



2016 National Advertising Programme was Discussed Six Months Earlier than Usual

The National Tourism Council gathered to discuss the 2016 National Advertising Programme at the end of July which set a precedent. For the first time ever the programme is offered for discussion this early. The Ministry's goal is to reverse the existing trend of belated promotion and to advertise the summer season in the wintertime and the vice versa. The meeting was presided by the Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova. The Deputy Minister Irena Georgieva and the Chair of the Consumer Protection Committee Dimitar Margaritov were among the speakers on some of the points in the agenda.

The participants in the meeting agreed that the promotional campaign for Summer 2016 should be launched now so that the country could be truly competitive on the world tourism market. „In the past months I had meetings with leading tour operators from France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and others and they were all unanimous that we should start advertising summer vacations as

early as September because the tourists from our target markets plan their vacations from 6 to 12 months in advance”, said Nikolina Angelkova. Sea and ski holidays remain the country's traditional tourist products but research shows that specialized forms of tourism are also attractive for generating markets. Hence the Ministry will continue to tap the country's poten-

tial for cultural and historical tourism as this could make Bulgaria more recognizable to the world.

„Bulgarian tourists are a special focus in the 2016 Advertising Programme. This is an approach that we adopted in 2015 and we'll continue to upgrade it in the next year”, stated Nikolina Angelkova. She explained that Bulgarian tourists have been some-

what neglected in the past though they are quite significant for the tourist sector. Neighboring countries are also a priority as well as countries from the remaining part of Europe. „Of course we'll continue to attract tourists for distant perspective markets for Bulgaria and we are aware that this is a long-term process that will bring results in the next five years”, said the Min-

Thematic open-space exhibits will also be organized in target or generating markets. Other planned activities include strategic partnerships with international tour operators and low-cost airline companies as well as journalistic tours.

So far the tourist summer season has been difficult but forecasts for apocalyptic drops have proved ungrounded. The overall drop of Russian tourists is no greater than 20% and expectations for fewer tourists from Ukraine have not been met. In fact a 5% increase of Ukrainian tourists has been registered. Indicators for other markets are also favorable: Germany (+5%), Great Britain (the 2-3% growth from last year remains the same) Turkey (+10%), Austria (+10 – 15%), Israel (+ 10%), France (+5%), the Scandinavian countries (about 2-3% growth), Greece (+5%), Romania (+3%) and others. There's been a significant growth of 40% from Moldova which makes for an additional number of 30 000 tourists for the summer season.



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„Digital marketing is a leading approach in our national advertising strategy”, stressed Minister Angelkova. Some of the main activities include joint e-marketing with foreign tour operators from target markets where an increase in online queries is registered; drafting a project for electronic marketing

Bulgaria and Italy to Develop Joint Tourist Products and Routes



Bulgarian-Italian Tourist Forum

Joint Bulgarian-Italian tourist products and routes will be developed in the future. This was agreed between Bulgaria's Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova and the Italian Minister of Cultural Heritage Dario Franceschini during the first ever Bulgarian-Italian Tourist Forum organized by Bulgaria's Ministry of Tourism, the Italian Embassy in Sofia, the Confindustria Bulgaria Association and the Italian Chamber of Commerce. "Both of our countries have exceptional assets that we should make full use of. Italy, Bulgaria and Greece take up the top three places in Europe in the number of uncovered artifacts", noted Minister Angelkova. The creation of such joint tourist products between the two countries that have historical ties is expected to boost the tourist flow.

An increase of 14% of Italian tourists has been registered for the first five months of 2015. Last year 126 000 Bulgarians visited Italy while the Italian tourists in Bulgaria amounted to 129 000. "Indeed, there has been an increase in Italian tourists, yet numbers could be even greater", said Minister Dario Franceschini. He also noted that his administration would fully cooperate with the newly-created Ministry of Tourism of Bulgaria and with Minister Angelkova who is quite familiar with the Italian culture and language. "The joint routes that we will develop and launch as early as our next meeting in December in Italy will introduce a new kind of European tourism. Bulgaria has also one other key advantage – your capital is located in close proximity to a mountain and you can easily develop winter tourism. Yet, to do so, you'll need to develop adequate infrastructure. And Italy can provide you with useful know-how in that respect", concluded Minister Franceschini.



Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova



Over 30 000 people visited the Bulgarian Tourist Fair in Paris

The Tourist Festival “Bulgaria – Traditions and Culture” which was held at Palais Royal in the very center of Paris attracted over 30 000 visitors for the three days of its duration. This is the first ever such event to be organized in the French capital by the Ministry of Tourism, Sofia Municipality and the French Cultural Institute in Sofia.

I am happy that so many people came to listen to the Bulgarian folk songs, to dance the traditional Bulgarian horo with the dancers of the Pirin folklore ensemble, to taste traditional Bulgarian dishes and to weave

traditional Bulgarian martenitsas in the craft shops. The Thracian treasures and the exhibit “Epopée of the Thracian Kings – archeological finds in Bulgaria” displayed at the Louvre attracted the attention of both the residents and the tourists in Paris. This colourful three-day festival picked on the inertia and stirred even greater interest in Bulgaria as a tourist destination. I believe that such festivals that give a first-hand impression of the Bulgarian traditions, culture and folklore heritage help boost the tourist flow”, said Minister Nikolina Angelkova.

A spotlight in the three-day (3-5 July) festivities were the culinary feats of chef and TV celebrity Uti Bachvarov. The gourmet master stirred up some traditional delicacies for Parisians including patatnik (potato dish), tarator (cold yoghurt soup), bob chorba (bean soup) and mish mash (summer dish with vegetables and cheese). The cook wizard used a huge copper cooking vessel to prepare his delicacies, an exact replica of the cauldron used at the St. George monastery in Mount Athos.



“Bulgaria-Traditions and Culture” Tourist Festival

The folk performances of the Pirin ensemble took Paris by storm and Palais Royal proved too small for all willing to learn the steps of the traditional Bulgarian horo. Other highlights in the festival were craft shops where visitors could learn how to design authentic kukeri’s (elaborately dressed men who scare evil spirits away), to weave martenitsi (a small piece of adornment made of red and white threads), to make soap with typical Bulgarian aromas or to learn calligraphy and a bit of Cyrillic. Dur-

ing her visit to the French capital Minister Angelkova held official meetings with René-Marc Chikli president of the Association of the French Tour Operators and the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Christian Masset. During the meeting with Secretary General Masset it was agreed that Bulgaria will use France’s know-how in the visa-issuing procedures for Chinese citizens. The launch of a joint Bulgarian-French pilot tourist product for distant markets such

as China and India was also discussed. France will also assist us in the drafting of a strategy for winter tourism as well as in the creation of a route map for the development of the entire sector. It will provide us with expertise on ski and infrastructure projects.

Bulgaria Dubbed Top Tourist Destination by Discovery Channel

Bulgaria was ranked most preferred destination in a poll among 30 000 Discovery Channel viewers. The majority of them have indicated that they want to visit the country as soon as this year.

The announcement was made by the TV Channel's representative Gerard de Frouville at the Sixth International Meeting of Tour Operators in Plovdiv (April 22-25). The prestigious Forum was opened by Deputy Minister of Tourism Irena Georgieva and attended by the mayors of Plovdiv



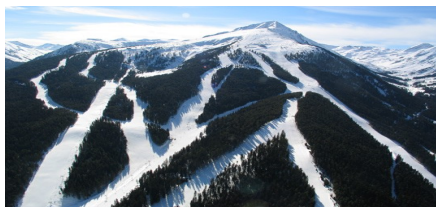
"The Eyes of God" Prohodna Cave, Bulgaria

and Thessaloniki Ivan Totev and Yiannis Boutaris.

De Frouville also noted that Bulgaria's surging popularity among the channel's viewers is also due to the recently launched promotional campaign by the Ministry of Tourism on the four Pan-European Channels – Discovery Channel, Eurosport, Eronews, National Geographic Channel. Two 30-second video spots are broadcast on all four channels in prime time (during morning shows and in the evening), more videos are in production and will also be made available for broadcast.

Winter Season has been Successful, says Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova

About 1.2 million foreign tourists have visited our winter resorts in the past winter season which makes for a growth of 8.2% compared to the same period of last year. This is what the Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova said during a press conference, following an open discussion with the concessionaires of the winter resorts, the lift operators and representatives of the local authorities. Minister Angelkova stressed that according to data by the Bulgarian National Bank, revenues from international tourism for the period December 2014-February 2015 amount to 640 million leva which is approximately a 6% growth compared to the previous winter season.



"We've been pleasantly surprised by the inflow of Turkish tourists for which a growth of 30% has been registered."

"No doubt this is partly due to the fast-tracking of the visa-issuing procedures for Turkish citizens that we introduced together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the beginning of the season", said Nikolina Angelkova. She added that a growth of tourists from Italy, Germany and Austria which are traditional markets for Bulgaria has also been registered – 20%, 10% and 8% respectively. "At the end of the winter season, we can safely say that despite the apocalyptic forecasts the drop of Russian and Ukrainian tourists has been fully compensated for. Moreover, the EU member states continue to be the most important generating market for international tourism for

Bulgaria with an approximate share of 50% and a total number of 600 000 tourists", concluded Minister Angelkova.

The Minister's winter tourism advisor and five-time world alpine ski champion Marc Girardelli who also attended the media brief commented that all of Bulgaria's winter resorts are faced with more or less the same problems primarily linked to the hurdles for building new facilities and the need for better infrastructure. He explained that Bulgaria has a value-for-money competitiveness, especially when it comes to children and youth and that the country should take full advantage of this. Minister Angelkova noted that the Ministry is working in cooperation with Marc Girardelli to develop a strategy for the development of winter tourism in Bulgaria. The strategy will address issues faced by all of Bulgaria's winter resorts – small or big.

Minister Angelkova and Winter Advisor Marc Girardelli Visit Two of Bulgaria's Historical Tourist Sites

Five-time world alpine ski champion Marc Girardelli visited the Thracian city of Perperikon nearby the city of Kardzhali and the Alexander Tomb in the environs of the Haskovo municipality during his two-day visit.

My country has no such ancient artifacts and it was very important for me to see the unique heritage that Bulgaria boasts", said Marc Girardelli.

"We can become more recognizable in the world through our culture and history. Hence the focus of the country's tourism promotional campaign for next year is cultural and historical heritage. We've developed cultural and historical routes that we can promote abroad. The goal is to promote the less known tourist sites and when tourists come, for example, in the Eastern Rhodope region to visit Perperikon they would be informed about other attractions as well", noted Minister Angelkova.

The world ski legend also met with Dimitar Dimitrov – the father and trainer of Bulgaria's best tennis player Grigor Dimitrov during a round of the tennis courts in the city of Haskovo where Grisho first learned to hit the ball.



Minister Angelkova and Marc Girardelli visited the Karzdzjali Regional Historical Museum

"It is an honour for me to be introduced to the father of one of the best Bulgarian sportsman", said Marc Girardelli and added that he hopes one of the kids playing tennis on the courts in Haskovo will one day surpass the achievements of Bulgaria's tennis star.

"The world fame of Grigor Dimitrov is a chance to make Bulgaria known to an ever greater number of people and to make them learn about our country's unique nature and history", noted Minister Angelkova.



Perperikon, Bulgaria

A Bulgarian Tourist Information Center to be Opened in Tokyo

Bulgaria will have its information tourist center in Tokyo. On 11 May Minister Nikolina Angelkova and the representative director of Japan and South-East Europe Business Association (JSEEB) Kihachiro Nishiura signed an agreement for the opening and maintenance of a Bulgarian tourist information center in the Japanese capital. JSEEB will be responsible for funding and running the center, all expenses will be covered by the Association. The Bulgarian Ministry of



Minister Angelkova and Kihachiro Nishiura

Tourism has agreed to provide promotional materials (print and video) on a regular basis which will be distributed in the information center. The two sides have vowed to continue their cooperation in promoting tourism and Bulgaria as an appealing destination in Japan.

12 Japanese tourists have visited Bulgaria in the past year alone which is a 7% increase compared to 2013. Interest in Bulgaria as a tourist destination from Japanese citizens has also peaked. Expectation are that the Information Tourist Center in Tokyo will lead to an even greater boost in tourists from Japan.

More Employees to be Appointed at Bulgaria's Visa-issuing consulate offices

An additional number of employees will be appointed at Bulgaria's consulate services in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kiev, Odessa so as to respond to the expected growth in "last minute" bookings from Russia and Ukraine. More experts will be appointed at the consulate departments in Kishinev, Minsk, Tehran, Beirut, Astana, Tbilisi, Istanbul and Bursa.

This measure is aimed to secure the fast and efficient processing of individual and group tourist travels and to encourage new bookings from these regions. The Ministry of Tourism has already allocated 331 000 leva from its budget to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to increase the efficiency of administration. The selected consulate services are located in traditional generating markets for Bulgaria or in markets that have a potential for growth. Official data shows that during the 2014 summer season (June-July-August) Bulgaria has been visited by 480 000 Russian citizens and by over 180 000 Ukrainians. 120 000 Belarus tourists have traveled to Bulgaria, Turkey is also a perspective market with 130 000 tourists which makes for a 16% growth. Kazakhstan and Iran also register a growth in tourists – 10% and 7 % respectively. The additional number of consulate employees is a yet another step undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism for overcoming the expected drop in Russian and Ukrainian tourists. In February an agreement was reached with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate the visa-issuing procedures for citizens of these counties. Consistent efforts are also made to extend cooperation with Russia and increase the tourist flow. Bulgaria's recent membership in the Association of Russian Tour Operators (ATOR) is one step towards achieving that goal.

The Russian tour operators report on a generally good interest in tourist travels to Bulgaria. Organized trips for children and family packages are in greatest demand.

Minister Angelkova says Regulation for the balneo-and spa centers has been drafted

The first draft regulation for the certification of balneo-, SPA, wellness and talassotherapy centers is already available for public discussion and uploaded on the site of the Ministry of Tourism. Minister Nikolina Angelkova outlined the main points in the regulation during the opening of the second congress (May 27-28) of the Bulgarian Union of Balneology and Spa tourism in Sandanski.

She stressed that this normative act will introduce for the first time the minimum legal requirements for the specialized centers. The Minister also explained that the abbreviation SPA can be used only by the establishments that have been certified in accordance with the regulation. There are three major categories according to the following requirements: construction and

equipment; available tourist services; qualifications and work experience of the personnel.

“Consumers must know what to expect when they pay for a certain service as well as when they’ll be provided that service. Hence we will set up a register of the certified centers which will be a part of the National Tourist Register”

said Minister Angelkova. She also noted that Bulgaria ranks second in Europe in the number of mineral springs and it boasts excellent conditions for combining spa services with the cultural and historical routes that the Ministry has already developed. “Thus the tourist season will be prolonged, new jobs will be opened and more upper bracket tourists will

Minister Angelkova and representatives of the branch industry discussed the new Regulation for the categorization of hotels

“The new Regulation for the categorization of hotels and eating establishments aims to provide stimuli for the business, increase the quality of tourist services and guarantee consumer rights”, explained Minister Angelkova at an open discussion with representatives of the branch industry.

According to the regulation, the European “Hotelstars” categorization is to be adopted. This allows for up to 15% of the rooms

to be of smaller size than required as long as guests of the establishment are informed about it. The alleviation is geared towards older hotels or such that are located in urban areas where technical improvements cannot be made but a variety of value-added services are offered. “The quality and service criteria for 4 and 5-star establishments have been increased to the maximum while requirements

for lower-class hotels have been eased” said Minister Angelkova. She noted that the new regulation has been drafted with regard to the good practices of the 15 member states of Hotelstars as well as general data provided by the World Tourism Organization on evaluating the categorization systems for high-category hotels in Europe and the world.

Minister Angelkova presented possibilities for investments in tourism at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa

“Bulgaria can become a one-stop shop for big investors if administrative procedures are fast-tracked”

The Bulgarian Minister was a main panelist in the ‘Rebooting Tourism’ open discussion during the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa which took place in Jordan (24-26 May).

Possibilities for investments in Bulgaria’s tourism sector were a main focus in her presentation. “Bulgaria can become a one-stop shop for big investors if administrative procedures are fast-tracked”, she noted.

She outlined the regional development of the country, the re-branding of the tourist destinations and attracting more investments in tourism as some of the Ministry’s leading policies. The Minister also explained that according to the Tourism Act the country will be divided into separate regions that will be managed by special organizations. This in turn will improve the marketing and promotion of local tourist products. “The personal touch is very important for foreign visitors. This has prompted us to start talks with a number of world-famous actors and

athletes from our main markets who will be featured in promotional videos of Bulgaria”, explained Nikolina Angelkova.

The Bulgarian Minister also focused on transnational cooperation and its even greater importance for the development of tourism in Bulgaria. “200 million Chinese citizens travel to Europe – this is an opportunity which we should take but it demands a global approach and collaboration”, she said. She noted that expanding partnerships with the Balkan countries – Romania, Greece, Turkey, Serbia and Macedonia is a precondition for sustainable development in the sector as well as for attracting more tourists to the region. The Minister announced that official data indicates that in 2014 Bulgaria has been visited by 7.3 million foreign tourists which is a 6% growth compared to the previous year while revenues from international tourism in 2014 are more than 3.1 billion euro. The Minister also pointed out that the digitalization of the tourist sector is an imperative.

“The use of mobile devices and online services is increasing worldwide. The need for innovations in the tourist sector also stems from the consumer demand consumers for transparency and flexibility”, said Nikolina Angelkova.

During her official visit to the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan, Minister Nikolina Angelkova met with Queen Rania of Jordan to discuss possibilities for expanding tourism in Bulgaria. The high-level world forum is under the patronage of his Majesty King Abdullah II. The Bulgarian Minister also held meetings with the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, with the President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas, with the President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, with the Prime Minister of Jordan Abdullah Ensour as well as with Shimon Peres and Gordon Brown. She held talks with Jordan’s Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Nayef Al-Fayez, with the owner of the airline company FlyJordan Amjad Maslamani, with the acting president of Royal Jordan captain Misto as well as with representatives of the local branch industry.

Bulgaria and Romania Signed a Cooperation Agreement in Craiova

The Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova and the Minister of Economy, Trade and Tourism of Romania Mihai Tudose signed a protocol of intent for bilateral cooperation in Craiova.

“We will develop and strengthen bilateral relations”, said Minister Angelkova. She noted that Bulgaria and Romania will focus on the introduction of joint tourist products for distant markets and particularly for China where a Bulgarian-Romanian tourist info center will be established. “

This center will offer and promote joint tourist products”, added Angelkova. Romanians who visit Bulgaria are up to 1 million a year while Bulgarians who visit our northern neighbor annually amount to about 300 000. She also noted that the signing of the protocol aims to maintain the current upward trend and introduce Bulgaria and Romania as a common tourist destination for third parties.

During her visit to Craiova Minister Angelkova met with the Deputy Minister of Economy, Trade and Tourism of Romania Marcel Bogdan Pandelică. The two agreed that Bulgaria and Romania will work on a common project which would be eligible for funding under the EU Cross-Border Cooperation Programme. The idea is to outline a common strategy for the creation of regional tourist products and to map out thematic routes on both sides of the river Danube which would enhance economic development and attract more tourists from third countries.

“China has expressed keen interest in the joint projects that we are developing. At this stage we can focus on the cultural-historical heritage in the Danube region and research possibilities for inclusion of other countries”, said Minister Angelkova.

Ministry of Tourism Hosts Danube Region Forum

The Ministry of Tourism hosted the first ever Forum on Sustainable Tourism through Cooperation with European Funds and Investments for countries from the Danube region. WTO’s Secretary General Taleb Rifai, the EU Directors General Walter Defa and Daniel Calleja, Deputy Prime Minister for EU funds and economic policy Tomislav Donchev, the Minister of Economy Bozidar Lukarski and the mayor of Sofia-Yordanka Fandakova were key speakers at the opening of the Forum.

“It is imperative to work on the develop-

ment and establishment of a Danube brand, so that we can become more recognizable worldwide. I hope that together with our neighboring countries we will be able to effectively start using the funding for cross-border cooperation. Bulgaria and Romania can rely on almost 260 million euro whilst Bulgaria and Serbia will be funding projects worth about 34 million euro. A substantial amount of these funds is allocated for tourism”, said Minister Nikolina Angelkova.

Tourism is the third largest economic sector involving 12 million people, who make up for 9% of Europe's GDP" said Director-General DG "Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SME's" Daniel Calleja. He drew attention to the main priorities for the sector such as the need to increase flights to Europe, encourage competition, have product diversification, overcome tourism seasonality, simplify the administrative framework, digitize sector services, continuous staff training and others.

The Danube River Region has great potential for tourism. Bulgaria alone has over 4000 tourist attractions and more than 670 of them are located within the region. The country also boasts over 600 mineral water springs. Indeed all kinds of tourism can be developed in Bulgaria – mass summer and winter tourism or some specialized forms including spa, eco, golf, gourmet, wine. Cultural tourism is a specific focus for the Ministry of Tourism. With



over 40 000 cultural monuments spread around the country, Bulgaria ranks third in Europe in the number of historical sites and uncovered artifacts, following Italy and Greece.

During the Forum, the Minister of Tourism Nikolina Angelkova and the Secretary-General of UNWTO, Taleb Rifai, signed an agreement of intent for the establishment of an international network of tourist observatories. These facilities will consist of academic and research centers as students and faculty members will work on the monitoring of a set of indicators following the UNWTO methodology. All data obtained will

be valuable for the study of trends as well as to identify ways of improvement of the tourist product of any given country. The network will be launched in several places in the middle and lower course of the river. And it will be an additional booster of the Danube brand.



Minister Angelkova and UNWTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai at the meeting of the Danube Region