

BRITISH TOURISM WEEK 23-29 MARCH 2009

- Britain's fifth largest industry – worth £114 billion – 8.2% of the nation's economy –
- Supports 2.7 million jobs and over 200,000 SMEs – more jobs than construction or transport
- 2009, a defining moment: weak pound makes Britain more affordable than ever –
- 4.9 million Britons will consider taking a holiday at home instead of overseas –

12 March 2009

BRITISH TOURISM WEEK 2009 MARKS 40 YEARS OF TOURISM

The British tourism industry celebrates its ruby anniversary in 2009, marking forty years since the Development of Tourism Act (1969) which established the statutory tourist bodies: the then British Tourist Authority (BTA, now VisitBritain) as well as the national tourist boards of England, Scotland and Wales.

It formalised responsibility for encouraging British residents to take holidays at home using 'publicity in any form, advisory and information services, research', as well as promoting the provision and improvement of tourist amenities and facilities. The BTA was also tasked with promoting tourism to Britain from overseas.

As well as the creation of the Act, 1969 was the year that the first Boeing 747 aircraft took to the skies (9 Feb), Concorde made its very first test (2 Mar) and supersonic (1 Oct) flights, HM the Queen officially opened what is now Heathrow Terminal 1 (17 Apr) and the QE2 made its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York (2 May).

Forty years on and the third annual British Tourism Week takes place from 23 to 29 March this year with high-profile events of its own. With the support of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the Week aims to galvanise organisations and individuals to take pride in being part of the nation's fifth biggest industry. It raises the profile of a £114 billion visitor economy and draw national awareness to its critical importance and the contribution it makes local economies and millions of livelihoods.

David Curtis-Brignell, co-chairman of British Tourism Week's multi-sector steering committee and past-chairman of the Tourism Society, says: "2009 is a potential turning point for British tourism. The current exchange rate gives us a new affordability for international travellers and an extra 4.9 million Britons are considering a holiday in their own country because of the economic climate. Continued investment could help us take full advantage of a not-to-be-missed opportunity and deliver rapid employment and economic returns."

Organisers also point to industry concern that the combined impact of the recession and continuing lack of investment mean that once-in-a-lifetime opportunities of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games are potentially being lost now. They will use British Tourism Week to urge recognition of tourism as one of the most deliverable and measurable legacies from the Games.

Recognising the enormous change that tourism has undergone in the past four decades, a special lunch on Monday 23 March will unite politicians from all parties with responsibility for tourism. Holders of the portfolio prior to current minister, Barbara Follett, included Lord Heseltine, Lord Lamont, Lord Tebbit and Lord Rodgers who introduced the Development of Tourism Act back in 1969. It will be followed in the evening by the Tourism Alliance Parliamentary Reception at the House of Commons.

On Tuesday 24 March, Ian Pearson MP, Economic Secretary to the Treasury and Economic & Business Minister at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform hosts a reception for public- and private-sector tourism leaders at Number 11, Downing Street. On Wednesday, the European Tour Operators Association and UKinbound have organised the Britain and Ireland Marketplace, a day of one-to-one business meetings between 100 travel trade buyers and providers from the UK and Ireland's hotels, attractions, ground handlers and other tourism services.

Given the increasing influence that politicians from all parties have on tourism – and the very real benefits the industry brings to local constituencies – the Week's annual 'Constituency Day' on Friday 27 March once again encourages MPs to gain a first-hand understanding of tourism businesses in their area and the issues they face. They are being urged to 'go back to the floor' and visit attractions, accommodation providers or tourist information centres in their area.

The Week culminates with the Best of Britain and Ireland exhibition from Thursday 26 to Sunday 29 March at London's ExCeL. The first two days (26 & 27 March) have been set aside exclusively for tourism businesses to exhibit in front of hundreds of travel buyers from the UK and around the world. It is an innovative reboot for national tourism agency VisitBritain's British Travel Trade Fair and the organisation will once again host more than 200 buyers and media from over a dozen countries. For the first time this year, the trade days will be followed by a two-day event for consumers (28 & 29 March) to discover all they can experience in the nations and regions of Britain and Ireland and covering different themes: active, coastal, countryside, flavours, heritage and luxury.

Says Bernard Donoghue, head of government relations at VisitBritain and co-chairman of British Tourism Week: "We want to ensure that the many sectors that make up our industry, the private and public sector, are prepared to

unite in generating a lasting legacy. It is up to us to inspire travellers with the appeals of heritage sites and historic buildings, our stunning countryside and cinematic landscapes or contemporary cities, as well as the events and quintessentially British, cultural experiences that make us unique. Success will mean increasing numbers of visitors, spending more in local economies and creating jobs: good news for Government and smaller businesses in a deepening downturn.”

Preparations for the opening of British Tourism Week follow a weekend when many Britons are looking for inspiration for Mothers’ Day trips. The week closes with two significant events on Sunday 29 March. The annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race begins the year’s calendar of major – and internationally appealing – sporting events with at least one a month until the end of summer including the Grand National (2 Apr), London Marathon (26 Apr), FA Cup Final (30 May), Royal Ascot (16 Jun), Wimbledon (22 Jun), Henley Royal Regatta (1 Jul) and Cowes Week (1 Aug). 29 March is also the official start of summer as the clocks go forward an hour for British Summer Time and British and international visitors look for inspiration on where and how to spend their longer, lighter evenings.

Visit www.britishtourismweek.com for more information on the week of events being organised around the country.

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For further information, please contact Elliott Frisby, Press and PR on 020 8563 3035 or 07951 996241

Notes to Editors

- British Tourism Week (23-29 March 2009) has been established to demonstrate the critical value of tourism to the economy of the United Kingdom. Through a week of events throughout the UK it will:
 - Increase awareness of the success and importance of the tourism industry
 - Raise quality standards
 - Promote training and professionalism
 - Improve competitiveness of the UK tourism industry
 - Support the preparations for hosting the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- British Tourism Week culminates with the Best of Britain and Ireland trade and consumer event at London’s Excel from 26-29 March. www.britainandirelandevent.co.uk
- British Tourism Week is organised by VisitBritain and UKInbound with the support of the Tourism Alliance, Tourism Society, ABTA the Travel Association, VisitScotland, Visit Wales, Visit London and Britain’s regional tourist boards.