

Tourism Ireland, SAA, Travelport and Etihad Airways host delegates in Dublin at the 51st annual ASATA Congress.

HAVING returned from the Association of South African Travel Agents' 51st annual congress, hosted in Dublin last month, ASATA Chief Executive Officer, Robyn Christie, takes stock, reporting back on events, successes and extends thanks to the many sponsors which made it all possible.

"Waking up to the news of yet another volcanic cloud is most distressing but, selfishly, I cannot help but be extremely grateful that it waited for us to get to and return from the ASATA Conference. The thought of "what could have happened" is just too distressing, so it is with great relief that we can say that the ASATA Conference 2011 was a great success.

'Craic' is an Irish term for fun and the delegates at this year's ASATA Conference made sure that they lived up to the challenge of our theme, which was "Put the craic back!" It seemed fitting, considering that sometimes we all wonder where the fun has gone. Being a distributor of travel products and services is not an easy task and yet we operate in such a dynamic industry. Everyone wants to travel, it is a lifelong dream, it is the means to exploring and growing as individuals and travel is an essential component of our corporate clients, but yet we, in the very core of its process are stressed, frazzled and close to burn-out. It was therefore great to see the industry leaders and decision makers having some 'craic'.

ASATA is often questioned as to why we take our conference off shore - this year was the perfect example of just why we should. Firstly, we are the outbound industry. We sell destinations and products that many of us have never visited or experienced. Ireland was one of those destinations introduced to us by Tourism Ireland and Etihad Airways and it is safe to say that those delegates who attended the conference are well positioned to maximise the opportunities that this country offers.

Trafalgar and Holiday Tours were the two selected tour operators which offered pre- and post-tours and those delegates who opted to see Ireland that way raved about their experience.

There is nothing to beat the Irish hospitality. Their wit, warmth and wisdom were felt the minute we landed at Dublin airport and, of course, the drive through the Irish countryside to get to the Druids Glen hotel was enchanting.

Considering that the level of delegates that had registered for the conference comprised mainly of top management and business owners, we knew that we had to invest in the content, more particularly in the quality of the speakers. It was a great honour when the President of ASATA, Jo Schütten, introduced the South African Ambassador to Ireland, Ambassador Ndou, who, in turn, kindly opened the conference and addressed the audience. Jo welcomed the delegates and articulated some of the important issues facing ASATA at present. Her candid and humble approach to what she believes the future of the association should look like gave lots of food for thought.

Without our sponsors we would never be able to put together an industry conference of this magnitude and it is most gratifying to see the commitment to ASATA from Etihad Airways, Tourism Ireland, South African Airways and Travelport as our premium sponsors. Each of the Chief Executive Officers of these companies was present at the conference and hosted their respective functions, a clear indication of the value they place with ASATA and its members.

To our other sponsors, a sincere thanks for making it a spectacular event. To the President, Jo Schütten and her board; Hadifele Mofokeng, James Sedgwick, Claude Vankeirsbilck and Dinesh Naidoo thank you for your unwavering support as always; and to my team at ASATA - you are simply the best!"



◀ Pictured (from l to r): ASATA President, Jo Schütten; ASATA Chief Executive Officer, Robyn Christie; with Denise Kotze, South African Airways' sales division.

▶ Pictured (l to r): ASATA Chief Executive Officer, Robyn Christie with South African Airways Commercial Manager, Theunis Potgieter.



◀ Pictured (l to r): Lydia Norval, SATC Reynolds Travel; Siza Mzimela, Chief Executive Officer, SAA; and Mary Reynolds, SATC Reynolds Travel.

▶ Pictured (l to r): Bidtravel Managing Director, Allan Lunz with ASATA President, Jo Schütten.

