

Community Impact Tourism Exchange (CITE) 2025

March 17–18, 2025 | Sofia | Astoria Grand Hotel

Can small communities transform the face of tourism in Bulgaria? How can we join forces to offer travelers unforgettable experiences? What attracts them most to our region?

Let's find the answers together! Join us for the first edition of CITE 2025: Tourism with Impact—The Power of Local Communities, a two-day event organized by the America for Bulgaria Foundation and filled with inspiring stories, successful case studies, and hands-on workshops.

Community-led tourism creates the authentic emotions that travelers seek. When we work together, the local economy thrives, interest in the destination grows, and everyone benefits.



Day 1: Monday, March 17

Innovative Communities with a Shared Vision for Transforming Destinations

When a community values its resources and joins efforts to share its unique story with the world, success is inevitable. Day 1 of the event showcases speakers who have turned ideas into reality and serve as shining examples of communities that have unlocked their tourism potential through unity.

1:30 – 2:00 PM

Registration

2:00 – 2:10 PM

Welcome Remarks by the Organizers

2:10 – 2:30 PM

Alex Crevar: From Niche to Norm – The Rise of Community-Based Tourism

Alex Crevar is a travel journalist, sustainable tourism consultant, and cycling route developer. He shares insights into the incredible power unleashed when communities embrace their uniqueness.

2:30 – 2:50 PM

Iva Taralezhkova & Krasimir Djonev, mayor of Letnitsa Municipality: The Vision of the Devetaki Plateau

What started with a single guesthouse with 12 beds has now grown into a thriving destination with over 60 guesthouses and 200,000 visitors annually. The Devetaki Plateau is a prime example of how united villages create an attractive tourism hub.



2:50 – 3:10 PM

Milen Dulev, mayor of Belene: Persina
Destination—Nature, History, and Adventure

Belene is a destination of contrasts. Its remoteness has turned it into a peaceful birdwatching paradise, while its painful past as a labor camp during socialism serves as a stark reminder of history. The combination of nature, history, and adventure tourism offers visitors unique experiences.



3:10 – 3:30 PM

Boris Begamov, Dunav Ultra: Cycling Adventures through Connected Communities

Dunav Ultra is Bulgaria's longest cycling route—740 km along the Danube River to the Black Sea. What started as a spontaneous initiative by three cyclists has evolved into the most popular platform for developing cycling tourism in Northern Bulgaria. Twelve years later, Dunav Ultra continues to grow through the "Destinations" project, offering small communities the chance to attract adventure-seeking tourists.



3:30 – 3:50 PM

Coffee Break and Networking

3:50 – 4:10 PM

Vladimir Dimitrov, Tour Strandzha: Discovering Strandzha from End to End

Tour Strandzha is a 180 km trekking route through one of Bulgaria's most beautiful regions—Strandzha Mountain. Whether on foot or by bike, the trail takes travelers through 19 locations, from remote villages to the Black Sea coast.

4:10 – 4:30 PM

Olivier Meissel Explores Bulgaria through His Father's Memoirs

French journalist and videographer Olivier Meissel has cycled across Bulgaria three times to capture its beauty and spirit. His adventures have led to a documentary film about Bulgaria titled MerSi!

Day 2: Tuesday, March 18

Sustainable Success Happens When Local Voices Lead the Way

If Day 1 is about what empowers local communities, Day 2 answers the question of how. A second lineup of speakers will share ideas for sustainable success rooted in listening to local voices. The event concludes with a practical workshop designed to help you uncover and present your community's unique story to the world.

9:30 – 9:50 AM

Elenko Elenkov, Begach Sports Club: The Northwest Cycling Tour



This initiative attracts over 1,000 tourists to Belogradchik and Chiprovtsi in just one weekend, proving how well-organized events can boost local businesses. Reservations are made months in advance, transforming the region into a sought-after destination.

9:50 – 10:10 AM

Stoyan Stoyanov, Bulgaria's Culinary Festivals: Local Food as a Bridge Between Traditions and Tourism

Food festivals rooted in local communities attract thousands of visitors and showcase how food can be a key driver of tourism.

10:10 – 10:30 AM

Stefan Bozadzhiev, Lyuba Tours 2007: Presenting Bulgaria on the International Market

Lyuba Tours 2007 showcases authentic Bulgaria on the international stage, attracting foreign tourists. At the heart of their work are unique travel programs crafted with attention to detail and deep respect for the communities they collaborate with.

10:30 – 10:40 AM

Video Presentation by Charles Knowlton, Global General Manager of Experience at Global Touring: What Makes the Perfect Partner?

Global Touring operates under two distinct touring brands: Topdeck Travel and Back-Roads Touring. Together, they form the Global Touring Network, offering diverse travel experiences tailored to different types of travelers. Topdeck Travel is the leading provider of organized group trips for the next generation of explorers, while Back-Roads Touring curates authentic, off-the-beaten-path travel experiences.



10:40 – 11:00 AM

Vasil Todev and Antonia Vicheva, Bikearea: First Steps in Nature Exploration

Bikearea's children's camps offer innovative outdoor programs that foster creativity, teamwork, and environmental stewardship among young participants.

11:00 – 11:30 AM

Coffee Break and Networking

11:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Practical Workshop with Alex Crevar, Part 1

On day two of the event there will be a two-part workshop that, like the overall event, focuses on the "what" and the "how" of storytelling for destinations. In this case, the "what" speaks to the creation of stories that bring positive attention to a community. The "how" provides insight into getting stories in front of readers across the international tourism marketplace. These workshops are meant for most tourism professionals: travel agencies, service providers, tour companies, operators, DMOs, tourism offices, governmental organizations, travel writers, and media outlets.

12:30 – 2:00 PM

Lunch

2:00 – 3:30 PM

Practical Workshop with Alex Crevar, Part 2

SPEAKERS:



Alex Crevar is a long-time travel journalist and regular contributor to The New York Times. He is also a cycle route developer, co-creator of the Trans Dinarica Cycle Route across the eight countries of the Western Balkans, and a responsible-tourism consultant.



Iva Taralezhkova is the founder and chairperson of the Devetaki Plateau Association, which has worked since 2008 to revitalize, develop, and promote a cluster of nine villages across three municipalities. Thanks to her organization's efforts, the area is now firmly on Bulgaria's tourism map.



Krasimir Djonev is a seven-term mayor of Letnitsa Municipality, dedicated to integrating the region's villages into Bulgaria's tourism landscape. He is also a strong supporter of the Devetaki Plateau Association.



Milen Dulev, as mayor of Belene, has made tourism development his mission, leading to a steady increase in visitor numbers each year.





Boris Begamov is the founder of the Dunav Ultra cycling route and has played a crucial role in reviving neglected areas along the Danube River. His efforts have helped promote tourism in 110 locations along the route.



Olivier Meissel is a French journalist and videographer who has traveled across Bulgaria by bike, capturing its landscapes and culture in his documentary film MerSi!



Vladimir Dimitrov is the founder of the Green Strandzha Association and an experienced mountaineer with over 30 years in Bulgaria's mountains. He is also an ultramarathon runner and a dedicated community leader in nature conservation.



Elenko Elenkov is the founder and chairman of Begach Sports Club, which has been organizing sports events in Bulgaria since 2012, promoting an active lifestyle and sustainable tourism.





Stoyan Stoyanov is the creator of Bulgaria's Culinary Festivals, a platform that unites people around food-driven tourism experiences.



Stefan Bozadzhiev is a licensed tour guide, a board member of the Association of Bulgarian Tour Operators, and a manager at Lyuba Tours 2007, specializing in authentic rural tourism programs.



Vasil Todev is the founder of Bikearea, an association dedicated to sustainable tourism and environmental education in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountains.



Antonia Vicheva is a member of the Bikearea Association team and has been actively involved in the organization's environmental conservation and adventure tourism initiatives in the Western Rhodopes since 2013.

