

Western Morning News

75p FRIDAY NOVEMBER 24 2017

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DEVON

BY MARTIN FREEMAN

The cream of Devon tourism enjoyed time in the spotlight last night as the best were recognised for their special contributions to a vital sector of the county's economy.

The Devon Tourism Awards 2017 saw a double for Plymouth Gin, which won gold as small attraction of the year and for providing the best artistic, cultural and learning experience. The distillery also picked up a bronze in the guided tour of the year category.

The 25 Boutique B&B, Torquay, was named winner of winners after also taking gold as bed and breakfast of the year. The Cary Arms and Spa, Babbacombe, also had a double success, as small/boutique hotel of the year and as the top spa and wellbeing experience.

The outstanding contribution to Devon tourism award went to Esther Pearson and the South West Coast Path project.

"Devon is an outstanding destination," the awards organiser, Robin Barker told the audience at the Guildhall, Plymouth.

As examples, he congratulated four Devon businesses that were county winners in 2016, then South West regional awards, and went on to be national finalists in the Visit England Awards earlier this year.

The glamping provider,

Longlands, of Combe Martin; The Coach House by Michael Caines, Kentisbury, also in North Devon, and the National Marine Aquarium, Plymouth, made it to the final stage while Glazebrook House, South-Brent, in the South Hams, went on to win gold as the national small/ boutique hotel of the year.

"The wider South West won more national awards than any other region yet again, and I hope we can keep it that way," said Mr Barker, director of services for tourism.

"Devon has had a moment-

'Devon tourism has had a momentous year'

Robin Barker, awards organiser

ous year in other ways too with success in bidding for funding for several Discover England projects covering our Seafood Coast, Mayflower 2000 and the South West Coast Path.

"We have also seen real progress from the new Visit Devon, with a website that is delivering real new business and wider than ever exposure for Devon on the world stage."

Westward Living, Westward Ho! was named International visitor experience of the year, while large attraction of the year went to the Royal Albert



25 Boutique B&B, Torquay (above), Ladram Bay Holiday Park, Budleigh Salterton (main picture), Bulleigh Barton Manor, Newton Abbot (above right), and Toby's Garden Festivals

Memorial Museum, Exeter. The camping and caravanning park of the year gold went to River Dart Country Park, Ashburton, while the top prize for holiday park of the year was won by Oakdown Holiday Park, Sidmouth.

Bovey Castle, North Bovey, on Dartmoor, won the large hotel of the year gold, and the special award for community engagement went to Paignton Zoo for the great big rhinos

project. Longlands repeated last year's success as Glamping and alternative accommodation of the year, and the contemporary craft festival, Bovey Tracey, won gold as tourism event/festival of the year.

There were a record 76 categories, the highest in the eight-year history if the awards, which were presented in association with the holiday operator, Hoseasons.

The guest speakers were the Devon polar explorer, Ann Daniels, and one of the UK's leading travel journalists, Simon Calder.

Mr Barker said the fact that some top winners from previous years took lesser awards this time meant that in a "fast-changing industry... this year's competition is simply different - or someone else is getting better faster!"

Tourism's best
and brightest