

RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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The Republic of Belarus has an exclusively rich natural, historical and cultural potential favourable for international tourism. Belarus is a country with an ancient and rich history and unique culture. It has a significant number of historical towns and cities. Many towns and cities have preserved ancient temples and walkways, palaces and castles of magnates of Rzecz Pospolita and of the Russian Empire, as well as valuable architectural, historical and cultural monuments. Urban and rural areas include over 20,000 monuments of history and culture and about 100 centres of artisan arts. Besides natural reserves and national parks, there are settlements and towns that represent complex memorials preserving their historical environment and traditional way of life.

The idea of rural tourism development has always been around. Although Belarus is the only country in Europe which does not have either access to sea or mountains, it does however possess significant potential for such kind of

tourism, namely 20,000 rivers and 10,000 lakes. In addition, 36% of its territory is covered with forests and 7% with national parks. The country has a multitude of villages, which has remained virtually unchanged since the 19th century.

It is hard to imagine anyone in Belarus opposing rural tourism. It will provide supplementary income for rural residents and enable them to improve living conditions. Rural tourism will bring a great deal of benefits for the local authorities and the region as a whole as it will generate additional funds, boost the development of infrastructure and create new jobs. In the nationwide perspective, rural tourism will drive tourism development in the country and lighten tensions between rural and urban areas. It will provide people with inexpensive vacationing in environmentally friendly locations.

The modern urban life style makes people feel nostalgic about a rural atmosphere. This is probably why rural tourism is so favored today and is becoming an essential part of tourist travel. There are numerous enthusiastic people in Belarus who believe that this inexpensive type of tourism allows people not only to spend very fruitful and exciting holidays but also to restore one's strength and gain energy for further activities.

The followers of this idea do not only believe it but also take practical steps.

New cottages and farmsteads are built and old ones restored and fit out with all the necessary details required for a comfortable and pleasant stay. Today nearly 100 farmsteads in Belarus are ready willing to receive visitors as their guests. The comparison of the number of farmsteads in Belarus and other countries is represented in diagram 1.

All the farmsteads offer accommodation in wooden or brick cottages with all modern facilities in double or triple rooms furnished with hand-made wooden furniture. As a rule, there is a storage of food products for cooking genuine Belarusian meals. Some farmsteads have haylofts with fresh hay suitable for sleeping to say nothing of fruit and vegetable gardens and traditional hens, cows, ducks and geese ... Many farmsteads are situated on the rivers or on the lakeside – a nice chance for swimming, fishing or sun-bathing!

More than 20 new farmsteads were built in Minsk region in 2007. Last summer the total number of cottages and farmsteads in Minsk region was a bit less than 50. By 2010 that number will have doubled.

The government does its best to help people, who want to start their own rural business, e.g. banks give 5 % credits to them. The information about the quantity of credits according to the programme of development of rural tourism in Belarus given by Belagroprombank is represented in diagram 2.

Diagram 1.

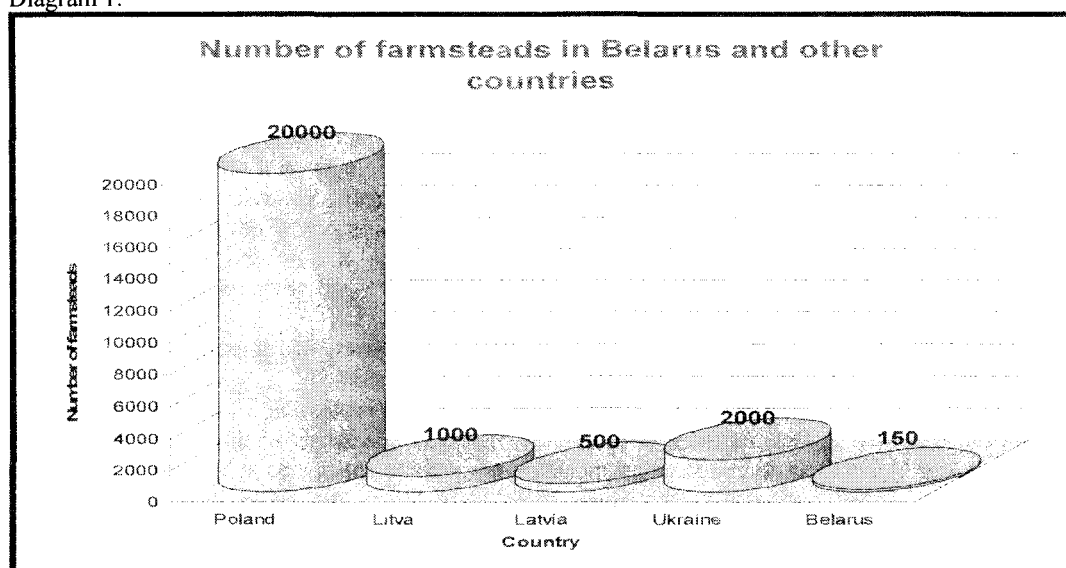
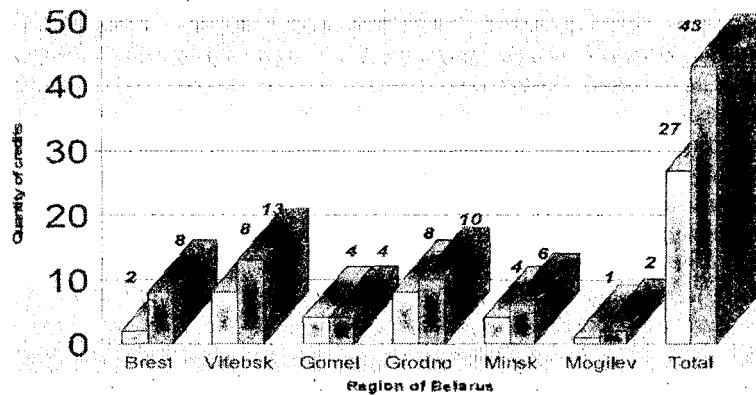


Diagram 2.

Quantity of credits according to the programme of development of rural tourism in Belarus given by Belagroprombank



□ 2007 ■ 2007 - Jan 2008