Outside Magazine Leads Field of Four Top Winners
In SATW Foundation Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Competition

Freelance Writer Kevin West Earns Travel Journalist of the Year Award


Kevin West, freelance writer from Monterey, Mass., is the Travel Journalist of the Year, earning the Grand Award for a portfolio of work.

The competition, for work from spring 2019 to spring 2020, drew 1,299 entries and was judged by faculty from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. The Lowell Thomas Awards, recognized as the most prestigious in travel journalism, were announced in a video presentation at the 2020 Virtual Convention of SATW, the premier professional organization of travel journalists and communicators. Members usually convene annually at a domestic or foreign destination but went virtual this year because of COVID-19.

In citing the Grand Award winner, judges praised West for bringing “artistry to every assignment. … Words are not just tossed onto the page, but parboiled and plated with care to deliver a … result that is as much about style as it is about substance.” West also won Bronze awards for Culinary-Related Travel and Environmental and Sustainable Tourism.

Also honored for Grand Award travel portfolios were Stephanie Pearson, freelance writer and contributing editor for Outside (Silver); Sebastian Modak, freelance writer-photographer and author of “The 52 Places Traveler” for The New York Times in 2019 (Bronze); and Aaron Teasdale, freelance writer-photographer (Honorable Mention).

In Newspaper Travel Coverage, judges praised The New York Times for “unpredictable content, rigorous research, polished writing and lush, striking photography.”

Silver for Newspaper Travel Coverage went to Wall Street Journal Off Duty, complimented for stories that are “smart, stylish and sophisticated — as well as practical and unpretentious.” Commended for its unusual story angles, The Plain Dealer in Cleveland took Bronze. Honorable Mention went to The Boston Globe.

Besides its top Travel Magazine honor, National Geographic Traveler took Gold in Special Packages/Projects for “Sound Journeys,” George W. Stone, Editor-in-Chief; and in Photo Illustration of Travel for “California: A Quest for Quiet,” by Jennifer Emerling. The magazine also earned two Bronze awards and an Honorable Mention.

Others in the National Geographic media family won two Gold awards: In Culinary-Related Travel, “The Path to Uncharted,” by Jill Robinson, in a special issue of National Geographic; and in Guidebooks, “Frances Mayes Always Italy,” by Frances Mayes and Ondine Cohane, for National Geographic Books.

For Travel Coverage in General Magazines, which contain varied topics besides travel, Yankee magazine took Gold for the second year in a row. Silver went to Midwest Living, Bronze to Outside and Honorable Mention to Westways.

The second Gold for The New York Times went to Pico Iyer for “A Journey Into Greece’s Land of a Thousand Stories,” in the publication’s Style Magazine. The newspaper also received two Bronze awards for work by freelancer Sebastian Modak as “The 52 Places Traveler” author (2019), besides a Silver and an Honorable Mention.

Besides its Gold, Travel + Leisure earned two Bronze, one Silver and two Honorable Mentions.

BBC Travel tallied five awards, including a Gold for “Is This the Future of Underwater Exploration?” by Ellie Cobb, in Multimedia Single Work.

Bloomberg Pursuits earned four awards, including Gold for “You Can Now Ride a Submarine to the Deepest Point on Earth,” by Fran Golden, in the Short Work on Travel category. Afar took three awards, including Gold for “Playing by Heart,” by Lavinia Spalding, in Special-Purpose Travel. And Matador Network won three awards, with two Golds: “Bars That Don’t Close and a Deep South Cultural Education in Natchez, Mississippi,” by Matthew Meltzer, in U.S./Canada Travel; and “Phil Good Travel: Things Get TRIPPY in Zagreb, Croatia,” by Phil Calvert and team, in Video on Travel.

“This contest illustrates why the Lowell Thomas Awards continue to be THE showcase for the best reporting and writing in travel,” said Emeritus Professor John Fennell, who with Professor Jennifer Rowe helped coordinate the judging. Winners this year stood out in several respects, Fennell said. Their entries show an ability to balance the personal with the universal, deftly weaving reflections with experiences to create stories that inspire. They also excel at practical information to guide travelers, he said.

Among the other Gold Winners are Kim Cross in Foreign Travel for “Noel + Leon,” in Bicycling; Emily Gillespie in Cruise Travel for “Instead of Flying to This Peruvian City, She Took a Slow Cruise Down the Amazon — on a Cargo Ship,” in The Washington Post; Melissa Sevigny in Adventure Travel for “The Wild Ones,” in The Atavist Magazine; and Taylor Dolven and Alex Harris in Travel News/Investigative Reporting for “Crew Are Stuck on Miami Cruise Ships With COVID-19 Spreading. Some Aren’t Being Paid,” in the Miami Herald.

Bob Krist won Gold in the Travel Book category for “Old Souls & Timeless Places” from Brilliant Press. Brad A. Johnson took Gold in Travel Blogs for his food and travel blog on BradAJohnson.net.

This year the Travel Audio competition was split into two categories, and Liz Beatty won Gold in both: in Travel Audio-Radio for “Rafting North America’s Wildest River System,” on Sirius XM Canada Talks, and in Travel Audio-Podcasts and Guides for “Inside Great Lakes Indigenous Culture — Before There Was a Canada/US Border,” on NorthAmericanaPodcast.com.

This year SATW Foundation is giving 99 awards in 26 categories and $21,650 in prize money to journalists in recognition of outstanding travel journalism.

The awards are named for Lowell Thomas, acclaimed broadcast journalist, prolific author and world explorer during five decades in travel journalism. The competition is open to all North American journalists.
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 in North America, Europe, Australia and Asia, including Carnival Cruise Line, Holland America Line, Cunard, Seabourn and Princess Cruises.

See following list of winners by category.

SATW FOUNDATION
LOWELL THOMAS TRAVEL JOURNALISM COMPETITION
Awards for Work Published in 2019-20

Faculty members of the University of Missouri School of Journalism judged the competition, with Emeritus Prof. John Fennell, Prof. Jennifer Rowe and administrative assistant Kim Townlain coordinating. There were 1,299 entries. In the following list of winners, numbers in parentheses denote number of entries in the category.

The Winners Gallery, showing the results, judges' comments and links to the winning work for all, may be viewed online at the Foundation website, satwf.com. For questions, contact: Mary Lu Abbott, SATW Foundation administrator, 281-217-2872, or awards@satwf.com.

Category 101: Grand Award—Lowell Thomas Travel Journalist of the Year (40)
Gold: Kevin West, freelance writer, Monterey, MA
Silver: Stephanie Pearson, freelance writer, contributing editor for Outside magazine, Duluth, MN
Honorable Mention: Aaron Teasdale, freelance writer-photographer, Missoula, MT

Category 102: Newspaper Travel Coverage (6)
Gold: The New York Times, Amy Virshup, Travel Editor
Silver: Wall Street Journal Off Duty, Deborah Dunn, Travel Editor
Bronze: The Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Susan Glaser, Travel Editor
Honorable Mention: The Boston Globe, Chris Morris, Travel Editor

Category 103: Magazines (14)
103A — Travel Magazines
Gold: National Geographic Traveler, George W. Stone, Editor-in-Chief
Silver: Afar, Julia Cosgrove, Editor-in-Chief
Bronze: Travel + Leisure, Jacqueline Gifford, Editor-in-Chief
Honorable Mention: Southbound, Kevin Benefield, Editor-in-Chief

103B — Travel Coverage in General Magazines
Gold: Yankee, Mel Allen, Editor
Silver: Midwest Living, Kylee Krizmanic, Editor-in-Chief; Trevor Meers, former Editor; Timothy Meinich, Travel Editor
Bronze: Outside, Christopher Keyes, Editor-in-Chief
Honorable Mention: Westways, Leslie Mieko Yap, Editorial Director; Elizabeth Harryman, Travel Editor; Eric Van Eyke, Creative Director

Category 104: U.S./Canada Travel (118)
Gold: Matthew Meltzer, “Bars That Don’t Close and a Deep South Cultural Education in Natchez, Mississippi,” Matador Network
Silver: Lillian Li, “All Eyes On D.C.,” Travel + Leisure
Bronze: Peter Fish, “The Forever Magic of Big Sur,” Coastal Living

Category 105: Foreign Travel (128)
Gold: Kim Cross, “Noel + Leon,” Bicycling
Silver: Chris Colin, “Road Tennis Is the Coolest Sport You’ve Never Heard Of,” Airbnb Magazine

Category 106: Photo Illustration of Travel (52)
Gold: Jennifer Emerling, “California: A Quest for Quiet,” National Geographic Traveler
Bronze: Dina Litovsky, “Philadelphia,” National Geographic Traveler
Honorable Mention: Gregg Segal, “American Idyll,” Smithsonian Magazine
Category 107: Special Packages/Projects (10)
Gold: George W. Stone, “Sound Journeys,” National Geographic Traveler
Silver: Nikki Ekstein, Chris Rovzar, Justin Ocean and James Gaddy, “Where to Go in 2020,” Bloomberg Pursuits

Category 108: Cruise Travel (53)
Gold: Emily Gillespie, “Instead of Flying to This Peruvian City, She Took a Slow Cruise Down the Amazon — On a Cargo Ship,” The Washington Post
Silver: Fran Golden, “Welcome to Your Luxury Cruise! Here’s Where It Gets Complicated,” Bloomberg Pursuits
Bronze: Christina Ianzito, “America by River,” AARP The Magazine
Honorable Mention: Maggie Shipstead, “Spirit of the North,” Travel + Leisure

Category 109: Adventure Travel (81)
Silver: Nick Heil, “The Tragedy on Howse Peak,” Outside
Bronze: Jayme Moye, “Thirteen Feet Under,” Alpinist
Honorable Mention: Adam Karlin, “Welcome to the Land,” The Statesider

Category 110: Travel News/Investigative Reporting (44)
Gold: Taylor Dolven and Alex Harris, “Crew Are Stuck on Miami Cruise Ships With COVID-19 Spreading, Some Aren’t Being Paid,” Miami Herald
Silver: Chabeli Carrazana, Rich Pope and Adelaide Chen, “Laborland: In a Theme Park Parking Lot, a Worker Sleeps in Her Car,” Orlando Sentinel
Bronze: Alex Perry, “The Last Days of John Allen Chau,” Outside
Honorable Mention: Nikki Ekstein, “Carbon Credits Won’t Be Travel’s Saving Grace,” Bloomberg Pursuits

Category 111: Service-Oriented Consumer Work (61)
Gold: Stephanie Pearson, “Does Travel Insurance Cover the Coronavirus?” Outside
Bronze: Katherine LaGrave, “An A to Z Guide to Not Killing the Planet When You Travel,” Condé Nast Traveler
Honorable Mention: Lisa Ballard, “Be a Savvier Traveler,” Image Health Watch

Category 112: Environmental and Sustainable Tourism (99)
Gold: Stephanie Pearson, “The Uncertain Future of the Boundary Waters,” Outside
Silver: Aaron Teasdale, “Building an American Serengeti,” Sierra magazine
Bronze: Kevin West, “Too Much of a Good Thing,” Departures
Honorable Mention: Bob Howells, “Prairie Home,” National Geographic Traveler

Category 113: Cultural Tourism (86)
Silver: Lavinia Spalding, “Love in a Time of Abundance,” Hidden Compass
Bronze: Jeff MacGregor, “The Last of the Great American Hobos,” Smithsonian Magazine
Honorable Mention: Christopher P. Baker, “The Ancient Guardians of the Earth,” BBC Travel

Category 114: Personal Comment (95)
Gold: Mark Sundeen, “I Was Flying to Montana to Bury My Son,” Outside
Silver: Diane Covington-Carter, “Departure Points: Dad’s Stories Resonated,” Los Angeles Times
Bronze: La Carmina, “I Traveled to Brazil With Author Elizabeth Wurtzel. Here’s Everything She Taught Me,” Fodor’s Travel
Honorable Mention: Steve Macone, “Ice Fishing Is Fun!” The New York Times

Category 115: Special-Purpose Travel (82)
Gold: Lavinia Spalding, “Playing by Heart,” Afar
Bronze: Taylor Gee, “Fame, Romance, and a Second Chance on the PCT,” Outside

Category 116: Short Work on Travel (61)
Gold: Fran Golden, “You Can Now Ride a Submarine to the Deepest Point on Earth,” Bloomberg Pursuits
Silver: Mary Bergin, “Pitmaster Puts Town on Map,” Chicago Tribune
Bronze: Sarah Khan, “Raise the Roof,” Condé Nast Traveler
Honorable Mention: Fran Golden, “Choose a Cruise Line With Strong Local Ties,” Travel + Leisure

Category 117: Culinary-Related Travel (89)
Gold: Jill Robinson, “The Path to Uncharted,” National Geographic (special issue)
Silver: Christopher Hall, “Purple Gold,” Via Magazine
Bronze: Kevin West, “The Tables of Babel,” Departures
Honorable Mention: Deborah Jacobs, “It’s Piquillo Pepper Season. So Don’t Mess With the Roaster in Tolosa,” DeborahJacobs.com blog
Category 118: Travel Book (17)

Category 119: Guidebook (21)
Gold: Frances Mayes and Ondine Cohane, "Frances Mayes Always Italy," National Geographic Books
Silver: Henry Kisor and Christine Goodier, "Traveling With Service Animals," University of Illinois Press
Bronze: Anne Howard and Mike Howard, "Comfortably Wild: The Best Glamping Destinations in North America," Falcon, an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group
Honorable Mention: Valerie Stimac, "Dark Skies," Lonely Planet

Category 120: Travel Journalism Websites (12)
Gold: TravelAndLeisure.com, Travel + Leisure, Deanne Kaczerski, Digital Executive Editor
Silver: FathomAway.com, Fathom, Pavia Rosati and Jeralyn Gerba
Bronze: Afar.com, Afar, Julia Cosgrove, Editor-in-Chief
Honorable Mention: MatadorNetwork.com, Matador Network, Laura Reilly, Scott Sporleder and Ross Borden

Category 121: Travel Audio (54)
121A: Travel Audio — Radio
Gold: Liz Beatty, "Rafting North America’s Wildest River System," Travel Update episode on Canada Now, Sirius XM Canada Talks Channel 167
Silver: Thomas Wilmer, "Door County’s Haunted Lighthouses, Cheese, Cherries & Family Resorts," NPR One/NPR affiliate KCBX
Bronze: Rick Steves, Timothy Tattan, Isaac Kaplan-Woolner and Kasmira Hall, "Travel With Rick Steves, Program 571: Pluto; One Giant Leap; Astronaut’s view; Summer of ’73," Rick Steves Europe

121B: Travel Audio — Podcasts and Guides
Bronze: Scott Gurian, "Medicine Man," Far From Home podcast

Category 122: Video on Travel (25)
Gold: Phil Calvert, Rob Chursinoff, Fraser James, Doree Simon and Scott Sporleder, "Phil Good Travel: Things Get TRIPPY in Zagreb, Croatia," Matador Network
Silver: Anne Banas and Anna Bressanin, "Anne-Sophie Pic: The Chef Who Rules France," BBC Travel
Honorable Mention: Kate Schoenbach, "The Africans Who Wear Victorian Petticoats," BBC Travel

Category 123: Travel Blogs (38)
Gold: Brad A. Johnson, Food & Travel Blog, BradAJohnson.net
Silver: Janet Steinberg, Travel Blog, TheTravelAuthority.com
Bronze: Sylvia Longmire, Spin the Globe, SpinTheGlobe.net
Honorable Mention: Amanda Williams, A Dangerous Business Travel Blog, Dangerous-Business.com

Category 124: Multimedia Single Work (13)
Gold: Ellie Cobb, "Is This the Future of Underwater Exploration?" BBC Travel
Bronze: Katie Knorovsky, "21 Visionary Women Travelers," National Geographic Traveler
Honorable Mention: Laura Kiniry and Daniel Kavanaugh, "For Salvadorans, Pupusas Mean Comfort," BBC Travel

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