



Best of Britain & Ireland unveils its exhibitor highlights

Popular TV shows set to help boost 2015 domestic tourism

Wednesday 11 March marks the return of **Best of Britain & Ireland** - the biggest annual event for the domestic tourism and venues industry. The popular two day show, at the NEC Birmingham, will feature over 250 exhibiting companies.

Brend Hotels, THORPE PARK Resort, Coniston Hotel & Country Estate, Cambria Tours, Gregynog, Holdsworth Hotels, Hilgrove Hotel Leisure & Spa, Resorts World Birmingham, Snowdon Mountain Railway, and Preseli Venture Ecolodge & Adventures are just a few of the 60 new exhibitors to this year's show.

Popular TV programmes – including *Downton Abbey*, *Broadchurch*, *Wolf Hall*, *I'm a celebrity...*, *Shawn the Sheep*, *Eastenders* and *The Voice* – are playing a major role in many of their 2015 domestic tourism initiatives (as highlighted below).

Alnwick Castle (B10) in Northumberland is hosting a new *Downton Abbey* exhibition featuring photography, costumes, and props from the episode that took place in the Castle. Group visitors will enjoy a groups-exclusive *Downton Abbey* tour of the castle's state rooms, art and furniture collection. The Alnwick Garden will also be hosting a *Stars War Day* on 4 May, featuring characters and music from the films.

BBC Tours (E36) has launched two new photo opportunities for visitors to mark the 30th anniversary of *Eastenders* and the popularity of *The Voice* at BBC Broadcasting House and MediaCityUK in Salford respectively.

Albatross Travel (C28) is profiling their new tours for 2016/17 celebrating literary greats, famous artists, iconic TV programmes and gourmet food. Tours include 'Agatha Christie and the English Riviera', 'Jane Austen's Bristol and Bath' and 'What the Dickens' a packaged five day Kent tour.

We Are Weymouth (C64) is seeing growing interest in the region due to the popularity of the ITV drama *Broadchurch* and locations seen in the show. Weymouth also plays host this year to Easter celebrations, a kite festival in May, Armed Forces celebrations in June and the Pommey Dorset Seafood Festival in July.

Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway (C10) is preparing for a visit from *Shawn the Sheep* during the October half term holiday and is also encouraging groups to book trips on the train. Currently the mascot of VisitEngland's domestic tourism campaign, the character will be 'travelling' on the Farmyard Express Trains.

THORPE PARK Resort (C79) will be promoting their new '*I'm A Celebrity*' jungle maze attraction following the signing of a deal with ITV Studios. The attractions, which joins the Resorts other 30 thrilling rides and experiences, features chambers, caves and tunnels.

Below is a preview of what's new from returning exhibitors at **Best of Britain & Ireland 2015**.

The Coniston Hotel & Country Estate (B50/2), located in the Yorkshire Dales, will be highlighting the 71 room hotel's new spa due to open in Autumn 2015. The hotel's facilities include a 24 acre lake, clay shooting, 4x4 off road driving, a falconry centre, fishing on the River Aire and walking trails.

Rural Concierge (G25), Herefordshire tours specialist, will be raising the profile of the country's key attractions, tours and exclusive excursions. Key events for 2015 include the 300th Choirs Festival, Herefordshire Art Week, Walking Festival, Cider Making Festival, Flavours of Herefordshire Food Festival and a programme to view the Magna Carta.

For all railway enthusiasts Northumberland's **Ford & Etal Estates (B10)** are set to launch a new diesel engine on the Heatherslow Light Railway. The engine will be officially named on Easter Sunday.

The Cotswolds (E37) will be promoting their new app version of its official visitor guide that can be downloaded free to any

iPhone or Android handset in advance of English Tourism Week. The app features rich content, images, opening times, prices, ratings, directions and maps.

Spinnaker Tower (F31), celebrating its 10th birthday this year, is offering special rates for groups. The 170 metre viewing Tower which overlooks Portsmouth harbor has reduced its group qualifying size to 10 to enable more group visits. Additionally, two joint tickets have also been announced – the Sail and See ticket with Gosport Ferry and a pantomime package with the Kings Theatre.

Victorian Gothic House **Mount Stuart (A26)** is introducing free flow days throughout the year to allow visitors the opportunity to experience the house at their own speed. A new programme of events is being rolled out for 2015 including the estate's first rhododendron festival, a magical summer solstice walk, a conker championship and a scarecrow festival. During September the house will be sponsoring the Isle of Bute Artist Studio Tour.

The Welsh seaside town of Llandudno is celebrating 150 years of **Alice in Wonderland (B85)** with the launch of a 3D digital app for 2015. Free to download the app takes visitors on a digital tour of Llandudno's literary heritage and retraces Alice Liddell's - the inspiration behind the story – steps past key landmarks. On the trail visitors will encounter Alice, the Mad Hatter, March Hare, Cheshire Cat and the playing card soldiers.

Devon's Top Attractions (D70) will be promoting what the county has to offer including South Devon Railway, Stuart Line Cruises and Powderham Castle.

Step back in time at **Blaenhavon World Heritage site** on the **Visit Cardiff** stand (**A81**). Visitors can travel below ground to discover what life was like in a big mining pit, explore footpaths, hop on a steam train, wander through the heritage town and experience the sights and sounds of ironworks. Entry to all the attractions is free, as is coach parking. There are facilities for disabled visitors and advice available for group travel organisers looking to create bespoke itineraries. Also, on the same stand learn about Visit Cardiff's two new group tours – The Cardiff History and Hauntings St Fagan Ghost tour and following the success of the BBC's Wolf Hall, a tour of St Donat's Castle and Gardens featured in the series.

Extreme Ireland (D52), will be profiling a variety of walking tours, soft adventure itineraries, day excursions and adventure courses in addition to introducing one day Whiskey and Castles Tours.

Southport (F51) are targeting groups at the show by highlighting events such as the Southport Flower Show, Air Show and Musical Fireworks Championship. The resort offers the coach market a free 'meet and greet' service. Dedicated town centre coach set down points, secure coach parking and driver's facilities and discounts for pre booked groups.

Visit Wiltshire (G43) is celebrating the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta with the launch of a new trail that includes a visit to see one of the four original 1215 Magna Carta documents at Salisbury Cathedral. Using a dazzling array of digital media displays, rare artefacts, interactive stations and video it will retell the story of Bad King John and share the legacy of our extraordinary Charter. From September 15-20 Magna Flora, a magnificent floral display, created by over 500 flower arrangers from across the South of England, will inspire and amaze! The trail heads to Stonehenge and Trowbridge. The tourist board is also planning to celebrate the 300th anniversary next year of England's greatest landscape gardener 'Capability' Brown.

Scotland's **Buccleuch Estates (C20/21)** will be showcasing its growing group travel offering. The Estate includes three visitor destinations – Drumlanrig Castle, in Dumfries and Galloway, Boughton House in Northamptonshire and Bowhill House and Country Estate in Selkirk.

West Midland Safari & Leisure Park (G81) is profiling their latest exhibit and attraction – Lorikeet Landing – giving visitors the opportunity to see free flying rainbow lorikeets in a tropically themed location.

Welsh based inbound tour operator **Cambria Tours (B79)** will unveil its new trade website and packages including self-guided walking, cycling and driving options and specialized group tours with historical, cultural, horticultural, culinary and musical themes.

Hotel brand **Accor (F74)** is highlighting the opening of two new hotels in Scotland in Edinburgh and Glasgow, bringing their total in the country to 20.

Visit Rugby (F48) is launching their Visit Rugby brand to highlight the birthplace of rugby as England and Wales host the Rugby World Cup later this year.

Best Western Hotels (D72) unveils its new brochure aimed at the groups market, aimed at helping group travel organisers to find the best hotel for their trip with information about location, lifts, bedrooms, disabled access and coach parking.

Sulgrave Manor (B42/10) in Northamptonshire, the home to George Washington's ancestors are holding 'A month of Sundays' – American style brunch served each Sunday in May, with tours of the house and children's activities.

The Manor is also hosting American Independence Day Celebrations on 4th July with battle re-enactments and living history camp representing life during the US Civil War, baseball on the front lawn, a Harley Davidson parade through the grounds. Burgers and Hot Dogs, Mississippi Mud Pie, Key Lime Pie, New York Cheesecake, soda floats and sundaes. There is also an exhibition of Native American artefacts and the story of the Washington family. UK and US Scouts and Guides will keep the young occupied with toys and games and activities.

Portsmouth & Gosport (F31) will be promoting the Americas Cup races in Portsmouth from 23rd to 26th July. Teams from Britain, Italy, Sweden, New Zealand, France and the USA will be competing with Sir Ben Ainslie leading the challenge for a British win.

Dartington Hall (B42/4) are introducing new group itineraries including new packages incorporating visits to Agatha Christie's Greenway House, award winning Sharpham Vineyard and the nostalgic South Devon Steam Railway and more.

Discover Carmarthenshire (A87) are launching their new travel organisers toolkits providing a valuable free downloadable resource for tour operators, guides, and anyone responsible for planning trips, breaks and holidays.

Menzies/Hallmark Hotels (F46) offer groups with a choice of 28 individual and distinctive hotels, ideal for groups and tours.

Beaulieu & Buckler's Hard (F30) are celebrating Grand Prix Greats - the history of F1 and its track forerunners - whilst Road, Race and Rally focuses on machines from the world of rallying, hill-climbing and street fashions.

Resorts World Birmingham (F47), set to open on the NEC site in summer 2015 will be home to a state of the art banqueting and conference centre with a capability to host up to 900 delegates together with a fifty unit outlet centre, eleven restaurants, a 178 room four star boutique hotel with five rooms and suites, an Asian themed spa, a range of bars, an 11 screen IMAX cinema and a 24 hour international casino.

Visit Liverpool (D30) will be celebrating the 175th anniversary of the Cunard Line by welcoming back to the famous Liverpool Mersey waterfront Cunard's three Queens – Queen Mary 2, Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria – on 25th May. On 4th July Queen Mary 2 will return to the cruise terminal to recreate the voyage of the first Cunard ship, Britannia, from Liverpool to New York.

Tate Liverpool will be playing host to a new Jackson Pollock exhibition opening in June, whilst the Beatles Story has a new exhibition which includes a collection of rare, behind-the-scenes photos of The Beatles and artefacts from musicians such as Jimi Hendrix and The Rolling Stones.

Ullswater 'Steamers' (C10), are announcing the opening of a new pier at National Trust Aira Force in May, connecting to Glenridding and a new three mile walk between the two piers. Enjoy a short cruise to National Trust Aira Force Waterfall.

Irish National Stud & Gardens (D44) in County Kildare, Ireland has developed a new area within its restaurant especially for groups and tour operators. From horses to horticulture, the Irish National Stud & Gardens offers something for everyone and is only 45 minutes from Dublin. See a working stud farm, marvel at the horses, enjoy the Japanese Gardens, or experience the peace and tranquillity on offer in St Fiachra Garden.

The new **World of Wedgwood (C78)**, opening in Spring 2015, offers a reinvented interactive factory tour, creative studios, inspiring flagship store, stylish Wedgwood tearooms, and a restaurant championing locally sourced produce. All of these elements will be fully integrated with the world class Wedgwood Museum. In addition there will be children's play areas, woodland walks and a programme of activities and events on offer, as well as incentives and facilities for Groups and of plenty of free coach parking.

The small Cornish town of **Looe, Cornwall (G45)** is launching its own Tour Operators Guide this year to entice more visitors to the area. The guide will be available to download from the town's website from March onwards and will include maps, parking information, suggested itineraries and general information about the town and area.

The Tank Museum (C64) is setting its sights on its next project 'Tank Factory', set for launch on 26th March 2015. Set within a mock factory scene, the Tank Factory exhibition will explore the design and manufacture of British armoured vehicles from 1916 to the present. Using first-hand accounts of workers from the large northern factories, the display will focus on the highly skilled job of building complex war machines like tanks and how the demands of factory life affected the workforce.

Abbotsbury Swannery and Gardens (C64), celebrating the 250th anniversary of Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens is opening this Easter a 36 metre long Burma Rope bridge to traverse the primal swamp pond area of the garden. The gardens have also commissioned a local micro brewer to produce a new beer using Drimys, a plant which grows in the gardens. A competition to name the new beer will be run on Facebook.

London's **Phoenix Artist Club (E35)** is offering any visitor who has bought any ticket to a West End Show or attraction free 24 hour membership to their charming private members club.

Wales Millennium Centre (A89) is Wales' No1 visitor attraction welcoming more than one million visitors a year. The Award winning Centre will be showcasing what the Centre can offer from theatre tickets, free performances, art exhibitions, events and conference spaces and behind the scenes tours of the building.

Isle of Man Tourism (A35) will be promoting the new Easyjet flights to and from Bristol and Flybe's new route from Stansted. A series of Welcome Schemes targeting walkers, cyclists and stargazers amongst others now offers an additional range of services and facilities to meet the needs of our visitors. Of interest to car clubs and classic car enthusiasts will be the new Isle of Man Motor Museum opening in March 2015 displaying the Cunningham Classic Cars Collection.

Shakespeare's England (F10) are looking ahead to 2016 to mark the 400th anniversary since the death of William Shakespeare. To commemorate this special anniversary many new attractions will be opening in Stratford-upon-Avon, including New Place, Shakespeare's final house managed by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the Royal Shakespeare Company will launch a brand new interactive exhibition about the rich history of the world's most famous and critically acclaimed theatre company in the Swan Theatre.

WWT Wetland Centres (D79) will offer visitors 'cheaper than 2014' group prices to visit one of nine stunning Wetland Centres from 1 April 2015 and you can take advantage of our new 15% group discount.

To register FREE for Best of Britain & Ireland, taking place at the NEC Birmingham (hall 8) on Wednesday and Thursday 11-12 March, visit www.bobievent.com/visit/visitor-registration. For further information, please visit www.bobievent.com.

Media enquiries & press pass requests:

Simon Greenbury, Event Director

Editorial representatives of relevant business and consumer media (including freelancers) are invited to apply for press passes to Best of Britain & Ireland before Friday 6 March 2015. Please note, additional details may be requested to verify journalistic activity and all press passes are issued at the management's discretion.

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