

12.06.2024

Elena Borisova: “Business Tourism Remains Key Area for Plaza Garden Moscow WTC Hotel”

First-class comfort level, security guarantees and faultless service levels make the Plaza Garden Moscow WTC hotel a leading business hotel in Russia. Elena Borisova, its general manager, in an exclusive interview to our magazine spoke of hospitality industry challenges in the RF, operating under the new reality and hotel development vectors.

In 2022 you had to change the name of your hotels to the Plaza Garden hotels (Crowne Plaza (Plaza Garden Moscow WTC) and Holiday Inn Express (Satelinn) and leave the international hotel chain system. It has been almost two years since, and you could take stock. How painful has the process been?

Considering serious premises for drastic changes in operations of chain hotels in 2022, we made vigorous preparations for the IHG brand exit both for operational processes and for the technology side. The primary goals at the time were to minimize financial losses and to make the transition to a new operational format unnoticed by our customers. I don't mind telling you that I had my concerns, but today one could confidently say that the rebranding was very successful and the financial bottom-line exceeded all expectations. Today the already independent Plaza Garden Moscow WTC hotel is a leader at the hospitality market of Moscow, stands out for its opportunities as a MICE hotel, and is setting trends to some degree. The complex and exciting rebranding experience helped unlock potential of the team and talents of specific employees, brought the team closer

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together and presented new opportunities.

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What measures did you have to take to keep hotel occupancy rates at the previous level?

Just like our colleagues, we focused on domestic tourism, we are constantly expanding our corporate base, working on attracting guests from friendly countries and CIS countries. Being a most prominent MICE site of Moscow, we conduct major events of the city in the WTC Congress Center, accommodating large guest groups at the hotel correspondingly.

Just recently our WTC Bonus application has been launched, offering a number of benefits to WTC customers, including our hotels. All of these efforts contribute towards keeping hotel occupancy rates high and raising its image.

What are the changes in your customer geography and what is the share of business tourism today?

Owing to the central location and unique versatility of the complex, historically the WTC is a landmark business site of the capital city. Correspondingly, business tourism has been and still is a key area in the Plaza Garden Moscow WTC hotel segmentation. Proximity to the City and the Expocenter in combination with ease of travel to the historic center, ideally comfortable internal logistics, availability of a largest Russian congress center, and finally, ample hotel parking space – all these factors keep business tourists coming to us.

The share of regional business has grown significantly over the latest years. So, for example, in percentage terms the number amounted to 70% in 2023 and to 66% in 2024. Our hotel is popular both with Moscow and Saint-Petersburg guests, and also with guests from other Russian cities, with Nizhny Novgorod, Tver, Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Novosibirsk in the lead.

The South-Eastern region, particularly China, is still active. If last year there were about 9% of Chinese tourists, then this year the number is already at 13%. Our hotel has always been popular and enjoyed great demand from the Celestial Empire. The Chinese are attracted by room configuration, availability of authentic Asian restaurants at the WTC, proximity to Chinese corporation offices, hotel staff adhering to communications etiquette and use of Chinese language, security, free transportation to the Expocenter on exhibition days and many other benefits.

Tourism from the Middle East is developing too. For now, the percentage of guests from the KSA, UAE, Qatar and Bahrain for our hotel is not very high and is generated primarily by business tourism, but there is great interest in Russia, particularly in Moscow. Russia is perceived as a location with great opportunities, and guests from the Middle East travel here for unique impressions.

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Agencies are working to put together tours, demonstrating versatility and identity of each city and region, including Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Kazan and Sochi in their tours.

Development of tourism with the Middle Eastern region is supported at the highest level. Business missions, organized by the project office for development of tourism and hospitality of the City of Moscow and by the Tourism Committee, enjoy immense popularity and bring palpable results. So, there will be inevitable growth for the Middle East.

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