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Press Release

For Immediate Release

Ljubljana, 20 February 2024

SLOVENIA HOSTING THE FIRST REGIONAL DECISION-MAKERS FORUM IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

The meetings industry represents a tremendous opportunity for regional development

The Slovenian Convention Bureau and the Slovenian Ministry of Economy, Tourism and Sports will organise the nascent decision-makers forum for the regional meetings industry on the eve of Conventa 2024. Conventa Crossroads will be attended by 37 attendees, including representatives of 10 leading regional destinations. Concurrently with the event, a bilateral meeting will take place between the Montenegrin Minister of Tourism, Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development, Vladimir Martinović and the Slovenian Minister of Economy, Tourism and Sports, Matjaž Han. The event will be attended by two mayors of the two largest Slovenian cities, Zoran Janković, the Mayor of Ljubljana, and Saša Arsenović, the Mayor of Maribor, joined by several other representatives of tourism municipalities. Ivo Franschitz, an esteemed industry expert from the Austrian agency ENITED, will moderate Conventa Crossroads.

The meetings industry is one of the four leading products in the Slovenian tourism strategy for 2022 - 2028. It is considered one of the most promising products with great potential for future growth.

The Minister of Economy, Tourism and Sports, **Matjaž Han**, emphasised: *"In Slovenia, we have a beautiful and diverse landscape, superb gastronomy and excellent winemakers, unforgettable tourist experiences, quality accommodation, well-equipped convention centres and expert event organisers, who follow the trends in organising the most demanding events. You may know that Slovenia is the only country in the world that has the word love in its name. It is less known that the word "srečanje" (meeting) hides the word "sreča" (happiness). That means that our language recognises the fact that people are happier when we meet, shake one another's hand and talk face-to-face."* Minister Matjaž Han took the opportunity to highlight the fast recovery of Slovenian tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic to foreign guests. In the past year, Slovenian tourism already exceeded pre-pandemic numbers, with 72% of overnight stays generated by foreign travellers. He also informed the guests about the expansive investment cycle in tourism over the past two years, amounting to almost 360 million EUR. The investments poured mainly into developing high-end tourist accommodation, renovating and evolving ski centres into year-round mountain destinations and revamping public tourism infrastructure.

The Slovenian Tourist Board partnered with the organisers as an official partner. **Maja Pak Olaj**, Msc, the Director of the Slovenian Tourist Board, stressed the importance of the meetings industry and outlined the excellent cooperation between the Slovenian Convention Bureau and the Slovenian Tourist Board: *"The meetings industry is one of the key pillars in the strategy for Slovenian tourism, with valuable multiplicative effects. After the forced standstill prompted by COVID-19, the global meetings industry is recording growth, which has opened new opportunities for Slovenia. The Slovenian Tourist Board, in close partnership with the Slovenian Convention Bureau, actively develops projects such as the Slovenian Congress Ambassador programme, educates stakeholders, cooperates with the most eminent global association and presents its offering at leading trade shows, trade fairs and other business event globally. Sustainability is the key competitive advantage that sets us apart from other destinations. We put our sustainable promises into practice with innovative tools such as the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism. At today's event, we*

are honoured to share our experiences and know-how about the importance and potential of the meetings industry and, together with stakeholders, discuss the direction of future developments that will benefit all stakeholders and the broader community.

In the meetings industry, Slovenia is considered a best-case example. At the event, the organisers will highlight Ljubljana, which has been implementing the regenerative paradigm with its action plan from 2022 to 2027. **Petra Stušek**, Msc., the Director of Ljubljana Tourism, will explain why events boost development in the fields of science, culture, sports and economy. In her words, events act as catalysts for change that are not seen only as a means to achieve endless growth and multiplicative effects. Instead, they are seen as essential for circular change, fostering multiplicative effects and prosperity for all. The organisers will also host a special guest, the Director of the German Convention Bureau, **Matthias Schultze**. According to research by R.I.F.E.L. Institute (www.rifel-institut.de) from 2020, the German meetings industry is the sixth most important economic sector in Germany. It employs 1.5 million employees and generates almost 130 billion annually. Business events represent the overwhelming majority (88.55%). Matthias will present reasons why Germany is a global force in event organising, ranked third in the world according to data by the Events Industry Council from 2018 (behind the USA and China). It is unsurprising to learn that Germany hosted over 3 million conferences and congresses at over 7,500 venues in 2020.

The attendees will learn about the exclusive results of the research by the LiveCom Alliance association. Their research includes leading European event agencies. Participants will learn about key trends in the industry. In addition, the research will present findings from before, during and after COVID-19.

Conventa Crossroads will conclude with four forums led by representatives of esteemed international associations:

- **Martin Boyle**, IAPCO
- **Christina Strohschneider**, ICCA
- **Eric Bakermans**, Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions
- **Matthias Schultze**, German Convention Bureau

Joining the event will be **Fred Fontanot**, the Director of the Slovenian Convention Bureau, **Miha Kovačič**, the co-founder of Conventa, and **Petra Stušek**, the Director of Ljubljana Tourism.

The organiser of the event, **Fredi Fontanot**, believes the event will become a fixed annual event on the calendar of the regional meetings industry. He already announced the next edition of the event in Ljubljana on Tuesday, 18 February 2025. Mr. Fontanot explained: *“The meetings industry positively impacts the holistic development of all Slovenian tourist destinations. Regardless of the season, expert meetings, events, and incentive trips take place year-round, alleviating the problem of dependence on the main tourist season. It is crucial to note that numerous event attendees become tourists after they attend an event in Slovenia, which further solidifies the role of the meetings industry as a tool for fostering tourism during off-season months. The Slovenian Convention Bureau has been connecting various stakeholders in the industry for twenty years. Still, we are aware that we need to take concrete steps in sustainable transformation, innovation, creativity, the use of AI and educating employees to address future challenges. Cooperating with all regional stakeholders is pivotal, as it will ensure we build firm foundations for sustainable development and development. In light of this, the central topic of our event is cooperation. We trust that this event will be a significant step forward for the industry, contributing to the holistic and sustainable development of tourism in Slovenia.”*

Press material:

• **Final event programme of Conventa Crossroads**
<https://conventa.si/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Conventa-Crossroads-2024-Decision-Makers-Forum-Final-Programme-.pdf>

• **Final event programme of Conventa**
<https://conventa.si/programme/>

• **Press Release Conventa**
<https://conventa.si/press-releases/>

• **Conventa photo gallery**
<https://conventa.si/photo-library/>

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Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/conventa_experience/
LinkedIn: <https://si.linkedin.com/company/conventa-2024>