

Successful Annual Conference hosted by Blackpool in 2018

CTA's Annual Conference and Workshop is always one of the highlights of the year for members. The 2018 event was in Blackpool, hosted by Refine BDL's Imperial Hotel, and proved to be one of the most successful to date.

For the first time for a number of years, the event was extended to include two nights giving more opportunities for networking around the conference venue. The Workshop which is a regular highlight for supplier and operator members alike, filled the whole of Monday morning with more than 550 'speed dating'-style appointments scheduled.

The Conference sessions which followed were another highlight with some excellent presentations delivered by expert speakers.

Silver Travel Advisor's Debbie Marshall kicked off proceedings with a rallying call for the sector to understand the over 50s-market better, and to ensure that its product offering matched their varied expectations.

Marshall pointed out 43 per cent of the UK's adult population are now over 50 - 23.6 million people - and that within 20 years this age group will outnumber the under-50s.

As we all know, people are living longer and there could be as many as half a million centenarians by 2050, according to Marshall, which has profound implications for how we should cater for their travel and tourism needs.

Silver Travel Advisor has found that this area of the market is now firmly in the internet age, despite not being 'digital natives'. More than three quarters of over-65s are now online and 40 per cent of over 70s say they use the internet.

Social media use is also booming for this age group, according to Marshall, so much so that younger people are now beginning to migrate away from platforms such as Facebook because their granny spends too much time there!

One of the key findings of recent research by Silver Travel Advisor on holiday plans showed the impact that worries about security and terrorism are having with more than 60 per cent saying they had changed their destinations because of these concerns.

And it's not all down to price either, according to Marshall, with survey respondents putting

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Delegates at CTA Conference 2018, Blackpool.



Debbie Marshall, Silver Travel Advisor.

previous good experiences with a tour operator, company reputation and customer service well ahead of other factors such as cheap prices.

The power of the online world is evident in how older people find inspiration for their next holiday, with 70 per cent stating they use review websites (including Silver Travel Advisor), and 68 per cent search the internet, while 24 per cent use a travel agency and just 7 per cent claimed to respond to TV or other advertising.

Marshall also segmented the market with a number of different groupings, including 'empty nesters', 'golden retirees', multi-generational travellers, and single female adventurers to demonstrate the diverse nature of the silver travel market.

Delegates were then brought back to the present with a presentation from CPT's Simon Smith on the plans for new Clean Air Zones around the UK. In addition to the London LEZ, Smith identified



Simon Smith, CPT.

a further 56 potential CAZs in England with five already announced and one so far in Scotland.

London has had its LEZ since 2008, but it has now expanded this with a new T-charge (standing for Toxicity charge) brought in in October 2017 ahead of the implementation of a new Ultra Low Emission Zone in 2019.

The London scheme will be tough for operators of older coaches with a proposed £100 daily charge for those which don't meet the Euro 6 emission standard, and £300 a day for any coaches which are Euro 3 or earlier.

Smith referred to a study by Steer Davies Gleave for CPT which estimated that the scheme could have a significant effect on London's tourism economy and could cost the capital £115million



Anita Rani, BBC Countryfile.

over the next 15 years. CPT estimates that more than three quarters of the coaches visiting London from April 2019 (a total of more than 16,000 vehicles) will not be compliant.

Elsewhere in England, schemes have already started being planned in Leeds, Nottingham, Derby, Birmingham and Southampton with implementation likely in 2019/2020, while Oxford is already planning a zero emission scheme for its city centre and York is preparing a low emission zone.

The third speaker slot was a double-header with BBC Countryfile presenter Anita Rani accompanied by Tim Etchells, director of the Countryfile Live event which takes place at Blenheim Palace.

Rani and Etchells conducted the presentation as a live Q&A session which focussed both on Rani's work on the BBC flagship countryside programme



Philip Welsh, Visit Blackpool.

and Etchells' role in developing the live event offshoot which is due to take place again in August 2018.

Rani recounted the passion and interest that British people have for the countryside which is reflected in the importance of countryside visits and activities for the coach tours and excursions market. She even managed to get in a mention of her school coach operator who served the local school she attended in Bradford.

Countryfile Live is a four-day interactive event which includes food and gift markets, live talks and numerous outdoor activities and attracted more than 125,000 people last year. Etchells pointed out that the venue is perfect for coach excursions, and operators may even be able to combine it with a visit to Blenheim Palace, if they can drag their groups away from the live event!

The final presentation provided some local context with Visit Blackpool's Philip Welsh



CTA chair John Wales (right) with Anita Rani and Tim Etchells, Countryfile.

offering an insight into the town's work to keep it among Britain's favourite destinations.

Blackpool's visitor economy remains huge; a total of 18 million tourism visits a year generating nearly £1.5 billion for the local economy, with day visits alone accounting for nearly £500 million.

The resort is not resting on its laurels however, far from it. A major effort is being made to regenerate the town which the casual observer will quickly see has far too many under-utilised and under-performing hotels and guest houses. Much progress has been made already with a revitalised tramway, £2 million invested in the Illuminations, and town centre regeneration schemes including better use of the flagship Tower and Winter Gardens which are now under the ownership of the town council.



Ian Coleman, Mayor of Blackpool.

Welsh reported that there are major investment plans for the Winter Gardens including making the most of its fascinating architecture, and the Tower Ballroom which is benefiting significantly from its Strictly Come Dancing TV exposure.

On the horizon for Blackpool is a new £25 million conference centre, new luxury hotels including a five-star Sands, and a Hampton by Hilton, as well as a new IMAX cinema and more live events. The latter have become a major income generator for the resort in recent years and this year will include Britney Spears appearing at the Tower Festival Headland Festival in September.

The Pleasure Beach continues to thrive as well, and the family-owned concern has just introduced a new £16 million ICON rollercoaster and it treated CTA delegates to a FAM trip on the opening day of the Conference.