

## Business as Usual At MITT 2009

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Against the backdrop of world economic crisis many analysts predict a drop in overall consumer demand and, first and foremost, a drop in demand for travelling. However, the results of the biggest Russian travel industry event, MITT 2009, marking the start of the main tourism season, clearly indicates that the show must go on and go on it did, with a strong message and a positive outlook.

For 16 years the Moscow International Travel & Tourism show has launched the spring-summer tourist season in Russia. This year, held on March 18-21, it occupied nearly all the space of Expocenter Krasnaya Presnya, representing all aspects of the travel and hospitality industry. Just strolling around the pavilions was a journey in itself.

The MITT exhibition has been running since 1994, organized by I TE since its inauguration. MITT started its history during the infancy of Russian tourism, and since then the event has developed together with the industry, gaining over time both interest and topicality. Every year thousand companies meet at the exhibition to develop the industry policy for the year, find new partners and discuss topical issues of the industry.

Maria Badakh, Event Director said: "This year the exhibition represented around 3000 companies, which represented 157 countries and regions of the world. The newcomers of the event - Colombia, Costa-Rica, Japan, Panama, Macao, and Hainan are also new to the industry. Many 'old-timers' increased their exhibition area, among them Dubai, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Fiji. Altogether, this year's exhibition demonstrated an 8% growth of overseas exhibitors".

Yet again the show proved to be a colourful event. The tourism administrations of Ethiopia, Catalonia and Portugal introduced new travel destinations and the show program at the Indonesian stand proceeded almost nonstop throughout MITT 2009. The Forum pavilion, which is traditionally occupied with representatives from some of the more exotic regions, impressed visitors with its colours, sounds and even aromas.

This year, Dubai was Partner Destination for the show. Russia has been posting significant year-on-year growth in the number of tourists to the Emirate; between January and September 2008 Russia, CIS and Baltics sent almost 319,000 tourists to Dubai, a growth of 11.2 % compared with the same period in 2007. "MITT is an important exhibition for us to showcase our strengths and tourism products and we have been participating in this exhibition for 16 years now," states Abdullah Bin Suwaidan, Deputy Director of Overseas Promotions DTCM.

Last year MITT attracted 91 thousand visitors, this year the figure released is approx. 87,400, only 5% down on last year, proving the show's importance as a not to be missed event, whatever the economic situation.

The exhibition business agenda was as full as ever with a host of valuable presentations and new ideas were also to be found actively penetrating the exhibition itself. For instance, one of the most important sectors this year was a new area - "Information Technologies in Tourism", located in Pavilion 8, which united software developers, booking systems for tours, air and railway tickets, search engines and tourism web-sites.

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MITT aims to attract industry professionals by offering opportunities to learn something new. At the opening press conference Alexander IDRISOV, the Founder and Managing Partner of Strategy Partners consulting company called the event "a generator of ideas". A joint project by ITE and Strategy Partners- "Regions of Russia: tourism development in times of crisis", focused on the issue of retaining and developing business in the current economic conditions. Also on offer was a 2 day summit on "Distribution and Online Marketing", organized by EyeforTravel who for several years have been an integral part of major international tourism exhibitions in Europe. The Summit was dedicated to the technology of online sales and Internet marketing in the sphere of tourism.

"Job Fair" was another fresh project organized jointly with Tourinfo newspaper, Russian International Tourism Academy, and Head Hunter - a major online service for career search and staff recruitment.

A consequence of the current economic situation is seen in the change now underway in Russian tourism and a change which is surely going to occur in many countries. Until very recently the government concentrated on promoting incoming tourism. Today the priorities stay the same, but as the result of economic crisis more attention is paid to development of internal tourism.

Prior to the crisis, the Russian tourism market was regarded as one of the fastest growing markets of the world. 2008 demonstrated that the sector developed at a steady pace - total turnover (in billions of Rubles) grew by 32.8%. Inbound tourists numbers surged by 67 thousand people, whereas the number of outbound tourists spectacularly jumped by 3 million.

However, and wherever the tourist dollar is spent, without any doubt, the level of interest at MITT 2009 proves that travel industry is feeling both secure and certainly, as far as Russia is concerned, with all the prerequisites for steady development in the near future.

For more information on MITT and other ITTFA events, please visit [www.ittfa.org](http://www.ittfa.org).

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