public. There are not many museums in Minsk. The most famous are the Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War, the Art Museum and Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas museum. In Minsk there are also concert halls, a circus, some cinemas, libraries and clubs.