

Politicians' Forum recognises value of meetings



The fourth annual Politicians' Forum held during IMEX 2006 revealed a growing interest in the value of meetings to local communities. 24 national, regional and local government representatives from Europe as well as Argentina, Georgia and Indonesia met with leading meetings industry figures. The Forum was held under the auspices of the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) and chaired by the European Federation of Conference Towns (EFCT).

"local political involvement can benefit the meetings industry"

Michael Hirst, chairman of the UK's Business Tourism Partnership told attendees "destinations that engender good working relations with their local politicians and develop a framework of support and promotion within an integrated municipal plan are those that are most successful."

The message was reinforced by the Forum's speakers including John Greenway, UK Member of Parliament, who used London as an example to show how the decision to devolve responsibility for tourism and business tourism to the mayor and the Greater London Authority has led to a much greater focus on promoting London to business tourism markets than ever would have been achieved under a central government structure. Extra funding included support for a commercially focused

business tourism team. The success so far, Greenway said, and this is not even counting the 2012 Olympic Games bid win is "a stunning testimony to the Forum's theme of how local political involvement can benefit the meetings industry."

Some of the key conclusions were that by supporting the meetings industry, communities can enhance the quality of their own lives while driving the local economy and also that there remains an urgent need to standardise international meeting statistics – joint industry association initiatives together with the World Tourism Organisation are beginning to address this issue.

The next Politicians' Forum will take place on Tuesday 17 April in Frankfurt. For a full report on the 2006 Forum see www.imex-frankfurt.com/politforum.html.



Politicians' Forum at IMEX 2006

South Africa steps up unique grading programme

The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) is embarking on a high profile recruitment and awareness campaign for its MESE (Meetings, Events and Special Events) star grading programme. Plans include a national roadshow, presentations to the industry and awareness programmes to highlight the benefits to be gained not only to establishments that become graded but also to those seeking and demanding quality assurances.

The MESE grading scheme is the world's first and only quality assurance programme that assigns star ratings to the meetings sector. Already close to 130 leading suppliers have been graded since its launch in 2004. Graded venues include Sandton Convention Centre, Gallagher Estate and ICC Durban. The scheme was launched to ensure South Africa becomes firmly positioned as a favoured business tourism destination – South Africa has been ranked 32nd in the global ICCA (International Congress & Convention Association) country ratings and in the top ten incentive travel destinations by Meetings & Incentive Travel readers. It is estimated that business tourism already accounts for more than R17.4 billion annually in revenue, sustaining more than 250,000 jobs in South Africa. International conferences alone contribute about R951 million to South Africa's GDP while creating 12,000 jobs.

