

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 103/2007
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The Opposition is surprised at the decision that the Government has taken to exhibit once again at the World Travel Market in London. There has been no dedicated Gibraltar stand at this event since 2003.

According to the Government, they took not to have a Gibraltar stand at the World Travel Market in the last few years followed the unanimous advice of a UKGTA sub-committee in July 2004. The industry felt at the time that the money which was being spent at this single event could be used more productively elsewhere.

In 2003, the last time that Gibraltar participated with its own stand, the total cost of the event was just under £ 72,000. The cost of the construction and design of the stand alone was nearly £ 42,000, the rental of the space just over £ 13,500. The cost of sending four persons there, including the Minister, led to air fare costs of just over £ 2500 and a further £ 2500 in receptions and entertainment.

This compares with the cost of a mere taxi ride to the event in 2006, which the Minister attended, but where there was no Gibraltar stand.

One of the reasons that was given for not having a stand in 2004 was that the cost of the stand was already high and was expected to go up by 25% from what it had been the year before.

It should be noted that the Government have already said that the stand they are using this year will create a "striking impact" in that it is larger than in previous occasions. This means that the cost of the stand will no doubt also create a "striking impact" on the tourism marketing budget.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Trade and Industry with responsibility for Tourism, Dr Joseph Garcia explained:

"This budget stood at £900,000 for this financial year. It is reasonable to estimate that at least 10% of the whole budget will have been spent on the World Travel Market alone. This is a disproportionate amount of money when there is no guarantee that it will generate more visitors to Gibraltar than spending the money on marketing elsewhere, which is presumably what has been happening in the last few years."

Another reason that the Government gave in 2004 for not having a stand at this event was its location in the Excel Exhibition Centre

in London Docklands. This was described as a “disadvantage” and we were told that the general feeling in the industry was that the move from the centre of London to Docklands had been a mistake. The World Travel Market this year is taking place at exactly the same venue which was described as a “disadvantage” in 2004, and there has been no explanation why the Government has been happy to attend at the same place in 2007 that they objected to in 2004, and to spend more money in doing so to boot!

In explaining their attendance this year, the Minister has said that the United Kingdom is our most important source market. This is true. However, what the Minister has failed to explain is how he expects many more tourists from the UK to come to Gibraltar when we now serve less destinations by air. It will be recalled that flights to London Heathrow and Manchester were terminated last year and that the Fly Gibraltar project for new flights from UK regional airports never got off the ground.

“The way in which the Government has handled its participation at the World Travel Market is symptomatic of the manner in which the marketing of Gibraltar is being directed. There is no certainty as to whether the substantial sums being spent actually produces more tourist visits. The Government seem to operate on the basis that value for money is not a consideration,” said Dr Garcia.

“Having examined the reasons that were given for not setting up a stand at this event in 2004, 2005 and 2006, it is not clear why the Government felt they had to do so in 2007 when little has changed. Indeed, given the uncertainty that has been created by the sale of GB Airways to Easyjet, it may have been more prudent to have waited until next year for the dust to settle,” he added.

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