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SATW Foundation Announces 2025 Recipients of the Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Awards

Thursday, September 11, 2025: Choosing among 1,457 entries, 26 judges at the University of Missouri School of Journalism conferred 120 awards on editors, writers, photographers, podcasters, social media experts and videographers in the 2025 Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Competition. The awards, overseen and funded by the Society of American Travel Writers Foundation, were announced today at the SATW annual convention in Detroit.

The University of Missouri School of Journalism conducted the judging, managed by Jennifer Rowe, Professional Practice Professor and Carol J. Loomis Faculty Fellow, along with Professor Heather Isherwood and newsroom coordinator Ellie Newberry-Wortham, all of whom coordinated the 26 judges.

Rowe and Isherwood agreed that this year travel journalists created work that frequently reflected a search for deeper meaning. Two words came up often in judges' comments: "connection" and "understanding." The pieces also sought to explore the reasons we travel. Judges repeatedly noted the expertise, personality and talent of the writers, citing entries that "put readers on the edge of their seats" or were elevated by "smart, agile reportage." In multimedia entries, that commitment was just as vigorous, Rowe said, and included videos that "take viewers on a rich journey" and offered "immersive soundscapes and intentional visual design" or Instagram entries that delivered a "masterclass in bite-sized travel storytelling."

Natalie Compton of The Washington Post received the Gold Award as Lowell Thomas Travel Journalist of the Year. The judges commended Compton's "unconventional eye for the offbeat, solid reporting and a strong charming voice." The Silver and Bronze awards for Travel Journalist of the Year went to SATW members Mark Orwoll and Tamara MC, respectively. The New York Times won gold for Newspaper Travel Coverage, led by Travel Editor Amy Virshup. Judges called the travel coverage "dazzling and impressive" delivered by "thoughtful, authoritative writers."

Travel + Leisure Magazine, led by editor-in-chief, Jacqueline Gifford, won Gold for Travel Magazines. "Inspiring photography, beautiful writing, informational details and a dose of fun create a publication that's immersive and varied," judges said.

Midwest Living Magazine picked up the Gold award in Travel Coverage in General Magazines. The travel coverage led by Julia Sayers Gokhale presents "delightful small towns, unexpected attractions and local knowledge to create an engaging combination in the travel coverage."



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The Gold award for Editorial Travel Website went to Adventure.com. Led by Executive Editor Oliver Pelling, Adventure.com was lauded as “a first-class travel website whose articles “connect travelers to the people who live in a destination” and reflect the “significance of the journey.”

“The Lowell Thomas Awards support, celebrate and sustain excellence in travel journalism,” said Catharine Hamm, president of the SATW Foundation. “We are proud of the independent judging by the faculty of the University of Missouri School of Journalism, a top journalism school. We are also grateful for the donations from the Board of Directors, SATW members and many other contributors who make these awards possible.”

The awards are named for Lowell Thomas, acclaimed broadcast journalist, prolific author and world explorer during five decades in travel journalism. The Foundation’s first Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Competition celebrated travel works completed in 1984. Since then, the Foundation has awarded more than \$655,000 to winners in the contest, the highest honor in North American travel journalism.

The sustainability of the annual competition is made possible by a generous contribution from Gold Supporter Carnival Corp., the world’s largest cruise company with a portfolio of brands. Its contribution helps make the prizes possible and supports the future of high-quality travel media.

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Please see the 2025 Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Competition winners below:

Category 101: Grand Award - Lowell Thomas Travel Journalist of the Year

Gold: Natalie Compton, The Washington Post
Silver: Mark Orwoll, Pleasantville, NY
Bronze: Tamara MC, New York, NY
Honorable Mention: Lilit Marcus, CNN Travel

Category 102 Travel Magazines

Gold: Travel + Leisure, Jacqueline Gifford, Editor-in-Chief
Silver: Condé Nast Traveler, Jesse Ashlock, Head of Editorial Content
Bronze: AFAR, Julia Cosgrove, Editor-in-Chief
Honorable Mention: Ori, Kade Krichko, Founding Editor, and Jessie Gallagher, Art Director

Category 103 Travel Coverage in General Magazines

Gold: Midwest Living, Julia Sayers Gokhale, Senior Travel Editor; Kylee Krizmanic, Editor-in-Chief; Hannah Agran, Executive Editor; and Mary-Beth Tibbens, Creative Director
Silver: National Parks, Rona Marech, Editor-in-Chief; Nicolas Brulliard, Senior Editor; Nicole Yin, Photo Editor; and Katherine DeGroff, Associate Editor
Bronze: Yankee Magazine, Ian Aldrich, Deputy Editor; Jennifer Johnson, Managing Editor; Katty Van Itallie, Art Director; Kim Knox Beckius, Editor, Travel & Branded Content; and Heather Marcus, Senior Photo Editor



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Category 104 Editorial Travel Website

- Gold:** Adventure.com, Oliver Pelling, Editor-in-Chief; Meera Dattani, Executive Editor; Tayla Gentle, Managing Editor; Nicola Bailey, Photo Editor; and Kassondra Cloos, News Editor
- Silver:** Fodors.com, Jeremy Tarr, Digital Editorial Director; Rachael Levitt, Managing Editor; Eva Morreale, Assignments Editor; Nikki Vargas, Travel Editor; and Stephen Horowitz, Publisher
- Bronze:** KidTripster.com, KyAnn Lewis, Editor; Jason Watkins, Videographer; Eliza Watkins, Teen Writer; and Shellie Bailey-Shah, Founder
- Honorable Mention:** CatalystPlanet.com, Amy Schrier, Founder

Category 105: Newspaper Travel Coverage

- Gold:** The New York Times, Amy Virshup, Travel Editor
- Silver:** The Washington Post, Gabe Hiatt, Travel Editor; Amanda Finnegan, Deputy Features Editor; Lauren Bulbin, Photo Editor; and Katty Huertas, Art Director, By the Way
- Bronze:** The Boston Globe, Chris Morris, Travel Editor
- Honorable Mention:** The Minnesota Star Tribune, Simon Peter Groebner, Travel Editor

Category 106: Robert Haru Fisher Award for Travel Health/Safety Coverage

- Gold:** Michael Wejchert, 'Swept Away,' Yankee Magazine
- Silver:** Betsy Andrews, 'Is Travel Actually Bad for Your Gut?' Saveur
- Bronze:** Kinsey Gidick, 'What Happens When a Doctor Responds to a Medical Emergency on a Plane?' Thrillist
- Honorable Mention:** Jennifer Murphy, 'Is It Safe to Travel to Mexico? I Think: Yes. Here's What to Know.' Outside

Category 107: U.S./Canada Travel

- Gold:** Dorian Fox, 'Wading In,' National Parks Magazine
- Silver:** Julia Sayers Gokhale, 'Cream of the Crop,' Midwest Living
- Bronze:** Jesse Ashlock, 'In Washington State's San Juan Islands, Time Stands Still and Nature Reigns Supreme,' Condé Nast Traveler
- Honorable Mention:** Mark Orwoll, Highway Stops, Then and Now from Stuckey's and Hojo's to Dinosaurs in the Desert, East-West News Service

Category 108: Foreign Travel

- Gold:** Cassandra Karpiak, 'This Safari Camp Offers the Dreamiest Treehouse Stay for an Epic Night in the Wild,' BLOX Digital Content Exchange/Associated Press
- Silver:** Peggy Orenstein, 'Second to None,' AFAR
- Bronze:** Andrea Sachs, 'Influencers Hyped the Amalfi Coast for Years. Now It's a "Theme Park."' The Washington Post
- Honorable Mention:** Eric Lucas, 'A Tale of Two Cities,' Epoch Times

Category 109: Cruise Travel

- Gold:** Jessica Lockhart, 'What I Learned on a Citizen Science Cruise Along Australia's Great Barrier Reef,' Toronto Star
- Silver:** Christopher Hall, 'It's Party Time on the Stockholm-Helsinki Ferry,' The New York Times
- Bronze:** David Hochman, 'Anchors Aweigh!' Virtuoso, The Magazine
- Honorable Mention:** Rachael Levitt, 'Forget Wellness, FEAR Is the Best New Travel Trend,' Fodor's Travel

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Category 110: Adventure Travel

- Gold:** Caroline Van Hemert, 'Navigating Orca Alley: One Family's Journey Among Rudder-Bashing Whales,' Outside
- Silver:** Justin Fornal, 'Cold Water Plunge,' Adventure Journal
- Bronze:** Bill Donahue, 'Riding High: Lael Wilcox,' The Red Bulletin
- Honorable Mention:** Bill Donahue, 'Unlock the Secrets of Cycling's Super-Agers,' Bicycling

Category 111: Travel News/Investigative Reporting

- Gold:** Rukmini Callimachi and Derek M. Norman, 'Lured by Luxury Vacations, They Were Stuck With Debt,' The New York Times
- Silver:** Natalie Compton, "'Barely Surviving": Some Flight Attendants Are Facing Homelessness and Hunger,' The Washington Post
- Bronze:** Vivian Song, "'Am I Now a Walking Target?" The Canadians Boycotting Travel to the United States Because of Trump,' CNN Travel
- Honorable Mention:** Valerie Bauerlein, Scott Calvert, Allison Pohle and Louise Radnofsky, "'Can't Wait to Be Home." The Final Moments of American Airlines Flight 5342 Passengers,' The Wall Street Journal

Category 112: Service-Oriented Consumer Work

- Gold:** Kate Nelson, 'How to Be a Respectful Visitor on U.S. Native Lands,' Condé Nast Traveler
- Silver:** Kathleen Rellihan, 'Top 8 Destinations on Earth to Take a Cold Plunge,' Outside
- Bronze:** Samantha Leal, 'As a Solo Female Traveler of 14+ Years, These Are the 15 Personal Safety Devices I Recommend You Always Pack,' Travel + Leisure
- Honorable Mention:** Andrea Sachs, Hannah Sampson, and Natalie Compton, 'The 45 Definitive Rules of Hotels,' The Washington Post

Category 113: Environmental and Sustainable Tourism

- Gold:** Bing Lin, 'Miles to Go,' Inside Climate News
- Silver:** Crai Bower, 'Starry, Starry Nights at Dark Sky Preserves,' The Saturday Evening Post
- Bronze:** Anna Fiorentino, 'Could Eelgrass Be the Next Big Bio-Based Building Material?' Smithsonian Magazine
- Honorable Mention:** Stanley Stewart, 'Nature's Keepers,' Travel + Leisure

Category 114: Cultural Tourism

- Gold:** Tony Perrottet, Debra Rosenberg, 'Greek Revival,' Smithsonian Magazine
- Silver:** Caleb Gayle, 'Can the Rodeo Save a Historic Black Town?' The Atlantic
- Bronze:** Lale Arikoglu, 'In Kosovo, Techno Is a Symbol of Resilience,' Condé Nast Traveler
- Honorable Mention:** Karen Gardiner, Nik van der Giesen and Mitsuru Wakabayashi, 'The Way of Craft,' Range

Category 115: Culinary-Related Travel

- Gold:** Marcia DeSanctis, 'Alla Bolognese,' Travel + Leisure
- Silver:** Hannah Agran, 'Cooking Forward,' Midwest Living
- Bronze:** Pier Nirandara, 'Diving and Foraging for Wild Food in Cape Town's False Bay,' Condé Nast Traveler



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Honorable Mention: Daniel McGinn, 'The Best Sandwich in Philadelphia Might Not Be a Cheesesteak,' Boston Globe Magazine

Category 116: Special-Purpose Travel

Gold: Karen LeBlanc, 'Crafting a Unique Cultural Journey Through Ecuador,' TravelWorld International

Silver: T.J. Olwig, 'Hearts Aflutter,' Hemispheres magazine

Bronze: David Farley, 'Back to Life: Rebuilding the Czech Republic's Miracle Village,' Ori

Honorable Mention: Chip Brown, 'Pedestrian of the Year,' AARP The Magazine

Category 117: Coverage of Diverse Communities

Gold: Rachel Ng, 'The Moving Story of Bringing Baseball Back to Manzanar, Where Thousands of Japanese Americans Were Incarcerated During World War II,' Smithsonian Magazine

Silver: Christopher Dong, 'Who are the Delta Gays? How the Airline Became a Haven for the LGBTQ Community,' USA Today

Bronze: Sheeka Sanahori, 'A Stranger Invited Me to Our Family's Reunion,' Thrillist

Honorable Mention: Claudia Laroye, 'Flying High: Meet the Métis Woman Behind Canada's First Indigenous, Woman-Owned Airline,' Adventure.com

Category 118: Personal Comment

Gold: Justin Fornal, 'What I Learned Chewing the Stimulant Khat Across Three Countries,' Thrillist

Silver: Joan Bregstein, 'An Elegy for Crystal Cove A7, Our Family's Piece of Paradise,' The New York Times

Bronze: John Penner, 'A Total Eclipse Is More Than a Spectacle. So I'm on the Road to See It — Again,' Los Angeles Times

Honorable Mention: Caroline Van Hemert, 'The Fleet-Winged Ghosts of Greenland,' Hakai Magazine

Category 119: Multimedia Single Work

Gold: Lale Arikoglu and Megan Spurrell, 'The Women Who Travel Power List 2025,' Condé Nast Traveler

Silver: Ben Buckland, 'Trekking Across Switzerland, Guided by Locals' Hand-Drawn Maps,' The New York Times

Bronze: Dawn Gilbertson, Daisy Korpics, Peter Champelli and Carl Churchill, 'What's the Fastest Way to the Airport? We Raced in New York, L.A. and Chicago.' The Wall Street Journal

Honorable Mention: Aaron Lavinsky and Simon Peter Groebner, 'Minnesota Waterfall Awards,' The Minnesota Star Tribune

Category 120: Special Packages/Series

Gold: Julia Cosgrove, 'Where to Go in 2025,' AFAR

Silver: Nick Mancall-Bitel, Nat Belkov, Lesley Suter, Monica Burton and Amy McCarthy, 'The Eater Guide to the Heartland,' Eater

Bronze: Annie Greenberg, Matt Paco, Max Dickson, Di Li and Ben Buckner, 'Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2025,' Lonely Planet

Honorable Mention: Christopher Reynolds and Elisa Parhad, 'The 101 Best West Coast Experiences,' Los Angeles Times



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Category 121: Still Photography on Travel

- Gold:** Pier Nirandara, 'Thirteen Photos That Will Make You Care About the Ocean,' BBC Travel
- Silver:** Sinna Nasser, 'Easy Does It,' AFAR
- Bronze:** Wayne Martin Belger, Jeff Campagna and Maria Keehan, 'Canyon of the Ancestors,' Smithsonian Magazine
- Honorable Mention:** Jake Naughton, 'The Timeless Appeal of Puerto Vallarta,' The New York Times

Category 122: Travel Book (other than guidebook)

- Gold:** Peter Guttman, 'American Character: Surprising Portraits of an Unseen Nation,' Skyhorse Publishing
- Silver:** Rowan Jacobsen, 'Wild Chocolate: Across the Americas in Search of Cacao's Soul,' Bloomsbury USA
- Bronze:** Leigh Ann Henion, 'Night Magic: Adventures Among Glowworms, Moon Gardens and Other Marvels of the Dark,' Algonquin Books
- Honorable Mention:** Rick Steves, 'On the Hippie Trail: Istanbul to Kathmandu and the Making of a Travel Writer,' Avalon Travel

Category 123: Guidebook

- Gold:** Jessica Gee, 'National Geographic Bucket List Family Travel,' National Geographic Books
- Silver:** Cassandra Overby, 'Home Base Hiking Europe: An Explore-on-Foot Guide to Unforgettable Destinations,' Mountaineers Books
- Bronze:** Valerie Stimac, 'Stargazing Around the World: A Tour of the Night Sky,' Lonely Planet
- Honorable Mention:** Andrew Nelson, 'Here Not There,' National Geographic Books

Category 124a: Travel Audio-Radio

- Gold:** Tom Grahslar, Tariro Mzezewa, Michael Olcott, Michaela Winberg and Bibiana Correa, 'Peak Travel Radio Special – Communities Fight Back,' WHYY, Philadelphia
- Silver:** Robert Carey, Mary Carey, Rudy Maxa, RJ Carey and Valerie B Selig, 'RMWorldTravel, August 10, 2024,' RMWorldTravel Connection
- Bronze:** Rick Steves, 'Travel With Rick Steves: "South Wales; Two Years in Kazakhstan; Global Empty Spaces,"' Rick Steves Europe
- Honorable Mention:** Annita Thomas, 'Hawaii Culture and History on Molokai,' WDUN — Travel With Annita

Category 124b: Travel Audio-Podcasts and Guides

- Gold:** Liz Beatty and Lia Grainger, 'Amateur Night Sky Chasers Who Changed the Science of the Northern Lights,' Here & There, Canadian Geographic
- Silver:** Derrik J. Lang, John McQueen, Angie Orth and Ginni Saraswati, 'Visiting Filming Locations Around the World: Part I,' Traveling with AAA, Automobile Club of Southern California
- Bronze:** Liz Beatty, 'Beauty and Darkness: Returning to the Northern Labrador Inuit Homeland,' Here & There, Canadian Geographic
- Honorable Mention:** Aislyn Greene, 'From Bomba to Bad Bunny: Searching for the Sounds of Puerto Rico,' Unpacked, by AFAR

Category 125a: Travel Video Story More Than 2 Minutes

- Gold:** Matt Costa and Tayla Gentle, 'Matt Costa x Adventure.com: Explorations of Sight and Sound, Vol. 2,' Adventure.com



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- Silver:** William Tang, 'My Wild Week Exploring Hidden Hong Kong Secrets,'
Going Awesome Places
- Bronze:** Preshita Saha, 'A Pro Chef's Guide to Indian Dining in London. Where
the Chefs Eat.' Condé Nast Traveler
- Honorable Mention:** Monica Rodman, 'We Stayed in the Scariest Motel in America,'
The Washington Post

Category 125b: Travel Video Story 2 Minutes or Less

- Gold:** Samantha Brown, Kevin O'Leary, Sylvia Caminer, Sharon Dymmel and
David Dean, 'Samantha Brown - Threatt's Filling Station on Route 66,'
Samantha Brown Media
- Silver:** William Tang, 'Best 11 in Hong Kong,' Going Awesome Places
- Bronze:** Raimee Iacofano, 'Must-Know Tips for Americans Traveling Abroad,'
Raimee Travel
- Honorable Mention:** Cory Lee Woodard, 'Visiting the DMZ as a Wheelchair User,' Curb Free
With Cory Lee

Category 126: Travel Blog

- Gold:** Lina Stock and David Stock, 'Divergent Travelers,' DivergentTravelers.com
- Silver:** Cory Lee Woodard, Curb Free With Cory Lee, Curbfreewithcorylee.com
- Bronze:** Kirsten Maxwell and Sarah Blevins, 'You Never Know Where Kids Will
Take You,' KidsAreATrip.com
- Honorable Mention:** Shivya Nath, 'The Shooting Star,' The-Shooting-Star.com

Category 127: Instagram Storytelling

- Gold:** Max Dickson, Annie Greenberg, Rachel Lewis and Deepa Lakshmin,
'Lonely Planet's New York City Shorts,' @Lonelyplanet
- Silver:** Juliana Broste, 'Turkish Delights,' @TravelingJules
- Bronze:** Nneya Richards, 'Fly into Milan and Explore Northern Italy,' @Nneya
and @Lonelyplanet
- Honorable Mention:** Lina Stock and David Stock, 'Ross Sea, Antarctica,' @Divergent Travelers

Category 128: Short Narrative

- Gold:** Brad A. Johnson, 'Showdown at The Grand,' OLTRE
- Silver:** Elaine Glusac, 'A Travel Writer Remembers Arthur Frommer,'
The New York Times
- Bronze:** Christopher Dong, 'Lost Your Luggage? Here's What Probably Went
Wrong,' The Wall Street Journal
- Honorable Mention:** Christopher Reynolds, 'A Definitive Yet Unserious Guide to L.A. for
Yankees Fans,' Los Angeles Times