



## **AITO Marks 50 Years with Anniversary Gala Dinner and Award Ceremony Honouring Travel Industry Leaders**

*AITO's Annual General Meeting took place in London on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2026*

**London, 18 March 2026:** AITO - The Specialist Travel Association currently representing over 100 of the UK's most trusted independent specialist travel companies, hosted its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Dinner and Awards.

During the event, 245 AITO Specialist Tour Operators, Specialist Travel Agents, Business Partners, Tourist Boards and guests were in attendance with a keynote speech from Matthew Parris, former Conservative MP and journalist for *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*. Drawing on his political career and years of travelling the world exploring lesser-visited destinations, Parris shared insights from both the political sphere and his adventures in global travel.

To celebrate the milestone, the event paid tribute to the SME travel sector's most influential and credible body, showcasing AITO 'through the years' from 1976 to the present day. The celebrations also looked back on this Golden Era with five former Chairmen and the current Chairman Chris Rowles who reflected on what AITO meant to them, the challenges they faced during their tenure and their proudest moments.

**Martyn Sumners, Executive Director of AITO, said:** "This Gala Dinner felt particularly special as we're marking 50 years of AITO, reflecting on how far the association has come and the strength of the community we've built together. Bringing the whole AITO Family together was a powerful reminder of the incredible sharing culture which exists within AITO. The evening was very much about celebrating with friends and colleagues past, present and future ensuring that the specialist travel sector thrives for the next 50 years."

The AITO Award categories included AITO Tourist Board of the Year, Tour Operator of the Year, Business Partner of the Year and the AITO Chair's Recognition Awards.

### **2025 AITO Tourist Board Partner of the Year**

This award is made to the AITO Tourist Board partner which – as voted by AITO Specialist Tour Operators and AITO Specialist Travel Agents - provided the best service and delivered the most interesting product innovations in 2025.

Gold: **Spanish Tourist Office**  
Silver: **Gibraltar Tourist Board**  
Bronze: **Switzerland Tourism**  
Bronze: **Greek National Tourism Organisation**



*L-R – Ian Bidwell (Evo) Valeria Knup and Alex Herrmann (Switzerland Tourism) Tracey Poggio (Visit Gibraltar), Pedro Medina (Spanish Tourist Office), Eleni Skarveli (Greek National Tourism Organisation)*

### **2025 AITO Business Partner of the Year**

This award is made to the AITO Business Partner which provided the best service and product in 2025, as voted by AITO Specialist Tour Operators and AITO Specialist Travel Agents.

Gold: **White Hart Associates**  
Silver: **The Firebird Partnership**  
Bronze: **Wild Dog Design**



*L-R – Chris Photi (White Hart Associates), Ian Finlay (Firebird Partnerships) Tom Dunn (Wild Dog Design) and Ian Bidwell (Evo)*

### **2025 AITO Specialist Tour Operator of the Year**

These awards celebrate those AITO members with exceptional customer reviews received between 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025

#### ***Platinum 2025 AITO Specialist Tour Operator of the Year:***

- Peter Sommer Travels

#### ***Gold 2025 AITO Specialist Tour Operator of the Year:***

- On Foot Holidays
- Bushbaby Travel
- Naturetrek

#### ***Silver 2025 AITO Specialist Tour Operator of the Year:***

- Mickeldore Travel
- McKinlay Kidd
- Martin Randall Travel

#### ***Bronze 2025 AITO Specialist Tour Operator of the Year:***

- Wilderness Scotland & Wilderness Ireland
- Experience Travel Group
- Ffestiniog Travel



*L-R Ian Bidwell (Evo), Nick Clark and Melissa Nichols (Experience Travel Group)*



L-R Ian Bidwell (Evo), Zoe Davidson (McKinlay Kidd), Graham Horner (Martin Randall Travel) and Martin Randall



*L-R Simon Scutt (On Foot Holidays), Abi Bush (BushBaby), Andy Tucker (Naturetrek) and Will Bidwell (Evo)*



*L-R Will Bidwell (Evo), Peter Sommer & Elin Sommer (Peter Sommer Travels)*



In addition to the main awards categories, the special **Chairman's Award 2025** was presented to four recipients, the first time this has been done in AITO's history. The winners included:

- Pam Hersey from AITO's Head Office
- Gemma Antrobus, Haslemere Travel
- John Tangney, Tangney Tours
- Martin Garland, Expressions Holidays

**Chris Rowles, AITO Chair, commented:** "Celebrating 50 years of AITO is a proud moment for our Association. Last night, we honoured outstanding members, business partners and tourist boards and I'm pleased to recognise the four recipients of the Chairman's Award for the first time – Pam Hersey, Gemma Antrobus, John Tangney and Martin Garland – whose contribution and dedication reflects the values that will guide AITO into its next 50 years. It's inspiring to see the passion and commitment across our members and I'm proud to be part of this community as we look ahead."

The AITO 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Dinner and Awards not only celebrated AITO's rich history but also reinforced its central role as the voice of SME travel business and its role in fostering collaboration, innovation and excellence across the UK specialist travel sector for the next 50 years.

**For events and information visit: [www.aito.com](http://www.aito.com)**

**ENDS**