

# Q&A

## SIMON PRESS, SENIOR EXHIBITION DIRECTOR, WTM LONDON

INTERVIEW BY Katie McGonagle

**Q. It's the 40th anniversary of World Travel Market in London. What can we expect this year?**

A. We're celebrating 40 years going strong. This year, we have increased opportunities to connect before the event – time is of the essence, so we have improved the matching system for scheduling appointments. We have revamped the leaders' lunch and we're working with the UNWTO again for the ministerial summit. It will be about technology for rural development, ensuring everyone's aware of opportunities outside the honeypot sites. We also launched Borderless Live, which was an influencer meeting in September with more of a festival vibe than a traditional B2B event. Influencers and content creators are the fastest-growing area within media, so it was great to do something new as we continue to evolve the event. We're releasing great research covering topics including diversity and women in travel, and Travel Forward, the technology event that runs alongside WTM London, will focus on the advance of tech in the travel and hospitality sector, questioning where we will be next year.

**Q. In the age of email and Skype, with myriad ways to connect, what value is there in meeting face to face?**

A. It's the opportunity to meet that person you have been having email or phone conversations with – that face-to-face element is so important. There's nothing like shaking their hand and understanding what that person is



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all about. That's the industry we're in, and that's what a live event generates. When you think about the fact that £3 billion of business deals were done as a result of introductions and business meetings held at WTM London last year, which is the biggest number we have ever created, you can see it's all about personal ties.

**Q. We've heard about London Travel Week – where does WTM fit in?**

A. We launched London Travel Week to put an umbrella over all the events that go on during the week of WTM, to shout about the size and scale of the travel industry in the UK. There are hundreds of other events, ranging from private dinners to tourist board parties, and a lot of destinations also take consumer branding throughout London, whether that's billboards at airports or wraps on taxis. WTM London will still remain the main B2B

event, but it's an opportunity to engage with a wider audience and embrace all those other events.

**Q. How has WTM changed over the past 40 years?**

A. Everyone's life has sped up dramatically over the years, so being able to ensure we provide relevant information throughout the year, as well as the content at the show, is important. Everyone has easier access to information, so we have extended our global platform. We package everything together to target the UK outbound audience, and that market is still there, but it's not just a UK outbound event – we get an international audience and international reach. We have certainly grown our engagement with broadcast media – CNN, Sky News and the BBC now broadcast live from WTM London – and last



**SIMON'S TOP TIP**

Look out for the festivals on Wednesday afternoon. They're a fun, engaging way for destinations to express themselves through dance, music, drinks and different foods

year we put all of our content sessions on the show floor in dedicated 'inspiration zones' so it's easily accessible and part of the atmosphere.

**Q. What can travel agents do to make sure they get the best out of WTM?**

A. We welcome travel agents on Tuesday and Wednesday. It's an opportunity to learn about new products and what's coming next year, whether new destinations or places where they can extend their reach – that knowledge is what differentiates travel agents. There are content sessions, ideas for how to use social media, and we run a strong Future You session on the Wednesday afternoon where you can ask questions or learn new skills. Have a look at the website first and make sure you pre-plan – book appointments with exhibitors, connect with social events and what's going on in the evenings, and have a schedule to make sure your time is best used. **TW**