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CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION BUREAU OF GEORGIA

"GEORGIA – MADE BY CHARACTERS"

Georgia is undergoing radical changes; the country's young generation is strongly oriented towards Europe and its values. The Guest of Honor at the Frankfurt Buchmesse 2018 is seeking to join the international congress market. In these efforts, the country is supported by GlZ and the Enited consulting agency.

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Sunday, October 7, 2018, 03:44 hrs: "Back again, this time for a whole week :-)," is what Ivo Franschitz posted to his friends in Facebook from the Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia. International hotel including Holiday Inn Tbilisi, the Tbilisi Marriott and the Courtyard by Marriott accommodate guests from all over the world. This was the fifth time Ivo Franschitz had traveled here from Vienna; the owner and managing director of the Enited consultant agency has been active in the meeting business for more than 30 years and helps put new destinations on the global map.

Georgia lies on the boundary between Europe and Asia, bordering in the west on the Black Sea, on Turkey and Armenia in the south, Azerbaijan in the east and Russia in the north. **In 1991, the small Caucasus republic declared itself independent from the Soviet Union.** In the World Bank's 2017 'Ease of Doing Business' ranking, Georgia came in ninth, putting it ahead of 181 countries including Germany and Austria. The country has close ties to the European Union and in 2014 signed an association agreement with the EU. Citizens from EU countries do not require a visa to travel to Georgia. As Guest of Honor at the Frankfurt book show 2018, the 70 authors chosen to present the country and its multifaceted history highlighted the 33 characters of its alphabet also to create a fitting motto: 'Georgia – Made by Characters'.

GEORGIA MADE BY CHARACTERS official



The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) has been active in Georgia as a service provider in the field of international cooperation since 1992 and supports on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development Georgia and its neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan with the development of a sustainable economy, democracy and environmental policies. The GIZ has "identified business events as prime mover for the country's development", said advisor Franschitz. "International networking and competition provide Georgia with knowledge and know-how transfers, thus improving its level of education and consequently its prospects." **Accordingly, GIZ finances the project for development of a strategy for business events for the Convention and Exhibition Bureau of Georgia (CEBG).**

Franschitz's contact here is Amiran Ivanidze. Said the Chief Operation Officer: "It is very important to have an action plan and suggestions from leading experts in the field, both for the CEBG and our members from the private sector." Ivanidze very much appreciates the professional experience of his international advisors: Ivo Franschitz from Austria and Henrik von Arnold from Sweden. "Their experience in the industry and their expertise is crucial for us to be on the right track."

With the support of Ivo Franschitz the Convention and Exhibition Bureau of Georgia is working on a strategy for business events.

PHOTO: ENITED

The development project from October 2017 thru October 2018 in its first phase was focused on a Destination Strategy, based among other things on a SWOT analysis and Strategic Directions by way of a Mission and Vision as well as targets and KPIs. The second phase was aimed at defining International Business Standard Guidelines and Knowledge and Learning Groups as well as an Education and Training- Program, launched at the kick-off with workshops on collaboration and Bidding Master



Classes from October 8 thru 12, 2018. **"All participants displayed a great deal of interest and commitment. There was a general consensus that acting and thinking jointly is imperative," said Franschitz.** He's convinced that this approach strengthens the CEBG, not only as the country's representative on the international market but also for development within the country. "The 12-month cooperation phase progressed very smoothly and on a partnership basis." The partners are venues, hotels, PCOs and DMCs listed in the English-language guide 'Meetings & Events'. Ivanidze emphasized that "English is widely spoken among the younger generation, as well as Russian and German."

One of three of the five million Georgians lives in Tbilisi; 31 airlines operate a total of 39 direct flights from the three international airports Tbilisi, Batumi and Kutaisi. Tbilisi International Airport is only 20 kilometers away from the capital city, with the ancient Narikala Fortress overlooking the city extending along the Mtkvari River. It's only ten minutes from the historic part of town to the ExpoGeorgia congress and expo center, which joined UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, in 2005. During the Soviet period, ExpoGeorgia was a place for permanent exhibition of industrial and agricultural achievements of the Soviet Republic. Privatized in the 1990s, the eleven multifunctional halls sized between 300 and 1,700 square meters are today "open for business".

“WE ARE THE HIDDEN GEM OF EUROPE”

Amiran Ivanidze, Chief Operation Officer of the Convention and Exhibition Bureau of Georgia (CEBG)

tw: Event planners look for new and emerging destinations, but Georgia is not well known yet in the Western hemisphere. How do you want to change this?

Amiran Ivanidze: Georgia has become a very trendy destination in terms of leisure. Lonely Planet named Georgia one of the top ten destinations to visit in 2018 and similar referrals have been made by TripAdvisor, CNN, Forbes and BBC Travel. Though this awareness created by the Georgian National Tourism Administration – of which the CEBG is part of – we are building the awareness for our MICE potential. We have been exhibiting at IBTM World and IMEX Frankfurt for several years and are participating in B2B workshops such as IBTM Arabia and M&I Forums. Since 2013 we are an ICCA member and move up in the ranking: 2017 we became first in the Caucasus and Central Asia region, surpassing countries like Qatar and Kazakhstan. Furthermore, on 22 and 23 October we hosted the Georgia International Meetings Forum in partnership with ICCA, inaugurated by our Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and ICCA President Nina Freysen-Pretorius. It is another step to position Georgia as a MICE hub between Europe and the Middle East.

How did you manage to get financial support by the GIZ to develop a strategy for business events?

GIZ has been a long-term partner of the Georgian Government and the Georgian National Tourism Administration in implementing standards and training for the local population. When we approached them and explained the need for a strategy for the Convention and Exhibition Bureau of Georgia and the training of the private sector in business events, it was a new field for them and a project they had not yet been worked on in the region. Since the establishment of the CEBG in 2016, we have solidified Georgia as the MICE hub of the region. We portrayed this to GIZ and that whatever standards will be implemented in Georgia, could be used by our neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan. With this global picture, GIZ was glad to be on board.

Why should corporations and associations choose Georgia for their conferences?

We are the new emerging European destination, the hidden gem of Europe according to many publications. We are also



PHOTO: CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION BUREAU OF GEORGIA

ranked 5th in the world in terms of safety and security (Numbeo crime index ranking), which is a big USP nowadays. Georgia has a lot of cultural and historical value to add to events. It is also economically more viable to conduct events here. We offer high quality service at affordable prices: The average rate for a 3- or 4-star hotel is around 100 USD. In terms of association meetings, Georgia has a very developed banking, medical and wine industry sharing knowledge with international colleagues. On the other hand, we have industries that are in need of education and experience from their more matured counterparts from abroad. Hence, conducting association meetings in Georgia will also benefit the country and the population in terms of education, which is an important for some associations.

How does the Convention and Exhibition Bureau of Georgia support meeting managers?

The CEBG has 48 members from the private sector; 18 DMCs, two PCOs, two venues and 24 hotels. We connect clients and international PCOs and to our members, who take care of their needs, starting from organizing the conference to creating incentive programs.

Which international conference did you win lately?

The latest bid that we won – and actually the first international bid we worked on – was the 18th World Federation of Tourist Guide Association Conference (WFTGA), which we won in 2017 in Tehran and will be hosting it in Tbilisi in 2019.

The WFTGA will take place at the Biltmore Hotel Tbilisi with a ballroom for 550 persons. Are there plans for a purpose built international convention centre in Tbilisi?

Thus far nothing concrete. However we know that it is crucial to have a convention centre in the upcoming years. What we are trying to figure out now is who should build it – a private sector initiative or the government? We are doing a case study right now to see how other destinations opened their convention centres.

KERSTIN WÜNSCH



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Event organizers have access to a number of arts and cultural centers such as the Tbilisi Concert Hall, the Opera House and the Rustaveli Theatre. Congresses with up to 500 delegates may be accommodated in the ballrooms at the Hôtels & Préférence Hualing Tbilisi or the Biltmore Hotel Tbilisi. The Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea are just perfect for recreational outdoor activities such as climbing and skiing, rafting and kayaking. The seaside resort Batumi with the Hilton Batumi, Sheraton Batumi Hotel and Radisson Blu Hotel Batumi, all equipped with meeting facilities, as well as the Batumi Art and Music Centre has everything anybody could wish for.

“The business tourism sector focuses on attracting significant numbers of visitors and, at the same time, promoting the development of other sectors and adopting international experience at the local level, along with sharing knowledge and introducing the best practices, which is imperative to our country.”

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze in his speech during the International Meetings Forum of Georgia, which was held in cooperation with the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) on 22 and 23 October 2018 at the Biltmore Hotel Tbilisi.

Anybody really wanting to get to know Georgia must savor the local cuisine and the Georgian wines – enjoyed preferably in company with spirited toasts being exchanged. Georgia is considered perhaps the oldest wine-growing country in the world; the ancient traditional Georgian wine-making method is inscribed in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. 500 of the 4,000 grape varieties across the entire world originated here. "I will need lots more time to learn more about the country's 8,000-yearold wine culture," is how Ivo Franschitz announced with a grin. Perhaps the main reason for wanting to return are the people he has encountered here. **"I was very impressed with the curiosity and the energy displayed by all the people we came to meet and with whom we in some way interacted."** KERSTIN WÜNSCH

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