

2010

THE HEART OF ENGLAND

EXCELLENCE
IN TOURISM AWARDS

Tourism Awards Preparation Workshop

Designed & Developed by

Howard Loxley
Tourism & Hospitality Services

07747 324 394

howard@mrloxley.co.uk

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Why enter the Awards

What's in it for me?

The Tourism Awards are a great opportunity for you and your business or organisation to be recognised and rewarded on a local, regional and potentially national basis for providing excellence.

- The Awards recognise and reward business and people working in the tourism & hospitality industry, and help raise the profile and importance of the industry.
- Entrants and award winners gain a competitive edge through recognition of their commitment to excellence and quality standards.
- High quality businesses can compete on quality as well as price.
- Significant press and PR coverage can be gained at local, regional and national level, for both those making the shortlist and those successful in becoming finalists and winners.
- Enhanced marketing profile within the Regions' marketing collateral – e.g. www.visittheheart.co.uk and local DMP publications and websites
- By making the application a team effort, entering the awards can be a positive and open way to involve your staff in the running of the business.
- Entering the awards is a positive, open and motivating way to recognise and reward your staff and their contribution to the business.
- Award winning businesses can attract high quality staff and help increase staff motivation, loyalty and commitment of existing staff.
- Entering the Awards and completing an application is an excellent management tool and helps businesses focus on key aspects of managing the business and how they can develop and improve in the future.
- Winners of most categories* progress to the shortlisting stage of the national *EnjoyEngland Awards for Excellence*, which opens up further press, PR and marketing opportunities.

* *Exceptions: Regional Culture Award and Chairman's 'Outstanding Contribution to Tourism Awards' for an Individual and Organisation.*

The 2010 Award Categories

Large Hotel of the Year

This Award is for all Hotels, Town-House Hotels, Country House Hotels, and Metro Hotels with over 35 bedrooms. This could include a range of businesses from Independent Operators to the flagship of an International Chain.

Open to any business assessed as a Hotel (not Guest Accommodation) by VisitEngland or The AA with a 1 to 5 Star rating.

Properties with a VisitEngland Gold or Silver Award and/or AA Red Stars are preferable but not essential.

Small Hotel of the Year

This Award is for all Hotels, Town-House Hotels, Country House Hotels, and Metro Hotels with fewer than 50 bedrooms. This could include a range of businesses from Independent Operators to those who are part of a Hotel Chain.

Open to any business assessed as a Hotel (not Guest Accommodation) by VisitEngland or The AA with a 1 to 5 Star rating.

Properties with a VisitEngland Gold or Silver Award and/or AA Red Stars are preferable but not essential.

Guest Accommodation / B&B of the Year

This Award is for all areas of Guest Accommodation including B&B's, Guesthouses, Farmhouses, Inns, Restaurant with Rooms and other types of Guest Accommodation.

Open to any Guest Accommodation that has been assessed with a VisitEngland or AA 1 to 5 Star Guest Accommodation rating, and also has a VisitEngland **Gold or Silver Award or AA Yellow Star Award**.

Self-Catering Accommodation of the Year

This Award is for Self Catering businesses such as, Serviced Apartments, Cottages and Flats etc that have boosted their business by making the most of their distinctive appeal and quality. Also includes Narrowboats and Cruisers

Open to any Self-Catering establishment, Serviced Apartments, Narrowboat or Cruiser that has been assessed with a 1 to 5 Star rating under the VisitEngland self catering standards.

Properties with a VisitEngland Gold or Silver Award are preferable but not essential

Caravan Holiday Park of the Year

This award is for Caravan Holiday Parks, Holiday & Touring Parks, and Camping & Touring Parks that have boosted business by making the most of their distinctive appeal. New to these criteria is the inclusion of Holiday Villages.

Open to any Caravan Holiday Parks, (including Holiday, Camping and Touring Parks) with a VisitEngland 4 or 5 Star rating in the British Graded Holiday Parks Scheme, or Holiday Villages with a VisitEngland 4 or 5 Star rating.

Businesses should show that Conservation and Sustainable Tourism are key features of their operation.

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Large Visitor Attraction of the Year

This award is for Visitor Attractions with more than **50,000** visitors per annum, and covers venues that can be visited within its published opening times and offers tours and other activities as part of its overall experience. Attractions will be judged on the overall quality of the experience they provide.

Open to visitor attractions of all kinds, including attractions that offer pre-booked tickets, museums, interpretation centres, theme parks, historic houses and castles.

Attractions must be signed up to the **Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions** or be part of the **VAQAS** standard.

Venues that are open on specific days of the year for special events i.e. sporting events such as race days cannot be classified as a true visitor attraction and would not be eligible for entry.

Small Visitor Attraction of the Year

This award is for Visitor Attractions with less than **50,000** visitors per annum, and covers venues that can be visited within its published opening times and offers tours and other activities as part of its overall experience. Attractions will be judged on the overall quality of the experience they provide.

Open to visitor attractions of all kinds, including attractions that offer pre-booked tickets, museums, interpretation centres, theme parks, historic houses and castles.

Attractions must be signed up to the **Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions** or be part of the **VAQAS** standard.

Venues that are open on specific days of the year for special events i.e. sporting events such as race days cannot be classified as a true visitor attraction and would not be eligible for entry.

Excellence in Business Tourism

This award acknowledges the huge importance of the meetings, conferences and exhibitions sector of the tourism industry. Special attention will be paid to innovative products or business tourism products reaching new market segments as well as upgrading of or creation of new facilities.

Open to any organisation in the business tourism industry, including for example, exhibition centres, convention hotels, country house properties, conference, banqueting and convention.

Taste of the Heart

This award aims to reward tourism businesses that produce a quality end product or use local produce and which, in turn, contribute to the long-term sustainability of the local community in which they live and run their business.

Open to any tourism business, which includes a visitor or dining experience of some sort - e.g. vineyards (wine tasting), specialist meat producers etc. - where visitors can sample the produce or can view the production process. This could include producers of locally grown or sourced food & drink products, restaurants, cafes, tearooms, accommodation providers, visitor attractions, pubs, independent delicatessen shops and food shops.

Entries must demonstrate creativity in their use of production of local produce, consistent quality in the delivery and presentation of food and creative marketing.

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Tourism Event of the Year

This award is for a Tourism Event or Festival that takes place over a weekend, week(s), a month or a season.

Open to Events and Festivals of a substantial nature, which are likely to involve large volumes of visitors (likely footfall in excess of 20,000 visitors) and a timed programme. It can be for either a paid entry or free audience/attendance event. The event can be a one off happening, or in a rolling series of annual events with a proven track record.

It should be noted that the supporting evidence in the submissions for this category are particularly important as any final assessment may have to be retrospective.

Access for All

This award is for tourism businesses that embrace the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005. The award winner will offer excellent levels of information, service and facilities related to visitors with varying access requirements. It is targeted at those who have made a clear commitment towards providing access for all visitors.

Open to any business directly involved in tourism, including for example - accommodation, visitor attractions, restaurant / cafes / other retail outlets, tourist information providers and other types of tourism businesses.

Entries will demonstrate proven commitment to accessible best practice in all areas of their business including exceptional customer service to all, be distinctive and stand out. There should be evidence of an Access Plan/Strategy and if an accommodation business, preferably have been assessed under the National Accessible Scheme (NAS) or introduced criteria as described within the NAS.

Tourism Experience of the Year

This award is for Tourism Experiences that are of a substantial nature and may be a large or smaller experience. Any tourism enterprise can enter that provides an outstanding unique experience for its customers.

Open to a diverse range of Tourism Experiences as diverse as Llama Trekking on the fells, driving a Battle tank or a major Air Show. Products and services such as Boating Experiences, Specialist Tours & Trails and specialist Themed Days Out could also be eligible.

The award however does not cover areas such as best breakfast experience or the best interpreted view from a cliff top.

Outstanding Customer Service

This award is designed to promote success stories as examples to the industry by recognising and rewarding an individual or team of people who have shown exceptional standards of Customer Care and made a significant contribution to a tourism business in the Heart of England Region.

Entries are by nomination. Customer-facing Individuals or Teams of People from any business within the tourism industry in the region can be nominated by a business or 3rd party such as an employer or customer.

The nominee/s should be those who have recognised the absolute importance of both welcome and customer service and who consistently demonstrate an exceptional customer care ethos. The individual should have gone above and beyond the call of duty, exceeding the expectations of their customers, colleagues and/or employers.

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Tourism Information Service

This award acknowledges the important part played by tourist information providers in the delivery of visitor services. The awards are open to Enjoy England Official partners only.

Tourist information providers that are Official Partners are eligible to enter this category regardless of their size, location or resources.

Sustainable Tourism

This award has been designed to reward tourism businesses working to maximise their positive impact on the environment and their local area & community, and who can illustrate their excellence and commitment to sustainable best practice.

Open to any business directly involved in tourism, including for example - accommodation, visitor attractions, restaurant / cafes / other retail outlets, tourist information providers and other types of tourism businesses. Entries will demonstrate proven commitment to sustainable best practice in all areas of their business along with innovation and a track record in making a difference in this field.

Any accommodation providers wishing to enter must hold a valid quality assessment rating by either VisitEngland or the AA. Attractions must be signed up to the Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions or be part of the VAQAS standard.

Regional Culture Award

Culture is seen as an integral part of the appeal of Visitor Destinations in the West Midlands and this award aims to recognise tourism operations that foster a greater understanding of the regions' history, heritage and its contemporary culture.

Open to businesses in the visitor economy that provide and promote services and facilities specifically around the regions' history, heritage and culture. Typical Products and Services eligible can be (but not exclusively): Performing Arts Venues; Performance Companies (including dance & theatre); Museums & Art Galleries; Music, Literature & Film; Heritage Sites and Historical Associations (People, Places, Industries, Communities).

Visitor Attractions and Festivals & Events have separate specific award categories they can enter, but may be eligible for this category if they can demonstrate they offer visitors a particular insight into the regions' cultural history and heritage.

Please note that this Category is a Regional Award only and the winner will not be eligible to go through to the shortlisting stage of the National EnjoyEngland Excellence in Tourism Awards 2010

Notes: *Which categories might be suitable for me to enter?*

The Application Form

The first stage of judging is based on the written applications. Most fall at this hurdle, and it's really important that you **don't assume the judges know your business**.

There are no set rules about the maximum number of businesses that are shortlisted for each category, but it is usually between 3 & 5. Therefore the quality of the initial application is very important, as you could have the best quality business but not get the message across in the application and then end up not being short-listed.

- Read the application criteria fully. Choose the award category(s) appropriate to your business.
- Submit a separate form for each category you choose to enter but try to avoid cutting and pasting information.
- Give yourself enough time to complete the application form.
- Type your answers and use the 'Spell-check'. You **must** send an electronic version of your application form, even if you send your entry & supporting information by post.
- Check & double-check your entry. Get a colleague to proof read it.
- Make sure your application is received by the deadline – **Wednesday 30th June** - otherwise it won't be considered.
- Get everyone involved in the process – for instance, the marketing manager won't necessarily know where the chef is sourcing food from or what the business is doing in terms of accessibility or sustainability.
- Fully consider what the judges are looking for.
- Use the guidance notes as a guide whilst filling in the application form.
- Make the application as relevant as possible.
- Cover each section as fully as possible but refrain from writing too much.
- Use the word limit available. If the question allows 200 words then this is the amount of information the judges are expecting you to provide. Bullet points are a good idea.
- Don't be tempted to direct the judges to website links as an easy way of answering a section/question. They won't have the time or inclination at the shortlisting stage to look at websites.
- Make sure you answer all the questions - empty boxes or one word answers will lose you marks and greatly reduce your chance of being shortlisted.
- Fully address all aspects of the criteria, and if applicable & relevant explain what you do/offer over and above the criteria.
- Try to include something that will grab the judges' interest.
- Get the message across in your application to show that you and your business:
 - Are aware of, and open to, change
 - Have an awareness of changing customer expectations
 - Can demonstrate progression, flair & innovation
 - Are totally customer focussed
- Remember, judges will be looking for evidence of YOUR passion for YOUR business.
- Don't be shy to extol your virtues, but be factual and honest, and don't embellish or exaggerate. Remember that any claims you make must be substantiated and may be subject to testing by the judges.

The Application Form

Notes: *What are the main things for me to consider when filling in the application form?*

Specific Requirements for each section

Commitment to Excellence

Quality of Facilities

Food & Beverage

Improvements & Developments

Customer Care

- What is your VisitEngland / AA / VAQAS rating?
- Do you have any other quality awards / ratings such as a VisitEngland Gold or Silver Award, AA Red Stars/Yellow Stars, MIA Accreditation, local excellence award, best breakfast award, Food/Dining Accolades, AA Rosettes, and Michelin Stars etc?
- For accommodation providers - Has your Quality rating increased, have you gone from Silver to Gold, has your AA percentage increased year-on-year.
- Do you have feedback from the assessor and/or your customers that your quality is improving?
- Give brief details of your breakfast / dinner / food & beverage offering, its quality, choice etc.
- If you serve food is it prepared using fresh, local and seasonal produce and cooked & served at the correct temperature.
- What improvements and developments have been made in the last 2 years? This could include major developments or just small quality enhancements such as new TV's, providing a new service, improved Tourist Information, for example.
- Is the business committed to re-investing back into the business? Give examples.
- Small improvements can be important as well as large investments.
- Do you have a formal Customer Care policy?
- Have you carried out – 'Welcome to Excellence' and/or local Customer Care training. What percentages of your staff have completed this training?
- Do you carry out In-House Customer Care training courses?
- Is Customer Care training part of an induction process for new staff?
- Do you have Customer Feedback initiatives, and have improvements been made in consideration of guests/ visitors needs and feedback?
- How are complaints dealt with?
- How do staff / proprietors deal with requests?
- Attention to detail. – Do you do anything different for your guests such as a welcome pack / route planning / guest and tourist information etc?
- What impact has improved quality and / or services had on the business / occupancy levels / customer satisfaction etc? Give specific details.

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Commitment to Excellence

Quality of Facilities

Food & Beverage

Improvements & Developments

Customer Care

Notes: *What are the main **Quality** aspects for me to consider for my application?*

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Investment in Staff Training & Development

- If you are an owner operator and don't employ staff, how do you ensure you keep yourself up-skilled and aware of the latest tourism developments?
- If you employ staff - What are your Staff Development / Staff Training policies and procedures?
- Do you have a formal Appraisal / Training Needs processes etc?
- What investment has been made in money and/or time in staff development?
- What training courses have been undertaken (i.e. Welcome to Excellence / Skills Training / Talent Programme / Leadership & Management Programme).
- Do you have any awards for best practice (i.e. Investors in People)?
- As well as recognised training courses, do you also use in-house coaching, mentoring, buddy systems etc?
- Have any of your staff competed in and/or won any of the Local Skills Awards?
- Do you provide opportunities for your staff to develop and move up the scale? Give examples.
- What is the Staff Turnover figure?
- Does the business have any members of staff that have been with the business a long time?
- Do you have employee awards – i.e. employee of the month etc?
- Are staff involved in the running of the business via staff meetings, staff consultative committee, staff newsletter, suggestion boxes etc?

Notes: *What are the main **Staff Development** aspects for me to consider for my application?*

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Innovative / Creative Marketing

- Judges will be looking for initiatives and fresh ideas which have brought in new or repeat business and how establishments build business outside their main months.
- What forms of marketing and promotion are carried out? Include anything relevant even if small.
- How do you research your marketing needs / target markets etc?
- Anything innovative would be really useful. i.e. making use of latest technology – podcasts / blogs / Google adwords / Bluetooth etc.
- What makes your website stand out from the rest?
- Are you trying or have you tried something different or out of the ordinary – innovative special offers, e-newsletters, taster sessions, staff involvement.
- Do you use social networking sites – Twitter, Facebook etc?
- Are you taking advantage of listings on TripAdvisor and other review websites?
- Do you work with other local tourism businesses to undertake joint marketing or create packages?
- What impact has this marketing had on the business / occupancy levels / customer satisfaction etc?
- If you don't spend too much on marketing, say why – i.e. high occupancy or repeat and recommended visits etc.

Notes: *What are the main **Marketing** aspects for me to consider for my application?*

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Commitment to Accessibility

- Can you demonstrate a commitment towards accommodating and promoting to visitors with special requirements (including the elderly, parents with pushchairs, people who are visually and hearing impaired as well those with physical disabilities).
- Where possible give examples of how your business goes above and beyond legal compliance requirements.
- Are you assessed under the National Accessible Scheme
- Have you carried out an Access Audit of your business?
- Has an Audit led to an ongoing short/medium/long term Action Plan?
- Do you have an Access Statement, is it comprehensive, and how is it advertised and available for prospective guests?
- Have you carried out any consultation with Local Access Groups?
- Are all impairments such as hearing visual and mobility impairments taken into account as well as just facilities and information for Wheelchair users?
- Have you made any innovative changes to your facilities and services to ensure your visitor experience has been enhanced?
- What is your marketing material, Guest & Tourist information and signage provision like in terms of differing formats?
- Is your website optimised for accessibility?
- Can you give details of a recent example of how you or a member of your staff has handled the specific requirements of a disabled guest?
- What staff training has been carried out to increase disability awareness – i.e. Welcome All / In-House training?
- Do you carry out on-going training in disability awareness and equality
- Can you demonstrate that your recruitment procedures and conditions of employment do not discriminate, particularly against disabled people.

Notes: *What are the main **Accessibility** aspects for me to consider for my application?*

Sustainable Tourism & the Environment

- Judges will be looking for measures which have been taken to use sustainable materials, energy saving initiatives, reducing waste (e.g. recycling, reducing packaging), supporting the local economy/community (e.g. promoting local events, using local produce or employing local people) and all methods which have a positive impact on the Region, its economy and environment.
- Does your business participate in any Green Schemes / Awards?
- How easy do you make it for guests/visitors to use any recycling facilities?
- How does your business deal with recycling, energy efficiency, water management, waste management, promoting sustainable transport and encouraging wildlife?
- How does your business get involved in the community – i.e. support local events, schools etc / sponsor raffles etc.
- Do you promote other local businesses – attractions, pubs, restaurants etc?
- Do you get involved in joint marketing initiatives?
- What do you do to reduce your carbon footprint – local goods / trades sourcing?
- How are your staff encouraged, engaged and trained to support your sustainability policy and contribute ideas of their own?
- Can you show the positive impact of your actions (cumulative or individual), either to your business, visitors, community or the environment?

Notes: *What are the main **Sustainable** aspects for me to consider for my application?*

Supporting Evidence

Providing supporting evidence will greatly enhance your application, but you must ensure it is relevant, valid and up-to-date. If you say you have it, or have done it then prove it!

Don't be tempted to overdo the amount of information you provide. One **small A4 folder** of neatly compiled documentation will easily be enough to get the message across.

If you are shortlisted, the judges may ask you to provide further supporting information.

What things should be included?

- Quality Rating Certificates
- Examples of marketing initiatives, collateral & brochures (Limit to 2 or 3 pieces if possible)
- Example Menus which demonstrate the use of locally produced or sourced produce
- Formal Customer Care policy and procedure documentation
- Formal Staff Development policy and procedure documentation - Training plans & staff awards, staff newsletter
- Example Mystery Shopping reports
- Example press cuttings
- Example customer feedback letters
- Relevant photographs to give the judges an impression of your business and its activities
- Sustainable / green policies
- Access Statement, Access Action Plans etc.

What should not be included?

Don't be tempted to overdo the amount of information you provide. The judges won't have time to look at DVD's and videos, or wade through loads of customer letters and feedback forms.

- DVD's, CD Rom's, Videos
- Bedroom or Bathroom freebies / smellies etc
- Too much Marketing Collateral
- Too many Press Cuttings
- Too many Customer Letters and/or Customer Feedback Forms

Referencing / Indexing

- Make sure any evidence you provide is fully referenced to the appropriate section / question.

Supporting Evidence

Notes: *What Supporting Evidence can I include with my application?*

What if you are shortlisted?

The next stage of the judging process is a Judging Visit to your establishment. Depending on the category, this could be Mystery Shoppers or by an Announced Visit. Judges are looking for excellent and consistent levels of service from all members of staff.

You say you are doing it in your application, but now is a good time to go back and check that you are actually doing things properly!

- Every day is a mystery shop for your customers!
- Ensure your organisation delivers what is promised, provides the personal touch, deals with and where possible resolves problems to customers' satisfaction.
- Facilities, services and products stated as offered on your application form should be available.
- Promotion, efficiency, fixtures and fittings, tone of voice, warmth of welcome, and cleanliness – they all count if you want to provide a high quality experience.
- Be the best you can in your market. Attention to detail is just as important in a budget hotel or guesthouse or small back street cafe as it is in a boutique hotel, country house or posh restaurant.
- Check out the competition – Stay as a guest or send your staff to visit as 'mystery shoppers' to find out what they are doing that you could do be doing. Study the winners of excellence awards – don't be frightened to pinch good ideas.
- Check out yourselves. Offer staff, friends and family a free night / free entry / free meal as a mystery shopper in return for a report on the quality of the experience. Larger businesses might consider having regular mystery shopping visits by a professional Mystery Shopping company?
- Encourage your visitors to provide feedback and measure the results so you can see where you are doing well and not so well and spot any worrying trends before they become a big problem.
- Test your booking procedures regularly. Is the information up to date, can visitors get to the booking information within two or three clicks on websites? Do the links still work from third party websites etc?
- Make sure your telephone and email enquiries procedures are working properly.
- Ensure you have a consistent enquiry and booking procedure and that all staff are trained in it.

Notes: *What are the things I need to check are working properly?*

Summing-up

Top 10 Tips:

1. Look at the Awards as a Business Improvement Tool that can benefit your business
2. Give yourself enough time to complete the application – Don't leave until the day before the closing date!
3. Get everyone involved in the process
4. Read the Guidance and Workshop notes thoroughly & refer to them when completing your application
5. Don't assume the Judges know your business
6. Make sure you answer all the sections / questions
7. Keep to the word limits and use 'spell-checker'
8. Don't waffle and/or over claim
9. Don't overdo your supporting evidence and make sure its relevant, up-to-date and referenced
10. Remember, judges will be looking for evidence of YOUR passion for YOUR business

Notes: *Main points I need to remember.*

For further Information, Application Forms, Guidance Notes, FAQ's etc.

www.excellence.visittheheart.co.uk

Questions & queries:

excellence@visittheheart.co.uk