

PRESS RELEASE

Announcement of an open call for SMEs - European tour operators and travel agents can now apply for an intensive, EU-funded support programme to improve their sustainability performance

ECTAA and a number of its member associations are participating in the EU-funded SUSTOUR project that fosters the uptake of sustainability tools and practices among travel agents and tour operators. A call for SME application has been launched today with the aim to select 175+ European small and medium sized enterprises that will obtain technical support for the implementation of sustainability practices.

Brussels, 11 March 2022. Sustainability in tourism is the central challenge that the industry is facing in the 21st century. Now more than ever, we are aware of the vulnerability of life and how important it is to protect the beauty of our planet, which is the foundation of every tourism product. Travel agents and tour operators play a key role in this, given their position as intermediates between tourists, suppliers and destinations and thereby influencing consumer choices, supplier practices and destination development.

“The SUSTOUR project is a real opportunity for SMEs who would like to ‘build back better’ in a post-COVID world. Thanks to the support of the European Commission, we can offer them this very intensive support programme” says Naut Kusters, Managing Director of ECEAT (European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism) and Travelife for Tour Operators, the leading training, management and certification scheme.

This call for SME applications has been launched to select a minimum of 175 SMEs that will be able to benefit from a comprehensive support programme to help improve their sustainability performance. SMEs can choose to obtain support towards sustainability certification and/or implementation of innovative practices in their supply chain.

All participating SMEs will receive the EU co-financing. SUSTOUR will additionally cover the remaining contribution for all SMEs that are members of a SUSTOUR partner or supporting travel association. Participation in the support programme for such SMEs is therefore free of charge. All other SMEs will have to provide an own contribution, ranging between 200€-400€ depending on the size of the SME.

The call for SME application is open until 10 May 2022, 17h00 CET. The selection of SMEs will be completed by 7 of June. The technical support programme is expected to start end of June 2022 and will end on 30 June 2023. The call details and application guidelines are available from the following website: <https://www.travelife.info/sustour/?menu=call-for-smes>.

Said Pawel Niewiadomski, President of ECTAA: “We encourage travel agents and tour operators to use the opportunities provided by this project and contribute step-by-step to a more sustainable tourism. As an important player of the tourism value chain, we have a shared responsibility to manage tourism in a sustainable way for present and future generations.”

The SUSTOUR project is led by a consortium composed of ECEAT and Futouris as well as 5 travel agents’ and tour operators’ associations, including ECTAA (Europe), ANVR (Netherlands), UHPA (Croatia), SMAL (Finland) and APAVT (Portugal).

Background information

What is the SUSTOUR support programme for SMEs and what does it offer?

The SUSTOUR support programme for SMEs is financed under the EU COSME programme and designed to help tour operators and travel agencies in improving their sustainability performance. Travel companies interested to get started on sustainability or wishing to improve on their existing sustainability practices can benefit from a mix of innovative online trainings, multi-day classroom trainings, intensive coaching (group and individual) as well as peer-to-peer learning – all provided and guided by selected sustainable tourism experts.

How does the support programme work and what is required from companies?

Companies that have been selected in the call will be eligible to participate in a number of training and coaching sessions that are expected to start from end of June 2022 until June 30th, 2023. They will receive vouchers, which they have to hand over to pre-selected trainers, coaches and auditors after completion of an activity, who in turn will be paid by the SUSTOUR project.

Companies that participate in the SUSTOUR call for SME support will be required to sign an agreement committing themselves to following the activities provided under the support programme until the end of June 2023.

Who are the partner or supporting travel associations?

The project partner travel associations include ANVR (Netherlands), APAVT (Portugal), SMAL (Finland) and UHPA (Croatia). The supporting travel associations include ABTTA (Bulgaria), ABTO (Belgium), ALTA (Latvia), ATTA (Adventure Travel Trade Association – Europe), ASR and DRV (Germany), DRF (Denmark), EDV and SETO (France), ETFL (Estonia), ETOA (Europe), FATTA (Malta), FTO (Italy), HATTA (Greece), MUISZ (Hungary), NTVA (Lithuania), SACKA (Slovakia), SRF (Sweden), UPAV and VVR (Belgium) and WKÖ (Austria).

Who can apply?

The call is open to travel agents and tour operators, who meet certain eligibility criteria. Among others, they need to be a SME and established in an EU Member State or a third country participating in the COSME programme.

Deadline for submission of applications: Tuesday 10 May, 2022

Expected duration of participation: end of June 2022 to June 30th, 2023

Maximum financial support for selected SMEs: SMEs selected by the call will receive vouchers for support services of a value up to 6,000€, depending on the options selected by the SME in its application form.

Language in which proposals must be submitted: English, but support services will be available in various languages.

Where can I apply and find further information?

The call details and application guidelines are available from the following website: <https://www.travelife.info/sustour/?menu=call-for-smes>

Official project reference: SUSTOUR, GRO/SME/19/C/077 (COS-TOURCOOP-2019-3-01)

About ECTAA

ECTAA represents some 70,000 travel agents and tour operators in Europe, which provide consultancy and sell transport, accommodation, leisure and other tourism services as well as combined products to leisure and business customers.

For more information, please contact:

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