

VisitScotland Quality & Standards



Best Bars Scheme Criteria

Best Bars

Quality Assurance Scheme Criteria

INTRODUCTION

Best Bars aims to promote good Scottish pubs, bars and inns of all types to visitors. Bars which join the scheme will promote ambience, sociability and good quality service – and will normally have a range of products to match available during normal licensing hours. Visitors will know from the scheme logo outside a participating outlet that they are visiting a bar where they can choose from, for example, Scottish and other cask ales, well-served regional ales and lagers, and/or fine wines and continental and other imported beers, craft ciders and more. Many will also offer a carefully-chosen range of malt whiskies and, perhaps, other deluxe spirits too. And they'll expect friendly, efficient service and a warm and welcoming ambience. Depending on the venue, they may also find there's a first class food offer too, or that it's a first class live music bar, or maybe that it's the best place in town to cheer on a rugby match. The scheme will signpost the country's 'best' bars in all their remarkable diversity – from those offering rustic charm to historic city pubs, busy and characterful 'locals' and elegant style bars.

ASSESSMENT

Pubs join **Best Bars** by signing up to the VisitScotland Code of Conduct and are assessed against the key areas listed in the criteria guidance section. **Best Bars** does not offer grading or star ratings - the pub either passes or fails an assessment. A pub passing its assessment is entitled to display the Scottish Tourist Board **Best Bars** plaque. A Quality Advisor will visit the pub to assess that the Code of Conduct is being adhered to, and this is will be on an annual basis. A key area of the overall assessment will be in the operation of the business to encourage responsible drinking, observing legislation and advice for serving alcohol from BII Scotland, SLTA, Servewise and Drinkwise campaigns.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Customer Care

The manager and staff will ensure that high standards of customer care are in evidence at all times. All staff will be expected to deal with customers in a courteous, efficient and polite manner. Complaints from customers or prospective customers will be dealt with courteously and promptly, with every effort made to resolve them to the satisfaction of all involved.

A helpful and friendly attitude reflects well on an individual business, on the local area, as well as on Scotland as a whole. The staff and manager should take a positive and proactive approach in dealing with queries from the general public (whether they are their own customers or not). In support of this, the manager will encourage all staff to develop a good knowledge of local attractions and tourist services.

The manager and staff should receive appropriate training and development, where required or beneficial – whether in specific technical skills or in more general customer care.

Safety, Maintenance & Hygiene

The manager/ duty manager will make sure that all buildings, premises, equipment and vehicles are maintained in sound condition, and fit for the purposes intended; and that high standards of safety are maintained at all times.

The manager will ensure that the highest standards of cleanliness and hygiene, as appropriate to the type of business, are maintained at all times.

Pricing & Advertising

The management agrees to ensure that the prices of all products and services offered are made clear and unambiguous, including any surcharges or charges for additional services. Where prices are agreed in advance, these would not be exceeded. A receipt or VAT receipt would be available if requested.

The products and services on offer must be described fairly and clearly in all advertising – whether by printed brochures, web sites, word of mouth, or any other means. This should be kept up to date, and any changes advised to prospective customers. These products or services should be supplied or delivered as agreed with the customer, or as advertised – for example opening hours, appointments and reservations will be honoured.

Legislation

It is the responsibility of management and staff to be aware of, and comply with, all relevant statutory obligations and local licensing requirements relating to the business; and to ensure that the business and all staff comply with these.

BEST BARS CRITERIA GUIDANCE

1. Exterior

1.1. Ambience and Maintenance

An assessment will be made of the exterior appearance of the premises. Many establishments will have a fairly minimal frontage, perhaps opening directly on to a busy street, whilst others will have quite extensive grounds. The assessment does not penalise the one and reward the other. Whatever the extent of the exterior, marking will reflect the standard of fabric, the condition of paintwork and signage and the general air of welcome.

Positive indications are well-maintained stonework, paintwork and windows, good clear signage, external lighting, and a tidy entrance free from litter, cigarette ends or other debris. Extra credit will be given for such things as seasonal flower baskets or potted plants. On the other hand, dirty window panes, out-of-date, fly-blown posters, overflowing cigarette bins, and other detritus will detract.

An entrance blocked by kegs or groups of smokers will not score well.

2. Interior Ambience and Facilities

2.1. Welcoming Environment

This section is concerned with the first impression on entering the bar, and takes into account the mood set by the lighting, music, if any, TV screens, and to a certain extent the behaviour of customers. It is central to The Best Bars scheme to promote sensible, safe drinking only. A bar where there is an atmosphere of noisy excess and abusive language will fail. This does not mean that a very busy bar with high levels of convivial conversation, where the customers are clearly having a good time will not do well.

Whether a bar is a modern, stylish one, or a more traditional type, consideration will be given to the use of mood lighting, the convenience, position and spacing of seating, the provision of reading material such as newspapers, local or beer guides, and any other features provided to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Negative features might include excessively intrusive and loud background music clashing with TV screens, unpleasant cooking smells coming from the kitchen, or dim lighting caused by blown bulbs.

2.2. Décor, Flooring and Furnishings

To a large extent the assessment of this section depends on the nature, age and style of the bar. In every case account will be taken of the essential character of the premises. Scores will only reflect the quality and condition of the fabric, not the design. Such things as sound furnishings, clean, unworn carpets and functioning lights, will score well whatever their style, whereas even the most avant-garde décor will do badly if it is scuffed, scratched, stained and dirty, or if carpets are worn through and light fittings broken.

2.3. Features/Focal Point

Where there is a special feature or focal point to the room this will be assessed. The most common example would be an open fire or wood-burning stove. During the appropriate season we would expect to see this lit and well-stocked with fuel. At other times the grate should be tidy and clear of ashes and dead embers. An un-cleaned grate with screwed up crisp packets and other debris will not score well.

2.4. Beer garden/Outdoor Smoking Area

Since the practice of smoking indoors was made illegal it has been necessary for bars to provide an area somewhere outside for smokers to enjoy their cigarettes etc away from the worst of the weather. This area will be assessed, not as to its capacity or comfort, but in relation to the condition and state of the fabric, cleanliness and tidiness of tables, chairs etc. Similarly, if a beer garden is offered as an attraction, this will also be rated. Where these facilities do not exist there will be no penalty, but in the case of no smoking area, this might lead to smokers congregating in a place of their choice, such as in the doorway of the bar, where they may have a detrimental effect on the exterior ambience.

2.5. Other Facilities and Accessibility

These might include a TV, juke box, newspapers, games, pool table, and so on. Where they are provided they should be easily available, well maintained and in a safe, useable condition. The non-provision of extra facilities of this type will not be penalised.

If animals are permitted, they should be under control and care should be taken to ensure that they do not cause an obstruction or health hazard.

Credit will be given for attention paid to the needs of customers with limited mobility or vision, in the shape of mobility and accessibility aids, large-print menus and so on.

3. Quality of Product

3.1. Range of Beverages

The range of choice need not be extensive, but should be well-managed, according to the nature of the bar. A bar specialising in real ales should have a good representative selection, a whisky bar will have a fair range of blended and malt whiskies, a cocktail bar should have a menu of interesting cocktails, and so on.

3.2. Local or National Representation

Credit will be given for a well-chosen range of local or national drinks, whether cask ales or bottled beers, spirits or other types of drink.

3.3. Information and Labelling of Beer Pumps, Optics etc

An assessment will be made of the quality of information given about the various drinks on offer. Beer pumps should have clear labels showing the name of the brewery, and preferably its locality, alcoholic content etc. These could be provided by the brewery, or may be hand-written. If cocktails are served there should be a menu, listing the ingredients. Every bar should have a clearly displayed list of prices and the volumes of measures served. Information could be

displayed on a wall notice or hand-written chalk board. There is no prescribed format, so long as the information is available, up-to-date and well maintained.

4. Service

4.1. Welcome at the Bar

Possibly the most crucial part of the service package as it sets the tone for everything that follows. We would look for a warm smile and a friendly welcome. In a busy bar the staff might be fully stretched when a customer enters, but an effort should be made to acknowledge the new arrival, and preferably to indicate that he/she will be attended to as soon as possible. Even a longish wait is bearable if the customer knows that he is in the queue and has been noticed. Staff should also make a mental note of the order in which customers are waiting, and try to serve them in that order rather than standing in one place and serving the person immediately in front of them regardless of how long they have been waiting.

4.2. Information/Recommendation from Bar Staff

In this section we are looking for good product knowledge, and a willingness to engage with the customer in making a choice. No-one expects staff to have a comprehensive knowledge of all types of drink, its provenance and manufacture, but a working knowledge of the principle drinks available, particularly when the bar is a specialist one, is highly desirable. A willingness to find out from other staff, or at the very least to take down a bottle and read the manufacturer's wording, is a help. Staff should also have a sound background knowledge that enables them to offer suitable alternatives when the preferred drink is not available.

4.3. Attitude

A helpful and proactive attitude in staff is a great asset to a bar. It can also make a big difference to the customer's enjoyment if staff engage them in friendly conversation, especially if they are alone. The staff should at all times relate to the customer, not just to each other. Bar staff who continue to hold a conversation between themselves whilst serving a customer, only to break off to demand payment, will not score well.

4.4. Knowledge of Other In-house Services

Staff should have a good grasp of the services on offer in the premises. They should know the times during which meals are served, and be able to locate the relevant menus. They should know if anything on the menu is currently not available. They should be able to offer advice on how to operate games or other machinery, and be able to direct customers confidently to a restaurant or games area, or beer garden, and tell them how to place an order if there is no waitress service.

4.5. Serving and Clearing

Bar staff should be proficient in the various ways of serving drinks, from simply pouring a pint efficiently and with minimal waste, to garnishing cocktails or spirits with fruit slices, ice etc. They need to know which glasses to use, and how to handle them, avoiding finger contact with any part of the glass that might come into contact with the mouth. Customers should be told what measures are available for wine, and offered a choice of glass size. There should be no spillage or dribbles, and if there is any such spillage it should be wiped up quickly.

Empty glasses, crisp and peanut packets or food plates should be cleared from the bar counter and tables promptly, not allowed to accumulate, and surfaces thoroughly wiped down. Staff should offer assistance with carrying a large order, if only to provide a tray.

4.6. Snacks on Bar/ Food service

Opinion is divided on the advisability of putting out bowls of snacks for customers to help themselves. Where they are provided we will take account of how well they are maintained, topped up and kept tidy and appetising.

We will also pay attention to the state of the menu. If it is dog-eared and food-stained it will not score well. On the other hand, a simple hand-written, photocopied menu in clean condition will score well. It need not be an expensively printed and laminated menu to assess well under this section.

4.7. Payment

Accuracy is of prime importance. The amount demanded should reflect the drinks and/or food ordered, and a correct receipt should be offered (though this would not necessarily be expected where a drink or drinks only are served)

The manner in which the transaction is carried out is also important. Payment should be requested in a pleasant, friendly way, the cash handled confidently, and the correct change given. If the bill is settled by credit card the staff should be well versed in the technology.

4.8. Last Impression

Almost as important as the initial welcome is the last impression. Staff should make a point of thanking customers as they leave, and adding some cheerful goodbye or wish to see them again. If departing customers place their empty glasses on the bar counter this should be acknowledged in a friendly manner. Even if staff are busy they can take a moment to call across a cheery goodbye whilst serving someone else.

5. Staffing

5.1. Staff Appearance

It is not necessary for staff to wear a uniform, or formal dress, tie etc. In many bars the staff wear jeans and tee shirts, or other casual dress. The essential point is that they should be clean and well groomed. Untied, lank, greasy hair, food and drink-stained clothes or shirts smelling of sweat are not acceptable. Long hair should always be tied back to prevent it getting into glasses and food. Clothes should be free from dirt and food/drink splashes. If there is a dress code set by the owner or manager, the staff should abide by it. The Best Bars scheme does not seek to impose any such code. We simply make an assessment of the bar's own chosen style.

5.2. Staffing/Training/Management

The Best Bars scheme does not monitor the input of training or check training procedures. We measure the output. What we look for is staff who are adequately trained to do their job, and who put their training to good use. We look to see that the right procedures are in use and that staff are both competent and have the right attitude to service. We also hope to see that they have been trained to promote a sensible attitude to drinking, and do not encourage excess or

unacceptable behaviour, as outlined in legislation and advice for serving alcohol from BII Scotland, SLTA, ServeWise and DrinkWise campaigns.

On the management side, and beyond the control of individual staff members, we assess the adequacy of staff provision according to the expected level of business, taking into account the time of day, nature and layout of the premises, any special events etc.

6. Toilet Facilities

6.1. Toilets

This is an essential area. Failure to provide adequate, clean and properly equipped toilets would result in a Fail for the establishment, regardless of the quality of other facilities and services. They do not have to be ultra-modern “state-of-the-art” facilities. Many traditional bars have very old toilets that date back to the construction of the premises. The essential point is that they be clean, fresh-smelling and well-maintained. Tiles, flooring, sanitary ware, piping and other equipment should be in sound condition. There should be adequate hot water, soap, and effective hand-drying facilities. Toilet paper should be provided in adequate quantity, and sanitary disposal bins, or other provision, should be available.

IN ADDITION

Legal Requirements:

All statutory obligations (and amendments) where applicable must be met.

As well as displaying the Scottish Tourist Board **Best Bars** logo on the premises, businesses can utilise the award as a useful tool in promotion and marketing material. VisitScotland Quality Assurance Schemes are marketed under the Scottish Tourist Board branding. The **Best Bars** award has been drawn up by VisitScotland after consultation with other leading bodies in the Licensed Trade: British Institute of Innkeeping Scotland (BII), Scottish Licensed Trade Association (SLTA), Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), Scottish Licensed Trade News (SLTN).

For further details of Best Bars, please contact:

Scotland’s Best Bars

VisitScotland

Old Town Jail

St John Street

STIRLING

FK8 1EA

Telephone: 01786 459201 Fax: 01786 471301 E mail: eatscotland@visitscotland.com