

USTOA ANNOUNCES 2026 FUTURE LIGHTS OF THE TOUR INDUSTRY AWARD RECIPIENTS



Photos caption (left to right): Julia Cope, Backroads; Jennie Jouvenaar, EF Education First; and David Soriano, TUI Musement

NEW YORK – September 14, 2026 – [The United States Tour Operators Association](#) (USTOA) announced today the recipients of the 2026 USTOA Future Lights of the Tour Industry. This year's honorees have championed responsible travel initiatives through addressing the needs of sustainability, diversity, equity, and inclusion in their companies and communities.

The Future Lights of the Tour Industry program, now in its fifth consecutive year, invites Active and Associate Members to nominate colleagues who have made meaningful impacts in their organizations and communities by pursuing a future of responsible tourism. This year's Future Lights of the Tourism Industry has been generously supported by partner Visit Rwanda.

The 2026 Future Lights are Julia Cope, senior impact specialist at Backroads, Jennie Jouvenaar, head of sustainability at EF Education First, and David Soriano, transport fleet manager for Ultramar in the Costa Blanca Region at TUI Musement.

"This year, we received a record number of nominations for the Future Lights of the Tour Industry program," said Terry Dale, president and CEO of USTOA. "It is such an honor to have Julia Cope, Jennie Jouvenaar, and David Soriano as this year's Future Lights, paving the way to a responsible tourism future. These individuals are the shining example of what it means to support USTOA's mission for positive impact."

Meet the USTOA Future Lights

Julia Cope, senior impact specialist, is **Backroads'** first dedicated impact hire, brought on to build and lead a company-wide strategy that turns responsible travel into measurable action across three pillars: People, Planet and Community. Since joining Backroads, Cope has translated that framework into

practical programs that engage office and field teams around the world. Under the People pillar, she launched the company's first Employee Resource Groups to strengthen belonging and elevate underrepresented voices. For Planet, Cope helped advance Backroads' transition toward electric vehicles and waste reduction programs. For Community, she launched the Give Back program for field teams to engage in hyperlocal community service and support in the places where Backroads travels. Her work has established a clear, scalable model for embedding impact into the company's culture, operations and guest experience.

Jennie Jouvenaar serves as **head of sustainability at EF Education First**, where she leads the organization's global sustainability efforts across one of the world's largest education and travel companies. She began her career at EF in 2016 starting in operational roles, working her way through the organization while consistently advocating for impact and responsible practices. Her responsibilities span environmental strategy, responsible travel policy, supplier engagement, reduction initiatives, and cross-divisional impact initiatives. Jouvenaar works collaboratively on EF's sustainability framework across multiple businesses ensuring that sustainability is embedded not just as a value, but as an operational standard. Jouvenaar believes sustainability is fundamentally about change management, requiring resilience and empathy, and she invests the time to build relationships authentically. Her involvement with the USTOA Sustainability Committee and SIR summits further demonstrates her commitment to elevating sustainability standards not just within EF, but across the broader tour operator industry, always seeking synergies to accelerate positive change.

David Soriano, Ultramar transport fleet manager in the Costa Blanca Region at TUI Musement is proud to have led the introduction of HVO renewable fuel across TUI's Ultramar Transport operation in Alicante, Spain and Málaga, Spain. Working closely with TUI colleagues and external partners, he oversaw the conversion of 10 buses and installation of dedicated HVO fuel pumps, enabling the vehicles to reduce fuel related emissions by up to 90%. TUI Musement's school transport operation has also given the project an important educational dimension. Through the sustainability branding on Ultramar buses, children traveling to school can see that they are traveling on a vehicle powered by renewable energy and learn how transport can contribute to a more sustainable future. Transport remains a traditionally male dominated industry, but Soriano has actively encouraged and supported women to become professional bus drivers, and TUI Musement now has four female drivers within the team. Soriano is excited to continue this journey with TUI and Ultramar as they introduce their first fully electric bus in 2026 and work towards a more sustainable future for transport in Spain.

"Identifying and championing those who are driving positive change in our industry is at the core of our Future Lights program," added Dale. "We are incredibly grateful for our judges counsel, and for Visit Rwanda's partnership in supporting these future leaders."

The judges for the 2026 Future Lights of the Tour Industry include Alison Atkinson, commercial director at Avanti Destinations and 2024 Future Light recipient; Hege Vibeke Barnes, managing director at Innovation Norway USA; Genevieve Lawrence, director of sustainability and impact at MaCher; and Mandi Stefanak, on behalf of Visit Rwanda.

“Sustainability is essential to the future of tourism, and it requires continued collaboration and leadership across our industry. Visit Rwanda is honored to support USTOA’s Future Lights program and celebrate the individuals who are turning responsible tourism principles into meaningful action that benefits communities, destinations and the environment,” said Jean Paul N. Baruhura, strategic market specialist, tourism marketing division at Visit Rwanda.

The 2026 USTOA Future Lights will be welcomed and acknowledged during the USTOA Annual Conference and Marketplace in San Francisco, CA, November 30 – December 4, 2026.

For information on the 2026 Future Lights of the Tour Industry and to see past recipients, visit <https://ustoa.com/future-lights>.

For more information on USTOA, visit www.ustoa.com.

About USTOA:

Representing \$24.4 billion in revenue, the member companies of United States Tour Operators Association provide tours, packages and custom arrangements that allow 8.4 million travelers annually unparalleled access, insider knowledge, peace-of-mind, value, and freedom to enjoy destinations and experiences across the entire globe. Each member company has met the travel industry’s highest standards, including participation in the USTOA’s Travelers Assistance Program, which protects consumer payments up to \$1 million if the company goes out of business. As a voice for the tour operator industry for more than 50 years, USTOA also provides education and assistance for consumers and travel advisors.

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