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TOURISM MINISTER RECOGNISES INNOVATION IN THE YOUTH TRAVEL INDUSTRY AT ANNUAL AWARDS

Tourism Minister, Margaret Hodge MP praised those working in the youth and educational travel industry for rising to the challenges facing the sector, when she addressed the annual British Youth Travel Awards in London last week.

Organised by the British Educational Travel Association (BETA), the awards acknowledge the crème-de-la-crème in student, youth and educational travel, recognising and celebrating the achievements of outstanding companies and individuals operating within the youth travel market.

“Travel and tourism is one of the biggest industries in the UK economy, employing 1 in 8, and so the government must keep thinking of tourism so that we emerge well from the recession,” the Tourism Minister said.

“There are many challenges facing the travel sector – including visa controls, airport taxes and a general shortage of money amongst consumers - but if we pull together, we can keep travel as a really important ingredient in young people’s lives.”

The Minister also acknowledged the valuable experience travel can represent for young people today. “Youth travel is one of the most life-enhancing experiences,” she said. “It is educational, allowing you to see parts of the world, learn and develop into an adult with the right set of values.

“Travel is a fantastic way of beginning to understand different cultures and bringing people together.”

An award-winning sector

Gapforce was named winner of the ‘Green Tourism’ award and Margaret Hodge MP praised industry members such as these that promote green tourism, by striving to prove you can get the “same bang for your buck that doesn’t destroy our planet.”

France was named ***International Youth Destination of the Year*** and London the ***Best UK Youth Destination***, with both the domestic and international awards given to destinations showing dedication and success in maintaining their promotion as a destination for youth, student and educational travel.

Sally Chatterjee, Interim CEO, Visit London, said: "The capital offers everything for student travel including a huge range of budget accommodation, world culture and incredible nightlife as well as unique events that you can only experience in London. The city is always evolving and leading the world with innovative concepts and ideas which keep London on the wish-list for all youth travellers both in the UK and overseas - be it for work, study or play."

Alison Armitage, Director of Generator Hostels, was named ***Most Promising Young Marketer***, which was one of two awards won by the youth hostelling chain, which took home the ***Best Youth Product*** accolade too.

"Winning these awards marks the culmination of an exciting year for Generator Hostels. Not only has our London hostel recently taken two travel awards but we've also undergone a multimillion pound refurbishment and seen visitor numbers increase for the 14th year in a row.

"Further refurbishments next year reflect our commitment to offering quality accommodation that doesn't break the bank."

Jim Zambrano, of Top Deck Travel, who beat off tough competition to take home the ***Most Innovative Marketing*** award, said: "This culminates our most successful year ever and is very humbling. It is a great tribute to all the hard work the Topdeck staff - from road crew to operations to sales to marketing to reservations and management - have put in this year."

World Nomads Group took home the trophy for ***Best Website***, and Director of Partnerships Nick Pound said the industry's endorsement meant a great deal to his entire team.

"World Nomads is 100% online, making our website our #1 tool and portal for all our customers and partnerships around the world. It's a great achievement for World

Nomads to have had the quality and content of our website recognised as being worthy nominee for this prestigious award.”

Susan Goldstein, who is standing down as Managing Director of WYSTC and was one of the short-listing judges, was presented with the ***Outstanding Contribution*** award: an award given to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the development of youth travel internationally.

Commenting on judging the submissions, she said: “I was really impressed with the standard of the entries for this year’s British Youth Travel Awards, and though it made my job harder, it’s a great reflection of how strong the industry is at the moment. The nominees for the Green Tourism Award were particularly strong, which was great to see.”

Judging:

The short-listing panel for this year’s awards consisted of respected figures from the youth and education travel sectors, with the eventual winners voted for by BETA’s members.

Liz Statham, Marketing & PR Director of Rough Guides said: “I was pleased but not surprised to see such strong entries for the Green Tourism category, as sustainability and ethical practices have become an increasingly important priority for those accessing youth travel industry. It is good to see that the sector is continuing to recognise and respond to consumer trends.”

Youth travel is “the future of the UK tourism industry”, says BETA

The global movement of young travellers generates €112billion annually along with the increased social value that comes with personal and professional development.

“The BYTAs provide us with a platform from which to celebrate and reward our high achievers, gain recognition, and raise the profile of the work and individual successes of organisations engaged in youth, student and educational travel, to, from and within the UK,” said Emma English, Executive Director of BETA, whose members span the sector, from large corporate companies to small businesses.

“The youth travel business is the future of the UK tourism industry, with young people travelling to and from this country giving great value to the world,” she added.

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For further press information about the British Youth Travel Awards or BETA, please contact Nicola Miller at Jump PR on 07909 922 122 or email Nicola@jump-pr.co.uk

Notes to editors:

- BETA is the sole trade body representing those who cover the whole spectrum of inbound, outbound and domestic youth, student and educational travel. It is the fastest growing sector of the travel industry, currently amounting to more than a third of the revenue of the entire UK travel market.
- The winners in each of the categories were announced at a special awards ceremony on 3 December 2009 at the Courthouse Hotel in London.
- The winners (**in bold**) and finalists in each of the categories are as follows:

Best website (sponsored by Travlaw):

- **World Nomads Group**
- Gapyear.com
- Explorica Educational Travel

Best Youth Product (sponsored by Course-you-can.com):

- **Generator Hostels**
- Smart City Edinburgh
- Tucan Travel

Most Innovative Marketing (sponsored by 2AM Media):

- **TopDeck**
- London Bridge Experience and London Tombs
- Umi Hotels

Most Promising Young Marketer (sponsored by Anglophiles Academic)

- **Alison Armitage, Generator Hostels**
- Adam Taylor, Go Walkabout Travel Insurance
- Steve Lowy, Umi Hotels

Green Tourism Award (sponsored by Global Gossip):

- **Gapforce**
- Africa Impact
- Sandemans New Europe

Best UK Youth Destination (Sponsored by ICEF):

- **London**
- Hastings

Best International Youth Destination (Sponsored by Rough Guides):

- France

Outstanding Contribution Award:

- Susan Goldstein, WYSTC

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