

ECTIAA

THE EUROPEAN TRAVEL AGENTS'
AND TOUR OPERATORS' ASSOCIATIONS

Let's **unlock**
Europe's travel potential.



MANIFESTO

2024

Let's unlock Europe's travel potential

Have you ever stopped to reflect on the variety of Europe's tourism offerings?

Our continent offers Pico Island with its majestic volcano in the Azores, the vibrant villages of Villajoyosa in Spain, the picturesque half-timbered houses of Ulm in Germany, the painted village of Čičmany in Slovakia, unique sights like the Belogradchik Rocks in Bulgaria, the green-roofed houses of Bour, and the floating houses of Lake Bokod in Hungary.

However, discovering such destinations isn't always straightforward. This is where the expertise of travel advisors becomes indispensable. These professionals can tailor trips that incorporate unique destinations, offering opportunities for travellers to enrich their journeys and engage with local cultures.

Tourism has shown remarkable resilience and continues to grow every year despite numerous crises since 2008. However, the flip side of this growth is that certain regions suffer from over tourism. This shift poses challenges but also underscores the need for responsible growth in the tourism sector. **By promoting lesser-known destinations, travel advisors play a pivotal role in distributing tourist footfall more evenly**, which helps preserve the natural and cultural integrity of these places.

But travel advisors also hold a significant role for consumers, both leisure and business travellers. **They offer choice and transparency in travel options and help to ensure a seamless travel experience.** They are commonly seen as a 'one stop shop' for all travel arrangements, including booking of travel and insurance protection, visa applications, information on foreign travel requirements, custom-designed trips, etc. They can also play an active

and vital role in affecting changes in behaviours and attitudes towards more sustainable forms of tourism by integrating sustainability in their selection of suppliers.

So, how do we unlock Europe's full tourism potential, promote off-the-beaten-path experiences, and offer tourists and business travellers a broader spectrum of seamless and sustainable travel options?

Unlocking the Full Potential of Europe's Travel Advisors

Travel advisors, more traditionally known as travel agents and tour operators, have reinvented themselves in recent years. They've evolved from simple intermediaries into expert guides within a complex travel system, uncovering Europe's hidden treasures for travellers throughout the continent.

There are currently more than 80.000 such companies in Europe, and in the decades to come, they will take on a more important role than ever, as people demand more tailored, sustainable, and ethical alternatives to traditional tourism offerings.

The truth is, however, that travel advisors could be doing a whole lot more for regional development and tourism in Europe. Today they are held back by an uncompetitive tourist market, where the market dominance of suppliers means that many of Europe's tourism destinations are underserved.

ECTAA has been the voice of travel advisors for more than 60 years. We are committed to ensuring that travel advisors, and by extension European tourism, can achieve its full potential.

For a competitive and sustainable travel industry, what do we need?

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Adopting a Fair and Balanced Revision of the Package Travel Directive

The existing Directive ensures robust consumer protection for package holidays, offering clear information, financial protection against organiser insolvency, and assistance during the trip. As the Directive undergoes revision, **EU decision-makers should avoid imposing prepayment limitations**. Unlike direct purchases from suppliers (e.g. air transport), travel packages already offer financial protection against organiser insolvency. We also need clearer and simpler definitions to facilitate the smooth implementation of the legislation.

EU decision-makers should avoid imposing prepayment limitations



The floating houses of Lake Balaton, Hungary

Introducing Airline Failure Protection

There is currently no obligation on airlines to provide guarantees or any other protection for the refund and repatriation of stranded passengers when they cease operations. This is a serious consumer detriment and distorts competition between airlines and tour operators. It results in direct losses for travel agents and tour operators organising package travels as they need to find costly alternatives to protect their package customers, on top of their obligation to provide guarantees against their own insolvency. ECTAA calls on the EU regulators to provide adequate consumer protection against airline failures and insolvencies and to level the playing field between airlines and tour operators.

TRANSPORT

Ensuring Consumer Choice and Transparency of Travel Options

Travel intermediaries create transparency and choice by offering diverse travel options beyond what individual transport companies provide on their websites. This includes a wide range of multimodal travel options. To present the full range of travel options to their customers, **intermediaries need access to the broadest possible content (fares, schedules, ancillary services) on fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory terms**. An ambitious Multimodal Digital Mobility Services (MDMS) proposal is crucial for promoting multimodal travel and increasing the uptake of more sustainable travel options.



Intermediaries need access to the broadest possible content on fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory terms

Establishing Effective Passenger Rights for Uni and Multimodal Transport

The Commission has adopted a package of proposals to revise the existing passenger rights legislation (air, rail, maritime, and bus/coach transport) and to introduce new rights for multimodal journeys. For these rights to be effective, EU legislators should ensure that **ticket refund rules through intermediaries are workable and that any sharing of passenger contact details for communication of operational disruptions is not misused by airlines for marketing purposes**. In the context of multimodal passenger rights, travel intermediaries should inform customers about the contract and the rights that apply to the ticket(s) they purchased but must not be held liable for operational disruptions, such as cancellations or missed connections when they offer different travel itinerary options.

Ticket refund rules through intermediaries should be workable

TAXATION

Ensuring VAT Rules that Work

Travel agents benefit from a special VAT scheme, which simplify VAT rules and ensure better VAT revenue sharing between Member States. The 2020 Commission evaluation of the special scheme concluded that while the scheme has been effective, it presents several shortcomings and is not applied uniformly across the EU. Key tourism industry stakeholders, including ECTAA, have been calling for a thorough review of the special scheme to update the rules, address competition distortions, and ensure uniform application across Europe.

ECTAA calls for a review of the VAT special scheme

Prevent Unfair Taxation of Platform Economy

As part of the 'VAT in the Digital Age' package, the Commission has proposed new VAT rules for platform operators in the short-term accommodation and transport sectors. Under the proposed rules, platforms will become responsible for collecting and remitting VAT to tax authorities when their sellers do not, for example, because they are small businesses or individual providers (so-called 'Deemed Supplier Regime'). We strongly oppose the proposed **DSR rules, which are non-proportional, create channel discrimination, generate distortions as the underlying sellers are not able to deduct input VAT, and fragment the market** due to multiple opt-outs available to Member States.

DSR rules are non-proportional, create channel discrimination, generate distortions and fragment the market

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Prioritising Tourism in Policymaking

Recognising that tourism is an important employer and generates more than 10% to EU GDP, tourism should be prioritized in EU policymaking. The Transition Pathways for Tourism has made recommendations to make Europe's tourism sector more sustainable, digital and resilient. EU decision makers and industry stakeholders need to work together to unlock tourism's potential. With this in mind, we call on the European Commission to continue the dialogue with tourism stakeholders and carefully review the impact of EU legislative initiatives on tourism. We also call on the European Parliament to institutionalise the dialogue with tourism stakeholders through the setting-up of an EP Tourism Task Force.



Belogradchik rocks, Bulgaria

Supporting the Green Transition of Tourism

Sustainability is essential for the long-term success of the tourism sector. The European Union has taken on an ambitious environmental policy agenda during the 2019-2024 legislative term. Major legislative measures, such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the Green Claims Directive, pose significant changes and challenges for the sector, especially for SMEs. To support travel companies in their sustainability efforts and compliance with new regulations, ECTAA advocates for the **creation of a dedicated budget line for tourism, providing direct funding opportunities for these companies to invest in the sustainable transition.**

ECTAA calls for the creation of a dedicated budget line for tourism, to invest in the sustainable transition

For the next five years

It is essential to balance maintaining the competitiveness of the travel industry and ensuring its sustainability. This dual focus will be a cornerstone of the EU agenda, keeping the industry vibrant and connected with public opinion. ECTAA will continue to advocate for fair regulations, effective consumer protections, and sustainable practices to achieve this goal.



Travel Advisors in Europe

80.000 companies*

350.000 employees*

€ 197 billion turnover**

€ 60 billion in airticket sales**

300 million tickets sold per year***

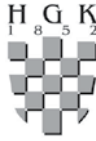
210 million travel packages sold per year***

* Eurostat 2022

** Eurostat 2016

*** 2019 based on ECTAA industry survey

FULL MEMBERS



AFFILIATED MEMBERS



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