

VisitScotland Food & Drink QA Scheme

Taste Our Best

Criteria/Guidance Notes

Exclusive Use Venues



The Taste Our Best food and drink scheme brings together the tourism and food and drink industries in Scotland

VisitScotland's Taste Our Best accreditation recognise businesses, including hotels, B&Bs, visitor attractions, restaurants, cafes, takeaways, bars & pubs, and Exclusive Use properties, that provide and promote a quality Scottish food and drink experience.

Food and drink is an important part of our Scottish cultural identity and heritage and is therefore a key strength in promoting Scotland as a holiday destination. Sampling traditional dishes and local produce is one of the top activities undertaken by visitors to Scotland.

Research has shown that visitors are willing to pay up to 15% more for food that is of Scottish or regional origin and businesses that provide local food can typically enjoy higher level sales of up to 20% per year. Visitors currently spend around £800 million per year on food and drink in Scotland and more than 70% of potential visitors to Scotland want to taste traditional dishes, regional specialities and fresh local produce.

The Taste Our Best accreditation is the latest addition to VisitScotland's Quality Assurance (QA) Schemes, which aim to drive up quality in tourism products across the country. Taste Our Best provides businesses with an assessment of their food provision and their menu by qualified assessors, with those meeting the necessary criteria gaining the award. The scheme responds directly to identified consumer needs.

Promoting Scottish produce in season not only meets consumer preferences but can have a wide range of benefits. Local food can provide freshness, reduce food miles, offer benefits to local farmers and communities, while seasonal food can offer better taste and be more affordable. Taste Our Best has been shaped to take account of consumer preferences and has been developed by representatives from the public and private sectors with particular experience in the tourism and food sectors.

So who is eligible?

As an Exclusive Use Venue you can be assessed for the Taste Our Best accreditation if you offer your guests food and drink as part of your overall service, either through your own in house catering team or through specified external caterers.

You will need to be able to prepare a tasting menu for the assessor to eat during your Quality Assessment visit. You will also need to have detailed information on the provenance of the Scottish food and drink used by your in house catering team or external caterers you work with.

Please Note: You do need to indicate to your Quality and Tourism Advisor in advance that you would like the Taste Our Best assessment to be included in the visit, so this can be planned for. There **is no additional fee** for the Taste Our Best assessment though, as this will be undertaken as part of your QA visit, providing added value to your investment in Quality Assurance.

For more detail on what is required for the Taste Our Best assessment please see below.

How does it work and what is expected from you?

As part of your pre-arranged QA day visit, one of our Quality and Tourism advisors can conduct a Taste Our Best quality assessment and provide you with comprehensive feedback.

The aim of Taste Our Best is to recognise businesses that are sourcing and using Scottish produce and are also clearly promoting the provenance to their customers.

To achieve a Taste Our Best accreditation, a business should demonstrate the following;

- the **overall quality** of the eating experience needs to achieve a minimum score of 3 out of 5 in all food related quality elements.
- at least 40% of the menu should include **scottish produce** (review a number or menus if applicable)
- the clearly **promotion of provenance** to customers (at least 40% visible)
- staff demonstrate **knowledge** of the produce on the menu and its provenance
- Use of **seasonal produce** use as part of menus throughout the year (menu to be changed at least twice a year)

Assessment of Quality

In order for our Quality and Tourism Advisor (QTA) to assess the quality aspects of the food provided, you will need to prepare a taster menu for the QTA to eat during the Quality Visit.

The assessor will be reviewing the quality of the ingredients, appearance and presentation, and the culinary skills exhibited.

If you do not have an in house catering team but work with a number of external catering businesses, the external catering business most frequently used should prepare the food for the actual food assessment being carried out during the QA visit, if possible.

Assessment of Scottish Provenance

If you have your own catering team, clear information about all Scottish produce used on menus and your suppliers will need to be made available to our Quality and Tourism Advisors during the QA visit.

If you are using external caterers to provide the food and drink for your guests, you will need to be able to produce detailed information about the Scottish produce and the Scottish producers/suppliers the caterers use for the preparation of the food for your guests.

It is recommended that each of your external caterers should supply you with a provenance statement describing all the different Scottish produce and producers/suppliers used when catering for your customers.

Please make sure that the information provided refers to the provenance of the produce as well as the supplier. For example, your meat supplier may be a Scottish company, but the range of meat products they provide could be sourced in Scotland or elsewhere.

The focus is on where the primary product is sourced, or if it is made by a Scottish company (e.g. jams, baked goods, sausages).

Seasonal Menus

In order to make the most of the Scottish produce when it is in season, menus should be changed regularly to reflect this.

Please have a selection of menus from past events held at different times of the year available for the QTA to review, in order to assess use of seasonal produce.

Assessment of Promotion of Scottish Provenance

A key part of the Taste Our Best award is ensuring your customers can easily identify the Scottish produce you use in your offering.

The story of your Scottish provenance can be told in many different ways using different channels, it could be part of your menu descriptions and/or a separate provenance statement. The provenance of the food served should be apparent to your customers for each of the meals served, e.g. breakfast and dinner.

Be original with your promotion, use maps, photos, board displays, the inside front page in your menu, a tent card on your tables or anything else you think will illustrate to your customers the range of the Scottish products used.

Information provided to your customers should focus on the provenance and producers of the products you are sourcing not just information on your supplier.

You are also encouraged to highlight the use of Scottish produce to your customers on your website alongside some sample menus, which customers receive during their booking process.

The QTA will review the promotion of provenance you have available for guests on site as well on your website.

For tips and examples of menus and provenance statement please see our 'Promoting Provenance' Advicelink guide at the following link.

<http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/PromotingProvenanceHotel.pdf>

Staff knowledge

Catering staff (internal and external) should also be knowledgeable of the Scottish provenance of the food they serve and be able to promote this information clearly and answer any questions your customer may have on provenance.

QTAs may ask relevant staff some questions about on provenance of the food served.

Criteria Guidance

There is a set of core criteria that our Quality and Tourism Advisors will follow when making the Taste Our Best assessment of quality, provenance and promotion, which is described below. This will add a new element to the quality assessment currently conducted.

1. Quality Assessment

For the quality element of Taste Our Best the advisors will be reviewing the following areas for the Taster Menu or three course meal provided the on the day:

- quality of the ingredients
- appearance and presentation
- culinary skills exhibited.

These are all quality scored on a basis of 1 - 5 marks, as with other areas of the quality assessment.

Following is some guidance on what the assessors will be looking for in each of the areas.

Quality of Main Ingredients, Sauce and Accompaniments

This would also include any sauce or other accompaniments including vegetables or salad that form part of the plate.

The quality of the raw ingredients will have a marked effect on the finished dish. Points to consider regarding the selection and quality of the raw ingredients when eating the finished dish are:

- The basic quality and condition of the raw ingredients, which will come into consideration along with the quality of preparation and cooking.

Taste and combination of flavours:

- The taste should exemplify the main ingredient, complemented by the other flavours on the plate thus delivering a balance where each ingredient has a recognisable taste but forms part of a coherent whole.

Appearance / Presentation

This broadly refers to the visual impact of dish as it is served.

- Assessors will have made a specific note of each dish as described on the menu to ensure all elements appear in the presented dish.
- The dishes should look attractive and have a range of flavours, colour and texture. They should be arranged and garnished in an appealing way.
- For vegetables and salads, whether on the main plate or served separately, the same assessment factors apply.

Culinary Skills including serving temperature

The level of technical ability will be commensurate with the style of establishment and judged accordingly. Cooking is a highly complex activity with innumerable variables. The result will depend on the quality of the ingredients and the skill of the cook / chef and the team on any given occasion.

- Culinary skills will take in the main elements on the plate and any sides of vegetable or salad.
- Expectations are that the plate of food and any sides will arrive at the table at the appropriate temperature and warmed plates used where appropriate.

Technical ability and consistency:

- The level of technical ability will be commensurate with the style of establishment and judged accordingly. Consistency is very important and the ability to produce food to a high standard at every meal will be credited.

Creativity:

- Creativity will be judged wherever it is found based on its suitability for the occasion, originality, purpose and its balance within the overall meal.

2. Scottish Provenance

A key aspect of the Taste Our Best accreditation is to recognise businesses that source quality Scottish food and drink. Therefore it is important for your catering team or external caterers to review the provenance of the ingredients used. To assess the provenance of the Scottish food and drink provided to your customers the advisors will be looking for the following:

- **Demonstrates use of Scottish produce on menus (i.e. breakfast and dinner)**
 - Measurement criterion - A minimum of 40% Scottish produce is used in the menu
 - Menu dishes; this will cover starters, main course and dessert. For the main course the key ingredient (main ingredient of menu dish), plus one accompaniment or side (e.g. vegetable dish or sauce) need to be of Scottish provenance
- **Menus need to demonstrate dishes are changed to reflect seasonality of produce / ingredients**
 - Measurement criterion – We will look for a selection of past menus prepared for different seasons in which the use of seasonal Scottish produce is reflected. We will look for details of menu changes on websites but may also ask for further information at the time of the QA visit.

Scottish Provenance Tests

For guidance please consider the following. If one or more of the following applies to the Key ingredients used, then it can be counted as ‘Scottish’

- **Produce is grown/reared/caught in Scotland**
(i.e. ‘primary’ produce like fruit, veg, meat, fish, milk/cream, eggs)
- For food & drink products that require an element of production, processing or preparation of the primary produce (e.g. Baked goods, Preserves, Sausages, Smoked Salmon, Kippers, Cheese)
- **‘Homemade’ products with primary ingredients being Scottish produce** (e.g. baked goods made in house using with Scottish eggs, butter and milk)
 - **Made/Produced in Scotland by a Scottish company, not necessarily with Scottish primary ingredients.** (e.g. Baxters Jams, Walkers Shortbread, Mackies Crisps, McSween’s Haggis)¹
 - **Made/Produced outside of Scotland /not by a Scottish company, but with Scottish sourced primary ingredients** (e.g. the Shortbread from Marks and Spencer’s own brand that are clearly labelled to be made from Scottish butter and flour)
 - ✓ Any food and drink product from Scotland with [Protected status](#) (e.g. PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) and PDO (Protected Designation of Origin)) Mixture of processed and unprocessed food.

¹ In order to comply with Food Labelling regulations businesses need to be very clear in these instances in their descriptions that the product is ‘made in/’ ‘smoked in/’ ‘baked in’ Scotland rather than describing it as Scottish

3. Promotion of Scottish Provenance

Customers are interested in eating quality Scottish produce and the more you can help your customer learn about the producers and the background and story of where the food they are eating comes from the better. By helping your customer understand the quality and provenance of the products you use, you can justify a price premium on some products and services.

For tips and examples of menus and provenance statement please see our 'Promoting Provenance' Advicelink guide at the following link.

<http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/PromotingProvenanceHotel.pdf>

To assess that the promotion of provenance is appropriate to achieve the Taste Our Best award, the advisor will look for the following:

- **Management/Staff demonstrates knowledge of Scottish produce on the menu dishes offered**

Measurement criterion - our Quality and Tourism Advisors will ask questions regarding the menu to test knowledge on dishes, provenance, Scottish produce and key ingredients.

- **Scottish produce highlighted on relevant menus (e.g. breakfast and dinner menu) and/or supporting documentation;**

The minimum of 40% Scottish produce used (see Scottish provenance) should be clearly promoted and identifiable to the customer. This could be done as part of the menu description or separate provenance statement.

As mentioned previously, please make sure that the information promoted to customers refers to the provenance of the produce as well as the supplier.

Your Quality and Tourism Advisor will be able to discuss this in more detail at the time of the visit.

- **Scottish produce highlighted on breakfast menu;**

Our Quality and Tourism Advisors will also be looking for the use and promotion of Scottish produce in breakfast menus and buffet displays where provided, again they would be looking for 40% of the menu content to be Scottish, and they will be able to offer further advice at the time of the visit.

Here are some examples of Scottish produce that can be used in breakfast menus. However please note this is not prescriptive and there are other options to highlight Scottish produce;

- Porridge, fruits, berries, compotes, yoghurts and cereals can certainly have strong Scottish elements.

- Scottish made breads, rolls, pancakes, oatcakes, jams, honey, and preserves and marmalade. If any of these are homemade they would need to include Scottish ingredients.
- Specialities such as fish (fresh or smoked), local/Scottish butchery products to include sausages (traditional or game), haggis, black pudding, bacon, white pudding, potato scones and other Scottish traditional items.
- Vegetarian produce, potatoes, mushrooms, herbs, etc
- Local farm/Scottish eggs,
- For the continental offering; Scottish cold meats, fish, cheese, pate, pickles, mustards, etc.

At the time of the QA visit any shortfalls can be discussed with the Quality and Tourism Advisor. Where a business does use the level of Scottish produce required but has not communicated this appropriately in their information available to (potential) customers, the business can achieve the 'Award Pending' status. The opportunity then exists to amend their consumer facing information and send it to VisitScotland for a desktop review. If the promotional requirement for the Taste Our Best award has been met, then the achievement of the accreditation will be confirmed.

Further Advice and Information

Advice will be provided at the time of the annual visit, in the mean time, further information on sourcing and promoting Scottish produce can be found on the following sites:

VISITSCOTLAND – Tel 01463 244 111, customerservices@visitscotland.com

www.visitscotland.org/taste-our-best.aspx

Here you'll find Information on scheme criteria for your type of business, detailed guidance, and links to other useful websites.

Scotland Food & Drink: Tel 0131 335 0940, info@scotlandfoodanddrink.org

[Showcase](#) - a comprehensive online showcase of over 1000 Scottish producers and suppliers. You can search by product type or by area, locate producers near you and create your own favourites list.

[Seasonal Calendar](#) – interactive online calendar and printable poster. The calendar contains extensive listings of each month's harvest with easy links to the supplier Showcase, also tips, and advice and food facts from Scottish experts.

[Case Studies](#) – you can find out what other businesses like yours are doing and benefit from their learnings.

Experiencing Scotland: Tel 0845 607 8787, enquiries@scotent.co.uk

Experiencing Scotland - offers 3 levels of support

- on-line information, top tips, updates and [case studies](#)
- interactive workshops tailored to local areas and business groups
- specialist one-to-one business review and action plan to enhance sourcing and promotion of local produce, improve service delivery and deliver financial improvements (at a cost)

Hear about the positive impact that Scottish sourcing is having on the bottom line of other businesses who have taken part, and sign up for free business updates.

Tourism Intelligence Scotland: Tel 0845 601 2454, info@tourism-intelligence.co.uk

The '[Food & Drink online guide](#)' and 'At Your Service' guides from Tourism Intelligence Scotland are packed with practical insights, top tips and case studies to help businesses develop more innovative food and drink products and services.

'The Larder' Regional Guides

The List in conjunction with regional partners has produced an ever growing range of **regional Larder guides**, for example for Perthshire, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Cairngorms, Fife, Lanarkshire, North Highlands, Ayrshire and the Scottish Borders. The regional guide aims to tell the story of the food and drink of each of the diverse region in all its variety and practical detail. The Guides are not only a great way for you to find out some more about local producers as well as promoting them to your guests.

<https://food.list.co.uk/guides/>

The Healthy Living Award

The [healthy living award](#) is a national award for the foodservice businesses in Scotland. Eating out plays an important part in people's lives and what people are increasingly looking for is good healthier food. The healthy living award works with businesses providing a food service to promote healthy eating outside the home and makes it easier for people to know where to go for healthier food.

The award is open to most businesses serving food and all advice and resources are FREE, as is registering for the **healthy living award**.

<http://www.healthylivingaward.co.uk/>

Allergen Information

In order to make it easier for customers with allergies and food intolerances to make safe food choices, new legislation has been introduced that requires businesses to provide the correct allergen information about ingredients that are in the food they make or serve to their customers. This has come into effect in December 2014. The allergen information can be provided in a number of different ways to best suit your business.

For more details on the new allergen rules, as well as advice on safer allergen management practices, please see the '[Allergen information for loose foods](#)' advice leaflet produced by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) or visit [the FSA website](#) for more information, guidance and template documents and other resources.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/allergy-guide/allergen-resources>

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http://www.visitscotland.org/business_support/quality_assurance.aspx

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