

World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations 15th Convention
Prague, Czech Republic
Report of U. S. Delegation / National Federation of Tour Guide Associations

January 24 – 30, 2015

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The Convention included a variety of speakers, excursions, workshops, and activities designed to improve guiding skills, to introduce the participants to Prague and to foster interchange among the 352 participants from many countries. Including all attendees, the US had 32 participants, the largest total of any country except the Czech Republic, our host.

The US attendees included WFTGA Secretary Esther Banike, WFTGA past President Deborah Androus, NFTGA Board Members Gene Reyes and Terry Hall, Guides Association of New York City President Matt Baker, and Guild of Professional Tour Guides of Washington, D.C. President Joe Steinbock.

U.S. Delegation Activities

Our delegate team worked together very well and tried to get the consensus of the U.S. attendees on as many voting issues as possible. In every case where a vote was required, the 3 team members reached a consensus and cast the U.S. vote accordingly.

An Executive Board (ExBo) and a General Assembly of Delegates governs WFTGA. There are normally 7 members of the Board, though at the time of the Convention there were only 6.

More than **20** hours were devoted to the General Assembly. This provided ample opportunity to participate in interchange among the credentialed delegates, representing tour guide associations in **32** countries in person or, in a few cases, by proxy. Conference participants came from **41** countries in total.

Having three representatives assured that there was always representation and allowed research and discussions while the General Assembly was in progress. Only 2 of the U.S. delegation were permitted to sit at the table at one time, with the 3rd delegate seated immediately behind, often adjacent to 2 WFTGA past presidents, Rosalind Newland (Great Britain) and Deborah Androus (USA). They provided useful counsel to the Board and to us. [Past Presidents are permitted to attend the General Assembly meetings but are not permitted to vote unless serving as delegates as was Ruby Roy (Canada).]

The key responsibilities of the delegation were to represent the USA (NFTGA) to the General Assembly including the vote to decide the location of the next WFTGA Convention and to vote on the WFTGA officers for the next two years.

2017 WFTGA Convention Site

Only 3 countries presented completed bids for the 2017 Convention Site. These were:

Denmark
Iran
Singapore.

The three bidders provided written and oral presentations, including a presentation for all Convention attendees. The General Assembly also had a brief opportunity for questions and answers with each of the three bidders in turn. We participated in questioning the bidders. Questions about each proposed Convention venue covered such topics as:

- Weather conditions during the proposed Convention dates
- Mass transit
- Distance of city center from airport
- Visa and passport requirements
- Education sessions at Convention including content and emphasis
- Hotel arrangements and cost of registration
- Proposed pre- and post-convention tours.

Before casting our vote, the U.S. delegation discussed the options with all U.S. Guide participants. This included some group discussion and also individual conversations with virtually every U.S. tour guide participant. Based on these discussions, further discussions with each of the bidders and our own evaluation of the three bids, the U.S. delegation reached consensus and cast our vote for Singapore. The final tally of votes in the General Assembly was:

Iran	18
Singapore	11
Denmark	3.

Thus Iran will host the 2017 Convention.

Determining why the votes were cast in this way by participating countries is pure speculation, but here are some considerations:

- Iran has never hosted the WFTGA.
- Iran has numerous world heritage sites yet has a weak tourism sector.
- The representatives of Iran at the Convention were friendly, engaging, helpful and conveyed openness to all
- The 2015 Convention is in Europe and the 2013 Convention was in Asia
- Singapore has hosted a WFTGA Convention in the past.

Selection of the new WFTGA Executive Board (ExBo)

Under WFTGA voting procedures, candidates run for President, Treasurer, and for the remaining 5 ExBo Member positions. Once selected, the new ExBo decides who will serve as Vice President and Secretary and who will take responsibility for various portfolios such as Marketing. It is possible to run both for President or Treasurer and also declare that if not selected for that office, the candidate will then run for ExBo Member. Voting procedures call for those receiving an absolute majority (17 or more out of the 32 votes cast in this case) to be elected. The two lowest of the remaining candidates who did not receive a majority are dropped and remaining candidates then participate in run-off elections.

The candidates presented written nomination forms detailing their past experience and qualifications and were available to answer questions.

President:

Felicitas Wressnig (Austria), current President, ran for re-election and won
Ruby Roy (Canada), a past President was the other candidate

Treasurer:

Hermann Friedsam (Austria), won
Roger Robert Rajah (Malaysia) was the other candidate
Patricia Blain (Great Britain), the current Treasurer, did not run

Board Members:

Ruby Roy (Canada) won and became Vice President
Esther Banike (USA), the current Secretary, won & will retain that role
Roger Robert Rajah (Malaysia) won
Ivana Curuvija (Serbia) won
Alushca Ritchie (South Africa) won
Alikaj Adiola (Albania) lost
Smaragda Touloupa (Greece) lost
Maria Aristidou (Cyprus), on the current ExBo did not run
Wilja Siebe (Netherlands), on the current ExBo, did not run

The US delegation voted for the successful candidate for President and some of the successful candidates for ExBo. In deciding for whom to vote the delegation considered the qualifications and demeanor of the candidates as well as geographic distribution. Our own Esther Banike was re-elected by an overwhelming majority.

Other Business

The General Assembly dealt with other topics, including:

- Staying informed – encouraging tour guide associations in all countries to try to improve communications using such tools as web site or e-mail etc

- Viator – Delegates expressed dissatisfaction with service provided by Viator to WFTGA. TripAdvisor acquired this job listing service and performance has declined. Following reports of inappropriate guide listings and difficulty getting answers, some delegates wanted to end the WFTGA/Viator relationship. The decision was to present WFTGA requirements to the new Viator representative at the Convention and to allow sufficient time for a response.
- Guideapedia – This service lists WFTGA members to assist users to find guides worldwide. Guideapedia received positive reports but delegates expressed some concerns
- Changing European requirements – Delegates discussed growing changes and requirements, particularly in countries where tourist guides are regulated.
- International Relations – Delegates discussed the need to stay abreast of the changes affecting tourism in various parts of the world.

Program

Stanislav Voleman and the rest of our Czech hosts presented an outstanding program. This included a variety of music such as American jazz and local folk music, dancing classes for those who dared at 8:00am each day, and many lectures, workshops and excursions to provide insight into many facets of Prague and the Czech Republic.

There were two **keynote lectures**, the first on the universality of music by an Austrian professor, the second an outstanding one on Baroque music, art and architecture by an American, Dr. Daniel E. Miller of the University of West Florida, Pensacola. Prague has many examples of the Baroque period.

All Convention participants were impressed with the **27** different **workshops**, each averaging around 2 hours and spread out among 3 days. These workshops included a wide range of topics that were of practical value to tourist guides throughout the World. Some topics covered were:

- Guiding Visually Impaired and Blind guests
- Guiding at Religious Sites
- DO, and DON'Ts for Local Cruise Guides
- Health Risks facing Tourist Guides
- The Image of the Tourist Guide in the Mass Media
- Analysis of the Supply and Demand for Tourist Guide Services

- Benefits for Members of Utilizing WFTGA Infrastructures and Concepts

One session of the Convention was devoted to **roundtable discussions** facilitated by the WFTGA President. These discussions engaged everyone, with assorted participants seated together in small groups discussing such topics as:

- Problem solving
- Income and tips
- Variety in work
- Partners
- International Relations
- Facts and figures
- Free tours

One Participant's Day

As an example of one day of the program here is one participant's January 28 program, selected from several other offerings available simultaneously.

Interpreting Difficult Heritage: Dark Tourism and the Tourist Guide presented by Iris Barry of Great Britain. This session focused on the difficult subject of presenting tours of the sites of horrific events such as massacres, genocide, battlefields, and bombings so that the group understands and respects the site and can deal with their reactions. Guides also have to be prepared to deal with inappropriate or offensive behavior at these sites.

Holocaust Experiences of Survivor Helga Hoskova-Weissova presented by the Czech Tour Guide Association. Helga described her experiences, illustrated by her contemporary watercolors that, like her, miraculously survived. She painted daily life in the Terezin (Theresienstadt) Ghetto/Concentration Camp. Her moving story of survival, her art and her vigor in her 80s were inspiring.

Regional bus tour: Terezin (Theresienstadt) – the former Jewish ghetto and concentration camp. Czech guides accompanied the group and described the countryside on the way to this site, the cemetery nearby, the fortress used as a small concentration camp for political prisoners as well as Jews, and the Jewish ghetto established by the Nazis in the 1940s. We visited the museum where Helga's watercolors were prominently displayed along with the names of thousands of victims. The two earlier presentations served as excellent preparation for this tour.

This example demonstrates the seriousness and educational value for guides of the offerings at the WFTGA Convention. Because the meetings for delegates, the General Assembly, overlapped with portions of the program, we were unable to experience all that other attendees saw. But the interaction with delegates from many other countries and the greater understanding of WFTGA and other nations that flowed from this was valuable.

Pre- and Post-Convention Tours

Those we spoke to who participated in pre- and post-tours to other parts of the Czech Republic gave very positive reports. Similarly, a one-day cruise guide training session following the convention was very well received.

Other Activities

There was a silent and live auction to raise scholarship funds to assist those with financial need to attend NFTGA Conventions and Training events.¹ A number of those attending, even as delegates (for example from Barbados and Uruguay), received such funding. Auction items from around the world added to the cultural exchange of the Convention, and the live auction was exciting with an Egyptian auctioneer doing a marvelous job. The members of the U.S. delegation donated some auction items representative of our country, for example vintage jazz and folk music recordings.

It is traditional to provide gifts to the host and officers as well as other delegates, and other handouts such as pins for attendees. We were aware of this and the U.S. delegation and attendees brought a variety of donated and purchased items for the purpose. Gifts were presented throughout the conference except the ones to the host, Stanislav Voleman that were presented at the closing plenary session.

On the final evening there was a gala dinner, auction and dance and Gene Reyes introduced a Mardi Gras Carnival theme with masks and beads he brought from New Orleans. Many attended in their traditional national costumes and the dancing and social interaction added to the enjoyment and cultural exchange of the Convention.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate.

Holly Jensen
Joe Steinbock
Gene Reyes

March 14, 2015

¹ The Androus Foundation, the family foundation of past WFTGA President Deborah Androus of the U.S., initiated and partially underwrites the scholarship program in conjunction with WFTGA.