



Young competitors from across the world showcased their skills - then were shown the sights of London

WorldSkills London 2011 - an international vocational skills competition for young people - is the largest public sector event to have taken place in London prior to the 2012 Olympic Games. Belinda Booker reports

Travel Places takes gold for logistical skills

Travel Places Events got a dry run at transporting thousands of people across London ahead of the Olympics this summer when it looked after 3,000 international delegates attending WorldSkills London 2011. The global skills competition, jobs and career event attracted students aged 25 and under from 51 countries and regions across the world.

The travel specialist will be handling logistics for a number of National Olympic Committees and Authorised Ticket Reseller programmes so was perfectly placed for the job, which saw the delegates taken to visit local schools and on tours around London, as well as to and from airports and stations.

Travel Places was also contracted to supply 29,000 bed nights - all within easy reach of the Jubilee Line or Docklands Light Railway.



Mark Nevill
Travel Places Events

Client: WorldSkills International
Event: WorldSkills London 2011
Other agencies: Grass Roots Group
Venue: London ExCeL
Participants: 3,000 competitors, judges and technical experts

Says Mark Nevill, operations manager, Travel Places Events: "The 1,000 competitors had to be accommodated on the campus so they could walk in - the ability to do this was one of the reasons London won the bid. We tried to keep the other delegates around Tower Gateway,

which is a good hub and they were all given an Oyster card so they could make their own way to ExCeL.

"We contracted 22 hotels and maximised the amount of rooms we could get in each. IHG, Travelodge and Park Plaza were the key providers and as we were buying the accommodation when it was just coming out of the recession, we were able to secure some very good rates."

Although the competition itself was only taking place over four days, the delegates stayed in London for more than a week, with numerous activities being organised. All of the visiting nations were paired with a local school to meet with the pupils and support the message that skills are important.

"We organised coach transportation to 44 different schools, going out as far as Waltham Forest," says Nevill.

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Meanwhile, two excursion trips for 1,200 and 1,700 delegates respectively saw the largest convoy of London's iconic Routemaster buses.

Delegates boarded 33 buses at ExCeL to take a tour of the capital's famous sites including the London Eye, St Paul's, Piccadilly Circus and Hyde Park. The buses had been sourced from private operators across the country - quite some feat since there are only around 50 original RML Routemasters left in the UK.

"WorldSkills had clear ideas: they wanted to do something very English and very London. Putting the programme together for 1,700 people took a lot of working out and there were lots of meetings between all of the suppliers. We hired 84 capsules on the London Eye and got everybody on between 13.15 and 17.15.

"They also went out on Thames Clipper ferries and were the first to try the new pontoon. It was imperative people got to the



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Eye and boats on time and we also needed to make sure they all finished at the same time and at the same place to go to the receptions at Central Hall and the QEIIICC, but it all went surprisingly smoothly. We only had one bus break down and we had a back up fleet."

A spectacular opening ceremony, organised by Grass Roots, took place on Tuesday evening at the O2 Arena, with more than 8,000 guests - including deputy prime minister Nick Clegg - in attendance.

And the competition kicked off the following day, with competitors demonstrating skills in more than 40 spheres, from robotics to web design, cookery to landscape gardening. It was the first time all 90,000 sqm of space at ExCeL had been utilised, with a total of 150,000 visitors passing through over the four days of the event.

After an entertainment-packed closing ceremony, which also took place at the O2, it was time for the delegates to head home and Travel Places had the mammoth task of transporting them all to their ports of exit.

"Moving 3,000 delegates from 22 different hotels to every airport and train station around the capital at one time was our biggest logistical challenge," says Nevill. "I think the challenges will be even greater for the Olympics, but LOCOG was very involved with this event, keeping an eye on the logistics, so it was a great dry run." ●



Please don't ignore us

If you don't bother to read emails from venues, you can't complain when you miss out on the latest offers, warns our disgruntled supplier

I know some suppliers send out lots and lots of emails, and I am aware that there are far too many that are irrelevant and misdirected. But in an industry that is dynamic and changes all the time, communication is key. Recently, many buyers, including the association organisers who are now finding themselves in high demand, are just ignoring communications.

We don't see email marketing as the cheap alternative. And it's only an alternative if it is effective so, whilst we're not as guilty as some, we do bash out about 10,000 per month. We use email to communicate offers or news that we feel is important. Recently one offer that we had sent to a financial services buyer went unopened (you see we can track them - we are not that daft). Shortly afterwards they contacted us and placed a last minute booking. But they didn't quote the special offer code - it was the added value of a complimentary breakfast for delegates but, hey, in 'value London' that's £30! We

took the booking in good faith and delivered according to the contract.

A short while after the event they asked for a full refund for the breakfast. They had found our offer. Too late, we explained, they hadn't quoted the special offer code. They got a bit uppity, threatening to never use us again, stating that they used us lots and we would lose out. Which is fine, as they own most of our debt so it really only affects them anyway.

Now I'm not going to get into the rights and wrongs of who should have reduced what. What I would say is that if they had bothered to open our email then they could have taken advantage of the offer.

So please, I ask that rather than leaving emails to fester unread, you ask to be deleted from our list so we don't bother you. Instead, assign one designated contact who does open the emails, does communicate relevant ones around and does ensure that you can take advantage of some of the offers out there. ●

