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SEARCH BEGINS FOR BEST TOURISM OPERATORS

The State's best tourism operators are being encouraged to enter the 2008 South Australian Tourism Awards, with nominations now open.

The coveted Awards, launched today by Tourism Minister Jane Lomax-Smith, attract hundreds of entries each year, with winners going on to represent South Australia at a national level.

"The Tourism Awards are designed to celebrate and reward innovation and excellence in the State's tourism industry, and they also provide a brilliant catalyst for creative tourism initiatives that benefit the industry as a whole," Minister Lomax-Smith says.

"One of these initiatives has been the introduction of a sustainable tourism award, which South Australia initiated in 2005.

"We have been a pioneer in promoting and applauding sustainable tourism practices at a State level, and this concept has now been adopted on the national stage, with the introduction of a major award recognising Excellence in Sustainable Tourism.

"The new national award has been initiated and sponsored by Qantas, which will also invest in seminars across Australia, providing information and support to local operators about sustainable business practices.

"Qantas will also provide the South Australian winner of this category with a \$2,000 prize to use towards an environmental initiative or airline tickets to attend the national awards in Melbourne.

"Our South Australian winner will then be in the running for a \$25,000 prize as a finalist at the Australian Tourism Awards. This prize can be used for a sustainability project in line with the philosophy of the award, such as solar panels, a community project or educational initiative."

In total, there are 27 categories this year including accommodation, tour and transport operators, wineries, restaurants, events, tourism marketing, attractions and more.

"I encourage all tourism operators to consider entering the 2008 South Australian Tourism Awards to reward themselves and their hard work," Minister Lomax-Smith says.

"The awards process gives them the chance to review their own goals, foster better business practices and record achievements while showcasing their success to visitors and the industry."

Nominations close on 11 July and submissions are due by 18 August. The Awards Presentation and Gala Dinner will be held on Saturday 22 November at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

For more information refer to the South Australian Tourism Awards website: www.satourismawards.com.au