

Experience is the best teacher

Star power, visitor recognition and industry support is growing. Over 27,000 businesses in England have a current star rating. Companies include ratings in the information they provide to their customers because your star rating says many things.

For customers it confirms:

- The level of quality to expect, irrespective of price and location
- Minimum standards of cleanliness, health and safety are met
- The business is run professionally
- In the event of a dispute there is a proper complaints process

For management it confirms:

- The market and customer best suited to the business today
- An achieved standard for staff motivation
- A positive marketing tool
- An independent measure of quality in the face of unreasonable complaint
- An annual quality benchmark

“ In the daily rigour of things, even I tend to overlook things. The AA assessors stay with us and then send a full report on the entire stay. It’s a benchmark which helps us.”

Selva Raj Ambrose, The Gallery Hotel, South Kensington.



i **A critical friend** As someone who visits hundreds of accommodation businesses every year, the assessor knows what your competition is offering, how consumer expectations are changing and the difference between a growing trend and a passing fad.

i **Marketing profile** Many promotional channels are available only to businesses with a star rating. Web booking companies like www.laterooms.com show official star ratings alongside customer reviews. Other companies such as the TomTom satnav systems include VisitBritain star rated businesses on their mapping information.

“ You can pick up our visitor book and it reads 'wonderful', 'fantastic', 'great'. If you use that as your only source of feedback then you'll be soon not be 'wonderful', 'great', 'fantastic'. Visitor comments are very nice, but we still need external assessment to give us the real 'this is what you're doing'.”

Kath and Malcolm Downes,
Old School House.



London knowledge

There are 6,128 licensed restaurants in London, 22% of Britain's restaurants. Menus from more than 50 international cuisines can be found here.

GLA Economics

Assessments In London, the AA and VisitBritain provide identical assessments. The difference is in the marketing benefits included in the overall price. Each organisation has their accolades (VB silver and gold and AA red stars). You can have both VisitBritain and AA ratings if you want.

Market advantage Only star rated accommodation is advertised on the UK websites and the 42 overseas websites operated by VisitBritain, on the AA website and from April 2008, on www.visitlondon.com So star rated accommodation providers gain a valuable business advantage.

Subsidy The annual fee varies by business type, size and tariff. The London Development Agency's Get London Graded scheme provides £400 towards the fee and offers one-to-one assistance to prepare for assessment. The overnight assessor pays for their stay.

Getting started Self-assessment checklists are available. Use them to see how you fare against the minimum standards. There are questionnaires for Guest Accommodation and Hotels.

Useful websites
www.qualityintourism.com - VisitBritain star rating information
www.aahotels.com
www.visitlondon.com
www.lda.gov.uk/tourismsupport - Get London Graded information