

2018 Distell Inter Hotel Challenge national winners announced

The sixth annual Distell Inter Hotel Challenge has announced its national winners for 2018 during a gala awards event held at the Belmond Mount Nelson in Cape Town. The event was attended by representatives from the tourism sector of government including Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom, the director general Victor Tharage and all of the competitors who together represent 33 hotels around the country.



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The event saw competitors take the stage alongside their mentors and management, executive chefs and sommeliers, vintners and hoteliers to hear who walked away with the highly contested awards and ultimately, the 2018 *Chef of the Year* and *Wine Steward of the Year*.

The primary objective of the competition is to partner with the industry in order to create and sustain a strong national base of top quality chefs, bakers and wine stewards. This in turn plays a huge role in South Africa's tourism industry.

“ Tourism employs more people than the mining sector and continues to grow. With our natural beauty and diverse offering South Africa makes a compelling long-haul destination. ”

Since taking over the portfolio of tourism, Hanekom, who was the keynote speaker for the evening, focused his attention on attracting even more tourists to the country citing the hosting of major conferences as one of the areas of growth.

According to the UNWTO, the World Tourism Organisation, global tourism grew by 7% in 2017. Hanekom pointed out that tourism is the world's fastest growing industry with over 1,3 billion people travelling internationally. Marketing is only part of the solution. Sustaining a hospitality industry that offers the very best in quality experience is critical.

"To sustain that level of delivery requires a long-term vision and that means the creation of a strong foundation of young talent to be our hospitality stars of tomorrow. Tourism employs more people than the mining sector and continues to grow. With our natural beauty and diverse offering South Africa makes a compelling long-haul destination," said Hanekom.

Ahead of the regional start to the Inter-Hotel Challenge, each competing hotel staged a competitive in-house search for their own best young chefs, bakers and wine stewards before putting forward one from each category to compete against the other hotels.

Comprehensive orientation workshops

The Distell Inter Hotel challenge commenced at the beginning of the year and continued with events over a six-month period. The young apprentice professionals – all of them employed in various capacities within the hotels – were put through comprehensive and thorough orientation workshops comprising experienced talks, demonstrations and lectures from senior lecturers from various culinary academies, top executive chefs, sommeliers, bakers, food authors and hospitality industry experts.

They met the partners and judges behind the Challenge and interfaced with the farmers and producers who supplied the food ingredients rigorously selected for their adherence to the best local quality can offer – along with wine and spirits from Distell before being given a specific brief for the June cook-offs, that were staged around the country.

"We selected only local farmers and producers for our ingredients as well as our wine and spirit partner," explained Annette Kesler, Showcook co-founder behind the Challenge. "It is important to us that our future generation of chefs and sommeliers are in tune with everything this country has to offer. We encouraged the candidates to be creative."

Richard Rushton, managing director of Distell also believes that the young candidates who go through the Inter Hotel Challenge, ultimately play an important ambassadorial role for the wine industry and the hospitality industry in general. "We firmly believe the Inter Hotel Challenge is an important platform to expose our young South African talent to the hospitality industry, and in particular the wine industry".

Guest speakers; Jeff Rosenberg, chairman FEDHASA Cape Region shared the aims of FEDHASA while John de Canha, former GM Beverly Hills motivated why hospitality has the potential of becoming a lifetime career.

Mentoring SA's young talent

"The hotel industry is the heartbeat of tourism," says Kesler. "It is essential that we maintain the high standards of our hospitality industry but we also have to make sure those same high standards are maintained going into the future. In order to ensure that, we need to have strong and sustained skills and upliftment programme where our young talent are mentored and given the opportunity to grow."

"The Distell Inter Hotel Challenge contributes tangibly to the hotel industry itself," says Chania Morritt-Smith, Showcook co-founder. "It is a unique event where hotels become a unified force. Although the industry is highly competitive from within, at the end of the day they all want the same thing – to ensure a strong and viable hospitality industry to encourage a strong brand South Africa. Our best chance of achieving that is by doing it together."

Siya Molefe from the One & Only Cape Town was named *Chef of the Year*, while Samantha Swartz from The 12 Apostles Hotel & Spa in Cape Town was awarded *Wine Steward of the Year*. View the full list of winners [here](#).

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