

Tourism Excellence Award - Small-Medium Business

A healthy visitor sector is one we can be proud to leave to those who come after us. While all operators aspire to excellence, there are some tourism businesses that stand out. These are businesses that demonstrate leadership across all of the Tourism Sustainability Commitments, show operational excellence, are generating demonstrable impacts and outcomes and are embracing a regenerative tourism ethos that benefits our communities and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Excellence is defined as a tourism business that has the wellbeing of communities at its heart, is representative of our culture and values, and has an excellent visitor experience at its core. It nurtures the natural environment and is brought to life by a profitable enterprise that shows a high level of responsibility.

The Tourism Excellence Award for Small-Medium businesses is for:

- Tourism businesses with an annual turnover over \$1.5 million and under \$6 million
- The entrant's business must not be part of or controlled by a larger organisation or parent company

What are the judges looking for?

- Leadership
- Operational excellence
- Impact and outcomes
- Dedication to the New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment*

How the New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment relates to this award:

This Award specifically relates to businesses that incorporate all values embedded in the Tourism Sustainability Commitment, including the four key elements and the 12 commitments that sit within each of these elements.

- **Economic** – Tourism delivers opportunity and prosperity across the New Zealand economy. This includes resilience, investment, and innovation.
- **Visitor** – New Zealand provides world-leading experiences for both international and domestic visitors. This includes visitor satisfaction, culture and heritage, and visitor engagement.
- **Environment** – Tourism strongly contributes to protecting, restoring, and enhancing New Zealand's natural environment and biodiversity. This includes restoring nature, carbon reduction and eliminating waste.
- **Community** – New Zealanders understand, support, shape and benefit from tourism operating in their communities. This includes being an employer of choice, community engagement and sustainable supply chains.

Brought to you by:



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. Achieving economic sustainability (up to 600 words) – 20 points

Please include the Leadership, Operational Excellence and Impact and Outcomes headers in your entry.

Leadership

- How are you providing meaningful work and opportunities for those working in the industry to develop and grow?
- Outline initiatives and strategies you have in place to ensure long-term sustainable business performance.
- How are you investing to create value opportunities and drive sustainable practices?

Operational Excellence

- What strategies do you have in place and how are you innovating to mitigate the challenges facing your business?
- How have you demonstrated resilience?
- How have you demonstrated innovation in the tourism industry?

Impact and Outcomes

- Please provide solid examples of financial and non-financial metrics/results, impacts and outcomes of your economic sustainability practices. It would enhance your entry if you can provide information over multiple years.

2. Achieving visitor sustainability (up to 600 words) – 20 points

Please include the Leadership, Operational Excellence and Impact and Outcomes headers in your entry.

Leadership

- Outline initiatives and strategies you have in place to ensure long term visitor sustainability.

Operational Excellence

- How do you utilise and promote the Tiaki Promise? What initiatives do you have in place to educate visitors about New Zealand's cultural and behavioural expectations?
- How do you measure customer satisfaction, including monitoring, evaluation, and reporting?
- How do you innovate to improve or upgrade your offering to enhance the visitor experience?

Brought to you by:



- How does your business incorporate the tikanga Māori values embedded in the Tourism Sustainability Commitment – kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga and whanaungatanga (guardianship, hospitality and relationship)?
- How are you embracing Te Whakarae Māori (Māori approaches and knowledge) within your organisation and/or visitor experience?

Impact and Outcomes

- How do you measure the impacts and outcomes of your visitor sustainability practices?
- Please provide solid examples of results that have been achieved, for instance an increase in visitor satisfaction or your product(s) being improved directly due to visitor feedback.

3. Achieving host community sustainability (up to 600 words) – 20 points

Please include the Leadership, Operational Excellence and Impact and Outcomes headers in your entry.

Leadership

- Outline initiatives and strategies you have in place to ensure long term community sustainability.
- How do you create a distinct company culture to motivate and retain great staff?

Operational Excellence

- How do you connect with employees to drive engagement, communicate a clear vision and exert strong personal values? Do you pay a fair wage to all staff?
- How are you actively engaging with the communities in which you operate?
- Have you worked with other business and/or community groups to effect positive change in your community?
- How are you working towards ensuring you have socially and environmentally sustainable supply chains?

Impact and Outcomes

- Please provide examples of the measured impacts and outcomes of your community engagement practices, such as local media coverage and testimonials.
- How have your staff benefited from any moves to improve to work culture?

4. Achieving environmental sustainability (up to 600 words) – 20 points

Please include the Leadership, Operational Excellence and Impact and Outcomes headers in your entry.

Leadership

- Outline initiatives and strategies you have in place to protect, restore and nurture the natural environment.

Operational Excellence

- What are you doing to actively protect, restore and enhance New Zealand's natural environment and biodiversity? Are you working towards helping achieve New Zealand's Predator Free 2050 goal?
- What carbon measurement and reduction programme do you have in place? When was this introduced and how has it evolved?
- What waste reduction and management strategies do you have in place with the aim of reducing, reusing, recycling, and recovering as much as possible, and ultimately eliminating waste?
- How does the business actively engage with visitors and communities on the importance of restoring, protecting, and enhancing New Zealand's natural environment?

Impact and Outcomes

- Please provide examples of the measured impacts and outcomes of your environmental sustainability practices, such as carbon emissions reduced, or waste eliminated.

5. Business impact and industry contribution/ leadership (up to 600 words) – 20 points

- What impact have your sustainability initiatives had on your business, e.g. strategic planning, attracting and retaining staff, staff satisfaction and visitor experience?
- What are your key sustainability and regenerative achievements – what are you most proud of?
- What actions have you taken to show leadership in your community or sector to bring others on the journey towards regenerative tourism?
- How are you supporting the Tourism 2050 'A Blueprint for Impact' Industry Strategy?

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 in marketing material.



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.

Entrants may want to consider including a Sustainability Action Plan aligned to the 12 commitments of the TSC as part of their supporting documentation. A template has been provided [here](#) and we recommend keeping the information concise, with a suggested maximum length of two pages.

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.

Brought to you by:



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.

If you have any questions, please contact events@tia.org.nz

Brought to you by: