

**AITO revisits conference strategy for 2016,**

**ahead of its 40th anniversary**

**With only a matter of months to go until AITO turns 40, the Association**

**announces two key changes to next year’s conference strategy:**

**Firstly,** **AITO’s annual overseas conference** will become a joint meeting between AITO tour operators, AITO Specialist Travel Agents and Affiliate members, following the success of this year's joint conference in Córdoba, Spain, in June 2015.

Next year's AITO and AITO Agents’ joint overseas conference will take place from 24 - 27 November, 2016, a change from the June dates which have featured over the past couple of years.

**AITO is currently accepting bids from destinations wishing to host this conference and interested parties should contact****helen@aito.com****for the appropriate documentation.**‎

The joint overseas conference will be revamped and billed as the **AITO Entrepreneurs' Conference**. It will be targeted at business owners of AITO tour operators and travel agents, together with affiliate partners, and will cover the complexities of running a travel business in today’s marketplace.‎ The new format follows feedback\* from delegates who attended the joint conference in Córdoba (\*see below for detail).

***Chairman of AITO, Derek Moore, says****: “For the past four years, AITO has been experimenting with both separate AITO Agents and Tour Operator conferences and combined formats.*

*“For AITO’s 40th year, it has been decided to move away from the concept of separate overseas conferences for agents and operators, and instead to focus on an approach that transcends the traditional labels of ‘agent’ and ‘operator’. The conference will be for travel professionals who run their own businesses, irrespective of whether they are an agent or an operator.*

*“Specialist tour operators and travel agents who have the knowledge and experience to sell niche holidays will have the edge in the marketplace with higher yield, greater customer loyalty and long-term business security.*

*Our AITO Specialist Travel Agents sell both locally and nationally. Our AITO tour operators sell both nationally and internationally.  Both sectors of our travel industry are venturing into new areas of business and it is important that AITO provides the foundations for them to succeed and prosper, no matter the* type of travel business they run.”

***Chairman of AITO Specialist Travel Agents, Gemma Antrobus (Haslemere Travel), says:*** *“Our retail travel agents are no longer simply traditional shop keepers – they are entrepreneurial business owners working within a complex and competitive travel arena.  It is important that they attend entrepreneurial events such as AITO’s overseas conference to innovate, to network and to expand their horizons in order to grow their businesses.*

*“The AITO agent/operator partnership is built on fostering trust and co-operation for the benefit of both parties – neither can perform to the maximum without the other.*

*"AITO Agents will continue to stage its hallmark AITO Domestic Conference in January, which focuses on sales networking and training for agents and operators alike.”*

**Secondly, AITO Specialist Travel Agents’ next domestic conference will take place at a brand-new venue -** Hinckley Island Hotel, Leicestershire, from 9 - 10 January, 2016.‎

This year’s conference – held at Drayton Manor Hotel in Staffordshire, for the second year running – saw more than 200 delegates attend, a record for any domestic conference to date.

***Chairman of AITO Specialist Travel Agents, Gemma Antrobus (Haslemere Travel), says:*** *“January 2016 will see AITO Specialist Travel Agents, Tour Operators and Affiliate members meeting for the 15th time for the largest gathering of members of the independent travel sector in the UK. Rather refreshingly, whilst many conferences struggle with numbers, this event sees growing numbers every single year. We are therefore moving our host hotel yet again, as our attendance levels have grown so significantly.*

*“It’ll be a jam-packed weekend of networking and learning, during a time when we are all super-charged for the peak booking period and can then put everything we have learnt into practice as soon as we return to our offices on the Monday morning.*

*“What better time to have our domestic conference than during the first month of AITO’s 40th anniversary year? I’m very much looking forward to celebrating AITO’s birthday during a time when the association is going from strength to strength.”*

**Early bird registration for the AITO Agents’ domestic conference is now open for AITO Agents and Operators**. There will be two optional, pre-bookable workshops on the Saturday afternoon, running alongside each other, solely for AITO travel agents. There will also be a welcome/networking session during afternoon tea.

During the conference’s All Stars Awards Dinner on the Saturday evening, an array of award winners will be revealed, including the overall national and regional winners of the **AITO All Stars incentive scheme 2015**, which recognises those AITO Agents who have achieved the best results when selling holidays offered by AITO Operators participating in the scheme. Other awards will include ‘best newcomer’ and ‘most improved AITO Agent’, as well as the ‘AITO Shining Star’ accolade, for the individual who has shown the most significant commitment to supporting AITO over the past 12 months.

On the Sunday morning, business sessions will take place which will include discussions on key industry issues, the AITO Agents’ Chairman’s report and an AITO update. The keynote speaker for the morning is Ben McBean, an inspirational double-amputee who will share his incredible story with delegates.

The conference will finish with a giant marketplace from 11 am – 2 pm. This event is for travel agency managers and their front-line staff who wish to network with AITO operators while learning about new products and destinations for 2016.

‎\*Results of feedback survey post last June’s joint Córdoba conference on AITO conference format, timing, etc:

* 73% of delegates said that the joint conference was their preferred choice of format.
* 80% of delegates thought the cost of attending the conference was about right and good value for money.
* 33% said that Córdoba as a conference destination completely met their expectations, while 50% said Córdoba absolutely exceeded their expectations.
* 13 travel companies said they would be seriously thinking of including Córdoba in their ‎future travel programmes.

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Ends – 16 October 2015

Press: For more information on AITO, please call Rebecca Milne or Sue Ockwell on 020 8891 4440 or email r.milne@travelpr.co.uk or s.ockwell@travelpr.co.uk.