

Eat Out unveils more robust judging process

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In its ongoing mission to champion the South African restaurant industry, *Eat Out* is announcing an update to the way it identifies and celebrates the best of the best from across the country.



Eat Out's new approach features a robust judging process designed to ensure that every judged restaurant is visited by the same judges and over a number of different visits, seasons and times. The revised system, with anonymous judges and an enhanced multi-stage review process, follows extensive consultation with the industry and its patrons.

New Media CEO Aileen Lamb says: "Thank you to the 514 people – chefs, restaurant owners, managers and staff, suppliers, industry members, media and diners – who took part in our survey. Your feedback has informed the next chapter for the Eat Out Restaurant Awards, just as it did when we changed to a star rating in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The enhancements we're announcing now make for a highly

robust judging process that is fair, transparent and ultimately ensures that the coveted *Eat Out* stars continue to represent the very best of South Africa's culinary talent."

Key aspects of the revamped Eat Out Restaurant Awards

- Restaurants will continue to be rated and awarded stars.
- A diverse panel of eight independent judges – including chefs, restaurant owners/managers, sommeliers, and food editors – is being appointed.
- All judges will remain anonymous throughout the process.
- Each shortlisted restaurant will be visited by every judge across peak and off-peak seasons.
- The 2024/25 judging season will be 1 July 2024 to 31 January 2025, with the announcement of the stars taking place before 31 March 2025.
- To support complete transparency, each starred restaurant will have automated access to their aggregated scorecard.

The judging process

The judging process proposed in *Eat Out's* 2024 survey was met with a favourable response – seven out of 10 respondents agreed it was robust. *Eat Out* has bolstered this process further based on the feedback received in the survey.

- To ensure thorough coverage, a panel of 50 reviewers – made up of qualified chefs, food and wine experts, and key industry players – will scout the country's thousands of restaurants for culinary excellence. Restaurants will also have an opportunity to motivate why they should be considered.
- If a reviewer scores a restaurant 70% (the minimum required for a star) or more, two judges will visit the recommended restaurant to affirm its reviewer rating. If affirmed, the restaurant will be added to the judges' shortlist.
- The 2022 and 2023 starred restaurants will automatically go onto the judges' shortlist.
- All eight judges will judge all the shortlisted restaurants.
- The judges' scores will be combined to determine a restaurant's final score and an independent panel will investigate any data discrepancies.
- Each starred restaurant will have transparent, automated access to their aggregated scorecard.
- *Eat Out* will pay for all of the reviewers' and judges' meals and the final results will be audited independently.

Judging criteria

The survey feedback confirmed menu composition, presentation, taste, technique, and service as the most relevant judging criteria. It is worth noting that the Eat Out Restaurant Awards are singularly focused on recognising culinary excellence. The updated judging scorecard will be published on eatout.co.za on 31 May 2024 and will reflect this focus on consistently world-class culinary experiences.

A smaller, industry-focused ceremony

In 2023, the Eat Out Woolworths Restaurant Awards generated more than R40 million in PR value for the restaurant industry. This was partly due to the ceremony being a large event that included multiple media guests and broadcasters. A smaller, industry-focused event will help *Eat Out* invest in the more robust judging process.

Eat Out is confident that it can maintain the level of exposure gained in 2023 – for the starred restaurants in particular – by producing relevant awards-related content throughout the year. This will ensure diners discover South Africa's culinary excellence and also the stories and personalities behind these achievements.

Woolworths reaffirms its commitment to the industry

Eat Out's 2024 survey also revealed that the restaurant industry and patrons see Woolworths as a leader in quality and a strong sponsor whose association with the Eat Out Restaurant Awards is beneficial. *Eat Out* is delighted to announce that Woolworths will continue as headline sponsor in 2024.

“Woolworths applauds *Eat Out*'s dedication to continuous improvement in its awards process,” says Elizka Ferreira, Woolworths' head of food marketing. “The revamped approach underscores a commitment to excellence that mirrors our own values at Woolworths. We're proud to continue our role as headline sponsor and look forward to celebrating the stars of South African cuisine alongside *Eat Out* this year.”

Lamb concludes: “A sincere thank you to each and every person who took the time to complete our 2024 survey. Your feedback has without question made us better. *Eat Out* exists to serve the restaurant industry we love. To that end, we want nothing less than an awards system that lives up to the exacting standards set by the best of the best in this industry.”

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