

## Is Europe Prepared for the Rise in Tourists from Asia?

As Asian giants China and India continue to drive world economic growth, the number of Asians travelling abroad is surging. Europe is already benefiting from this trend, with inbound arrivals to Europe from Asia hitting 14 million in 2005, according to the European Travel Commission. However, many European countries are currently unprepared, in terms of infrastructure and services, to meet the specific demands of Asian tourists. This is a situation which needs to be addressed now if Europe is to safeguard future tourism revenue, according to a WTM Global Trends Report 2006, produced for World Travel Market by Euromonitor International.

In addition to the opportunities presented by the rapidly growing numbers of Asian leisure travellers to Europe, there is also huge potential in the business travel sector. As the US introduces increasingly stringent security measures, and difficulties in obtaining visas continue, the shift away from North America to Europe for BTMICE activities (business travel, meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) is likely to intensify.

Indeed, over the 2004-2005 period, total business arrivals to the US fell by 10% to 7 million, while in Europe the number of business visitors grew by 8%, to 84 million. The European BTMICE sector is likely to gain even further as Chinese and Indian business travellers choose to come to Europe for meetings, rather than America, to avoid obstacles such as difficulties obtaining US visas.

## Location is the Key Advantage

According to Miha Kovačič, the director of the Slovenian Convention Bureau, Slovenia's geographic position is one of its main advantages. "International congress players consider Slovenia as a new destination for MICE tourism, even though we have more than 20 years experience behind us," Mr Kovačič said. Slovenia is increasingly attracting interest from companies in the corporate sector with larger groups and more money. Its entry into the EU, the adoption of the euro and the impending EU presidency (in 2008) have all contributed to raising the country's profile. "Slovenia still has lot to do, but we have already proved to be a stable country with a sound economy," says Mr Kovačič.

## Promoting Slovenia's MICE

The Slovenian Convention Bureau has organized three marketing projects focused on MICE tourism in Slovenia and targeting the Austrian, German and English markets. The first of these, held in September, involved journalists from the specialist publications Tagungswirtschaft (Germany) and Meetings & Incentive Travel (England), who were invited here on a fact-finding mission. The second project, involved holding workshops in Vienna, Munich, Frankfurt, Berlin and London during October. The final project will be concluded next spring with study visits throughout Slovenia. The Bureau has budgeted almost EUR 40,000 for this promotional campaign.

## MICE Europe 2006

In partnership with Venice Convention, Newtowns S.p.a, Starwood Hotels Italy and BBC World, the naseba group, the global executive event organizer, presented the 4<sup>th</sup> MICE Europe Congress, which was held in the Palazzo del Casinò, on Lido Island, Venice, between 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2006.

The event attracted 140 corporate buyers from leading companies in Europe, such as British Telecom, Canon, Hewlett-Packard, IBM and Schneider Electric, who are responsible for purchasing and organizing convention, incentive, event and travel solutions.

A record number of 70 service providers (hotels and resorts, congress centres, convention bureaus, etc.), from destinations across Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, were represented this year. Interactive presentations, given by leading industry figures, on topics as diverse as incentive tourism, partnership development and marketing, leadership and "Italy as the perfect location for car launches" were informative and very well received, according to one of the event organizers.

## 27<sup>th</sup> World Travel Market

# New Slogan Launched in London

*At the 27<sup>th</sup> World Travel Market, which took place in London from 6 - 9 November 2006, Slovenia promoted itself in the event's official catalogue with the following text: "Slovenia, a green and diverse country that lies between the Alps, the Mediterranean and the Pannonian plain embraces all the beauties of the Old Continent. If you have ever wished to learn about Europe in one go, come to Slovenia".*

BY TANJA SLAPNIK

The "Diversity" campaign was presented alongside a celebration of the centenary of the Bohinj railway, which was the focus of this year's Slovenian presentation. The Slovenian exhibition occupied 210 sq m of space, and consisted mainly of visual images that haven't changed in years. The addition to the traditional exhibit this year was a train carriage with conductors, which offered visitors the opportunity to take a virtual trip along the Bohinj railway. Sadly, this innovative and creative addition with a well-designed look occupied just one corner of the Slovenian exhibition space. Throughout the rest of the exhibition the "Come closer and we will tell you" tune was being played. What was missing was an atmosphere of liveliness and any sort of "wow" factor, which would have attracted people from

other parts of the hall and would have made passers-by curious to come in. The most important thing in promoting tourism is not showing still images and data, but enabling potential customers to interact with real people who are showing their enthusiasm. Somewhat more visible in the exhibition hall were the burgundy and pink promotional materials, such as caps, magnets, coasters, and neck straps, exhibiting the brand-new slogan "I feel sLOVEnia". Visitors to WTM actually had the opportunity to see the new slogan before it was publicly announced in the Slovene media. However, because of the fact that the National Information Office of the Republic of Slovenia occupied only a small stall within the Slovenian Tourist Organisation's exhibition space, the launching of the new slogan was not very no-

ticeable.

A press conference took place on the first day of the fair from 1 to 2 pm. Following the official speeches came the part of the programme celebrating the centenary of the Bohinj railway, which literally saved the whole press conference. The energetic, entertaining and yet professional presentation was wrapped up with a screening of the promotional video for the railway and the happenings around it. Presenters Janez and Micka successfully concluded the programme, but unfortunately it was unintelligible to most visitors as it was presented in Slovene with no translation provided. Nevertheless, the Slovenian delegation did make a favourable impression at the press conference and the relaxed atmosphere continued into the cold buffet and short entertainment programme that followed.

The "Happy Hour" at 6 pm on the same day was not a big success. The visitors were mostly Slovenes, which is no good for business. Probably most of the foreign journalists and others who were interested in attending didn't know they were welcome because the Slovenian "Media Diary of Events" stated that it was an "invitation only" event. What a clever move - particularly when no information was given as to where one could obtain an invitation!

After the official speeches, the Jararaja, with Lado Leskovar

singing, performed "Iz daljave slišim vlak..." (I hear a train in the distance), and while the song is beautiful and well-known in Slovenia, it is too melancholic for such an occasion. Spirits were subsequently lifted a bit with the opening of some Refošk champagne (a red champagne specialty from Slovenia made from Refošk wine) and a cold buffet. However, anybody who didn't go looking for Slovenia's exhibition space would have had no idea anything was going on there.

In addition to the boring presentation, another troubling aspect was that the exhibition space was open on one side only, which in effect meant that guests had to walk around it in order to enter it. Shortly before the Slovenian Happy Hour took place, the Serbian crew managed to attract a large group of people from all over the exhibition hall and to get them moving with a group of "trubači" (brass players). If we consider the fact that the main theme of this year's Slovenian presentation at WTM was the Bohinj railway, Triglav National Park and the Julian Alps, presenting the popular Avsenik song "Na golič", which is played and recognized worldwide, would definitely have drawn much more attention to our exhibit. Sometimes you have to do things in a flamboyant way in order to be visible, and Avsenik would probably have done the trick. ■



Slovenian "attractions" at the London trade Market

## Conferences

# Ljubljana to Host Enter 2007

*A conference set to a place, where high-tech meets traditional environment.*

ENTER 2007 scheduled for 24th to 27th January is the 14th annual conference organised by IFITT, the International Federation for IT & Travel and Tourism. This dynamic forum brings together leading industry practitioners, researchers, destination managers, consultants and a host of participants with an interest in this rapidly changing world of new and emerging technologies and business solutions. The host for ENTER Ljubljana is, according to the organisers, a destination which truly reflects the theme of this year's conference - "Connecting Destinations" Most definitely a connected destination in every sense of the word - not least in its approach to technology and tourism. The high-tech conference venue, easily accessible for international participants, is centred in this rich cultural capital that combines tradition and modern technologies. IFITT aims to bring all stakeholders in this domain together to share knowledge and cross-fertilise ideas. This means we will not only hear the latest research which will influence our business models but also about brand new business models in action. New for this year is a three day eDestinations Summit which will form a major dedicated track and which will focus on the needs of Destination Management and will showcase leading solutions both mainstream and new. This track is chaired by Marco Truffelli, Chief Executive of Visitscotland.com. However, he is just one of the highly regarded participants expected at enter.

ENTER is expected to be a very social conference and with a belief in the power of the network. ■ (SOURCE: IFFITT)