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**AGRITOURISM OF OSIPOVICH I DISTRICT AS ONE OF THE WAYS OF
ATTRACTING OF FOREIGN TOURISTS**

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Theoretical Part	
1.1 The main principles of agritourism.....	5
1.2 The development of agritourism in the Republic of Belarus.....	8
2. Practical Part	
2.1 Agritourism of Osipovichi district.....	11
2.2 The homesteads of Osipovichi district.....	13
Conclusion.....	18
Bibliography.....	20
Appendix A	21
Appendix B.....	23

Introduction

Agritourism is a kind of activity which is organized in the rural area, where tourists are offered a wide range of activities that include accommodation, entertainment, recreation and educational activities. It is one of the fast developing branches of tourism in Belarus. It supposes the use of Belarusian natural, historical and cultural heritage. Our country has a very substantial potential for the development of agritourism. There are about 20 000 rivers, 10 000 lakes in it. Forests cover over 36% of its territory. Tourists who are looking for beautiful historical and architectural buildings and monuments, untouched nature are going to be surprised by the beauty of Belarusian attractions. The gorgeous scenery and the large range of wildlife, extremely sociable and hospitable people, deep-rooted national holidays and traditions make our country an interesting and distinctive tourist destination.

Belarus draws special attention to the development of agritourism. The President's Decree №372 "Measures for developing of agritourism and ecotourism in the Republic of Belarus" aims to create favorable conditions for tourist development.

The fast growing number of homesteads proves the positive tendency in the sphere of agritourism. Today more than 2000 homesteads are available for tourists.

The foreign tourists that visited Belarus in 2003 were asked about their preferences in sightseeing in our country. The survey showed they would like to enjoy nature, to learn more about national traditions, to get acquainted with folklore and communicate with the local people. But they regretted that there wasn't enough information about the Belarusian homesteads in English. Moreover, we have interviewed the owners of Osipovichi district homesteads and have found out that none of them have the description of homesteads in English. That's why we have decided to present the information in the English language and make it available for English-speaking tourists.

These facts explain the choice of our research. The aim of the research is to study the information about the homesteads in Osipovich district, the services they offer and attract tourists by advertising the local homesteads. For this purpose we have decided to design a leaflet of the most visited homesteads in Osipovich district in the English language.

The tasks of the research are:

1. to study the main principles of agritourism;
2. to analyze the development of agritourism in the Republic of Belarus;
3. to study the information about homesteads in Osipovich district;
4. to describe the most visited homesteads in Osipovich district and design a leaflet with the information about them.

The object of the research is the development of agritourism in Osipovich district.

The subject of the research is the homesteads in Osipovich district and the services they offer to visitors.

The hypothesis of the research can be formulated as follows. We suppose that the homesteads in Osipovich district offer a wide range of services and activities which can attract foreign tourists and satisfy their interests.

The methods used in the research are systematization and analysis of the main notions of the research, sampling the information.

The research material was taken from the articles on tourism, the Belarusian agritourism and economy, and from the official statistics of Osipovich Executive Committee. The research results can be used practically by foreign visitors to enjoy the beauty of our district and to get agricultural experience through participating in various activities.

1 Theoretical Part

1.1 The main principles of agritourism

The phenomenon of agritourism has been developing in Europe since the 1960s.

Longman dictionary of contemporary English gives the following definition:

'agritourism' 1. holidays in which visitors stay in country areas on farms or near farms. [7]

Collins English dictionary defines this notion as follows:

'agritourism' 1. tourism in which customers stay in accommodation on working farms and may have the opportunity to help with farm work. [8]

Agritourism is the idea of bringing urban residents to rural areas for leisure travel or for educational purposes as many people have no idea of how their food is produced or the region it comes from. Agritourism also offers people a chance to try such activities as picking fruit, milking cows, collecting honey. Moreover this type of tourism gives an opportunity to meet people with a thorough knowledge of the history and traditions of their region. Agritourism acquaints visitors with the heritage of a particular culture.

The main feature of agritourism is to give tourists individual contact with the countryside and allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of the local people.[1]

Therefore, there are three key elements that distinguish agritourism from other forms of tourism:

- Meeting people's needs for information and participation in food production and processing,
- Fulfilling needs for direct contact with animals, plants and rural environment

- Meeting needs for better understanding farm culture and rural heritage and for experiencing the real life of a rural family and a rural society.

In fact the main difference between mass tourism and agritourism lies in the visitor's needs: agritourism customers, apart from their expectations to be active, informed and mentally engaged, need to have authentic experiences. This type of tourism will get them back to their roots, and will teach them to value agricultural products, rural environment and people who live and work there.

Analysis of the world development of agritourism reveals the following patterns:

1. Legislative support of this branch of tourism increases the number of homesteads, improves the service quality.

2. The creation of associations accelerates agritourism development. The role of associations is decisive in making of preferential legal conditions for rural tourism development.

3. In most countries agritourism is aimed at national market. The exceptions are Austria and Slovenia where about 40% of foreigners spend their holidays in rural areas, as well as in Italy more than 50 % of foreign tourists prefer to visit local villages.

4. Human factor is a basis of agritourism, because a direct contact and communication with the farmers and the locals are the most attractive things in this branch of tourism.

World Tourism Organization has created a universal model of the variety of agritourism activities. [2, p.17] You may see it in the following diagram.

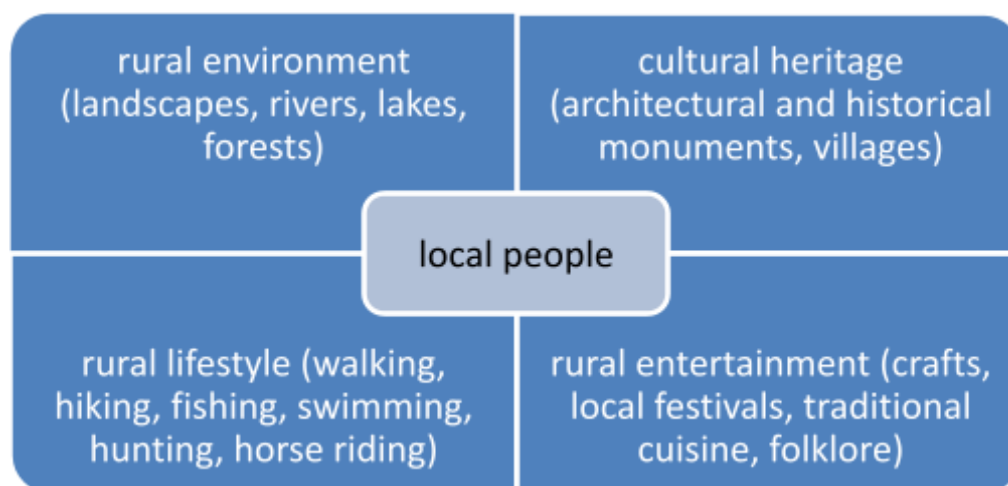


Diagram 1.1- A universal model of the variety of agritourism activities

In general, agritourism activities include accommodation, entertainment, recreation and educational activities. Specific activities are as follows:

- ✓ Providing visitors with accommodation;
- ✓ Offering various activities as participating and enjoying an agricultural experience (fishing, hunting, picking fruit or vegetables and much more);
- ✓ Providing tourists with fun-on-farm activities such as horse-riding, hiking, bird watching, observing wildlife and etc.;
- ✓ Educating people (learning to cook local cuisine, visiting historical and cultural attractions, participating in crafts and arts workshops).

Summing up the information mentioned above, agritourism is the way to immerse tourists into the authentic atmosphere of culture, traditions and history of a country.

1.2 The development of agritourism in the Republic of Belarus

Tourism is one of the priorities of the Belarusian economic and social development. The government takes special care of this industry. The first national tourism development program was adopted in 2004. The program helped to launch the export of tourism services, develop tourism infrastructure in the country, visa support and terms of stay for foreigners in Belarus.

As we have mentioned, agritourism has become increasingly popular in Europe since 1960s. Belarus joined this movement much later. This year agritourism in Belarus celebrates its 15th anniversary.

Our country has a very substantial potential for the development of agritourism. There are three main preconditions for it:

- Natural preconditions include picturesque landscapes of Belarusian upland, numerous lakes, rolling hills, sweet-scented meadows, magnificent valleys along the rivers, and the untouched nature of national parks. There are about 20 000 rivers and 10 000 lakes in Belarus. Forests cover over 36% of its territory; national parks occupy about 7 % of our country. Flora and fauna are extremely varied: 1500 plant species, 28 tree species, more than 60 species of bushes, 73 species of mammals, 280 species of birds, 50 fish species.

- Historical and cultural heritage consists of 17 500 unique monuments (cathedrals and churches, castles and towers, palaces and fortresses, museums and monuments to outstanding people of Belarus), 2 500 of them have got national value.

- It also includes intangible cultural heritage. According to the Convention of protecting intangible heritage adopted by UNESCO in 2003, intangible heritage includes customs, traditions, knowledge, skills and connected with them objects and artifacts that are recognized by people as cultural heritage. These are different festivals, holidays and traditions that are deep-rooted and typical of our nation such as “Kupalle”, “Kalyady”, “Maslenitsa” and many others. They are unique and reflect our culture.

About 216 foreign tourists were interviewed at Minsk airport on their travelling preferences in 2003. The survey shows they would like to enjoy nature (93.7%), learn more about national traditions (43.8%), get acquainted with folklore (37.5%), and communicate with the local people (37.5%). [2, p.44] It proves that our country has all necessary facilities to satisfy foreigners’ interests in agritourism.

There is hardly anybody in Belarusian society who dislikes the idea of agritourism. For residents of villages, it means extra income and an opportunity to improve their living conditions. For local authorities, agritourism is a great chance to develop infrastructure and create new working places. For the Belarusian state, it is an opportunity to develop tourism outside cities in the complete absence of hotels there. [2, p. 58]

Moreover, it is a chance to withdraw contradictions between a city and a village, to have cheap holidays in picturesque places.

The development of agritourism in our country began in 2003, the year Belarusian Public Association “Holidays in a village” was created. The main idea of the organization is to attract people’s attention to this branch of tourism and its popularization.

The state draws special attention to agritourism. The President’s Decree № 371 “The measures of state support of tourism in the Republic of Belarus” and Decree № 372 “ The measures of developing agritourism and ecotourism in the Republic of Belarus” are aimed to create favourable conditions for agritourism development in the country.[5]

Belarus’s agritourism potential consists of natural diversity and beauty, unique historical and cultural heritage. Tourists have an opportunity to enjoy unsophisticated nature, to watch wildlife of our country and plunge into rural life of the Belarusians. The statistics shows that in 2006 there were 34 homesteads in the country, in 2009-876, in 2012-1776, in 2015- 2263. For several years this branch of tourism has become so popular that the number of homesteads has increased, and today more than 2293 homesteads are available for tourists. All of them are absolutely unique. [2, p.43]

The growth of the number of homesteads in Belarus is shown in the following diagram:

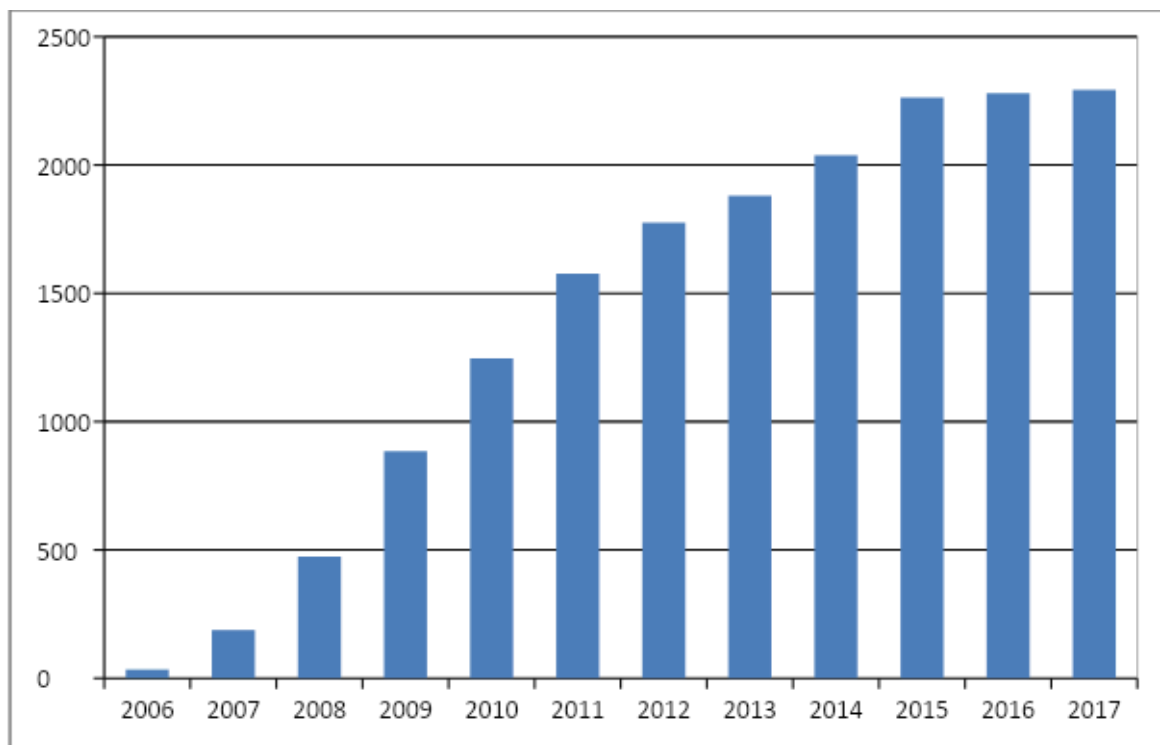


Diagram 1.2- The growth of the number of homesteads in Belarus

In some of homesteads travellers are offered a house with a fireplace, billiards and a sauna; in others, a small room in a house and a basin with the well water outside. Some things remain unchangeable at all times: delicious local food and a lot of entertainment. The entertainment activities are ranged according to their specialization:

- ❖ Active lifestyle activities (fishing, hunting, boating, trips to the local sights);
- ❖ Family activities (walking in the woods, picking berries, making souvenirs);
- ❖ Acquaintance with unique Belarusian traditions and villagers' life.

To sum up, agritourism is one of the most attractive ways to spend holidays in Belarus. Picturesque landscapes, untouched nature, numerous villages, hospitable local people make our country an interesting and attractive destination.

2 Practical Part

2.1 Agritourism in Osipovichi district

Osipovichi district has a great natural, historical and cultural potential for the tourism development. It is situated in the south-west part of Mogilev region. The territory of the district is mostly flat with rolling hills in its western part. Osipovichi district is a very picturesque place with its magnificent forests, green meadows and golden fields. The forests cover 60% of its territory, lakes and ponds – 2%, swamps – 2%. There are about 20 rivers there, including three major rivers – the Berezina, the Svisloch and the Ptich. There is a large water-storage reservoir there (Osipovichi vodohranilishche). Its territory is about 1307 hectares. Moreover, there is a relict oak-grove, the oldest in Europe, where the average age of the trees is 250 years old.

There are 19 wonderful oaks 38 - 42 metres high. Tourists may also visit the ruins of Svisloch castle which has a long and fascinating history.

The best way to learn about culture and history of the district, to breathe fresh air, to taste delicious national cuisine, to feel close to nature is rural tourism. It is one of the priority types of tourism in Osipovichi district. Agritourism helps villages to develop and revive. The local authorities draw a lot of attention to the development of this branch of tourism. According to the official information a working group on the development of agritourism of Osipovichi Executive Committee was established in 2010. The group consists of representatives of the “BelAgroPromBank”, structural subdivisions of the local Executive Committee, travel agencies and homesteads. Its main tasks are:

- to create conditions for the development of agritourism in Osipovichi district;
- to organize competitions for the homestead owners in the district to identify the best one;
- to post information about homesteads on the official website of Osipovichi Executive Committee;
- to promote the idea of agritourism through the local newspaper;
- to organize the annual event “Open Doors Day of Homesteads”.

In the course of the research, we have found that Osipovichi district occupies the leading position in the sphere of agritourism in Mogilev region. Its development in our district started in 2008, when the first agritourism homestead was registered. You may see it in the diagram below:

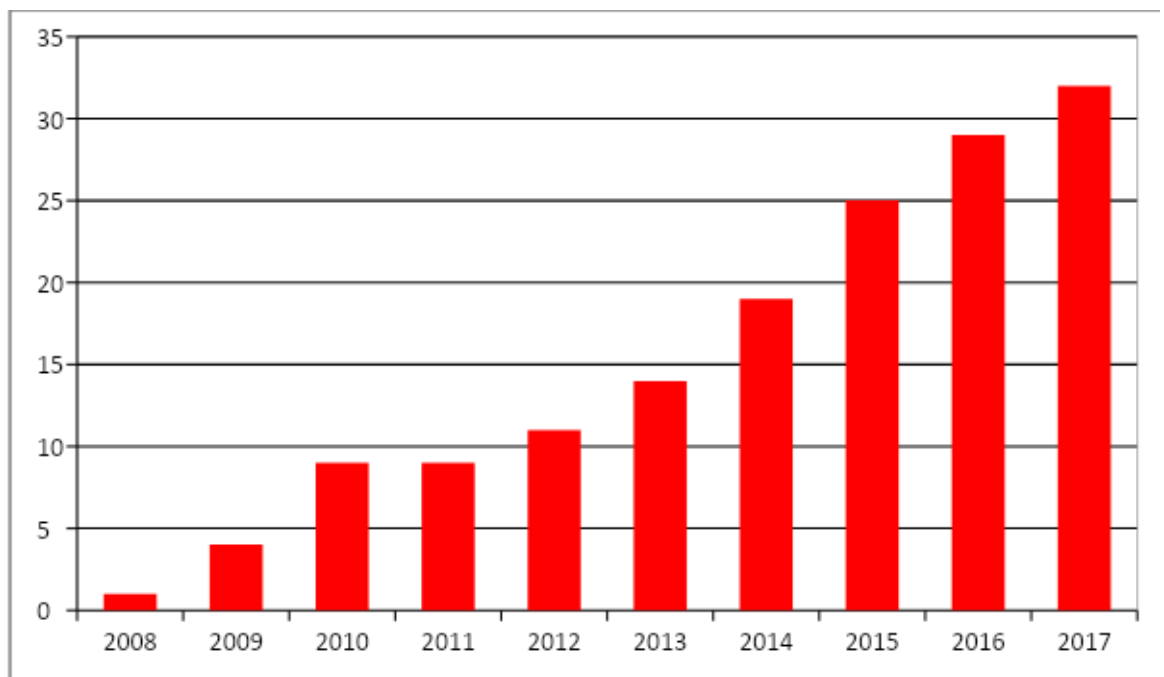


Diagram 2.3-The development of agritourism in Osipovichi district

The diagram shows that from the very start there was only one agritourism homestead in Osipovichi district. But by 2013 the number of registered agritourism estates had risen to 14, and the number is still growing. [4]

Summarizing the above mentioned information we can say that the priority type of tourism in our district is agritourism, as all necessary measures for its development are taken by the local authorities. As the result, the number of homesteads is constantly growing which proves the positive tendency in the sphere of agritourism in Osipovichi district.

2.2 The homesteads in Osipovichi district.

By the beginning of 2018, 32 entities of agritourism have been registered in Osipovichi district. They are situated in 18 villages of Osipovichi district.

It is important to mention that 10 homesteads are in the village of Svisloch, the villages of Smyk, Lapichi, Krasnoe, Tsel have 2 homesteads in each. (Appendix A).

We should say that they include 20 working homesteads and 12 are still being built. In 2017 the functioning homesteads signed 625 contracts and hosted 4331 tourists. It is necessary to mention that 49 of them were foreigners. The following diagram shows the number of tourists and the countries they came from:

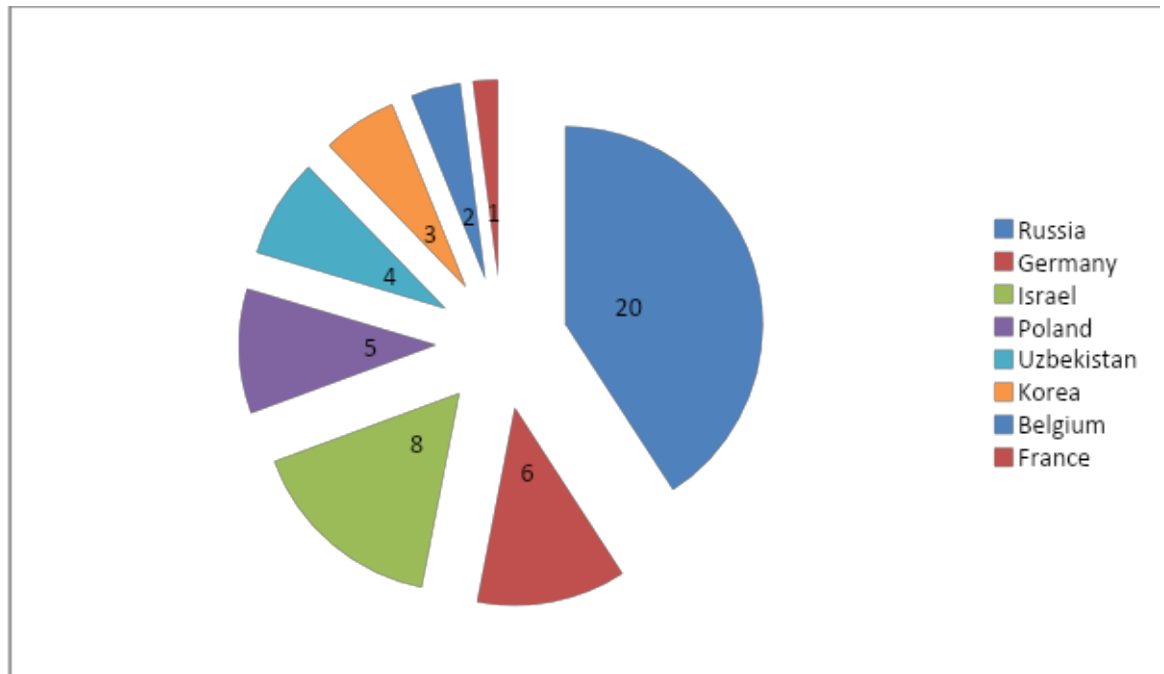


Diagram 2.4- The number of tourists visited Osipovichi district in 2017

The statistics shows that the largest number of tourists came from Russia, and the smallest number – from France, Belgium and Korea. The average length of their stay is 6 days.

According to the official information the most visited homesteads in Osipovichi district are: “Svisloch”, “Lilia”, “Kamenaya Goroka” (vil. Svisloch), “Krasnoe” (vil. Krasnoe), “Gostinoe Podvoriye” (vil. Lapichi), “Na Ptichi” (vil. Daraganovo).

We have studied the information about these homesteads using different sources in order to describe each of them in detail.

Homestead “Krasnoye”

It is situated on the picturesque bank of the river Svisloch, in the village Krasnoye. The homestead is a unique place where the present and the past meet. The village was founded in 1791. It is a restored estate of the landowner Nezabytovskiy. Nowadays it is a perfect place to spend holidays in the countryside.

The homestead consists of two houses:

1. A historical building, with the interior of the 19th century. There is a spacious sitting-room with a fireplace and a library. There you can play the piano, the guitar, board games and even Xbox. There is also a cozy dining-room for 36 people, where guests can enjoy a nice meal sitting by the fireplace which is decorated with the Nezabytovskiy emblem. There is also a special room for those who love playing billiards.

2. A guest house is large and convenient. There are 10 rooms with luxurious furniture, warm floors and all necessary conveniences. It can host 24 adults at time. Children under 5 are free of charge.

The homestead guests will be nicely surprised by its delicious authentic Belarusian and Lithuanian dishes. Moreover, all the vegetables are grown in the homestead kitchen garden.

A great number of activities are offered there:

- walking or a bike riding along many paths in the nearest forest;
- participating in various competitions and games(darts, archery);
- fishing;
- boating, kayaking, travelling on rafts;
- playing intellectual games;
- relaxing in the banya with a Jacuzzi and warm waterbeds.

Children will enjoy their staying in the homestead as there is a well-equipped play room and a playground in the backyard.

Homestead “Gostinoye Podvorie”.

It is situated in a very magnificent place in the village of Lapichi. The homestead is an ideal base for those who seek for privacy and relaxation. As the river Svisloch is rich in fish, tourists are offered such an activity as fishing. Not far from the homestead there are unique pine forests where guests can enjoy walking, berry picking and mushroom hunting.

There are also modern facilities for tourists’ needs in the village: a shop, a bank, a café, the chemist’s.

The homestead offers a comfortable house with all necessary conveniences: a shower, WC, running water, a well-equipped kitchen, a TV and the Internet. Up to 10 people can be accommodated there.

Even fussy eaters will enjoy the best traditional Belarusian dishes cooked in the homestead.

Hospitable and friendly hosts are always glad to meet guests. One of the most exciting activities is excursions to the city of Mogilev, the administrative centre of Mogilev Region and the third largest city in Belarus. It is the best way to learn interesting facts of the region history, to visit the place where the last Russian Emperor and his family lived, to learn mysterious legends about the Romanovs, to visit Mogilev Drama theatre.

Homestead “Svisloch”

The homestead is called “Svisloch” after the name of the nearby village. It is situated in a lovely place where rivers the Svisloch and the Berezina meet.

The best activities to enjoy unique landscapes, the beauty of nature, fresh air and the silence of the countryside are fishing, horse riding, picking berries and mushrooms.

The tourists are invited to live in a comfortable house with modern conveniences. There is a cozy pavilion with all necessary equipment for a picnic. Furthermore, tourists can go to the banya, take a steam bath and cool off in the river Svisloch. There are also special facilities for children to make their holidays unforgettable. Those who are keen on history can visit the 18th century houses in the village and the ruins of Svisloch castle which dates back to the 17th century.

In 2013 the homestead won the competition “The best homestead in Mogilev region” in the nomination “Hospitality”.

Homestead “Na Ptichi”.

“Na Ptichi” is the first registered homestead in Osipovich district. It is located on the bank of the river Ptich, which is considered to be one of the cleanest rivers in Belarus.

The territory of the homestead is about 2000 square meters. There are 2 convenient wooden houses, an orchard, a bee farm and a large vegetable garden. The homestead offers such activities as:

- picking fruit and berries;
- collecting honey;
- working in the garden, learning how to grow vegetables;
- wine tasting;
- bee therapy.

The homestead is situated in the environmentally clean area, where tourists can enjoy fresh air, bird watching, walking in the pine forest which is next to the homestead.

The guests can go to the banya and take contrast shower.

In addition, some tourists can play board games while others can go on excursions to different places of interest in Belarus.

In 2012 the homestead participated in the 15th World Tourist Service Fair “Holidays-2012” in Minsk and got a special certificate in the sphere of agritourism.

Homestead “Kamenaya Gorka”

The homestead is near the village Svisloch with the area of about 3000 square meters. The hosts offer their guests a comfortable house with a sauna and all modern conveniences. There is a beautiful pond with a bridge over it in front of the house. Tourists can spend time in a cozy pavilion with a fireplace. There is a picnic area and a dance ground where the homestead guests can celebrate their special occasions.

A playground with swings and a trampoline will give great pleasure to its little visitors. For those who are fond of active lifestyle different sports facilities are available: they can play football or go camping. They can also rent a boat, fishing rods, skies and sledges in winter. For curious visitors a great number of excursions to Mir, Nesvizh, Minsk, Mogilev and Dudutki are organized. The homestead has deserved the reputation of one of the best places with Belarusian national cuisine.

In the year 2014 the homestead participated in the annually competition “The Best Homestead of Mogilev region” and became the winner in the nomination “The Best Start”. (Appendix F).

Homestead “Liliya”

The homestead is in the village of Svisloch. It is surrounded by picturesque lakes and rivers, the biggest of which are the Svisloch and the Berezina.

It is a small but a very comfortable modern brick house with necessary conveniences. It can accommodate up to 5 people. The visitors will be impressed by its cozy and home atmosphere. In summer the garden here will remind you of the Botanical garden because of the great number of blossoming flowers there. The hosts even arrange gardening lessons for tourists.

The provided activities will make everyone’s holidays unforgettable as the owners of the homestead pay a lot of attention to healthy lifestyle, and offer a wide range of sports equipment and activities. The most popular are: fishing, boating, walking along the forest’s paths, picking berries and mushrooms. The children will enjoy playing active games on the playground.

Thus, you may see that the above mentioned homesteads possess all the necessary facilities and services to meet the most selective tastes. Their common features are traditional Belarusian cuisine and comfortable accommodation with modern conveniences. They provide well-organized activities including sports activities and excursions. Moreover, they are situated in environmentally clean areas.

Summarizing the mentioned information we may say that Osipovich district homesteads have a great potential for attracting and hosting foreign tourists.

Conclusion

The main aim of the research was to study the information about the Osipovich district homesteads and the services they offer, which can attract foreign tourists and satisfy their interests.

The first part of the work is a short review of the main principles of agritourism. This branch of tourism is an opportunity to give tourists individual

contact with the countryside and allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyle of the local people. It is a great chance to immerse into the authentic atmosphere of culture, traditions and history of the country.

The government of the Republic of Belarus pays a lot of attention to the development of agritourism which is quite a new experience for our country. First of all, Belarus has a substantial potential for its development: natural diversity, unique cultural and historical heritage. Secondly, the development of agritourism means a lot for the Belarusian economy. Thirdly, it is one of the most effective ways to promote the Belarusian culture and traditions.

The second part includes the research itself where we observe the development of agritourism in Osipovichi district and homesteads that have been registered by 1st January 2018. There are 32 homesteads in our district. All of the functioning homesteads provide comfortable accommodation with modern conveniences, well-organized activities and authentic Belarusian cuisine. The greatest advantage of the homesteads is their location in environmentally clean areas with picturesque landscapes. Thus, the hypothesis of the research has been proved: Osipovichi district homesteads have a great potential for attracting and hosting foreign tourists.

The challenge is to put together the mechanisms in order to turn this potential into the development of agritourism in Osipovichi district: in terms of increasing the number of visitors, expanding the range of facilities open to them, as well as the number and quality of homesteads in the district.

We suggest that the facilities and benefits of Osipovichi district should be made more visible to potential visitors. This can be done through the local website or social media. It will be more convenient if the website has a “translate” function so it can be used by potential visitors from different countries. Moreover, there should be two aspects of informing the public. The first is advertising the wonderful facilities and opportunities in the district and the second is publishing the choice of the homesteads there.

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned facts, we believe that the research purpose has been achieved. As we have designed a leaflet of the most visited

homesteads in our district, we suppose that it can be very useful for people who would like to visit Belarus and to get an experience of the Belarusian rural life in Osipovichy district. Hopefully, the leaflet will be distributed in the local travel agencies and hotels.

In our opinion, the topic of our research is quite promising. There can be a lot of ways to use it in further projects. One of them is creating a website on Osipovichy district homesteads.

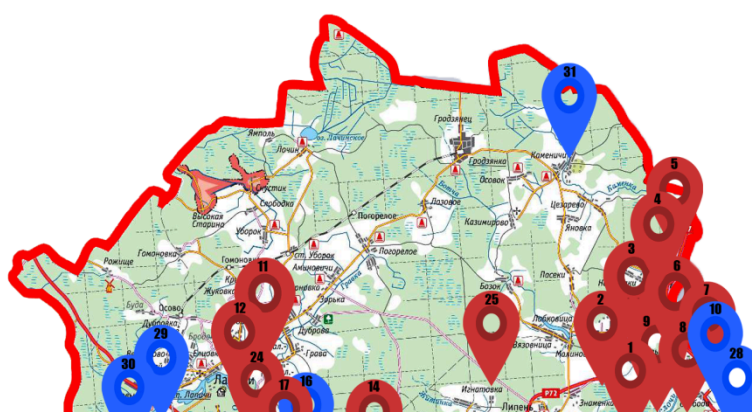
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Appendix A

The Homesteads of Osipovich District



Homesteads:

1. “Lilia”
2. “Zhuravliny Klyuch”
3. “Svisloch”
4. “Vyasnovye Farby”
5. “Kamennaya Gorka”
6. “Zolotaya Gorka”
7. “Mezhdurechiye”
8. “Spadchyna”
9. “Tsikhy Ugolok”
10. “Dve Reki”
11. “Gostinoye Podvoriye”
12. “Batskouskaya Spadchyna”
13. “Usadsba”
14. “Zelyonaya Dubrova”
15. “Panski Hutorok”
16. “Usadsba”
17. “Usadsba”
18. “Na Ptichi”
19. “Vyazye”
20. “U Tatsiany”
21. “Usadsba”
22. “U Lukomorya”
23. “Myadovy Padvorak”
24. “U Ryzhego Kota”
25. “Mishkina”
26. “Krasnoye”
27. “U Grigorievicha”
28. “Vysoky Bereg”
29. “U Kravchukov”
30. “Feeriya Otdykha”
31. “Soloviny Rai”
32. “Rechnaya Volna”

The leaflet of the most visited homesteads of Osipovichi district