

Geoparks triumph at ITB in Berlin

Geoparks won the award as the 3rd best exhibitor in their category (NGOs and non-profit organizations) at the leading tourism trade ITB (Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin) in Berlin. Global Geoparks under the auspice of UNESCO were represented next to the stands of Lesbos Geopark and German World Heritage site of Grube Messel by the stand of Global Geopark Network members from Portugal geopark Naturtejo Meseta Meridional, Finnish geopark Rokua, Czech Geopark Bohemian Paradise, Spanish geopark Basque Coast and three German geoparks Harz Braunschweiger Land Ostfalen, TERRA Vita and Vulkaneifel. The European Geopark Network coordinator Prof. Nikolaos Zouros and the Chief of the Global Earth Observation Section of UNESCO Prof. Patrick McKeever were also presented.



The 13th year of the renowned competition “Best Exhibitor Awards“ in the frame of the ITB organized by students of the internationally recognized Cologne Business School (CBS) was among the highlights of the entire trade fair. During 3 days Emerging tourism managers of CBS visited approximately 12,000 stands ITB and they evaluated them according to many criteria, e.g. information transfer, interactivity, authenticity, approach and service quality of the stand team.

The awarding ceremonial was held on Saturday evening, 9 March, in the Palace of famous Funkturm tower with the audience of more than 600 invited guests, including ministers and national

representatives and other ITB participants. Geoparks raised the award high in the main stage altogether showing their commitment of international cooperation among regions of the world.

The stands were evaluated in the following 11 categories: Hotel Business, Carriers, Travel Organization, Travel Support and Media, NGOs and Non-Profit Institutions, Europe, Asia/Australia/Oceania, America / The Caribbean, Near/Middle East, Africa and Germany. The competition is of growing importance because it serves as a benchmarking comparative indicator for ITB exhibitors, which indicates that the good placement is becoming more and more important and many exhibitors got used to taking these criteria into consideration when preparing their stand design.

Geoparks presented themselves as innovative, vibrant, sustainable and responsible tourism destinations. Live cooking, real touchable fantastic fossils and rocks, local products exhibited, videoart, presentations and talks in the 8th Pow-Wow for professionals, documentaries and the performances of the Adufe Players from Idanha-a-Nova (Portugal) during several events under the main subject of the Adventure and Responsible Tourism Hall - “Wetlands

and Geoparks - celebrating Earth Heritage, Sustaining Local Communities” attracted a lot of attention from the side of both experts and general public.

The Geoparks stand and the presence of geopark representatives at ITB proved to be of great value as a kind of “information desk” for the regions, countries and areas that would like to know more about Geoparks and the opportunities they are open for a sustainable tourism development. Several representatives from African countries but also from India, East Europe and South America came to gain a clearer picture about the results of geoparks, e.g. what the evaluation criteria for membership are and what the main areas of geoparks work are. Please see the following website for more information <http://www.europeangeoparks.org/>.

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Establishing the Annual Conference on National Geoparks

On 25 – 26 April, the First Annual Conference of National Geoparks was organised by GeoLocci National Geopark in cooperation with the Council of National Geoparks and Czech Geological Survey in Chodová Planá Township.

The aim of the conference was to enable a broad discussion of representatives of national, candidate and emerging geoparks, members of the Council of National Geoparks, general public and also representatives of local governments and various organizations in the territories of particular geoparks on the selected issues related to geoparks, sharing experience and their mutual inspiration. The conference is designed as touring and each year will be organized by one of national geoparks. The first annual conference focused on two issues - “The involvement of local partners and public in the development of tourism” and “Interpretation of

geological heritage” - which can be seen in the wider context of care for local (not only geological) heritage and cultural identity, support of local development, particularly through the development of sustainable tourism. Details and outcomes of the conference are available at URL <http://geoloci.webnode.cz/konference/>.

Conclusions and challenges

Interpretation of geological heritage

In the presentation of geopark attractions we need to use appealing and easily understandable schemes, animations and simulations of present technologies such as the Internet, social networks, virtual paths and guides, collector or open-air cognitive/sightseeing games (e. g. geocaching or quests). However, we have to remember to contact visitors in person through georangers.

The interpretation should not focus only on geology but should deal with further attractions (architecture, history, religion, traditions, gastronomy etc.) while trying to point at their geological aspects or origin (e. g. how mineralogical composition of affects the taste of wine, which is planted in it, or from which material and where masonry and church interior decoration come from) and pointing out the relation between geology and the development of the entire region.

Involvement of local partners and public in the development of geotourism

The existence of geoparks and its activities in the regions should be based on a number of partners co-operating with each other in order to develop visitor infrastructure, to promote the region as a tourist destination, to organize activities for public and secure vulnerabilities. An example of the cooperation with professional institutions can be, for instance, walks in the countryside with experts. Local enthusiastic laymen could be good guide georangers as well.

In their geotourism offer, Geoparks should try to attract ordinary visitors. They should not