EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES

Belarus Explorer (MI 2017)

TRIPDURATI(
10
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Full On

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: MI

Trip Highlights - Belarus Explorer

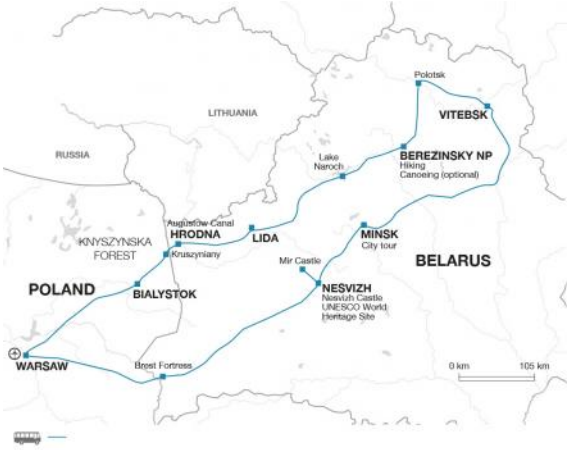
- ✓ Cultural gems - Explore the rich history of Hrodna (Grodno), Polotsk and Vitebsk
- ✓ Castles - Visit the fortresses of Nesvizh, Mir and Brest
- ✓ Berezinsky National Park - Hiking through some of the most pristine landscapes in Belarus
- ✓ Minsk - The Belarus capital: a superb example of Soviet urban planning

Trip Essentials

Accommodation:	9 nights Standard Hotel
Included Meals:	9 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 2 dinners
Start Point:	Join trip: Warsaw
End Point:	Trip ends: Warsaw Airport
Transport:	Bus
Countries:	Poland, Belarus

Belarus Explorer

Join us on this exploration of the villages, forests and historic cities of Belarus and eastern Poland. Along the way we spend a night in the Nesvizh Castle and visit the 15th century Mir Castle, both fascinating UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and take a walking tour through the streets of Minsk. We'll discover the incredible variety of flora and fauna while hiking in Berezinsky National Park and learn about the rich history of Hrodna (Grodno), Polotsk and Vitebsk, home to the artist Marc Chagall.



Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Full On

These fast paced tours move on quickly from place to place and with lots of early starts and long busy days, they're packed with experiences.

Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Explore Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced Explore Leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Explore Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your Explore Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join trip in Warsaw, Poland

Join trip in Warsaw, Poland's capital city, and check-in to our hotel for the night.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Cross into Belarus; visit Brest Fort and stay at Nezvizh Castle

Today we leave Poland and enter the lesser visited but fascinating country of Belarus. Our first stop is the 19th century fortress at Brest, once the largest in the old Russian Empire. It was an infamous prison during the Soviet trials of the 1930s; this immense fortress went on to achieve lasting fame when it became a symbol of Soviet resistance during the German invasion of Russia in 1941. We then continue to the impressive UNESCO World Heritage Site of Nesvizh Castle, which has been home to the Radswill Family for over 400 years. We will spend the night in this remarkable building.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 Visit Mir Castle; walking tour of Minsk

This morning after time to finish exploring Nesvizh Castle we drive to the beautiful Mir Castle, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Construction began here at the end of the 15th century and it has sections in Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles. We drive to the Belarusian capital of Minsk. Set on the banks of the Svislach River, the city was first settled by the Early East Slavs back in the 9th century AD. Trinity Suburb is one of oldest and most picturesque areas, which is perfect for strolling in, and Victory Square is the most famous part of the city and features a memorial to the fallen heroes of World War II. On arrival we'll enjoy a walking tour of the main highlights of the city.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4 Free morning in Minsk; drive to Vitebsk

This morning is free for you to relax and further explore Minsk. You may choose to visit the Azgur Museum which houses numerous sculptures from the Soviet era or if you're looking to relax then Sendai Japanese Garden is very serene or there's the Minsk Botanical Gardens. This afternoon we drive to the picturesque city of Vitebsk. Straddling the waters of the mighty Dvina River, close to Belarus's border with neighbouring Russia, lies the thriving city of Vitebsk. It's the birthplace of Marc Chagall, one of the most renowned painters of the 20th century, and it's possible to visit his former home here. Other main sights include the Uspensky Cathedral, Three Bayonets Memorial Complex and the City Hall.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5 Drive via historic Polotsk to Berezinsky National Park

You have some free time this morning to discover more of Vitebsk before we depart for Polotsk, a cultural gem that is one of the oldest Slavic towns in the region. Tracing its origins back to the 9th century, the town is home to no fewer than 130 historical and cultural monuments, including the 11th century Cathedral of Saint Sophia. The town provides us with a fascinating lunch stop en route to the forests and marshes of the Berezinsky National Park.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6 Hiking in Berezinsky National Park

Encompassing one of the largest areas of marshland left in Europe, the Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve provides a haven for an incredible diversity of flora and fauna, including more than 780 herbaceous species, 34 species of fish, over 50 species of mammal and an impressive list of over 200 different birds. We have a full day hiking or you may choose to partake in optional canoeing through the park today, enjoying the natural and scenic beauty of one of the most pristine environments in the country.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7 Drive to Lida via Lake Naroch

We drive toward Lida today, but will take a break on the banks of Lake Naroch, the largest lake in Belarus. Covering nearly 80 square kilometres, the lake is home to pike, perch, eel and tench and its picturesque landscapes provide us with an ideal lunch stop before continuing the rest of the way to Lida. The city has a long history and it previously had a very large Jewish population, but they suffered badly during World War I and II and the Soviet occupation that followed, so their numbers diminished drastically.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Visit to the Augustow Canal; walking tour of Hrodna

Our first stop today is to view the restored eastern section of the 19th century Augustow Canal on our way to Hrodna. Home to one of the largest Catholic populations in the country, Hrodna is filled with a wonderful collection of Medieval and Baroque architecture, including the impressive Cathedral of Saint Francis Xavier and the unique Church of Saints Boris and Gleb; the only surviving example of Black Ruthenian architecture left in the area. We take a walking tour of the city on arrival this afternoon.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9 Drive through the Knyszynska Forest to Bialystok, Poland

Today we depart Belarus and head back over the border to Bialystok in Poland. Immigration formalities at the border may take around an hour to complete, after which we continue our journey travelling through the charming villages of the Knyszynska Forest and stop in the small community of Kruszyniany to visit its unique wooden mosque. The mosque is still used today by the small Tartar population of the region. We drive on to north-eastern town of Bialystok on the banks of the Biala River. It's the largest city in the region and it lies at the heart of Belarusian culture in Poland and was a recent finalist for European Capital of Culture. Home to a number of museums and parks, the city also boasts one of the oldest puppet theatres in the country.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10 Trip ends at Warsaw airport

We leave Bialystok today and drive three hour to Warsaw airport where our trip ends.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Included Activities

This trip is designed to acquaint you with Belarus's highlights and to give you the opportunity to get to know this fascinating lesser known country better. There's so much to see and do during your time in Belarus and there's a lot of ground to cover, so please be prepared for the busy nature of this enthralling holiday.

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 9 breakfasts, 0 lunches,2 dinners included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

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.

Poland

Lunch £: 08.00

Dinner £: 18.00 - 22.00

Belarus

Lunch £: 6.00

Dinner £: 11.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Poland

Bottle of Beer £: 1.50 - 3.00

Water £: 0.80

Belarus

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00 - 4.00

Water £: 0.40

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Minsk - Minsk Centrel Library €5.00
Vitebsk - Chagal Art Gallery €1.00 for 1 hour
Berezinsky National Park - Museum of Nature €12.00

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely 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 please allow £30.00 for tipping on this trip.

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.

Foreign Exchange

Poland

ATM Availability: Available in all major cities

Credit Card Acceptance: Credit cards are widely accepted in all major cities

Travellers Cheques: Easily exchanged

Local Currency: Polish Zloty

Recommended Currency for Exchange: British Pounds Sterling, US Dollars and Euros are all accepted at exchange offices and banks

Where to Exchange: Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival

Belarus

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.

Local Currency: Ruble

Recommended Currency for Exchange: USD or Euro

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

Joining your Trip

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 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 on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. 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, 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 please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

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.

Important Information

Travel 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. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

EXPLORE!
The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Travel Aware

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 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety
We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination.

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.

Visa Information

Poland: Visas not required by citizens of the UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

Belarus: Entry visas are required for UK citizens and need to be applied for in advance. A tourist voucher is required as part of your application and Explore will request this on your behalf. This is received and sent to you from 4- 6 weeks before departure. You should ensure that your passport has at least six months' validity and two unused pages. All other nationalities should consult their relevant Embassy prior to departure for visa requirements. Please note that Belarus Immigration Authority requires you to have medical insurance which is recognised by the government. You have the option to purchase such medical insurance at the border for 20 Zloty (approximately 5 Pounds) for a week.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying 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.

Vaccinations & Protection

Poland

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, polio and hepatitis A. Tickborne encephalitis is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Europe, at specific times of the year. 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 http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Belarus

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Rabies, Tetanus, Tick-borne encephalitis, Tuberculosis and Typhoid 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 http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

Poland

Poland has a temperate, changeable climate. September and October are cooler and gradually become damper until late November when temperatures fall below freezing with snowfall, particularly in mountainous areas. Cold temperatures last through to March, but are tolerable. Snow can lie for up to three months in the mountains.

Belarus

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.

Clothing

We recommend taking lightweight clothes for during the day plus some warmer clothes for colder nights. Take a lightweight rain jacket and an umbrella. Ladies should take a headscarf, which may be required for entering some churches.

Equipment

Please carry a mosquito repellant with you for walk in the National Park.

Footwear

We recommend bringing comfortable shoes and sandals for relaxing and walking shoes for the walking tours and hiking.

Luggage: On Tour

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

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Poland

Population: 38,186,860

Size of Country: 312,685 sq km

Major Language: Polish

Religion: Roman Catholic

Time Difference to GMT: +1

Belarus

Population: 9,503,807

Size of Country: 207,595 sq km

Major Language: Belarusian

Religion: Orthodox

Time Difference to GMT: +3

Electric Supply & Plugs

Poland

2 Pin Round

Belarus

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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