

Inter Hotel Challenge set to unveil the best in hospitality

Excitement is building as the Inter Hotel Challenge 2023, sponsored by Heineken Beverages, approaches its grand finale. Out of the 115 contestants who initially entered the competition, only three will be selected as national finalists and have the opportunity to travel abroad to receive part of their prizes. The Wine Steward of the Year will embark on a two-week trip to Amsterdam, the headquarters of Heineken Beverages. Meanwhile, the Pastry Chef of the Year will intern in France, and the Chef of the Year will spend three working weeks at a renowned hospitality establishment overseas, the location of which is yet to be revealed.



Source: Supplied

An extensive panel of judges is now deliberating and deciding on category winners to be announced at a gala event in Cape Town on 28 November.

Teams from 26 top hotels across South Africa competed across a variety of hotel and restaurant services categories, from wine stewards and mixologists to chefs and pastry chefs, bakers, baristas, concierges and more. The cook-off and service presentations took place in late October, in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban.

Chania Morritt-Smith of Showcook.com, who, with food doyenne Annette Kesler, conceived the concept 11 years ago, describes the annual challenge as: "A multifaceted competition that recognises, cultivates and rewards excellence."

"Before contestants can even compete, they are extended the necessary mentorship, support and practical tools through a series of workshops that help them to perform at their very best levels. The result is that whatever the outcome for individual participants, everyone is a winner."

Millicent Maroga, corporate affairs director for Heineken Beverages highlights how important the challenge is in "promoting economic opportunity and inclusion. It grows expertise, career development and creates a talent pool for the tourism and hospitality industries."

In recognition of the challenge's skill transfer drive, the National Youth Development Agency has become a partner and is providing International Hotel School bursaries to candidates who achieve outstanding results.

The winning wine steward will earn an all-expenses-paid two-week experience in Amsterdam, sponsored by Heineken Beverages, as well as wine courses with the Sommeliers' Academy, the South African Sommeliers' Association (SASA) and the Cape Wine Academy.

The top chef will intern for three weeks with a top international hotel (destination to be revealed at the gala event), and the top pastry chef a three-week working stint at Château de la Creuzette in Boussac, France (courtesy of Lancewood).

Since the inception of the award, some 1,500 candidates have been exposed to the speciality training provided by the challenge.

This years judging panel comprises:

- Wine and spirit service: Sandy Harper (CWM) and Jean Vincent Ridon (sommelier)
- Wine and food pairing: Aubrey Ngcungama, Deon Roets, Wanda Cronje (CWM), Germain Lehodey, Kristina Beuthner, Karen Bloom (CWM) and Mark O'Flaherty
- Food: Hugh von Zahn, Jocelyn Meyers-Adams, Fatima Stanley and Elsu Gericke
- Kitchen skills: Julietta e Silva Overmeyer, Marlon de Freitas, Candice Adams, Ukhonaye Mconi, Nandile Bongekile Mtshaha and Sharon Visagie
- Barista: Oz Davids, Johandré Delpont, Caroline Ncube, Ree Moya, Malusi Ngwane, Wayne Abrahams, Paddington Chivare and Shaakira Mohamed
- Concierge: Horst Frehse, Jeff Rosenberg, Lorna Gourlay, Mike Waller, Tarryn Tomlinson and John de Canha

Category winners receive trophies, cash prizes and, in the case of the wine, mixology and cheffing category winners, the chance to be mentored abroad by well-known talents, as well as bursaries to build locally on their existing expertise.

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