

CEETRA Travel Retail Forum in Budapest spotlights regional brands



The Central and Eastern European Travel Retail Association (CEETRA) hosted its bi-annual Travel Retail Forum in Budapest this week. With a strong focus on the importance of regional brands as well as advocacy, the industry event brought together retailers, suppliers, airport commercial management and service providers.

Chairman Andrzej Milaszewicz at Lagardère Travel Retail Poland, welcomed attendees, with a reminder of his objective to enhance networks by creating a communication junction in the region. Milaszewicz especially thanked the Hungarian winery Sauska, one of the largest local duty free suppliers, which held a networking evening on April 24. Budapest Airport's Retail and Property Director Mirko Fechner also stressed how important the channel is for the airport operator.

Peter Mohn at m1nd-set was first to present. He shared updated passenger figures and data for the CEE region. Based on IATA DDS and own data, forecasts see Budapest and Warsaw Airport to be the largest airports with 8.3M departing passengers this year each, followed by Bucharest and Prague (7.5M). Passengers in this region are more likely to buy on impulse than in the rest of Europe, and less likely to interact with staff – an opportunity for operators to improve, he shared.

Julie Lassaigne, General Secretary of ETRC, outlined plans ahead of the upcoming EU elections. "Engagement of regional and local associations is very important to us," she stressed, "and even though we coordinate on EU level, we could not do it without them." The audience discussion focused on the industry's sustainability initiatives and Lassaigne encouraged to voluntarily "reduce, re-use and re-fill" packaging. Some regulations, such as mandatory deposit return schemes (DRS) for single-use plastic bottles and metal beverage containers are sometimes implemented without considering the special needs of the duty free channel. Members of the association continue to receive timely information on planned and actual legislation, she vowed.

Bence Biro, Managing Director of Gebr. Heinemann's Hungarian subsidiary Magyar Duty Free was joined by Barbara Puncsák (retail development) and Eszter Udvardy (assortment & marketing), who gave insights into how store design and engagement with local brands deliver unforgettable experiences for customers and create a long-term asset in place activation for the company. From

hand-painted décor to bespoke coloured tiling evoking designs of famous buildings in Budapest, their presentation was packed with inspirational details.

As every fourth product sold by the duty free operator is local, two of these local heroes were asked to share their story on stage: chocoMe, a Hungarian confectionary offering exclusive hand-made chocolate creations, has grown from a 2010 start-up into a global player, now being present in 23 duty free shops at airports and cruise ships. Founder Gábor Meszáros reported strong sales growth (with pre-pandemic numbers already exceeded in 2022) and has benefited greatly from airport tastings and promotions.

Dr. Bálint Dámosy, Ginsmith and founder of Hungarian's first craft gin distillery OperaGin, said the secret of success starts with quality ingredients, and the locally sourced lavender and poppy seeds provide the floral and nutty aromas to the spirit. The award-winning bottle labels feature the Budapest opera house and add to the appeal for gifting in travel retail.

Martins Tamovics, Budapest Airport's airport development director showcased the airport's expansion plans to cope with increasing demand for more capacity. Participants learned about the challenges to balance interests of all stakeholders, and how the development team integrates needs of commercial partners in the master planning process. "We are looking for a sustainable balance in capacity development, revenue growth and quality", with retail and F&B offerings being an important part of a high quality passenger experience.

A glimpse of the future of aviation was provided by Patrick Bohl's presentation of EVIA Aero's vision on growing air travel in a scalable, sustainable yet economically viable manner. The German company will operate regional flights using emissions free aircraft such as Eviation's Alice. "We support the regional economy providing customers the opportunity of affordable, time-saving and sustainable travel," said Bohl, who confirmed, that the Bremen based team is in advanced discussions with numerous airports to invest in photovoltaic solar energy plants and recharging facilities.