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Insight



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How to Attract Visitors during the "Slow Growth" of Prague City Tourism
——Interview with Nora Dolanská, the Prague City Tourism Head

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Ten Reasons of Visit Minsk



Museums Turned Into Soft Power Nowadays

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Developed by Joseph Nye from Harvard University, soft power is a concept describing the ability to attract and co-opt in other ways than through coercion (hard power), using force or persuading with money. So, in what way can museums be seen and act as agents of soft power? In the current era, museums are not just landmarks. They are also key elements in successful place-making. Museums represent efficient, accessible and meaningful places where people can meet, exchange their views and try to solve problems.

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As stated by The Soft Power 30 in their report, not long ago, museums were a form of hard power. They acted as safeguards of the spoils of war and conquest of mankind. It was a form of expression of the state hegemony and cultural diplomacy. However, the role of museums has gone through some changes in the past years.

More Soft Power with Smaller Government Involvement

Joseph Nye's research proved that soft power is more effective when the source is independent of government and large corporations. In the past 40 years many museums had gone from being led by governments to being under civil society institutions.

(read more please turn to page 3)



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More and more museums are leaning to this path. For example, 80% of U.S. museums are non-profits with independent boards. As a result, museums have gained new roles and responsibilities such as: positioning cities and regions as tourism destinations, knowledge economy stimulation or job creation.

In the current era, museums are not just landmarks. They are also key elements in successful place-making. Museums represent efficient, accessible and meaningful places where people can meet, exchange their views and try to solve problems. This once again proves how museums can act as platforms for soft power. Many cities have understood this and have planned museums at the epicentre of various urban development projects. The goal was to draw attention to the city on the global scene and improving the quality of life.

The "Bilbao Effect"

The Spanish Basque city of Bilbao is a great example of place-making. It shows that a post-industrial centre can be transformed into an attractive tourism destination. Before the construction of the Guggenheim Museum, the city received less than 100 thousand overnight stays per year.

After the construction of the museum, the number rose to over 800 thousand. This has been a great stimulus for the development of the city in many aspects, e.g. hotels, restaurants, shops and much more.

Similarly, London has transformed the King's Cross area into a centre of knowledge and culture. The area now features 55 museums, universities, research institutes, the British Library, restaurants and living spaces with international train links to Paris and Brussels. In short, King's Cross has become a powerful place for opinion formers, travelling and thus also soft power.

Museums of Communism in Eastern Europe

Another example of museums used as soft power are museums of communism or occupation in Eastern Europe. These countries take advantage of their own but also other historical developments and try to show the reality of communism to visitors, in order not to forget crimes committed in the 20th century. Some examples of these museums are the Museum of Communism in Prague, the Sighetul Marmatiei Memorial Museum in Romania or the Museum of Occupation in Tallinn, Estonia.

It is true that it is important to remind the new generations of the horrors and woes of the past. However, perhaps in this case there is a feeling of slight overuse and selections, with some events being publicized preferably over others, that the respective countries are not too proud of.

Museums of Communism

Nevertheless, museums are a strong form of soft power and are expected to be even stronger as time passes. Museums attract and engage people in real time and space and by transmitting knowledge and thought to the people they want to make countries and the world a better place.

Museums Registered Record Numbers of Visitors in 2016 in Italy

According to Dario Franceschini, the Italian tourism minister, the data of 2016 have created a new record for Italian museums. The number of visitors reached 44.5 million in state cultural institutions which brought a revenue of 172 million euros to the state budget. This is an increase of 4% and 12% compared to 2015, corresponding to 1.2 million more visitors and 18.5 million euros in gains.

The revenue will return completely to the museums under a system that rewards the best management and simultaneously provides support to the small companies. This is the third consecutive year of growth for Italian museums, according to the Minister. In 2013, 38 million tickets were sold, since then there has been continuous increases and this year the number is 44.5 million. This represents a 6 million increase in three years and an increase of 15% over the period.

Southern Italy has played an important role in the growth. Campania stands 2nd in the ranking of regions with the number of visitors exceeding 8 million, an increase of 14.2 % compared to 2015.

Archaeological heritage has a lion's share on the increase. In the Colosseum, Roman Forum, Palatine, the Archaeological Museum of Naples and the archaeological park of Paestum and Pompeii 11 million ticket sales had been registered in the past year.

However, museums also have an important role, since about half of the cultural inflow is concentrated in the autonomous museums.

"Italy wears the pink jersey in Europe. All the positive data put Italy in sharp contrast to other European countries where 2016 was a year of decline of visitors in museums, as demonstrated by the data that are being published now," Franceschini added.

Over 8 million people have participated in the initiative of free Sunday entries (first Sunday of the month) since it was established in 2014. In 2016, 3 million entries were registered on the first Sundays of every month, compared to 3.5 million the year before.

This has become a custom for families and tourists. The data show that since the first edition in July 2014 the attendance has substantially doubled and now stood at 250/300 thousand visitors for every edition with significant peaks, such as the first Sunday of April 2016 with 376 thousand visitors. These are large figures and even more significant if we consider the visitors of civic museums joining the initiative.

The gradual expansion of digital presence of state museums is also playing an important role. For example, the fact that autonomous institutions are creating official accounts on various social networks as well as the fact that the Ministry of Tourism is intensifying online communication campaigns.

After a year of monitoring the online reputation of Italian museums, the overall satisfaction of museum visitors is 86.6%, according to data provided by Travel Appeal. This is an increase of about 4% compared to 2015. The number of reviews and posts on social media that visitors publish online grew by 45.5% compared to the year before.

Italian museums' digital activity has also grown in 2016. The number of content published on social networks directly by the museums grew by 156.5% last year. Facebook is the network with the highest level of engagement, although Twitter and Instagram are not far behind.

Overall, 2016 was a year of digital improvement for museums thanks to restyling of some websites and more conscious use of social media.

Finally, in 2016 autonomous museums established by the MiBACT reform have fully entered the system. This reform has relaunched their managements from new directions. The number of visitors coming to these museums totaled over 24 million, which is more than half of the total admissions of the state cultural institutions.

Ethiopia – A Living Museum of Remarkable Cultures

Ethiopia is one of the tourist destinations, which for a long time now have been hidden from the eyes of the world. However, the country's tourism industry has been on the rise, and it is slowly establishing itself as one of the emerging tourist destinations in the world. It is a safe country with a lot of attractions, which offer a unique and rewarding

experience to the visitors. However, one of the most amazing things about Ethiopia is the indigenous cultures of the local people.

Ethiopia is famous for cultural tours that are organized in the country focusing on the communities living in the Southern region, especially the people of the Omo Valley. These tours provide a unique opportunity to appreciate the joy of living the life to the fullest without the need of material things.

Southern Ethiopia is one of the most culturally-rich regions in the world, featuring people from nearly 45 different language groups. The communities that reside here include the Borane and Karo, who exhibit several amazing practices. One of the most fascinating traditions of these people is the building of dome-shaped houses, which are beautifully designed using bamboo trees.

One of the most interesting places in the Southern region that you can visit for a full cultural experience of the Ethiopian people is the area around the Mago National Park. The park is famous for a wide range of wild animals that inhabit it.

In addition, it is surrounded by people from seven different ethnic groups. These communities are an important part of the ecosystem, and visitors are welcome to get to know their cultural practices, and learn how they co-exist harmoniously with the surrounding wildlife.

The Omo Valley region is one of the most unique regions in Africa, where you can find some of the major ethnic groups existing peacefully with each other in a relatively small area.

Anthropologists around the world have even gone as far as terming the region a "Living Museum" due to the unique cultural representation that it holds. Below are some of the major peoples and cultures in the region:

The Dassanech people

The Dassanech are part of the Cushitic speaking group that resides in the Omo Valley. They reside in the southern region of Ethiopia, where the Omo River deltas pour into Lake Turkana, hence their name which means "people of the Delta". Their main livelihood comes from cattle, which is used as a source of milk, meat, and leather for clothing. They also engage in farming, especially during the rainy seasons when the Omo River has plenty of water.

They are popular for the ceremony known as the Dimi, where the

upcoming marriage of the daughter of a male member of the society is celebrated. During the ceremony, the man becomes an elder in the community.

The Dorze tribe

The Dorze tribe is a part of the Omotic speaking people of the southern Ethiopia. The tribe was formerly known for its warriors, but its people are now famous for their farming practices and their rich weaving tradition – they weave a very high quality cotton clothing. The Dorze tribe lives in a community-based society, where most of the disputes are settled the traditional way – through elders.

The Karo tribes

The Karo tribes are found along the borders of the Lower Omo River. They are famous for their rich traditions, which include wearing elaborate headdresses among the women and decorative body art among the men, which is achieved by painting their bodies with chalk. These practices are common during important ceremonies, such as the Pilla, which marks the rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood.

The Konso people

The Konso people are part of the eastern Cushitic speakers, who practice farming and weaving. They are found approximately 960 miles to the south west of Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. They are widely known for their woodcarving practice, and they are often referred to as the "people of wooden totem".

The Mursi and Surma

Found in a remote wilderness in the southwest region of Ethiopia, the Mursi and Surma are a largely forgotten ethnic group who lead their lives with very little influence from the outside world. They are widely known for their unique culture, which includes lip and earlobe piercing among the women, and stick fighting among the men. They also have a long history of painting their bodies in decorative art.

The Hamar and Benna

The Hamar and Benna people reside in the far south west region of the Omo Valley, beyond the Mt Buska. They are highly superstitious and until recently very little information about them was known to the outside world.

Often referred to as the "Bull-jumping" people they are famous for their bull jumping ceremonies, which are used as a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood for the male members of the society. The bull-jumping ceremonies also serve as courting, where both men and women decorate themselves in order to win a mate.

Paris: Remarkable Museums At Hand

France is without any doubt one of the most beautiful historical countries in Europe. Its capital Paris receives around 42 million tourists yearly, making it the third most visited city in the world. Unfortunately many tourists keep going to the same old places every time they are in town, skipping over some of the other interesting places. However the city hides a number of remarkable museums worth visiting.

Art Museums

If you love art and you are a little bit tired of waiting in line every single time you want to go to the Louvre, instead you can visit the Jacquemart-André museum. It is a small museum with a great collection of Italian art that includes paintings of Bernini and Botticelli, among others, and was founded by the banker and soldier Edouard André and



Nélie Jacquemart, his wife, who was a well-known painter in the late nineteenth century.

Their love for art made them open this outstanding museum to spread it around Paris.

Another lovely art museum in Paris is Musée de l'Orangerie, a big repository of Impressionist and post-Impressionist artistic works from renowned painters like Monet, Matisse, Cezanne and Picasso. You can find this extraordinary museum close to Place de la Concorde.

Pop Culture Museums

If you prefer a unique kind of a museum, go to the Musée du Fumeur or the Smoking Museum. As you may guess, this place shows a large historic collection related to smoking, like carved wooden pipes and hookahs for example. There is also a tour covering the most recent history of smoking and even some famous smokers.

If your interests are more musical, you can pay a visit to the Edith Piaf museum, a two-room museum designed for the singer's most hardcore fans that includes many of her belongings like pictures, fan letters, clothes and even her gold records. Although the admission is free you must make a reservation ahead.

Natural History Museums

Not everything in France is about history or art. One of the most interesting museums you can find in Rue de l'Ecole de Medecine, is the Musée Dupuytren with an exhibit of anatomic anomalies, such as diseases and malformations founded by the surgeon Baron Guillaume Dupuytren.

In their collection there aren't only individuals or animals with those attributes displayed, but wax models, pictures and technical books. Another natural history museum you can visit is the Galerie de l'Évolution, a museum dedicated to fauna diversity on Earth and their habitats.

This fantastic museum is located in rue Geoffroy Saint Hilaire, where you can learn a lot about endangered species and evolution.

Top 10 Most Interesting Museums in Germany

If you are on holiday in Germany and the weather is not particularly nice, you might find yourself at a loss what to do. However, you do not have to worry since there are many interesting places that you can visit, German museums being one of the most often recommended.

Tourism-Review.com brings you the list of 10 must-see museums while you are travelling in Germany. The list is based on a research from February 2009 that was made among the users of the server Pointtoo.de.

Pergamon Museum, Berlin

Pergamon Museum is situated on the Museum Island in Berlin. It was built between the years 1910 and 1930 and was designed by Alfred Messel and Ludwig Hoffman.

Among other exhibits that are worth seeing, the museum houses original-sized, reconstructed buildings such as the Pergamon Altar and the Market Gate of Miletus.

Both were transported from Turkey. The museum consists of three parts: Antiquity Collection, Islamic Art Museum and The Middle East Museum. The main display, the Ishtar Gate and the Procession Way of Babylon, is housed in The Middle East Museum.

German Museum, Munich

Opened on 2 May 1925, German Museum in Munich now houses approximately 28,000 exhibits from 50 fields of science and technology.

The museum is the right choice for science fans as it is the largest museum of science and technology in the world. The main part of the museum is located on a small island in the Isar River.

Aquazoo and Löbbecke Museum, Düsseldorf

Aquazoo and Löbbecke Museum in Düsseldorf is not a traditional museum. Since it keeps and rears animals, it is rather a zoo than anything else. Opened in 1904, it now owns about 3,700 animals of 400 species. The main attraction is a public aquarium. The 'museum' is perfect especially for families and children.

Grünes Gewölbe (Green vault), Dresden

The museum is located in the former UNESCO city of Dresden and was founded by Augustus II the Strong in 1723. Grünes Gewölbe is named after its first room that was painted in green. It houses unique and rich variety of exhibits from baroque period to classicism totalling over 4,000 pieces together. It consists of nine rooms with special exhibition theme in each of them. The museum was fully reconstructed and reopened on 1 September 2006. The most interesting exhibits are the statue of Moor with Emerald plate and the Dresden Green Diamond.

Porsche-Museum, Stuttgart

Those of you who are keen on cars should not miss the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart. The automobile museum opened in 1976 and is situated just outside the Porsche Headquarters in Zuffenhausen. The museum houses over 80 exhibits, mostly rare cars and original models.

Romano-Germanic Museum, Cologne

Romano-Germanic museum is an archaeological museum in Cologne. It was opened in 1974 and houses a large collection of Roman artefacts from the roman settlement called Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium on which the city of Cologne was built. The museum itself is situated on a place of an original Roman villa parts of which are still preserved and now protected by the museum.

Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich

Pinakothek is one of the most famous art galleries in Germany. It contains paintings of European masters that lived between the 14th-18th century. Albrecht Dürer's Christ-like Self-Portrait, his Four Apostles, Raphael's paintings The Canigiani Holy Family and Madonna Tempio as well as Peter Paul Rubens's two-storey-high Judgment Day belong among the highlights of the gallery.

Goethe House and Museum, Frankfurt

Goethe House is the birthplace of the most famous German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. There are many original pieces of furniture that Goethe and his family actually used. The exhibition includes manuscripts written by Goethe's own hand. The original house was destroyed in the Second World War but was carefully rebuild with all its details.

Museumshafen Oevelgönne, Hamburg

Museumshafen Oevelgönne situated in an old harbour in Hamburg-Altona is a maritime museum. The river Elbe with old Captain's houses on its banks, a beach and various ships are definitely worth seeing while visiting Hamburg.

Übersee Museum, Bremen

Übersee (Oversea) Museum is an ethnographic and natural history museum located in Bremen. The museum specializes in nature, culture and trading, mainly in the regions of Asia, America, Africa and South Pacific.

(Source: tourism-review)

WTCF and Chinese Friendly Co-hosts "One Belt One Road Event: First Pan-Asian Conference on Chinese Tourism" in Astana



On June 24th, 2017, the "One Belt One Road Event: First Pan-Asian Conference on Chinese Tourism" was held in Astana, capital city of Kazakhstan. The conference was hosted by Astana Convention Bureau LLP, World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF), Kazakhstan Tourism Association, Kazakhstan Association of Hotels & Restaurants, Committee of Tourism Industry of the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and Chinese Friendly. Also, the event was supported by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Ministry of Culture and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Municipal Government of Astana, EXPO 2017 Astana. More than 200 tourism experts, institutions and international organizations, representatives from Spain, Italy, Iran, China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan participated in the conference. To promote market exchange and cooperation in countries along the "Silk Road," the participants discussed topics including promoting tourism cooperation and improving tourism service during the conference.

As the co-organizer, Yan Han, Deputy Secretary-General of WTCF, brought greetings on behalf of WTCF and delivered the first themed speech. Mr. Yan Han introduced the history and current situation of WTCF. He also analyzed the Chinese outbound tourism market while referencing the report released by WTCF: Market Research Report on Chinese Outbound Tourist (City) Consumption. The research data provided by the report gave an insight into the changes of Chinese outbound tourism patterns and current status and explained the features, habits, and preferences of Chinese tourists. In addition, Mr. Yan Han

analyzed the advantages and trends of the tourism development between China and Kazakhstan. He appealed for the joint efforts of all the countries along the Silk Road to construct the tourism corridor and build the tourism node cities. Mr. Yan also encouraged participants take the opportunity of "The Belt and Road Initiative" to promote the diversity of tourism products, simplify the visa process, enhance the connections of the people from Silk Road countries and realize the mutual trust and mutual benefit.

At the conference titled "Being competitive in Chinese Travel Industry," Mr. Richard Matuzevich, Senior Manager, Secretariat of WTCF, who is responsible for the liaison work of Europe and Africa, delivered a speech themed "Alliances and Partners, constructing a new belt: Silk Road Cities" in Russian. Representatives of the tourism industry from

many countries along the One Belt One Road route said they hoped to join WTCF, and jointly boost the development of the China - Kazakhstan tourism industry.

Mukhamediyuly, Minister of Culture and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan, UNESCO representative José María, Ravshan Usmanov, Deputy President of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism Development, and other representatives all spoke at the conference. Minister Mukhamediyuly welcomed the opening of the forum, carefully listened to what the honored guests said, and introduced the "Kazakhstan - China Tourism Year" plan. The plan promises to actively promote visa facilitation and other initiatives, so that Kazakhstan's tourism brand development strategy can be practically and effectively promoted in the Chinese market.

Deputy Secretary-General Yan Han was also interviewed by the national TV station of Kazakhstan, KAZAKSTAN and other Kazakhstan media. He introduced the current development status of WTCF, and was also invited to analyze the advantages and direction of connection and cooperation between the countries along the One Belt One Road route and China's tourism market.





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Nine Technology Trends Shaping Tomorrow's Travel Industry

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Sabre Corporation has released its latest technology forecast, Sabre Labs' 2017 Radar Report. The report evaluates an outsized impact of nine key technologies like artificial intelligence, neural interfaces and quantum computing on the travel landscape.

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Sabre's newest technology forecast, the 2017 Radar Report, evaluates how the nine tech trends are reshaping the travel landscape.

Artificial Intelligence

Back in 2011, Gartner research predicted that by 2020, customers will manage 85% of their interaction with companies without interacting with a human. Servion consulting released a more recent figure, predicting that AI will power 95% of customer interactions by 2025.

The effective service and support teams have an AI layer capable of understanding and responding to most basic questions, paired with humans available to step in when the AI isn't confident it has an answer.

For travel, the AI layer might provide

hotel checkout times or local restaurant recommendations and the human might take over if a customer has a special request or wants to share a personal experience.

Als can drastically reduce the load of repetitive tasks—whether physical or digital—freeing humans up for higher value, more creative work.

For instance, Als are rapidly improving in the area of language translation, which is helping to flatten the world economy, streamline travel and make it easier for people to connect with one another.

Augmented Reality

Last year saw the launch of three foundational AR efforts: Microsoft HoloLens, Google Tango,

and Pokemon Go—a trio of radically different projects, each demonstrating a different element of AR's potential. It also saw the proliferation of real-time video filters and interactive selfie animations added to Snapchat and Facebook. But the big news in augmented reality this year is Apple's release of ARKit, a tool for developers to build AR apps in preparation for the launch of iOS 11 this fall.

AR is already being used for things like translation—the ability to read every sign or document in your preferred language in real time. And it's easy to imagine all kinds of other functionalities, like visual Wikipedia for the real world... every building, street and landmark mapped to layers of rich content. Or in social

spaces, never forget a name or an interaction; businesses could greet every passenger or hotel guest by name and know their customer history at a glance.

Autonomous Delivery

Earlier this year, Starship Technologies and delivery service Postmates launched a robotic delivery service in Washington, D.C. The robots look like medium-sized coolers on six wheels and have special approval to travel exclusively on sidewalks in the District and in neighboring Virginia.

They use GPS and an array of nine cameras to help navigate their environments. They can't bring all your groceries yet, but they can bring quick takeout meals or a bag of items from a local convenience store.

When combined with other technologies, like biometric identity, it's easy to imagine a world in which travel becomes a virtually hands free process, thanks in large part to autonomous delivery technologies.

An autonomous suitcase and autonomous personal porter are already in production—it may soon be commonplace to see small robots following their owners through airports, train stations and city streets. Luggage may even check itself in and come find you after you disembark.

It might even be possible to retask your luggage to run errands once you're at a destination drop off the dry cleaning or pick up a snack. If you're out in the city and left your phone or sunglasses in the hotel, no worries...those can be delivered.

Blockchain

Blockchain appears to excel when you need a clear and immutable record of any type of information (such as location or ownership) to be accessible to multiple parties who may not trust one another. We're beginning to see blockchain prototypes emerging in the travel space:

a) Webjet is piloting hotel room inventory on blockchain, to collect exponentially more data with each booking and ensure prompt and complete payment to all parties.

b) Startups are eyeing digital identity management on blockchain. Combining biometric identification with blockchain may provide more secure digital proof of identity, over traditional identity measures like a passport.

c) Hotel and airline loyalty programs may transition to blockchain to help streamline tracking of loyalty points and simplify conversion and redemption across all parties.

d) Airbus has brainstormed blockchain possibilities, and is part of the Hyperledger blockchain consortium; their test project is

to use blockchain to create industry-wide tracking.

e) Moog Aircraft group is using blockchain for parts tracking, as well as to digitally authenticate and provide rights management for 3D printed airplane parts.

Neural interfaces

In June, the U.S. Department of Energy infused an additional \$258 million into the race in a bid to keep up with China, which promises to have an exascale computer functional by 2020.

Complexity and speed aren't ends unto themselves, but as supercomputers approach the complexity of a human brain, it becomes possible to perform deeper simulations of the inner workings of the brain, to better understand how they work.

At a hackathon last fall, Sabre Labs built an EEG-based flight shopping app for iOS. Wearing an EEG headband, users undergo a quick training session looking at images of beaches and mountains to establish baseline brainwaves.

After training, a person can simply think of a destination—mountain vs. beach—to launch the appropriately themed flight search.

Quantum Computing

As quantum computers get closer and we better understand their potential, it appears their first “killer app” is likely to be optimization-finding the most efficient way to chart a path or engineer a system.

And this has tremendous potential for travel!

Much of travel—along with other common things like internet search and social media—relies on optimization across large data arrays.

Flight scheduling, crew allocation, aircraft routing, traveler itineraries, etc., are all optimization problems with countless variables.

Traditional computers work on these problems with limited toolsets; quantum computers may be able to find entirely new solutions and efficiencies.

Space Tourism

Some of the aircraft technologies being developed—particularly for near space flights—may see broader commercial applications within the next decade.

Various patent filings and prototype tests for hypersonic aircraft are under way. Hypersonic craft travel at Mach 5 and above—at least 7 times faster than the top speed of an Airbus A380 or Boeing 787.

These speeds could shorten Atlantic-crossing times to an hour, and London to

Sydney times to as little as 2 hours, radically shrinking the world and changing the shape of global business.

Trusted Presence

The travel industry is in the business of establishing trust—knowing the location and identity of people and objects is one of its most important responsibilities.

Travel programs like EasyPASS (Germany), Smart Entry System (Korea), Global Entry (US), among others, aim to streamline travel through prevetting.

Questionnaires, background checks and interviews establish trust for individuals, so that once identity is established a high degree of trust is automatically present.

The trick to going seamless is establishing identity quickly and accurately at every point in a journey. Today, clusters of technology similar to those in place at the Amazon Go market are in various stages of development and deployment to help expedite identity authentication in the travel process.

The most rapid inroads are in airports. Australia has outlined the most ambitious goals of any country, planning to automate 90% of incoming international air travel processing by 2020, using a combination of facial recognition, fingerprints and iris scanning to identify passengers without the need to show passports.

Virtual Reality

In Labs, we firmly believe VR will never replace travel, but instead will augment and inspire travel experiences.

VR is a natural technology for inspiring real world travel and upselling premium experiences. In part, because VR helps make new kinds of experiences possible, especially around education.

For instance, a VR tour through a simulated Rome at the height of the Roman Empire can provide deep historical context to make visiting modern Rome even more meaningful.

VR can also help inspire local travel opportunities like diving with sharks or paragliding off a cliff—the VR experience is more accessible and can help people mentally prepare for real world experiences that may be at the edge of their comfort zone.

But the most important reason travel in the physical world is here to stay is authenticity. Authentic experiences matter, especially to rising generations of Millennials and Gen Z. And as VR experiences grow in number and prominence, the value of physical—real—experiences is likely to increase in value. ➡

(Source: Sabre)



Blockchain: Beyond the Hype

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In the past two years, 'blockchain' has become a magic word, able to open doors and investor wallets, panic industry juggernauts, and guarantee headlines.

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But much of its power comes from mystery and misunderstanding—we all know it's important, but not how to talk about it. And meanwhile, we see headlines touting all the ways blockchain is transforming whole spheres of society: finance, security, transportation, public information and beyond.

Blockchain Basics

Blockchain is self-descriptive: blocks of data are sequentially added to a chain of similar blocks. All blocks in a chain must follow the same set of rules, established from the first block. As each new block of information is added, the entire chain is tested to make sure nothing is out of place. Chains are unbreakable or “immutable”—once a block is in place, it can't be moved or changed without taking the whole chain apart. At its core:

Blockchain is a framework optimized for immutable, distributed, public ledgers. It allows the direct transfer of value between parties

without requiring those parties to trust each other. The value can be any digital record—currency, property, identity, loyalty, votes, media, etc.

Blockchain is not a single thing; it's a set of ideas. Blockchain protocols (like those defined by Bitcoin, Ethereum, Hyperledger, etc.) are essentially programming languages—each has various strengths and weaknesses.

Blockchain is nascent in its development. At an MIT-hosted conference on blockchain in April, blockchain was compared to the 1989-1990 Internet—a time when today's protocols (like HTML) were still being figured out. This comparison suggests: 1) blockchain could have a powerful and widespread future; 2) blockchain still has a very long way to go; and 3) blockchain is ripe for experimentation.

Gartner Inc. has placed blockchain on their Hype Cycle near the “peak of inflated expectations.” According to their model, this means blockchain may slide into the “trough of disillusionment” for a period of

years before it comes into its own and has a transformative and lasting impact.

Global Impact

The number of companies working on blockchain is increasing exponentially. The Ethereum protocol alone has over 500 decentralized applications live or under way, and new blockchains are being launched weekly.

At present, an array of governments, businesses, non-profits and ad hoc collectives are using blockchains in a breadth of ways hinting at its future potential.

Businesses are committed to and experiment with blockchain platforms and protocols. The two most significant concentrations are around the open-source Hyperledger project and the Enterprise Ethereum Alliance.

Blockchain-based currencies have the potential to bring the entire world into a digital economy. Governments, banks and non-profits are testing blockchain-based cryptocurrencies, with the potential to bring digital financial services to everyone, including 2 billion people in developing nations who have never had access to a bank or credit card.

Every good—physical or digital—can have a unique permanent record (a ‘passport’) stored in blockchain. Outside finance, the hottest growth area for blockchain seems to be transforming supply chains to better track goods between businesses and across borders, helping guarantee authenticity and eliminate counterfeiting.

Blockchain has the potential to change the shape of public information.

Blockchain-powered projects providing services similar to Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and countless other major platforms are proposed or in development with the goal to return ownership of assets to the individual and assure freedom from censorship.

Trust Issues

Blockchains are being hyped as the end to silos, corruption, lack of transparency and insecurity.

But in taking a wider look at the tech landscape, it’s still unclear in which cases blockchains will offer a favorable value proposition over other kinds of ledgers, including traditional databases.



The touted immutability of blockchains is both a pro and a con. If the data is correct and the protocol is secure, then immutability is a tremendous benefit.

But whenever something is recorded incorrectly, or a loophole is found and exploited in the original protocol of the blockchain, those problems are very difficult to resolve. With nodes as partners, there is no “higher authority” to appeal to if/when something goes wrong.

Private blockchains “solve” the higher authority issue, since every node within a blockchain is controlled by a business, coalition or government. But in many of these cases, it’s unclear why blockchain is necessary. Existing database solutions can be built with most of the same features as blockchain and can often be implemented at lower costs with existing infrastructure.

Since the rules for a blockchain are established from the first block, what effectively occurs in a public blockchain is a shift in trust: instead of trusting an institution to create and maintain data records, participants are asked to trust that whatever entity creates the initial block does so in a clear and secure way, that data is then entered correctly, and that the majority of nodes remain committed to the original goals of the system. In a private blockchain, trust is similar to today: you trust whatever entity (or entities) controls the network.

Travel Relevance

Blockchain appears to excel when you need a clear and immutable record of any type of information (such as location or ownership) to be accessible to multiple parties who may not trust one another. We’re beginning to see blockchain prototypes emerging in the travel space:

Webjet is piloting hotel room inventory on blockchain, to collect exponentially more data with each booking and ensure prompt and complete payment to all parties.

Startups are eyeing digital identity management on blockchain. Combining biometric identification with blockchain may provide more secure digital proof of identity, over traditional identity measures like a passport.

Hotel and airline loyalty programs may transition to blockchain to help streamline tracking of loyalty points and simplify conversion and redemption across all players.

Airbus has brainstormed blockchain possibilities, and is part of the Hyperledger blockchain consortium; their test project is to use blockchain to create industry-wide tracking of pilot diplomas, certifications and qualifications.

Moog Aircraft group is using blockchain for parts tracking, as well as to digitally authenticate and provide rights management for 3D printed airplane parts.

Even the most bullish blockchain proponents acknowledge the need for some centralized or trusted authorities within complex business systems. In travel, centralized players are necessary to help ensure proper identity, policy compliance, reporting and security. The cost and potential regulatory liability of moving billions of transactions to a new and barely-tested ecosystem is extremely prohibitive, as is the challenge of consensus around a new platform.

This is not to say that travel distribution functions will never be provided via a blockchain. But when these develop, they will most likely be on a private blockchains, and implemented only after extensive testing and validation of the security and safety of the platform. And there would still be a central, trusted authority, helping manage compatibility and compliance within the blockchain system. Regardless of which projects get off the ground, blockchain looks to have significant long term impact inside and outside the travel industry. ➤

(Source: Sabre)



How to Attract Visitors during the “Slow Growth” of Prague City Tourism

Interview with Nora Dolanská, Prague City Tourism Head

“

2016 was a good year for tourism not least in the Czech capital, which saw yet another increase in the number of visitors in Prague. Radio Prague discussed with the head of Prague City Tourism, Nora Dolanská, about the overall performance of the city tourism in Prague.

”

In most respects 2016 was a good year for tourism not least in the Czech capital, which saw yet another increase in the number of visitors.

But there were complications as well, among them heightened security introduced at Prague Castle mid-season which led to unexpected and unprecedented lines, at least for a time. Still, on the whole, Prague

offers more and better possibilities than ever, something Radio Prague discussed with the head of Prague City Tourism, Nora Dolanská. We began by asking her first how she rated 2016 overall.

Nora Dolanská said: “I must say this year has been very successful. Last year, we had six and a half million tourists in Prague and we expect that this year we should have



Nora Dolanská, the head of Prague City Tourism

about 5% more. This is a very very good number and we are very satisfied with it.”

Usually, ranking in numbers, top were German tourists. Around 60 or 70 % of all the tourists are Europeans. The second and third place are the tourists from the USA and from the United Kingdom.

This is very good for us because this is good quality and we are satisfied with the quality of the tourists.

Of course this all is a matter of change. We most some Russian tourists last year, but in the second half of this year we expect growth again in Russian visitors and in visitors from Eastern Europe.

Other tourists are from China, from South Korea, because now we have cooperation with the Asian countries.

This is very good, especially with the direct flights to Prague, which are very important for tourism generally.

Q: Of course and just to follow up, when you talk about German tourists, obviously, a neighbouring country, no surprise there. In terms of the nature of visits these days, do these seem to be short-term, overnight stays or a couple of days, when talking specifically about German visitors?

A: We have a lot of tourists, who come to Prague. They do not stay for so long, two or three days maximum. But together with them, we have a lot of tourists who are coming only as visitors. They come in the morning and in the afternoon the same day, they will go home.

And this is very problematic for a small city like Prague, because we have a small historic centre, the streets are all very close, or tight, not like in bigger cities such as Vienna or Paris or London.

And for us this is it is very complicated in some times of the year with how full is the city.

Q: So it is congested you are saying, a lot of the time there are many people here at the same time.

A: Yes it is, and of course, most of them are coming in the high season, from April to October. Our target is to have a longer season.

We shall prepare some exhibitions and performances in the low season, from November until February.

We would also like to show other parts of the city to tourists, who remain mostly in the centre. This is a new progress, we must prepare new routes and new trips to other parts of the city.

We have a lot of interesting buildings there but it is the matter of showing them, so the tourists stay in the city and have a lovely time in the other parts, not only in the centre.

Q: You may say that they are missing out if they only see the main sights, there are hidden secrets here.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Which leads into my next question because obviously, the main sights are not going to change anytime soon, Charles Bridge, Prague Castle, Malá Strana. Those are the initial draws. Is it fair to say that the kind of quintessential Prague experience that some of us had 15 or 20 years ago that that has changed? It is not just the historic sights now, it is not just the lunch and dinner with the pork and dumplings and beer. Is that changed?

A: Yes it is, now we have a lot of other possibilities in gastronomy. We have a lot of restaurants, special bars, night clubs. Also places in other parts of the city, for example Prague 7 or Prague 8. It is a new area for tourists, they have not seen it until now and it is some very good experience there.

Q: Prague 7 is for example now in the process of reinventing itself as more of a cultural hub.

A: Yes, exactly, this is it. And together with them, we have some new wine areas, also a Prague wine tour. It is very new but very interesting for some of them.

Q: You mentioned the high congestion during the high season which I suppose can detract to a degree from the experience, it can be difficult if tourists have to wait lines. So my next question is, were there any negatives that we saw this year? For example Prague Castle heightened security, which created long lines. Also from the perspective of tourists, how did you view the Segway ban which is now in place?

A: For the Prague Castle, I think it is not that different from the rest of Europe, when you are going to expositions. In London in Paris – you have this thing too.

With the Castle, it was a special situation, because I must say, it was not well prepared.

It was put in place too quickly and in the middle of the season, it was not there for the whole season, information were not issued to the travel agencies before it was installed.

I think for the tourists in general it is now not such a big problem.

The problem with Segways, it is a general problem with Prague, because it is a very

tightly-packed city. I think the ban is right, it is very good.

Q: You used to see these see long lines of ten, twenty Segways heading up to Prague Castle...

A: Yes and it was dangerous! I have seen one of them going on the street with cars, it really was a very dangerous situation and with so many people together in the city, it is impossible.

Q: So in short, visitors coming to Prague can look for other experiences than Segway rides.

A: Yes, Prague is for walking, it is the best experience is in the walking distance. And this is what we are trying to show and prepare for people to experience in our city.

Q: Previously, the city has done very well when it came to for example Trip Advisor. How is it ranked at the moment?

A: We have now the best Christmas market in the centre of Europe. The Christmas market is very romantic, and generally we can say, that our experience of our tourists is that Prague is altogether very romantic. It is the main slogan for all that we do.”

Q: We just saw the tragedy in Germany, a terrorist attack which claimed 12 lives, including that of a Czech woman: they have heightened security at these key sights that we are talking about. Is that the reality that we have to live with now?

A: The reality, in all of Europe I think, is that we must be very flexible, you cannot do anything with this situation. For Berlin, it is a pity I must say. In Prague we have the city police and they must help us take the people who come to Prague and make them safe.

Q: We are still in the Christmas period, it is obviously not a bad time to visit Prague as you said, Prague is one of the most romantic cities in Europe. What is your advice for anyone heading to Prague in the winter months?

A: You should try and get a deeper sense of the city. For next year we want to promote a new term, what we are calling 'slow tourism'. People should not be in a hurry. It is not possible to sit on the bank of the river in winter of course but if you see there is a small cafe somewhere and you can sit there and see and feel the atmosphere of the city. That is the best which you can do in Prague.

Q: So in some ways, it is the return to the basics, of what tourism really should be.

A: Yes, it is important and I think in spring, tourists will come to Prague and enjoy the wonderful atmosphere.

Q: Some 1,380,000 people visited Prague in the first quarter of 2017, spending over three million nights in the city, according to data released by Prague City Tourism. After years of downfall in the number of Russian tourists, the office has recorded a significant surge in the number of Russian tourists. Do Russian tourists tend to spend more days in the city when they come to Prague?

A: Yes, around 60 percent of incoming Russians spend their time in Prague only. But the amount of days spent here is what makes them so specific.

The average number of bed-nights is 2.5 but for Russians it is almost four, so they do tend to spend the longest time in Prague among all nationalities.

Q: In recent years, we have also seen an increase in the number of tourists coming from Asia. Is that still the case?

A: Definitely. For example in the first quarter of 2017, we recorded a 24.8 percent increase. Tourists from Asia used to come to Prague only during the summer but now we see that the trend is changing and they are coming throughout the whole year. So their numbers are constantly rising, mainly tourists from South Korea and China.

Q: You have also recorded an increase in the number of local tourists coming to Prague. What are the reasons behind this trend?

A: If you look at the numbers you can see a certain correlation with the depreciation of the Czech crown, when holidays abroad became significantly more expensive for people here.

But we also try to target local tourists. We highlight festivals and cultural events, trying to improve Prague's reputation, showing them that there is a lot to do and to see, that it is not just an expensive destination for foreigners.

For May and June we have an outdoor campaign on our main roads and highways all around the country trying to show local

tourists that Prague can be theirs as well, that this is an attractive destination where they can spend their time.

Q: Czech department store takes Chinese name to tempt high spending tourists?

A: One of the Czech Republic's oldest department stores, Kotva, which is located in downtown Prague, wants to focus more on Chinese clients, its management announced in a press release on Wednesday.

The store has even acquired an official Chinese name: gao-te-wa.

The three Chinese characters in the title are reminiscent of the Czech name Kotva, which means anchor in English. The title was chosen with the help of the Confucius Institute of Palacký University in Olomouc and refers to "exceptionality and high quality". The department store, owned by the Irish company Markland, will use it in their campaign targeting Chinese customers.

We chose the same direction as they did for example in London, where important buildings and heritage sites have their official Chinese names.

We hope that this step will also help



us in highlighting Kotva as an interesting architectural site and as a traditional Czech department store for Chinese tourists.

The importance of Chinese customers for Czech retail has been increasing in recent years. In the third quarter of 2015, Chinese tourists spent more than the Russians, who until then had led the ratings.

In the period between July and September, Chinese visitors accounted for 33 percent of the total spent by non-EU tourists in the Czech Republic. Meanwhile, the share of Russian tourists last year almost halved to 16 percent from the previous years' 31 percent.

In 2014, some 211,000 Chinese tourists arrived in the Czech Republic and according to the estimates of the Czech Association for Tour Operators and Travel Agents, their numbers soared to around 270,000 last year.

The average amount the Chinese visitors spend on their shopping during their stay has increased to 19,400 crowns in 2015, compared to 15,900 in the previous year.

Kotva managed to remain in business despite a huge modern shopping centre, Palladium, opening directly across the street in 2007. In 2014, Kotva's sales increased by 50 million crowns compared to the previous year to total roughly 800 million.

The Brutalist architectural style department store was opened in 1975 and it was one of the first outlets of its kind in Prague. The building, whose ground plan consists of several interconnected hexagons, was designed by the husband and wife team of architects Vladimír and Věra Machonin, who also designed the Hotel Thermal in Karlovy Vary.

Prague City Hall has recently applied to include the department store in the list of national cultural heritage sites.

Q: Higher vat returns for visitors would boost spending?

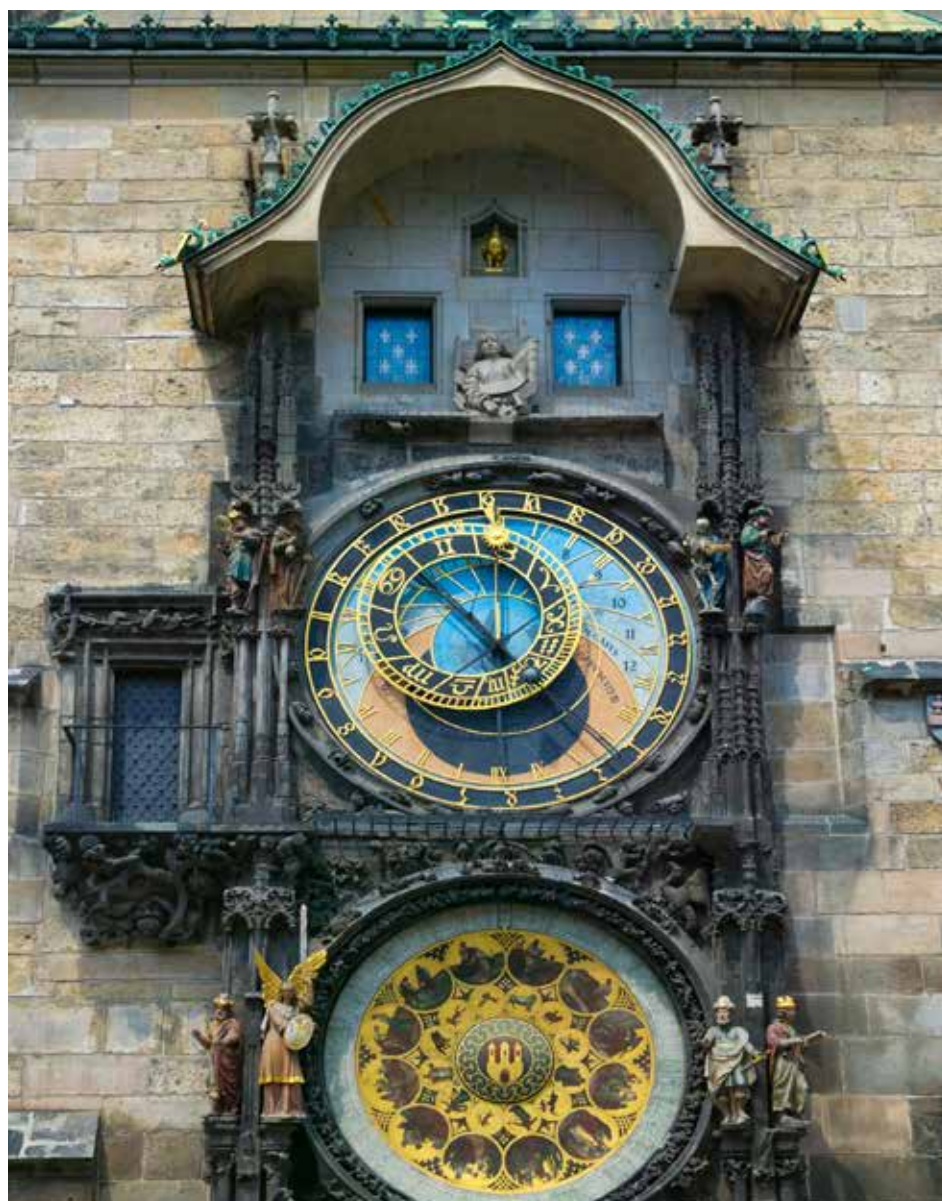
A: The number of Chinese visitors to the Czech Republic has been rising fast in recent years.

Now Czech tourist industry groups want to encourage them and other non-EU tourists to spend more when they are here – by offering them greater VAT returns on goods bought during their stay.

At present visitors from China, Russia and other non-EU states can apply to get the VAT back on all purchases made in the Czech Republic at a value of CZK 2,000 crowns or more.

Now associations involved in incoming tourism are lobbying for that amount to be cut to CZK 1,500, iDnes.

If the change were made, tourism bodies believe it would lead to a marked uptick in



how much such visitors leave in the country, the news website said.

A study produced by the Czech Chamber of Commerce suggests that the move would leave a hole of CZK 30 million a year in the state coffers. But that is a small amount when set beside the CZK 1 billion that tourists now get back in VAT annually, according to the study.

The study's authors believe the idea would above all have a psychological effect. Thanks to the overall sense that good deals are to be had in Czech shops, non-EU visitors would spend an extra CZK 150 million a year, they say. What's more, the number of jobs in tourism would grow because of the impact on the grey economy, which would suffer as documentation would obviously be necessary to get the VAT back, the report contends.

It also claims that reducing the limit would serve as a buffer when the Czech National Bank ceases its weak crown policy,

probably next year. However, the tourist associations' idea has a major opponent: The Ministry of Finance.

Spokesman Jakub Vintrolik told iDnes.cz that the ministry is against reducing the limit as it sees no benefit to it.

According to the Ministry's calculations, the move would cost the state at least CZK 250 million. In addition, such tourists tend to buy luxury items which go for considerably more than CZK 1,500, so it would be of little benefit to retailers in any case, they say.

However, a representative of crystal producer Moser said visitors spent an average of CZK 1,730 on small gift items at its stores in Prague and Karlovy Vary.

Retailers also argue that they need to compete more with outlets in other states. Germany returns VAT on all purchases made by non-EU tourists, while states such as Poland have lower limits than in the Czech Republic. ●

(Source: radio.cz)



Ten Reasons of Visit Minsk

“

Minsk (Мінск) will almost certainly surprise you. The capital of Belarus is, contrary to its dreary reputation, a progressive, modern and clean place.

”

Fashionable cafes, impressive restaurants and crowded nightclubs vie for your attention, while sushi bars and art galleries have taken up residence in a city centre once totally remodelled to the tastes of Stalin. Despite the strong police presence and obedient citizenry, Minsk is a thoroughly pleasant place that's easy to become fond of.

Razed to the ground in WWII, Minsk has precious few buildings remaining from the pre-war years, and there are relatively few traditional sights in the city, save a clutch of worthwhile museums.

Instead, there are myriad places of interest to anyone fascinated by the Soviet and Lukashenko periods and a growing wealth of cosmopolitan pursuits to keep you entertained come evening.

For many travellers, Minsk evokes far-flung Soviet gloom. Many more would struggle to name a single sight in Belarus' capital. More's the pity: the architecture of this ever-evolving city makes for an intriguing visit, and there's a clutch of attractions worthy of global attention. From historic sights to lip-smacking brews, here are 10 reasons to open your mind to Minsk.

Uplifting religious architecture

The double-towered Holy Spirit Cathedral (pl Svabody) is the Old Town's most striking landmark, but the 'Red Church' (pl Nezalezhnastsi) is perhaps the most eye-catching of Minsk's religious buildings. This Roman Catholic church has holiness layered into its very foundations: the bricks were brought all the way from Polish pilgrimage

site Częstochowa. It was twice repurposed into a cinema but is now the heart of Minsk's Catholic community. Admirers of the classic onion-domed Orthodox churches should make for the star-spangled Church of St Mary Magdalene (vul Kisyalyova).

Poignantly beautiful memorials

The WWII saw Minsk all but flattened. A succession of previous occupations and other conflicts also scarred the city. Explore Minsk's dark history through its memorials, often astonishing in design and scale. At the 'Island of Tears', statues of mourning women and weeping angels gaze out in remembrance of those lost in the 1979–89 war with Afghanistan. On the riverside near the National Museum of the Great Patriotic

War, the silver 'Road to the Future' sculpture resembles lightning striking the shore. But the loveliest is surely beneath the eternal flame at Victory Circus: an underground memorial hall is dappled with soft amber light from above.

Sipping your way around the city

Want to knock back vodka? You won't be disappointed by Minsk's local spirits, from innocent-looking Minsk Kristall vodka to local Balsam – which gives as morbid a hangover as this tarry brown liquid forbodes. Minsk is also a haven for hop-heads. Settle in to U Ratushi for light and dark brews plus live music, or line your stomach with rustic cuisine at Rakovsky Brovar brewery-restaurant. If your tastebuds are pointing west, enjoy the Belgian flavour of Gambrinus (gambrinus.relax.by) or nine Bavarian brews on tap to wash down bratwurst at BierKeller (bierkeller.relax.by).

Sleeping in a converted monastery

No need to take religious vows to bed down in this historic building. Manastyrski Hotel, with elaborate iron chandeliers casting shadows along every corridor, is as atmospheric as it gets. This charming hotel within a converted monastery is right in the middle of Minsk's Old Town, and retains all the Gothic trimmings of its spiritual past. But instead of rising at dawn and spending your days in sombre contemplation, you can test out the sauna and bar-hop the lively Old Town. Living like a monk never felt so decadent.

A world-class war museum

From the moment you see Belarus' Museum of the Great Patriotic War, the building alone will intrigue you. A burnished dome seems to emerge from the ground, surrounded by angular mirrored shards. Inside, the museum experience is immersive, with vast dioramas of scorched earth and rubble to evoke wartime Minsk. Stories of partisan soldiers are told in a series of wooden shelters, just like the ones built by forest-dwelling Belarussian soldiers. Biplanes and tanks are amassed in a huge atrium. Between the Molotov cocktails and glaring propaganda posters there's fascinating detail on the human stories: families torn apart and acts of astonishing bravery that won't fail to leave you gripped. The Hall of Victory, flooded with light, is a fittingly dramatic finish.

Bird's-eye views from a space-age library

The 23rd floor of the National Library of Belarus has the best aerial view over the city's ever-changing skyline. Lines of tower blocks extend into the distance, huge Soviet

murals adorn buildings, and a forest of cranes busily shape central Minsk: it's a captivating view, if not a classically beautiful one. But it's the library building itself that seizes the imagination.

This modernist marvel looks like a cut diamond – if the diamond were rendered in Soviet slate grey and balanced on a mirrored UFO. As an architectural creation, it's divisive but unforgettable. As a bonus, you'll find one of the city's best coffee stops, Graf Café, at the top.

It's an assassin's former home city

Minsk affords a glimpse into a rather unexpected chapter of history: the assassination of JFK. Lee Harvey Oswald declared that he was renouncing his American citizenship before making his way to settle down in Minsk; visitors can see his former apartment on vul Kamyunistychnaya 4.

Minsk was Oswald's home for years before he begged for the return of his American passport, returned to the US and on a fateful day in 1963 changed the course of American history...

Rustic local cuisine

Visit a traditional Belarussian restaurant and you'll wonder how locals stay so svelte. Pancakes dipped in rich pork broth (machanka), dumplings and solyanka soup are staples of Belarus' button-popping cuisine.

While local palates increasingly look west, with French cafes and Italian pizzerias dotted across the city, wear your stretchy pants for at least one Belarussian feast. The bare-brick walls, stained glass and traditional embroidery at Kamyaniitsa restaurant (kamyaniitsa.by) are the perfect backdrop. Try draniki (potato pancakes), herring-stuffed tomatoes and slabs of

grilled pork, ideally between sips of the excellent homemade honey and horseradish liqueurs.

Colourful handicrafts

If ever a craft made much of scant source materials, it's Belarussian straw weaving. Before you raise an eyebrow at swapping your roubles for straw, fix your eyes on Belarus' elaborately woven Christmas decorations, baskets and sculptures. If you don't think these delicate items will survive the journey home, brightly painted matryoshka (Russian dolls) and some frankly bizarre Soviet kitsch (Stalin fridge magnet, anyone?) are sure to sate your urge to shop. Minsk's Stolitsa underground mall is full of excellent handicrafts stalls.

It's surprisingly easy to visit

'Europe's last dictatorship' isn't a fortress hidden behind endless paperwork, nor is it hard to navigate for visitors. Once you're in, you'll find English signs across the efficient metro system and at tourist sites. The war museum has extensive English explanations, and most restaurants have an English-language menu. From mid-February 2017, citizens of 80 countries can travel to Minsk airport visa-free for stays of up to five days.

For longer stays or if travelling by train, you do need a visa – check the requirements on Belarus' official website (belarus.by). Reserve accommodation and request a booking confirmation on headed notepaper to submit it with your visa application.

When you crane your neck at Minsk's architecture, plug cellar-room beers or cruise the museums, you'll be glad you made the effort. ➤

(Source: Lonely Planet)



Chinese Visitors Spend Lavishly, Boost Helsinki Tourism Trade



The number of overnight stays by Chinese visitors in the Finnish capital of Helsinki is gradually on the rise.

Last year, the number of Chinese tourists had risen by almost 20% as compared to the previous year and this trend seems to be continuing this year as well. Research and Analysis Centre (TAK) that is a premiere travel industry observer mentioned that on an average, a tourist is known to splurge about 298 euros per visit. But then, a Chinese tourist spends nearly 896 euros. And, as a group, Chinese tourists spent approximately 214 million euros in the capital region last year. Tuulikki Becker who is the CEO of Helsinki Marketing said that the number of Chinese arrivals here is expanding at a very rapid rate. He went on to add that this year they had as much as three times more overnight stays by Chinese nationals as compared to that in the year 2010. And, he feels that in the period between February and May, the number had increased by almost 60%.

One of the main reasons that prompted the boost of Chinese visits in the Finnish capital is its strategic location. This is because Vantaa Airport of Finland has emerged as a major hub for air traffic from Asia and is the fastest route to Europe for Eastern tourists.

Becker said that a majority of the Chinese tourists continue travelling to other destinations and do not prefer remaining in Finland, rather like to visit other cities in Europe. Many managers of shops and restaurant owners have observed this growing trend of Eastern tourist arrivals and have adjusted their services accordingly.

About two years ago, Russian and Chinese tourists had injected the same amount of cash during their stays in Helsinki, but now the scenario has undergone a transformation.

Last year, Chinese tourists have spent some 214 million euros in Helsinki and this amount has surpassed that from all the visitors representing other nations.

On the other hand, Russians have spent nearly 125 million euros in the capital region last year.

Montreal's Hospitality Week - Tourisme Montreal and Local Hotels Roll Out the Red Carpet for Tourists

Tourisme Montreal is encouraging Montreal hotels to participate in Hospitality Week, a new initiative that promises to become a major annual event. Scheduled to take place from August 21 to 28, the event is part of Montreal vous accueille [Montreal Welcomes You], a broader project led by Tourisme Montreal to enrich the visitor experience by enhancing the overall quality of tourist hospitality in the city.

After aligning the visual identity of Montreal's main points of entry and the city's fleet of taxis through a joint initiative with the Bureau du taxi [Taxi Bureau], Tourisme Montreal is now calling on several members of the Hotel Association of Greater Montreal to proudly display the "Bonjour" signature during Hospitality Week.

Participating hotels can also offer guests postcards, luggage tags and umbrellas featuring the "Bonjour" logo.

"Since visitors are increasingly seeking local experiences, Tourisme Montreal is looking to improve the tourist welcome strategies used by our partners across the city. We would like to sincerely thank all the hotels that will be participating in this initiative, as it will help generate buzz about the city," said Yves Lalumiere, President and CEO of Tourisme Montreal.

"I'm delighted to report that many hotels located in the city centre and Old Montreal have agreed to participate. This goes to show how important it is to them to offer a warm welcome, and it's a testament to their commitment to working together on this joint project," said Eve Pare, President and CEO of the Hotel Association of Greater Montreal.

Tourisme Montreal hopes to make Hospitality Week an annual event, to be held at the beginning of the summer tourist season.

Everyone is invited to share their experiences during Hospitality Week by using the #MTLMoments hashtag.



St. Petersburg Hotels Show Record-breaking ADR and RevPAR on the Back of Occupancy Declines

JLL presents the H1 2017 results of the quality hotel market 1 in St. Petersburg.

"Russian North Capital quality hotel stock in H1 2017 showed the highest performance in last five years in terms of ADR and RevPAR – growth by 15% and 8.5%, to RUB 6,400 and RUB 3,500 respectively. On the back of dropping occupancy (decline by 1.8 ppt – down to 50.5%), hoteliers focused their attention on demand quality, building up prices and thus revenues. As a result, price sensitive tourists shied away from St. Petersburg quality hotels in favor of more budget-friendly accommodation options or other travel destinations." – Tatiana Veller, Head of JLL Hotels & Hospitality Group, Russia & CIS, comments.

June in St. Petersburg was marked by two international events - St. Petersburg International Economic Forum and FIFA Confederations Cup. "Generally, common tourists tend to avoid destinations of large-scale sporting events, fearing extortionate prices, stricter security measures, overcrowded airports, overloaded traffic and infrastructure. Consequently, despite the significant reduction in number of sold rooms, this month exhibited considerable ADR growth in all segments and eventually resulted in substantial RevPAR growth over last year." – Tatiana Veller notes.



Midscale segment this month took a lead in ADR and occupancy dynamics: ADR increased by nearly 19% (to RUB 6,200), occupancy dropped from 90% in H1 2016 to 80% this year. Luxury hotels in the first summer month of this year achieved unbelievable ADR (almost RUB 45,000, 2.5 times higher than most expensive hotels in Moscow). Even though their occupancy dropped by 5.5 ppt, but it still remained high for this segment – 74%.

Upper Midscale segment became a leader in revenue growth and the only category that showed slight growth in occupancy – by 1 ppt, to 65%. Due to the solid ADR improvement (9% vs. H1 2016, to RUB 5,500), RevPAR here increased by 11%, to RUB 3,600.

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