

A master class in rosette training for top Cumbrian hotels

The Lake District Hotel Group were so determined to continue developing the quality of the menu's and food in their hotels, that they commissioned an AA Rosette Academy to be held at their own Lodore Falls Hotel in Borrowdale. Teams from all six of their hotels attended what was the first AA Rosette Academy in Cumbria to purely focus on one independent Cumbrian hotel chain.

This year marks a century of service from the AA and they have introduced positive changes in the way they work, adapting to what the current market needs. They are now more approachable and interested in working with chefs and front of house teams to help hotels achieve higher restaurant ratings. Their AA Rosette Academies have had great success over the last two years and their 2008 training programme appealed to Kit Graves, Director of Lake District Hotels because it was very interactive, included blind tasting sessions and provided constructive guidance on the 16 criteria against which the AA assess food.

Kit Graves said "we are a little cocooned in the Lakes, and it is sometimes difficult to be inspired by new things. It was quite innovative to bring the AA Rosette Academy to us and we included as many key staff as possible, not just our Head Chef's. With 22 staff at the training, I believe we are the largest group the Academy has visited in the Lake District – highlighting our commitment to training and producing great restaurant food."

There were 21 modules on the day which included seasonality and local sourcing as well as issues like technique versus flavour and industry awareness. The course is an excellent way to test chefs against industry best practice and to see how they compare to the country's top chefs who score around 63%. Lake District Hotel chef's scored very highly (up to 59%) and they came away very motivated.

Mike Ward is Head Chef at the Lodore Falls Hotel where he manages a multi national team of 17, he said "It was a very inspiring day and gave an insight to what they are looking for to achieve rosette standards. For the blind tasting we used nose clips and were blindfolded before tasting the samples – it demonstrated just how reliant we are on using more than one sense to enjoy our food. It was also very useful to see which new trends and methods they focus on and the way they like the menu's worded – something I will pass on to the younger members of our team. Seasonality and local sourcing is also high on their agenda; we do take this in to consideration, but we also have to remember it's about balancing improvements with what we know our customers want. "

The AA Rosette Academy aims to motivate front of house teams as well as Head Chefs. All 6 Restaurant Managers were at the Academy including Cath Serginson who has been Restaurant Manager at The Borrowdale Hotel for 30 years. The hotel only joined the Lake District Hotel Group in March of this year so the day was an excellent opportunity to spend time with other hotel teams. "My day on the course was something quite different. Having worked in the industry for a long time it was very enlightening to see the advancements in technology which can be achieved by such passionate and accomplished chefs. Amidst a list of criteria, the course advocated using fresh local produce - which I do agree with, however some of the criteria make it very hard to achieve and maintain these coveted awards, as it depends a lot on your market and your location. Having met other head of departments on the day I saw teams who have already achieved a lot and am sure with such commitment and dedication we can achieve more in the future."

Kit Graves was very clear about what she wanted to achieve, "The Academy is about bringing everyone up to date and to improve the dining experience in our establishments. Rosettes would be nice, but we are realistic too. We offer table d'hote menus in most of our restaurants, as our guests (many of them now staying for more than 4 days), expect to see a completely new and interesting menu each night, when they sit down for dinner. The AA inspector prefers to see the menu change only with the season, but our guests take precedence over this view and it is perfectly possible for our kitchens to present a menu that changes daily, which is also up to AA rosettes standard. So rather than upsetting our guests we hope to change the AA inspectors view on this. Each hotel team had time together at the Academy to work out what was most important to them and I am pleased to see that they are incorporating the most relevant parts of the training already".

Gary Wilson is General Manager at Inn on the Lake. He summed up the day by saying " The course was very rewarding and helped everybody gain a better understanding of what the AA inspector is looking for when assessing restaurants for the rosettes awards. We already have one rosette at the Inn on the Lake, we can achieve our next one and that is what we are working towards."



The Lake District Hotel group includes The Inn on the Lake at Glenridding, The George Hotel at Penrith, The Skiddaw Hotel and the Kings Arms in Keswick, plus The Lodore Falls Hotels and the Borrowdale Hotel in Borrowdale.

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Pictured: The Lake District Hotel team after their AA Rosette Academy training at the Lodore Falls Hotel

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