

**Tourism South East Statement on
Government Tourism Policy**

March 2011

In the South East, visitors to the region spend over £13 billion pounds which supports 300,000 jobs so Tourism South East welcomes the recognition at the highest levels of Government of the importance of the tourism sector in creating wealth and employment in the economy and the role that it can play in the overall economic growth strategy.

Tourism South East also supports the Government in identifying major international events such as the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games as being vital to the sector and with the support of SEEDA, the Regional Development Agency, Tourism South East has been undertaking an extensive 2012 programme of activity to maximise marketing opportunities, provide world class customer service and enthuse the public and private sectors to get involved. The relaxation of rules regarding tourist visas is most welcome and should help fulfil the ambition to increase the levels of overseas visitors post the Games particularly from China and the Asia Pacific countries.

The creation of 'alternative destinations to London' is a positive move but there should be a recognition that the tourism product is a rich tapestry of cities, towns, rural and coastal as well as individual attractions and there will be a need for support mechanisms that we believe may not be served by one single centralised 'body of last resort' such as VisitEngland.

The cuts in public funding to tourism as a result of the abolition of Regional Development Agencies and the tough settlements for Local Authorities, are creating some hard challenges for the structures that have traditionally supported tourism. The Policy identifies the need for the private sector to become much more actively engaged in destination marketing and management and Tourism South East itself has recently remodelled to become 'smaller, highly focussed and industry led' built around its 2,000 commercial members. It is one of few regional Tourist bodies in the country that seems set to continue.

Most tourism businesses are small or medium sized employing less than 5 people so recommendations in the Policy to reduce red tape and potential tax burdens are encouraging although the same intentions have been expressed by previous Governments to little avail.

Tourism South East believes that the star rating scheme for accommodation still adds value to the visitor's decision making process but recognises that it is currently one of a number of factors consumers take account of when making a choice. Consumers also value an independent object assessment which cannot be manipulated as there is no doubt that having the quality assessment scheme is a significant stimulus to higher standards and professionalism.

There are some significant challenges to giving tourism the support it needs to become one of the top 5 most efficient and competitive visitor economies in the world and this Policy is a useful framework.

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For further information please contact enquiries@tourismse.com