



TOURISM EXPORT AWARDS

2026 GUIDELINES

About the Tourism Export Awards

The Tourism Export Council of New Zealand (TECNZ) is proud to present the Tourism Export Awards, celebrating excellence across New Zealand's export tourism sector.

These awards recognise outstanding operators who demonstrate leadership in delivering exceptional visitor experiences, alongside a strong commitment to quality, sustainability, health and safety, team development, and robust business practices.

In addition to the operator categories, two individual awards acknowledge those making impact within the industry. The 'Good Sort' Award honours an individual who consistently goes above and beyond, while the 'Unsung Hero' Award recognises a dedicated contributor whose efforts often take place behind the scenes.

Award winners are announced and celebrated at the annual TECNZ Tourism Conference, where they are recognised and applauded by their industry peers.



TECNZ Export Award Categories

- Large Inbound Tour Operator of the Year
- Small / Medium Inbound Tour Operator of the Year
- Large Allied Operator of the Year
- Small / Medium Allied Operator of the Year
- New Member of the Year
- Good Sort of the Year (front house, sales)
- Unsung Hero of the Year (behind the scenes)

YoungTEC Award Categories

- YoungTEC Rising Star
- YoungTEC Leadership Development Award

Note: Guidelines for the YoungTEC awards are managed seperately.



Key Dates

Wednesday 13 May 2026	Online nominations open to members
Wednesday 27 May 2026	Online nominations close at 5pm
Wednesday 03 June 2026	Award entry CLOSING day for nominees to submit their entry for judging
Thursday 04 June 2026	Judging of awards commences
Wednesday 17 June 2026	Judging of awards close
Monday 22 June 2026	Finalists announced & member voting commences
Monday 13 July 2026	Online voting closes 5pm
Thursday 6 August 2026	Winners announced at the Tourism Export Awards Dinner being held at One New Zealand Stadium

Criteria and Eligibility

Small/Medium and Large - Inbound and Allied

Awarded to outstanding businesses which recognises excellence in terms of quality, professional development for the team, health & safety, sustainability, business systems and outstanding visitor experiences by peers within in the industry.

- <\$10million turnover annually for Small/Medium category.
- >\$10million turnover annually for Large category.
- The nominating company and nominee company must be financial members of TECNZ.
- If a company has been nominated for a TECNZ Award in the past, whether or not they received an award, new information must be presented for the TECNZ Board to consider this nomination. A list of past winners is available below.
- An individual cannot nominate an operator with which he /she / they are directly associated for (i.e. self-company nominations are not permitted).
- These business awards cannot be self nominated i.e. a member nominates another member.

Criteria and Eligibility

New Member Award

A new award in 2026 awarded to a member who has recently joined TECNZ.

- Company must have been approved as a member in the past two years (after 1 April 2024).
- This award can be self-nominated i.e. the company can nominate themselves. Same question criteria.

Note: From 2027 onwards only those in the past year will be eligible for this category.

Good Sort of the Year (Individual award)

This award recognises a person in the tourism industry who goes above and beyond often with a sales and marketing focus and positive impact. A person supporting others in the industry both professionally and personally and who is a colleague supporting the work of TECNZ.

Those nominating an individual in this category need to provide the following at the time of nomination:

- A brief summary on why you consider this individual should be nominated for this award
- Areas to consider could include:
 - Describe how this person is working to make a real difference in a company, community or industry
 - What is the impact of their work with ideas, initiatives or projects
 - How they've supported you personally and/or helped fellow members or colleagues

Criteria and Eligibility

Unsung Hero of the Year (Individual award)

This award honours an individual who quietly contributes 'behind the scenes', offering steadfast support to colleagues or the broader community. Often unrecognized, this individual is a true champion within their company or industry. The Unsung Hero consistently demonstrates outstanding dedication across various roles, making a meaningful and lasting impact.

Those nominating an individual in this category need to provide the following at the time of nomination:

A summary on why you consider this individual should be nominated for this award. Areas to consider could include:

- Describe their role and how they support your business
- Outline any challenges or obstacles they may have faced
- Highlight the qualities that make the nominee truly stand out

Process

Nominations

Nomination open 13 May - 27 May

To be considered for the Annual TECNZ Tourism Export Awards, a nomination must be submitted online no later than Wednesday 27 May 2026. This nomination is to be submitted by an individual or organisation in the belief that the nominee has fulfilled the criteria and eligibility requirements outlined in the guidelines.

The nominated company will be contacted to advise they have been nominated (business awards only) and will be requested to provide additional information to support their nomination (see selection considerations).

The Good Sort Award & Unsung Hero Award nominees will not be contacted and therefore it is important that as much information as possible is provided by the person making the nomination when submitting online.

- The TECNZ Inbound Board members plus two independent judges will review Allied nominations (for small/medium & large categories) and provide a shortlist of three Finalists in each category using a point system.
- The TECNZ Allied Board members plus two independent judges will review Inbound nominations (for small/medium & large categories) and provide a shortlist of three Finalists in each category using a point system.
- All Board members and two independent judges will review nominations for the Good Sort & Unsung Hero of the Year Award.

The top three scoring companies and individuals will become the Finalists for each category.

Process

Each nomination will be scored on the basis of information contained in the online nomination form and supporting documentation provided by the company who has been nominated. The decision of the TECNZ Board will be final and no correspondence will be entered into.

Members will then have an opportunity to vote on the top three finalists in each category to determine an overall winner.

- Allied Members vote for Inbound Awards (small/medium and large)
- Inbound Members vote for Allied Awards (small/medium & large)
- All members can vote for New Member, Good Sort & Unsung Hero of the Year Awards

The winners of each award category will be announced at the awards evening held at the annual TECNZ conference on Thursday 6 August 2026.

Award Entry Questions

Small / Medium & Large Operator of the Year Awards Allied and Inbound

Criteria

Overview of Operation

- 10 Background on your company (no. years' operating, no. staff, no. visitors hosted, markets you operate in)
What prompted you to establish your export business (international visitors)?
What is your future vision for the business?

Innovation (Product & Marketing)

- 20 Describe how your export business is positioned in the segment or sector and created a competitive advantage?
Give example/s of innovative ideas of your product, service, marketing function or itinerary that has provided a step change for your organisation. e.g. bespoke service, cluster/branded new products, themed itineraries.
What international trade marketing activities do you engage in and how do you measure ROI?

Working with NZ Inbound Trade Partners

- 20 Explain how you achieve and maintain quality services and experiences and relationship with NZ ITOs.
Allied: How do you work with ITOs? Include growth statistics in international visitors from working with ITO partners (in NZ).
Inbound: How do you work with product suppliers? Include new products on itineraries or new itinerary ideas supporting suppliers.
How do you measure ROI or success from relationship?

Award Entry Questions

Small / Medium & Large Operator of the Year Awards Allied and Inbound

Criteria

Leadership and Performance

Explain the strategies your export company has in place to measure the following areas:

Leadership, team culture, use of AI/ technology used in all or some areas of your business.

40 What professional development do you have in place for your staff? (full-time, part-time, contract).

Do you encourage your younger team members to join YoungTEC or other networking organisations?

Explain how your company measures performance. e.g. number of visitors, increase in revenue, financial and non-financial indicators, NPS score, positive media coverage etc. Provide examples if possible.

Responsible and safe tourism management

What health and safety systems do you have in place internally for team and externally for visitors?

10 What emergency/crisis management plans do you? How is this communicated to the team and visitors?

What sustainability processes do you have in place?

Outline any conservation, biodiversity or charity support you provide in your local community?

Q&A

When was the TECNZ Awards programme established?

The TECNZ awards programme was introduced in 1982 to acknowledge Inbound Tour Operators for the outstanding work they do. The awards have expanded over the years to what they are today.

Who is eligible?

Both nominee and the nominating company must be financial members of TECNZ.

Who can make a nomination?

The nominating company must be financial members of TECNZ.

How do I make a nomination?

Submitting an online nomination form. Please note all entries must be nominated by another member not associated with your company.

Can a previous winner be nominated again?

Yes. Each company will be judged only on achievements since the previous award was received. For those who have been nominated in the past (and have not won), previous nomination information can be updated and will be considered for the present nomination.

Do I have to fill out separate nominations for each nominee?

Yes. Each Award will require you to submit a separate nomination.

Where can I find the names of previous recipients?

On the Tourism Export Council NZ website.

Are the nominations confidential?

Yes. Unless you indicate at the time of nomination that your information can be shared with the nominee, if requested.

When do nominations close?

Wednesday 27 May 2026.