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ECTAA Welcomes EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy: A Vision for Balanced, Connected, and Resilient European Travel

Travel agents and tour operators highlight the strategy's forward-looking framework on balanced visitor flows, seamless connectivity, data-driven policymaking, modernised VAT rules, and skills.

Brussels, 4 November 2026 – ECTAA, the European Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Associations, warmly welcomes the European Commission's newly presented EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy. As a strategic roadmap designed to reinforce the long-term competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience of European tourism, the initiative sets an ambitious direction for destinations, travellers, and the wider travel community.

Tourism represents a cornerstone of Europe's economy and social fabric, contributing 10% of the EU's Gross Value Added and supporting over 20 million jobs across all territories. While European tourism has demonstrated remarkable resilience amid geopolitical shifts, changing climate conditions, and evolving consumer habits, a coordinated European approach is essential to steer sustainable growth and maintain Europe's global standing as the world's leading destination.

Eric Dresin, Secretary General of ECTAA said: "Our industry has shown great resilience in recent years, but we cannot take this for granted. Businesses are facing growing costs and uncertainty, while competition remains strong. We therefore welcome the Commission's Strategy as an opportunity to give tourism the attention and support it deserves. A strong European tourism industry needs a competitive business environment and the capacity to invest in its future."

ECTAA particularly commends the European Commission for addressing key structural enablers in the new Strategy:

- **Balanced tourism:** ECTAA strongly endorses the balanced tourism approach, supported by the proposed Council Recommendation and the EU Toolbox for Balanced Tourism. Harmonising visitor demand with local destination capacity will help alleviate pressure on overcrowded hotspots and protect local ecosystems and resident wellbeing.
- **Strengthened connectivity:** Transport is the foundation of travel. ECTAA welcomes targeted initiatives on rail, aviation regulation, cross-border car rental, and integrated ticketing solutions. Maintaining reliable, affordable transport links is especially critical for remote, island, and coastal regions to unlock their full potential and spread visitors more evenly.
- **Modernisation of the VAT rules for travel agents:** ECTAA welcomes the Commission's commitment to modernise the VAT framework applying to travel agents and tour operators, removing market distortions and establishing a fair, modern playing field.
- **Data-Driven policy and planning:** The creation of the Common European Tourism Data Space and the EU Tourism Observatory will provide the entire ecosystem with reliable analytics, enabling more informed policymaking and sustainable planning.

- **Investment in skills:** The launch of the EU Tourism Academy and collaborative networks will address crucial skills gaps, equipping workers with the green and digital competencies needed to meet the expectations of tomorrow's tourism businesses and travellers.
- **Enabling framework for SMEs:** As small and medium-sized enterprises represent 99% of tourism businesses, the commitments to cut unnecessary administrative red tape and simplify access to funding provide a welcome foundation for innovation.

Travel intermediaries: Steering sustainable and balanced visitor flows

Travel agents and tour operators play an indispensable role in shaping visitor patterns and connecting consumers with diverse destinations and service providers across Europe.

Through destination expertise and proactive advice, travel advisors help channel demand away from saturated areas and peak seasons toward emerging, lesser-known destinations and off-season travel. This guidance directly supports the Strategy's balanced tourism objectives, ensuring economic benefits are distributed broadly while preserving local cultural and natural assets. Furthermore, travel intermediaries remain central to promoting responsible, sustainable travel choices that match the evolving values of modern travellers.

"Europe's tourism sector is one of our continent's greatest assets, driving regional development, cultural exchange, and employment in every corner of the Union," concluded **Heli Mäki-Fränti, President of ECTAA**. "We welcome the Commission's EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy as a forward-looking vision to secure the future of travel. Balanced tourism flows, reliable connectivity, particularly for remote regions, and access to shared data are essential to making tourism sustainable for destinations and visitors alike. Travel agents and tour operators stand ready to act as a catalyst in this transformation, guiding travellers toward authentic, lesser-known gems and helping deliver a more balanced, resilient European tourism model."

ECTAA looks forward to engaging constructively within the EU Tourism Alliance and partnering with European institutions and destination managers to help translate these strategic ambitions into lasting realities.

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About ECTAA

ECTAA represents the interests of 100,000 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.

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