

## **Revival of business tourism in the aftermath of the pandemic**

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**'We are ready for a good start to the 2022 tourism season', claim the representatives of the MICE industry in Kraków. Even though there is currently no shortage of bookings at conference venues and hotels, there is always room for more visitors, the organisers assure.**

Just before the upcoming summer, event organisers are confident that the approaching tourist season is shaping up to be much better than the last two years, which were marked by the pandemic. There is only one condition that will make or break this season: they need to dispel the myth that Kraków is a city filled to the brim with refugees. This is a misnomer, as they are Kraków's new residents, who came to the city from Ukraine!

Representatives of the hotel, conference, catering and transport industries, as well as meeting and event organisers, have met at the ICE Kraków Congress Centre to exchange recent experiences and to work out a joint position. 'As a city, Kraków is as beautiful as ever, where life runs as slowly as it used to, despite the fact that we have some new residents. These recent events had no impact on our friendliness, openness and readiness to welcome new tourists, visitors and guests alike', assures Małgorzata Przygórska-Skowron, Head of the Kraków Convention Bureau. Izabela Błaszczuk, President of Kraków5020, adds that 'Kraków is a ready, open, friendly and safe city. That last one, I think, needs to be particularly emphasised these days. There are no refugees living on the streets. They became new residents of the city. All the events can be conducted as before and they are as safe as ever – the recent conflict has not changed anything in that regard'.

Tourists from all over Poland and from abroad are going to flock to Kraków. In the first quarter of the year, John Paul II Kraków-Balice International Airport served more than a million passengers. At this point, the airport authorities declare that they are able to accommodate 6 million more. 'In the summer, the Kraków airport will offer more than 140 connections. We hope that they will enjoy great interest among our residents, but we are also looking forward to reopening Kraków for business and tourism,' says Radosław Włoszek, Chairman of the Board of John Paul II Kraków-Balice International Airport. Hotels also claim to be ready for the season: they are already seeing significantly more bookings than in the last two years. 'The hotel industry is ready and welcomes visitors with open doors. We took advantage of the lull during the pandemic to carry out necessary renovations — we overhauled our glass atrium. Now, the conference season is upon us and we are ready to open our doors to visitors', points out Paweł Mroziak, Director of Marketing and Sales at Sheraton Grand Kraków.

The representatives of various industries continue to receive calls from international tourists who are concerned about Kraków's new role as a host city. Some myths and rumours have been circulating in various places that Ukrainian refugees are camping out at train stations and in the streets. 'The city is linked with an enormous immigration wave, and we are trying to stand out in contrast to the image of France and Italy, who accepted immigrants from Africa. We treat the newcomers from the neighbouring Ukraine as new residents of the city,' claims Paula Fanderowska, Vice President of Kraków5020. Spring is the time for a new calendar of events to be held at the ICE Kraków Congress Centre. As of now, the venue is set to host a total of 157 events, including important international conferences such as the ACI Customer Experience Global Summit – an aviation industry event – and SAE International, held by representatives of



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Kraków**

the oil industry. In November, ICE Kraków will host the ICCA congress, the largest event to bring together the entire MICE industry. The city's objective is to attract tourists and keep them in the city for longer. 'The trees in Kraków are slowly beginning to blossom, the grass is starting to smell – the city is getting just as green as Vienna, Barcelona and Madrid. We are about to launch promotional campaigns to show these images abroad', says Grzegorz Soszyński, an expert on the tourism market. 'Life goes on: we go to cinemas, theatres and restaurants and we participate in concerts and events. We need to work together to show this to the rest of the world', concludes DMC Poland's Agnieszka Faracik-Leśniak.

The company Kraków5020, which is responsible for building the image of the city and promoting it as an attractive business destination, is gearing up to launch a promotional campaign aimed at international audiences. With the help of the MICE industry and actors brought together by the initiative called KRAKÓW NETWORK, we are sending the message that Kraków is a safe city. By the end of May, the ICE Kraków Congress Centre will also host Mariska Kesteloo, one of the 10 most popular influencers in the business tourism industry. She is currently visiting Polish cities and using social media outlets to showcase the many ways Poland has been getting ready for the upcoming tourist season.