



Belarus

Беларусь

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Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Eridan (p93)
- » Hotel Europe (p81)
- » Semashko (boxed text, p95)

Best Places to Eat

- » Jules Verne (p90)
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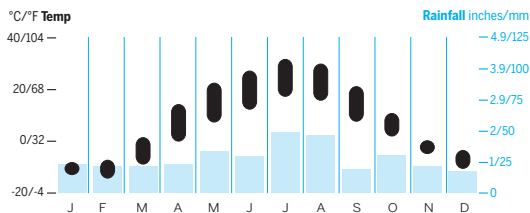
Why Go?

Eastern Europe's outcast, Belarus lies at the edge of the region and seems determined to avoid integration with the rest of the continent at all costs. Taking its lead from the Soviet Union rather than the European Union, this pint-sized dictatorship may seem like a strange choice for travellers, but its isolation remains at the heart of its appeal.

While the rest of Eastern Europe has charged headlong into capitalism, Belarus allows the chance to visit a Europe with minimal advertising and no litter or graffiti. Outside the monumental Stalinist capital of Minsk, Belarus offers a simple yet pleasing landscape of cornflower fields, thick primeval forests and picturesque villages. The country also offers two excellent national parks and is home to Europe's largest mammal, the zoobr (or European bison). While travellers will always be subject to curiosity, they'll also invariably be on the receiving end of extremely warm hospitality and a genuine local welcome.

When to Go

Minsk



June-August

You won't have to worry about high season: come to escape the crowds elsewhere.

Mid-July

Join in Vitsebsk's superb Slavyansky Bazaar festival and celebrate all things Slavic.

Early July

On 6 July watch the locals celebrate Kupalye, a fortune-telling festival with pagan roots.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Belarusian rouble (BR)
- » **Language** Belarusian and Russian
- » **Money** ATMs taking international cards are widely available
- » **Visas** Needed by almost everybody

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 207,600 sq km
- » **Capital** Minsk
- » **Telephone code** 375
- » **Emergency** fire 01, police 02, ambulance 03

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	BR3187
Canada	C\$1	BR3165
euro	€1	BR4409
Japan	¥100	BR3620
New Zealand	NZ\$1	BR2393
UK	UK£1	BR4953
USA	US\$1	BR3045

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room**
BR70,000
- » **Two-course meal**
BR60,000
- » **Museum entrance**
BR2000
- » **Beer** BR1000
- » **Minsk metro ticket**
BR700

Resources

- » **Belarus Embassy in the UK** (www.uk.belembassy.org)
- » **Belarus Tourism** (www.eng.belarustourism.by)

Connections

Belarus has good overland links to all its neighbouring countries. Daily trains from Minsk serve Moscow, St Petersburg, Vilnius, Warsaw (via Terespol) and Kyiv; see p102 for more details. Bus services, which tend to be less comfortable, connect Minsk to Moscow, St Petersburg, Kyiv, Warsaw and Vilnius; Vitsebsk to Moscow and St Petersburg; and Brest to Terespol in Poland.

ITINERARIES

Three Days

Spend two days getting to know Minsk – its Stalinist architecture belies a lively and friendly city – before taking a day trip to Dudutki and Mir to get a feel for the charming Belarusian countryside.

One Week

Begin with two nights in Brest, including a day trip to the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park, then take a train to Minsk, allowing yourself time for a day trip to Dudutki and Mir before continuing on to historic Vitsebsk.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Belavezhskaya** A bitter herbal alcoholic drink
- » **Draniki** Potato pancakes, usually served with sour cream (*smetana*)
- » **Kletsky** Dumplings stuffed with mushrooms, cheese or potato
- » **Kolduni** Potato dumplings stuffed with meat
- » **Manchanka** Pancakes served with a meaty gravy