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PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 11 January 2019 - **Brussels City Council is happy to announce a positive outcome for the 18th Winter Wonders as well as all other events having taken place in the past few weeks, putting the spotlight on the capital not only in Belgium but internationally.**

Winter Wonders has confirmed its great appeal and has consolidated its position as the event that can't be missed during the end-of-year festivities. *"This event, featuring all sorts of activities, attracted 2.969.754 visitors this year of which 2.054.369 were Belgian (1.255.038 inhabitants of Brussels and 799.331 people from other regions) and 915.385 were from abroad!"* confirm both Philippe Close, Mayor of Brussels and Delphine Houba, Alderwoman of Culture, Tourism and Big Events.

The traditional attractions were as popular as ever: the Big Wheel, the carousels, the Ice Monster, the choirs, The Smurf's Saint Nicolas, the sound and light show and the Christmas tree on Grand-Place, ... For the latter « *a réflexion is being made with a variety of associations in order to find the best way to give it a second life, to recycle or to reuse it in a fun and creative way* », states Delphine Houba, who supports the sustainability of the events. Not forgetting the **skating rink** which was set up in a cosy village on place de la Monnaie, attracting no fewer than 49,215 people even setting a new record with a 10% increase.

The **Van Gogh** exhibition has already announced 100,000 entries and, given its huge success, has now been prolonged through to 27 January.

Finland was the guest of honour at the event showcasing typical products and a host of highly popular activities. 11,400 persons of 91 different nationalities visited their magnificent "House of Silence"!

On top of the traditions the Belgians hold dear, Winter Wonders also laid on some innovations.

"The Dome" was undoubtedly the most ambitious one! This high-tech installation, set up in partnership with Société des Arts Technologiques (SAT) from Montreal, stood proud on the boulevards du centre, screening 360° short and feature films watched by a total of 5,283 people. Nine Belgian and international artists also performed, providing a unique, immersive experience.

In the City Hall courtyard, the **Northern Lights** installation captured the imagination of its audience with its fairy-tale Aurora Borealis. Other **luminous attractions** were dotted along the way including the magical inauguration show, the Vismet tree of light and walkways dotted with fairy lights.

For the sixth time, **"Shop lights"** illuminated 123 roads and squares in the city, unfurling 8km of garlands and 13.8km of original lights, making the heart of the capital a must for shopping and a stroll.

Two **video-maps** put the focus on audiovisual creativity: Starloops brought the façade of the Viage to life, while Oli-B, in collaboration with Dirty Monitor, brought wondrous light to that of Sainte-Catherine's church. The Brussels-based artist, who also created the much appreciated 2018 Winter Wonders poster, has just finished a 60sq.m fresco spanning two façades, at the l'Écuyer- Fripiers crossroads, standing out from the cityscape with its hallmark bright colours. This work was included in the **PARCOURS Street Art**, initiated in 2012, during which over 70 frescoes were produced by way of calls for tender for projects and collaborations with the owners of private and public buildings, the ultimate goal of this project being to create an open-air museum.

"The sixth edition of "Stores in Light" made 123 main city roads and squares shine, using 8km of tinsel and 13,8km of original lighting turning the heart of the capital into the must see area for strolling and shopping. Overall, the 250 storekeepers present at the Christmas Market were very positive about this 18th edition" states Fabian Maingain, Alderman of Economic Affairs, Employment, Smart City and Administrative Simplification.

With increasing numbers of followers, social networks also highlighted high levels of interest



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in Winter Wonders. The Facebook page attracted 10% more visitors, events reached 541,800 people and the reach of the Instagram account increased by 25% ! 178,727 unique visitors (up 2.72%) surfed the event website, which also benefitted from massive media coverage: several foreign TV channels reported on it and in Belgium, the audience totalled 54.4 million (from 12.11 to 08.01 – TV, radio, press and web. Source: Auxipress).

Traffic conditions affected by Winter Wonders were yet again a prime focus for the Brussels City Council. An interactive map showing streets involved in the event was produced along with a campaign. Compared to the previous edition, the frequentation of Sainte-Catherine metro station rose by 30 to 40%, during the first 3 weeks of the event, and even increased up to 90 to 120% during those 3 weekends (Source : STIB).

Two tonnes less waste was generated thanks to the introduction of 400,000 reusable cups, confirming that the environment is a priority for Brussels City Council.

For the second year, the little **WINTER POP** caravans were to be seen in various neighbourhoods on four successive weekends. Square Ambiorix, Marolles, Neder-Over-Hembeek and Laeken all hosted this friendly, pop-up village. A host of fun and creative activities for the young and young-at-heart were organised in collaboration with local associations. Yet again, the locals were enchanted with the warm, friendly atmosphere in a spirit of sharing. This initiative reverberates the Brussels City Council's aim to decentralise events throughout the city.

The **NEW YEAR'S EVE celebrations** were organised on Heysel plateau for the second time, beautifully wrapping up the festivities to mark the 60th anniversary of the Atomium and Expo 58. The visitors, comprising 60% Belgians (of which 15,000 from Brussels) and 40% from abroad, gathered in a relaxed, festive ambience, dancing to timeless hits expertly introduced by DJ Simon LeSaint, and enjoying the enchanting overhead show performed by the company Theater Tol. A sumptuous 18-minute firework display, enhanced with lighting effects projected on Palais 5, entertained all those attending and heralded the first hours of 2019 with smiles and delight. A splendid way to ring in the New Year!

Lastly, the December hotel occupancy rate confirmed a very nice progression in the last few months, with a occupancy rate of 69,1% in December, a ... of 2,4% compared to the same period last year. On New Year's Eve, all previous records were pulverised with a total occupancy rate of 94,7% (source : Brussels Hotels Association).

OUR WONDERFUL CAPITAL CITY STILL GENERATES PLENTY OF BUZZ!

See you from 29 November 2019 to 5 January 2020 for the 19th edition of Winter Wonders and for joyful celebrations in the heart of Brussels.

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