



The Blue Badge Access Awards 2023 recognises the very best ‘accessible style and design’ in the hospitality and leisure business.

The winners of the prestigious **BLUE BADGE ACCESS AWARDS 2023** were announced at an exciting ceremony tonight at London’s Great Scotland Yard Hotel. The Blue Badge Access Awards aims to raise the profile of accessibility in the hospitality & leisure industry and beyond, and to recognise those venues that are achieving the ‘Gold Standard’.

Nominations flooded in ranging from an accessible recording studio, a chapel, distillery, and a dinosaur park! The eleven Awards, from best loos to hotels, best spas to bars were presented to venues and individuals that have truly excelled in providing exceptional accessibility, stylish, and imaginative design ... and to those that haven’t!

Pushing the boundaries to exceed expectations takes an enormous amount of energy and drive and the BBAA are proud of everyone who has gone above and beyond.

AND THE WINNERS ARE!

Above & Beyond Award (sponsored by The Institute of Hospitality) AND Best Accessible Bathroom/Toilet (sponsored by Bespoke Hotels)

Won By: AbleStay London’s first accessible holiday home accommodation co-founded by Charles & Jo van Berckel who scooped up both awards. Based on the needs of their son Kit, every inch of detail has been considered to make for an easy and stress-free stay including: peninsular locations for toilets and height adjustable baths, profiling beds, ceiling hoists that connect the bedroom to the bathroom, a changing/shower trolley, and small kitchen with height adjustable surfaces and a fridge for meds. A ‘wheelchair friendly everything’ for a truly accessible stay which delivers the stylish BBAA ‘wow’ factor!

Best Luxury Hotel Award (sponsored by Hewi)

Won By: The Kimpton Fitzroy Hotel, London WCI The 334 bedroomed luxury hotel provides stylish accessible bedrooms and suites, which feature a roll-in shower or an easy access bath. Step free ground and lower floors and a hotel gym with a disability-adapted rest room with shower. Complimentary rooms are given to carers each and every time. The front entrance has the latest Sesame lift which provides wheelchair access and seamlessly maintains the historical features of the 19th-century, Grade-II listed building.

Best Boutique Hotel (sponsored by BluKite)

Won By: Wraxall Yard a sensitively restored dairy farm in Dorset offering inclusive holiday accommodation. An ambitious renovation of the derelict site to provide exemplary standards of accessibility and sustainability, without compromising the unique historic and agricultural character of the existing buildings. The judges commented ‘This is a really commendable project, beautifully designed and great ethics.’

Best Venue in an Historic Building Award (sponsored by Historic England)

Won By: Blenheim Palace for its excellent accessibility scheme with the emphasis on highly trained staff. It has not only provided training in visitor-facing roles but has offered it to all members of staff, this year including Tourette's awareness training. They have their own Access Champions, sensory maps, access statements and trained staff in BSL, with touch tours providing all visitors with a fully inclusive visit to Blenheim Palace.

The Blue Badge Style Access Champion

Won By: Anna Neary at Legoland awarded to their very own Access Champion who is passionate and proud to inspire the ever-evolving changes and improvements for Accessibility. For creating inclusive projects and ideas such as championing Merlin's Magic Wand and creating the content for their Sensory & Accessibility Guides and Flashcards. A dedicated Accessibility Experience Team is a unique team to Merlin who assist with the whole guest journey starts pre-visit to post visit feedback and who have interacted with over 5,000 families' last season where the minimum standard is accessibility.

New! Best Spa Award (sponsored by Guarantee Laundries)

Won By: Chewton Glen for its excellent disabled entry into the main hotel and public areas with portable ramps, accessible changing room and pool side access, pool hoists for entry into the water safely in both their indoor and outdoor pools, a stair climber along with trained, experienced staff to assist when needed. Highly trained fitness instructors provide personalised training schedules and exercise regimes.

Best Restaurant Award (sponsored by Conran & Partners)

Won By: Gaucho – Cardiff Their newest opening, this awe-inspiring restaurant has been spaciouly designed with everyone in mind. Thought has been given to an exclusive dining experience with exceptional food and providing accessibility in every aspect of its wide-open entrance, access to both floors, toilets and comfortable dining space without feeling crowded or cramped.

Best International Venue (sponsored by Ahead Awards)

Won By: Amilla Resort Maldives is part of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower initiative, an IncluCare-certified resort, and a member of the Conscious Travel Foundation. Their aim is to make accessibility features feel like an integrated part of the resort. The team are undergoing training for guests with sensory challenges as well as mobility challenges to ensure that everyone can enjoy the paradise on earth that is the Maldives.

Best Bar (sponsored by ANON Drinks)

Won By: The Audley Public House is traditional neighbourhood pub carefully restored where history and contemporary art collide. The team shares a passion to enrich and educate lives through art, architecture, culture food and nature. The Judges comment was 'Definitely not style over content here - love the combination of art and atmosphere. Great they think about guests of all abilities!'

Special Award for Outstanding Achievement in Accessibility

Won By: Charlie Lyons, Sesame Access Systems – Charlie invented the Sesame lift to help people in wheelchairs enter any building through the front door, especially Listed Buildings. Over 200 Sesame lifts have now been installed worldwide, including at Sydney Opera House, 10 Downing Street and the Bank of England. He died sadly in March this year and the BBAA introduced this special award to celebrate his work for accessibility where he has revolutionised step-free access in a creative and versatile way.

Robin Sheppard, Co-founder of the BBAA Awards, and President of Bespoke Hotels said:

"We're thrilled with the response to our 2023 Awards. After eight years of trying to persuade the hospitality industry to put "access" higher up their collective agenda I am delighted to say that tonight's award ceremony is testament to the progress that has been made. We have witnessed a much wider acceptance of the need to do better. We had an embarrassment of riches in terms of nominations and some very worthy entries. Congratulations to all our winners and runners up this evening."

Fiona Jarvis, Co-Founder of the BBAA awards and Chief Judge said:

"This was a very emotional and positive evening as all the nominees and winners were there with the common goal of making places hospitable for all. None were complacent and all wanted to know how they could do better. BUT.... The list to choose from for our Ludicrous Loo & Ridiculous Ramp awards was unbelievable and show that there is more to be done. It's hard to remain positive when you hear of such disregard for 19% of the population. Bad access and practices at venues must be called to account and we name the following:

AND THE LOSERS WERE...

The Ludicrous Loo Award goes to **45 Jermyn Street, SW1** The disabled toilet is in a room where the waiters can cut through to the restaurant, which is not only outrageous, but also an environmental health hazard! Similarly, we know of a Michelin Starred restaurant that still think it's acceptable not to have a disabled toilet, but to offer instead the ground floor toilet used by the kitchen staff which doesn't cater for disabled users due to the lack of grab bars.

The Ridiculous Ramp was awarded to **'The Quarter Lounge', Southampton** where previously a good ramp flush to the ground was provided and useable for electric wheelchairs. The new owners re-furnished the restaurant and there is now a 3-inch step to get onto the ramp making it impassable for an electric wheelchair."

Quotes from our wonderful BBAA Winners 2023:

"We're delighted to be recognised by the BBAA for the work we've done and the bureaucratic hurdles we've had to overcome to bring AbleStay to life and in doing so open the doors to London, that have been closed to so many in our community. Our passion comes from our lived experience of our amazing son Kit (15) who sustained a brain injury at birth resulting in him having quadriplegic CP and non-verbal. Our drive was to deliver fully accessible holiday accommodation for those needing the highest level of mobility support when staying away from home.

Charles van Berckel, Co-Founder of AbleStay

"True hospitality is about joining more people together, in more places, more often, right across the world. We want to open doors, break down barriers and create meaningful differences both as an employer and for our guests – this is what drives our passion and motivation to create an environment which is 100% inclusive."

Garreth Walsh, General Manager, Kimpton Fitzroy London

"My late mother had multiple sclerosis. We were all appalled at the lack of accessible holiday accommodation and the ugly, institutional look of interiors that people with disabilities have to put up with. When we embarked on the project to create Wraxall Yard it didn't occur to me that we might be shortlisted for such an important award. We're immensely proud."

Nic Read, Wraxall Yard

"We're motivated to offer excellent accessibility at Blenheim as we recognise the impact this has on not only individuals but families and the local community. Our accessibility team is passionate about inspiring others and raising awareness of accessibility across the business as everyone deserves to have an amazing experience when visiting Blenheim Palace."

Heather Carter, Managing Director, Blenheim Palace.

"Knowing when I come to work every day, I'm making a difference as a champion for accessibility for a great business and industry. I'm so proud to be a part of the growing change for Accessibility. We've worked so hard to be as inclusive and accessible as possible so everyone can enjoy an AWESOME experience. It's so rewarding knowing how many guests we reach and impact every day because of the great work and our team here."

Anna Neary, Legoland

"I am particularly proud that one of our luxury hotel properties, Chewton Glen, has won the new Best Spa Award and that its sister hotel Cliveden House, was also nominated in the same category. Our strength has always been our team and their determination to ensure that all guests find a sanctuary in which to relax and fully enjoy a welcoming spa and wellness experience, this is paramount in all we do."

Kerry Hudson, Spa Director, Iconic Luxury Hotels.

"We are truly honoured and humbled to win the Best Restaurant Blue Badge Access Award. We're extremely proud and excited by the future relationship with Blue Badge and what we can achieve in harmony. We strive to be the best in all aspects of what we do and aligning with Blue Badge values is part of this vision."

Dominic Ashworth, Rare Restaurants

“We are delighted to be recognised for the commitment we have made to embrace inclusivity. We continue to modify the resort as we learn what works best, and our team are undergoing training for guests with sensory challenges as well as mobility challenges to ensure that everyone can enjoy the paradise on earth that is the Maldives.”

Narelle McDougall, General Manager Amilla Resort Maldives

“Sesame Access lifts are a stylish way of getting into and out of buildings without a fuss. When someone has to wheel out a dusty old ramp from the store cupboard to give me access it’s awful. We applaud Sesame for their stylish lifts and platforms, and particularly to the late Charlie Lyons for his innovation and style.”

Fiona Jarvis, CEO Blue Badge Style

EDITORS NOTES: Useful Links & Sources

‘14.6 million disabled people live in England’.

‘Expenditure on tourism trips in England by those with an impairment, is worth around £15.3 billion annually’.

‘Businesses are estimated to lose about £2 bn a month by ignoring the needs of disabled consumers’.

Purple Pound: The Purple Pound – Infographic wearepurple.org.uk

Visit Britain: <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/value-purple-pound>

Skift: [The Value of Accessibility](#)

HGEM Accessibility Survey 2022: [Consumer Insights](#)

Business Disability Forum 2022 study: [Business Disability Forum](#)

Barclays Corporate: [Power of the Purple Pound](#)

For further information please contact:

Marian Addicott

PR & Communications for the BBAA

m: 07976 851045

email: marian@bluebadgeaccessawards.com

www.bluebadgeaccessawards.com

www.bluebadgestyle.com

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