

NEWS RELEASE

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Under embargo until 29 October 2008

Final line-up announced for prestigious Tourism Awards

The final results of the Tourism ExSEllence Awards covering the whole of the South East were announced last night at a Gala Event. Winners, Runners Up and Highly Commended organisations from the 13 shortlisted businesses in Kent across 15 categories can now be revealed. The winners in Kent are **The Gardener's Rest**, Kingsdown near Deal (B&B/Guesthouse category), **Kent Conference Bureau**, based in Maidstone (Business Tourism category) and **Visit Kent**, based in Canterbury (Tourism Website).

There was significant success across the county with Runners Up and Highly Commended Awards going to 10 organisations. The Runners Up were **Canterbury Historic River Tours** (Best Tourism Experience), **Abode Hotel Canterbury** (Large Hotel) and the **Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest in Goudhurst**. Those awarded Highly Commended were **the Alkham Court Farmhouse, nr Dover** (B&B/Guesthouse category), **St Peters Village Tour, Broadstairs** (Best Tourism Experience), **The Historic Dockyard, Chatham** (Large Visitor Attraction), **Rochester Castle** (Large Visitor Attraction), **Joss Bay Surf School, Broadstairs** (Sports Tourism), **the Rose and Crown, Selling nr Faversham** (Sustainable Tourism) and the **Royal Tunbridge Wells Tourist Information Centre** (TIC category).

With a total of 15 Award categories, including 'Sports Tourism', 'Best Tourism Experience' and 'Business Tourism', the Tourism ExSEllence Awards are the premier awards for the tourism industry in the South East and are managed by Tourism South East. They cover all kinds of tourism organisations, from small Bed & Breakfast businesses to large exclusive hotels and

visitor experiences. Winners in this region will go on to compete in the national Enjoy England Awards for Excellence in 2009.

Judges look for excellence, quality and innovation, covering all aspects of the business from customer service, sales & marketing, to training & development for staff. Peter Birnie, former Chief Hotel Inspector for the AA, was the judge of the B&B/Guesthouse Category and described Winner **The Gardener's Rest** as 'A wonderful B&B, with no faults in the bedrooms, a magnificent garden and a passion for continuous improvement through marketing, training and innovation'. Judge of the Business Tourism category, Alan Blenkinsopp, was clearly impressed by **Kent Conference Bureau's** 'professional and enthusiastic team', praising their 'exceptional service and easy-to-use website'. And Jenefer Yeung, judge of the Tourism Website category, declared **Visit Kent** as the outright winner due to its 'professional look and feel' and easy-to-access information on what to see, what to do, and where to stay in Kent.

Runners up and Highly Commended businesses were also of a very high standard. Judge of the Best Tourism Experience category was clearly impressed by **Canterbury Historic River Tours'** 'use of rowing boats to create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere with a commentary delivered with detail, and humour – very different from the normal "and now on your left" approach.' **Chatham Historic Dockyard** was described as 'a fascinating historic Dockyard site with 'Living History' re-enactments and characters now implemented. The **Rose and Crown** near Faversham was felt to be a 'Lovely country family pub run by a couple who are wholly committed to sustainability principles and who also recognise the essential importance of friendliness, service and quality.' And the **Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest in Goudhurst** scored highly by being 'an affordable and unique product offering healthy outdoor activities to visitors of all ages, abilities and incomes, 365 days a year'.

Robert Collier, chief executive of Tourism South East, comments on this year's successes, "It's a delight to see such a high standard of entry – it gets better every year. We look forward to seeing more success as the winners go forward to the national Enjoy England Awards for Excellence in 2009.

More information about this year's Tourism ExSEllence Awards can be found at

www.getdiscovered2008.co.uk.

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Note to Editors:

Judges' quotes and images of all Award recipients are available by emailing the above contacts.

Full final line-up for the Tourism ExSEllence Awards in Kent (full list across the South East available on request):

Winners

The Gardeners Rest, Deal , B&B, Guesthouse
Kent Conference Bureau, Maidstone Borough Council, Maidstone, Business Tourism
www.visitkent.co.uk, Tourism Website

Runners Up

Canterbury Historic River Tours, Best Tourism Experience
Abode Hotel, Canterbury, Large Hotel
Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest, Goudhurst, Sports Tourism

Highly Commended

Alkham Court Farmhouse, Dover, B&B, Guesthouse
St Peters Village Tour, Broadstairs, Best Tourism Experience category
Joss Bay Surf School, Broadstairs, Sports Tourism
Royal Tunbridge Wells TIC, TIC category
The Historic Dockyard Chatham, Large Visitor Attraction
Rochester Castle, Large Visitor Attraction
Rose and Crown, PerryWood nr Faversham, Kent, Sustainable Tourism

Sponsors of the Tourism ExSEllence 2008 Awards include:

Customer Maze – further information from www.customermaze.com

Enjoy England www.enjoyengland.com

Pure Brand Media www.purebrandmedia.com

South East Food Group www.sefgp.co.uk

Sport England www.sportengland.com

Take One www.takeonemedia.com

The Visitor Network www.thevisitornetwork.com

Tourism for All www.tourismforall.org.uk