

Edinburgh winners at the VisitScotland Scottish Thistle Awards

Last night at a glittering ceremony at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, five Edinburgh businesses were recognised at the final of the Scottish Thistle Awards.

These are the highest award in the Scottish hospitality and tourism sector.

Zakia Moulaoui of Invisible Cities won the Innovation in Tourism award for her groundbreaking work with homeless people. Zakia runs a social enterprise training people who have experienced homelessness to become walking tour guides in Edinburgh. The business was commended for supporting staff to gain transferable skills allowing them to build their own career ladder.

Zakia Moulaoui Founder and CEO of Invisible Cities said: "Being recognised by our peers in Tourism is one of the most important things. It makes our guides, and the whole team proud of what we do, day to day."



L-R Craig Hill, Sales Director at Geotourist, Mo Talukder, Zakia Moulouai, Charlotte Malliet, Myriam Guery, from Invisible Cities and presenter Jennifer Reoch PHOTO Chris Watt Fred Berkmler owner of L'escargot blanc on Queensferry Street won the award for best Restaurant experience. There he serves up French food using the best Scottish seasonal produce. They also won a mention for their Scottish larder dinners.

Fred Berkmler, Chef and owner of l'escargot blanc said: "On behalf of the whole team at l'escargot, we're thrilled to have been awarded Best Restaurant Experience at this year's Thistle Awards. Everything we do is centred around the customer experience from start to finish. The pride we take in sourcing the very best food with great provenance is equal to the pride we take in looking after our guests."



L to r: Craig Hill, Fred Berkmler, L'escargot blanc, Scottish Thistle Awards Industry Panel member and Chief Executive of the Associations of Scottish Visitor Attractions, Gordon Morrison, and presenter Jennifer Reoch PHOTO Chris Watt
The 16 room Dunstane Houses at Haymarket was named Best Hotel Experience in the award sponsored by laundry company Fishers. This award celebrates hotels which try to give their customers the most hospitable and comfortable experience while they stay in Scotland.

Shirley Mowat, Owner and Samantha Wright, General Manager of The Dunstane Houses said: "We are delighted to have been recognised for our commitment to the hotel experience at The Dunstane Houses. Over the last 24 months we have invested much in ensuring much care and attention is paid to every guest to make sure their experience is unique. From initial enquiry through to after stay feedback, every step of the journey is carefully co-ordinated to be effortless. We are so pleased we have achieved this."



Left to right Craig Hill, Fishers Commercial Director Scott Inglis, Shirley Mowat and Samantha Wright from The Dunstane Houses and presenter Jennifer Reoch PHOTO Chris Watt

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018 received the inaugural Inclusive Tourism award, sponsored by The Cumberland. Introduced for the first time this year, the award celebrates a business or destination offering a service that can be enjoyed by all. Edinburgh Festival Fringe attracts thousands of international visitors each year to watch live performances across a plethora of art forms, with over 150 countries represented on and off stage.

Brigid Kennedy, Marketing Manager for Edinburgh Festival Fringe said: "The Fringe Society are thrilled the Edinburgh Festival Fringe has won the Inclusive Tourism Award in the Scottish Thistle Awards. This award is a welcome recognition of all the hard work of thousands of talented people that goes in to putting this brilliant festival together."



L-R Craig Hill, The Cumberland Senior Business Lending Manager, Grant Seaton, Nina Nicoll, Lija Jursins from Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018, and presenter Jennifer Reoch
PHOTO Chris Watt

Brigadier David Allfrey who is Chief Executive and Producer of The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo was honoured with the Johnstons of Elgin Silver Thistle Award. He has been running the show for the last decade and will be standing down at the end of this year. The Tattoo with its audience of around 220,000 people here in Edinburgh and a worldwide audience of 100 million ensures that the Tattoo is a big Edinburgh fixture. Allfrey was commended as an inspiring leader of many in the industry. He was also said to be 'always finding the time for others to share his thoughts and to support initiatives to help grow quality tourism in Scotland'.



Left to right Presenter Craig Hill, George McNeil, Johnstons of Elgin Managing Director for Retail, Brigadier David Allfrey, VisitScotland Chair Lord Thurso and presenter Jennifer Reoch PHOTO Chris Watt

Scotland Regional Leadership Director Paula Ward said: "Congratulations to all of the winners from Edinburgh at the Scottish Thistle Awards National Final and a special congratulations to Brigadier David Allfrey, a very worthwhile winner of this year's Silver Thistle award.

"The Scottish Thistle Awards give businesses and individuals working within tourism in Scotland the opportunity to earn the recognition and appreciation they deserve from their own industry peers.

"The impact of tourism goes far beyond the holiday experience. It is vital to the Scottish economy, reaching every corner of the country, creating jobs and bringing economic and social change."

The Scottish Thistle Awards is led by a panel of industry experts from several organisations including VisitScotland, Aberdeen City and Shire Tourism Awards, Highlands & Islands

Tourism Awards, the Hospitality Industry Trust Scotland, the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions, Scotland Food and Drink, Scottish Tourism Alliance, the Scottish Licensed Trade Association, **sportscotland** and Wild Scotland.