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RealNZ crowned Supreme Winner at 2026 New Zealand Tourism Awards

South Island tourism operator RealNZ has taken home the industry's highest accolade tonight, being named the Air New Zealand Supreme Tourism Winner at the 2026 New Zealand Tourism Awards.

Hosted by Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) at Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre in Ōtautahi Christchurch, the awards recognised the quality and variety of tourism experiences on offer throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Based in Queenstown, RealNZ offers a range of travel, cruises and excursions in Queenstown, Milford Sound / Piopiotahi, Te Anau, Fiordland and Stewart Island / Rakiura - while also operating two skifields in Cardrona Alpine Resort and Treble Cone.

This is the second Supreme Tourism Award win for RealNZ, having previously won the honour in 2024. The organisation also took home the Sudima Hotels Tourism Excellence (Large Business) Award and was a finalist for the Tourism Talent Employer of Choice and KiwiRail Tourism Environment Awards.

Judges praised RealNZ for their passion, industry leadership and purpose, describing it as a conservation organisation fueled by tourism; unified in a clear purpose to make New Zealand a better place. The judges noted RealNZ's commitment to regeneration, alongside their outstanding recruitment and training programme and increased customer satisfaction, as making them worthy Supreme Award winners.

Upon accepting the award, RealNZ Chief Executive Dave Beeche said the Supreme Tourism Award win is a "deep honour" and "recognition of an incredible amount of hard work from the RealNZ team".

"We love what we do, and we love delivering outstanding guest experiences day in and day out. We also love delivering on our purpose, which is to help the word fall in love with conservation. To have that recognised tonight is phenomenal," says Beeche.

The annual New Zealand Tourism Awards provide an opportunity for tourism businesses, both large and small, to showcase achievements across 12 categories, with the 48 finalists providing a benchmark of excellence and inspiration to the wider tourism industry. This year saw a record 177 entries received.

The judges were impressed by the exceptional quality of entries, with many commenting on the breadth of innovation, commitment to regenerative tourism, and their ability to offer visitors an authentic, real experience that embodies Aotearoa New Zealand.

TIA Chief Executive Rebecca Ingram says the awards are an opportunity to celebrate the people and businesses who make New Zealand's tourism industry special.

"The entries this year were varied and strong. They show operators finding fresh ways to share New Zealand with visitors and doing it with care and a commitment to our environment.

"Together the winners perfectly illustrate where the industry is heading. My warmest congratulations to all the finalists and winners."

About the 2026 New Zealand Tourism Awards

Each year, the New Zealand Tourism Awards recognise businesses, organisations and individuals who are demonstrating business success, living the values of the New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment and embracing kaitiakitanga (guardianship).

The awards are hosted by TIA alongside Award Partner Air New Zealand, and sponsored by: Auckland Airport, Avis Budget Group, FareHarbor, GO Rentals, KiwiRail Tourism, New Zealand Māori Tourism, New Zealand Media and Entertainment (NZME), ServiceIQ, Sudima Hotels, Tourism Talent and Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust (TINZT).

TIA thanks its valued partners and sponsors for their support.

New Zealand Tourism Awards 2026 – winners

Air New Zealand Supreme Tourism Award

- *RealNZ*

Tourism Talent Employer of Choice Award

- *Intrepid Travel New Zealand*

NZME Visitor Experience Award

- *Ōpuke Thermal Pools & Spa*

Avis Budget Group Community Engagement Award

- *Cycle Journeys*

FareHarbor Tourism Collaboration Award

- *ChristchurchNZ*

KiwiRail Tourism Environment Award

- *Okarito Kayaks*

GO Rentals Innovation Award

- *Redwoods Treewalk & Glowworms*

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

- *Muirs Tours*

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

- *Auckland Sea Kayaks*

ServiceIQ Tourism Excellence Award (Small-Medium Business)

- *Hamilton Gardens*

Sudima Hotels Tourism Excellence Award (Large Business)

- *RealNZ*

Sir Jack Newman Outstanding Industry Leader Award

- *John Barrett*

Tourism Industry Aotearoa Emerging Tourism Leader Award

- *Ocean Mead, Auckland Sea Kayaks*

Auckland Airport Tourism Industry Champion Award

- *Lisa Li, China Travel Service (NZ)*

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

KEY FACTS

- Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) is Aotearoa New Zealand tourism's peak industry body. We are the only independent association that represents all sectors of the country's large and diverse tourism industry.
- TIA has about 1,200 member businesses from across the industry, ranging from small owner/operators to large publicly listed tourism corporates and international hotel chains.
- TIA leads implementation of the industry's Tourism Sustainability Commitment, which aims to see every tourism business in Aotearoa New Zealand contributing positively to our people and cultures, our environment and our economy.
- TIA delivers a comprehensive range of industry events including TRENZ, New Zealand Tourism Awards, Discussing Tourism regional events and Tourism Summit Aotearoa.
- Visit www.tia.org.nz for more information.