

NEWS RELEASE – SURREY VERSION

23 APRIL

IMPORTANT EMBARGO NOTE

WINNERS *DO NOT* KNOW THEY HAVE WON

PLEASE DO NOT PUBLISH OR CONTACT WINNERS *UNTIL 2300, 23 APRIL 2010*

**RHS GARDEN WISLEY SCORES GOLD
AT NATIONAL INDUSTRY AWARDS**

Surrey's RHS Garden Wisley is celebrating golden success at the annual Enjoy England Awards for Excellence held today in Brighton. Kent-based Livingstone Lodge Overnight Safari also gained gold and a further five regional tourism businesses will carry off silver awards.

The annual Awards, organised by national tourism body VisitEngland, are now in their 21st year and recognise the outstanding quality of some of the UK's very best tourism businesses. The winners lead their field in their commitment to the high quality and customer service that help make England a world-class destination.

Across the South East the diversity of tourism businesses is ever-increasing and provides both domestic and overseas visitors with a broad range of holiday, short break and day visit options. With the 'staycation' trend set to continue, the South East looks forward to a bumper spring season to boost the 2009 figures of 5.7m Brits choosing to holiday in the Beautiful South (a rise of 37% year on year).

To reach the final of the prestigious national Awards is affirmation of the standards that the region's top businesses have achieved. No other region had more finalists in the Awards than the South East with contenders from the Beautiful South featuring in no less than seven out of the 15 categories. All finalists were presented with their Awards by VisitEngland Chairman, Viscountess Cobham at the St George's Day ceremony held at the Brighton Dome today.

‘We’re absolutely delighted for all our winners’ said Mike Bedingfield, Chief Executive of Tourism South East, ‘and whole-heartedly congratulate RHS Garden Wisley (Large Visitor Attraction) on being awarded the ultimate national accolade. Competition was tougher than ever this year with all tourism businesses striving to improve, so to walk away with gold is a real stamp of success. And it is made all the sweeter by taking place in our very own Brighton, one of England’s most successful and popular destinations.

The path to the national finals comes via Tourism South East’s regional awards and we’re already looking forward to the calibre and diversity of this year’s entrants. We are completely confident that the standard of our tourism businesses coupled with easy access are the key attractions for the ‘staycationing’ visitor.’

VisitEngland Chief Executive, James Berresford said: ‘The fantastic diversity and quality of tourism product across the length and breadth of England means we can compete confidently on the international stage, making this country a must-visit destination for Brits and overseas visitors’.

ENDS

Full list of winners:

Gold Awards

- Large Visitor Attraction - RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey
www.rhs.org.uk/whatson/gardens/wisley
- Best Tourism Experience - Livingstone Lodge Overnight Safari, Hythe, Kent
www.totallywild.net

Silver Awards

- Small Hotel of the Year - Lainston House Hotel, Winchester, Hampshire
www.lainstonhouse.com
- Tourist Information Service - Portsmouth Information Service, Portsmouth, Hampshire
www.visitportsmouth.co.uk

- Self Catering Holiday of the Year - Coldharbour Cottage, Kent
www.coldharbourcottage.co.uk
- Tourism Event - Brighton Festival, Brighton, East Sussex
www.brightonfestival.org
- Large Hotel - South Lodge Hotel, Horsham, West Sussex
www.southlodgehotel.co.uk

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.

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More information about the Enjoy England Awards for Excellence can be found at
www.enjoyengland.com/excellence

More information about Tourism South East can be found at
www.tourismsoutheast.com

the Beautiful South