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## Hospitality Saskatchewan Honours Tourism Excellence at 2025 Awards Gala

Hospitality Saskatchewan announced the recipients of the 2025 Tourism Awards of Excellence at the Awards Gala on Wednesday September 24, honouring outstanding achievements in the province's tourism and hospitality sector. Held at Prairieland Park, Saskatoon, the annual gala brought together industry leaders, innovators, and community builders to celebrate the people and organizations driving Saskatchewan's visitor economy.

"These awards celebrate the vision and passion of the people who make Saskatchewan a welcoming and vibrant destination," said Jim Bence, President & CEO of Hospitality Saskatchewan. "Their achievements showcase the best of our province and strengthen communities across Saskatchewan."

This year's honourees are:

### TRAVEL MEDIA PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

*This award recognizes an outstanding Canadian storyteller for their commitment to excellence in storytelling and a published body of travel media work that celebrates and showcases Saskatchewan's tourism destinations, experiences, and stories.*

#### FELIPE GOMEZ



Felipe Gomez is an acclaimed adventurer, filmmaker, and creative visionary whose career reflects both global reach and deep local impact. Originally from Chile, he first gained international recognition as Felipe the Bass Invader, captivating audiences through his innovative bass and bike world tour. In Saskatchewan, Felipe made history as the first immigrant to serve as The Saskatchewaner, where his compelling blogs, photography, and videos showcased the province with authenticity and flair, earning him a devoted following. Today, as creator, director, and editor of the acclaimed "Big Heart | Small Town" web series, Felipe highlights Saskatchewan's diverse communities, including Indigenous food systems and cultural traditions. With boundless creativity, infectious energy, and an unwavering passion for storytelling, Felipe Gomez embodies innovation and inspiration.

## **BUSINESS OF THE YEAR / 20+ EMPLOYEES**

*Presented to a tourism business that exemplifies industry best practices in all aspects of its operations and is thus an example of all-round business excellence in the tourism industry.*

### **SASK. AQUATIC ADVENTURES**



Sask. Aquatic Adventures has established itself as Saskatchewan's premier floating water park operator, delivering innovative, family-friendly recreation across Regina Beach, Kenosee, Blackstrap, Duck Mountain, and Candle Lake. Welcoming more than 40,000 guests in 2024—with nearly one-third from outside the province—the company has become a powerful driver of tourism, supporting local businesses and showcasing Saskatchewan's natural beauty. Renowned for its 96% guest satisfaction rating, Sask. Aquatic Adventures blends adventure with uncompromising safety and hospitality. From lifeguard-certified teams and sensory-friendly sessions to VIP experiences and accessible programming, every detail reflects a commitment to inclusivity, excellence, and innovation. With strong partnerships, investment in high-quality infrastructure, and a reputation for worldclass guest care, Sask. Aquatic Adventures exemplifies leadership in tourism.

## **BUSINESS OF THE YEAR / UNDER 20 EMPLOYEES**

*Presented to a tourism business that exemplifies industry best practices in all aspects of its operations and is thus an example of all-round business excellence in the tourism industry.*

### **CANADIAN WESTERN AGRIBITION**



Canadian Western Agribition (CWA) stands as a world-class agricultural and entertainment showcase, epitomizing excellence, innovation, and community impact. Since its founding in 1971, CWA has grown from a three-day local show into a six-day international event, generating \$116.5 million in annual economic impact while remaining deeply rooted in Saskatchewan's culture. Guided by visionary leadership, a dedicated board, and a strong volunteer base, CWA exemplifies sustainability through diversified revenues, inclusive marketing, and a commitment to customer care. More than an event, CWA is a catalyst—building global industry connections, mentoring future leaders, and fostering community partnerships. By merging premier livestock genetics, thrilling rodeo entertainment, and educational programming, CWA delivers unmatched value.

## EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

Presented to a business that champions equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. This employer embraces innovation supports work-life balance and fosters well-being and productivity. They communicate with respect, reward and empower employees, encourage personal growth, and model integrity. Above all, they provide a safe, fair, and supportive workplace.

### PARK TOWN HOTEL



The Park Town Hotel has long been a cornerstone of Saskatoon's hospitality landscape, distinguished by its unwavering commitment to people. Independently owned and operated, the hotel fosters more than employment—it builds careers, community, and belonging. Longevity within the team speaks volumes: 43 employees have served over three years, 13 beyond a decade, five for over 20 years, with two surpassing 40 years of service. This loyalty reflects a culture rooted in respect, opportunity, and shared purpose. Employees are welcomed as family, supported with mentorship, professional growth, and flexible, people-first practices. Recent renovations and rebranding highlighted the team's resilience and pride, showcasing a culture that thrives through change.

## ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

*The Tourism Rookie of the Year Award is a special recognition presented to an emerging talent in the tourism industry. This prestigious award's purpose is to celebrate businesses/individuals that have made remarkable contributions and achievements in their early stages of a new tourism business, event, or service.*

### SASKATCHEWAN OPEN FARM DAYS



Hosted by Farm & Food Care Saskatchewan, Open Farm Days is a province-wide celebration connecting visitors with the people and places behind their food. Its inaugural year welcomed more than 3,000 guests to 36 diverse sites, including grain farms, greenhouses, wineries, distilleries, Hutterite colonies, and agricultural museums—each offering unique Agri-tourism experiences. To maximize reach, the event launched targeted marketing campaigns, created custom itineraries, and offered sold-out bus tours from Saskatoon and Regina. Hosts received extensive support, including free training through Tourism Saskatchewan, ensuring exceptional visitor experiences and high host satisfaction. With 41.8 million media impressions and strong community partnerships, Open Farm Days has quickly established itself as a signature provincial initiative—advancing agricultural awareness, rural pride, and

Saskatchewan's reputation as an Agri-tourism leader.



## INDIGENOUS TOURISM EXPERIENCE

*This award recognizes a business, partnership, organization, event, or attraction that incorporates Saskatchewan Indigenous culture, traditions, and stories into its product offering. This recipient demonstrates a commitment to delivering authentic Indigenous experiences and working collaboratively to enhance the tourism landscape in Saskatchewan.*

### WATERS EDGE ECO LODGE



Waters Edge Eco Lodge, located on the traditional lands of Waterhen Lake First Nation within Meadow Lake Provincial Park, exemplifies excellence in Indigenous tourism. Fully First Nations-owned and operated, the lodge weaves Cree language, teachings, and traditions into every guest experience, offering cultural integrity alongside environmental stewardship. Signature programs include Askiy – A Land Experience, a guided medicine walk led by Cree knowledge keepers, and Acâhkos – A Celestial Experience, a storytelling journey beneath the stars rooted in Cree cosmology. In 2025, the opening of a Tipi Village further elevated its role as a cultural hub, welcoming visitors to share in reconciliation and community celebration. With measurable impacts in tourism growth, cultural preservation, and sustainability, Waters Edge stands as a national leader in transformative Indigenous tourism.

## TOURISM EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

*This award recognizes a front-line employee whose professionalism, dedication, attitude, and quality of service exemplifies excellence in the tourism industry.*

### GENALYN DIOSO



Since 2016, Executive Chef Genalyn Dioso has elevated Northern Lights Casino's culinary program to national acclaim, embodying professionalism and innovation in Saskatchewan's tourism industry. A Red Seal Journeyperson, she is completing her Certified Chef de Cuisine designation, with her practical test set for June 2026. Genalyn has earned eight consecutive Best Local Chef titles in the Prince Albert BOB Awards, multiple Wintershines Great Soup Cook - Off victories, and a 2024 People's Choice win at Canada's Kitchen Party, with invitations to return in 2025 and 2026. Most recently, she competed at Saskatoon's Zoogala, where her team's dessert was judged Best Dessert. Through mentorship, Indigenous culinary integration, and service on industry boards, she advances Saskatchewan's culinary and cultural tourism with passion.

## **TOURISM BUILDER RECIPIENTS**

*Presented by Tourism Saskatchewan.*

*These individuals have made tourism an important part of their life's work, and their actions have had a positive impact on the industry they serve. Tourism Builders have helped to shape our sector as a vibrant contributor to the economy and position Saskatchewan as a welcoming destination.*

### **GEORGE GABER**



Since 1996, George Gaber has devoted his life to sharing the authentic Canadian cowboy way of life at La Reata Ranch, transforming it into a globally recognized symbol of Western heritage and rural tourism excellence. Originally from Europe, George fell in love with the Saskatchewan prairies and built a ranch experience that welcomes guests like family, offering them the chance to ride, rope and reconnect with nature under endless skies. His pioneering vision has positioned Saskatchewan as a premier destination for cowboy and ranching experiences and elevated Canada's profile in international tourism markets. A true ambassador, George's passion, leadership and legacy continue to inspire visitors worldwide while preserving and celebrating an important part of Saskatchewan's cultural identity.

### **DEAN AND SYLVIA KREUTZER**



Over the last 25 years, Dean and Sylvia Kreutzer have turned Over the Hill Orchards & Winery into one of Saskatchewan's most celebrated agri-tourism destinations. With no background in agriculture, the Kreutzer's left successful careers to pioneer prairie fruit growing, innovating with University of Saskatchewan cherries, apricot breeding, and trademarking the "Prairie Cherry." Their vision expanded beyond farming to create experiences that connect people to the land – culminating in Supper in the Orchard, an acclaimed culinary tourism series now hosting more than 80 events each season. From humble beginnings to award-winning leadership, their journey is defined by resilience, innovation and community impact. Today, their orchard produces premium wines, nurtures local talent, and welcomes thousands of visitors, embodying Saskatchewan's spirit of possibility and hospitality.

## ASHLYN GEORGE



For more than a decade, Ashlyn George has been one of Saskatchewan's most influential storytellers, shaping how the province is celebrated at home and recognized around the world. A digital creator, writer, photographer and speaker, she is best known for her award-winning platform *The Lost Girl's Guide to Finding the World*, which marks its 12th anniversary in 2025. Ashlyn's Saskatchewan focused content reached more than 3.2 million viewers in 2024, while her features in *National Geographic Traveller UK*, *Maclean's*, *info*, and more have amplified Saskatchewan's profile globally. A former Saskatchewaner, she continues to elevate local voices and experiences through authentic, collaborative storytelling. With passion, professionalism and innovation, Ashlyn has built a legacy as a trusted voice whose work has redefined Saskatchewan tourism.

Together, this year's Tourism Awards of Excellence recipients reflect the strength, diversity, and future potential of Saskatchewan's tourism and hospitality sector.

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