ITB Berlin: 50th anniversary of a global success story

In 2016 the world’s leading travel trade show will be celebrating its 50th anniversary – launched in 1966 as a minor event, it rapidly became a global success – a look at the past and into the future

Berlin, 27 October 2015 – In 2016 the world’s leading travel trade show is due to celebrate its 50th anniversary, marking a genuine success story “made in Berlin”. When it was first launched in 1966 as a minor event covering a display area of 580 square metres it hosted nine exhibitors from five countries and was attended by 250 trade visitors. Today it has become the world’s most successful platform for the travel industry. Currently, the 26 halls on the Berlin Exhibition Grounds, with a floor space of around 150,000 square metres, are booked up. More than 180 countries from around the world will be represented at this event by some 10,000 exhibitors. Every year at ITB international business and sales worth nearly seven billion euros are concluded on the Berlin Exhibition Grounds. Parallel with the fair the industry’s largest travel industry convention takes place, attended by 2,300 visitors. Every year the show attracts over 110,000 trade visitors, more than 40 per cent of whom are from abroad. Since 1966 ITB Berlin has grown not merely in terms of size, exhibitors and visitors. Over the last 50 years it has become the world’s largest travel trade show, displaying a comprehensive overview of the market that includes travel products and services from around the world and growth-intensive niche markets. It also reflects trends in society as well as technical and economic developments. As a driving force and pioneer in the tourism industry ITB Berlin always has been and still is a step ahead of the rest.

A difficult launch

From the outset ITB Berlin’s recipe for success was its ability to recognise trends and visionary ideas. However, the events surrounding its launch did not bode well for the fair. In the Messe Berlin archives correspondence can be found that urgently advises calling off the “tourism exchange”, labelling it as “totally pointless”. By contrast, the Berliner Morgenpost daily described the idea of holding a “travel exhibition” as “very original”, particularly in view of the limited travel opportunities available to West Berliners, due to the Berlin Wall. It also thought that an event with German exhibitors only would have a much greater chance of success than an international fair. Prof. Dr. Manfred Busche ignored the doubters and refused to be swayed. In 1966 he launched the first event under the heading of an overseas import fair. Nine exhibitors...
from five countries (Egypt, Brazil, the Federal Republic of Germany, Guinea and Iraq) displayed their products and services on the exhibition grounds.

In the Sixties a rapid increase in tourism products, companies and organisations meant that the 2nd International Tourism Exchange was an all-round success. The display area covered 4,700 square metres and the event attracted 1,250 trade visitors. Thousands of Berliners came to find out about travel destinations abroad. Romania and Hungary were also represented, two East Block countries during the Cold War. Thus, from the very beginning ITB Berlin represented a neutral platform for exhibiting products regardless of political divisions.

Growth and new concepts in the Seventies

The Seventies were a period of intense growth. In 1974 the display area already exceeded 20,000 square metres. In 1977 more than 500 companies exhibited their products and services to 7,000 trade visitors from over 100 countries. Large international tourism associations were also represented. In 1975 the Pacific Asia Travel Association launched the PATA Days. Featuring a two-day congress in 1976 and the launch of the Tourism Experts Forum (TEF) in 1978, the ITB reflected international trends. For the first time the Association of German Travel Journalists (VDRJ) presented its annual award in recognition of significant contributions to the world of tourism. ITB Berlin had already become an event that attracted major media attention.

Electronic systems and alternative travel products and services: trends in the Eighties

During the Eighties ITB Berlin established itself as a pioneer by introducing and showcasing new technologies. BTX was already being used to display trade fair information in 1981, for instance. Two years later ITB Berlin joined the ongoing lively debate about “new media”. In 1988 at ITB Berlin, Galileo and Amadeus with their innovative electronic information systems and the START reservation system using BTX were two examples of the level of change affecting the industry.

Over the years ITB Berlin had also established a strong image with its content and increasingly was becoming a driving force in the tourism industry. When criticism arose of the more problematic aspects of tourism ITB Berlin presented new and alternative travel products and services. In 1984 a special exhibition took place on the topic of alternative travel and barrier-free services, elements which are still focused on to this day.

The Nineties: focus on health tourism and protecting the environment

During the Nineties at ITB Berlin trends such as sustainable tourism and health tourism were addressed, placed centre stage and positioned successfully on the market. This included creating special sections for new products and services for a variety of audiences including business travellers,
health-conscious travellers and young people (Youth Travel Center).

In 1992 ITB Berlin had already addressed the issue of human rights at holiday destinations and put protecting the environment on its agenda. The focus was on eco-friendly and energy-saving products which helped to make people in the tourism market more aware of these aspects. ITB Berlin also adopted a pioneering role where corporate social responsibility was concerned. It regards the principles of ecological and social responsibility as fundamental to confronting the future and ensuring long-term success, not only in the market.

**ITB Berlin post-2000: a centre of expertise and a major knowledge platform**

The digital transition has brought a level of change to the travel industry unlike in any other sector. In 2000 the mobile internet was already being discussed at ITB Berlin. At the same time the Travel Technology section was created, which to date remains one of the largest and most dynamic, with a huge international appeal.

2004 witnessed the launch of the ITB Berlin Convention. The programme of events at what has now become the world’s largest tourism convention examines the latest developments and their impact on the global tourism market, with regard to the hotel industry, corporate social responsibility, the marketing of tourism and the future of travel. Visitors to the international travel industry's leading think tank can find out about the latest industry developments, trends and research results from 200 keynote speeches, interviews and panel discussions. The ITB Berlin Convention now sets the tone for the entire tourism industry and has become a major attraction for the public. When in 2007 Story Musgrave, then the world’s oldest serving astronaut, talked about space tourism, and one year later Bertrand Piccard, chairman and captain of Solar Impulse, spoke about "solar energy as an energy source for aeroplanes", the auditoriums were packed to capacity.

**Leading the way in innovation and market information**

As a pioneer in this field ITB Berlin established LGBT Tourism as a trade show section as early as 2010. Gay and lesbian travel is one of the fastest-growing markets in the international travel industry and ITB Berlin currently features the world’s widest range of LGBT tourism products at a single fair.

The world’s leading travel trade show anticipates market trends and continuously implements new concepts. Nowadays, travel technology in its various guises accompanies almost every trip. Searching for a dream holiday, using travel apps or booking a hotel room via GDS at a travel agency are just a few examples. The ITB Berlin eTravel World has made a name for itself as a platform for innovation in this field. It features the biggest display of travel technology products at any travel trade show worldwide and has
information for visitors on digital marketing, social media and mobile travel services. Papers and workshops provide information on the important changes taking place in the digital world. Be it chatting, blogging or tweeting, ITB Berlin can be found on every channel. Travel bloggers from around the world meet at the eTravel World and the Blogger Speed Dating event.

ITB Berlin has set itself the task of furthering knowledge and staying in touch with the latest trends. The ITB Academy webinars represent a year-round information platform that gives tourism professionals an opportunity to quickly and easily improve their knowledge. Autumn 2015 will witness the start of a multi-session, free Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) aimed at showing how social media in tourism is crucial to marketing travel products.

The success story of ITB Berlin does not end there. Indeed, it has now become a successful export on the international market. Eight years ago it was launched in Asia and in no time at all ITB Asia established itself as the leading B2B show for the Asian travel market. With close to 800 exhibitors from over 70 countries and around 9,650 participants from 110 countries, this trade and conference points the way forward for Asia’s tourism industry.

The future has begun, and the team of ITB Berlin with their strategic knowledge, experience and the contacts they have established worldwide over the last 50 years are ably equipped to meet the challenges ahead.

About ITB Berlin and the ITB Berlin Convention
ITB Berlin 2016 will take place from Wednesday to Sunday, 9 to 13 March. From Wednesday to Friday ITB Berlin is open to trade visitors only. Parallel with the show the ITB Berlin Convention, the largest event of its kind, will be held from Wednesday, 9 to Saturday, 12 March 2016. More details are available at www.itb-convention.com. ITB Berlin is the global travel industry’s leading trade show. In 2015 a total of 10,096 companies and organisations from 186 countries exhibited their products and services to 175,000 visitors, who included 115,000 trade visitors.

Join the ITB Press Newsroom on LinkedIn. Become a fan of ITB Berlin at www.facebook.de/ITBBerlin.
Follow ITB Berlin on https://twitter.com/ITB_Berlin.
Get the latest updates from the Social Media Newsroom at http://newsroom.itb-berlin.de.
You can find press releases on the internet at www.itb-berlin.com under the section heading Press / Press Releases. Make use of our information service and subscribe to our RSS feeds.