

A BUSINESS FORUM FOR TOURISM WAS HELD IN THE CITY OF SANDANSKI

The different forms of tourism, as an opportunity to develop a successful business, were the basis of the second Business Forum for Tourism, which was held on August 4 and 5 in Sandanski and Melnik. More than 50 participants in the event had the opportunity to learn first-hand how history, natural features and local life can combine in such a synergy to make a place attractive to people from different parts of the world.

"The choice of the host city for the event is not accidental. The town of Sandanski and the area around it are a major tourist destination in Bulgaria, which offers various forms of tourism and is a preferred place for relax and rest, both by Bulgarian and foreign tourists," commented Yanislava Vangelova - Chairman of IN FOCUS Association - organizer of the event. And it is true - the region is known for its mineral springs, unique climate, natural, cultural and historical sites of national and world importance and last but not least - wine production.

Guest speakers at the tourist forum in the city of Sandanski were successful businessmen and experts engaged in tourism and sectors inextricably linked to it - owners of tourist sites, tourist guides and bloggers, business consultants and experts in the field of European financing, experts in the field of marketing and advertising and producers of organic food.

The forum started with Marian Kanev - a successful young entrepreneur with many years of experience in developing software products and providing marketing services through the implementation of innovative digital solutions. He presented the opportunities to improve the tourism product by using modern technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), virtual and augmented reality, software products for managing tourist sites, robots, blockchain and other technologies that contribute to improving the quality of the tourism product in line with modern trends and in response to the needs of the 21st century tourist.

As a natural continuation of the topic, the entrepreneur Boyan Milushev, who is one of the pioneers in Bulgaria, offering innovative products and services in the field of virtual reality (VR), got involved. A demonstration using 3D glasses gave the participants the opportunity to immerse themselves in another reality - to visit iconic tourist sites and participate in historical battles recreated using VR technology. The possibilities and wide application of VR technology in other economic sectors and spheres of activity were discussed - an important tool for attracting new customers, covering new markets and increasing the competitiveness of any business.

The licensed tour guide, blogger and professional tourist, as Simana Markovska defines herself, presented many years of activity in the field of tourism that she has. In her presentation, she showed





unknown tourist sites in Bulgaria and Turkey, which offer different types of experiences, outside of conventional destinations and routes, which are increasingly sought after by tourists.

With her inherent serenity and smile, Baba Deshka, the emblem of rural tourism in Bulgaria, talked about her experience in the field in which she works. Starting from her unexpected and difficult beginning in tourism, going through the difficulties and problems accompanying any new venture and reaching the dozens of guests from all over the world who fill her house daily, Baba Deshka is proof that anything is possible if you work with an open heart. Through the experience gained over the years, she explained how important partnerships at every level are for the development of a successful business - in the family, with neighbors, and even with competitors.

The place of organic agriculture in tourism was presented by Rositsa Telkedjiyska from the Moravsko selo organic farm. True to the motto "Healthy food - healthy people", she talked about the benefits of clean foods and the way they are produced. Their farm has grown many times in recent years, and as a side activity, she and her family run a bio hotel, where, in addition are serving their guests only organic food from their own harvest. They also offer additional activities in nature, which shape a complete tourist product. Moravsko selo organic farm offers its products in a successful organic online store, but the business forum also presented another interesting opportunity - the creation of a partnership between the farm and local restaurateurs and hoteliers who want to offer their customers organic products with guaranteed taste qualities.

It was the power of partnerships and networking that was the final topic that closed the first day of the forum, presented by Zhivko Ivanov, who is developing a successful consulting business aimed at providing expert support to start-ups and existing SMEs in the various stages of their development. It touched on areas such as strategic planning, marketing, developing and launching new products and services on the market, implementing innovations, discovering new market niches and entering new markets, networking and finding business partners. He gave a number of examples from his work of successfully developed businesses in various sectors of the economy.

The expert from the District Information Point - Blagoevgrad Elena Mihova also participated in the program and presented current opportunities for financing projects with European funds and upcoming procedures for the programs financed by the European funds under shared management.

In order to see what the tourist business means in its essence and what are the steps to turn it into a successful and profitable venture, on the second day of the business forum the participants met successful entrepreneurs - good examples in this regard.

The Kordopulova kashta in the town of Melnik and those employed there clearly showed how the historical heritage, combined with the traditional wine production at the area, can attract guests from Europe, Asia, Africa and even America to a town hidden among sandstones with only 120 permanent residents.





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Welcoming guests from near and far is also a way of life for Margarita Manoleva, who welcomed the participants at the forum at the Manoleva guest house - a family business created with the joint efforts of family, friends and neighbors. They built the house a few years ago and since then there has been almost no rest for them. "If you are not ready to neglect yourself in order to offer comfort, relaxation and pleasant emotions to others, you should not get into this business," believes Margarita. There is almost no time for herself, but this does not bother her, because she believes that when you are engaged in something that you do from the heart, you are happy. And she is categorical that in addition to shelter and food, a successful business in tourism also requires something very important - attitude. If you welcome your guests in such a way that they feel like they are among friends, they will not only come back again, but also tell about you, and what better advertisement than that, says Margarita.

The Business Forum for Tourism held under the title "Opportunities, Perspectives and Good Practices" is the last of the four business events that the IN FOCUS Association held within the INNOBUS project and which gave the participants the opportunity to make contacts, find new business partners and plan joint business projects to implement in the future.

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