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ASTA's IDE Hailed a Success by Attendees, Exhibitors

Trade show floor sells out for first time in four-year history

Alexandria, Va., March 31, 2009- ASTA, the world's largest travel trade association, announced today the success of its recent International Destination Expo (IDE) in Sun City, South Africa (March 8-11), noting that for the first time in its four-year history the trade show floor sold-out. All told, 130 supplier companies (148 booths), were on hand to meet one-on-one with more than 1,000 travel professionals from 29 countries, as they gathered to learn about the culture, attractions and travel business of South Africa and its neighboring countries.

Exhibiting companies, 97 percent of which were new to the event, included international tourist offices, hotel properties, travel and tour companies and transportation firms. The trade show hosted suppliers representing regions of South Africa and beyond and unique areas such as Istanbul, Turkey, the home of IDE 2010. In total, 12 countries were represented among the exhibitors.

"IDE is a unique event that cannot be found elsewhere in the industry. It offers intense, destination specific education that cannot be obtained through classroom education alone," said Chris Russo, ASTA president and chair. "The contacts agents made there will enrich their personal knowledge and understanding of the destination and allow them to better share the beauty of the country upon their return home. IDE is more important to travel agents than ever before because of the competitive and ever changing needs of the travel industry."

The sold-out trade show was just one of many firsts to mark the annual event, not the least of which was the event's debut on the African continent. This year's International Destination Expo was also the first to offer attendees a chance to explore the various provinces through a series of two-day Provincial Packages. All told, 506 attendees took advantage of the opportunity to experience the many culturally diverse regions of the country.

The IDE in Sun City was also the first time in which a local travel trade association held its annual meeting in conjunction with the event: the Association of South Africa Travel Agents (ASATA) hosted its annual conference for 2009 at Sun City. ASATA members, 150 in all, were able to join in meetings, evening functions and participate in the trade show, allowing travel agents from very different parts of the world to interact and network on issues of common ground.

"It was such a wonderful thought for us as the South African travel trade to know that 1,000 ASTA members were in South Africa to experience our spectacular country. We are delighted that the event was such a success and enjoyed the privilege that we had to meet our colleagues from the United States," said Robyn Christie, CEO of the Association of South African Travel Agents. "Events such as this don't happen every day, and we grabbed the opportunity to maximize it as best we could."

"We were very grateful to the ASTA members who participated in our panel discussions which were most informative, and I would recommend that future host countries do their best to involve their members as much as possible. On behalf of the ASATA Board of Directors and our members I take this opportunity to thank ASTA for coming to South Africa and wish them every success with the 2010 IDE in Turkey," Christie added.

ASTA's IDE is an annual gathering of travel industry professionals, seeking to immerse themselves in the culture, food and sightseeing of a unique destination, with the purpose of educating their clients about the region. To that end, 589 certifications were awarded during the event in such destination education courses as FUNDI (South African destination course), Botswana and Namibia, as well as niche programs on spa and wine travel.

The event also provided attendees the rare opportunity to network with smaller tourism entities from across South Africa thanks to an event hosted by the South African International Business Linkages (saibl) program and the Tourism Enterprise Programme (TEP). The event provided South African companies the chance to meet one-on-one and showcase their packages to U.S. travel agents and tour operators during this invitation-only event.