



VisitEngland™

Awards for
Excellence

— 2015 —

Tips from the top

Now in their 26th year, the **VisitEngland Awards for Excellence** recognise those that excel within the industry. The awards feature 15 categories and cover a range of business types from small B&Bs to large attractions, as well as key markets such as sustainability and access for all. The winners of each award, plus those who take home the Silver, Bronze and Highly Commended plaudits, are chosen by a panel of tourism industry experts. Here, five of this year's Gold winners tell us what they believe makes their business successful.



‘Attention to detail is vital’

These days, those ‘little extras’ aren’t just welcome – they’re expected. And Bosinver Farm goes out of its way to provide them right across the board

SELF-CATERING Holiday Provider of the Year Bosinver Farm Cottages in Cornwall offers guests an eco-friendly oasis in child-friendly surroundings. Owner Pat Smith, who runs the four- and five-star Gold-accredited business with her husband Dave, says as guests become increasingly demanding it’s more important than ever to go the extra mile.

‘We don’t just give our guests the key to the door, but access to all that we do here,’ says Pat. ‘We offer a number of activities, such as our daily animal-feeding sessions and “Learn how to compost” classes. We’ve also put together an e-book called Nanny Pat’s Adventures, which is a guide for local days out with children based on the experiences we’ve had with our grandchildren.’

Although guests may come to Bosinver to get closer to nature and enjoy all that the countryside has to offer, they still want stylish surroundings. ‘I make sure that each cottage has a distinctive look, and we work with local craftspeople to help achieve this,’ says Pat. ‘We also carry out refurbishments every year.’

Pat’s efforts have clearly paid off – one guest even told her that when she returned home from holiday she ‘Bosinvered’ her lounge!

‘Ensure that you continuously improve’

Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust prides itself on staying on its toes and introducing the kinds of changes that keep visitors coming

AS THE RECIPIENT of VisitEngland’s Large Visitor Attraction of the Year, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust in Shropshire is clearly ticking the right boxes with judges. The museum’s director of marketing and PR Paul Gossage thinks its success is down to the team’s willingness to constantly evolve.

‘We understand what our visitors want and we’re always looking ahead,’ says Paul. ‘From our catering and customer service to education and sustainability, we always act on feedback and constantly strive to improve.’

One of the ways in which the museum evolves is by introducing new initiatives. In 2014, it set up a Customer Service Ambassadors scheme which sees every member of staff nominate a colleague whom they feel demonstrates customer service excellence. The nominations are then

reviewed by senior management and all the nominees are congratulated at the museum’s end-of-year meeting, where the winner is presented with a certificate. ‘The scheme is a great way to help everyone realise the importance of customer service and celebrate colleagues’ outstanding levels of customer care,’ says Paul.

Having previously entered the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence and achieved the Silver and Highly Commended titles, Paul and the team were absolutely delighted to finally win the top prize. However, Paul says that each time they have entered the awards the process has proved to be really helpful. ‘Filling out the award entry gives you a chance to take stock of what you’ve achieved over the past year and think about the things you need to focus on next,’ he says.



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‘Make your guests feel at home’

Introduce some thoughtful personal touches and you’ll definitely be rewarded for your efforts, say the owners of Colton House

HAVING STARTED their business in 2004 with no previous hospitality experience, Gay and Ron Lawrence, owners of the five-star Gold Colton House in Staffordshire, have gone on to win the Bed and Breakfast/Guest Accommodation of the Year award. They’ve learnt a lot of new skills over the years, but have never forgotten the importance of getting the basics right.

‘Our house is a grand grade II-listed townhouse, but people always tell us how at home they feel when they stay here,’ says Ron. ‘We love having people to stay and we make sure we find out as much as we can about them before they arrive – whether that be noting that they have an allergy that needs our consideration or that it’s their birthday during their visit. We also make sure we really get to know our guests, which is why I think so many of them return.’

Although Ron and Gay are already doing a great job, they often stay at other award-winning properties to see what else they can learn. ‘It’s important to keep on top of what other businesses are doing. You can get lots of new ideas that way,’ says Ron.



Photos: VisitEngland



‘Know your USP – and then use it’

However you innovate or market your attraction, always keep your main USP at the centre of everything you do, says the World of James Herriot

YORKSHIRE’S THE WORLD of James Herriot may be small, but its managing director Ian Ashton has plenty of big ideas. From embracing the latest digital developments to partnering with local businesses, the Small Visitor Attraction of the Year never stands still, but always stays true to its roots.

‘We have the largest collection of James Herriot memorabilia in the world,’ says Ian. ‘We see this as our unique selling point and that guides everything we do. That doesn’t mean we’re not open to new ideas, though. We attract a large number of visitors from all over the world so we recently created a new website that is easy to find and navigate. We also have a really innovative app, which provides a guide to the museum and the local area – you can even use it as a Sat Nav.’

The museum partners with Grand Central Rail, which runs the London to nearby Thirsk route, to help gain even more publicity. ‘As a small museum with a lot of competition, it’s important to work with larger organisations to help spread the word,’ says Ian.

And the word is certainly spreading: visitor numbers have increased year on year since 2012.



‘Make access a priority’

How should you cater for your disabled visitors? Why not start by asking them for advice, says the National Children’s Museum in Yorkshire

WINNER OF THE ACCESS for All Tourism Award, Eureka!, The National Children’s Museum in Yorkshire, caters brilliantly for disabled visitors. Inclusion manager Trizia Wells says this is because they make a real point of putting accessibility at the forefront of everything they do.

‘The museum has always been popular with disabled visitors,’ says Trizia, ‘and about four years ago we brought in an external evaluator to see how we could improve our offering for them. We also collaborated extensively with


people with access needs. It’s amazing how much you can learn just by walking around with someone who has an impairment – you start to see things from their perspective.’

Trizia says the key to catering for people with access needs is to seamlessly embed disability awareness into all areas of your business. ‘Ensuring that all our customer-facing employees know ten British Sign Language phrases is just one of the simple but effective ideas we’ve introduced into our staff inductions,’ she says.

FIVE WINNING STRATEGIES

- **Make the most of your surroundings.**
Plan activities for adults and kids based on the unique features of your area.
- **Listen to feedback.**
Good or bad, visitor reviews are your opportunity to make positive changes and evolve. Listen to them.
- **Get personal.**
Encourage repeat custom by getting to

- know your guests’ unique needs.
- **Canvas disabled visitors.**
Want to improve access? Start by asking disabled guests for their views.
- **Simplify your message.**
You probably have several unique selling points, but which one comes out on top? Decide, then put it at the heart of your marketing messages.

 Go to www.visitenglandawards.org for more information about the awards.