

The ITB in Berlin – the world’s biggest tourism congress

> Motaz Othman & Armin Gemmer

Despite all efforts by competitors, Berlin clearly remains the biggest tourism fair in the world. The competitors, e.g. FITUR in Madrid, indeed have been able to increase their number of visitors to impressive figures; but the number of visitors and exhibitors of the ITB 2008, can be seen as evidence that this is a global trend which favours the entire tourism industry. With over 11,000 exhibitors from 186 countries, an increase of 25%, this year’s exhibition outshines all the others from previous years. Although the activities had to fill 26 exhibition halls offering more than 160,000 square meters exhibition space the organisers could announce several weeks before opening the exhibition that the ITB was already fully booked.



The leading global tourism fair counted more exhibitors than ever before. In spite of strikes and snowy weather the number of visitors in five days beat the figures of the previous year. Nearly 40 percent of all trade fair visitors came from abroad to the German capital city to inform themselves about the current tourism trends. An entire exhibition hall was devoted to the topics “Market Trends & Innovations” and “Effects of global climate change and more than 500 smaller conferences and symposia were held during the fair.

Almost 180,000 visitors flooded the exhibition halls on the opening weekend, despite the fact that this year there was a bad omen: there was a nation wide strike on the opening day of the fair. In Berlin alone 150 cancelled flights ▶



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hindered the timely arrival of exhibitors and visitors to ITB. Moreover, those who only had a short distance to travel were frustrated because at the beginning of the fair the local transport services were not available. But despite these setbacks, business went on as usual.

While the German hosts were apparently embarrassed by all these mishaps, the guests took it lightly. At the press conference the chairman of Ghorfa (Arab-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry), Dr. Thomas Bach, underlined that the current chaos was an exception to the norm. The Arab tourism ministers, and in particular the Syrian tourism minister Dr. Saadalla Agha Al Kalaa, responded calmly by reiterating their solidarity and saying that these were unforeseeable occurrences which could also have happened in their countries.

Tourism fairs are a boom industry resulting from a shifting of economic activities from North America and Europe to the Far East and Gulf region. In particular, this shift seems to eclipse all previous trends and therefore it is not very surprising that the biggest tourism fair is also setting new benchmarks. This year the most spectacular evidence was the world premier of Emirates Airlines to the exhibition. An accessible three-storied rotating globe which occupied almost a quarter of the entire hall fascinated the visitors.

The twin country of The Dominican Republic enjoyed maximum media coverage, but almost all world regions, from the small Spiekeroog Island in the North Sea, Bavaria, Austria and Kazakhstan to Africa or native reserves in North America were represented. It was as if one

could travel the world in a few minutes. The trade fair visitors showed particular interest in the Arab exhibition stands from countries like Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Their classical ancient ruins were skilfully marketed with miniatures on display on the exhibition stands. First and foremost one has to mention the Iranian stand which improved in size and appearance and represented the classical ancient city of Persepolis.

The Yemeni tourism minister Nabil Al-Faqih who met with our representative Motaz Othman at his stand expressed his satisfaction with the course of the fair.

The organisers of ITB Berlin will also do justice to the relocation of the tourism industry from Europe to Asia. In October the association will be organising ITB Asia in Singapore. ■

