

PROMOTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS BY AWARDING WITH A GOLDEN APPLE

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The current challenges of tourism destinations are related both to ensuring efficient management, but also to finding the most innovative ways of promotion, as competition in the international tourist market has grown tremendously. The goal is essentially one: attracting as many tourists as possible.

Marketing specialists admit that the media is able not only to provide the support of tourism publicity but also to get involved in promoting a destination - and the recent trends in the online environment reinforce this idea. Beyond social media, networking, blogging or other instruments of tourism 3.0, there is a certain tradition in the tourism press – of over 45 years old - which actually means rewarding destinations that are marked by sustained efforts to increase tourism and its intense promotion. This is the Golden Apple Award, a true Oscar for tourism, awarded by World Federation of Travel Journalists and Writers – FIJET.

After its establishment in 1970, the prize was awarded to 47 destinations in about 20 countries. The award-winning gallery is impressive, including well-known destinations, as well as destinations with strong growth on the international market. One can find on the list Sicily (Italy), Sarajevo (Yugoslavia), Antalya (Turkey), Palos de la Frontera, Cantabria and Caceres (Spain), Krakow (Poland), Funchal / (Colombia), Moscow (Russia), Split, Opatija and Dubrovnik (Croatia), Luxor, Alexandria and Sharm el Sheikh (Egypt) and many other destinations. From Romania, Bukovina (1975), Sibiu, the Danube Delta, and Blue Air Company (2009), Targu Jiu (2014) have received the Golden Apple.

Recently, a destination for memorial tourism drew attention. Considering that we are celebrating 100 years since the Great War, Belgium received in 2016 the fourth Golden Apple, this time for Ypres, a remembrance of the First World War. Both the city and the surroundings keep alive the memory of the heroes, from both barricades, who shed their blood "on the fields of Flanders".

This destination can be considered a wonderful example of memorial tourism. Within a radius of about 3 km around Ypres, the multitude and variety of commemorative monuments are absolutely impressive - starting with excellent cemeteries of the Commonwealth (Essex Farm Cemetery, but especially Tyne Cot Cemetery, the largest) and of Germany as well (the one from Vladslo), continuing with extensive architectural monuments (the equestrian statue of King Albert I of Belgium, from Nieuwpoort), with trenches arranged for visiting and commemorating (at the Diksmuide), or with impressive museums like Memorial Passchendaele 1917 and In Flanders Fields Museum of Ypres. More than that, it can be added the most impressive commemoration of all: under the triumphal arch Menin Gate (in the walls of which are the names of the Britons who gave their life in the Great War - 54,896 names) in Ypres at 8.00PM of every day since 1928, despite of climatic conditions, the local population, together with various authorities and associations, honour their heroes with a gorgeous and exciting ceremony, bringing together the city's inhabitants and tourists. In the trumpet sound of musicians from the Last Post Association, the participants remember, pray and lay wreaths after a 100-year-old ritual.

The Golden Apple Trophy is now being exhibited at Ypres Tourism Information and Promotion Office, for the pride of hosts and the joy of tourists. It is a new symbol of the city, alongside red poppies that recall the poems of John McCrae - *In Flanders Fields*.

John McCrae - *In Flanders Fields*

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*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*