

EUROPE · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · WILDLIFE · CULTURE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Belarus

Belarus rewards travellers who like their Europe unpolished: the turreted red-brick Mir Castle, the Radziwiłł palace at Nesvizh, and Belovezhskaya Pushcha, the primeval forest where European bison roam. Minsk itself is a showcase of grand Stalinist boulevards, a tidy metro and lively cafés. Entry rules and travel advice change often, so check both carefully before booking.



The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Belarus.

Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice. FCDO advice last updated 10 September 2026.

 CAPITAL Minsk	 CURRENCY Belarusian rouble (BYN) £1 ≈ BYN 3.98	 LANGUAGE Russian, Belarusian	 BEST TIME May-Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £35-£150 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 8h 30m via Istanbul ~£300-£550 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3 standard time

Belarus is a flat, forested, lake-strewn country where the Soviet past is more visible than almost anywhere else in Europe. Minsk was rebuilt after the Second World War as a model socialist capital, and its broad Independence Avenue is lined with monumental architecture. Most first trips use Minsk as a base for day trips to the UNESCO-listed castles at Mir and Nesvizh, then head south-west by train to Brest for its war-memorial fortress and the Belovezhskaya Pushcha forest on the Polish border. Grodno, with its Catholic churches and older streets, makes a good finish; those with more time head north to the Braslav lakes.

Travel here is inexpensive, orderly and quiet: trains run on time, streets are clean and you will meet few other Western visitors, even at the castles. English is not widely spoken outside hotels, and signs mix Cyrillic Russian and Belarusian, so a translation app earns its keep. Visitors are often surprised by how good Minsk's café and restaurant scene is, and by the warmth of people once the initial reserve breaks. The flip side is a tightly controlled political climate: entry requirements, card payments and flight routes can all be affected by sanctions and border closures, so research carefully and check the FCDO advice first.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

ARCHITECTURE

Mir Castle

A UNESCO-listed fortress begun in the early 16th century, its red-brick towers trimmed in white plaster and reflected in the pond beside it. The restored interiors trace the Radziwiłł family's rule; arrive early to have the courtyard to yourself.
- 2

HISTORY

Nesvizh Palace

The Radziwiłł dynasty's main seat for four centuries, this moated palace complex is another UNESCO site, with grand restored halls, a portrait gallery and landscaped parks. Easily combined with Mir on a day trip from Minsk.

3

WILDLIFE

Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park

Shared with Poland's Białowieża, this is one of Europe's last stretches of primeval lowland forest and a refuge for European bison. Cycle the forest trails from Kamenyuki, visit the bison enclosures and the nature museum.

4

HISTORY

Brest Fortress

The 19th-century citadel whose garrison held out against the German invasion in June 1941 is now a vast memorial, with a giant stone soldier's head, ruined barracks and a defence museum.

5

NATURE

Braslav Lakes National Park

Around 30 glacial lakes scattered through pine woods near the Latvian and Lithuanian borders. Climb Castle Hill in Braslav for the view, then swim, canoe or rent a lakeside cabin in summer.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Minsk

≈ 2 million people

The capital is a showpiece of post-war Stalinist planning, with an efficient metro, the rebuilt Trinity Suburb, Victory Square and a surprisingly good café scene. Allow two or three days.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Gomel

≈ 500,000 people

Belarus's second city sits on the Sozh river in the south-east; its highlight is the Rumyantsev-Paskevich palace and riverside park. Worth a stop rather than a long stay.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Grodno

≈ 364,000 people

Close to the Polish and Lithuanian borders, Grodno kept more of its old streets than most Belarusian cities, with baroque churches, two castles above the Neman river and a relaxed pedestrian centre.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

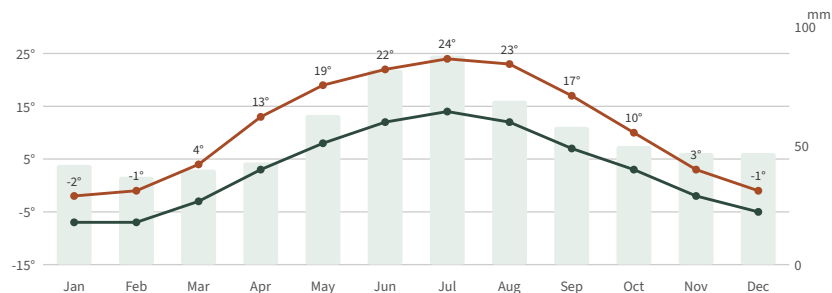
When to go to Belarus

Best time: **May–Sep.**



Average climate in Minsk

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Maslenitsa The week-long farewell to winter before Orthodox Lent, with pancakes (bliny), folk games and the burning of a straw effigy in town squares.
Jul	Kupalle (Kupala Night) The night of 6–7 July brings bonfire-jumping, flower wreaths floated on rivers and a search for the mythical fern flower, best seen at open-air museums and village celebrations.
Jul	Slavianski Bazaar Vitebsk's big international music and arts festival, held each July in an open-air amphitheatre, drawing pop stars and folk ensembles from across the Slavic world.

How much does Belarus cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ BYN 139 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £75 per person / day ≈ BYN 298 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £150 per person / day ≈ BYN 596 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Draniki Crisp grated-potato pancakes, the closest thing to a national dish, served with soured cream (smetana) or a pot of pork and mushroom stew.	Machanka A rich gravy of pork and sausage, thickened with flour and cream, into which you dip rolled pancakes or draniki — hearty village food.	Kholodnik Bright pink cold beetroot soup with kefir, cucumber, dill and boiled egg, eaten on hot summer days.
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Getting around

Belarusian Railways links Minsk with Brest, Grodno, Gomel and Vitebsk on cheap and punctual trains; buy tickets at stations or on the railway's website. Marshrutka minibuses and buses fill the gaps, Minsk has a simple three-line metro, and Yandex Go is the usual taxi app. Hiring a car makes the Mir–Nesvizh loop and Braslav easy, as roads are good and traffic light.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 103 Fire: 101 Police: 102 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +375	TIME ZONE UTC+3 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Around 10% in sit-down restaurants and cafés if service isn't already on the bill; round up taxi fares.

ETIQUETTE

Take shoes off in homes, bring an odd number of flowers (even numbers are for funerals), and never photograph police, soldiers, border posts or government buildings.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Minsk National Airport (MSQ), Minsk

Visas & entry for Belarus

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

The Belarusian authorities have announced that until 31 December 2026 all British nationals (except those entering on a diplomatic or official passport) can enter Belarus for up to 30 days without a visa, limited to a total of 90 days per calendar year.

If you want to stay longer than 30 days during a visit, or for a total period exceeding 90 days per calendar year, you must have a visa. You can find more information from the Embassy of Belarus in the UK.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B

Rabies

Tick-borne encephalitis

Tuberculosis

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Belarus

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sat 7 Nov 2026

October Revolution Day

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Catholic Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sat 2 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Thu 7 Jan 2027	Orthodox Christmas Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	Women's Day
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Catholic Easter
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 2 May 2027	Orthodox Easter
Sun 9 May 2027	Victory Day
Tue 11 May 2027	Radunitsa (Day of Rejoicing)
Sat 3 Jul 2027	Independence Day of the Republic of Belarus (Day of the Republic)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Russian

ENGLISH	RUSSIAN	SAY IT
Hello	Здравствуйте	ZDRAST-vooy-tyeh
Thank you	Спасибо	spa-SEE-ba
Please	Пожалуйста	pa-ZHAL-sta
Excuse me	Извините	iz-vee-NEE-tyeh
How much is this?	СКОЛЬКО ЭТО СТОИТ?	SKOL-ka EH-ta STO-eet

Know before you go

- Check the FCDO travel advice before you book: it changes often, and travelling against it can invalidate standard travel insurance.
- Bring some euros or US dollars in cash as a back-up, because foreign-issued bank cards may be declined; exchange only at banks and official kiosks.
- Place names appear in both Belarusian and Russian forms — Hrodna or Grodno, Homiel or Gomel, Niasviž or Nesvizh — so search both spellings for timetables and maps.