



Mark Twain Travel Journalist Contest Rules 2026

All MTJA Active members in good standing are invited to submit work in the broad category of travel reporting published or broadcast from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

All entries, entry forms and payments must be received by August 6, 2026. Winners will be announced in the fall.

CATEGORIES

- **Newspaper Articles: Domestic** – Print or online newspaper article covering a U.S. destination.
- **Newspaper Articles: International** – Print or online newspaper article covering an international destination.
- **Magazine Articles: Domestic** – Magazine article from a print, digital, or online-only publication covering a U.S. destination.
- **Magazine Articles: International** – Magazine article from a print, digital, or online-only publication covering an international destination.
- **Culinary** – Print or online food/drink-themed travel articles.
- **Midwest** – Print or online articles covering destinations in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin (MTJA's geographic area).
- **Recent Sites** – Print or online articles originating from MTJA meetings at one of the six most recent meeting sites (2018-2025), including articles covering pre- or post-tours: Atlanta/DeKalb County, GA; Pigeon Forge, TN; Wichita, KS; Fort Myers/Sanibel, FL; Fort Wayne, IN; Mammoth Lakes, CA, Bismarck-Mandan, ND, Branson, MO, Playa del Carmen in Riviera Maya, Margaritaville Cruise.
The entry fee has been waived for submissions in this category. The prize money for these category winners has been doubled.
- **Short Copy** – Any print or online travel pieces, advisories, or news items that are 500 words or fewer in length.
- **Photojournalism** – The writing and photography for these print or online entries must be the sole work of one MTJA member. Your entry will be judged on the article and how your photography enhances the story.

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- **Group or Series of Photographs** – Three or more images (color or black and white) published together as a group, or in a related series of articles that appear in successive issues of the same print or online outlet or publication. Photographs must be the sole work of one MTJA member.
- **Digital Alternate Media Travel Journalism** – This broad category is meant to recognize travel-related stories and material published or reposted in various digital venues, including:
 - Podcasts
 - Online video broadcasts (YouTube, cablecasts, or online news programs)
 - Digital publication owned solely by an MTJA Active. Submit the main URL and URLs of 3 articles or an article series published within contest dates.
 - Specialty travel publications
 - Apps

Broadcast entries may have been hosted by other talent, but an MTJA member provides significant content. Because this is a changing and broad category, the judge will be asked to review all entries and make awards to those that best convey a sense of place, spark a desire to visit the destination or experience – and otherwise effectively communicate the joy of travel. Entries should be submitted in a common format that can be easily reviewed by the judge. PDFs and direct online links are acceptable.

ENTRY PREPARATION

Good scans are required for the PDFs. You can also submit the direct link to the online article. ****PLEASE NOTE: You DO NOT need to conceal your byline and publication name.**** (MTJA trusts the judge will be fair in reviewing all entries.) It is still very helpful to have some form of the category name and article title as part of the file name when you submit it for the contest.

For example: Say I'm scanning my Rye Croissants newspaper article, and my magazine article on Paella School in Valencia. I will name my PDF files **Rye Croissants.Recent Sites** and **Paella School.MagIntl**. If I also want to submit that croissant article under the newspaper category, I'll name that file **Rye Croissants.NewspDomestic**, and submit these 3 separate PDF files.

Articles must be submitted as PDF attachments and/or the direct online links along with the contest entry and payment. [Link to the contest entry form - 2026 Mark Twain Travel Journalist Contest](#)

A maximum of twelve (12) entries is allowed per person, but there is not a maximum limit to the number of entries submitted in each category. Individual articles may qualify for, and be entered into, more than one category.

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COST

\$12 per entry (except the Recent Sites category). A maximum of twelve (12) entries is allowed per person.

PRIZES

An independent judge with no affiliation with MTJA will review all submissions and select winners. The judge reserves the right to award multiple prizes, or no prize, in any category.

From the first-place winners, the judge may select one recipient for the Mark Twain Travel Journalist of the Year award.

Cash prizes will be awarded for First, Second and Third Place, as well as for Mark Twain Travel Journalist of the Year.

Please note: Categories receiving fewer than 15 entries will award cash prizes only for First and Second Place. Third Place winners in those categories will receive a certificate only.

Prize amounts:

- Third Place: Certificate and \$25
- Second Place: Certificate and \$50
- First Place: Certificate and \$100
- Mark Twain Travel Journalist of the Year: Certificate and \$500

QUESTIONS

For questions, please contact Erin Schmitz, (MTJA Administrator). admin@mtja.us or 319-529-1109.

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