

A scenic view of a Greek island, likely Santorini, featuring white buildings with prominent blue domes. The buildings are situated on a cliff overlooking a deep blue sea. The sky is clear and blue. A semi-transparent circular overlay is positioned in the bottom right corner, containing the title and website information.

ECTAA Annual Report 2020

ectaa.eu

Introduction

Covid-19 has caused an unprecedented crisis for the tourism industry. International tourist arrivals are projected to plunge by 60 to 80 percent in 2020, and tourism spending is not likely to return to pre-crisis levels before 2024. Travel agents and tour operators have to buckle up for a bumpy ride ahead. With travel restrictions changing constantly and in an uncoordinated manner, travel confidence is unlikely to resume anytime soon. But we are not giving up! ECTAA will continue to fight for relief measures and more flexible conditions to work in the 'new normal'.

While priority will be to help our travel agents and tour operators survive this crisis, we also need to look ahead. What is the travel and tourism industry going to look like post Covid-19? How can we shape it so that it becomes more resilient, sustainable and digital to compete in an increasingly global marketplace? There are many discussions at European level to determine the long-term policy strategies for the coming years, such as transport, consumer protection, tourism, etc. Through ECTAA you can provide input to these important strategies and be part of the reset of the travel and tourism industry!

We stand by your side in these difficult times and, to quote an esteemed colleague: "together we will bring the ship to safe harbour!"

Your president

Pawel Niewiadomski

Greece – ECTAA's Preferred Destination 2020



Out policy achievements and actions in 2020

ECTAA response to Covid-19 crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought the whole travel and tourism industry to a halt: borders were closed, airlines grounded, hotels closed, travel cancelled. Travel agents and tour operators have seen almost a complete stop in their activities, while enduring costs of cancellation and rebooking due to the pandemic and uncoordinated, continuously changing travel restrictions.

Faced with this unprecedented crisis, ECTAA has redoubled its efforts vis-a-vis the EU policy makers and industry partners to adapt the legal and business environment to these exceptional circumstances. ECTAA has met with the highest instances of the European Commission, notably Commissioner Reynders responsible for Justice, Commissioner Breton responsible for Internal Market (including tourism) and Commissioner Valean responsible for transport, to seek relief measures for the sector and to ensure a coordinated restart of travel and tourism. ECTAA has made alliances with many stakeholders to raise the profile of the travel and tourism industry and jointly address common challenges.



Flexibility required for tour operators

Early into the Covid-19 crisis, ECTAA issued a comprehensive position on the needs of the travel industry. This position called for a number of flexibility measures, based on 2 pillars, notably allowing the emission of vouchers and/or longer deadline for reimbursement and effective financial support via national/EU state aid schemes. With this canvas of actions ready, ECTAA Members were able to promptly engage with their respective governments to save their national market.

At the same time, ECTAA engaged with the EU Commission to quickly address the shortcomings of the existing EU legislations, in particular the package travel Directive. ECTAA was in dialogue at the highest level of the EU administration to find solutions for the travel industry. This resulted in the release of numerous recommendations from the European Commission, notably an [information note](#) of the package travel Directive, a [Recommendation](#) on vouchers and an [FAQ](#) on passengers rights and package travel.

The ECTAA Legal Committee met weekly to share information on the implementation of national measures and to exchange best practices. ECTAA also enabled this benchmarking among all Members, via the provision of regularly updated tables on state aids and voucher laws. The Legal Committee also drafted a [FAQ](#) listing the possible scenarios that might affect organisers during the pandemic (e.g. negative travel advises, quarantine...) and providing interpretation on how to deal with these cases according to the package travel Directive.



Watch out for airline insolvencies!

ECTAA has advocated for an airline insolvency protection for many years. In light of the Covid-19 crisis and the immense impact on airlines, ECTAA has massively pushed this issue with the EU institutions.

ECTAA has participated in an IATA working group looking into the issue of airline risk. In three calls, different possibilities for a solution have been discussed including an insolvency insurance, a fund or to keep the money on an escrow account until the service is delivered. Airlines raised arguments against every possible solution while agents made clear that this needs to be addressed and that there is political pressure to tackle airline insolvency protection. As a short-term solution, IATA will follow up on a risk management approach in line with the one applicable for agents. Airlines would be assessed and given a risk status. Depending on the risk status, certain airlines would need to provide guarantees.

Insolvency protection is also a major issue in relation to airline vouchers that have been given to consumers and travel agents/tour operators while there is no protection in place. While the European Commission has clarified in their [Communication of 13 May](#) that vouchers can be offered, this can only be with the consent of the customer. Also, Member States were encouraged to make the vouchers more attractive by securing them against insolvency. So far, Member States have done little to enforce these consumer rights and protect airline vouchers.

Insisting on airline refunds

As one of the first steps in the crisis, many airlines have switched off the automatic refund option via the computer reservation systems. This mechanism allows travel agents and tour operators to process a refund quickly in order to pay back their customers. By switching off this mechanism, airlines had to approve every refund individually. In many cases refunds have been delayed for months or not processed at all. This has been a massive issue for travel agents and tour operators. They either could not refund their customers or had to pre-finance the refund while carrying the risk of an airline possibly going bankrupt. Customers often do not understand why the agent could not refund and this negatively affects the customer relationship.

ECTAA has raised this issue numerous times with IATA and requested that IATA enforces their own rules which oblige airlines to refund in a certain time. The issue has also been brought to the attention of the Commission. A list of airlines not (timely) refunding was sent to IATA and the Commission. The Commission is looking into the issue closely. They have also received many complaints from consumer organizations.



Addressing Covid-19 issues with IATA

Since March, ECTAA participated in several PAPGJC crisis calls that were practically held on a weekly basis. Several issues around the Passenger Agency Programme have been addressed. ECTAA has made two proposals to the PAConf for voting. One is about the issue of a reduced Remittance Holding Capacity following the current crisis. ECTAA proposed to use 2019 as the base year instead of 2020 to give agents a high enough RHC to avoid that all agents hit the RHC when sales will increase again. A second proposal was to keep BSPLink open for agents to allow communication with airlines and look into pending refund applications in case of default and termination. The second proposal was accepted by airlines and the technicalities will now be closely looked at.

At the PAPGJC call in September, IATA presented a proposal to address “grey zones” of agency risk again. Given that airlines have still not addressed ‘airline risk’ nor provided data on outstanding refunds to assess airline risk, the agents’ representatives ‘walked out’ of the call. ECTAA was part of the selection team to decide on the new Travel Agency Commissioners (TACs), which are the independent arbitrators in disputes between IATA airlines and agents. The agents’ representatives managed to keep one of the existing TACs in office to ensure continuity in the independent arbitration system.

Preparing for start-up

Together with other stakeholder associations, ECTAA has been calling for the rapid and coordinated start-up of travel and tourism. Mid-May the Commission adopted a [package of measures](#), which contained proposals for a co-ordinated resumption of travel and tourism and a European strategy for the recovery of Europe’s tourism. It also contained a Recommendation to Member States on vouchers as an alternative to reimbursement for cancelled package travel and transport services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. ECTAA has pushed for more coordination on travel information. The European Commission has launched a website [Re-open EU](#) with relevant information provided by Member States on entry restrictions, travel documentation, quarantine and testing requirements, etc.

Strong, insistent calls for coordinated travel restrictions

ECTAA has joined forces with other European stakeholder associations to denounce the patchwork of uncoordinated travel restrictions and border controls across Europe, which threaten to erode consumer confidence as travel restarts. The Commission has adopted a Recommendation [proposal](#) for a more coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ECTAA supports the adoption of this proposal and further calls for the replacement of quarantine requirements with a testing protocol. ECTAA participated in the social media campaign [#testdonttrap](#) [#noquarantine](#).



Direct information on start-up plans of destinations

Starting-up travel and tourism after a lockdown is difficult. With the help of Members, ECTAA hosted 3 virtual meetings of ECTAA Members and the Ministers of Tourism of Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria respectively. The aim was for these destinations to provide direct information on their start-up plans and allow ECTAA Members to raise questions and problems that need to be tackled to allow the smooth resumption of activities.

Malev refunds finally paid out to agents!

After lengthy legal proceedings initiated by ECTAA against IATA following the insolvency of the former Hungarian flag carrier Malev in 2012, the case has been closed. IATA-paid out the agreed percentage of validated refund claims for agencies that participated in the court case. The court ruled in 2018 in favour of travel agents but further discussions followed on how the money should be refunded to travel agents. IATA and ECTAA reached an agreement this year. Today, nearly 4m Euro have been paid out to 160 agencies, 14 payments are still outstanding pending confirmation of the agents' bank details. The non-participating agents with claims have been approached by IATA concerning payments. While this case has taken a lot of time and effort, it is the first time that a court has decided, given the circumstances of the case, that customers are entitled to a refund through agents' refunds when an airline goes bankrupt. It goes to show that a faster and more efficient system needs to be put in place to allow such refunds in the future.



Setting priorities for the recovery of aviation

As a joint initiative of DG MOVE and DG COMP, an Aviation Roundtable on the recovery of the aviation sector was set up this summer. Two virtual meetings have taken place in July and September 2020 bringing together associations from the whole aviation ecosystem. ECTAA participated in the two calls to present the views from travel agencies and tour operators including our concerns around airline insolvencies as well as the ongoing consolidation of the airline sector leading to reduced competition. The aim of the aviation round table is to come up with a paper of the whole sector that reflects common views on necessary issues that have to be tackled.

Ensuring better information to rail customers

The European rail passenger rights legislation is under [review](#). The aim is to ensure that rail passengers benefit from certain rights when there are disruptions, such as delays, cancellation of services, missed connection, etc. An essential point in ECTAA's lobbying in collaboration with EU Travel Tech has been the access to on-journey information to allow travel agents to provide the same information as railway undertakings. That part is now being addressed to avoid channel discrimination.



Our priorities for 2021

Package travel Directive

The European Commission has to publish a report on the implementation of the package travel Directive (PTD) by January 2021. It has also announced a full review of the Covid-19 crisis and how it affected the package travel industry by 2022. ECTAA will be advocating a two step approach: **immediate revision of the PTD** to alleviate the huge financial burden of assistance and refund obligations in extraordinary circumstances, such as the Covid-19. And a more **thorough change of the PTD** to rebalance the responsibilities and obligations of all actors in the travel and tourism ecosystem. This is the top priority for ECTAA today and the years to come.

Consumer legislation and digital platforms

ECTAA participated in the public consultation on a New Consumer Agenda, which -among others- specifically addresses the impact of Covid-19 on **consumer rights legislations in travel** (package travel Directive, passenger rights legislations, accommodation legislations). ECTAA will advocate for a rebalancing of responsibilities in travel legislation.

ECTAA also participated in the public consultation on the Digital Service Act. ECTAA will engage in the upcoming debate on the **platform economy** to ensure that the specific situation of travel agents is taken into account.

European strategy for transport

ECTAA participated in the public consultation covering the 2011 White Paper “Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system” and on the announced future European Strategy for a Sustainable and Smart Mobility. ECTAA will continue to feed into the **European Strategy for a Sustainable and Smart Mobility**.

Review of air transport legislation impacting travel agents

The Air Services Regulation (Regulation 1008/2008) as well as the CRS Code of Conduct (Regulation 80/2009) are under review and an impact assessment is under way. ECTAA has participated in the public consultation on the Air Services Regulation. A report was expected for the end of 2020, but there could be delays as the Commission is closely watching the effects of the Covid-19 crisis on a possible revision. Especially relevant for ECTAA is the aspect of **price transparency and access to content**.

The public consultation for the CRS Code of Conduct has not started yet. ECTAA participated in the evaluation process. In light of technological developments in distribution and the strong market power of some major airlines, ECTAA is pushing for an extension of the scope and a **level playing field for all reservation system providers**.

Travel coordination

ECTAA will continue to **press for more coordination of travel restrictions within Europe**. There is already a ‘White List’ of non-EU countries, for which the ban on non-essential travel to the EU has been lifted. A similar white list should be established for non-essential travel of EU citizens to non-EU countries. Moreover, Member States need to swiftly adopt and implement a common approach to travel restrictions, such as contained in the Commission [proposal](#) on the coordination of travel restrictions.

Special VAT scheme for travel agents

ECTAA contributed to the Commission consultation on the evaluation of the special VAT scheme for travel agents, the purpose of which is to assess if, and to what extent, the special VAT scheme for travel agents is still fit for purpose. ECTAA has been calling for the **modernisation of the VAT rules**, which date from 1977. Following a comprehensive [study](#) on the application of the special scheme, it is important that the Commission follows-up on this evaluation and starts an impact assessment for the **review of the special scheme**.

Tourism Agenda 2050

The travel and tourism industry is one of the most affected industries by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the Commission, the tourism ecosystem will require € 161 billion worth of investment to bounce back to pre-crisis levels and to meet the pressing challenges of strengthening resilience and digital and green transitions. As part of the recovery plan, the Commission intends to establish **roadmap 2050 towards a sustainable, innovative and resilient tourism ecosystem**, the so-called European Agenda for Tourism 2050. ECTAA will actively contribute to the elaboration of this roadmap and ensure that there are funds available to help the industry in their digital and green transition.

Our work programme 2021

The following is a list of issues to be addressed in 2020-21 (not exhaustive):

Sustainability – European Green Deal	Strategy for sustainable and smart mobility Empowering the consumer for the green transition European Climate Law enshrining the 2050 climate neutrality objective New Circular Economy Action Plan
Digital services	Digital Services Act
Consumer protection	A new Consumer Agenda Evaluation of package travel Directive Review of geo-blocking rules
Transport	Revision of the provision of air services Revision of the CRS Code of Conduct Revision of airport charges Revision of slot allocation rules
Passenger rights	Recast of rail passengers' rights and obligations Recast of air passenger rights Protection against airline insolvency
Tourism	Tourism Agenda 2050 and EU funding for tourism
VAT	Proposal as regards rates of value added tax Impact assessment of the special VAT scheme for travel agents
Home affairs	Implementation of the Passenger Name Record (PNR) Directive
IATA	ECTAA complaint against IATA - Review of the Passenger Agency Programme Monitoring the implementation of New Gen ISS and NDC Participation to PAPGJC and PAConf
Destination matters	Destination issues, such as health and safety, travel restrictions, taxes and fees, etc.



Our sustainability project

ECTAA is participating in an EU-funded project - SUSTOUR- that promotes the uptake of the Travelife programme. The latter provides online training and practical tools for sustainability management and certification for travel agents and tour operators. The awarded companies comply with more than 150 criteria, related to an operators' office management, product range, international business partners and customer information. The Travelife standard is covering the ISO 26000 Corporate Social Responsibility themes, including environment, biodiversity, human rights and labour relations; and is formally recognised as being in full compliance with the UN supported Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

The project is lead by ECEAT in collaboration with ECTAA and a number of ECTAA Members, including UHPA (Croatia), ACAVe (Spain), DRF (Denmark) and ANVR (Netherlands).

Our Preferred Destination 2020

Greece – A 365 Day Destination Explore 13 Wonderlands



Attica . The land of the eternal, bright Attic Light

Discover world heritage sites and ancient monuments. Visit Parthenon, the Acropolis Museum, the Herodion ancient open-air theatre, as well as the Panathenaic Stadium where the first modern Olympic Games were held. Enjoy the sunset view at the Temple of Poseidon in Cape Sounio. Run in the authentic Athens Marathon in November. Don't miss the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre, the city's newest cultural venue. Sail along the Athens Riviera and cruise to the Argosaronic islands.



Eastern Macedonia and Thrace

A multi-cultural heritage area

Enjoy the emerald waters of Thasos and Samothraki Islands. Wander in the famous Evros River Delta. Go skiing on Mt. Falakro. Explore the Rodopi mountain range. Go hiking or bird-watching in its forests and wetlands. Join the locals in lively festivals and celebrations.



Central Macedonia

The legendary birthplace of Alexander the Great

Tour the sites of Vergina and Pella - the ancient Macedonian State. Hike to Mt. Olympus, the residence of the ancient Greek gods. Explore Thessaloniki and learn all about its history, culture and gastronomy. Enjoy the summer in the famous beaches of Halkidiki and the Olympic Riviera.



Western Macedonia

The alpine beauty of Greece

Explore imposing mountains and breathtaking lakes. Tour Prespes Lakes, a famous UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visit Kastoria and its impressive Byzantine churches. Discover the mushroom and crocus-growing areas. Follow the E4 and E6 European trails.



Epirus

The pristine paradise of Greece's mainland

Hike along majestic mountainous landscapes and rivers. Visit traditional stone villages and meet hearty people. Enjoy the wide range of alternative outdoor activities. Savour mouthwatering salty or sweet pies. Take a bike tour around Pamvotida Lake in Ioannina and admire modern art sculptures along the banks.



Thessaly

One region, many a charm

Visit Meteora Rocks, an awe-inspiring UNESCO World Heritage Site. Go hiking on Mt. Pelion - the legendary mountain of the Centaurs. Escape to the green Sporades islands - home to Monachus Monachus - the well-known Mediterranean monk seal.



Ionian Islands

Small niches of paradise surrounded by turquoise waters
Visit Ithaca the land of King Odysseus. Explore UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as the historic Old Town of Corfu. Go caving in Kefalonia Island. Enjoy windsurfing and kitesurfing on Lefkada Island. Taste mandolato - a delicious sweet, on Zakynthos Island.



Western Greece

Greece's window to the West

Visit Ancient Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympic Games. Join the famous Carnival Parade in Patras and have the time of your life. Enjoy winter sports at Kalavryta's ski resort, only half an hour's ride from the seaside. Join the celebrations in Nafpaktos for the Lepanto Naval Battle anniversary in October.



Central Greece

A fascinating mainland

Visit Delphi, believed by Ancient Greeks to be the navel [i.e. the centre] of the world. Stay in cosmopolitan winter resorts and visit the Arachova ski centre. Go hiking on Mt. Dirfys on Evia Island and relax by Aidipsos natural hot springs.



The Peloponnese

A region known since the dawn of history

Explore towns and ruins of ancient kingdoms dating back to the Mycenaean Period [1600-1100 BC].
Watch performances at the world-famous ancient theatre of Epidaurus.

Visit medieval Byzantine and Frankish castles and learn about their legends. Have a refreshing swim in coves and far stretching beaches. Take part in harvesting grapes, oranges and olives.



North Aegean Islands

Unspoilt nature

Choose Chios and taste the world famous fragrant mastic, a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage product. Discover the secrets of longevity and wellness on Ikaria Island. Taste ouzo (an aniseed spirit) on Lesbos Island and take a trip to Sigri Petrified Forest (UNESCO World Heritage Site). Thrill your palate with Muscat wine on Lemnos Island.



South Aegean Islands

Bright Blue, Shining White

Go island-hopping to the most famous Greek islands. Explore gorgeous sandy or rocky beaches. Discover their traditional lifestyle and upbeat nightlife. Choose them as the ideal setting for your honeymoon or wedding.



Crete

Steeped in history and blessed by Nature

Tour ancient palaces and settlements of the Minoan Civilisation. Swim in famous beaches and stay in traditional villages. Savour Cretan gastronomy and discover the elixir of life. Enjoy the warm hospitality of locals. Go hiking across Samaria Gorge, the longest gorge in Europe.

Our Members



Full Members

ÖRV and WKÖ, Austria

FIT, Belgium

ABTTA, Bulgaria

UHPA and UPA-HGK, Croatia

ACTA, Cyprus

ACKKA, Czech Republic

DRF, Denmark

ETFL, Estonia

SMAL, Finland

EDV, France

DRV, Germany

HATTA, Greece

MUISZ, Hungary

ITAA, Ireland

CONFTURISMO, Italy

ALTA, Latvia

NTVA, Lithuania

FATTA, Malta

ANVR, Netherlands

VIRKE, Norway

PIT, Poland

APAVT, Portugal

ANAT, Romania

SACKA, Slovakia

ZTAS, Slovenia

ACAVE, Spain

SRF, Sweden

SRV, Switzerland

ABTA, United Kingdom

Allied Members

Amadeus

Sabre

Travelport

GNT0 (2020)

International Members

ITTAA, Israel

FNAVM, Morocco

FTAV, Tunisia

MATTA, Malaysia