

ALBERTA  
**GRIT**  
AWARDS

2025

NOVEMBER 24, 2025  
EDMONTON, CONVENTION CENTRE

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*Alberta GRIT Awards presented by:*



## CHAIR'S MESSAGE

On behalf of the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta, it is my honor to welcome you to the 2025 Alberta GRIT Awards - a celebration of the visionaries, changemakers, and innovators who embody the very best of the province's entrepreneurial spirit.

GRIT, which stands for Growth, Resilience, and Inspiration in Tourism, is so much more than an acronym: it is a reflection of the strength and determination that defines Alberta communities, businesses and, the leaders within them.

Tonight, we honour those who have overcome obstacles, embraced innovation and are contributing to a thriving tourism industry.

As we gather here at the Edmonton Convention Centre, we are reminded that success is never achieved alone. It is the result of collaboration and unwavering commitment to achieving what's possible.

To our GRIT Award nominees and finalists, congratulations on your achievements and - thank you for your contributions to Alberta's tourism industry.

We look forward to celebrating your accomplishments this evening.

*Brett Ireland*

Chair, TIAA Board of Directors  
Chair, GRIT Awards Judging Committee

## ABOUT THE ALBERTA GRIT AWARDS

The Alberta GRIT Awards, presented by the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA), were created to celebrate the enduring values of Growth, Resilience, and Inspiration in Tourism - qualities that are central to supporting the future growth potential of Alberta's visitor economy. The Alberta GRIT Awards were purpose-built to align to province's \$25B tourism ambitions, rooted most recently in the Higher Ground Tourism Strategy.

The Alberta GRIT Awards are not only about recognizing success at a specific moment and time, they are intended to celebrate the values of persistence, innovation, and creativity that drive the tourism sector forward.

Alberta's tourism industry is being built by individuals and businesses who continue to demonstrate their willingness to take risks and create transformative experiences. The Alberta GRIT Awards cast a light on these efforts, celebrating the achievements of those who see opportunity where others see barriers: those who are turning bold ideas into realities that benefit communities and the province as a whole.

The Alberta GRIT Awards are a tribute to Albertans who continue to push the boundaries: a celebration of entrepreneurs, community champions, and inspired leaders who embody what it means to be resilient in the face of change.

By honouring these trailblazers, the Alberta GRIT Awards help to affirm tourism's vital role as a growth engine for the province.

## THE JUDGING PROCESS

Alberta GRIT nominations were submitted by the September 30, 2025 deadline through TIAA's online awards portal: a best-in-class awards management platform powered by Awardify.

Nominations were initially screened by TIAA to ensure their completeness and eligibility. Nominations confirmed to meet the requirements were forwarded to the Alberta GRIT Awards Judging Committee. The Committee is comprised of respected tourism and community leaders who applied clear evaluation criteria to score each submission.

Scores were compiled independently, and confidentially, by each of the judges within Awardify's judging platform. The aggregate results were reviewed by the Committee to confirm the highest-scoring nominees in each category that would advance as finalists, including the selection of the winners in each of the three nominations categories.

The Judging Committee's recommendations were confidentially advanced to TIAA's Executive Committee for ratification through the Judging Committee Chair, who also serves as TIAA's Board Chair. TIAA's Board Chair participates 'ex-officio' on the Judging Committee to establish the governance and oversight linkage between the Judging Committee and the TIAA Board of Directors.

## 2025 ALBERTA GRIT AWARDS JUDGING COMMITTEE

- Hon. Karen Sorensen, Senator, Alberta Rockies
- Cindy Ady, Former CEO Tourism Calgary (Retired)
- Tara Lockyer, Chief People Brand & Communications Officer, ATB
- Karen Oshry, Lawyer & Partner, Kennedy Agrios Oshry Law
- Brenda Holder, Owner, Mahikan Trails
- Brett Ireland, CEO Bearhill Brewing, TIAA Board Chair (ex officio)

## AWARD CATEGORIES

### GROWTH

The **Growth Award** honours a tourism organization that celebrates and encourages new tourism initiatives that not only offer exceptional experiences but, also adhere to the principles of sustainability, community responsibility, and entrepreneurial innovation, in line with the Higher Ground Tourism strategy. The **Growth Award** aligns to this strategy by recognizing excellence in transformative and experiential tourism product development that embodies sustainability and community responsibility.

### RESILIENCE

The **Resilience Award** honours a tourism organization that has clearly demonstrated an ability to anticipate, adapt to, and thrive in the face of industry-specific challenges while building long-term organizational sustainability. This award recognizes those who proactively prepare for the future through innovative, adaptative and sustainable business measures that by extension, also help better position Alberta as a global tourism leader.

### INSPIRATION

The **Inspiration Award** honours a young Albertan, aged 18 to 30, who is helping to redefine what a career in tourism can look like. The **Inspiration Award** celebrates individuals who lead with passion, inspire others through their work, and are actively trying to shape a more dynamic and meaningful future for Alberta's visitor economy. These emerging leaders are not only building their own paths of professional development, they are purposefully sharing their enthusiasm with colleagues, guests, and communities alike. By recognizing their achievements, the **Inspiration Award** supports Alberta's vision for a skilled, innovative, and sustainable tourism sector that is aligned to the aims of the Higher Ground Tourism Strategy.

## FINALIST

### MILLER'S HAUNTED TOURS



Miller's Haunted Tours has built a reputation for delivering unforgettable tourism experiences that go far beyond traditional ghost tours. What makes the experience truly unique is that the stories come directly from the citizens of Medicine Hat. Guests aren't just hearing about legends: they are experiencing the living folklore and personal historical memories passed down by the very people who call Medicine Hat home.

Miller's Haunted Tours has expanded its offerings with seasonal editions, such as the Scream Edition; a limited-time October experience featuring heightened scares, new stories, and theatrical surprises. The exclusivity of the experience encourages visitors to plan their trips around Medicine Hat and further inspires them to extend their stay to enjoy other fall attractions.

At the same time, its Sensory-Friendly Edition ensures accessibility by providing a low-scare environment that is welcoming to families, children, and individuals with sensory sensitivities.

This creative and inclusive programming ensures there is a tour for everyone, while the company's deep connection to local storytellers makes each experience meaningful and transformative. Guests leave with more than chills: they gain an authentic sense of Medicine Hat's heritage, culture, and community spirit.

By blending creativity, inclusivity, and citizen-driven storytelling, Miller's Haunted Tours has created a distinctive tourism product that not only entertains but also strengthens the connection between visitors and the region, encouraging visitors to stay longer and to share their experience with others.

## FINALIST

**MÉTIS CROSSING**

Over the past two years, Métis Crossing has launched a series of experiences that have transformed how visitors engage with culture, land, and wildlife. At the heart of this growth is the Visions, Hopes and Dreams Wildlife Park - the first Indigenous-owned wildlife experience in Canada focused entirely on the restoration of Métis heritage species.

More than an attraction, the Wildlife Park is a living act of cultural reclamation. Here, white bison, wood bison, elk, and Percheron horses roam freely on traditional river lot lands, reintroduced not for spectacle, but for healing. These animals hold profound spiritual and historical meaning for the Métis, and their return is a reconnection to land-based teachings once disrupted by colonial settlement.

Visitors walk the land alongside Métis Knowledge Holders who share stories of survival, kinship, and ecological balance. It's an experience that fosters awe, reflection, and deep emotional resonance.

Unlike drive-through safaris or fenced enclosures, this is a regenerative cultural landscape, where animals, humans, and the land co-exist in a respectful relationship. The Park also supports local employment and mentorship for Métis youth and guides.

Surrounding the park are immersive accommodations, sky domes, trapper tents, and The Lodge, paired with seasonal cultural programming, Métis cuisine from an on-site vertical farm, and stargazing rooted in traditional sky knowledge. Guests frequently extend their stay to participate in workshops, storytelling, and ceremonies that unfold as the seasons change.

Together, these innovations represent a bold, community-driven model for tourism growth that is fully aligned to land-based teachings.

## FINALIST

**THE WOODS EXPERIENCE**

The Woods Experience has built a truly distinctive rural Indigenous tourism destination in Alberta that invites visitors to slow down, reconnect, and immerse themselves in nature and culture. What sets the experience apart is the way the company combines authentic, land-based teachings, unique accommodations, and, wellness-focused offerings to create an environment where guests not only stay longer, but leave transformed.

Guests are welcomed into the boreal forest to stay in handcrafted cabins and traditional Tipis, each designed to create a sense of intimacy with the land. The centerpiece of The Woods Experience's growth has been the Wilderness Nordic Spa: a wood-fired Nordic Spa surrounded by forest, where visitors cycle through hot, cold, and rest. This immersive wellness experience encourages reflection, relaxation, and connection with the natural world, adding significant value to a rural community setting where such amenities are rarely found.

Beyond accommodations & wellness, The Woods Experience delivers authentic cultural and land-based programming. The company's Trapline Experience allows guests to walk the land, learn sustainable practices, and understand traditional relationships with the environment. Through these teachings, visitors gain an appreciation of Indigenous ways and culture while engaging in hands-on learning that is both meaningful and, memorable. Together, these offerings provide guests with more than just a getaway: they provide a transformative journey that blends relaxation, culture, and adventure.

Visitors often extend their stay in the region, or return frequently, drawn-in by the opportunity to experience something they cannot find elsewhere: a tourism product that is at once creative, original, & deeply connected to the land & community.

## FINALIST



## SUNDOG TOURS

SunDog Tour Co. has a long track record of adapting to rapidly shifting visitor trends and market realities, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 Chetamon wildfire. The 2024 Jasper Wildfire Complex presented the company's greatest test yet: one that required fast, forward-looking action to maintain operational continuity and visitor confidence.

Immediately following the fires, SunDog Tour Co. adjusted its Edmonton Connector service to operate daily between Hinton and Edmonton while access to Jasper was closed. This ensured critical regional transportation remained available, supported community mobility, and, kept key staff employed. Within 2-days of evacuation, the company had positioned 19 vehicles and 27 drivers and guides in various locations throughout the province.

Recognizing that visitor expectations would change after the wildfire, SunDog Tour Co. quickly developed the Wildlife and Ecology of Fire Tour (launched September 2024) to help travelers understand the ecological importance and regenerative role of fire in mountain landscapes like Jasper.

To address potential winter visitation declines, the company also diversified its product line with the launch of the Pleckaitis Canyon Icewalk and Daily Snowshoe Tours in December 2024, ensuring compelling, non-ski winter experiences were available.

In the fall of 2024, SunDog Tour Co. embarked on an ambitious sales / promotional mission to the UK to reassure the largest sellers of Western Canadian hospitality products that Jasper remained a viable, world-class destination.

By anticipating shifts in visitor interest and operational constraints, and by communicating regularly with wholesale and receptive partners, SunDog Tour Co. has maintained service quality and visitor trust while adapting its business model to meet evolving market conditions.

## FINALIST



## CANYON SKI RESORT &amp; RECREATION AREA

Canyon Ski Resort has been able to remain successful due to the organization's ability to adapt and become a four season resort instead of just a winter destination.

Canyon Ski Resort & Recreation Area well-anticipated a shift in visitor trends by offering unique attractions not found in other areas of the province. Growing numbers in the province meant many visitors were looking to experience more local tourist attractions; the organization shifted to meet these market demands.

As a ski resort, Canyon Ski Resort & Recreation Area saw there was huge, unfulfilled potential to develop more outdoor adventure tourism product and experiences based on what was being offered in neighbouring B.C.

In response, the organization developed an enthusiastic and forward-thinking master plan in 2020. The master plan reflected a proactive approach to future opportunities, addressed emerging trends around the world and was developed on foresight and anticipation of future developments. Although it is ambitious plan, the organization is confident it can achieve it with slow and purposeful growth.

Canyon Ski Resort & Recreation Area put its dream into motion to diversify to become a year-round, all season resort in 2022, by: installing Alberta's only alpine coaster the "Canyon Coaster" in summer of 2022; installing Western Canada's longest summer tubing slide in summer 2023; and, installing an aerial park, zipline and the only net park of its kind in Alberta and Canyon Bungee in 2024.

The goal of these offerings was to mitigate seasonality, to open up new markets, and, to make the organization more sustainable as a year round recreational facility.

## FINALIST



## ALPINE VILLAGE CABIN RESORT

For more than 80-years, Alpine Village Cabin Resort has evolved its offerings to align with changing guest expectations.

The Allin family took over Alpine Village Cabin Resort in 1986 with 30 cabins, spending the next 40 years building 25 new upscale log cabins featuring kitchens, fireplaces, 1-2 bedrooms, Wi-Fi and hot pool access. This diversification positioned the company to appeal to a broader range of visitors, from outdoor enthusiasts, families, and international travelers who were all seeking higher levels of comfort.

The 2024 Jasper Wildfire destroyed 25 of 55 cabins, most of which had been built within the last 10 years. In the immediacy of the wildfire event, the organization's resilience was fully-tested, yet it pivoted quickly. Core infrastructure and damage to the grounds were repaired with the re-opening of the 30 remaining cabins completed in May, 2025. Just nine months after the wildfire, efforts were underway to rebuild 18 log cabins: the only fire-damaged accommodation provider to do so, all the while maintaining its focus on guest comfort and service excellence.

Alpine Village Cabin Resort has actively managed seasonality and market shifts employing flexible pricing strategies. Special low/mid-season rates offered during bear and elk rutting season encourage extended stays outside peak summer months, supporting both the business and Jasper's broader tourism economy. Fully winterized, rebuilt log cabins are also helping to extend stays longer into the off-season.

Consistently ranked as "TripAdvisor's #1 Place to Stay" since 2006, Alpine Village Cabin Resort has sustained high service standards despite fluctuations in visitor demographics and economic conditions.

Through recovery, diversification and pricing flexibility, Alpine Village Cabin Resort has proven that there is always a way to navigate the path of change.

## FINALIST

## IHOR ZVADA (THE MALCOM HOTEL)



Ihor leads by example, taking initiative every day to elevate guest interactions with warmth, professionalism, and genuine care that his teammates naturally want to emulate. His positivity, grace, and poise have raised service standards across departments, inspiring colleagues to refine their own approach to hospitality. It is no surprise that Ihor has been recognized as Employee of the Month and is regularly nominated by both peers and leaders for his exceptional contributions.

Beyond his core role as Bell Attendant, Ihor demonstrates leadership through versatility and problem-solving. When the Malcolm Hotel's sister property faced staffing shortages, he willingly stepped-in to support their housekeeping team, bringing the same dedication and reliability that have defined his approach to work. His adaptability, cross-training, and commitment to excellence showcase a solutions-focused mindset that benefits the entire organization.

Ihor's dedication extends to the community. He requested later Friday shifts to volunteer weekly at the local seniors' center and has supported Ukrainian community fundraisers, including a concert and meal he helped to organize. He participates in Bow Valley community clean-ups and actively encourages guests and colleagues to choose sustainable travel options like walking, biking, or public transit.

Through initiative, mentorship, and a strong sense of social responsibility, Ihor shines as a young leader whose influence is felt in guest satisfaction, team development, and community engagement.

His commitment to hospitality, professional growth, and community connection exemplifies the highest standards of leadership in tourism.

## FINALIST

**KYLIE PENNEY (TELUS SPARK)**

Kylie exemplifies 'people-first leadership' at TELUS Spark Science Centre, believing meaningful work begins with connection and, curiosity.

She has consistently demonstrated that investing in people, not just processes, builds strong teams and meaningful visitor experiences. Her approach to leadership is defined not by titles, rather by the lasting impact she has on the people she guides and the culture she nurtures.

One of Kylie's most significant initiatives was restructuring the floor teams. By aligning roles with individual strengths, clarifying responsibilities, and implementing new service standards, she fostered a culture of collaboration, trust, and engagement, reflected in an eighty-five percent employee engagement score. These operational improvements enhanced efficiency while creating a work environment where staff feel empowered to grow.

Kylie invests deeply in her team's professional development, mentoring and coaching them to reach their full potential. She has personally supported the promotion of two team members and celebrated the achievements of others, including 10 team members nominated for Spark's staff awards, reflecting her ability to cultivate talent and inspire confidence. With two promotions herself and oversight of multiple portfolios, Kylie models the growth she encourages in others.

Kylie has consistently demonstrated that leadership is about creating opportunities, celebrating team members, and, nurturing an environment where those around her can thrive. Her leadership is defined by empathy, strategic vision and a commitment to excellence. Kylie continues to prove that meaningful connections and thoughtful guidance and encouragement must always remain at the centre of effective leadership.

## FINALIST

**MACKENZIE BROWN (GLENBOW MUSEUM / KAMAMAK)**

Mackenzie Brown is a First Nations Cree woman from the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, currently residing in Mohkinstsis (Calgary).

She is an extraordinary force in tourism, a tireless relationship builder and a leader who has worked extensively to elevate Indigenous voices, culture, and visibility across Alberta and beyond through her leadership.

During her tenure as Director of Industry Development with Indigenous Tourism Alberta, Mackenzie built programs and partnerships that transformed opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs and communities, creating long-lasting impact on the sector. Prior to her tenure at Indigenous Tourism Alberta, Mackenzie also advanced skills and knowledge working for Explore Edmonton and the Government of Alberta.

In her new role as Executive Advisor, Indigenous Engagement at the Glenbow, Mackenzie is expanding that reach nationally, helping to weave authentic Indigenous perspectives into Canada's tourism narrative.

At the same time, Mackenzie continues to contribute as a celebrated artist, producing powerful public works that bring authentic Indigenous art into shared spaces, enriching visitor experiences while inspiring pride and connection within communities.

In Mackenzie's own words: "Reconciliation is a journey that takes place in relationship with one another. When we learn from and care about each other, we can make more informed decisions for the benefit and growth of our communities."

## AWARDS AGENDA

5:00 PM – Cocktail Reception

6:15 PM – Opening Remarks

6:20 PM – Awards Ceremony & Dinner

7:20 PM – Premier's Address and Conversation  
with Premier Smith

8:00 PM – Event Concludes

## DINNER MENU

### **Caprese salad**

Free Gull Valley Farms tomatoes | bocconcini |  
micro greens insalata mista | cracked black  
pepper | lemon & olive oil vinaigrette

### **sous vide Alberta beef short**

rib | Gluten Free cultured butter mashed  
potatoes | beef reduction sauce | Chef inspired seasonal vegetables

### **Revisited classic ratatouille | Vegan + Gluten**

Free creamy basil polenta | tomato | onion |  
zucchini | eggplant | organic olive oil | toasted  
pumpkin seeds | tofu feta | Chef inspired  
seasonal vegetables

### **Lemon yogurt chantilly cream pear jam | pear**

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Join this evening's conversation and help us celebrate Alberta's best in tourism! We encourage you to share your photos, videos, and reactions to tonight's gala - from arrival, to the minute the award winners are announced.

### SHARE YOUR REACTIONS

Please use the following in your posts to ensure content from this evening's awards program is featured and easy to find. Be sure to tag your team members, industry partners, and, friends.

Also, tell us what the award categories of **Growth, Resilience and Inspiration** mean to your own business. How do the aims of growth, resilience and inspiration influence your own leadership style and the work of your organization? What have you learned along your own journey that would be helpful to impart to others?

#AlbertaGRITAwards

#TourismGRITAwards

#HigherGroundTourism

#AlbertaVisitorEconomy

### WHERE TO FIND US

Follow the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA) to stay up-to-date on industry news and advocacy activities from across the province's tourism industry.

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/company/tourism-industry-alberta](https://linkedin.com/company/tourism-industry-alberta)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### EDMONTON CONVENTION CENTRE (ECC)

TIAA extends its sincere thanks to the Edmonton Convention Centre for its exceptional hospitality and partnership in delivering this, the inaugural Alberta GRIT Awards. ECC's world-class facility, dedicated staff, and gastronomic artistry has been pivotal to making this celebration possible and, at a standard that reflects the very best in Alberta tourism hospitality.

### ENCORE CANADA

A heartfelt thank-you to ENCORE Canada for their outstanding partnership and production leadership in bringing the inaugural Alberta GRIT Awards to life. Their creativity, professionalism, and unwavering support of Alberta's tourism industry exemplifies the spirit of collaboration and our shared passion for the future of this industry.

### GRIT AWARDS JUDGING COMMITTEE

TIAA gratefully acknowledges the Alberta GRIT Awards Judging Committee, all of whom are respected leaders whose integrity and impartiality helped to ensure that the GRIT Awards appropriately acknowledge excellence in tourism. TIAA is grateful to each committee member for generously sharing their knowledge and time in service of Alberta's tourism industry.

### TO ALL ENTRANTS THAT SUBMITTED A GRIT NOMINATION

The Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA) expresses its sincere appreciation to all those who shared their passion for tourism through the Alberta GRIT Awards nomination process. Behind every submission lies a commitment to excellence, a belief in the power of tourism to transform the economic potential of communities, and a willingness to inspire others by example. While not every nomination could be recognized as a finalist, each one of your stories contributes to the ongoing story of Alberta's tourism success. Your participation embodies the spirit of the tourism industry's grit and determination and we're stronger for having partners like you as part of the industry. Thank you.

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