

The Heart of England – The West Midlands Region

EXCELLENCE IN TOURISM AWARDS 2009

APPLICATION GUIDANCE NOTES

This information is intended as guidance only and is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. However these are some things to consider when answering questions on the Entry Form.

You are advised to refer to the relevant criteria for the particular award category you are entering and tailor your answer to your own business or organisation.

Answer all the questions with as much relevant information as possible as you need to give the judges a clear picture of your business and what you provide.

Remember that the Excellence in Tourism Awards are not just about Quality Standards. Of course Quality is over-riding, but importantly they also take into account Investments made in the business; Customer Service; Staff Development; Marketing; Accessibility and Sustainability.

APPLICATION FORM

The first stage of judging is based on the written applications. Most fall at this hurdle - don't assume the judges know your business. A maximum of three entrants are shortlisted for each category from the written applications. Therefore the quality of the initial application is very important, as you could have the best quality product/business but not get the message across in the application and then end up not being short-listed

- **Fully consider what the judges are looking for. The sections that are assessed are listed below.**
- **Cover each section as fully as possible but refrain from writing too much. Use the word limit available. If the question allows 300 words then this is the amount of information the judges are expecting you to provide. Bullet points are a good idea.**
- **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 and relevant explain what you do/offer over and above the criteria.**
- **Make the application as relevant as possible.**
- **If possible type your answers; it is much easier to read than a handwritten form.**
- **Don't be shy to extol your virtues, but be factual and honest and remember that any claims you make must be substantiated and may be subject to testing by the judges**

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Providing supporting evidence such as marketing initiatives/collateral, brochures, menus, training plans & awards, press cuttings, customer letters, feedback forms, photographs, staff newsletters, access/green policies, access statement, etc. will greatly enhance your application, but you must ensure it is relevant, valid and up-to-date.

- **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.**

COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE - OVERALL QUALITY & IMPROVEMENTS / DEVELOPMENTS

Facilities and intrinsic quality should be of the highest level possible, and businesses should be able to demonstrate a commitment to this through ongoing investment.

Where applicable, the dining experience is a major part of the customer stay/visit so should be reflective of the overall quality of the establishment. Judges will be looking for evidence that the business sources and promotes local ingredients and if how they, and other specialities and healthy choices, are incorporated into menus.

What is your VB / AA / VAQAS rating?

- **Do you have any other quality awards / ratings such as a VB Gold or Silver Award, AA Red Stars/Yellow Stars, local excellence award, best breakfast award, Food/Dining Accolades, 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, or do you have feedback from the assessor 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? 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.**
- **Have improvements been made in consideration of guests/ visitors needs and feedback?**

CUSTOMER CARE / STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Customer care should be paramount and service standards of a high quality with staff anticipating and responding well to customer needs.

Owners/ managers and if applicable any staff should have undergone training, whether in-house and/or via recognised training schemes, enabling them to enhance customer experiences by anticipating and responding well to their needs.

- Evidence of Customer care Training – Welcome to Excellence/In-House Training courses attended. Is it part of an induction process for new staff?
- Evidence of customer feedback initiatives.
- How are complaints dealt with?
- Staff appearance / uniformed.
- How do staff / proprietors deal with requests?
- Attention to detail. – Do you do anything different for your guests such as a welcome pack / guest and tourist information etc?
- If you employ staff - What are the Staff development Staff Training policies – Appraisal policies / Training Needs 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) and 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.
- Do you provide opportunities for your staff to develop and move up the scale?
- 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, suggestion boxes etc?

INNOVATIVE MARKETING / PROMOTION

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.
- Anything innovative would be really useful. i.e. making use of latest technology – podcasts / blogs / Google adwords / Bluetooth or trying something different or out of the ordinary – innovative special offers, staff involvement.
- What impact has this marketing had on the business / occupancy levels / customer satisfaction etc?
- Do you work with other local tourism businesses to undertake joint marketing or create packages?
- If you don't spend too much on marketing, say why – i.e. high occupancy or repeat and recommended visits etc.

ACCESSIBILITY

Establishments should demonstrate a commitment towards accommodating and promoting to guests with special requirements (this includes the elderly, parents with pushchairs, people who are visually and aurally impaired as well those with physical disabilities). Where possible give examples of how your business goes above and beyond legal compliance requirements.

- Has the business carried out an Access Audit?
- Has an Audit led to an ongoing short/med/long term Action Plan?
- Is there an Access Statement, is it comprehensive, and how is it advertised and available for prospective guests?
- Has any consultation been carried out 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?
- What is Guest / Tourist information and signage provision like in terms of differing formats?
- Is the 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?

ENVIRONMENT / SUSTAINABILITY

Establishments must demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and 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 the business participate in any Green Schemes / Awards?

How easy is it made for guests/visitors to use any recycling facilities?

How does the business deal with energy efficiency and recycling?

Does the business get involved in the community – i.e. support local events, schools etc / sponsor raffles etc.

Do they promote other local businesses – attractions, pubs, restaurants etc?

What do they do to reduce your carbon footprint – local goods / trades sourcing?