

SOCHI TOURISM THRIVES ALSO THANKS TO SPORT AND MICE TRAVELERS



many reasons.

Sochi has a reputation of the “summer capital of Russia”, despite the fact that there is just as much for travelers to see and do up in the mountains as there is besides the sunny shore. In fact, Sochi has proven to be quite a versatile area that can draw in tourists for

There are the ski holidays, city breaks and summer holidays on the coastline, but now it seems that tourists are flocking to this Russian gem for lots of other reasons. **Sochi tourism keeps growing also thanks to sport fans and the MICE sector.**

Sochi has long been admired by the Russian elite and the rest of the world is catching on. A growing number of tour operators offer tours focused on the various aspects of the city - culture, nature, and sport.

Olympics in Sochi

Sochi only really became world famous as a potential tourist destination in 2007, when Russia won the bid to host the Winter Olympics 2014. From that point, the world got to see the potential of a place that was far removed from the other major cities and perceptions of the Russian landscape.

Domestic travelers have flocked to the 145 kilometer coastline for decades to take in the sunshine, culture and scenery and the city's developing nightlife and high-end facilities mean that this appeal has only increased. Today, Sochi is viewed as the ideal all-year-round destination because of the contrast of ideal summer holidays and the quality of the winter sports facilities at the nearby resort Krasnaya Polyana.

2015 was a great year for Sochi tourism businesses, with an increase in occupancy rates from 77% up to nearly 100%, and there are high hopes for repeat business from tourists that discovered the city and plan to return.

Travelers are said to opt for Sochi over Noumea, Anapa and Crimea and the current forecast for occupancy rates is 96%, according to the Mayor. The combination of this ongoing appeal, high profile events, desirable facilities and a beneficial exchange rate mean that 2016 and beyond should be highly profitable for the Sochi tourism industry. Sport and MICE tourism niches are likely to contribute to this trend.

Sport Tourism

It is no surprise that sport still plays a massive part in the fortunes of Sochi tourism industry since the city is still synonymous with the Winter Olympics 2014. The Fisht Olympic Stadium is currently being converted - with a few inevitable delays - to transform it into a large 69,000 capacity football stadium for the upcoming FIFA 2018 World Cup and the next Confederations Cup. It is hoped that the stadium will also have a retractable roof and pitch, but there will be no guarantee on the finished designs - or cost - until the project is completed.

Another interesting prospect on the local sporting calendar is the Russian Grand Prix. The event is set to visit the track of the Sochi Autodrom and will prove to be an interesting option for F1 fans

across the world for three important reasons: Sochi has the landscape, climate and culture that F1 fans look for, it is an alternative to the usual destinations and it should prove to be much cheaper. Current prices suggest that fans can get a trackside seat and a room for a week for \$110 and \$250 respectively.

MICE Tourism

Sochi tourism is not all about leisure which is clear from the growth of events and congress tourism in the city. Other major cities once led the way when it came to business meetings, employee incentive programmes, conferences and other events, but Sochi has quickly put itself on the map with a series of new conference centers and hotel facilities. **The draw for business travelers is the choice of scenery, great weather and the chance to really get away from the usual destinations.**

There are top facilities like the Pullman Sochi Centre - with its expansive 12 room Congress Centre and spa - and the ballroom of the Swissotel Sochi Kamelia, but it is also about the choice of landscape. The sister hotels of the Mercure Sochi Centre and Mercure Rosa Khutor are a great example of this - the former being in the city center and the latter being located in the mountains. Travelers can choose the sea view on the sunny shore or the chance of some winter sports after an important meeting. Another favorite with MICE travelers is the Hyatt Regency Hotel, which provides a range of 5-star facilities in a prime location.

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