**Launch of new Tourism and Hospitality Campaign sends clear message to political leaders**

As the political parties prepare for battle in the long run up to the next general election, the British tourism and hospitality industry has a clear message for leaders:  *“Tourism and hospitality are major contributors to the UK economy, 10% of the UK workforce work in the industry – so don’t leave it out of your manifestos.”*

In a bid to ensure all major parties recognise the tourism industry for its contribution to the UK economy, **33 leading UK tourism bodies** have joined forces to launch the politically-focused **Campaign for Tourism**. The group includes organisations from all aspects of the tourism industry including attractions, historic houses, heritage sites, B&Bs, hotels, restaurants, palaces, language schools and destinations.

The **campaign, which launches on 8th October 2013,** will see letters distributed to all major political parties underlining the fact that tourism wasn’t mentioned in any of the UK parties’ political manifestos at the last General Election. It will highlight the fact that existing government policies are hampering the industry’s efforts to create hundreds of thousands of jobs for young people.

Signed by leading industry figureheads and tourism associations including the Tourism Alliance and British Hospitality Association, as well as major commercial organisations including Merlin Entertainments, the letters aim to trigger debate as well as proactively setting out key opportunities for the Government:

* Improving the industry’s international competitiveness
* Investing for success
* Recognising tourism and hospitality as an economic growth generator

**Lord Lee of Trafford, Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Tourism and Chairman of the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions said:** “The UK government still hasn’t got the message. Tourism and hospitality is the number one industry in more constituencies than any other industry in the country. By coming together to support this campaign, we are able to deliver a clear message to the government: Take tourism seriously.”

**David Michels, President of the Tourism Alliance said:** “Tourism is a huge contributor to the UK economy and one of the UK’s leading growth industries employing nearly three million people. The growth in tourism spend to £134 billion in 2012 supported another 180,000 jobs, more than one in three new jobs in the UK. Politicians need to acknowledge and act on this in developing manifestos for the next election. They must include tourism-specific policies and positions to maximise the true potential of this great industry.”

**Ufi Ibrahim, CEO of the British Hospitality Association said:** “For some inexplicable reason there is a perception that the tourism and hospitality industry is somehow less valuable than other industries. In fact, the tourism industry in the UK comprises over 200,000 businesses and ours is a major contributor to both the economy and to the creation and generation of new jobs. The Campaign for Tourism is a fine example of our industry working together, and our collective voice is stronger and our impact is greater when we work together.”

**Mary Rance, Chairman, Tourism Alliance said:** “The UK is one of the top tourist destinations in the world, bringing in billions of pounds of revenue, but government needs to move faster to stay with the pack. Visa reform, conference destinations, air passenger duty - these all prevent tourists from spending their money on our shores and Government can make direct improvements. Let’s work together to support success and help us drive the UK’s economy forward.”

ENDS

For further information:

**Notes to editors**

Lack of investment in the industry from the government remains a significant issue, having dropped by 25% between 2001 and 2011. This is in stark contrast to the increases given to the tourism industry in other European countries during the same period. Tourism benefits everyone, in every constituency, every day in the UK.

VAT remains at 20% on visitor accommodation and attractions – despite the fact that many of our European neighbours have reduced it to as low as 5% - ensuring the cost of visiting the UK remains high. After a study using HM Treasury’s own Computable General Equilibrium, Professor Adam Blake, an economic advisor to the Treasury noted that *reducing tourism VAT was one of the most efficient, if not the most efficient, means of generating GDP gains at low cost to the Exchequer that I have seen with the CGE model.*

Air Passenger Duty in mainland UK has risen 360% in the last five years. This is despite the fact other EU countries have lowered or indeed abandoned it altogether.

Tourist Visas are still a problem, being both costly and onerous to apply for. Madam Ning Ning Yu, President, China International Travel Service, made the following observation: *In 2012 only 149,000 Chinese visitors came to the UK. Five times more visited Australia, which has a longer flight time. Until the UK government improves the access to the UK for Chinese tourists, our ability to bring groups here is limited.*