

THE MINSK CITY CARD: BUILDING AWARENESS OF A NEW TOURIST PRODUCT

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This article is devoted to the problem of building awareness of a city card as a new type of tourist product for Minsk. Much attention is given to the current state of the development of the Minsk City Card. The advantages and disadvantages of the Card are assessed during the comparison with the analogue from another city. The article is focused on the search for new prospects for the Card's development, which can be implemented in the near future in order to increase its popularity among foreign tourists. This article can become practically relevant as the ideas that are suggested in it can become a part of the Belarusian tourism development strategy.

Key words: Minsk City Card; tourist card; tourism development; recommended routes; innovative tourist product.

Since 01.02.2017, foreign tourists have been able to come to Belarus visa-free. This programme allows citizens of 80 countries to enter Belarus through Minsk National Airport for a period of 5 days without obtaining a visa. According to the BELTA, about 83,000 people have taken this opportunity [1].

Unfortunately, foreigners do not know about the tourist potential of Belarus. The worst thing is that those who come to our country are not provided with appropriate information about its attractions. So, it is important to make a variety of descriptive material available on the Internet, as well as in Belarus itself.

When you arrive in any country, you usually do not have a well-planned route of your city tour. So, it is high time that we provided our guests with a map, which recommends routes and attractions for all kinds of tourists. It would be even better to give them tickets for all the museums and places of interest they may want to visit. The latter may have seemed impossible in the past, but recently a practical solution was found.

In 2018, Minsk joined the list of cities which have launched their own tourist cards. This programme is managed by the state enterprise Mingorspravka. The «Minsk City Card» became available in retail outlets on 17 January 2018 [4].

The Minsk Card is a sightseeing package, including a smart card and a guidebook. The card entitles the holder to free or discounted prices for visiting different tourist attractions and allows them to join any tour covered by

the Card. 37 museums joined the project from the very beginning as well as 16 hotels, 6 public catering establishments, and 8 retail chains.

Five formats of the Card, valid for 1 to 7 or 365 days from the moment of activation, include 16 types of cards, developed on the basis of Mingor-spravka research. Possible types of cards are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Types of Minsk City Card

Type of card	Period of validity	Free tourist attractions	Discounted tourist attractions	Transport pass	Additional discounts	Price, BYN
VIP Minsk Card	1 day	☑	☑	☑	☑	39
	2 days					54
	3 days					69
Premium Minsk Card	1 day	☑	☑	☒	☑	27
	2 days					42
	3 days					57
Luxe Minsk Card	1 day	☒	☑	☑	☑	15
	2 days					18
	3 days					21
Business Minsk Card	1 day	☒	☑	☒	☑	5,5
	2 days					6,5
	3 days					7,5
	5 days					9
	7 days					11
	10 days					14,7
Economy Minsk Card	365 days	☒	☑	☒	☑	18

In order to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the card, we decided to compare a well-known City card with ours. For our survey, we have chosen the London Pass. The card includes free entry to over 80 attractions, tours and museums, and a 1-Day Hop on Hop off Bus Tour. There is also a special guidebook with helpful tips, information, recommended routes and maps [3].

The London Pass system is much simpler. It consists of 10 types, which differ only in period of validity and presence of transport pass. Cards have special child rates, which are up to 40 % lower. It is also possible to buy the London Pass at discounted prices during various sales.

The Minsk Card also plays the role of an electronic transport pass, which provides you with 10 subway trips and unlimited trips by overland public transport during the validity period. This number of trips is probably enough

for a three-day usage. However, people would prefer an unlimited transport card. This change will not affect the costs critically.

The Minsk Card provides you with up to 20 % discounts at certain hotels, restaurants, cafes and shops as well as with discounts for car and bike rental services. The discounts are valid for 3 years from the moment of Card purchase.

The London Pass is not so generous regarding terms (these discounts are offered for a period of a week), but it gives more benefits, because it provides up to 50 % discount at over 100 top restaurants and shops in Central London.

There are only two ways of purchasing the Minsk Card. You can order it on the Internet and pay online. Within 24 hours, you can pick up it in one of the sales points. Alternatively, you can make a purchase directly at one of them.

Surprisingly, The London Pass can be collected only in one place in London. However, this does not mean that the Minsk Card has a better sales system. The London Pass chosen strategy is better for modern-day life. When you buy The London Pass online, you can have your order shipped to your home address (from £3 to £35 within the period of 4 – 15 days), collect it in London or it will be sent to your smartphone with a special app.

In order to understand whether the Minsk Card is actually worth buying, we decided to calculate discounts available using the Minsk Card and the London Pass in two ways. The first one: let us assume that you can obtain all discounts, which the Card offers. It includes visiting all the attractions from the guidebook. However, experience shows that it is impossible in practice. The second one is more realistic. It consists of visiting the attractions from the recommended three-day route around the city's best sights and museums. The route for the London Pass is developed by the London Information Tourist Centre. But for the Minsk Card we decided to develop the route ourselves. It includes:

- Day 1 [City Tour «Open Minsk»; The National Historical Museum; The National Art Museum; The National Library];
- Day 2 [The Minsk Zoo; The Minsk History Museum; The Strana Mini; The Lebyazhiy Aquapark];
- Day 3 [The Belarusian Great Patriotic War Museum; The National Centre of the Modern Art; The Museum of Ancient Culture of Belarus; The Museum of the History of Belarusian Cinema].

The results of our survey show that the Minsk Card is not as well-developed as The London Pass (Table 2). All in all, discounts offered by our card are not attractive enough to get people to buy it. The developers of the Minsk Card should cooperate more closely with existing and future partners. People are likely to pay more at the outset and visit all places free of charge afterwards.

Table 2

Discounts with London Pass and Minsk Card

Card	The Minsk Card	The London Pass
Price of all tourist attractions without card	\$ 179,6	\$ 1342,4
Price of all tourist attractions with card	\$ 89,0	\$ 0
Maximum price of the card	\$ 35,4	\$ 284,8
Percentage of discount	31 %	79 %
Price of tourist attractions from the route without card	\$ 68,4	\$ 350
Price of the card	\$ 34,1	\$ 204,5
Price of tourist attractions from the route with card	\$ 18,6	\$ 0
Percentage of discount	23 %	41,6 %

Unfortunately, there are many drawbacks, which make the Card difficult to use. Tourists point out that there are some difficulties with this card, because the staff of some museums still does not know how to use it. Moreover, the system of discounts and their variety needs to be improved.

An ineffective marketing strategy and the unsatisfactory product resulted in low demand. Only 100 people have bought the Minsk Cards over a period of nearly 3 months [2]. In order to increase sales of the Minsk Card, its developers must analyse the weaknesses of their product and increase benefits, which you get with this card. They also should plan their marketing strategy with clearly defined prices and promotion. The immediate goals are the following:

- setting up new sales points (in Minsk Airport and Trinity Suburb);
- translating the guidebook into different languages;
- launching a Sport Minsk Card before the Second European Games (with additional sports facilities and hospitality zones);
- increasing the list of sights and tourist attractions.

To summarize, we want to say that the Minsk City Card is a new promising project, and like any other project, it has its advantages and disadvantages. In order to improve the Minsk City Card we would recommend the following:

- set up a system of sales points (for example, in souvenir shops or hotels);
- develop the app with the electronic card and mobile guideline with maps;
- launch special offers (discounts for children; free souvenirs for 10 BYN in a certain souvenir shop; seasonal offers, etc.);

- develop special routes for different groups of tourists;
- launch a fast track entry to sports facilities during the II European Games.

We are sure that if the current problems are settled and our suggestions are implemented, the Minsk City Card will become popular among our guests and will help them to discover the beauty and attractiveness of our capital.

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