

The main challenge is to overcome the misperception about Istanbul

An exclusive interview with Hicran Özbük, General Manager of Istanbul CVB

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WHERE WEST MEETS EAST AND MODERN MEETS TRADITIONAL

Hicran Özbük, General Manager of ICVB

Hicran Ozbuk is the General Manager of Istanbul Convention & Visitors Bureau (ICVB) and the General Manager of Istanbul Shopping Fest, a position she has held since 2014 and she will continue managing both positions. Hicran graduated in Geophysical Engineering

from Istanbul University and took her masters' degree both in Contemporary Management Techniques from Marmara University and European Integration from the Middle East Technical University (METU).

Q: Why should meeting planners consider Istanbul?

Istanbul is one of the most visited places on the planet, where West meets East and modern meets traditional, bringing together cultures and people from all over the world. It's a metropolis with 8,500 years of rich history. The beauty of the city, its exciting metropolitan way of life, and its modern infrastructure make it a unique meeting place for businesses. Istanbul is the ideal meeting destination with its vibrancy, modernity, diversity, and enviable geographical position.

Q: What can meeting delegates experience in Istanbul?

Istanbul is home to a diverse culture and vibrant populace. The city offers an infinite number of possibilities for incentive ideas which meeting delegates can only experience in Istanbul. Some examples are a boat tour between two continents, eating like sultans from a menu of century-old Ottoman recipes, shopping at the 500-year-old iconic Grand Bazaar, a treasure hunt in the Sultanahmet neighborhood (which has been called an open-air museum), relaxing in a Turkish bath, experiencing Turkish hospitality, and witnessing the ceremony of Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes. You can do any or all of these while enjoying an event. Also, with its unique venues, the city offers numerous innovative ideas to create events. Not all cities in the world are blessed with such a unique venue selection from such a rich, long history as well as temples from all three of the major monotheistic religions.

Q: What's the outlook for 2017 and beyond for the Istanbul meeting industry? What large events are coming to the city in the near future?

This year, we will be hosting very important and prestigious congresses with a large number of delegates, from the World Petroleum Congress (WPC) with 5,000 delegates to the Apimondia International Apicultural Congress with 8,000, from the World Conference of the International Association of Science Parks (IASP) to the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies' (WFNS) World Congress of Neurosurgery. For 2018 and beyond, we are working more and more effectively with new leads, and I'm happy to report that we are receiving positive feedback for future congresses.

Of course, Istanbul has always been one of the capital destinations for international events and festivals. Throughout 2017, the city is hosting a number of concerts, events, and festivals. Just to name a few, EuroLeague Basketball in May, and the Istanbul Shopping Fest and the Istanbul Jazz Festival, both in July.

Q: Where are you positioning your marketing efforts this year and next?

On behalf of Istanbul, we are positioning our marketing efforts to be more visible in the international arenas so that we will be able to interact face to face and be the ambassadors of our city. In addition, we are also focusing on hosting more and more international planners, associations, influencers, bloggers, and journalists in Istanbul as we are aware of the power of word of mouth. In summary, effective communication is our priority for this and next years' plans and we're also going to reinforce all our marketing efforts with strong global PR in order to reach an efficient ROI.

Q: On a personal note, what would be your ideal event to host in Istanbul?

As a huge metropolis, Istanbul has always been a meeting point for mega events in the past. The ideal event is the Olympics, for which I believe Istanbul would be the perfect host city, especially with all the new developments and constant investments that are ongoing on the city's agenda. I would definitely be more than happy to see our city hosting such a prestigious event in the future.

Q: Would you share one or two of your secrets about Istanbul with our readers, like a favorite spot for meetings and lifestyle?

As a local, I can assure you that there are countless hidden gems in Istanbul. The city offers first-time experiences and beautiful places to see as well as plenty of secret corners to discover. The first place that comes to mind is the Prince Islands. You get around on each island in horse-drawn carriages. You can see the beautiful, historical wooden houses there, and you can also see Istanbul from the hills. It's the perfect spot for those who want to escape from the crowded metropolis and enjoy their leisure time.

Q: What is the cooperation at the destination like? What is it like for major candidacies when the whole destination has to work together? Are you satisfied with the cooperation?

As the official bureau of the city, we work in close coordination both with our members and with tourism industry associations like the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, and Turkish Airlines. This is especially true when it comes to a major bidding process or to adding more value to a confirmed event. At this point, I would like to share a recent example. The representatives of the WFNS-World Congress of Neurosurgery wanted to visit the authorities in Istanbul before their congress 20-25 August 2017. We arranged a meeting for them with the Mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the Governor of Istanbul Province, with very positive results.