

## JOHN KENT

Pro-Chancellor,

John Kent is an internationally reputed entrepreneur and visionary leader in the tourism and leisure industries. He is the Chief Executive of youtravel.com, the founder of Aquis Hotels and Resorts, and was formerly UK Managing Director of Lastminute.com. Strongly committed to education, he promotes and supports cutting-edge research at BU's John Kent Institute in Tourism.

John, who has an MSc in Industrial Psychology, is internationally recognised for his depth of market knowledge, business insight and astonishing sense of timing, which have been rewarded in a series of very successful developments, mergers and acquisitions. Industry commentators have noted his capacity to see opportunities before others do, his agility in pursuing them and his capacity for dynamic innovation. His personal qualities are also admired by his colleagues, who praise his loyalty and his track record of longstanding, fruitful business relationships. These gifts and strengths have brought him distinction as a serial entrepreneur, mainly in the online and dynamic packaging sectors of tourism and leisure.

John's first senior executive post was UK Managing Director of Greek Flight Club Limited, a travel agency aimed at Greek students, which in the mid '90s was the first company to offer online bookings through its website, a revolutionary development which placed it ahead of all the well-known tour operators. And there was a typical touch of his ingenuity: along with their tickets, his customers received posters and promotions, thus creating an extended marketing network.

In 1997 John joined Gemstone Travel as Commercial Director and within a year he took what was then a three-branch call-centre to second place in the *Sunday Times* Fastrack 100 list of fast-growing UK travel businesses, and sixteenth in all industries. On the basis of this record he was bound to go far, and Richard Branson soon appointed him Sales and Marketing Director for the newly launched Virgin.com, which in its first year of operation turned over about £100 million.

Then in 2001, striking out on his own, John founded Travelbargains.com, followed soon after by Medhotels.com. As Chief Executive of both companies he again revolutionised the UK travel scene by introducing the dynamic packaging model to the leisure industry, which until then was dominated by the traditional package holiday. Medhotels effectively unpacked the package, breaking it down into its main components - flights, transfers, hotel – and thus created an entirely new market. Subsequently most of the European industry has moved in this direction.

After two very successful years of operations, and having revolutionised package holidays in the UK market, Medhotels and Travelbargains were acquired by lastminute.com, along with John himself as UK Managing

Director and Global Hotel Director in the lastminute.com group. He also took a leading role in the group's mergers and acquisitions, and was a member of the negotiating team when lastminute was acquired by Sabre Holdings.

Since leaving Lastminute.com John has generated further fast-growing projects: Youtravel.com, an internet-based resort accommodation provider which in its first two years of operation achieved turnovers of €115 million, and his latest venture Aquis Hotels and Resorts which is building a portfolio of hotels in the Mediterranean. After just two years of operation Aquis is already one of the largest hotel chains in Greece.

John Kent's remarkable success in business was recognised in 2008 by a Fellowship of the Institute of Directors, and in the same year he was nominated for *Status* magazine's Man of the Year award. But international accolades for entrepreneurial achievement tell only part of the story. He has long been committed to education, as a Visiting Senior Fellow at the University of Surrey but mainly through his support of BU's School of Tourism where he is a Visiting Senior Fellow whose presentations have been a source of stimulus and challenge to students. His most potent educational development is the John Kent Institute in Tourism, created to realise his vision for academic research closely linked to the needs of a fast-moving industry. Five PhD students, all from different nations, are now well advanced in programmes of research in tourism and are beginning to make a mark at academic and industrial conferences. More will follow them as the Institute pursues its interests in areas such as the economic impacts of tourism and of special events, the economic effects of government policies on tourism, and the use of tourism promotion as a means of alleviating poverty in majority-world countries. So today we honour John Kent's major contribution to higher education and research in tourism as well as his extraordinary business achievements.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present John Kent, and I ask you to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Business Administration, *honoris causa*.