

VisitScotland Food & Drink QA Scheme

Taste Our Best

Criteria/Guidance Notes

Hotel Accommodation

(Hotel, Small Hotel, Country House Hotel, Town House Hotel, Metro Hotel,
Budget Hotel)



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

It is designed to recognise businesses including hotels, restaurants, cafes, takeaways, visitor attractions and B&Bs that not only offer a quality food and drink experience, but include and promote Scottish produce on their menus to give consumers choice.

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 scheme 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, as well as contributing to your business's sustainable practices. 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.

When will my visit be conducted?

As part of your overnight QA visit, one of our Quality and Tourism Advisors will conduct a Taste Our Best quality assessment and provide you with comprehensive feedback. The assessment takes into account the quality of the food, the menu and in particular the extent to which Scottish produce is featured and promoted on menus. The aim of the scheme is to give recognition to those establishments who have a policy of sourcing and using Scottish produce and also promoting this to our visitors. Quality of cooking, service and presentation skills are also considered as part of this assessment.

There are various channels which can be used to highlight your use of Scottish produce to your visitors. Details of your purchasing policy can be featured on your website and on menus or contained within room information folders. Many establishments also promote sample menus on their website, both for breakfast and dinner where provided. Dishes can have Scottish produce individually highlighted or a credit section added to the back of the menu detailing your suppliers. In smaller establishments a personal approach is sometimes given and menus are handwritten and displayed on black boards or similar, highlighting house specialities and local produce.

There is a set of core criteria that our Quality and Tourism Advisors will follow when making this assessment. This gives slightly more detail than the food assessment currently conducted, as part of your regular QA visit, with the inclusion of a check on the use of Scottish produce, details of provenance and promotion to the consumer.

Please Note: You do not need to apply for a Taste Our Best assessment as this will be included in your QA overnight visit. There is no additional fee for this assessment, giving considerable added value to your investment in Quality Assurance.

Criteria / Guidance Notes

We currently conduct a quality assessment of your business which includes breakfast and evening meals where provided.

Within breakfasts we currently review the quality of the ingredients used, the culinary skills, choice, range and presentation. With dinners we similarly review the quality, culinary skills, choice and presentation. These are all covered in the current Hotel criteria and quality guidance notes and are also part of the Taste Our Best assessment.

The Quality and Tourism Advisors will be looking for some additional information and criteria as part of the Taste Our Best assessment, outlined below;

- **Management, Bar and Waiting staff demonstrate 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.*

- **Where dinner provided; demonstrates menu dishes are changed to reflect seasonality of produce / ingredients**
 - *Measurement criterion - menus changed twice a year minimum. This enables businesses to maximise the use of*

seasonal produce and reflect this in their menus. We will look for details of menu changes on websites but may also ask for further information at the time of the debrief.

- **Demonstrates use of Scottish produce on dinner menus**
 - *Measurement criterion - A minimum of 40% Scottish produce is identifiable on the menu*
 - *Menu dishes for Hotels; this will cover starters , main course and dessert , for the main course this equates to - Scottish produce as the main ingredient (main ingredient of menu dish) plus one Scottish sourced accompaniment (e.g. vegetable dish or sauce)*

- **Scottish produce highlighted on dinner menu;** listed below is a ready reckoner for the 40% calculation. Your Quality and Tourism Advisor will be able to discuss in more detail at the time of the visit.

Total number of dishes (starters, main courses, desserts)	10	12	13	14	15	16	18
Total number of dishes with recognisable Scottish produce needed	4	5	6	6	6	7	8

- **Scottish produce highlighted on breakfast menu;** a full Scottish breakfast is often one of the highlights of a guests stay. However the question is what makes it Scottish? Our Quality and Tourism Advisors will 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 or homemade breads, rolls, pancakes, oatcakes, jams, honey, marmalades and preserves
- 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

Taste Our Best - accreditation standard

In summary, to achieve a Taste Our Best accreditation, a business should demonstrate the following;

- 40% of the (customer facing) menu identified as being Scottish produce
- A minimum quality score of 3 out of 5 must be scored in all food related sections for breakfast and dinner (where provided), in your annual grading visit. As below;

Item 54	Dinner Quality	Minimum score 3
Item 55	Dinner Choice and Presentation	Minimum score 3
Item 57	Breakfast Quality	Minimum score 3
Item 58	Breakfast Choice and Presentation	Minimum score 3

- Management and staff demonstrate knowledge of Scottish produce used by the business and featured on the menu.
- Menus are changed at least twice a year to embrace seasonality.

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 on their menu, the opportunity exists to amend their consumer facing information on menus and send it to VisitScotland for a re-assessment of the Taste Our Best award.

Advice will be provided, at the time of the annual visit, on sources of information on the use and sourcing of Scottish produce.

Further information on sourcing Scottish produce can be found on the following links;

- www.scotlandfoodanddrink.org
- www.scottishfoodanddrinkforums.org
- www.provenanceonaplate.co.uk
- www.experiencingscotland.co.uk