

Russia, also officially known as the Russian Federation, is the largest country in the world, covering more than one-eighth of the Earth's inhabited land area. The country's tourism industry grew rapidly in the post-Soviet era though recent events have affected outbound tourism. Given the challenges arising from economic and other changes, this theme issue considers current industry trends and possible responses. Theme editors Marina Sheresheva and John Kopiski assembled an expert team comprising nine Russian academics (six of whom also serve as industry consultants); the co-owner of an agro-tourism centre, a hotel chain senior marketing manager, a chief financial officer and the founding president of the association of the most beautiful villages of Russia. I should like to thank Marina, John and all their contributors for a fascinating and detailed analysis – our first theme issue from Russia.

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development, and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATT* theme editor, please do contact me.

Richard Teare
Managing Editor, WHATT

What are the main trends, challenges and success factors in the Russian hospitality and tourism market in the experience economy era?

The Russian tourism and hospitality industry has significant development potential because of the country's history, culture, diverse landscapes, rivers, lakes, mountains, flora and fauna, small towns with ancient churches, local museums and other unique features. It is worth noting that Russia has 35 national parks and 84 forest reserves situated in different climatic zones, and coupled with diverse flora and fauna, they offer unique opportunities for ecological tours and rural tourism. Yet there are many problems that impede the development of both national and international companies in the Russian tourism and hospitality market. For example, most local managers have yet to recognize and respond to the challenges posed by the experience economy era and the need to create memorable tourist experiences based on cooperative strategies and network relationships.

This theme issue explores the challenges, opportunities and success factors that are important to the development of the tourism and hospitality industry in Russia. As far as we know, this is the first time that a detailed assessment of the opportunities and mechanisms for creating memorable tourist experiences has been attempted. We also explore the question: are current institutions, policies and structures adequate and sufficient to ensure the steady development of Russia as an attractive tourist destination? In particular, we examine the strategic issues related to the identification of problems that surround the development of tourism and hospitality, the implications of these issues for the industry, and, finally, the solutions proposed to address them. All nine articles have contributed to various aspects of this important analysis; all confirm that the sustainable development of the industry requires the participation of all stakeholders in the industry and networking with the direct support of the state. We hope that this issue will make a significant contribution to the development debate so

that stakeholder partnerships can begin to release the huge potential of Russia as a tourist destination. Guest editorial

Marina Sheresheva and John Kopiski
Theme Editors

About the Theme Editors

Marina Sheresheva PhD is Professor and Director, Master's program (MSc) in Marketing, Director of the Research Center for Network Economy and Head of the Laboratory for Institutional Analysis, Faculty of Economics, Lomonosov Moscow State University. She has published widely on marketing, consumer research, clusters and business networks and in hospitality and tourism. Her publications have appeared in *Industrial Marketing Management*, the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* and other academic and professional journals, monographs and conference proceedings. She is currently working on a monograph of the history of the Russian press and print advertising from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Marina Sheresheva is the corresponding Theme Editor and can be contacted at: m.sheresheva@gmail.com

John Kopiski is a 66-year-old dairy farmer and partner in his wife's agro-tourism pioneer project in Russia. Prior to this and for more than 40 years, he was an international businessman, specializing in trade finance and marketing in the steel industry. During this period, he lived in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, India and South Africa and from these bases travelled to more than 80 countries. His insights on the tourism business have been derived from direct experience in the hospitality trade; the demands of not only a business man, but also a Corporate leader and as a father with five children, who vacationed in the Caribbean, Europe, Africa and India on visits ranging from simple holidays to exclusive safari and experience-based travel.