

## 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

### BRITAIN'S SPORTING CALENDAR CAN BOOST BRITISH TOURISM IN 2009

The close of British Tourism Week on 29 March kicks off a summer season of social and sporting occasions throughout Britain that will attract visitors from Britain and abroad and help ensure 2009 is a boom year for tourism.

Bernard Donoghue, co-chairman of British Tourism Week (23-29 March 2009) and head of government relations at national tourism agency, VisitBritain, says: "Britain is a sporting nation with a great sports heritage and 'cathedrals of sport' – like Aintree, Lord's, Wimbledon, Old Trafford, Wales Millennium Stadium and St Andrew's – of huge international appeal. This year, we have a real opportunity to use these great, often unique events to convince Brits and international travelers that holiday experiences here can easily rival our competitors overseas."

The calendar kicks off on Sunday with the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race and follows with a key occasion every month right through the summer. Many of the events, crossing horse-racing, boating, sailing, tennis, are renowned worldwide.

Choose to champion one of Britain world-famous university cities in **March**: it's the **Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race** on the 29<sup>th</sup>

- For the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, up to 250,000 spectators crowd the banks of the Thames on Race Day from Putney to Mortlake to witness 2008 loser Cambridge challenge Oxford. Overall however, Cambridge currently lead the series by 79-74 since 1829. Enjoy the festival atmosphere for free from one of the many vantage points along the course, particularly Putney Bridge, Putney Embankment and Bishops Park (at the start); Hammersmith and Barnes (mid-course); Dukes Meadows and Chiswick Bridge (at the finish). There are Big Screens at Bishops Park, Fulham and Furnival Gardens, Hammersmith.

Spend a day at the races in **April**: it's the John Smith's **Grand National** on the 4<sup>th</sup>

- 2009 is the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Lottery* becoming the first winner of the then Grand Liverpool Steeplechase on February 26, 1839. Although the John Smith's Grand National actually runs over three days, beginning on the 2 April, 600 million viewers worldwide will tune in for the 4.15 Steeple Chase over 4 miles 4 furlongs for a prize fund of £900,000.
- Away from race days and visitors can book ahead for a tour around the Aintree visitor centre, which gives the inside story of what jockeys wear under their colours, of famous characters like the King of Afghanistan, and of historic events. Visitors can sit in the jockey's Weighing-in chair, stand in the Winner's Enclosure, and see Red Rum's stable in the yard as well as his final resting place at the finishing post of the Grand National Course.

Celebrate quintessential Britain gardens in **May**: it's the **Chelsea Flower Show** from 19<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>

- The ultimate event in the gardening calendar, the RHS Chelsea Flower Show sets the latest gardening trends, features the newest and most desirable gardening products and creates an explosion of colours and scents. The five-day Show is attended by 157,000 visitors each year.

Settle back with strawberries and a Pimms in **June**: it's **Wimbledon** from 22<sup>nd</sup> June to 5<sup>th</sup> July

- The Championships, Wimbledon, is the oldest tennis tournament in the world and the only one still played on grass courts. If you're not lucky enough to get a ticket, outside tournament time visitors can explore the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, which features exhibits and artefacts never seen before, as well as audio guides in eight different languages. Highlights include a new cinema showing a film about the science of tennis, a ghost-like image of John McEnroe giving a tour of the normally off-limits, players' dressing room area, the Whites of Wimbledon exhibition, as well as interactive games and displays.

Get ready for one of the most hotly contested sporting series in **July**: it's **the Ashes** from the 8<sup>th</sup> - August 24<sup>th</sup>

- The Ashes Test cricket series between England and Australia is one of international cricket's most celebrated rivalries and dates back to 1882. It comprises five matches in 2009 at Swalec Stadium (Cardiff), Lord's (London), Edgbaston (Birmingham), Headingley (Leeds) and the Oval (London).
- Created in 1883, the Ashes urn was given to the England cricket captain, the Hon Ivo Bligh, after his side had triumphed against Australia in the 1882-83 series and bequeathed to the world's oldest sporting museum, the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) Museum on his death in 1927.
- Visitors can tour Lord's and see the tiny Ashes trophy, which remains on display and is seen by the tens of thousands of people who visit each year. MCC has been collecting cricketing artefacts since 1864 and today they include the stuffed sparrow that was 'bowled out' by Jehangir Khan in 1936, and the copy of *Wisden* that helped to sustain EW 'Jim' Swanton throughout his captivity, in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, during the Second World War.

Catch competitive sailing in **August**: it's **Cowes Week** from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>

- Since 1826 Cowes Week has played a key part in the British sporting summer calendar and is one of the UK's longest running and most successful sporting events. It now stages up to 40 daily races for over 1,000 boats and is the largest sailing regatta of its kind in the world. The Week is a fusion of many exciting elements, with its great mix of competitive sailing and social activities. The 8,500 competitors range from Olympic and world class professionals to weekend sailors. In excess of 100,000 spectators come to watch the sailing, enjoy the parties and live entertainment, and to experience the unique atmosphere.

Have a highland fling in **September**: it's **the Braemar Highland Gathering** on the 5<sup>th</sup>

- Known colloquially as *The Games* - and originating from those believed to have been held by Malcolm III - Braemar holds an annual Highland Games Gathering. Since Queen Victoria's time, the reigning Monarch has been the patron of the Braemar Royal Highland Society and the Games continue to be regularly attended by the Royal Family. The foot races at the Gathering are the world's oldest, having been organised on a regular basis by the same body since 1832.

Ask 'are they mad?' in **October**: it's a month of **weirdly wonderful championships**, which in a single week from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> includes:

- John Smith's Mascot Grand National Day (4 October), Huntingdon Racecourse, Cambridgeshire
- World Pea Throwing Competition (4 October), Lewes, East Sussex
- British National Ploughing Championships, (10 - 11 October), Soham, Cambridgeshire
- World Conker Championships, (11 October), Ashton, Peterborough
- World Porridge Making Championships, (11 October), Carrbridge Village, Inverness

Britain's reputation for hosting globally renowned sporting events will stand its tourism industry in good stead to benefit from a coming 'golden decade' of major events that crosses every nation of Britain and includes the Ryder Cup in Wales in 2010, the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, the Commonwealth Games in Scotland in 2014, as well as England's bid for football's World Cup in 2018.

With the support of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the third annual British Tourism Week takes place from 23 to 29 March and aims to galvanise organisations and individuals to take pride in being part of the nation's fifth biggest industry. It will raise 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.

This year, the Week focuses on the potential turning point that 2009 represents for Britain's £114 billion visitor economy. Despite the downturn, continued investment in tourism would enable the industry to take advantage of a not-to-be-missed opportunity and deliver rapid employment and economic returns. The current exchange rate is giving Britain a new affordability for international travellers and an extra 4.9 million Britons considering a holiday at home because of the economic situation.

David Curtis-Brignell, co-chairman of British Tourism Week's multi-sector steering committee and past-chairman of the Tourism Society, says: "Our priority this year is to encourage Britons to explore their own country and foreigners to visit us right now, when we offer great value. 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."

Visit [www.britishtourismweek.com](http://www.britishtourismweek.com) for more information on the week of events being organised around the country.

- ends -

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](http://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.