

BALKAN PEACE PARK SECURES NOMINATION FOR MAJOR TOURISM AWARD

Each year in November, the World Travel Market in London kicks off with a dinner at the Savoy Hotel, hosted by the British Guild of Travel Writers. The Guild numbers among its members many of Britain's most accomplished travel journalists and authors. The dinner highlight is the announcement of the winners in the annual Tourism Awards.

Previous winners in the 'best overseas tourism project' category have included a national park in Madagascar, an eco-tourism initiative in Gambia and a clinic caring for elephants in Thailand. The criteria are simple: the project must be genuinely innovative, it must be sensitive to environmental and ecological concerns, and it must make a positive social contribution. At their best, such projects allow for interested travellers to explore landscapes, communities and cultures which might otherwise be off-limits.

Among the dozen or so projects in the running for the 2007 award is the Balkans Peace Park Project (BPPP). Advancing the nomination, Nicky Gardner (who is editor of *hidden europe* magazine) noted that BPPP unites communities that have hitherto been divided by common borders. She suggested that the project makes a stand against environmental degradation and promotes the effective protection of a region that has mountain landscapes and rural lifestyles which are not replicated elsewhere in Europe. Nicky also highlighted how the project promotes access to the region for ethical and responsible tourism in one of Europe's remotest areas.

Having been included in a list of candidates is a far cry from actually securing an award, but even getting this far is a mark of recognition for BPPP. At the 12 September meeting of the British Guild of Travel Writers in London, the nominating individuals act as advocates for their chosen project and present their case to the Guild's membership, who then vote to whittle down the candidates to a short list of just three contenders. Representatives of those three finalists are invited to attend the Savoy evening, which this year will take place on Sunday 11 November, the eve of the World Travel Market. During the month of October, a postal vote of Guild members identifies the winner – but that is kept a firm secret. It is announced only at the dinner.

2007 is the thirtieth year in which the British Guild of Travel Writers has made an award for the best overseas tourism project. For more information on the Guild see www.bgtw.org. For details of the World Travel Market, go to www.wtmlondon.com. The editors of *hidden europe* magazine, Susanne Kries and Nicky Gardner, have been keen supporters of BPPP. Their magazine focuses on Europe's lesser known cultures and landscapes, and has frequently included coverage of the south Balkan region. For more see www.hiddeneurope.co.uk. For detailed information on the Balkan Peace Park Project, go to www.balkanspeacepark.org.

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