

§ 1. Imagine an entire town made up of spectacular buildings of multi-coloured ice. A town devoted to pleasure where you can ride in a horse-drawn carriage, go down ice slides (*зорки*) and watch swimming events by an icy river. It sounds like a setting for a work of children's fiction, but this magical scene appears every January on an island just outside the Chinese city of Harbin.

§ 2. Winter in Harbin would be very boring indeed without its annual month-long Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival. Harbin has average temperatures of -16°C at the time of the festival. So what better way to brighten up winter than with a colourful winter wonderland that recreates some of the world's most impressive architectural landmarks? It's possible to reproduce them using blocks of ice at Harbin because its winters, though freezing cold, are dry. There is a tradition of ice sculpture in the region that goes back hundreds of years and began with ice lantern (*фонарь*) artworks lit by candles.

§ 3. People who have been to the festival say the sculptures are most impressive at night, when they are lit by floodlights or from inside by clever use of LED (*светодиодный*) bulbs that change colour periodically. You can also **appreciate** the amazing detail of the snow sculptures better when there's no sunshine. If you want to see as many sculptures as possible, you should plan your trip for a few weeks into the festival. That's because by then the international snow-sculpting competition that is held during every festival is over and you can admire the creations in all their beauty.

§ 4. If you are more interested in physical activities than art, you'll still find plenty to **amuse** you at the festival. The event is well-known for the long snow slides that are incorporated into the designs of the ice buildings.

§ 5. Perhaps the most extreme event at the festival is the river swimming. Even setting up the event is a challenge. The organisers have to remove enough ice from the surface of the River Songhua to make a pool for the friendly competitions. The brave participants jump into the water wearing nothing but swimming costumes and caps, surrounded by spectators in winter hats, coats and gloves! Although the festival has become well-known enough to attract visitors from outside China, it's rare to see a non-local swimmer in the competitions. In northern China, however, there is a strong tradition of winter outdoor swimming, especially among the middle-aged and the elderly.

Прочитайте текст. Ответьте на вопросы.

Why does the writer recommend going to the festival towards the end?

- 1) It is less busy then. 2) Competition entries (*скульптуры*) are on show then. 3) More activities are available then.