

Awards' Guidelines 2025



2024 ACSTA Winners

www.acsta.co.uk



A celebration of the achievements of tourism businesses in the north east of Scotland

We're so glad you are considering entering the 2025 Aberdeen City and Shire Thistle Awards. We're looking to reward businesses which deliver a fabulous experience for our visitors. It's time for recognition of your efforts for our sector.

Everyone is treated equally in our judging and - for many of our categories – you are not just judged on your digital entry, but on an unannounced mystery shopper visit or an interview

So, businesses large and small can compete equitably.

And, to make sure there is no barrier in your way, there is no entry fee. The awards are totally free for you and you can enter as many relevant categories as you like. (Just make sure you tailor each entry to the category criteria).

Whatever the size of your business, your project, your product or your team, all that matters is that you are delivering a great experience for Aberdeen City and Shire visitors. Enter today!

Stephen Gow
Chairman
Aberdeen City and Shire Thistle Awards



9 Tips for your entry

■ Read the question carefully

Does your awards submission ask you direct questions? Read them with care, and then re-read them. Make sure you're completely clear on what is being asked of you, so you don't go off-topic.

■ Answer the question!

This seems too basic that it's insulting to include. But ask anyone who has ever judged awards and they will tell you that many entrants simply forget to answer the question – preferring to tell the judges what they want to tell them, rather than what the judges have asked to hear.

■ Provide evidence

It's crucial that all your statements are backed up with evidence, to prove your achievements.

■ Can you provide stats showing progress?

Don't say "we've improved significantly". Instead, find figures which show how much you have improved

■ Stick to the format

It can be tempting to go 'off script' when confronted with a rigid awards submission format. But don't do it! Be sure to stick to the right word count and system.

■ Use straightforward language

Minimise your jargon. This will help make the award submission easier to digest for the judges.



Read more on our blog [‘Crafting An Award Winning Entry’](#)



Categories

Best Bar or Pub

This award celebrates the key role of bars and pubs as part of the Scottish visitor's memorable experience. Our licensed trade provides visitors with a wide variety of options, from traditional music and fayre by the fire to bespoke cocktails.

We are celebrating those offering an authentic, cultural experience with a warm welcome. Businesses should have sustainability at their heart and strive to support the local community.

Who should enter?

Any business in Aberdeen/Shire which considers its main activity to be a bar or pub.

2024 Winner The Harbour Bar Gourdon




Best Eating Experience

In Scotland there are eateries to suit every occasion and budget. This category is designed to recognise restaurants and eateries that provide an exceptional experience for diners, as well as a warm Scottish welcome. We are celebrating those with a quality food and drink offering, promoting local Scottish produce. Businesses should have sustainability at their heart, with a responsible approach to food sourcing and waste, and strive to support the local community.

Who should enter?

Any business which considers its main activity to be providing customers with a distinctive, memorable experience centred around Scottish food and drink.

2024 Winner The Library at Douneside House



Best Self-Catering Accommodation Experience

This category is aimed at businesses providing outstanding overnight accommodation, which do not consider themselves a hotel, inn or guest house. Businesses should provide an authentic Scottish experience and genuine engagement with the visitor, whether online or in person, and an exceptional service. This award celebrates those providing a unique and bespoke accommodation experience to suit visitors' travel style, while ensuring true Scottish hospitality is at the forefront of the offering.

Who should enter?

If you offer overnight accommodation but are not a hotel, inn, guest house or B&B – then this award is for you! Examples may include, but are not limited to: self-catering or serviced apartments, holiday lets, wigwams, campsites, caravan parks, campervan hire, hostels or budget accommodation, agritourism businesses with an accommodation.
2024 Winner Cowden Farm Holidays



Best B&B or Guest House Experience

B&Bs and guest houses are at the front line of Scotland's hospitality reputation and are key to creating visitors' lasting impressions of Scotland. This category celebrates businesses going the extra mile to provide a personal, memorable and authentic experience. Businesses should provide a warm welcome to all visitors and have sustainability at their heart.

Who should enter?

Any business that considers itself a guest house or B&B and demonstrates exemplary levels of customer service and satisfaction.

2024 Winner Cowden Farm Holidays



Outstanding Cultural Event or Festival

Scotland is the Perfect Stage for events. From large scale international events to regional and community festivals, Scotland has a rich annual programme of events and festivals, and each makes an important contribution to our thriving communities and cities.

Who should enter?

This category aims to celebrate and recognise outstanding cultural events/festivals that are part of our tourism offering. Entries are sought from events/festivals that can demonstrate creativity, innovation and the delivery of unique, excellent experiences. Eligible event editions will have taken place between 1st May 2024 – 31st March 2025.
2024 Winner Clan Cancer Big Hop Trail



Innovation in Tourism

This category celebrates businesses taking significant steps to improve and invest in the future of 21st century Scottish tourism. This award sets out to honour those driving forward positive change in innovative ways, and those creatively adapting in line with the changing landscape and consumer behaviour. Entrants should be finding new ways to provide exceptional experiences to visitors.

Who should enter?

This award is for any business operating within the tourism, hospitality and events industry championing innovation, whether that be in technology and digital, physical expansion, or investment in change.

2024 Winner Northern Frights



Best Community Tourism & Events Initiative

It is now more important than ever to ensure that the benefits of tourism and events are experienced directly by our communities and that our visitors enjoy enriched experiences delivered by proud and passionate people who live and work in Scotland's destinations. This category celebrates partnerships, collaborations and team working – whether that be with local businesses, communities or a group of individuals – coming together to protect and enhance our environment whilst growing social, cultural and economic wealth.

Who should enter?

This category is open to anyone (businesses & individuals) in tourism, hospitality & events industry – community tourism, tourism businesses (B2B & B2C), hospitality businesses, event organisers, destination management organisations (B2B), tour operators, destination marketing companies, DMCs, transport operators, destination & sector organisations, retail & entertainment venues. If you are operating a collective approach to deliver activity, this is the category for you!

2024 Winner We Too!



Inclusion

This award celebrates a business or event that sets the standards for inclusion and demonstrates a strong commitment to serving the market and providing excellent customer service.

Some examples of inclusive practices would include:

- An ongoing commitment to training frontline staff or event volunteers in equality, diversity and inclusion awareness
- Providing facilities and services designed for different customer groups or a specific customer group e.g., autism or dementia friendly tours or accommodation which is accessible to wheelchair users, services for deaf or for the hard of hearing, braille signage etc.
- Social activity which offers opportunities for low-income families or young disadvantaged adults to participate in Scottish tourism and events.

Who should enter?

This award is for any tourism or event business that can serve as an example to industry, by emphasising their inclusion ethos, who demonstrates a commitment to serving the market and providing excellent customer service.

2024 Winner Farm Stop



Best Hotel Experience

Accommodation is a vital part of the visitor journey. The hotel experience is key to creating visitors' lasting impressions of Scotland. This award celebrates hotels of all sizes which provide customers with a memorable and authentic experience. Businesses should provide a warm welcome to all visitors and have sustainability at their heart. .

Who should enter?

Hotels of all sizes demonstrating exemplary levels of customer service and satisfaction.

2024 Winner Kildrummy Inn



Climate Action Award

In line with the Outlook 2030 strategy's ambition for sustainable and responsible growth, and the national events strategy vision for Scotland to be "the Perfect Stage for Events", it is important that the tourism and events industry in Scotland continues to develop in a responsible way. Tackling climate change is one of the biggest long-term challenges facing Scottish tourism and events now, and in the future, and we want to inspire future generations to say that Scotland made a difference and led the way to Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

The purpose of this award is to celebrate success across business, events and destinations who have made demonstrable progress on their climate action journey to Net Zero. This can include the measurement, monitoring and mitigation of emissions and waste, taking general action to decarbonise, as well as communicating and collaborating with their staff, customers, and broader stakeholders to deliver climate action.

Who should enter?

This award is for any tourism business, event organiser or destinations that has set an excellent standard for Responsible Tourism practice and can serve as an example to the wider industry by demonstrating their commitment to reducing carbon emissions, tackling climate change, and driving positive change towards Net Zero.

2024 Winner The Bay Fish and Chips



Best Visitor Attraction


Scotland has a wealth of unique and fascinating visitor attractions, from castles and palaces to nuclear bunkers and famous pandas! This category celebrates the variety of opportunity provided to Scotland's visitors, and the attractions which provide world class service with an authentic, memorable experience. Attractions should provide a warm welcome to all visitors and have sustainability at their heart.

Attractions should provide a warm welcome to all visitors and have sustainability at their heart.

Who should enter?

For visitor attractions that demonstrate exemplary levels of customer service and visitor satisfaction. This category is open to visitor attractions of all types and sizes.

2024 Winner The Gordon Highlanders Museum

A person is fly fishing in a river, casting a large loop of line. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The water is dark and rippling. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a hat. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with warm lighting.

Best Outdoor or Adventure Experience

Outdoor, adventure, tour, agritourism and wildlife experiences are a key part of what makes a visit to Scotland so unique and memorable. With a vast and varied landscape full of opportunity for adventure and excitement, there truly is an activity for every visitor. This category celebrates businesses that provide unforgettable, quality and authentic experiences to their visitors and who engage with the landscape and local communities in a positive and environmentally sensitive way.

Who should enter?

Businesses large and small that provide exceptional outdoor, adventure, tour (guided or self-guided), agritourism or wildlife experiences and have a focus on delivering real visitor satisfaction.

2024 Winner Twin Peakes Fly Fishing



Employer of the Year

This category celebrates employers who have demonstrated a real commitment to the welfare of their employees, providing a supportive and inspiring work environment. Diversity and inclusivity should be core to the business, ensuring workers from all backgrounds can thrive and succeed. This award aims to highlight and celebrate employers who are showcasing tourism, hospitality and events as an exciting career path and inspiring the next generation. In line with the Outlook 2030 strategy, businesses should support Scotland's ambition to become a leading Fair Work Nation, and provide opportunities for development to their employees.

Who should enter?

Tourism and events businesses which are going above and beyond for their employees. Employers should demonstrate a commitment to Responsible Tourism & Events practices and align with Scotland's Outlook 2030 strategy and its commitment to a skilled, committed, diverse, and valued workforce.

2024 Winner The Fife Arms

Aberdeen City and Shire Thistle Awards 2024



Individual of the Year

People are the essence of the tourism, hospitality and events sector and we all have a responsibility in shaping the future of our industry. This category is for individuals who go above and beyond to deliver exceptional customer service, and who prioritise inclusivity, sustainability, community and responsible practices.

This award aims to highlight and celebrate those individuals who act as an ambassador for change within the industry, showcasing a commitment to tourism as a force for good.

Who should enter?

Self-entry for this category is not permitted. Entries must be submitted on behalf of the individual by a colleague or contact. This category is open to anyone working within the Scottish tourism, hospitality and events industry – from front of house staff to senior management – who is excelling in their field & striving to make their workplace, community &/or local area a better place for everyone.

2024 Winner Alison Christie Leonardo Hotels

A close-up portrait of a young woman with blonde hair styled in a messy bun, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark red, sequined halter-neck dress and small hoop earrings. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some blurred text and a logo.

MacRobert Trust Rising Star

People are the essence of the tourism, hospitality and events sector and we all have a responsibility in shaping the future of our industry.

This award aims to recognise the achievements of individuals that are at the start of their career within the tourism, hospitality or events industry and who display passion and enthusiasm and give companies an opportunity to demonstrate the investment they make in their workforce.

Who should enter?

Self-entry for this category is not permitted. Entries must be submitted on behalf of individual by a colleague or contact. This category is aimed at anyone working full-time within Scottish tourism, hospitality or events industry who are at the start of their working career as well as those who have made a career change and are new to the industry. Open to those that have either worked in the industry for less than 5 years OR under the age of 30 years old (at time of entry).

2024 Winner Elie Gray The Chester Hotel



How to enter

- Select your category/categories. You can enter as many categories are relevant but you should have an entry for each which addresses the criteria for the specific category
- Familiarise yourself with the judging criteria
- Complete the registration via the 'Register and Enter' button which you will find on each category description
- Complete the online entry form and upload a few supporting words about your company for the event programme
- Upload your company logo.
- Choose and add three stand out images for the event presentation to show your business as its best
- Share your social media handles so we can make a noise.
- Submit your entry

Any queries - email awards@acsta.co.uk

9

Reasons To Enter

■ Team Hype

Awards are a great morale booster and recognise your team's hard work

■ Free Marketing

Being shortlisted improves brand awareness and promotes your business

■ Benchmarking

Entering makes you look at your business from a different perspective

■ Credibility

Shortlisted and winning companies act as a third party endorsement of your business



■ Attract New Talent

Being recognised as 'the best' enhances your stature as an employer of choice

■ Networking

Our award ceremony is a great place to increase your network of contacts

■ Stronger positioning against your competitors

■ More sales, more customers

■ Scottish Thistle Awards

ACSTA winners automatically become Scottish Thistle finalists



Key dates

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Entries open | - | Monday 17 March 2025 |
| Entries close | - | Monday 28 April 2025 |
| Short list announced | - | W/c 7 July 2025 |
| Awards ceremony | - | Friday 19 September 2025 |
| Scottish Thistle Awards | - | November 2025 |



www.acsta.co.uk