

ITB Berlin - a short chronicle



ITB Berlin – a little history of a big event

ITB Berlin, the International Tourism Exchange, is known throughout the world as both the top trade show for the global tourism industry and the largest travel show for private visitors. The ITB Berlin generates a turnover of around €5 billion in just five days. The trade show attracts well over one hundred thousand visitors to the German capital and has deservedly earned a reputation as an international meeting place. Three quarters of the almost 11,000 exhibitors travel to Germany from all corners of the earth. Almost one third of the trade visitors also come from abroad, keen to find out about the latest market developments and wrap up business deals at ITB Berlin.

How it all began in the 1960s

Steadily rising exhibitor and visitor figures have charted the rise to success of this unique market event from its earliest days. Since March 1966, representatives from an ever increasing number of countries and regions have been meeting in an ever-increasing number of exhibition halls under the Berlin radio tower. An authentic holiday ambiance is evoked by the authentic design of exhibition stands typifying the countries represented. Trade partners hailing from every continent conclude business transactions for the coming tourism year. Trade visitors from all tourism-related source and destination regions discuss business strategies and learn about the latest industry trends at the integrated ITB Convention.

A rocky start

The story of the ITB is a genuine Berlin success story. Oddly enough, however, back in 1965, a year before the first event took place, the German tourist authorities were far from enthusiastic about the idea of establishing a trade show of this kind in Berlin. The Messe Berlin archives contain correspondence in which the idea of staging a “tourism exchange” is described as “utterly futile” and advised against in no uncertain terms. The “Berliner Morgenpost” newspaper, meanwhile, described the idea of a “travel exhibition” as “ingenious”, particularly in the light of West Berliners’ restricted travel options. But it gave far better chances to a Germany-only trade show than an international exhibition.

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An international trade show with nine exhibitors

Not one to be put off by the detractors, Prof. Dr. Manfred Busche launched the first event in 1966. It was part of an overseas imports trade show: Nine exhibitors from five countries – Brazil, Egypt, the Federal Republic of Germany, Guinea and Iraq – presented their products and services to 250 trade visitors in a display area of 580m². “New holiday destinations in new continents” was the subject of a discussion with 24 Central and West African states at a seminar in the Tiergarten convention center.

Tourism’s “Golden Years”

The sharp increase in options available to holiday-makers and mushrooming travel companies and organizations in the 1960s conspired to make the second event in 1968 a tremendous success, too. The “2nd International Tourism Exchange” was held at the same time as the Berlin International Boating and Leisure Exhibition. The temporary “Mega Travel Agency”, now spanning 4,700m², had grown to accommodate 1,250 trade visitors. 123,500 Berliners came to learn about foreign holiday destinations. It was the time of the “Cold War”, and yet two Eastern bloc countries, Romania and Hungary, were also represented. The ITB Berlin was to remain a presentation platform transcending political boundaries over the following years also, during which exhibitors from the GDR and the Soviet Union, Egypt and Israel showcased their respective countries in a spirit of peaceful coexistence – even, for instance, in the direct aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab states of Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

Increasing display area and a high level of media interest

The ITB Berlin’s display area grew at a dizzying pace: In 1972 it reached a five digit amount, measuring 13,400m². In 1974 the exhibition area exceeded the 20,000m² mark. By 1976, 35,500m² were available to exhibitors. Five conference rooms for events and press conferences were inaugurated and used for such events until the opening of the ICC Berlin conference center in 1979. ITB Berlin had long since become a media event. The Association of German Travel Journalists (Verband Deutscher Reisejournalisten) presented the first of its annual awards for deserving recipients in the field of tourism. In 1980, the ITB Berlin covered almost 52,500m² and became independent of the boating exhibition. Today, all 26 halls in the venue under the radio tower, with a total area of around 150,000m², are used to capacity.

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ITB Berlin Mirrors the Ever-Changing Tourism Industry

The ITB Berlin is both a catalyst for success and a barometer of trends for the entire industry. It is marked indelibly in the events' calendars of the major international tourism associations PATA, WTO, WTTC, COTAL and ASTA and in the marketing schedules of tourism firms. The world's largest travel show anticipates new market trends and is constantly implementing new concepts. The arrangement of halls according to country and the introduction of trade show segments have improved presentation, making it easier for visitors to find their way around the exhibition. Social trends and economic developments are reflected at the show. In the 1980s, critical voices were raised concerning problematic aspects of tourism, paving the way for new, alternative travel options. Trends such as "soft" tourism and health tourism in the 1990s and the subsequent "wellness" wave were all addressed at ITB Berlin, developed further, and placed on the market as sure-fire product ranges.

New offers and topics for a variety of target groups

Business travel was already a key topic at ITB Berlin as early as 1985. Since 2006, the trade show has covered all aspects of this segment, including a wide range of professional development options. New products and services for every kind of customer, from young people, senior citizens and the disabled through to families and hikers, cater to an increasingly diversified demand. The ITB Berlin has consistently presented new technologies. Since 2000, a separate exhibition area has been devoted to "Travel Technology". For some years now, digitalisation has been changing the face of the travel industry more than almost any other business segment. Today, the entire branch meets at ITB Berlin – whatever your requirements are - you will find the perfect business partner.

The tourism industry's leading convention

Since 2004, ITB Berlin takes place in parallel to the tourism industry's leading convention - the ITB Berlin Convention. Over the last 10 years around 113.000 trade visitors from all different markets around the world informed themselves about recent trends in this sector and discussed business strategies at ITB Berlin. The steadily increasing visitor numbers proof that the ITB Berlin Convention is the Leading Travel Industry Think Tank dressing topics such as travel technology, hospitality or tourism marketing which are held to discuss current trends and their impact on the international tourist trade. This wide range of topics offers something interesting for both ITB Berlin visitors, as well as exhibitors and therefore the attendance at the ITB Berlin Convention should be deeply rooted into/ be part of the ITB Berlin-visit.

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A successful future for ITB

Together with the ITB Asia, which has been highly established since 2008 in the Asian market, this success story will go on. Not only the strategic know-how, but also the experience and contacts from more than 40 years of ITB Berlin have been the best pre-condition to establish ITB Asia in Singapore within only a few years as the leading travel trade show in Asia. By pure visitors presence ITB Asia focuses exclusively on B2B relationships. Leading and also emerging tourism companies from the Asian-pacific region meet international buyers from MICE-, leisure- and business travel markets. In 2013 around 9.100 visitors from over 110 countries attended the ITB Asia and 825 exhibitors from 73 countries displayed.

ITB Berlin 2014 was successful as well; in 2014, 174.000 visitors attended the trade show, from which 114.000 were trade visitors, counting 39% from foreign countries. Moreover, 10.147 companies exhibited from 189 countries.

The future of the traditional brand ITB continues unbridled and we are looking forward to an exciting future with you.