

Hotel's accolade in front of 250m

A LUXURY hotel has capped a remarkable year by winning its most biggest accolade to date.

Seaham Hall Hotel and Serenity Spa, in County Durham, was named England's leading spa resort at the European finals of the World Travel Awards, held last night at the Marriott Gosforth Park Hotel, Newcastle, and screened by the BBC around the globe.

The awards ceremony - broadcast to 250 million homes in 200 countries around the world - is the most celebrated event in the global travel industry.

The competition has been staged since 1993 and has previously been held in Miami and Barbados, but this year the awards included a European leg for the first time, before the world final in the Caribbean paradise of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The North-East successfully bid to stage the ceremony and the two-day World Travel Forum to take place after beating off competition from the likes of Poitou-Charentes, in France, and Saxony, in Germany.

Last night, judges on rain-lashed Tyneside gave their verdict on sun-kissed resorts such as Cannes and St Tropez.

Seaham Hall beat 12 competitors to win its title, but narrowly failed to take the European crown, where it was up against opposition from the likes of St Moritz and Monaco.

The luxury hotel, which opened in 2001 and has recently won permission to more than double its size, was named the best small hotel at the North East Tourism Awards last month.

But last night's award is its most celebrated to date.

Meanwhile, ferry operator DFDS Seaways was named Europe's leading North Sea ferry operator, seeing off five of its competitors to win the title.

The awards also included categories for the first time to acknowledge environmentally-friendly tourism.

The North-East was chosen to host the event following the success of the Passionate People, Passionate Places advertising campaign, created by regional development agency One North-East, which won the World's Leading Regional Marketing Campaign title for two years running.

Margaret Fay, chairwoman of One NorthEast, said: "It has been a real honour to host the World Travel Awards. North-East England has been

placed at the centre of the world stage, creating a fantastic opportunity to promote the region."

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By Tony Kearney

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