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**WINNERS OF THE LATA ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2017 ANNOUNCED ON DAY ONE OF EXPERIENCE LATIN AMERICA (ELA)**

[The Latin American Travel Association](http://www.lata.travel) (LATA) is delighted to reveal the winners of the **LATA Achievement Awards** announced during the first day of B2B travel conference [Experience Latin America](http://www.experiencelatinamerica.online/) (ELA) on Monday 12 June.

Now in its 7th edition, the LATA Achievement Awards recognise individuals and/or companies who have made an exceptional contribution to the development of Latin American tourism.

Voted for by the LATA membership, the LATA Achievement Awards celebrate and reward initiatives and efforts made by the tourism industry to bring the Latin American region closer to the UK.

The winners are announced below:

**Sustainable & Responsible Tourism Award:**

**Winner: Nicaragua Tourist Board**

With 7% of the world’s biodiversity contained in its territory of active volcanoes, rainforests, lakes, mountains, rivers, pristine Caribbean and Pacific oceans coasts, diverse tropical fauna and much, much more, it is no surprise Nicaragua is a careful custodian of its ecology and environment.

The Central American country is currently enjoying a 9.6% growth rate\* in foreign tourism after a decade of sustained growth, yet at the same time has achieved a transition from 25% to over 53% renewable energy since 2007, and is projected to reach 90% by 2020.

It is clear that Nicaragua's Tourism Board (INTUR) strategy is in line with the country’s commitment to an environmentally and socially sustainable economy, with the tourist board promoting eco-tourism and a model of sustainable development through a number of policies and nationwide campaigns. One example is the recent creation of the National Tourism Commission with an emphasis on empowering local native communities to ensure they are fully part of the decision-making process, and benefit from the remarkable tourism growth to the country.

Nicaragua’s tourism industry is mostly locally owned, with independent establishments taking precedence over global chains. The tourist board emphasises close co-operation with sustainably produced Nicaraguan products, such as its world-famous coffee (endorsed by the Rainforest Alliance), its organic chocolate (with some of the most eco-friendly, artisan cocoa plantations in the world), and others, so that tourists are able to experience the processes of locally owned, ethical production first-hand. The sustainable promotion of cultural patrimony is also evident in campaigns supporting local artists, craftsmen and communities in the production and commercialisation of traditional artwork and artefacts.

**Customer Service Award**

**Winner: Aqua Expeditions**

Celebrating a decade of success in 2017, Aqua Expeditions (A.E.) has achieved global recognition as a leader in luxury small ship river cruising and are committed to providing excellent customer service.

Aqua Expeditions are commended for their trade support which includes regular webinars, a resource library of sales materials including rates, departure dates, itineraries and marketing materials and the agent web booking system, which offers “Real time” availability check and 24/7 online bookings.

The systems and processes have been carefully curated to enable excellent customer service including quick customer response times, smooth booking processes and a team of knowledgeable staff to support throughout the whole booking process.

**Innovation and Creativity Award**

**Winner: Belize Tourist Board**

The Belize Tourism Board will host the first Belize Virtual Expo on June 29-30, 2017. The virtual platform will offer participants the opportunity to easily learn and connect with 25 Belize tourism service providers from the comfort of their home locations.

With free registration open to all travel agents, tour operators and members of the press, the Belize Virtual Expo offers an alternative way for participants to network and discuss opportunities to further their Belize sales and increase their product offering.

Participants and exhibitors can connect from anywhere around the world, opening new lines of communication typically unavailable in traditional trade show formats.  The Belize Virtual Expo offers participants a risk-free way to decide whether introducing Belize as a new destination is right for their business. This advancement in technology creates a free alternative for members of the travel industry to connect and learn more about Belize tourism outside of a traditional trade show environment.

**Promotional & Marketing Success Award**

**Winner: Darius Morgan Jr, Crillon Tours**

Darius Morgan is renowned throughout the LATA community for his enthusiasm for Bolivia and all that it has to offer. His passion for Bolivia's product and in particular the Deluxe Airstream Camper Experience in the Uyuni Salt Lake is infectious and this is reflected in the coverage and publicity he has attracted over the past year in The Times, Conde Nast Traveller, The Guardian, Travel+Leisure, National Geographic Traveller and Vanity Fair to name a few. Due to his efforts, the Deluxe Airstream Camper itineraries are published in the catalogues of many of the most distinguished tour operators in the world and the Deluxe Airstream packages have become one of the fastest growing products in Bolivia.

CEO of LATA, Tony Mason says:

*“We are absolutely delighted with the winners of this year’s LATA Achievement Awards. Latin America has had an outstanding year in terms of tourism growth from the UK and Europe and this has been in part thanks to the commitment, innovation and enthusiasm of these teams and businesses.”*

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For further information, please visit [www.experiencelatinamerica.travel](http://www.experiencelatinamerica.travel) or contact Kate McWilliams or Lucy Keenan at Lotus (latapr@wearelotus.co.uk / 0207 953 7470).