

## News Bulletin

### Minister Angelkova gives the go-ahead of the biggest travel exhibit in Bulgaria Vacation&SPA

Bulgaria registers record-highs in domestic overnight stays for 2015 and revenues of over 512 million euro, informed Minister Nikolina Angelkova during the official opening of the biggest travel exhibit in the country Vacation&SPA in Sofia on the **11th February**.

„We had a difficult past year, yet more than 7 million foreign citizens have vacationed in the country and have generated revenues of over 21 million”, said Minister Angelkova. She stressed that over 4 million euro in overnight stays have been generated by Bulgarians. „It is no accident that according to a Eurostat report Bulgaria ranks 10th in EU in the growth of overnight domestic stays”, added Nikolina Angelkova. She explained that the Ministry of Tourism makes consistent efforts to boost the interior market and that one of its latest initiatives, a billboard campaign for the promotion of interior and heritage tourism has triggered substantial interest. This is a joint endeavor with the Bulgarian municipalities and the number of regions that want to be included in the campaign is ever increasing. “This joint initiative is a telling example of how an effective promotion could be realized with a modest budget”, noted the Minister.

The Minister also underlined the fact that preliminary data indicates growths in the number of tourists for 2016. An increase is expected from some of Bulgaria’s generating markets including Great Britain, Poland, Germany. Prospects are good for Russia as well with expectations of a 20-30% increase. “It is still early to talk in numbers but if these forecast turn out to be correct we are in for a very successful summer season”, concluded Nikolina Angelkova.

The 33rd edition of the International Tourist Exhibit Vacation&SPA gathers all involved in the tourist sector as well as Bulgaria’s important international partners. The number of participants in the exhibit increases with each passing year. This year

there are 400 exhibitors from 18 countries. The Ministry of tourism is also featured at the expo with a stand of 150 sq.m. where 25 tourist organizations and municipalities are presented. The event takes place from 11th February to the 13th February at the Inter Expo Center in Sofia.



*Minister Angelkova opened the biggest travel exhibit in Bulgaria Vacation&SPA*



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## Minister Angelkova hosted a round-table discussion on mountain and ski tourism

During the first day (11<sup>th</sup> February) of the biggest travel exhibit in Bulgaria, Vacation&SPA Expo, the Ministry of Tourism initiated an open discussion on mountain tourism. Panelists in the round-table discussion included Minister Nikolina Angelkova, Bulgaria's Minister of Sports Krassen Kralev, the head of the Executive Agency for Forestry Tony Krastev, the Deputy Minister of Environment and Water Boyko Malinov, the director of Directorate Rilla National Park, Miroslav Kalugerov, the advisor to the Minister of Economy Vladimir Karolev, Marc Girardelli the advisor of Minister Angelkova for winter tourism, the renowned international expert on winter and ski tourism Laurent Vanat and the manager of one of Austria's leading ski resorts Ischgl/ Tyrol Area. During the meeting Minister Angelkova expressed the opinion that in order to develop mountain tourism Bulgaria needs to invest in improving its facilities and ski lifts in an eco-friendly manner aligned with all world standards. "Cable cars are the greenest possible transport which will provide year-round access to the mountain not only for winter sports lovers but for all who love mountain hiking", stated the Minister.

Her winter advisor, the five-time overall ski champion Marc Girardelli noted that Bankso, one of Bulgaria's leading winter resorts, has greatly developed in the past ten years and

that he would want to be not only an ambassador for winter and mountain tourism in Bulgaria but also someone who would advertise the country to the world as an excellent place for travel and vacation.



*Minister Angelkova and the Minister of Sports Krassen Kralev (the third one on the left) discussed topical issues on mountain tourism with leading world experts, Laurent Vanat (the second one on the left) and Marc Girardelli (to the right from Minister Angelkova)*

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*Minister Nikolina Angelkova with her Macedonian colleague, the Minister of Economy, Bekim Neziri*

### **Bulgaria and Macedonia to set up working groups for promoting mutual tourist flow**

Republic of Bulgaria and Republic of Macedonia will work actively towards expanding bilateral cooperation in tourism and strengthening mutual tourist flow. This was agreed in Skopje by the Bulgarian Minister of Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova, and the Minister of Economy of the Republic of Macedonia, Bekim Neziri, during a working visit on the **2<sup>nd</sup> February**. The working meeting was also attended by the Mayors of the Bulgarian municipalities of Smolyan, Blagoevgrad, Chepelare and Bansko and the Mayors of the Macedonian municipalities of Skopje, Ohrid, Tetovo, etc. The discussion was joined by business representatives from both countries.

„Thank you for this meeting that has further consolidated our good relations in tourism. Albeit more than 470 thousand Macedonians have visited Bulgaria last year, there is room for much more”, Minister Angelkova said after the discussion. She explained that during the talks they had agreed with Minister Neziri on concrete measures to stimulate the exchange of tourists from both neighboring countries. “Within two weeks we are going to designate members of joint working groups that will focus on measures to promote the tourist flow as well as on the positioning of Republic of Bulgaria and Republic of Macedonia as a common tourist destination for distant markets”, Nikolina Angelkova said. Furthermore, the working groups will channel their efforts towards creating a single “Balkans” destination, encouraging partnerships with other countries in the region, the Bulgarian Minister went on to explain.

Bekim Neziri confirmed that tourism is a key priority for his country and expressed hope for the number of Bulgarian tourists to the Republic of Macedonia increase as a result of the future cooperation. In the words of Minister Angelkova the format of the working meeting is very effective as it provides for an intensive dialogue between state administration, municipalities and business. Active part in the talks was taken by the Mayors of Bulgarian and Macedonian cities who supported the proposed steps for expanding bilateral partnership.

*“Thank you for this meeting that has further consolidated our good relations in tourism. Albeit more than 470 thousand Macedonians have visited Bulgaria last year, there is room for much more”, said Minister Angelkova*



## Bulgaria, Spain to sign a Memorandum of Cooperation in Tourism

Bulgaria and Spain will sign a Memorandum of Cooperation in Tourism during the ITB International Tourism Fair in Berlin in March this year. This was agreed in Madrid by the Bulgarian Minister of Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova and the Minister of Industry, Energy and Tourism of Spain, Jose Manuel Soria Lopez. The two discussed opportunities on for deepening of cooperation and exchange of experience in the sector during the International Tourism Fair FITUR in Madrid (20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> February).

“For us it is important to learn from your experience and if possible to use your developed network of outsourced visa centers in China. Bulgaria has much to offer for the development of a joint tourist product with France that will have a positive effect on both countries”, said Minister Angelkova. She stressed that Bulgaria has a very good starting position in this respect and that we have recently signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with China.

Opportunities to attract more tourists from Spain and work more actively with tour operators were among the topics discussed at the meeting of Minister Angelkova with Rafael Gallego, President of the Conference of Tour Operators in Spain. This is the largest stakeholder organization in the country, involving over 2,500 agencies, realizing more than 6 million sales per annum.



At the meeting it was agreed that representatives of the Spanish organization take part in promotional tours around Bulgaria organized by the Ministry of Tourism for foreign experts and media. In the course of the meeting it emerged that Spanish tourists visiting Bulgaria are interested mainly in cultural and historical landmarks, cognitive tours around the country, balneo and spa treatment, etc.

*Minister Agnelkova with the Spanish Minister of Industry, Energy and Tourism (to the right) and the ambassador of Bulgaria to Spain Kostadin Kodzhabashev*

Bulgaria is visible in the French tourist market and various news about tourism opportunities in the country are often publicized. This was noted by Michel Durio, Head of Tourism Department and Policy Adviser in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, during his meeting in Madrid with Minister Angelkova.

He also stressed he was familiar with the strategy of Bulgaria to put the stakes on the personal attitude and perception in advertising the country as a tourist destination. The two countries have already begun preparation to coordinate efforts in the Chinese market. For France, attracting tourists from Asia is subject to long-term strategy .

## **Minister Nikolina Angelkova: I am glad we were able to ease the visa issuing procedures for Turkish citizen**

During her visit at FITUR 2016 in Madrid at the end of February Minister Angelkova held talks with the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Turkey Mahir Unal. “I am glad we were able to ease the visa issuing procedures for Turkish citizens. This gave a very good result last year as we registered a 30% growth in the number of Turkish tourists who have visited our winter resorts and over 20% growth for the entire 2015”, said Minister Nikolina Angelkova. She informed her Turkish counterpart that the same measures will apply this year and that an ever growing number of Turkish citizens are visiting Bulgarian winter resorts. The two ministers agreed to speed up work on the development of a joint tourist product aimed for distant markets and to organize on reciprocal basis “Days of Bulgaria” in Istanbul and “Days of Turkey” in Sofia. Minister Angelkova invited her Turkish colleague to take part in the First World Congress of Modern Tourism and Ancient Civilizations, which will be held in Sofia at the end of this year.

## **US Embassy launches STEP campaign**

The American US Embassy, which is a regular participant in annual working meetings between local authorities and representatives of the diplomatic missions in Bulgaria on fostering tourism in the country, have kick-started a new campaign which aims to provide information on how to safely vacation in the country.

The online Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) <https://step.state.gov/step/> allows American citizens to record foreign trip and residence information so that the US Embassy in



Bulgaria can use to communicate with them and assist them in case of an emergency and in order to secure tourists a pleasant vacation in the country. Once customers create and account they will be able to view their profile or add trips or overseas residences.

*The US is a potential market for Bulgaria and in 2015 the country has welcome over 79 000 American tourists which is nearly a 2% increase compared to 2014.*

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