Belarus Short Break

BELARUS - TRIP CODE BEL

SHORT BREAKS

Why book this trip?

This short break is designed to give a taster of everything that makes Belarus a great destination. Experience the Soviet history in Minsk, historic castles, rolling countryside and rural traditions - all in just five days.

- **Minsk** - Discover its Soviet history and the unique Brazilian-Belarusian fusion street art
- **Castles** - Admire the grandeur of UNESCO-Listed Mir Castle and spend a night within the Nesvizh Castle complex
- **Rural traditions** - Explore the rolling countryside and Belarus's almost forgotten rural lifestyle and musical heritage

INCLUDED MEALS
Breakfast: 4
Lunch: 2

TRIP STAFF
Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)

TRANSPORT
Bus
Train

ACCOMMODATION
4 nights comfortable hotel

TRIP PACE:
Full on

GROUP SIZE:
12 - 18

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Minsk

Arrive in Minsk. This exciting long weekend begins in Belarus's capital city.

For those arriving on time our Leader plans to meet you in the hotel reception at 8.30pm for the welcome meeting and for those that wish, there is the chance to go out for dinner. There are no other activities planned today, so you are free to arrive in Minsk at any time. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you'll need to arrive into Minsk National Airport (MSQ), which is around one hours' drive. Should you miss the welcome meeting, your Leader will inform you of any essential information as soon as you catch up.

If your flight arrives earlier in the day, perhaps you might choose to sample some Belarusian cuisine. Popular dishes include machanka, a hearty pork stew, and draniki, which are thick potato pancakes. For an after dinner tipple try Krambambula, a traditional Belarusian liquor, which is similar to mead and flavoured with spices and honey.

On this trip we have packed in as many highlights of Minsk as we can, but there is very little free time in the city, so if you wish to spend some time discovering more on your own then we would recommend extending your stay for a night or two. Perhaps you might like to relax in the serene surroundings of the Sendai Japanese Garden or there's the Minsk Botanical Gardens. Please note that many of Minsk's museums are closed on a Monday or Tuesday, so if you wish to visit a particular attraction then please check that it is open on the day you wish to visit it.

ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Tourist (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel

SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE

MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

DAY 2 - Market visit and tour of Soviet Minsk; view colourful street art

Minsk is a city with a long history, set on the banks of the Svislach River, it was first settled by the East Slavs back in the 9th century AD. However, our guided tour this morning is going to focus on its more recent history, which has largely been dominated by Soviet rule that lasted from around 1920 to 1991. The city was almost entirely destroyed during World War II with around 80% of its houses and infrastructure reduced to rubble. Afterwards the city was rebuilt with its historic centre being replaced by Stalinist architecture with grand buildings, brutalist statues, broad avenues and imposing squares. Victory Square is the most famous part of the city and features a memorial to the fallen heroes of World War II. During our tour we'll have a brief visit to the Museum of the Great Patriotic War, which is the centre piece in Victory Park. This huge museum has hundreds of exhibits and two of the most poignant rooms are the Hall of Glory that celebrates the heroes of the Soviet Union and the emotive memorial found in the Hall of Remembrance and Sorrow.

This afternoon we board the metro for the city market where we can see the local residents out haggling for fresh fruit and vegetables that are on sale from nearby farms. You can see, and of course buy, a whole range of edible goodies here including meat, cheese, nuts, spices and more. Next we will visit the Azgur Museum which houses numerous sculptures from the Soviet era that were designed by the architect Zair Azgur.

Belarusian politics remains controversial with Alexander Lukashenko having ruled as president since 1994. During your free time for lunch you might like to dine in the Parliament's House of Representatives canteen where you may be lucky enough to spot politicians having lunch.

Next, we drive to see Minsk's unusual Central Library building, with its unique architecture. In Minsk's industrial district we'll be able to view the result of collaboration between Belarusian and Brazilian street artists that have injected some much needed colour and fun into the formerly grey and stark buildings. Old tower blocks, factories, trams and buses have been decorated with fanciful designs featuring animals, folklore creatures, cartoon people, geometrical patterns and more.

After a full day exploring, the evening is free to relax in the city before returning by metro at a time of your choosing to our hotel. You might like to take a stroll through the Trinity Suburb, which is one of oldest and most picturesque areas. There a number of Stolle Restaurants in the city, which are famous for their variety of savoury and sweet pies that you can either eat in or take away. Just a few of the many pie fillings include meat and egg, salmon, lemon, and cabbage.

Please note that the Central Library can be closed at short notice due to events taking place, so we may need to visit this in the morning of day two or in the afternoon of day four instead.

ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Tourist (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel

SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE

MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 3 - Visit UNESCO-listed Mir Castle and spend a night at Nesvizh Castle

Today we drive out of the city and head for two of Belarus's best known attractions. Firstly we have a guided tour of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Mir Castle. Its red and white towers reflect in the surrounding water and protect an enclosed cobbled courtyard with a well in the centre. Creation of the fort began at the end of the 15th century and it is widely recognised as being one of the most splendid castles in Europe. It was reopened to the public in 2010 after being extensively restored to its former glories.

Next we drive to the impressive Nesvizh Castle, which is also UNESCO-listed and has been home to the Radswill Family for over 400 years. The fortresses construction began in 1584, but it's been extended and changed over the years and now features a mix of Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Classicism and Neo-Gothic architecture. The estate also contains the largest landscape gardens in Europe and a number of ornamental lakes. On arrival we'll check-in to our rooms and have lunch at the castle before being taken on a guided tour.

This evening is free to stroll through the castle park, which includes English and Japanese gardens as well as the native flora, and a number of monuments and memorials such as the Wishes Stone. Alternatively you can take a walk to Nesvizh town to see the 16th century Town Hall, old city gate and the Baroque church. There are also a number of restaurants within walking distance for you to choose from this evening.

ACCOMMODATION:
Nesvizh Palace (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel

SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE

MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST AND LUNCH

DAY 4 - Discover rural Belarus at Rosy Eco Village and Ales Los Farm

On our way back towards Minsk today we'll venture into the rural Valozhyn district to experience what life is like outside of the city. Rosy Eco Village was created by several families who decided to escape hectic city life and get back to a more traditional lifestyle where they live off the land and reconnect with nature by farming their own food and creating a family nest. This type of settlement and country lifestyle used to be common, but was mostly lost during the many years of urbanization in Soviet Belarus. Now in this village there are 40 self-sufficient homesteads on five acres of land with cattle farms, fruit and vegetable plots, and gardens. We'll be introduced to the eco village concept by the families living here and get the chance to sample their organic tea, homemade bread, honey, and other delicacies.

After having lunch in a tavern at Martinova Gus we head to Ales Los Farm, created by a popular Belarusian musician and artist called Ales Los. We will see here how his passion for folk music and folklore meets nature. We will be introduced to his collection of traditional musical instruments, almost forgotten folk songs and dances, and handcrafts. All of which formed an important part of old-time Belarusian culture that were almost totally erased during the Soviet years.

We drive back to Minsk for our final evening in the city.

ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Tourist (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel

SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE

MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST AND LUNCH

DAY 5 - Trip ends in Minsk

The trip ends after breakfast at our hotel in Minsk.

There are no activities planned today, so you are free to depart from Minsk at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day luggage storage facilities are available at our hotel. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you need to depart from Minsk National Airport (MSQ), which is around one hours' drive.

MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

Trip information

Climate and country information

Belarus

Climate

Belarusian climate is moderately continental, a transitional form from maritime to continental climatewith mild and humid winters, warm summers and damp autumns. Average July temperatures range from +17 C to +18.5 C, January temperatures vary from -8 C to -4.5 C. In the Naliboki Forest area temperatures in winter can fall as low as -25 C.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+3	2 Pin Round	Orthodox	Belarusian

Budgeting and packing

Clothing

July and August are the hottest months and lightweight cotton clothing is best. During spring and autumn temperatures can be lower or drop during the evenings and there is also a stronger possibility of rain, although light rainwear may be needed at any time of year. Layered clothing and a warm fleece/jacket is recommended for cooler evenings. Ladies should take a headscarf, as it may be required when entering some churches.

Footwear

We recommend taking comfortable walking shoes for exploring and trainers or sandals for relaxing.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a day pack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

We advise taking a water bottle for our included walks as well as sun glasses, sunscreen and a sun hat. In case of emergency we also recommend that you carry a torch and a first aid kit. For the time spent in the countryside you may find mosquito repellent handy.

Tipping

Explore leader
Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our leaders all receive a fair wage. You may however, want to recognise a leader that has done a great job or really added to your trip by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It is a tricky one, and down to personal preference, but we would recommend £15 to £20 per person per week as a guideline.

Local crew
Although voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow approximately £20 of local currency for tipping.

In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leader may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip.

Belarus

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£6	£11	£2.00 - 4.00	£0.4

Foreign Exchange

Local currency	Recommended Currency For Exchange
Ruble	USD or Euro

Where To Exchange
Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability
You might find it difficult to obtain money from some ATM machines using Maestro and Visa cards due to difficulties in reading the card.

Credit Card Acceptance
Restaurants and shops in major towns.

Travellers Cheques
Are difficult to cash on this tour.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Train

Accommodation notes

Our hotel in Minsk is conveniently located just a few minutes' walk from the Partyzanskaya Metro Station and it's a 15-20 minute journey into the very centre of the city. Close to our hotel is the Belarus Department Store where you may like to browse for local products such as textiles. The area around the hotel is dominated by locals including a large tractor manufacturing base which employs an astonishing 17,000 people. They are extremely proud of their tractor production and so there are monuments to the tractor and even children's parks with tractor shaped toys. The hotel and the surrounding area have a very Soviet layout and give us a glimpse into what normal life is like in the city. The hotel is tall and offers great views from the higher floors.

We will also spend a night inside the palace ensemble at Nesvizh Castle. There are only 22 rooms here so it's a very exclusive experience. Rooms are en suite and have free internet access, but aren't air-conditioned and each varies in layout and decor due to the historic nature of the building.

Essential Information

Government Travel Safety Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK citizens, check the latest Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advice.

Please refer to our COVID-19 entry requirements page for any country-specific conditions of entry. Whilst we strive to update this on a regular basis we recommend you also check the FCDO website for the latest advice on entry requirements in this fast-evolving situation. Information can change at any time.

Under 18 immigration guidance
Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information.Booking Conditions

Visa and Passport Information

Belarus: All national passport holders from the UK and Ireland, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada (except those entering on a diplomatic or official passport) can now enter Belarus for a maximum of 30 days without a visa. Please note that the day you arrive counts as day one, regardless of your arrival time and entry and exit will only be permitted at Minsk International Airport. On arrival you will need to show your passport, documentation proving that you have medical insurance valid in Belarus and valued at a

minimum of €10,000, and funds equivalent to €25.00 per day (so €125.00 in total for five days). This can be in the form of cash, credit cards or travellers cheques in any currency. You should ensure that your passport has at least three months' validity from the date of entry into Belarus.

A maximum of 90 days stay in Belarus in any one calendar year is permitted. If you wish to stay longer than thirty days then a visa is required. If you're travelling from/to any Russian airport then this visa-free arrangement doesn't apply and you'll need a visa.

There are 80 countries in total that the visa free arrangements apply to and a full list of these and further information can be found on the Belarus Embassy website:
http://uk.mfa.gov.by/en/consular_issues/visas/

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.

Booking a land only package with Explore
Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad
Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.
Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.
If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click here

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.
Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them here.

Flight Information
You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a ‘flight inclusive’ package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore
We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.
On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Ability to swim

No

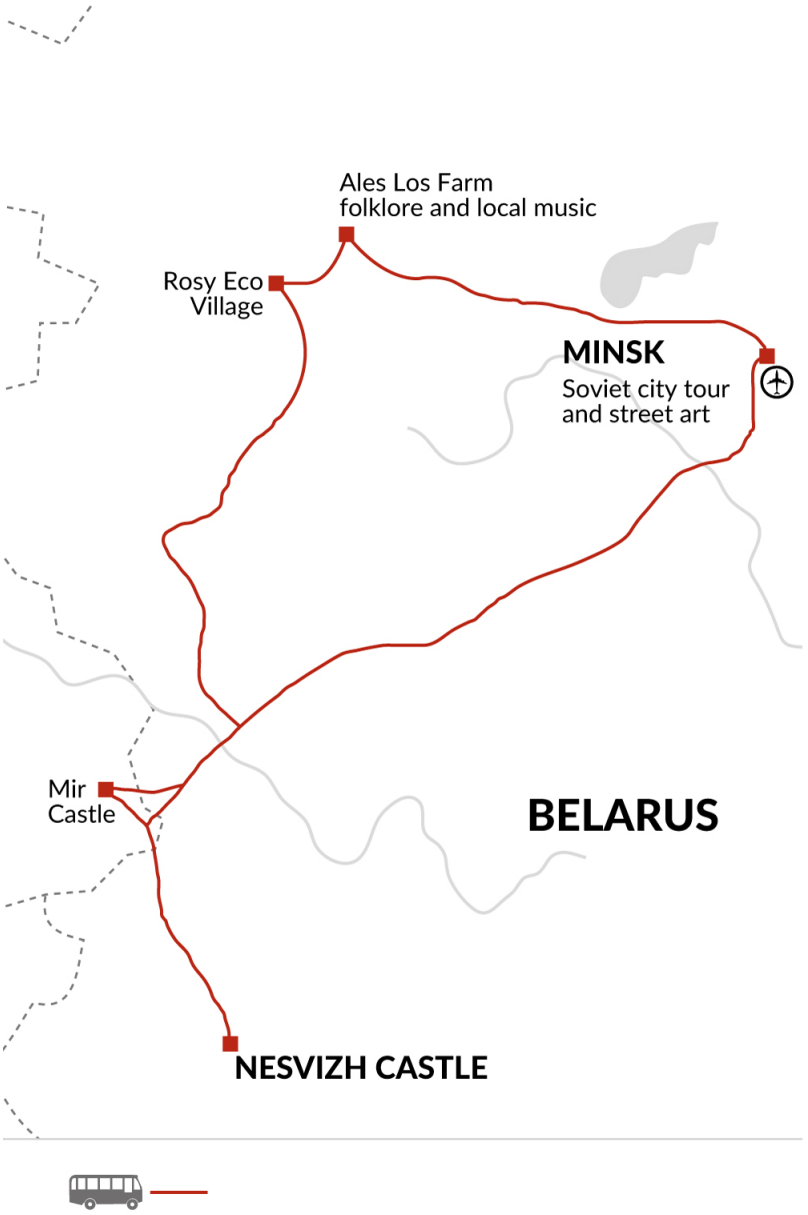
Belarus

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Rabies, Tetanus, Tick-borne encephalitis, Tuberculosis and Typhoid. Please check the latest requirements with

your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Additional Information



Why book this trip

It's visa free! Until recently a visa was required to visit Belarus but currently visitors from the UK, USA, Australia and more, can travel to Minsk International Airport for up to thirty days without the need for a visa, so it's never been cheaper or easier to discover Belarus. See the Visa Information section of our trip notes for further details.

Reviews

AWARD WINNING EXPLORE LEADERS	PRICE GUARANTEE PROMISE	AIRPORT TRANSFERS