

NEWS

TOURISM CHIEFS TO VISIT KEY OXFORDSHIRE ATTRACTIONS

Lady Cobham, Chairman of VisitEngland, and John Williams, Chair of Tourism South East will be visiting top Oxfordshire venues on Monday 7th June. The day visit will include calls at Bicester Village, Oxford Castle - Unlocked and the newly refurbished Ashmolean Museum.

John Williams, Chair Tourism South East, said 'On behalf of the regional tourist board, I'm delighted to welcome Lady Cobham to three such different and important venues, each of which demonstrates the amount of innovation and investment that is going into tourism in Oxfordshire and the south east. Tourism is a vital part of Oxfordshire's economic and cultural life, contributing around £600 million to Oxford City and £1.3 billion overall within the county, but it needs public and private partnership and support to realise its full potential.

Bicester Village acts as a tourism magnet for the whole county and attracts invaluable foreign exchange earnings. The Ashmolean Museum now has a breathtaking world-class building in which to showcase its world-class collections whilst Oxford Castle - Unlocked offers visitors an imaginative insight into the City's past'.

Lady Cobham, Chairman VisitEngland said: 'I'm delighted to be invited to tour the South East. With such gems as the city of Oxford, the world famous Ashmolean museum and excellent shopping at Bicester Village, the region should be high on any visitor's itinerary. I'm proud also to present Oxford Castle - Unlocked with the VisitEngland Visitor Attraction Quality Assessment Scheme Award (VAQAS). I am sure this attraction will continue to delight tourists from both the UK and internationally throughout the summer and the rest of the year.'

Bicester Village, home to over 130 top designer outlet boutiques such as Gucci, Dior and Burberry, offers high-end value shopping to a growing market of which 40% are domestic or international tourists. Strongest overseas markets are mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan with significant growth from Malaysia, Korea, Russia and the UAE leading to an overall 45% rise in Tax Refund Sales in the year to date.

Lady Cobham and John Williams will tour the Village and visit the on-site Tourist Information Centre. Helen Peters, Senior Tourism Manager UK & Ireland, Value Retail Management (Bicester Village) Ltd said 'Our relationships with Visit England and Tourism South East are extremely important to us and we were honoured to receive our Enjoy England-accredited status last year. We pride ourselves on being one of the most visited tourist attractions outside of London and, as a result of this, helping to drive visitors to Oxfordshire'.

The visit to Oxford Castle - Unlocked will see Lady Cobham present Oxford's newest tourist attraction with its VAQAS (Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme) accreditation. In addition, the Castle will host a networking lunch with Lady Cobham, John Williams and leading local Oxfordshire tourism businesses. Open just over four years, Oxford Castle - Unlocked welcomed 70,000 visitors last year and has averaged 10% growth year-on-year since opening.

The Ashmolean Museum was reopened by Her Majesty The Queen in November 2009 after a £61 million redevelopment that has provided 100% more display space. The 39 new galleries incorporate the innovative display strategy Crossing Cultures Crossing Time, which enables visitors to discover how civilisations developed as part of an interrelated world culture. Escorted by Christopher Brown, Director of the Ashmolean Museum, Lady Cobham and the party's tour will culminate in a visit to the 'Lost World of Old Europe' exhibition. Dr Brown, said: 'The Ashmolean's redevelopment has provided the City of Oxford and the south east region with a remarkable new resource – a beautiful civic space combining contemporary and classical architecture, and a building which does justice to the collections of an internationally renowned museum. Since we reopened in November we have welcomed more than 650,000 visitors. We are so pleased to have the opportunity to show Lady Cobham the transformation that has taken place here.'

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More information about Tourism South East can be found at

www.tourismsoutheast.com

More information about Bicester Village can be found at www.BicesterVillage.com

More information about Oxford Castle – Unlocked can be found at

www.oxfordcastleunlocked.co.uk

More information about the Ashmolean Museum can be found at www.ashmolean.org

Note to Editors:

Tourism South East is the official tourist board for South East England, covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East and West Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire and Surrey.

The South East is the largest region for tourism in Britain outside of London, worth in excess of £12 billion p.a. to the regional economy (7% of regional GVA) supporting over 300,000 jobs.

VAQAS is the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme. It is VisitEngland's quality assessment service for all types of visitor attractions throughout England. The service was launched nationally in 2001 and today there are participants from all regions in England from Cumbria to Cornwall and from all areas of the industry. The service does not attempt to grade attractions but assesses each on its own merits using objective quality benchmarks, provided by the industry. Each visit is followed by an assessment report and, if successful, the accreditation of 'Quality Assured Visitor Attraction'.

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