

Press Release

BUSINESS TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

Leading the way

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BUSINESS TOURISM CHIEF RECEIVES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

At the 11th annual International Hotel Investment Forum being held in Berlin from the 3rd to the 5th March, Michael Hirst OBE, Chairman of the Business Tourism Partnership and former Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Hilton International received the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award.

In a career spanning 45 years, Hirst has held a number of senior positions in the hotel, hospitality, leisure and tourism industry. He started as a graduate trainee with the Forte Group in 1964 and was General Manager of London's famous Talk Of The Town Theatre Restaurant, as well as Director for Forte's leisure, restaurants, banqueting and outside catering interests.

Joining the Ladbroke Group in 1976, he was part of the team that built up its non-betting businesses, culminating with the acquisition of Hilton International in 1987. He was named Corporate Hotelier of the World in 1993.

Since leaving Ladbroke in 1994, Hirst has advised on hotel property investment with CB Richard Ellis and is a consultant and director for other companies in the leisure and tourism sector.

He became Chairman of the Business Tourism Partnership at its inception in 1999, having co-ordinated the report "Business Tourism Leads The Way", which was commissioned for inclusion in the Government's tourism strategy. Since then the Partnership, shortly to be renamed the Business Visits and Events Partnership, has spearheaded the drive for greater recognition for business tourism and a more competitive, high quality and more profitable sector within Britain. It's now estimated to be worth £22 billion to the visitor economy.

Hirst was named Meetings and Incentive Travel Industry Personality Of The Year in 2003 and appointed an OBE for his services to tourism in the same year.

Reflecting on his career Michael Hirst said, "I've been fortunate in learning many lessons from my time in this great industry and within its many diverse sectors. Its vibrancy and creativity have always been a source of inspiration to me".

"Events are, to my mind, the 21st Century driver of visitor traffic around the world. The last 10 years has seen not only a significant increase in the recognition of the sector, but a dramatic rise in the value of business visits and events".

"International congresses, major exhibitions, sporting events and cultural festivals all have the power to attract large volumes and fill destinations regardless of seasonality. I have no doubt we'll see many more destinations developing event strategies and more people planning their travel around such programmes."

Hirst said he has no intention of retiring just yet. "We've got the biggest event of them all coming up in 2012. I want to be very much part of the successful industry that stages them." Seeing a London International Convention Centre open would also be a dream come true".

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For further information, please contact:

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Note to editors:

- **The Business Tourism Partnership** is shortly to be renamed **The Business Visits and Events Partnership**. Its aim is to lead the way in supporting a competitive, high quality and more profitable business visits and events sector in Britain. The Partnership seeks to provide a cohesive industry voice and will work with VisitBritain and other government departments and agencies to influence and develop policies and practices favourable to the growth of tourism, trade and creative enterprise from business visits and events.
- The **Business Visits and Events Partnership** will have the support of twenty two member organisations including the leading trade organisations and government agencies with an interest in conferences, meetings, exhibitions, trade fairs, incentive travel, corporate hospitality, and business, sporting, cultural and festival events.
- Business tourism is worth **over £22 billion** in terms of its wider economic impact through associated visitor expenditure on travel, entertainment, shopping, pre and post conference tours etc.) In addition the value of business transacted at trade events is estimated to generate in excess of **£100 billion** a year.
- The 2006 IPS figures for inbound business visits and spend indicated a record over **9 million visitors spending £4.75 billion**. This is an increase of 10% and 17% respectively on 2005, at a growth rate that exceeds overall tourism growth
- Over the past ten years there has been a **53% growth** in all business trips exceeding the overall tourism growth rate
- **The sector generates 28% of all overseas visitors and 30% of inbound tourism earnings.**
- Business visits and events create high quality, year round employment opportunities accounting for some **530,000 jobs** directly and indirectly.
- **Around 80 million people attend 1.5 million** conferences and meetings annually.
- **Business visitors spend on average £527 per visit** – nearly twice the daily rate of that spent by the leisure traveller.
- **450 major Events take place in the UK annually contributing more than £1 billion**
- For further information on Business Visits and Events, please refer to the website: www.businesstourismpartnership.com