

President of ABTA, Justin Vandermere Fleming

The car salesman who travelled far

By Sheila Collis

▲ **President of the Association of British Travel Agents** since May 2006, Justin Fleming has already guided them through a major shake-up. ABTA, the trade organisation of British travel agents, was founded in 1950, the same year that Vladimir Raitz pioneered modern package tourism through his new Horizon company. The father of mass tourism is generally agreed to be Thomas Cook, who organised the first package tour ever in 1841 for 570 temperance campaigners from Leicester to travel to Loughborough, eleven miles away, but Raitz is considered the originator of modern package tourism. Horizon's first offer was a two-week holiday in Corsica at an all-inclusive price of £32.10s for holidaymakers to sleep under canvas, try the local wines and with a guarantee that at least two meals a day would include meat - a big draw for those suffering the austerity measures in post-war Britain.

The man who now occupies the top job in the organisation is a Londoner who was born in the Middlesex hospital, some 100 metres from ABTA's Head Office, "some may say I was born to do this job," he joked. His unusual Dutch middle name, meaning the man from the lakes, comes from his William of Orange ancestors as he proudly informed us. This top travel expert's first memories of holidays were in Cornwall, "cold and wet" and his

first overseas holiday was to Tossa de Mar in Catalonia. He was just 14 and travelled from England by minibus to a campsite in this north eastern area of Spain. Nowadays his holidays tend to revolve around sporting events and his family, he "went to New Zealand to watch the British Lions play rugby and Paris to the World Cup Final. I have family in Germany and Hong Kong and so have been known to visit them too and I'm off to Bali, Singapore and Australia to be with them for Christmas."

After studying retail management practice, he went into the transport industry as a car salesman and the ABTA President's first brush with the travel industry was in the Costa Brava where he used his old London black cab to drive around the resorts advertising a local discotheque. He began his career as a travel agent with the Hove Travel Agency Ltd in 1976, moving ten years later to Panorama Holiday Group, then on to the Holiday Places Group Ltd and he now serves as a Non-Executive Director with Classic Collection Holidays Ltd. Out of 23 destinations on Classic Collection Holidays Ltd's website, nine are Spanish and four are from the Canaries (covering five of the seven islands). Mr Fleming has only actually visited Tenerife in the Canaries, but many times, as he used to contract the hotels when he was with Panorama Holidays. "It's a fabulous holiday destination for us northern Europeans. It has year round sunshine, great hotels and good beaches. As a volcanic

island, it is both beautiful and in areas, brutal." A member of the Board of Directors with ABTA since 1990, Mr Fleming has also served at various levels in the Association of Independent Tour Operators, the Tour Operators' Study Group and the Federation of Tour Operators.

The annual Convention for ABTA members began in 1951 and has gone from strength to strength ever

since. This year, there will be 1,300 delegates representing the 5,500 travel agents and 850 tour operators who are now ABTA members, at the stunning new Magma Convention Centre in Costa Adeje. From humble beginnings, the types of holidays and travel elements sold through ABTA members are now vast and they still sell about 90 per cent of all package holidays in addition to a significant

proportion of independent and business travel. At this year's Convention, the traditional plenary sessions have been replaced with more sharply focused business presentations by people like Tesco's top retail and marketing guru, Clive Humby and will be chaired by the Panorama anchorman and BBC Radio 2 presenter Jeremy Vine. The popular Master Classes continue,



ABTA president, Justin Fleming

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