



## **AITO winners of the prestigious 2016 Travel Writer of the Year Awards announced**

**19 October 2016**

The Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO, [www.aito.com](http://www.aito.com)) has announced the results of its 20<sup>th</sup> Travel Writer of the Year awards. This year saw the highest number of entries since the awards began in 1997, with 240 articles submitted, all of an exceptionally high standard.

AITO introduced a brand-new category this year – **Travel Trade Writer of the Year**.

Additionally, after much deliberation - and following a suggestion from a high-profile writer - it was decided to create two separate categories for the Travel Writer of the Year Award: **Under 1,500 words** (for articles commissioned to be short and punchy) and **Over 1,500 words** (for those commissioned as longer and more descriptive articles).

There were thus five awards this year:

- Young Travel Writer of the Year (aged 30 and under)
- Travel Writer of the Year – short (under 1,500 words)
- Travel Writer of the Year – long (over 1,500 words)
- Blogger of the Year
- Travel Trade Writer of the Year

Another innovation this year saw the first round of marking judged by 12 AITO members.

The AITO Travel Writer of the Year Awards are marked according to four key criteria – the judges seek copy that is **inspirational, informative, interesting** and **well-written**. Every one of the 240 entries were read by teams of two people to create a shortlist. All those entries shortlisted were then read again by four separate judges, with the average score deciding the top three winners in each category.

For the first time this year, each award was sponsored by **five AITO members**, each contributing the following prizes:

**Ramblers** -Travel Writer of the Year (Long) - £1,000 in Ramblers vouchers

**On Foot Holidays** - Travel Writer of the Year (Short) - £1,000 in On Foot Holidays vouchers

**Sunvil** - Young Travel Writer of the Year - £250 in Sunvil vouchers

**Tucan Travel** - Blogger of the Year - £250 Tucan Travel vouchers

**Classic Collection** - Travel Trade Writer of the Year - £250 cash prize

**AITO Travel Writer of the Year**

This award is always extremely hotly contested and, over the past 20 years, some of the most respected travel journalists in the industry have featured on the roll of honour (see below). It recognises excellence in the huge field of travel writing, and this prestigious award is always an impressive entry on any writer's CV. As ever, the top five or six writers in both categories were extremely close – just a couple of points separated the winners from other writers snapping at their heels.

### **Over 1,500 words**

The winner of the AITO Travel Writer of the Year (Over 1,500 words) Award for 2016 was **Liz Edwards** for her piece on rural Spain called 'Pig in Clover', in The Sunday Times Travel Magazine. All the judges were in agreement that Liz's piece did a fantastic job of describing, very evocatively, scenes from rural Spain, "creating pictures out of a few well-crafted words" and "tickling the taste buds of the traveller looking for the authentic Spain."

In second place was **Hannah McKeand** for her article 'The Polar Diaries' for SUITCASE magazine. The judges thought it was "extremely thought-provoking" and also remarked that "perhaps, as the author says, 'there is indeed some hope still for this little blue world'...".

In third place was **Chris Haslam** for his piece entitled 'Nepal: it's Time to Return', in The Sunday Times. One judge described the article as a "step ahead of the pack on a welcome to Nepal." Another judge made a short but sweet comment - "fantastic factual stuff – great job".

### **Under 1,500 words**

From a very big field of entries, the winner of the AITO Travel Writer of the Year (Under 1,500 words) Award for 2016 was **Michelle Jana Chan** for her piece on Nepal called 'Why Now is the Time to Visit Nepal' for The Daily Telegraph. One judge described it as "a very dramatic opening with a good mix of descriptive writing and informative, useful tips. Not a trip I'd ever take, but an extremely good read."

In second place, for his piece in The Times on Wyoming, described as having "real wow factor" with "great facts and descriptions", was **Aaron Millar**.

In third place was **Rachel Johnson** for her piece on Burma in Town & Country magazine. One judge said the piece had "a marvellously fresh style of writing. Wonderful photography, and gently amusing and enjoyable."

### **AITO Young Travel Writer of the Year**

This award celebrates travel writing talent for those aged 30 and under. It was a very large and interesting field of entries and the judges found it challenging to select the overall winner. One judge mentioned how enormously impressed and encouraged he was with the fine writing in the younger category this year.

The winner of Young Travel Writer of the Year was **Francesca Angelini** on 'Iceland's Really Wild Side' in her piece for The Sunday Times. Francesca's article impressed the judges with its huge range of activities - "from naked geothermal bathing in the open air to riding Icelandic ponies, amongst much else, this sounds quite the perfect – and very intense - activity break."

In second place was **Simon Parker** for his around-the-world piece in The Daily Telegraph called 'Sailing in the Clipper Yacht was Like Staring into the Jaws of Hell'. One judge said it

was a “timely reminder never to challenge the sea” and “the journalist pulls no punches with his graphic descriptions. I should like to have learnt why anyone would do this!”.

In third place was **Emily Ames** for her piece in SUITCASE magazine called ‘Between a Rock and a Calm Place’. It was felt that the journalist “brilliantly contrasted the initial scepticism of a travel writer with being swept up by the majesty and intoxication of Arizona and its calming health centre.” Another judge called it “humorous”, “fascinating” and “a triumph”.

### **AITO Travel Trade Writer of the Year**

This new award was created to recognise the technical writing abilities of travel trade writers – and also the understanding required of complex travel industry issues. Trade articles can tend to be less descriptive/colourful pieces and to be more informative, eg trade-specific pieces on companies which sell via the travel trade.

The first-ever winner of the AITO Travel Trade Writer of the Year Awards was **Joanna Booth** for her piece in Aspire magazine named ‘Big Beasts’. One judge said it was a “simple article, well told... with all the elements necessary to inform the reader of the total experience, very concisely written.” Another judge remarked how it was “a crystal-clear explanation of safari options in Botswana – essential information, but not often delivered in this way. Great descriptions, too, such as “hippos...resembling slow-moving pebbles in the river.”

In second place was **Josephine Price** for her well-written piece in ABTA magazine about the unknown side of Israel. One judge said “it was very informative indeed, and succeeded in capturing the reader’s attention right from the start”.

In third place was **Meera Dattani**, for her Travel Weekly piece on Sri Lanka - ‘A New Dawn’. One judge said: “Crikey! There can be nothing left about Sri Lanka that I do not know. An excellent trade article which clearly matches the editor’s brief.”

### **AITO Travel Blogger of the Year**

This category was a category introduced three years ago, to recognise the increasing influence of travel bloggers and their role within the travel writing community.

The winner of AITO’s Travel Blogger of the Year award was **James Draven** for his piece in Dearlydepartures.com entitled ‘Cape Horn: The End of the World as We Know It’. One judge said that it was “a poetic, hypnotic piece of writing – inspiring. I still feel slightly queasy!”.

In second place was **Emma Gregg** for her blog called ‘All Aboard the Flying Toast Rack!’ in *AllAboutEverywhere.com*. It was all about Brighton, and one judge said it was “a jaunty, friendly and interesting piece of writing, describing a proper day out by the sea”. Another judge described it as “a charming vignette of only 12 minutes of travel: a 12-minute holiday - a holiday in a lunchtime. Quirky, and proves you don’t need a grand, big, theme if the article is well-written. Delightfully original”.

In third place was **Mike Gerrard** for his blog on The Scottish Highlands in TravelDistilled.com for “The Bacon Roll Challenge’. One judge described it as “a nice, light article, short and (like the malt) sweet.” Another judge called it “whimsically informative” and said “you could practically smell the bacon”.

**Chairman of AITO, Derek Moore, said:** "Huge congratulations to all of the entrants for such a high standard this year. The new categories proved to be extremely popular, particularly the Travel Trade award.

"As usual, it's been a mammoth but very interesting exercise for the judges. I would like to say a special thanks to the five sponsors who contributed such fantastic prizes to the winners. And thanks are also due to the 12 AITO members who - again for the first time - kindly contributed their time and expertise to act as judges for the first round of these awards.

"I'd like to thank the writers of so many carefully-crafted articles, about so many fascinating destinations, for their brilliant demonstration of how vividly words can bring a place to life and drive demand to visit a destination, despite disasters and tragedies."

For further information, visit [www.aito.com](http://www.aito.com).

**-Ends-**

**Notes to editors:**

Shortlisted from a total of 240 entries, the names of those who scored highest are as follows:

**The top 10 places for the AITO Travel Writer of the Year award 2016 (Over 1,500 words) were as follows:**

1. Liz Edwards, The Sunday Times Travel magazine
2. Hannah McKeand, SUITCASE magazine
3. Chris Haslam, The Sunday Times
4. Sarah Barrell, National Geographic Traveller
5. Alicia Miller, The Sunday Times Travel Magazine
6. Nick Boulos, Wanderlust
7. Paul Bloomfield, The Sunday Telegraph
8. Nicky Holford, The Guardian
9. Sue Watt, The Daily Telegraph
10. Martin Hemming, The Sunday Times

**The top 10 places for the AITO Travel Writer of the Year award 2016 (Under 1,500 words) were as follows:**

1. Michelle Jana Chan, The Daily Telegraph
2. Aaron Miller, The Times
3. Rachel Johnson, Town & Country magazine
4. Matthew Teller, BBC News magazine
5. Ben Lerwill, Rough Guides
6. Nigel Tisdall, Marie Claire
7. Jeremy Head, The Guardian
8. Simon Heptinstall, The Mail on Sunday
9. Richard Mellor, The Explorer
10. Jamie Lafferty, The Guardian

**The top eight places for the AITO Young Travel Writer of the Year award 2016 were as follows:**

1. Francesca Angelini, The Sunday Times
2. Simon Parker, The Daily Telegraph
3. Emily Ames, SUITCASE magazine
4. Alex Allen, The Sunday Times
5. Cathy Adams, Escapism
6. Sophie McGrath, Lonely Planet
7. Hazel Plush, The Daily Telegraph
8. Nicola Trup, The Independent

**The top five places for the Travel Trade Writer of the Year 2016 were as follows:**

1. Joanna Booth, Aspire
2. Josephine Price, ABTA magazine
3. Meera Dattani, Travel Weekly
4. Tamara Hinson, Travel Weekly
5. Sophie Griffiths, TTG

**The top five places for the AITO Travel Blogger of the Year award 2016 are as follows:**

1. James Draven, Dearlydepartures.com
2. Emma Gregg, AllAboutEverywhere.com
3. Mike Gerrard, TravelDistilled.com
4. Hannah Summers, Burgersandbruce.com
5. David Whitley, Countrybycountry.com

**A warm thank you to everyone who entered the AITO Travel Writer of the Year awards, and many congratulations to all the winners.**

**The list of past and present winners in full:**

**The AITO Travel Writer of the Year award - *celebrating 20 years of excellence in travel writing***

2016	Over 1,500 words - <b>Liz Edwards</b> , The Sunday Times Travel magazine
2016	Under 1,500 words – <b>Michelle Jana Chan</b> , The Daily Telegraph
2015	<b>Oliver Smith</b> (Lonely Planet)
2014	<b>Oliver Smith</b> (Lonely Planet)
2013	<b>Mark Jones</b> (BA High Life)
2012	<b>Oliver Smith</b> (Lonely Planet)
2011	<b>Stephen Bleach</b> (The Sunday Times)
2010	<b>Stephen Bleach</b> (The Sunday Times)
2009	<b>Minty Clinch</b> (FT/How to Spend It magazine)
2008	<b>Chris Haslam</b> (The Sunday Times)
2007	<b>Peter Hughes</b> (The Daily Telegraph)
2006	<b>Chris Haslam</b> (The Sunday Times)
2005	<b>Nigel Tisdall</b> (Ultratravel Magazine, The Daily Telegraph)
2004	<b>Brian Jackman</b> (The Daily Telegraph)
2003	<b>Peter Hughes</b> (The Daily Telegraph)
2002	<b>William Gray</b> (Wanderlust)
2001	<b>Matt Rudd and Stephen Bleach</b> (joint winners – The Sunday Times)

2000 **Max Anderson** (The Sunday Times)  
1999 **Jane Bussman** (The Mail on Sunday)  
1998 **David Wickers** (The Sunday Times)  
1997 **Jill Crawshaw** (The Times and The Independent on Sunday)

#### **AITO Young Travel Writer of the Year award**

2016 **Francesca Angelini** (The Sunday Times)  
2015 **Maria Alafouzou** (SUITCASE magazine)  
2014 **Laura Goodman** (The Sunday Times Travel Magazine)  
2013 **Alasdair Baverstock** (The Daily Telegraph)  
2012 **Rory Goulding** (Lonely Planet)  
2011 **Nick Boulos** (Wanderlust)  
2010 **Oliver Smith** (Lonely Planet)

#### **AITO Blogger of the Year Award**

2016 **James Draven** (Dearly Departures)  
2015 **Emma Gregg** (All About Everywhere)  
2014 **Mark Hodson** (101 Holidays)  
2013 **Charlie Walker** (Charlie Walker Explore)

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