

037-042 TRA DI Oct 2016.indd 37 13/09/2016 14:49



HE DRINKS
INTERNATIONAL
TRAVEL RETAIL
CHALLENGE celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. The
challenge was initially launched to celebrate the importance of the drinks sector within the duty free retail industry.
Despite multiple trials, the category remains a vital part of the duty free mix, accounting for more than 16% of all duty free and travel retail sales in 2015 and worth more than \$10.2bn a year.

The event quickly became a popular addition to the calendar of launches, cocktail and awards events held at the TFWA exhibition in Cannes, concise in format but a great networking opportunity. This year's challenge comprises eight operator and seven supplier awards, to be announced at Hotel Majestic, Cannes, on October 4.

The Travel Retail Challenge has always adapted to the changing nature of this fast-paced retail sector and 2016 is no exception.

We have added an Airport Bar of the Year award to reflect the growing sophistication and diversity of the airport on-trade scene, as well as an Innovation award to honour suppliers willing to push the boundaries. The winners of this and Drinks Buyer of the Year will be announced on the night.

The line-up of judges this year contained some old and new faces. Joe Bates, *Drinks International*'s long-standing travel retail correspondent, returned as head judge, alongside magazine publisher Justin Smith. Making their debut were Karen Sparrow, director of operations at inflight retailer DFASS UK; Nicola Ridges-Jones, managing director of MSX, bonded warehouse and distribution company to UK airport stores, cruise lines and airlines; and Row Holland, veteran travel retail PR consultant.

And reflecting the growing importance of the blogging community to the drinks trade, the last of the year's judges was French whisky writer Anne-Sophie Bigot. She blogs on her own site, thewhiskylady.net, and has been writing about whisky since 1990.

The quality of entries this year was definitely up with suppliers and operators putting much more thought into their submissions. Many employed supporting video content and detailed statistical evidence of their success.

Reflecting broader trends in the market, there were a higher number of entries from single malt whiskies and premium wines, but fewer competitors from white spirits and liqueurs.

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