

3 September 2026

Media release for immediate

Tourism in the spotlight: Finalists announced for the 2026 New Zealand Tourism Awards

Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) has today named the finalists for the 2026 New Zealand Tourism Awards, recognising the quality and variety of tourism experiences on offer throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

This year saw a record 177 entries received across the 12 categories, surpassing last year's then-record of 150 entries. Rebecca Ingram, Chief Executive for Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) says that the increased popularity of the annual awards is a sign of a thriving tourism industry.

"We're delighted with the record number of entries received from a range of individuals and tourism businesses across the country. It shows that people in the industry are proud of what they've achieved over the past year," says Ingram.

"The judges remarked that the quality of the applications has also been extremely high, with more applicants taking the time to provide solid evidence to back their entries.

"The diversity of applicants this year is also a good sign for tourism; we've seen a high number of first-time entrants, both large and small, alongside several new tourism operators who are making a noted impact within the industry.

"These are the experiences that help showcase what New Zealand has to offer - both to international visitors and domestics travellers - and the awards serve as a benchmark of excellence and inspiration to the wider tourism industry; giving operators a chance to highlight and celebrate their amazing achievements and successes achieved."

Winners will be announced at the New Zealand Tourism Awards Dinner on Wednesday 4 November at Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, following Tourism Summit Aotearoa.

This year's Summit theme, Tourism Inc: Distinctive by Design, explores what it means to be 'distinctive by design' for both tourism businesses and New Zealand tourism. Through a mix of international and local perspectives, the event will examine how purposeful decisions can help create competitive advantage, drive innovation, strengthen global competitiveness and shape experiences that could only come from Aotearoa New Zealand.

See below for the full list of categories and finalists.

For more information, please contact TIA Communications Manager James Craw at james.craw@tia.org.nz or (021) 224 8056.

New Zealand Tourism Awards 2026: Categories and Finalists

Avis Budget Group Community Engagement Award 2026

- Cycle Journeys
- Muirs Tours
- Ngā Manu Nature Reserve
- Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari

NZME Visitor Experience Award 2026

- Mad Campers
- New Zealand Trails
- Ōpuke Thermal Pools & Spa
- Redwoods Treewalk & Glowworms

Tourism Talent Employer of Choice Award 2026

- Hahei Explorer
- Intrepid Travel New Zealand
- Shotover Jet
- RealNZ

Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust Tourism Excellence Award (Micro Business) 2026

- Auckland Sea Kayaks
- Glass Bottom Boat Whitianga
- Hapuku Kitchen - Te Kura Taka Kai
- The Seventh Generation

ServiceIQ Tourism Excellence Award (Small-Medium Business) 2026

- EcoZip Adventures
- Hamilton Gardens
- Wild Kiwi Tours
- Ziptrek Ecotours

Sudima Hotels Tourism Excellence Award (Large Business) 2026

- Intrepid Travel New Zealand
- RealNZ
- Shotover Jet
- Southern Discoveries

KiwiRail Tourism Environment Award 2026

- National Kiwi Hatchery
- RealNZ
- Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari
- Ōkārito Kayaks

Toroa ā-uta, Toroa ā-tai Māori Tourism Award 2026

- Muirs Tours
- Te Wharewaka o Poneke
- Waka On Avon - Ko Tāne Limited
- Whanganui Tours

FareHarbor Tourism Collaboration Award 2026

- ChristchurchNZ - Central South Island Collective
- Native Nations, Te Aka Trails & The Visitor Promise
- Kiwi North
- The International Travel College of New Zealand Ltd

GO Rentals Innovation Award 2026

- Air New Zealand
- Redwoods Treewalk & Glowworms
- Southern Discoveries
- Waka On Avon - Ko Tāne Limited

The Air New Zealand Supreme Tourism Award will be selected from these ten business award winners and will be presented at the Gala Dinner.

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Auckland Airport Tourism Industry Champion Award 2026

- Craig Buckland, *Kaiteriteri Recreation Reserve*
- Gavin M. Faull, *Swiss-Belhotel International*
- Lisa Li, *China Travel Service (NZ)*
- Sarah Farag, *Southern Crossings*

Tourism Industry Aotearoa Emerging Tourism Leader Award 2026

- Carl Bennett, *Millennium Hotels & Resorts*

- Charlie Buchan, *Tūhura Otago Museum*
- Narissa Phipps, *First Light Travel*
- Ocean Mead, *Auckland Sea Kayaks*

The Sir Jack Newman Award for Outstanding Industry Leader will also be presented at the Gala Dinner.