

Innovation Award

The tourism industry is sustained by businesses that are willing to innovate to solve problems, create new ways to do things, increase productivity and build resilience through a strong purpose and vision.

The Innovation Award recognises a tourism business that exemplifies innovative and creative problem-solving alongside operational business excellence. This business has a clear vision and mission, operates on sound business practices, has effective strategies in place to increase productivity, build resilience and invests to create value and opportunities while driving sustainability practices.

What are the judges looking for?

- **Leadership** – an example of an industry-leading creative innovation, initiative or investment (including the responsible use of digital or AI-enabled solutions) that has solved a problem or increased productivity.
- **Innovation** – details of your innovation and how your ideas were rolled out.
- **Operational excellence** – demonstration of how innovation, creative problem-solving, investment and strong business practices are a core part of your business. How are you championing the Tourism 2050 'A Blueprint for Impact' Industry Strategy?
- **Impact and outcomes** – demonstrable results have been achieved, and the impact is measured.

New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment

This Award specifically relates to tourism businesses taking a lead role on the TSC's Economic element – "Tourism delivers opportunity and prosperity across the New Zealand economy". This Award focuses on business commitments 1, 2 and 3, while advancing other elements of sustainability.

Commitment 1 – Resilience. We focus on long term business performance and resilience.

Commitment 2 – Investment. We invest to create value, opportunities and to drive sustainability practices.

Commitment 3 – Innovation. We innovate to solve problems, create new ways to do things and increase productivity.

Judging criteria

Your entry should include the following and must be submitted using the online portal.

Organisation statement* (150 words)

A short statement about your organisation and why you should win this award.

Award statements

Award statements should concisely outline how the organisation has demonstrated the criteria for this award, for each of the areas below.

1. Leadership (up to 200 words) – 20 points

- Describe the problem you needed to solve or the reason you needed to increase productivity and the solution you implemented.
- How did you achieve support from your staff and/or community and stakeholders for this initiative?
- How did you invest to create value and opportunities?
- How does your business demonstrate leadership in the tourism industry?
- How does your initiative demonstrate innovation in the tourism industry?

2. Innovation (up to 250 words) – 25 points

- Please outline the details of your innovation. What did you do? How did you do it? This may include the use of artificial intelligence, automation or data-driven tools where relevant.
- What changes did you need to implement to deliver your innovation?
- How did the changes you made achieve greater productivity or resilience for your organisation?
- Has your innovation or initiative been leveraged with other businesses or partners?
- If applicable, how has AI, automation or data analytics been used to:
 - improve decision-making
 - enhance customer or visitor experience
 - reduce manual effort or operational risk
 - improve forecasting, pricing, staffing or resource allocation?

3. Operational excellence (up to 250 words) – 25 points

- How is your innovation or initiative continually evaluated and improved?
- How is technology (including AI-enabled tools where relevant) used to monitor performance, test improvements and support continuous learning?
- How do you make innovation a core part of your business planning and product development processes?
- How have you created value and opportunities?
- How do you benchmark your business against your own performance and that of others?
- What staff training or professional development was required, if any, as part of the implementation of the initiative?
- How are you championing the New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment? Your answer could include some or all of the following areas:
 - What carbon measurement and reduction programme do you have in place? When was this introduced and how has it evolved?
 - What actions are you taking to support New Zealand's Predator Free 2050 goal or champion biodiversity and conservation efforts?
 - How are you embracing Te Whakarae Māori (Māori approaches and knowledge) within your organisation and/or visitor experience?
 - How do you use and promote the Tiaki Promise? What initiatives do you have in place to educate visitors about New Zealand's cultural and behavioural expectations?



4. Impact and outcomes (up to 300 words) – 30 points

- How have you measured the impact and outcomes of this innovation or initiative?
- How has your productivity been impacted? Please share before/after metrics.
- Was there strong staff and/or stakeholder buy-in and how did you measure this?
- Were any benefits achieved beyond what was expected?
- What are your ongoing expectations of the innovation or initiative?

Financial Performance and Compliance Statement

As part of the submission process, you will be asked to confirm that:

- Your business is financially sound.
- The entrant (individual or organisation) is not under investigation or been prosecuted by any New Zealand or international statutory body.
- All the information provided in your application is true and verified where possible.

This will be a tick box in the submission form.

* This information may be used in TIA and Award partners marketing material.

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Supporting material

While not mandatory, we strongly encourage all entrants to submit supporting material, as it provides valuable context for the judges and can strengthen your entry. However, it must clearly relate to the relevant question and written response. All information required for judging must be included within the designated answer fields. Supporting material is supplementary and will not be assessed as a standalone component.

Supporting material should be a single document in PDF format of no more than 10 pages and a max of 2MB. You may include graphs, screenshots, testimonials or a link to video content (no more than three minutes video footage in total). Documents exceeding 10 pages will not be considered.

Use of AI tools

Applicants may use AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Copilot etc) to assist with drafting and support the preparation of their submission. However, all content must be factually accurate, reflect the applicant's genuine work and achievements, and be verifiable by the applicant.

AI must not be used to fabricate data, outcomes, testimonials, or experiences. The applicant remains fully responsible for the integrity of their submission.

Referee

You will be asked to provide the name of a referee, including their contact email and phone number. If you are selected as a finalist, your referee may be contacted by a member of the judging panel.

Questions?

If you have any questions about the awards or the entry and submission process, please contact events@tia.org.nz.

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2026 Entry Terms and Conditions

- You must complete an online entry form for each of the awards you wish to enter.
- **Entry Fees:** An entry fee is applicable for each award category (excluding the Sir Jack Newman Award). The entry fee is non-refundable.
- Payment by credit card is required at the time of registration. If you'd like to pay by invoice, please email us. Failure to pay the full amount by the required date may result in the entry being removed.
- For individual awards, you can only enter yourself or an employee.
- For business awards, you can only enter your own organisation.
- Entry for the Sir Jack Newman Award is by nomination only and nominations need to be submitted via the awards portal by the awards closing date.
- The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.
- **Previous Award Winners and Finalists:** Previous winners and finalists are welcome to enter the New Zealand Tourism Awards. The only exception to this is the Toroa ā-uta, -Toroa ā-tai Māori Tourism Award which a three year stand down period applies for the previous year's winners of this award (2023-2025). Previous winners of this award can still enter other categories.
 - For all other categories, if you were a winner or finalist in 2025 and are eligible to enter into the same award category again for 2026, your entry must clearly demonstrate significant improvements or changes compared to your 2025 submission. You will be required to provide this information in a separate text box on your entry form.
- Current employees of Tourism Industry Aotearoa cannot enter the awards.
- All finalists and winners agree to media coverage. All entry information is held on a commercial-in-confidence basis. No entry information will be shared or distributed to third parties (with the exception of the judging panel). Where an award sponsor requests information to promote the finalists or winner in their category, TIA reserves the right to provide them with the organisational statement provided on entry. Entrant's contact details may be provided to the Awards sponsors and Tourism Industry Aotearoa Strategic Partners.
- TIA reserves the right to cancel the Awards programme or individual award categories within the programme.
- TIA reserves the right to remove an entrant or entry for risk of reputational damage or events that occur between entry and awards night that necessitate action by TIA.
- The entrant (individual or organisation) confirms that they are not under investigation nor have been prosecuted by any New Zealand or international statutory body (for example Accident Compensation Corporation, New Zealand Police, Health and Disability Commission, Inland Revenue Department, Immigration, WorkSafe NZ, Commerce Commission or other). If this is to be found untrue, it will result in the entrant being removed from the Award category.
- TIA may choose to conduct their own research from public sources on entrants. This may result in information being provided for judges consideration as part of the judging process.

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