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IMEX Wild Card 2008 winners reflect new market growth

The continued rise of Eastern European destinations within the international meetings industry is confirmed once again today with the announcement that Torun (Poland) is among the winners of the 2008 IMEX Wild Card programme. A second, free exhibition place has also been awarded to the Republic of Armenia. Two further Wild Card places have also been awarded specifically to new German exhibitors - Holstein Eventmarketing and Marketingoperation Staedte Schleswig-Holstein.

The IMEX Wild Card programme offers aspiring entrants into the international meetings market the chance to exhibit free of charge alongside established destinations and other participants. To qualify for the scheme, entrants must not have exhibited at a major international fair before, although they must have sufficient infrastructure and skill to support their ambitions to enter the meetings or incentive travel market. In addition to a free exhibition place, winners receive free accommodation and travel as well as complimentary tickets to the show's gala dinner. The IMEX marketing team also provides each winner with year-round marketing support and guidance.

Torun, Poland

Torun is known as 'the beautiful city' which already welcomes one million tourists each year. A prominent trade centre in the middle ages, much of its medieval architecture has been preserved thanks to designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The city can currently host events for up to 1000 delegates and has a growing reputation as a centre for science, medicine and new technology. 30,000 of its 200,000 residents are part of the Nicholas Copernicus University which also houses the city's 900-person lecture theatre. Torun is also well served by elegant ballrooms, hotels and a modern exhibition hall, the Park Fair Centre. It will also compete for the title of the European Capital of Culture in 2016.

Republic of Armenia

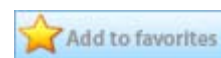
Formerly part of the Soviet Union, Armenia is now an independent country. It lies along the Great Silk Route and reflects a long history of mixed Turkish and Persian influences. After an uncertain period, infrastructure investment is now allowing Armenia to develop its meetings and incentive travel industry services.

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Armenians are known for their friendliness and hospitality.

Although Armenia is a new destination for meetings and incentive travel buyers, Armenian Event, the events department of Aquarius Travel, claims it has a good infrastructure that almost matches European standards.

Holstein Eventmarketing

Holstein Eventmarketing specialises in planning conferences or incentives for smaller groups. It has developed a unique approach that allows several small groups to share a single event or different elements within it. This innovative concept promotes synergy between hotels, agencies and other suppliers whilst ensuring that smaller groups still benefit from economies of scale.

Marketingkooperation Staedte in Schleswig-Holstein

As a tourism marketing organisation, MakS represents 14 cities in the German federal state of Schleswig Holstein. It has been honoured several times in various local business awards and its team is passionate about sustaining and developing a strong meetings industry within the state.

Says Carina Bauer, IMEX Marketing and Operations Director, "As the international meetings industry becomes bigger and stronger every year new destinations are entering the market and gaining recognition more quickly. Many of them are able to attract development funding but others struggle to convince investors or local business partners of the value of having a higher meetings industry profile. We are delighted that our Wild Card programme can help these fledgling destinations to demonstrate their potential and ambition. And we know it works because, over the years, we have seen several Wild Card winners come back to the show as exhibitors in their own right."

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