Thomas Cook Announces New UK & Ireland PR Team

Thursday 3 September, 2015

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Thomas Cook Group announces changes to its UK & Ireland PR team, with former Brighter MD and TUI Senior PR Manager Ian Benjafield tasked with recruiting and heading up a new in-house function.

Following a review of the Communications function within Thomas Cook Group, the company has today confirmed that it has overhauled its UK & Ireland PR function. Working across the Group's London Headquarters and Peterborough-based UK business, the team's role will aim to ensure consistency of messaging across Group and UK communications with a focus on meeting the company's ambition of delivering industry-leading trade, consumer and brand PR.

The team will be led by Ian Benjafield, who had been retained by Thomas Cook as a PR consultant since April 2013. As Head of PR, Thomas Cook UK & Ireland, Benjafield will lead the new team to provide strategic and creative counsel in PR strategy, brand communications, media relations, reputation management and crisis responses. He reports in to Mathias Brandes, Group Head of Communications, based in the Group Head Office in Aldersgate, London.

Benjafield has broad international experience in consumer and brand communications and issues, reputation and crisis management. Previous roles include that of Content Director working on conferences such as The ABTA Travel Convention and Travel Matters with live event management company Dellar Davies; Managing Director of travel communications specialists Brighter Group; senior communications roles at TUI Travel UK managing the First Choice and Thomson PR teams both pre and post-merger; and 13 years at Disneyland Paris, where he headed up the company's European Press and Promotions team before returning to the UK in 2005.

The new team also includes Deputy Head of PR Yasmina Cherquaoui, PR Manager Louise Evans and Senior Press Officer Sarah Anderson, all of whom report into Benjafield.

Yasmina assumed the role of Deputy Head of Public Relations, Thomas Cook UK & Ireland, at the beginning of July 2015. She joins from Sandals Resorts International (incorporating Sandals, Beaches and Grand Pineapple Resorts), where she was Head of UK & European Public Relations for seven years. During her time with the luxury holiday company, she was tasked with bringing UK PR in-house and managing PR agencies across Europe. She spent three years in the Bahamas office launching Sandals Emerald Bay and managing international and local PR and Marketing in the Caribbean. Prior to that, Yasmina was PR manager at First Choice, having joined from First PR & Marketing.

Louise Evans has held her position as PR Manager, Thomas Cook UK & Ireland, since May 2015, joining from Black Diamond where, as Senior Account Manager, she provided strategic media counsel and media relations for a number of clients including California and South African Airways. Louise trained as a journalist and started her career working across numerous consumer titles such as Mother & Baby, Zest and Now magazine, before a move into Travel PR with TUI UK and then Hills Balfour Synergy.

Sarah Anderson, who was previously a Press Officer in the Thomas Cook PR team, has re-joined the division as Senior Press Officer after a year's secondment working on special projects. Sarah started her career at Thomas Cook in 2003 as PA to the then Chief Executive, joining the PR team in 2005. Her experience in communications, combined with her extensive knowledge of the business and its people, will be an invaluable asset as the new team look to actively contribute to the success and continued evolution of the UK business.

Mathias Brandes, Group Head of External Communications, Thomas Cook Group, said: "It is an exciting time for Thomas Cook as we prepare for our 175th Anniversary celebrations next year. We are committed to investing in PR and believe that having an experienced and dynamic in-house team with substantial media contacts, great ideas and boundless enthusiasm will help us build on the strength of our brand through creative, engaging and fun PR campaigns."

Although the in-house team will maintain exclusive contact with media, Lotus PR, headed up by Jules Ugo, have been retained to provide additional PR support.

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Ian Benjafield | Head of PR

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