



FISMTM

Fédération Internationale des Sociétés Magiques
International Federation of Magic Societies

FISM Newsletter

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**To all Presidents of the FISM member-societies,
and Delegates in the GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the FISM**

Dear Mr. President, Dear Friend in Magic,

It's my pleasure to keep you abreast of the latest developments.

Site Inspection Report Saint-Petersburg, Russia, September 1-4, 2019

Inspectors : FISM Board Members: Domenico Dante, Peter Din and Satoru Yamamoto, assisted by FISM International Consultant, Gerrit Brengman and the Presidents/Delegates of some FISM Associated Societies:

- Joan Caesar (Canadian Association of Magicians)
- May Closa (G.E.N.I. , Spain)
- Gianni Loria (CMI, Italy)
- Eberhard Riese (MZvD, Germany)
- Walter Rolfo (Masters of Magic, Italy)
- + Xavier Tapias (Co-director of the ECM 2020, Spain)

Purpose : Inspection of the feasibility of Russia as host country for the 2024 FISM World Championship of Magic.

- Visit of two proposed venues and hotels in their neighbourhood.
- Discovery of Saint Petersburg, its cultural and tourist opportunities and the local gastronomy.
- Meeting with the organizing team, the delegates of the PCO and the key executives at the two venues.
- Get-together and Q&A session with the United Club of Magicians.



At the request of : Mr. Stepan Pestriakov, CEO of the TVOY PRODUCER Production Company and Producer of the International Forum of Magicians and Mr. Alexander Murataev, President of the United Club of Magicians.

Hosts : During our visit we were hosted by Mr. Pestriakov and Mr. Murataev, who were joined by some other dedicated members of the team :

- Ms. Anastasia Petriakova, production assistant
- Ms. Maria Zaglyadimova, production assistant
- Ms. Svetlana Davidovich, project manager
- Ms. Oksana Popchenkova

The site inspection was well organized. The places we visited were expecting us and the people in charge took the time and trouble to listen to us and to help us in finding solutions for the problems linked to our specific requirements, some of which were certainly unusual to them. Our guide (Ekaterina Egnakova), at the museums as well as on the boat did an excellent job.

SAINT PETERSBURG

With around five and a half million inhabitants, Russia's second largest city (after Moscow), is situated in the North West of the country. It's located in the delta of the Neva River on numerous islands.

The city is recognized as one of the largest economic, cultural and scientific centres, not only of Russia, but of Europe and the whole world.

The grandeur and history of Russia's imperial capital never fail to amaze. It's a treasure trove of art and culture. On top of the numerous museums, there are the illustrious performance halls where one can enjoy world-class ballet, opera and classical as well as current-day music.

Time zone

The standard time in Saint Petersburg is the same as in Moscow: UTC/GMT + 3 hours.

Currency

The unit of currency is the rouble (RUB). At the time of our visit one Euro was worth 73.30 RUB and one US \$, 66.74. It came as a pleasant surprise that, even in small shops, we could pay using a debit card, which proved to be much more interesting than using a credit card. Of course "Apple Pay" should be readily available too.

Other information

Russia uses the international metric system and electrical outlets for 220 volts/50 Hz. The power plugs and sockets are of type C (also known as Euro plug) and type F (also known as Schuko).

Most shops in Saint Petersburg are open all week from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and some Supermarkets are opened 24 hours.

Climate and temperature



The average temperature in July is 18°C (64°F), but there can also be quite hot and sunny periods with maximum temperatures around 30°C (86°F). The average number of rainy days in July is 16.

Language

The language is Russian, but at the airport, hotels, cultural or tourist sites as well as in the important shopping districts the people understand enough English to help you out. However, most street names, signposts and names in shops or restaurants are only in Russian and can be difficult to read. So, it's absolutely worthwhile to spend a little time to get acquainted with some of the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet before travelling to Russia.

Visa

It must be said that applying for a visa for Russia has not always been a picnic and chances were that the support offered by a Visa Application Centre would cost quite some money. However, the good news is that since October 1st, 2019 all this has changed. Now it's possible to apply for an on-line visa for Saint Petersburg and Moscow FREE OF CHARGE.

The organizers even promised to take the necessary actions to provide the people attending the convention with a special document, to further facilitate their application if this might be of help. They'll also try and find a way to make it easy for the magic dealers to comply with the necessary conditions to take their merchandise in and out of the country.

Transportation

Saint Petersburg Pulkovo Airport is served by most international airlines and in Europe quite a number of low cost flights are available. There are busses to the city centre and taxis are not expensive, although traffic can be heavy. (In the early afternoon it took a taxi a little less than an hour to drive us from the Yubileyni Sports Palace to the airport for a price (negotiated by one of our hostesses) of only 9 Euro.

The bus and trolleybus networks in Saint Petersburg are cheap and very extensive, but not particularly easy if you cannot decipher Cyrillic. The Metro is efficient as well as beautiful and offers the advantage that the names of the stations are displayed in both the Russian and Latin alphabet.

YUBILEYNI SPORTS PALACE

This was the first of two possible venues proposed to us for the organization of the 2024 FISM World Championship of Magic.

During the time of the convention (in July, 2024) the whole complex would be exclusively put at the disposal of FISM.

The "*Indoor Sports Venue and Auditorium*", originally opened in 1967, was completely renovated and upgraded in 2015-2016.

On being ushered into the main hall it came as a surprise to be confronted with an enormous sports arena which, at the time being, was fully fitted out as an ice hockey rink of, I guess, the international or Olympic dimensions of 30 x 60 m. (99.4 x 197 ft.). A tiered seating system with a total capacity of about 7000 seats surrounded the arena.

It was quite impressive and the organizers were proud to tell us that, apart from important sports tournaments, they organized big pop concerts and had successfully hosted one of the shows of the *Cirque du Soleil*.

At first, the technical crew seemed a little disappointed that we were not overly enthusiastic, but when they understood what we needed, they became very cooperative and succeeded in convincing us, not only that they could fulfil all our wishes, but that they actually liked the challenge.

One of the other halls, where figure skaters were training in an ice skate rink at the moment of our visit, could be transformed into an amphitheatre, with a tiered seating capacity of at least 1500 and a performing surface, meeting all our requirements for the close-up competition and close-up gala show (when scheduling alternate performances for half of the conventioners).

Another big space would be made available to accommodate the dealers. It would be fitted with a minimum of 100 modular booths and an area to relax where a CCTV system could make it possible to follow the competitions.

One problem remained: there was no other hall in the building, large enough to accommodate a seated gala-dinner for some 3000 conventioners. But, never mind about that. It took the organizers only one day to come up with a satisfactory solution. A big tent could be erected next to the Sports Palace. When I asked if their budget could afford the extra cost, they gave me the impression that I might have asked an indecent question.

EXPOFORUM

The “Convention and Exhibition Centre” was opened in 2014 and this modern complex was voted Best Russian Venue in 2018. There’s no theatre in this centre either, but all we could possibly want can be realized. Of course the price tag would be considerable. A member of the organizing team told me that she estimates that the total cost would be at least 50% higher than the already very significant price the Sports Palace would have to charge.

It was exceptional that the management promised that no other activities would take place in the huge complex during the FISM Convention. I got confirmation that during these days, we would not be hindered by any other event or exhibition taking place.

Here also, one of the multifunctional halls was large enough to build the big theatre we need, but it was clear that they could never meet the acoustic standards which we’d like to have. (This is also true for the Sports Palace, but there the technicians promised to try and find a solution.)

One of the halls was fitted out as an amphitheatre with fixed seating and very good acoustics and it could be easily adapted to become a *superb* close-up theatre.

This being said, and sad as it may be, we have to accept that the location is far from ideal for our needs. The Centre is situated at about 5 minutes from the airport, but this means that it is rather far from the historical city centre. Also the fact that, apart from the expensive Hilton and Hampton hotels, included in the infrastructure of the building, there is no sleeping accommodation nearby.

HOTELS

Hotels in Saint Petersburg are readily available, ranging from the luxurious and more expensive ones to a number of hostels with rooms offering up to eight beds for a very low price. Anyway, there are numerous hotels near the Yubileyni Sports Palace and in the old city and all of them are very moderately priced. A double room in a 4 star hotel can be easily found for around 70 € (\$ 77). There are also many Bed and Breakfasts in the neighbourhood.

We visited a hostel (AQUAHOSTEL) right in front of the Yubileyni Sports Palace and near a metro station, offering rooms at nightly rates between 20 and 35 dollars per room. Some of the rooms had bunk beds that could accommodate 6 to 8 persons. These were offered at a mere 10 \$ per person per night. There were laundry facilities, a recreation room and a sun terrace on the roof with a view of the convention venue.

A member of the organizing team told us that it would be possible to rent the whole place (180 beds) for the duration of the convention.

PARTNERS AND SUPPORT

The organizers are assured the support of the State Culture Committee of Saint Petersburg, the Tourism Development Committee, The Consul Service Agency, Pulkovo Airport, Russian Railways, the TV Channel "Saint Petersburg", Russkoe Radio and others still to be announced.

Conclusion

After having examined the pros and possible cons of the site and the possible venues, the FISM Board of Directors has come to the conclusion that Saint Petersburg is an excellent site to organize FISM 2024 and that it certainly can keep pace with any other applicant organizer.

We were impressed by the close collaboration offered by the Yubileyni Sports Palace and the enthusiasm expressed by everyone involved.

However, considering the location of the Expoforum Convention Centre, the huge costs to have the pavilion to be used as a theatre, adapted to our needs as well as the absence of lower priced hotels in the neighbourhood, we fear that only Yubileyni Sports Palace can be taken into consideration.

To be absolutely certain that the budget will be available to make it possible to adapt the Yubileyni Sports Palace to our needs, the Board will demand a written guarantee before signing the contract with the organizers.

Kind Regards,



Domenico Dante
International President



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