

15 JANUARY 2011

**SHREK THE MUSICAL AND EX-EASTENDERS STAR NIGEL
HARMAN OPENS EXCURSIONS™ 2011 GROUP TRAVEL SHOW
Saturday, 15th January 2011: Alexandra Palace, North London**

Shrek The Musical and ex-Eastenders star Nigel Harman officially opened the Excursions™ 2011 one day group travel show at Alexandra Palace, North London at 10.30am on Saturday 15th January. Cast to play Lord Farquaad in the West End production, which opens on 6th May at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, Nigel appeared at Excursions™ courtesy of See Tickets who are exhibiting at the show.

Taking time out to open the show from his busy rehearsal schedule, Nigel said: "I was delighted to be asked to open this year's Excursions™ group travel show. All West End productions are heavily reliant on group audiences coming to see our performances, and Shrek is no exception. We really appreciate the huge effort put in by group travel organisers to bring their coach parties to the theatre". After declaring the show 'open' he toured the stands and met visitors.

Over 200 Exhibitors

Excursions™ 2011 was well attended with around 230 attractions, destinations, accommodation providers and tour operators from around the UK showcasing new ideas for groups and coach parties. Several of the exhibitors were also offering overseas holidays.

The free entry show, which was organised by Tourism South East and Group Travel Organiser magazine, was supported by Visit London and East of England Tourism.

Excursions™ continues to be the premier one day event for group and coach party organisers seeking facts and figures about what's on offer for days out and short breaks. Visitors also include tourist guides, corporate social clubs, school and higher education teachers, youth organisations and in fact anyone who is involved in arranging away days and short breaks for groups.

Showing for the First Time

Nearly 20% of exhibitors took a stand at Excursions™ for the first time this year, all keen to inform group travel organisers about their latest developments. Among them were Lord's Tour, which takes groups on a visit to England's world famous cricket ground taking in the legendary Long Room, dressing rooms and MCC Museum and the Household Cavalry Museum in the heart of Horse Guards at London's Whitehall.

Other new exhibitors include BDL Hotels and Park Inn, both of which have 25 properties across the UK; Best Weston Ufford Park Hotel, Golf & Spa, near Ipswich and the new East Kent Leaf Hotels group.

New Events, Anniversaries and Exhibitions

The majority of exhibitors highlighted something new at Excursions™ several with Olympic connections. These included the White Water Centre in Lee Valley Regional Park, Hertfordshire, which is to be the venue for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games canoeing and kayaking events and the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site in south east London, another 2012 Games venue with some exciting developments planned for completion during 2011. These include the opening of the Sammy Ofer Wing in the National Maritime Museum plus three new hotels; the completion of a multi-million pound redevelopment of Greenwich Pier and the re-opening of the famous *Cutty Sark* during the autumn.

The ten Ironbridge Gorge Museums, a member of the Shropshire Star Attractions Group, had details on their stand about their multi-site *Science, Sport, Life Festival* - an exciting series of events, activities and exhibitions, which will form part of the West Midlands' Cultural Olympiad celebrations in the run-up to the 2012 London Games.

Several Excursions™ 2011 exhibitors will be celebrating a special anniversary in 2011. Among them is Hatfield House which will be marking its 400th anniversary with a major exhibition of outdoor sculpture by British artist Henry Moore (1898 – 1986).

The Isle of Wight Steam Railway is making 2011 a year of celebration with an ambitious programme of 40th anniversary events including two gala weekends, while CroisiEurope river cruises will be celebrating its 35th anniversary with a 35% discount on 35 selected cruise itineraries.

Other key anniversaries include a 300th for Ascot Racecourse, Berkshire; a 25th for the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, Shropshire and a 10th for Encore Tickets agency, while the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-on-Avon will be celebrating its 50th birthday with a new season of productions in its £112.8million redeveloped theatre.

Visitor Registration Competition

Run for the first time this year, the visitor registration competition offering free entry into a prize draw for everyone who pre-registered and attended the show proved a huge success, setting the scene for a record show.

The many fantastic prizes donated by exhibitors included a private view of the new Modern British Sculpture Exhibition with the Royal Academy of Arts for the winner and four guests worth £1,000. Short breaks waiting to be won included a Stena Line car ferry trip to Ireland for two worth around £800 and a three-night weekend break in Exeter valued at £450, while the Group Travel Organisers Association, GTOA, offered a hundred complimentary memberships worth a total of £2,000.

Free Coach Travel

Visitors from outside London attending Excursions™ were kindly offered free coach travel by members of the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK's Coach Marque quality scheme. There were seven coaches with pick-ups from around 20 major towns plus six central London main line railway stations each carrying a Blue Badge Guide to provide interesting facts on the journey.

This year the central demonstration area featured a large screen with presentation material from various exhibitors enabling visitors to have a preview of what's on show. While watching the video clips, they could enjoy a refreshing cup of tea by courtesy of London Cuppa.

Sample Local Beer from Kent and Wine from Surrey

Media visiting the press office at Excursions™ 2011 were able to sample the delights of locally brewed beer by courtesy of Shepherd Neame of Faversham, Kent (stand SE28) and English wine from Denbies Wine Estate, Surrey (stand SE41).

For further details visit www.excursions.org.uk.

- Ends -

For press enquiries and images please contact:

Pat Edgar, PR Matters
Brambling House, 7 Finch Lane
Little Chalfont, Bucks HP7 9NE
15 January 2011

Tel: 01494 764932
Fax: 01494 764408
Mobile: 07836 786043
Email: PRMatters@dsl.pipex.com