

The Slovenian Convention Bureau

Agencies vs. Hotels

The autumn general meeting of the Slovenian Convention Bureau (SCB) was held on 23rd November in the Domina Grand Media Hotel in Ljubljana. There were two main items on the agenda – the first was the proposed merger of the bureau with the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO); the second was conflict resolution between agencies and hotels.

By TANJA SLAPNIK & IGOR DRAKULIČ

The merger

"The members of the SCB's advisory council are still mulling over the pros and cons of the proposed merger with the STO and further meetings will need to be held before all the issues are properly addressed. Ideally, this process will be completed before the end of the year. We will then pass on our recommendation to the SCB board," said **Gorazd Čad**, the chairman of the advisory council.

Do we need each other?

The second item on the agenda was a lively debate that tackled the thorny question: why do hotels need agencies? The 'showdown' pitted the agencies – captained by editor and journalist **Tatjana Pirc** – against the hotels, who were led by fellow editor and journalist **Drago Bulc**. Both 'sides' threw questions from the floor to the two team leaders, who did an excellent job of arguing their case and demonstrating best-practice conflict resolution. While it was impossible

to reach a consensus in a single one-hour session, the debate highlighted the willingness of both sides to listen and to cooperate with each other in finding common ground. The result – an honourable draw.

Yes, we certainly do!

Following the meeting, the director of the SCB, **Mr Miha Kovačič**, said: "I was pleasantly surprised with the attendance; the meeting drew 80 representatives from SCB members. It was heartening to see that both sides were able to openly and con-

structively discuss the issue, which has never happened before. In the end, we established that we do need each other. A close bond is essential if we are to make an impact in foreign markets, and we can not do that unless we have knowledge, trust and sincerity. I am also glad that the hotel and agency members have agreed to work together to develop guidelines that will define their mutual relationship."

The Slovenian Convention Bureau is a body set up in 2004 to promote and market Slovenia as a meeting and incentive destination and to attract international

MICE business to the country. This non-profit organization is a useful source of expert and objective information on destinations, meeting venues and service providers. The SCB acts as a professional intermediary between meeting planners and suppliers, assisting organisers to select the most appropriate solution for their event. The 48 members include convention centres and hotels, professional congress organizers, destination management companies, the Ljubljana Convention Bureau and other service providers. The Slovenian Tourist Board is a strategic partner. ■



Miha Kovačič, the director of the Slovenian Convention Bureau

Old Palace Hotel Returns in 2008

Culture Minister Vasko Simoniti and Igor Bavčar, CEO of food, energy and tourism holding Istrabenz, laid a foundation stone in a symbolic gesture marking the renovation of the Palace Hotel. The investors expect that the hotel will reopen in the spring of 2008. Bavčar said that investors are facing a challenging time as they will be renovating the hotel, one of the landmarks of the seaside resort of Portorož, part of the coast and the area around the building. Igor Okorn, the director of Istrabenz's tourism subsidiary Istrabenz hoteli, told the press the investment is worth EUR 37.5m, with the state contributing EUR 4.17m. Istrabenz, the hotel's owner, is providing the rest of the funding. Okorn explained that the facility will become the first Slovenian hotel in the five stars de luxe category. It will have 185 rooms, including luxurious presidential suites, and sport a congress centre, library, gallery, and wellness centre. When it was built at the end of the 19th century, the luxurious Palace Hotel was the largest hotel of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It boasted top-of-the-line equipment and a variety of premises for socialising such as a reception room, a crystal hall as well as gentlemen and ladies' salons. The hotel was last refurbished in 1951 and has been closed since 1990.



USA is Number One

MICE industry is one of the fastest growing segments within the tourism industry generating millions in revenues for cities and countries. Europe and United States still remain the major markets worldwide in respect of the number of meetings, conferences and exhibitions. According to the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) 5,283 registered events took place in 2005, a rise of 479 over 2004.

As we can see on ICCA's global ranking, USA and Europe dominate in the MICE business, with Vienna ranking first in the meeting industry followed by Singapore and Barcelona in the second and third place respectively.

There were no changes in the first three places in the countries' table compared to 2004 as USA, Germany and Spain maintained their position. United Kingdom has managed to surpass France climbing to the fourth place. It is worth mentioning that Australia remained 8th and Switzerland is a newcomer in the global ranking taking 10th place.

Rank	Country	Meetings	Rank	City	Meetings
1	U.S.A.	376	1	Vienna	129
2	Germany	320	2	Singapore	125
3	Spain	275	3	Barcelona	116
4	UK	270	4	Berlin	100
5	France	240	5	Hong Kong	95
6	Netherlands	197	6	Paris	91
7	Italy	196	7	Amsterdam	82
8	Australia	164	8	Seoul	77
9	Austria	157	9	Budapest	77
10	Switzerland	151	10	Stockholm	72



Opportunities

Two Tourism Projects in NE Slovenia

The district of Spodnje Podravje in NE Slovenia is hoping to become a new tourist force in Slovenia through the realisation of two projects from the resolution on national development projects for 2007-2023.

By STA

The plans for the Megalaxia amusement park and Janežovci Thermal Spa would create around 1,500 jobs, according to Marjan Hribar, the head of the Directorate for Tourism at the Ministry of the Economy. According to Hribar, the projects are well thought out and present a good basis for the development of Spodnje Podravje. An advantage of the projects is that they are complementary to each other. Hribar hopes that the projects will give the area a new standard of life and new attractions. "There is a great possibility that the projects will be financed in part with EU structural funds", added Hribar.

An investor for the Megalaxia amusement park has already been found and the Hajdina municipality has confirmed the required spatial plan. The company Cross, which has been chosen to carry out the project, is currently awaiting building permits.

The Megalaxia project has been evaluated at EUR 105m, while the investors are hoping to get between EUR 5m and EUR 10m from EU funds.

According to France Pukšič, the mayor of the Destrižnik municipality, small investors in Janežovci Thermal Spa are already known, while talks with the major investors are still under way. "We have four companies from Italy, Austria, and England in the mix, but I would not talk about the names at this time", added Pukšič.

The first phase of the construction of the spa resort would cost EUR 40m, whereas the second phase involving a golf course would cost an additional EUR 20m. "We are expecting between EUR 5m and EUR 8m from the EU funds," explained Pukšič.

The resolution on national development projects for 2007-2023 is made up of 35 projects worth a total of EUR 24bn.

Promotion

Slovenian Tourist Board to Open Office in Brussels

Rok Klančnik will take charge of the new office the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) is to open in Brussels on 1st January, 2007.

By STA AND IGOR DRAKULIČ

Klančnik, the former head of communications at the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), is one of three newly-appointed heads of STO offices abroad; the others being **Majda Rozina Dolenc**, who will manage the Munich office, and **Gorazd Skrt** who will oversee operations in Milan. The STO believes the Brussels office will make a significant contribution towards improving Slovenia's standing as a tourism destination in the Belgian market and strengthen the country's contacts with various EU institutions.

"We will not just be promoting and supporting the marketing of Slovenia as a tourist destination; we will be directly addressing the media and the EU's institutions, i.e. the European parliament, European Commission, and the Director-General for Services and Tourism. We have to raise the awareness of Slovenia in decision and opinion making circles," Klančnik said.

The Brussels office will also target the multitude of international organizations and corporations as well as tour operators and travel agencies operating out of Brussels and the Benelux countries.

"The two main goals will be to raise incoming from Benelux and trying



Rok Klančnik