

SUMMARY

The 4th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum
“Tourism linking Baltic Countries”
17 – 18 May 2011, Sopot, the Sheraton Hotel

“European Maritime Day 2011”
19 – 20 May 2011, Gdańsk
Frederic Chopin Baltic Philharmonic Hall in Gdańsk

The 4th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum and the 2011 European Maritime Day were held in Sopot, Poland, on 17-18 May 2011. The topic of this year's Forum was *"Tourism linking Baltic Countries."*

The Forum's organisers were: the Polish Ministry of Sport and Tourism, the Office of the Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship, the Sopot Municipal Office, the Pomeranian Regional Tourist Organisation and the Polish Tourist Country-Lovers Society.

The Forum provided an opportunity to meet representatives of the Baltic Countries' tourism sector entities responsible for creating and implementing regional development policies.

The panel discussions focused on priority common thematic areas, with particular emphasis on competitive cross-border tourist offer as well as potential customer groups and tourism product markets.

The first discussion panel, attended by representatives of entities offering sea transport services and related services, focused on common tourism policy and joint marketing activities. The specificity of the Baltic Sea was presented as a source of new possibilities in sailing, sea cruising and yachting services provided within an integrated network of tourist attractions.

The second discussion panel, devoted to cultural tourism, emphasised the significance of national cultural values. Cultural tourism attracts customers through ethnographic variety, historic architecture and local entertainment offer building up on local traditions, celebrations, habits and music.

The third discussion panel, devoted to joint tourist products, stressed the need to develop, for each country, its national tourist product specific to a particular country and thus constituting its symbol and the central point of its tourist offer addressed to different groups of customers.

The discussion was concluded with a presentation by Mr Michael Cramer, Member of the European Parliament. The presentation promoted the new "*Iron Curtain Trail*" which forms EuroVelo route no. 13 and is a cycling trail that runs along the borders of the former Warsaw Pact countries, from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, covering a large part of the Baltic coast.

At the panel meetings the following conclusions were formulated:

Five areas for effective cooperation were identified and determined:

- a) products (identity markers)
- b) joint promotion
- c) communication
- d) education
- e) sources of funding

Emphasis was placed on the Baltic Region's tourist potential in several areas

The Baltic Sea Region as an attractive holiday destination has not yet been fully "discovered" by the world tourist markets. Therefore, the region's position should be enhanced using suitable forms of promotion, according to the saying "what is unknown is always interesting".

The Baltic Region's tourist offer has been considerably broadened as a result of the socio-political and economic transformations that took place over the past 20 years. Apart from the most popular recreational tourism, there is a growing interest in spa tourism, cultural tourism and culinary tourism.

The Baltic Sea Region, with its rich tourist offer, can be compared to a one-stop shop where everyone can find something interesting for himself.

At present, the region's tourists are primarily internal (national or regional) customers. However, the increasingly numerous and appropriately advertised attractions are gradually attracting the attention of external tourists from Western European, South American and Asian countries.

Forms of promotional activities for the Baltic Sea region were identified

The development of an effective promotion strategy for the region should be started with identifying its characteristic features which distinguish it from other regions and are attractive and intriguing for tourists. The defined original and unique regional tourist product should be presented as effectively as possible, using all available forms of promotion. The promotional activities should include the building of the broadly understood image of the region, against which the developed product will be effectively exposed. The promotion may be carried out also through events such as tourist fairs and workshops and through the media: websites, publications and broadcasts.

The need to further develop the Baltic Sea region's tourist products was pointed out

In recent years the Baltic Sea region has been experiencing a dynamic development of cruise tourism which, together with sailing, constitutes the Baltic's marine tourism offer based on the constantly developing network of marinas.

Along with the increase in tourist traffic using water transport, there is a growth in the number of low cost airline connections which, although competitive to cruising services, provide an opportunity for the region's development.

The Baltic Sea Region, due to its specific climate conditions, should offer an appropriate package of tourism products "for bad weather", in particular in the field of cultural tourism: museums, galleries, exhibitions, historic parks and gardens, as well as culinary tourism and health tourism with spas, wellness centres and health resorts.

One of the main elements of the region's tourist offer is active recreation with particular emphasis on cycling. The extension of existing cycling routes and trails and the construction of new ones together with the associated infrastructure and facilities should be a permanent part of the joint activities in the field of tourist product development in the Baltic Sea region. An excellent example of such an initiative is the Iron Curtain Trail presented during the Forum.

In order to emphasise the original, unique nature of the Baltic Sea region it is necessary to develop a joint product constituting the region's symbol. The common element representing this region of Europe may be amber.

The success of the amber show organised during the Forum best demonstrates the attractiveness of this precious ornamental material.

The introduction of amber into the promotional campaign of the Baltic Sea region may attract attention and encourage many potential tourists to visit the area.

The importance of Local Tourism Organisations was emphasised

Local Tourism Organisations should act as leaders in tourist product management and development in the Baltic Sea region. The factors decisive for their effectiveness are well-qualified people representing actively cooperating entities of each country in the region.

It should be remembered, however, that local grassroots initiatives, although extremely valuable, should be supported by measures taken on the national and EU levels. An effective programme of building a common Baltic Sea Region brand can be implemented only through effective cooperation of all management levels.

The need for more intensive cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region countries was stressed

The Baltic countries cooperating in the field of tourism should establish a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) to carry out work in the following areas:

- a) Promotion and PR
- b) Information,
- c) Finance
- d) Education,
- e) Research and development.

The organisation would work on developing a regional brand strategy and a brand book, on planning specific projects and tasks, and would determine the region's flagship brands.

The cooperation on shaping the region's image is crucial to the effective creation of an attractive tourist offer. Each country should have the opportunity to present its strategic products, however, looking from the point of view of the whole region it is important to create a common product and a single clear message to potential customers.

The role of science and education in developing the Baltic Sea region and alleviating differences between the individual countries was appreciated

The key obstacle to the region's sustainable development is the uneven level of economic development across the Baltic Countries. Science and education provide a chance for the less developed countries to begin cooperation and enjoy the same status as the other states. This needs to be done through training of specialised personnel with the aim to implement the actions set out in the priorities of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy.

The importance of information exchange between the individual countries for the promotion of the Baltic Sea Region was acknowledged

For the development of cooperation in the region, efficient information exchange channels are necessary. To create effective promotion tools in the future, a common internet portal should be established as a compendium of knowledge about the tourism sector and a collection of up-to-date information which would reach specific target groups as a clear and easily understood message.

Until the establishment of the said web portal, the participants of the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum may exchange information thanks to the courtesy of the administrator of the portal www.balticseatourism.eu run by the Tourist Board of the Federal State of Mecklenburg - Western Pomerania. The portal is going to publish, among others, the speaker's presentations given at the 4th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum.

The possibility of holding accompanying events during the next editions of the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum was considered

One of the suggestions was to organise accompanying exhibition events which would gather touroperators from the region and make it possible for them to participate in the various sessions of the Forum. Representatives of the tourism industry taking part in the Forum would have the

opportunity to present the most interesting sub-regional, national and regional tourist offers to the other participants of the Forum.

The use of the current logo in the works of the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum was declared

The Forum participants thanked the Tourist Board of the Federal State of Mecklenburg - Western Pomerania for its consent to using the logo in the works of the Forum, and declared their readiness to use the logo in its further actions and related initiatives.

Proposition of the Baltiysk city authorities

Given that the Russian Federation has waived the visa requirement for nationals of other countries arriving to port cities by ferry in organised groups (for up to 72 hours), the Forum committed themselves to taking action in their countries to explore the possibility of introducing similar arrangements by the other Baltic Sea countries on a reciprocal basis.

The Forum participants welcomed the declaration of the Federal State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania regarding the hosting of the 5th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum. The proposal is in line with the formula adopted in Kaliningrad, according to which the subsequent annual editions of the forum are going to be held in the individual Baltic countries on a rotational basis.

Moreover, with the aim to enhance the status of the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum and broaden its spectrum of activity, the possibility of coordinating the dates of the Forum with the dates of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) summits and dates of the ministerial meetings should be considered. This is a good moment to take the initiative as in 2012 both the Forum summit and the CBSS summit are going to be held in Germany.

Actions recommended for implementation until the 5th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in 2012

Appreciating to-date actions taken by the Forum participants in the field of sustainable development of tourism in the Baltic Sea Region, consideration should be given to the possibility of increasing the political commitment of governmental administrations of the region's countries and of the European Union structures, to allow for more effective implementation of initiatives undertaken within the *European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*.

Taking into account the information content published on www.balticseatourism.eu, consideration should be given to the possibility of organising a working meeting for representatives of national

tourism organisations with the aim to discuss possible supplementation and extension of the scope of presented materials as well as the introduction of new solutions allowing for faster collection of up-to-date information on the tourism sector in the Baltic Sea region countries.