

## **Prague Retained International Congresses and Conferences in 2022, Ascending to the Top 5 Sought-After Meeting Destinations**

- International meetings significantly boost the prestige of capital city, GDP, and public budgets.
- Number of events in Prague reached 66% of the record year 2019.
- International Congress Association ICCA placed Prague in the 5<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking of the most sought-after meeting destinations in the world.
- Meeting delegates in Prague spend three times more than an average foreign tourist.
- Increasing the tourist tax by CZK 29 (ca EUR 1.2) will help the cultivation of tourism and its development.

30<sup>th</sup> May 2023, Prague – Prague welcomed almost four thousand events with 616,000 delegates last year, according to aggregated data from the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO) and the Prague Convention Bureau (PCB). Although this was an increase of several hundred percent compared to the years of pandemic, meetings Prague has not yet come close to the record years of 2018 and 2019. In international comparison, however, it has improved. In the ranking of the most sought-after congress destinations in the world by the International Congress Association ICCA, the Czech capital has landed on the fifth place in 2022, leaving Madrid, Berlin, Athens, Brussels and London behind.

### **In-Person Meetings are in Demand Again, Especially in Prague**

Aggregated data, i.e. CZSO data from collective accommodation facilities supplemented by Prague Convention Bureau statistics from the key meeting venues in Prague, show that the number of delegates and events held in the capital city last year reached roughly the level of 2014. Compared with the record year of 2019, only 66% of events were held in Prague last year, but with a much higher attendance. *"The number of congresses and conferences held at the beginning of 2022 was further affected by the fading pandemic and the related restrictions not only in the Czech Republic but also abroad, as well as by the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Although there were fewer events compared to the pre-covid years, we have seen an enormous interest in participating. Prague welcomed 616,597 delegates in 2022, which corresponds to 86% of event participation in the record meetings year of 2019. These numbers only confirm that personal contact is irreplaceable not only in business communication,"* says Roman Muška, Director of the Prague Convention Bureau.

### **Prague is the Fifth Most Sought-After Meetings Destination in the World**

Although the Czech capital has not yet achieved the results of previous years, in international comparison it has ranked the best in its history. It is fifth in the ranking

of the world's most sought-after meeting destinations, improving by four positions since 2019. The ranking is compiled on an annual basis, except for 2021 and 2022, by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and includes only the number of international association meetings held. Moving into the group of TOP 5 world destinations is a huge success for Prague, in 2010 it was only in 19th place. However, thanks to the conceptual approach of all organizations in the area of meetings industry development, it has improved by 14 places and the biggest challenge now will be to maintain its position at the top. Vienna topped the list this year, followed by Lisbon, Paris and Barcelona. The TOP 10 cities are complemented by Madrid, Berlin, Athens, Brussels and London. Compared with previous years, Asian destinations such as Singapore, Bangkok, Seoul and Tokyo dropped out of the TOP 10 ranking. Prague must be able to compete with them, which is what the Prague City Hall is aiming to with its support campaigns.

### **Positive Economic Outlook: More Events for More Nights**

The public health and political situation at the beginning of 2022 also had a significant influence on the distribution of events over time and on their structure. While the meetings season in Prague would typically spread mainly over the spring and autumn months, last year it was extended. The busiest months were June, and in addition to the traditional September and October, also November. At the same time, data from the Prague Convention Bureau show that there has been a significant increase in the segment of larger events. Before the pandemic, most events held were those for up to 50 persons, in 2022 the most common events were those with between 500 and 1,000 delegates. Most events last year had one-day duration, but multi-day events recorded a notable increase, which led to an increase in the average length of the event to 2.46 days.

*"Prague is successfully rising in the ranking of the world's TOP meeting destinations, which has a huge economic benefit for the capital. Congresses attract more affluent tourists to Prague, who spend three times more than the average international visitors. In addition, many delegates regularly return to Prague for leisure holidays. In the PCC, we perceive a rapid return of demand, which we want to meet adequately. Thanks to the Czech Presidency of the Council of Europe, we hosted a total of 262 events last year and documented a record year, which has also reflected in our business results,"* explains Lenka Žlebková, CEO of the Prague Congress Centre.

### **309 Large Events a Year: Despite the Decline in International and Corporate Events**

The uncertain international situation in the region has triggered changes in the ratio of the participants' nationalities. While the ratio of international and local events in Prague was usually balanced, in 2022 the local events still prevailed by a ratio of 2:1. Source markets remained similar to previous years, mainly the UK, the US, Germany and Belgium, but Europe gained even greater percentage dominance (96% of events vs. 87.8% in 2019) at the expense of North America (2.7% of events vs. 8.1% in 2019) and Asia (0.7% of events versus 2.7% in 2019).

Postponing the large association congresses and conferences has led to the fact that in 2022 Prague welcomed the most events of this type in the last five

years. A total of 309 of them took place here. Almost every calendar day of the year a conference or a congress took place. On the other hand, the share of corporate events which was at 42% of the record year 2019, did not return to its original level. *"Among the most frequently discussed topics at Prague congresses and conferences in 2022 were medical sciences, economics and finance and technology. We have seen a significant increase especially in the number of events dealing with ecology or with previously mentioned technologies,"* adds Roman Muška.

### **Looking Ahead: New Hotels and Stronger Support for Tourism**

In 2022, the largest number of events took place: traditionally in hotel facilities, which are suitable for holding smaller meetings and conferences. The hotel market is now undergoing significant expansion. In recent months, several larger hotels have opened, and more should be added by 2024, especially in the luxury segment. These new facilities will offer nearly 2,000 hotel rooms, in addition to the existing 45,000 rooms in 873 premises, with more than 1,700 m<sup>2</sup> of meeting space.

*"I firmly believe that the Prague meeting industry will also undergo positive changes thanks to the increase in the tourist tax from the original CZK 21 (ca EUR 0.8) to CZK 50 (ca EUR 2), which the capital city introduced at the beginning of last year. The funds obtained this way will flow into the cultivation of tourism and its sustainable development, including support for Prague as an important meeting destination,"* adds Roman Muška.

*"Thanks to the increase in the tourist tax and the reinvestment of income back into development, we are able, in cooperation with the Prague City Tourism, to support the Stay in Prague campaign, aiming to present Prague as a cultivated destination and to attract a solvent clientele. Prague is not interested in tourists travelling to Prague for drunken entertainment,"* explains Jiří Pospíšil, Deputy Mayor of Prague for Culture, Tourism, Heritage Care and Exhibitions.

*"Today, half of the revenue from the tourist tax is reinvested back into tourism, allowing us to plan marketing campaigns better, aiming at travellers with a deeper interest in the city. Moreover, these campaigns are paid for by the tourists themselves,"* adds František Cipro, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Prague City Tourism.

### **New PCC Hall will Allow Prague to Host Largest Congresses and Social Events**

The support from the city is also welcomed by the Prague Congress Centre, which has long been struggling with the lack of exhibition space necessary for organizing the largest international events. Therefore, the Centre is preparing to implement the long-delayed project of expanding its capacities with a multifunctional exhibition hall. *"Already in 2017, the management of the capital city was engaged in the architectural competition; covid interrupted our plans, but now we are reintroducing the project of a new hall. Meetings industry has a great potential, which Prague should use. Part of the project of a multifunctional exhibition space is also the revitalization of the public space around the PCC, which will allow us to revive the cultural and social life of residents in this locality,"* concludes Lenka Žlebková.

**About Prague Convention Bureau**

*Prague Convention Bureau (PCB) is a non-profit organization established in 2008. The company acts as an official representative of the Prague congress tourism and promotes the city as a one of the European leading congress destinations. Together with Czech tourism bodies, partners and members the PCB offers effective assistance in organizing conferences, meetings, seminars, exhibitions and incentive events in Prague.*

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