

The third capital of Russia, Yekaterinburg, set to come to Cape Town

For the first time ever, Yekaterinburg, the third capital of Russia and the main city of the entire Ural Region, will come all the way to tell its story at the 2020 Brand Summit Africa. The first capital of Russia is Moscow and the second capital is St Petersburg. A few months ago, in July 2019, this city unveiled a brand-new Congress Centre to mark its determination to play a bigger role and attract a chunk of the European and Asian Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events (MICE) market. Situated along the freeway entering the city, the new Congress Centre represents a thoughtful architectural response to Yekaterinburg's new vision to be a key player in this lucrative economic sector.



Tatyana Fleganova - Head of the Congress Bureau

Yet Yekaterinburg is not just any other city. Many will remember it for the bloody assassination of Tsar Nickolas II, Emperor of Russia, his family, the Romanovs, and a number of support staff members who had been imprisoned with the Romanovs, by the Bolshevik revolutionaries on the early morning of 17 July 1918. The executions took place in Ipatiev House, which belonged to a local merchant and in which the Romanovs had been imprisoned for some 78 days before the revolutionaries arrived to finish them off. Ipatiev House has since been destroyed and, in its place, construction began in 2000 for the 'Church on Blood in Honour of All Saints Resplendent in the Russian land', and completed in 2003, when it was opened to the public.

More contemporary observers of Russian politics and history will remember Yekaterinburg as the home of Russia's former (now late) President, the colourful, even loud, Boris Yeltsin, the country's first post-Soviet era president. He famously climbed on top of a military tank outside the Russian Parliament on August 19, 1991, to address crowds of angry communist hardliners who supported an attempted military coup against then Russian President, Mikhail Gorbachev, who drove the glasnost (openness) and perestroika (listen) agenda of Soviet reform.

Today, Yekaterinburg is a fast modernising and future-looking Russian city that is increasingly geared to position itself as a global business destination. Apart from the brand-new Congress Centre, Yekaterinburg Expo, an ultra-modern International Exhibition Centre, has been a regional favourite for prestigious shows since its construction in 2011. The most notable of such shows was the Innoprom – a large-scale international industrial exhibition held annually. It attracts up to 50,000 guests every July and illustrates Yekaterinburg's capability to effectively host huge events.

Explaining the rationale for inviting Yekaterinburg to Cape Town, Solly Moeng, Convenor of the Brand Summit Africa, had this to say, "Both Cape Town and Yekaterinburg - even though situated worlds apart from each other - have rich human histories, the earlier parts of which are very sad, even divisive. But they're future facing cities determined to overcome their past and embrace humanity, and they have come a long way. In that regard, they have a lot to teach each other and to learn from each other. The Brand Summit Africa aims to host multifaceted conversations about cities, regions, countries, and continents that go beyond the African continent, not ones that remain parochial, trapped only in local issues. This is because we live in a decidedly connected world in which the movement of humans, investor funds, and information has become unstoppable. It is also a world in which perceptions can make or break destinations."

The head of the Ural Congress Bureau, Tatyana Fleganova, expressed excitement at the prospects of leading a Russian delegation to the 2020 Brand Summit Africa; "We're a fast-growing region of Russia and have already begun investing in seriously modern infrastructure, including technology, to attract the best and most lucrative business in the MICE sector. And just like Africa, we also have issues of perception to overcome, including the need to keep improving the ease of travel to, into and within our region by outsiders. This includes issues such as e-Visas and language barriers. We're happy that as fellow members of BRICS, Russians and South Africans no longer need Visas to visit each other's countries. It is a good

place to start.”

In a week-long program during the first week of June, the **Brand Summit Africa** will host thematic delegate and media excursions into the 2020 host city and region (Cape Town), a series of Master Classes, and culminate in the core two-day summit, including an awards evening.

“Destination brands are a lot more complex to analyse than simple corporate or organisation brands”, explained Solly Moeng, “Perceptions around cities, regions, countries, and continents are informed by developments in politics, business, and society. All of these have to be understood in order to best come up with strategies to enhance positive perceptions while progressively reducing and eliminating the negative ones for long-term gain. The brand summit is not about spin doctoring; it aims to assist cities, regions, countries and continents – with a specific focus on Africa - to effectively address negative perceptions that may hamper economic development,” he concluded.

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