

Minister Angelkova: For the first time in the world one can use a Viber app to quickly and easily share information about tourism sites in Bulgaria

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The Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism is the first one worldwide to launch a service enabling direct sharing of tourism sites via Viber's Chat Extension. The service is a joint project of the Ministry of Tourism and iLoveBulgaria. Anyone using Viber on their cell phones in Bulgaria will now be able to obtain information about Bulgarian tourism sites via the direct link between the app and the iLoveBulgaria platform, announced the Minister of Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova. The event was attended by Vesselin Vassilev, CEO of iLoveBulgaria, and Atanas Raykov, Business Development Director of Viber for the Central and Eastern Europe countries and CIS countries, and Telecom Partnerships Director.

The link will enable that anything connected or added to a mobile app and website of iLoveBulgaria will also automatically be shown in Viber, announced the Minister. She explained that users will be able to find and forward in chat mode photos and info about our national sites. We, the Ministry of Tourism and iLoveBulgaria, are the first in Bulgaria and worldwide, who are able to provide content in Viber's Chat Extension, further indicated Minister Angelkova, commenting that digitalization is a major highlight in the 2018 Annual Agenda for National Tourism Advertising.

At its launch, the iLoveBulgaria project incorporated the 100 national tourism sites and new places of interest from a number of municipalities, both along our Black Sea coastline and the country's interior, recollected the Minister. After their QR code is scanned, visitors "end up" among unique tourism routes. Work is now being done on the videos for the sites. Once ready, these will also be available through the Viber chat, explained the Minister.

Currently, the platform contains over 250 national tourism sites, with the total locations incorporated in it being over 5000, said Vesselin Vassilev, adding that members of iLoveBulgaria are over 500 organizations, with over 17 000 installations having been reported during the first 10 months following the project launch.

Viber users in Bulgaria are over 2 million, while their number worldwide exceeds 900 million, announced Atanas Raykov, explaining that two clicks is all it takes to find a given tourism sites via the new service.

Project implementation requires no funding, said Minister Angelkova, explaining that the contract between Viber and iLoveBulgaria is barter-based, whereas the platform provides information about locations, while Viber provides the dissemination channel.

Global studies indicate that use and significance of internet are on the rise. 2/3 of tourists traveling for recreation purposes arrange their vacations via internet. Within one year – July 2016 to July 2017 – bookings via mobile device have increased by 37 per cent. Furthermore, 95% of vacationing travellers will read at least 7 recommendations before booking their vacation. Eight out of 10 tourists would prefer personalized routes by tracking their digital profile. In one year alone internet users have increased by 10%, the growth being 21 per cent in social networks.

We expect that involvement of digital technology will contribute to the positive development of tourism in the country, the results for the year's first 10 months being very encouraging, announced Minister Angelkova. She explained that according to NSI data over 8 million international tourists have visited Bulgaria until October, registering a 7,6 per cent growth. We expect the winter season to be successful as well, further commented the Minister. The forecasts predict a 5 to 10 per cent growth in international visitors to our country, their number exceeding 1,4 million last season, thus registering an over 19% increase.

BNB data on international tourism revenues are also very good. During the January-September 2017 period proceeds from international tourism and travel amounted to nearly BGN 6 billion, the growth being 9,4% compared to the same period of last year. In the summer months of June to September alone, international tourism revenues stood at some BGN 4,5 billion, registering a 7,6 per cent growth compared to the same period of last year.