

Castles, Fortresses, Towers



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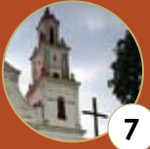
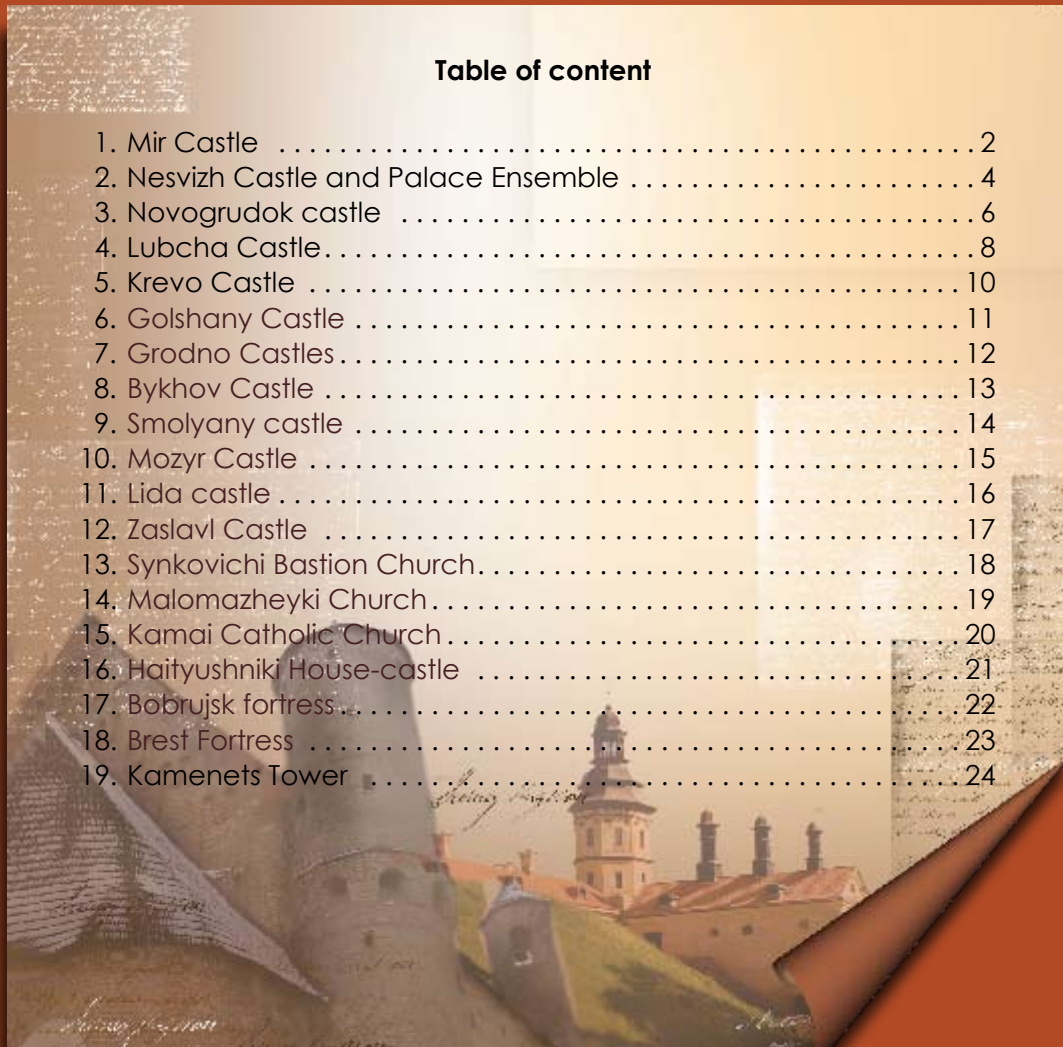


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travelers!

Are you looking for medieval mysteries and unforgettable impressions, exciting trips and new discoveries? Welcome to Belarus! It is often called “the country of castles”. The first stone fortresses appeared here in the XIIIth century! The tower of Kamenets rising on the western border of Belarus has been an amazing example of the beauty and grace for more than 7 centuries. Mir and Nesvizh castles included into the UNESCO World Heritage list are stunning and unique constructions. Brest fortress walls remember lots of historic events – tragic as well as fascinating.

In this edition we present the most interesting objects of the defense architecture of Belarus. However there are far more of them than this brochure can include. Belarus is a wonderful and peculiar country that managed to preserve its unique aura. Take a look at the magnificent architectural masterpieces, created by the talented architects!

**National Tourism Agency of
the Republic of Belarus**





Grodno region,
Karelichi district,
Mir,
Minsk - 100 km,
Grodno - 197 km



Like a bewildering mirage lost in time Mir Castle lures tourists. Five similar but not identical towers create its exceptional silhouette. The towers are decorated with the myriad of niches and moldings. This was a traditional feature of the XVIth century architecture. However Mir Castle is still unique. Neither in Russia, nor in Poland, nor in the Baltic states there are its analogs preserved.

The construction of Roman style Mir Castle was commenced by the Ilyinichi dukes in the beginning of the XVIth century. The new owners, the Radzivil family added some gothic and Renaissance features to the building in late XVIth century.

History-lovers will appreciate the numerous mysterious legends that wrap Mir castle. According to one of them there is a 35 km long underground tunnel that connects Mir castle and the Radzivils family residence in Nesvizh. Another legend tells that a lamb was immolated during the laying of the castle. This was made to insure the building against destroying. A stone similar to the head of the lamb in its shape can be noticed in one of the walls.

Mir Castle has its own ghosts. In early XXth century two dead soldiers in armour were found under one of the stabs. They say that since that time the moaning and the swords clanking are heard on the New Year's night at the ancient chambers.

Numerous wars damaged the

castle severely. During the war between Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth the castle was stormed by the Russian army and during the Great Northern War (1705) the Swedes blew up one of the towers and set the castle on fire the traces of which can be seen on the ancient brickwork.

The last owners of Mir Castle Sviatopolk-Mirskie dukes restored it. Lots of efforts were made by Michail Sviatopolk-Mirski who was rebuilding the destroyed rooms carefully and patiently. Once this spade bearded man with a sophisticated sense of humor noted jokingly: "There are two wrecks in Mir – the castle and me".

The last tragic page in the history of Mir castle was opened by the World War II. There was a ghetto organized behind the ancient walls where more than 1000 people were killed.

Today the Castle of Mir is a branch of the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus. In 2000 Mir Castle was included into the UNESCO World Heritage List. After the reconstruction, that takes place at the moment, the restaurant and the conference hall will be opened at the castle. Today one of the towers, the gallery and the cellar are open for the tourists. Rise up on the spiral stairs, look out of the narrow loophole, touch the rough walls and you will feel the scent of the days long gone.



On this page (top to bottom):
Mir Castle, called the brightest medieval flower is the most famous castle in Belarus.

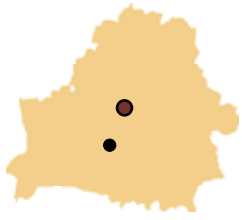
The family vault (1904) of Svyatopolk-Mirskie dukes is hiding in the ancient park.

The bird's eye view.



On this page:
Mir Castle was rebuilt many times becoming similar to a palace. The courtyard view.

The castle admires its reflection in Miryanka river.



Minsk region,
Nesvizh district,
Nesvizh,
Minsk -110 km



The family residence of the uncrowned kings of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is the title that Nesvizh castle bears by right. Erected in XVIIth century it became the residence of the Radzivils, one of the most powerful families in the Eastern Europe.

Nesvizh castle was laid down by Mikolaj "Sierotka" Radzivil in 1584 and the last representatives of this family left it only in 1939 when Nesvizh was merged into the USSR.

Over the course of XVIIth – XIXth centuries the castle was destroyed and rebuilt many times and today it amazes the travelers with its intricate combination of the Renaissance, baroque, gothic and classicism architectural styles. The inside decoration of the castle astonished the guests with its splendor. There were 170 rooms in total. The most fascinating halls, decorated by the priceless arms collections and rare works of art were called the Royal Hall, the Golden Hall, the Marble Hall, the Hunting Hall and the Arms Hall.

The earthwork and bastions as well as the system of the canals and ponds that locked the whole construction on the island made the castle absolutely inaccessible. The remains of the fortifications can be seen today. The chain of the underground paths, stables and vaults, the whole underground town hidden in the earthwork usually provokes special interest of the tourists.

The Radzivils family was

fabulously rich. The coevals told that Stanislaw Radzivil rode his guests in sledge along the road dusted with salt in summer. It has to be noted that the salt was as expensive as the gold at those times. Another myth comes about the mysterious Radzivils' treasure, buried somewhere near the castle in 1812. There are the legendary 12 Apostles – the golden figures of the human height among the other gems. Even now this hoard heats the imagination of numerous treasure-hunters. Who knows, may be it is you, lucky enough to unriddle this secret?

Still, the most popular legend of Nesvizh castle is the story about "the Black Lady". For several centuries the spirit of the poisoned Barbara Radzivil (the wife of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth King Sigizmund II Augustus) appears at night in black dress and wanders along the ancient halls as if warning about the coming tragedies. It is said that she was seen the day before the fire in 2002 when that largest part of the castle was burnt.

Nesvizh Castle was included into the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005. Today the castle is being reconstructed and in 1020 the galleries, the armory and the oldest part of the castle decorated by the unique 300-year old frescos will be available for tourists.



On this page (top to bottom):
The Cathedral Church or Corpus Christi Church is a family vault of the Radzivils. There are about 70 burials there.

Gold-plated figures that decorate the church.
One of Nesvizh Castle towers.



On this page (top to bottom):
Various styles blend harmonically in the architecture of Nesvizh Castle.

Nesvizh townhall, which is considered to be one of the oldest and one of the most fascinating townhalls in Belarus, is the coeval of the castle.



Grodno region,
Novogrudok district,
Novogrudok,
Minsk - 148 km,
Grodno - 190 km



The tragic but rich history of Novogrudok castle constantly attracts those looking for unusual impressions. Erected in the middle of the XIIIth century it gained its final look in the XVth century becoming the main part of the defense system of the ancient town of Novogrudok.

Large bricks and small stones were chosen for the building which made the castle even stronger. Novogrudok fortress was the largest one on the territory of Belarus and had 7 towers. It was situated on the knap of the hill. That is why in favourable weather the soldiers could watch 15-20 km of the surrounding territory and notice the enemy in time.

Could it be the reason why the legendary Mindaugas chose Novogrudok as the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania? According to the numerous sources it was here where he was crowned. Pope Innocent IV gave the crown to Mindaugas, who later united the Lithuanian and Slavs tribes' lands and as the ancient sources tell "had the glory and honour and resisted anyone who was against him".

In 1314 Novogrudok castle walls witnessed the memorable victory of duke David over the army of the knights-crusaders. In 1422 another notable event took place here – 73-year old Jogaila married 16-year old princess Sophia of Halshany. The young Queen soon gave birth to Casimir IV of Poland, founding the Jagellonian royal family.

The fortress suffered lots of trials. In the XVth century it was stormed several times by the Crimea Tatars but all the times they were rolling back from its walls like the waves roll back to the ocean from the shore. But during the war between Russia and The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1654 – 1667) the castle was severely damaged. Later it was demolished by the Swedish army during the Great Northern War (1700 – 1721).

The history of Novogrudok castle inspired the outstanding and the most mysterious polish poet of the belarusian ancestry, Adam Mitskewich. It was here in Novogrudok where he spent his childhood and later, being a famous poet he often wrote about Belarus.

Today there are only picturesque ruins surrounded by the stone setting, the deep ditches where the animals peacefully grass and the cobbled street remained from the once majestic castle. But if you walk along the high earthworks enjoying the dazzling landscapes, the quiet murmur of the grass and the song of the wind you will hear the whisper of the history.



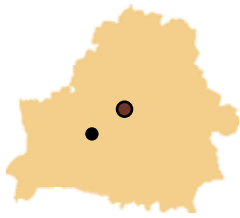
On this page (top to bottom):
These picturesque ruins are the only reminder of once the largest castle in Belarus.

The medieval festival in Novogrudok.
One of the castle walls.



On this page (top to bottom):
The roof of the Cathedral Church in Novogrudok (1395).

More than 500 years ago the legendary wedding of the King of Poland Jogallo and the princess Sophia Halshanskaya was held in Novogrudok Cathedral Church.



Grodno region,
Novogrudok district,
Lubcha,
Minsk - 150 km,
Grodno - 180 km



Standing on the high bank of the mighty river Neman the ancient Lubcha castle is hiding from the onlookers in the splendid rim of the old trees and fragrant motley herbs. The name of the town where the castle is situated apparently come from the word "love" that sounds like "lubov" in the Russian language. There is a legend according to which it was near the river Neman where the Duke Mindaugas met a girl and fell for her at first sight. He named this settlement in honour of his love.

But the story of the castle starts a bit later. It was built by Jan Kishka, who was then the owner of the town, in the second half of the XVth century. Kishka was one of the richest magnates of those times. In 1590 Lubcha was granted Magdeburg Right thanks to his efforts. The town also received its own coat of arms that looked like a silver horseshoe with three golden crosses and two silver salmons on the blue background. Kishka also initiated the construction of the Arian church here and Lubcha turned into the largest centre of the Protestant movement. Initially the castle was all wooden. The only exception was the threatening and unattackable entry tower. Even today its groundwork boggles the imagination. It goes underground for more than 3 m! Stony tower with four circles of loopholes was the main part of the defending system of the town. The citadel was surrounded

by the high earthworks and a 10-meter deep graff.

The new owner of the castle, the duke Mikolaj Radzivil made a major rebuilding of the castle in late XVIIth century. The whole construction was made of stone and three more towers were built. These changes transformed the looks of the coat of arms of the town into the picture of the castle gates and a knight in armor.

In the middle of the XVIIth century the duke Janusz Radzivil, Great Hetman of Lithuania, won several victories over the Ukrainian Cossacks. But it cost him his estate – the castle was conquered and burnt by the army of Hetman Ivan Zolotarenko in 1655 and most of the population was killed.

It was only in the XIXth century when the fortress was reanimated. The last owners of Lubcha were the Baltic noblemen Falts-Feyns who constructed the English neogothic palace with two lobed corner towers near the two towers remained from the old castle

Today the castle is still filled with the middle age spirit and it seems like the clock hands shortened their snail here. Lubcha is home of Love and love has nothing to do with time, its ageless.



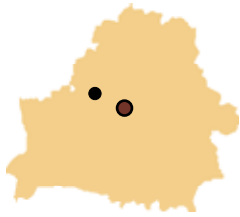
On this page (top to bottom):
Lubcha Castle. The two preserved towers.

The medieval reconstructions are often held in Lubcha.
The castle looks very fetching surrounded by the greenery.

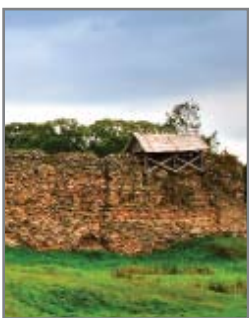


On this page (top to bottom):
The fortress erected on the drifted hill seems to swim along the river Neman.

The entrance gates and the guest house built by the Falts-Feynes in gothic style.



Grodno region,
Smorgon district,
Krevo village,
Minsk - 108 km,
Grodno - 215 km



This castle knew the spin of intrigues, the bloody crimes and the decisions that changed the cavalcade of history and the fates of the peoples. Strong bastion was constructed in 1330-ies by the Grand Duke of Lithuania Algirdas. Built in the Roman style from the huge boulders the castle had only two towers – the Duke's Tower and the Smaller Tower.

On Jogaila's order his uncle Keistutis, who was claiming for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania throne, was strangled in the Duke's Tower. The same fate was prepared as well for Vitautas, the son of the murdered feudal. But as legend tells, Vitautas managed to escape at one last grasp, dressed in the woman's clothes.

However, it was a bit later when the castle became widely known. In 1385 the Union of Krevo that united Poland and Lithuania into the powerful state, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was worked out here.

In early XVIth century the fortress got the treatment from the Crimea Tatars, but was soon restored. In the second half of the same century the Russian duke Andrey Kurbskij escaping from the Ivan Groznyj pursuit found home and shield inside the fortress.

During the Great Northern War (1700-1721) Krevo Castle faced the severe attack. Even more trials were destined for it during the World War I, when the ancient walls appeared to be on the battle line between the Russian

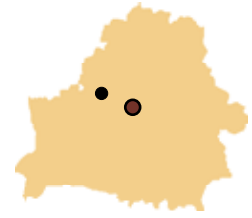
and the German armies...

Today only the picturesque treed wrecks remain us about the once magnificent castle. If you wander around them you may hear the mighty voice of the centuries long gone.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
The legend tells that the Transfiguration Church was built on the place of the former pagan temple.
The road to the church.

Krevo Castle. The fragment of the wall.
The numerous wars turned one of the oldest belarusian castles into the ruins.



Grodno region,
Oshmyany district,
Golshany village,
Minsk - 125 km,
Grodno - 185 km

Mysterious and unfathomed, Golshany Castle is famous for its secrets. Its history begins in the XIIIth century, when some person called Golsha built a wooden bastion and named himself as the duke Golshanski. Later on many representers of this family were pretending for the throne but the history knows only the 16-year old Sophia Golshanskaya who married 73-year old Polish King Jogaila and gave birth to the crowned prince Kazimir. In early XVIIth century the

new owner of Golshany Pavel Sapeha, the representative of one of the most powerful families of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania built here the splendid residential palace which was called by his contemporaries "the Lithuanian flower" for its elegance and inimitable beauty.

Golshany is well-know for its fascinating story about the Belaya Panna. They say that during the erection of the monastery a girl was immured alive into one of the walls to prevent the walls from destruction. The building really seems to stand firm but the soul of the poor girl can't find the rest, she wanders around at night and scares the travelers.

Another legend tells about the princess cursed by the peasants. They say that the woman imposed large taxes on the locals to build her castle. Once she started to spin and the spinning wheel just wouldn't stop. Noone could help her free her from this involuntary job, neither the doctor, nor the priest. The old sorceress advised that the prayer of the poor girl could help the princess but in return she had to make peace with the peasants.

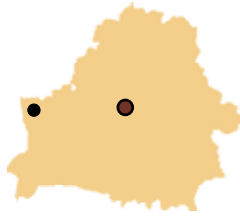
Great Northern War (1700 – 1721) turned one of the most beautiful Belarusian castles into the romantic ruins. But it is the patina that makes the old thing even pricier. And this patina, the mysterious breathing of the history is kept well in Golshany...



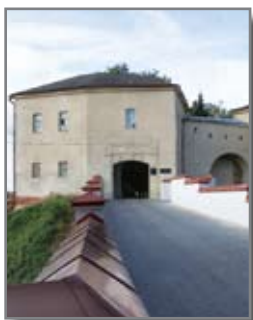
On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
John the Baptist Church. According to the legend the White Lady is most often seen here.

"The Black Castel of Golshany" was once chanted by the famous belarusian writer Vladimir Korotkevich.

Even now the ruins of the Lithuanian flower have a dazzling look. The only tower remained intact.



Grodno region,
Grodno,
Minsk - 280 km



There are two castles that remained intact in the annals of Grodno – the Old Castle and the New Castle.

The Old Castle was constructed in 1398 by the Duke Vytautas as the defense from the crusaders. Built on the cuspate bank of the river Neman from the large stone and bricks, decorated by the five towers the castle was almost unattackable for the adversaries. It was here, where Vytautas headed off to the famous Grunvald battle in 1410.

In 1576 Stephan Batory occupied the throne of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and made the castle his own residence. On his order the bastion was rebuilt and turned into the elegant Renaissance castle.

The next centuries' wars inflicted serious damage to the castle, which fell to desolation and lost its defensive importance. That is why in 1737-1740 on the order of the King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania Augustus III next to the old castle a new palace was laid down, which later got the name "the New Castle". The gorgeous Baroque building looked a lot like the Dresden Gallery, Zwinger.

The New Castle was a place where the legendary "silent" meeting of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Sejm was held in 1793. Under the pressure of the Russian ambassadors the senators had to give the silent assent to the division of their country

between Russian, Austria and Prussia.

Today Grodno strongholds keep the history and the culture of Belarus like the rigorous wardens. The New Castle is home to the Karsky Regional Library, and the Historical-Archeological Museum is situated in the Old Castle. The majestic architecture of both castles elates thousands of tourists.

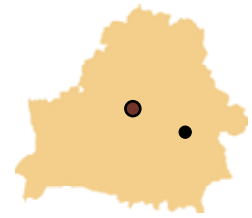


On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
The Old Castle of Grodno was built on the place of the Old Russian fortifications of the XII century.

The Holy Cross Finding Cathedral and the Bernardines monastery have the unique locked monastery courtyard.

The Old Castle walls are about 300 m long and 3 m thick.

The New Castle was famous for its posh interior. The Senator and the Circle Halls stood out for their rich decoration in molding and carving.



Mogilyov region,
Bykhov district,
Bykhov,
Minsk - 222 km,
Mogilyov - 47km

The ancient Bykhov was once known all around Europe. In this town in XVI–XVIII centuries the excellent professionals founded guns, cannon balls, bullets and other things that were the infinite part of the medieval life.

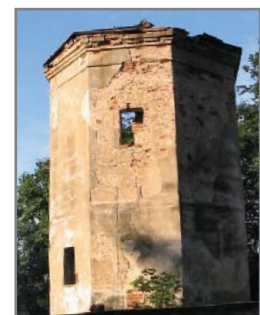
Bykhov, a vivid example of the walled-town, was first referred to in the chronicles of the XIVth century. After having changed several owners in 1542 the town was passed to the powerful magnates Khodkevichi who started to construct the stone

fortifications. The building was accomplished by Lev Sapieha in XVIIth century. The ideas of the medieval architects resulted in the inimitable and graceful palace-castle ensemble with the features of Baroque and Renaissance and a splendid arcade-like gallery. It is interesting that in the XVII–XVIIIth centuries there were only two stone buildings in the town which were the castle itself and the synagogue.

The high Dnieper bank on the one side and the huge 800-meter earthwork with bastions and ditches on the other represented the solid defensive system of the town. That is why Bykhov was given the name "the unattackable citadel". The castle was rebuilt many times but it was always separated from the town and its fortifications by the ditch and the drawing bridge.

The fortress endured lots of devastating wars. In 1590 the Cossacks of the Don River Hetman Matyusha invaded the castle. And during the Great Northern War the allied army of the King Augustus II and Peter I invested the town twice and managed to occupy it at last.

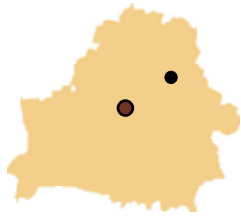
Today Bykhov is a town where the time goes slowly and the mysterious ancient spirit fills the air.



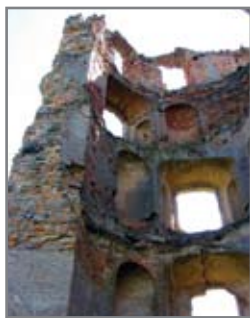
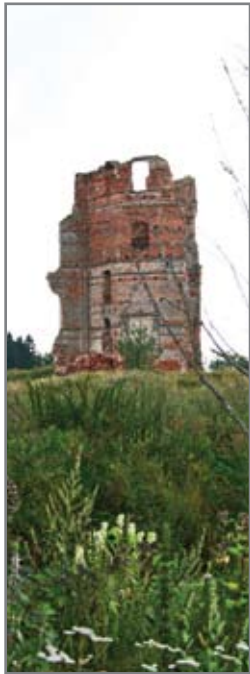
On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
Bykhov Castle was well-known for its luxury and splendour.

Bykhov bastion town harbored the large part of the magnate's army.

The castle was defended by the huge 800-m earthworks with bastions and mighty towers. The remains of Bykhov Castle fortifications.



Vitebsk region,
Orsha district,
Smolyany,
Minsk - 207 km,
Vitebsk - 103 km



The ruins of the Smolyany castle won't leave anyone unimpressed. They lift amidst the river meadows like the monument to the centuries long gone. The small wallows are the reminders about the system of the pond that were once surrounding the fortification and defending it from the enemies.

Erected in XVII on the order of the duke Semyon Sangushko-Kovel'skiy, the castle was rectangular on the plan, decorated by the square corner towers and the large entry gates. The walls were 1,2-1,7 m thick and the highest tower defending the entrance into the fortification consisted of 5 levels.

The castle combined the features of the western-European architecture and the belarusian traditional architecture which made him looking unique. The influence of the Dutch style can be noticed in the decoration of the windows and the traditional architecture shows up in the choice of the materials. The ancient builders used the pricey brick as well as the simple stone which made the construction cheaper. The decoration of the castle included the posh door and window frames, expensive moldings and splendid fireplaces. It is known that in the later days of his life the duke Sangushko asked to paint the rooms with the religious pictures, mostly including the themes of death and oblivion. All the premises of the castle were white-washed and the castle was

often called "The White Kovel".

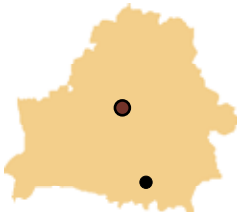
During the Great Northern War (1700-1721) the fortress was bombed on the order of Peter I who didn't want it to fall to the Swedes. But the final destruction of the White Kovel came in the middle of the XIXth century when the new owner of Smolyany Semenov, the senator, sold the castle for the bricks.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
Five-cant tower ruins is the only part of Smolyany Castle remained intact.

Some decorations of the castle like the moulded cartouche and window aperture adornments still can be noticed.

The remains of the circle stairs.
The reconstruction of Smolyany Castle.



Gomel region,
Mozyr district,
Mozyr,
Minsk - 335 km,
Gomel - 130 km

The fortification made of stone appeared on the place of the wooden stronghold in Mozyr in the XVth century. There is a document that says that in 1519 the Grand Duke Sigismund I gave "Mozyr castle as the outpost to Albrecht Hashtold for 1500 kops of roubles".

The castle looked really impressively for those times. Behind its walls defended by 3 towers there were the feudal's palace the included the living rooms and the premises, the Holy

Savior church and the well. The town possessed the Magdeburg right and the document is still kept at the National Belarusian Historical Archive. In 1576 the fortress was rebuilt, its territory expanded including two more towers – The Ptich one and the tower over the old marketplace.

Mozyr fortress was devastated by the Tatars three times in the XV-XVIIth centuries, the severe riot of the disobedient magnate Glinsky took place here and in 1535 the fortification was destroyed by the army of Vassily IV. But the shattering blow was experienced by Mozyr castle in January 1649 from the Vilno Duke Janusz Radzivill, who occupied the town and set it on fire. The citadel was never restored...

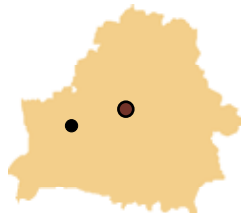
Today Mozyr castle is a unique site of the recreated ancient town. Erected on the Castle hill it is the small copy of the real medieval town. You can listen here to the Middle Age music, buy original souvenirs and view the expositions in the towers.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
The reconstructed Mozyr Castle is a mini-replica of the original one.

The fortress earthworks are the remains of the ancient fortifications.

The children are most attracted by the wooden towers with the loopholes.
You are welcome to spend your spare time in the arbors.



Grodno region,
Lida district,
Lida,
Minsk -170km,
Grodno - 111 km



Lida castle is one of the oldest castles in Belarus. In 1323 the Grand Duke Gediminas founded the castle on the confluence of the rivers Lideya and Kamenka, surrounded by wild forests. The fortification was aimed to defend the land from the knights-crusaders, settled at the Baltic shore. The walls made of large stones were unbelievably thick (3m)! The wide and deep ditch became the impenetrable obstacle for the enemies.

The story of the unmerciful betrayal bound with this castle strikes imagination. They say that Dmitry Karibut, the King Jogaila's brother, escaped from the fortress besieged by the crusaders and ordered to keep the bastion by all manner of means. All the defenders of the bastion were killed and their spirits still can't find rest wandering around the ancient halls...

The curious fact about the town of Lida is that since 1396 Tokhtamysh, the direct descendant of Genghis Khan's dwelled here. After having lost the war to Temüjin he escaped to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania counting on the support of the Duke Vytautas in his battle for the Golden Horde throne.

Lida bastion lost its defending importance after several wars that rolled around the territory of Belarus in the XVI – XVIII centuries. In the XIXth century the pushing moneymakers started to dismantle the castle and sell the stones.

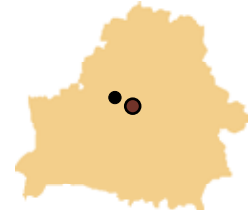
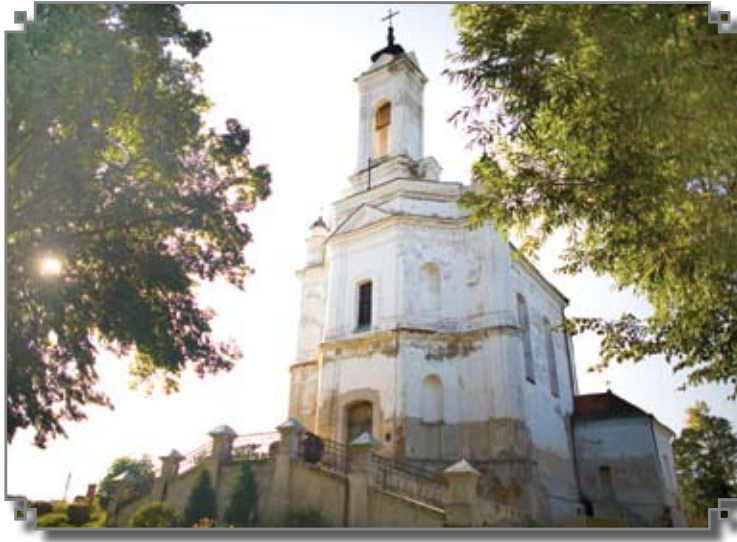
Today the ancient fort is reconstructed and there is a natural history museum in one of the towers. Don't miss the chance to get acquainted with this magnificent medieval architecture monument and have a walk around the large galleries and narrow spiral stairs.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
The prototype for Lida Castle was the knight's "castello" – a special rectangular castle that could harbor the whole garrison.

It is easy to believe in ghosts here in the vague candlelight.
The Lida Castle tower remained intact.

Built from the large stones Lida Castle could endure any attack.



Minsk region,
Minsk district,
Zaslavl,
Minsk - 27 km

Do you want to delve into two various historical periods at once? You are welcome to try if you come to the ancient town of Zaslavl, known for its castles erected in different epochs and bound with the names of the legendary persons.

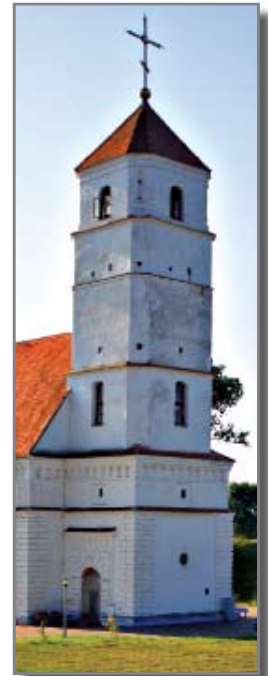
In 985 the future baptizer of Russia Duke Vladimir found the wooden fortress. By that time he had already forced Polotsk princess Rogneda to marry him. The young woman had never forgiven him his violent

murdering of her parents and brothers. According to the "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" epic poem of the XIIth century, one night Rogneda decided to kill the spouse but he awoke at the moment when she was standing beside him with the knife in her hand. Vladimir was close to another murder but his 5-year old son Izyaslav stopped him saying: "Stop, father! You are not alone here in the room!" the disobedient wife and the small son were exiled to the faraway fortress that received the name of the boy – Izyaslav.

The earthwork is well preserved at the "Small castle" as the site of the X-XIth centuries is called today. In 1988 a monument dedicated to the 1000-year anniversary of the Christianity appeared here.

The earthworks of the other castle (XVIth – XVIIIth centuries) rise nearby. It was found as one of the first bastion fortifications in Belarus by the Duke Hlebovich. A Calvinist church was erected in the centre of the castle and later it was turned into the Michael the Archangel Catholic Church and since 1840 it's become Spaso-Preobrazhenskaya Orthodox Church. 35-meters high 5 level belfry served as a watchtower at the troubled times.

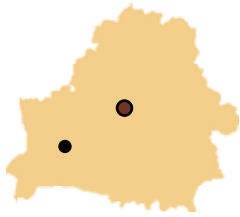
The sad lot was destined for the castles. They fell to desolation and were dismantled by the local for the "construction material". But the church managed to survive and now you are welcome to attend the service there.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
The Birth of the Virgin Mary Catholic Church in Zaslavl was founded in 1774.

The view on the Transfiguration Church.
The Transfiguration Church used to be a Calvinist Church and a Catholic Church.

"Zamechek" hillfort. The legend tells that Rogneda was buried here.



Grodno region,
Zel'va district,
Synkovichi village,
Minsk - 210 km,
Grodno - 130 km



The devastating wars often rolled across the territory of Belarus and people often found shelter at the churches-fortresses in such troubled times. Like a gem among the masterpieces of the ancient architecture shines the Michael the Archangel Synkovichi Church.

The historians argue upon the exact date when it was built. Some of the name the date 1470, the others are persuaded that the church wasn't constructed until the late XVth – early XVIIth c. There are no direct indications on the date of erection and the name of the founder so there are legends that may help.

According to one of the legends the church was laid down by the Duke Vytautas in gratitude for his salvation. After Algirdas died in 1377, the battle for the throne commenced in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. On the one hand there was Jogaila, the son of Algirdas who was pretending for the throne and on the other hand the brother of the deceased Duke Kejstutis and the nephew Vytautas also had similar rights. Once Jogaila noosed his uncle and cousin into the castle. Kejstutis was killed disloyally and Vytautas managed to escape. Some sources say that that the latter spent several months in Synkovivhi preparing for another battle.

One can't stop admiring Synkovichi Church. The western European gothic and Byzantine style mingle harmonically in its decoration; delicate esthetics

of the God's home coexists with the power of the ancient castle. There was a circle of the loopholes on the cornice of the building and the walls were 1,5 m thick. There is a crypt under each of the corner towers and under the floor.

During its long history the church had belonged to the Orthodox as well as the Catholics and Uniates. Today this is an acting church and everyone is welcome to attend the service.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
The main facade of Synkovichi Castle. Two front towers are eight-sided and the other two are circular.

The decoration of the Gates.
The Archangel Michael Church looks like a small fortress from afar.

The backward façade of the castle.



Grodno region,
Shchuchin district,
Murovanka village,
Minsk - 216 km,
Grodno - 65 km

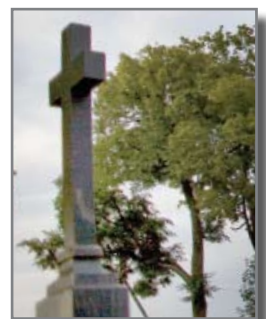
Malomazheyki Church strikes the visitors with elation and surprise. Lost amidst the humble wooden buildings it dominates the village like the lovely messenger of the past. The church is often called Murovanka. This name comes from the name of the village where it is situated. Murovanka successfully combines the sacred and defensive functions. The locals found shelter there during unstable times.

It is hard to tell the exact date when Murovanka was built. Apparently it was laid down in the

beginning of the XVIIth century. The gothic and the Renaissance style intermingle intricately in the decoration of the church. Some historians consider that the architects of Murovanka were inspired by the eastern minarets. The building is genuinely unusual and in 1706 the King Charles XII ordered to attack it by fire, scared of its exotic looks. Afterwards the church went to desolation and it was only in 1882 when it was restored.

Four corner towers with spiral stairs leading to the loophole make Murovanka look harsh and militantly in the XIXth century. Two-meter thick walls were a reliable protection for those hiding inside. The iron door, closing in dangerous moments with the metal trellis didn't give the chance for the enemy to rush inside.

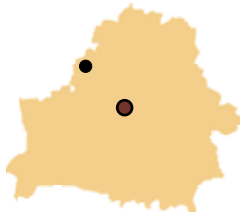
Unfortunately the repair works of 1871 – 1872 changed the look of Murovanka, making the front towers higher, turning them into bell-towers; the spiral stairs disappeared and several loopholes were walled up. Since 1990 the church has been acting again and the museum is intended to be open on the attic in the nearest future.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
Murovanka is one of the oldest belarusian churches.

The whitewashed decorative niches make the construction look airy.
The western entrance used to be closed by the iron door and the defensive bar.

The cross by the entrance.



Vitebsk region,
Postavy district,
Kamai village,
Minsk - 175 km,
Vitebsk - 259 km



John the Forerunner Catholic Church is one of the rare churches in Belarus that were never closed. This fact is incredible taking into account the age of the church which is more than 400 years!

The construction of the church was accomplished in 1606. The History didn't preserve the name of the architect but it is known that the church-fortress was laid down on the order of the Khotinsk battle with the Turkish (1621) Jan Rudomina Dusyatski.

The building has a really stern look – the decoration includes just four arch vaults in the upper part of the façade. Two 16 m high towers with the diameter of 5 m were the main parts of the defensive system of the church. Numerous gunports situated on the various levels allowed sweeping the whole surrounding territory with fire.

In the mid XVII century the son of the founder of the church Petr Rudomina ordered to build the cannon balls from the Swedish cannons into the walls as the reminder about the wars that often Kamai so often.

Opposite the Kamai Church there is a stone cross that is 150-200 years older than the church itself. The old-timers tell that the Soviet authorities intended to demolish the cross but didn't manage to pull it off the ground and all those trying to do this died in a year.

Now tourists are welcome to the church where they can attend the service as well as to listen to one of the oldest Belarusian organs.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
Kamai Church endured lots of wars and sieges during its long history.

John the Baptist Catholic Church. The inside view. The Altar.

The bell cast in honour of the 400-year anniversary of the foundation of the church.
The stone cross that is much older than the church.



Grodno region,
Voronovo district,
Haiytyushniki village,
Minsk - 195 km,
Grodno - 154 km

This fascinating house resembling a small castle is situated not far from the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. It is the only monument of such type of architecture on the territory of Belarus that remained intact.

House-castle was constructed in 1613 on the project of the Dutch expat engineer Petr Nonhart who was in charge of Vilno royal buildings. What is curious about the house is that it was actually home to the engineer himself. The

proverb "the cobblers wife is the worst shod" wasn't about that man, as he had an absolutely serious approach towards the construction of its own home.

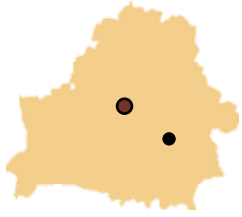
The size of the house is rather humble – 15x34 meters. It is a two-storied building but the central part that includes the rectangular tower has three stories. Despite the modest size the building could maintain defense thanks to the thick walls (1,5 m), four round towers in the corners, earthworks and ditch filled with water. To ensure the autonomous water supply there was a well in the cellar. A small military garrison was lodged on the ground floor and the owner was dwelling on the upper level. Fantastic it is but during the Great Northern War the house-castle endured the siege of the Swedish army.

After Nonhart's death in 1633 the castle was handed down to Shretter who painted the walls of the house with the pictures of the hunts. Later on the house was owned by Chreptovichi, Sakkeny, Rimshi. Once Mariya Vereshchaka, the beloved lady of Adam Mitskevich stayed here and the famous poet was a frequent guest here, coming to Haiytyushniki from Vilno.

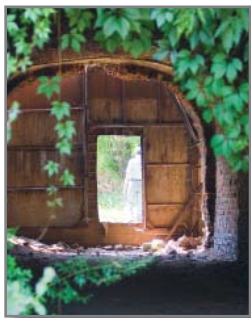


On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
The fortress-house is well-preserved.
The fortress was once surrounded by the ditches and now there flowers all around.

The owners' coat of arms.
The fortress-house looks like a real castle from afar.



Mogilev region,
Bobrujsk district,
Bobrujsk.
Minsk - 145 km,
Mogilev - 115 km



Bobrujsk fortress is one of the youngest in Belarus but it is rich in its history. The construction of the largest citadel in the Eastern Europe lasted 30 years and. It was extremely important for the Russian Empire as the hard-hitting fortification on the Belarusian lands that were merged in the Empire.

The project was worked out by the talented military engineer major-general Karl Opperman. By the time the Russian-French war of 1812 commenced the banks were raised, the ditches and redoubts were prepared, five bastions, cantonment buildings, the hospital and the storehouses were built. The historians say that the three-day rest under the defense of the half-constructed fortress allowed the soldiers of the Second Russian army under the commandment of Bagration to conjoin the First army in time which predetermined the result of the legendary battle of Borodino.

The construction was accomplished in the peacetime, in 1836. Its territory increased substantially and 17 new towers and bastions appeared there. There is a legend that tells that the famous napoleon's treasures are hidden somewhere in the huge labyrinth of the underground citadel pathways.

The tower also has some connections to the Decembrist revolt. In 1823 the revolutionary noblemen were preparing to arrest here the Emperor Alexander I and to proclaim the

new constitution. However the plan wasn't a success as the Emperor didn't appear at the fortress.

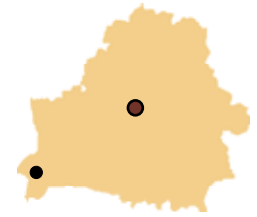
The ancient citadel became infamous during World War II when 80 thousand of soldiers and peaceful population were killed behind its mighty walls at the german concentration camp.

Several buildings of the fortress are well-preserved and attract lots of historians and tourists.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
The ruins of Bobruisk fortress – caponier.

Saint George Church (1905-1907).
The tunnel in the defensive earthwork.
The city museum exposition.



Brest region,
Brest,
Minsk - 350 km

Brest Fortress situated on the confluence of the rivers Western Bug and Mukhavets is well-known all over the world. To create this massive construction the Russian government of the XIXth century made an unprecedented step – they laid flat Berestye, one of the oldest and one of the most beautiful towns of the Eastern Europe.

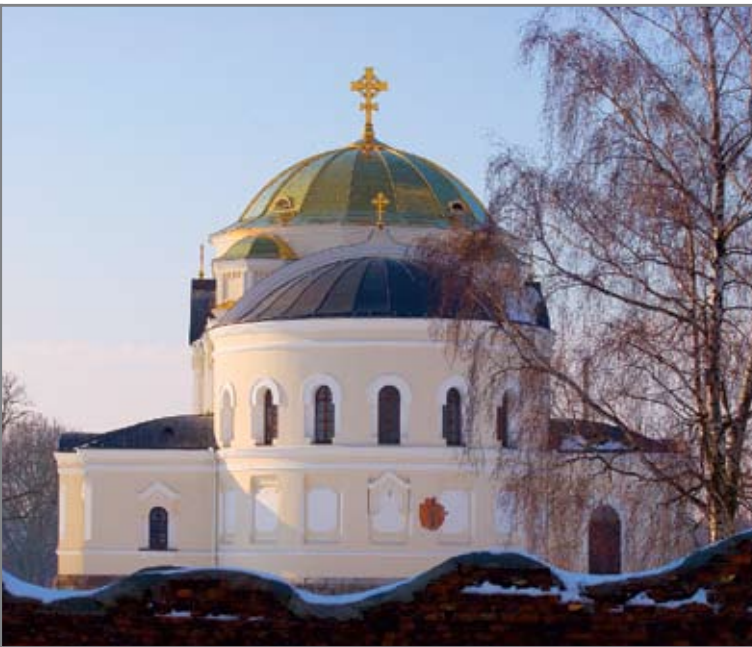
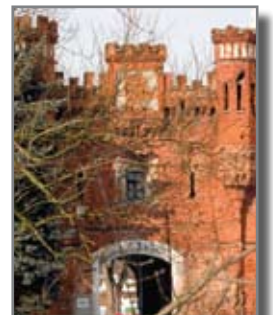
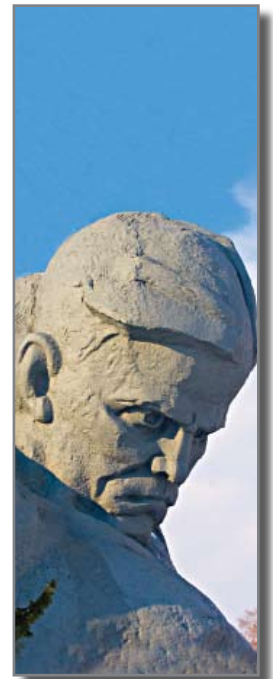
Two rivers estuary, by-pass canal and numerous fortresses made the citadel unattackable. The length of the vallum is close

to fantastic and makes up 1800 m.

Brest Fortress is a real architectural masterpiece famous for its history. In 1918 the USSR government signed here the separate peace with the Germans and on June 22, 1941 the citadel was the first to face an attack of the german-fascist army. That was how the Great Patriotic War began.

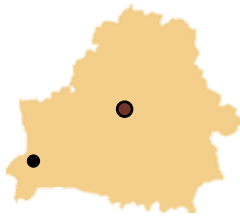
The ancient fortress was enduring the enemy's push for 28 days. The Soviet military post of 4000 soldiers was defending it in total isolation without food and water supplies. Lots of bullet and shell traces can be seen at the Holmsk gates and one of the forts wasn't stormed despite all the enemy's attacks. After the long and ineffectual gunfire the defendants of the fort were stifled by gas.

In the peacetime the Brest bastion was awarded a title Hero-Fortress, and later a memorial complex was solemnly opened on its territory. Today the Museum of the Brest Fortress Defense offers the visitors to have a look at the shell splinters, arms and even read the letters of those who were heroically defending their Motherland...



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
Brest Fortress entrance.
The Saint Nicholas Church (former St.Nicholas garrison Church) is built on the territory of the fortress.

The main sculpture of the "Brest Fortress Hero" memorial.
Holmskie gates.



Brest region,
Kamenets district,
Kamenets,
Minsk - 340 km,
Brest - 37 km



One of the oldest monuments of the defensive architecture in Belarus is the Kamenets Tower, which is often called the Kamenets pillar or Belaya Vezha. Simple but infallible lines and forms of this mighty construction attract tourists interested in ancientry. The Tower is situated on the outskirts of Belovezhskaya Pushcha, the largest relict wood on the territory of the Eastern Europe.

Belaya Vezha was erected in the second half of the XIIIth century. At those times knight-crusaders and Tatar-Mongols often attacked the Slavs' lands. The Ipatiev Chronicle tells that the bastion was laid on by the Volyn' duke Vladimir Vasilkovich. The similar fortifications defended many medieval Belarusian cities such as Brest, Vitebsk, Hrodna, Novogrudok, but Belaya Vezha is the only one that remained intact.

Built from the red brick the tower has always been red. It received the name "Belaya" (White) Vezha thanks to the good graces of the local historians of the XIXth century who were sure that at those times the fortifications were white-washed. Kaments fortification is a donjon tower, a high and many-level construction. The donjons were traditionally constructed in the centre of the fortress-sites and surrounded by the earthworks, walls and graffs with water. It was a good place for the defenders to hide and fight even after the

town was conquered by the enemy. Belaya Vezha is 30 m high and the walls, crowned by the square scallops are 2,5 m thick.

Built in the tradition of the Roman style the tower astonishes with its formidable silhouette. Today the tower is home to the Brest Regional Natural History Museum.



On this page (top to bottom, left to right):
Kamenets tower has been rising above the outskirts of Belovezhskaya Pushcha for more than 7 centuries.
Medieval knight's armour.

Kamenets tower model exposed in the museum situated in the tower itself.
The upper circle of the tower is decorated by the traditional Slavic ornament.

On the next page:
The Belarusian castles on the etching of Napoleon Orda.



Ministry for Sports and Tourism
of the Republic of Belarus



National Tourism Agency
of the Republic of Belarus

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