

AWARDS

THE DRINKS TOURISM CHALLENGE

THE ANNUAL AWARDS ARE A HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR FOR ANY COMPANY WHICH INVESTS IN CREATING A VISITOR EXPERIENCE. **CHRISTIAN DAVIS** REPORTS

VISITOR CENTRES HOST thousands of guests every year and as such provide an excellent opportunity to showcase a company's products to an interested, captive audience.

The Drinks Tourism Challenge seeks to reward excellence in hospitality, be it teaching how a wine or spirit is made; the history of the winery or distillery and its environs; conducting a testing or laying on an event.

This year the judging took place at the Wine & Spirit Education Trust's London headquarters and the panel of experts judges included drinks industry professionals with experience of PR, marketing, merchandising and tourism (see right). **DI**

THE JUDGES

Graham Cox, WSET UK business development director
Anita Jackson, UK director, Wines of Chile
Jenny McGee, executive director, The Tourism Society
Victoria Morrall, director, Dillon Morrall, a specialist PR & marketing company
Jo Wehring, UK marketing manager, Wines of South Africa
Christian Davis, editor, Drinks International

BEST VISITOR CENTRE VIU MANENT

This visitor centre, in Chile's well-known Colchagua valley to the south of Santiago, has something for just about everybody. Tastings and food matchings are a given but there is also an equestrian club so you can travel through the vineyards on a horse or in a horse-drawn carriage.

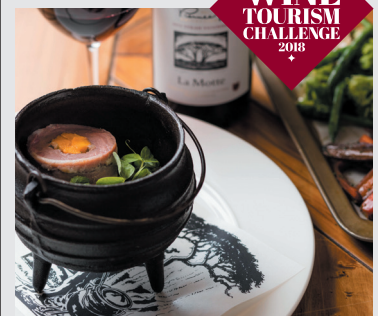
It is claimed to be the only winery in the valley that has extended hours, 09.00-23.30, so you can gather around the fire on the terrace and enjoy a deli platter. The company has 40 people working directly in the hospitality area. The judges were impressed with the comprehensive nature of the facility.



BEST FOOD AND WINE MATCHING EXPERIENCE

LA MOTTE

Leading South African producer La Motte in the Franschhoek valley is a past winner with an entry that was hard for the judges to resist. Information is available in English, French, German, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. Nominated as one of the top 20 restaurants in South Africa, it showcases the Cape winelands' cuisine. There's a Chef's Table, Harvest Tasting, Festival Food, Vintage Wine and Venison, and Taste the Terroir – a celebration of Sauvignon Blanc. Something for just about everyone.



MOST INNOVATIVE TOURISM EXPERIENCE

ZENI 1878

"Smell is a neglected sense, almost forgotten," says the entry from the Zeni family, best known for its Bardolino wines. In April last year, it inaugurated an 'olfactory gallery' with the aim being to "stimulate and train the olfactory memory of visitors." The judges approved of the initiative.

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Finca Constancia, Gonzalez Byass with its Sponsor your Cask Club – choose from seven grape varieties, monitor your vine, select your cask type (French or American), select ageing and customise the bottle label.



BEST WINE EVENT

TIO PEPE FESTIVAL

This is a “musical experience connected to the wine and winery”, according to brand owner and producer Gonzalez Byass. The festival is said to revitalise tourism and culture in the Andalusian region, famous for sherry. With 6,200 spectators, it aims to connect, interact, build loyalty with customers and engage new Tío Pepe drinkers.

Concerts, Michelin-starred chefs – the festival is all about broadening the appeal of sherry and build bridges to the next generation.



THE
WINE
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BEST PROMOTIONAL BODY

WINECELLARDOOR.CO.UK

Wine Cellar Door... The guide to visiting English and Welsh vineyards, founded by Elisabeth Else who met business partner Ian Hardwick while working at Visit Britain, the national tourist board. They share a background in tourism technology, with Else having many years of ecommerce experience while Hardwick is a geographer, which explains why a map is such an important part of the website. He is also a bit of a wine expert so he writes the tasting notes.

They have been blogging for a few years now and say they have visited well over half the vineyards on the site. There is a directory for visitors to the site to pick the features that matter to them.

Else told *Drinks International*: “We bring the same vision, but different strengths to the party; I’m more of the website expert and Ian does the formal tastings.

“We both love exploring vineyards, finding great wines and the stories behind them, as well as meeting the new and interesting people that our website introduces us to.

“The website particularly encourages people to get involved, whether that’s volunteering at a charity vineyard, helping with harvest, becoming a member of their local vineyard or going on a Be a Winemaker for a Day workshop as well, of course, as just enjoying a glass of wine or two.”



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BEST VISITOR CENTRE

JAMESON DISTILLERY, BOW STREET, DUBLIN

The home of Irish Distillers’ flagship Irish whiskey, Jameson, reopened in March last year following a six-month redevelopment programme. At the time of entry, 261,000 people had visited. In 2015/16, 305,000 had passed through the experience’. It boasts four ‘journeys’: community, live music and product demos, a bar, and not forgetting retail. The jewel is the 90-minute Whiskey Makers ‘full sensory experience’ with a Jameson ambassador.

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Bundaberg Distillery for its fulsome, comprehensive entry.



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BEST DISTILLERY EVENT & BEST DISTILLERY RETAIL EXPERIENCE

BUNDABERG RUM

Bundaberg always puts in a comprehensive entry. It was narrowly piped to Best Visitor Centre this year by Jameson, but the judges saw fit to give it awards for both its retail operation and its commitment to educating visitors in the broadest sense, not just extolling the undoubted virtue of its brands.



THE
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BEST DISTILLERY TOUR

LOST SPIRITS DISTILLERY

The judges liked this off-the-wall entry from Los Angeles, which appears to take its inspiration from Disneyland and nearby Hollywood. The rum tasting takes place on a boat passing through a jungle, and whiskey is experienced in a tent in a jungle. The tour is guided by a computer called Tessa, that tells the 1,000 guests a month, that ‘she’ even runs the bathroom. The judges thought it sounded great fun.



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BEST EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

IRISH DISTILLERS’ IRISH WHISKEY ACADEMY

Irish Distillers, through its Midleton distillery, has historically dominated Irish whiskey and still produces most of the whiskey made in Ireland. So it is laudable that the company has taken it upon itself to lead the industry by establishing an academy to teach everyone, from experts to relative novices, and enthuse them about Irish whiskey.



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