

# 10 tips for doing business with European tourism buyers

Building successful business relationships with European buyers is key to earning and keeping their business. The market for European tourism buyers is crowded and competitive, comprising tour operators, online travel agencies (OTAs) and travel agents. It is also a mature market where operators are highly informed and experienced. To work effectively with this group of professionals it is important that you carefully research how to do business with European buyers.

## Contents of this page

1. [Understand the business culture of your buyers](#)
2. [Communicate in a clear and precise manner with European tour operators](#)
3. [Honesty and clarity are paramount](#)
4. [Create a unique selling point for your product](#)
5. [Consider teaming up with other local operators or DMCs](#)
6. [Market your trips and experiences online](#)
7. [Set a fair price for your services](#)
8. [Be upfront about concerns over infrastructure](#)
9. [Join trade membership organisations](#)
10. [Seek advice](#)

## 1. Understand the business culture of your buyers

Understanding the business culture in the country where your buyers come from is very important to develop successful international business relationships. Business culture includes behaviour, ethics and etiquette of a country in general and your client organisation's values, beliefs and way of working. Europe is a very culturally diverse continent, but countries grouped in geographical regions share some similarities in the ways they conduct business:

- Northern Europe: People in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden generally have a good level of English. People in Ireland and the United Kingdom are native English speakers. Business people in these countries appreciate receiving facts and technical details. Punctuality is regarded as a sign of reliability and professionalism. It is appropriate to use titles (Mr, Mrs, Ms) until the client switches to using first names.
- Southern Europe: In Croatia, Cyprus, Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey, it is important to develop personal relationships with business counterparts. Contacting the right people and maintaining strong bonds with business partners are essential. Trustworthiness, loyalty and respect are key attributes for doing business with partners in these countries.
- Western Europe: Businesses in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands use formal business etiquette, favouring documentation and formalities over personal business relationships. Punctuality is also an important attribute for this group. English is also widely spoken in these countries. In the specific case of French business people, dealing with them in French may be very positive.
- Eastern Europe: The groups of countries comprising Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia is too large and diverse for generalisations. If you plan to do business with partners in any of these countries, do more research into the specific country, its language and business culture.

You can find out more about business culture and etiquette, developing international business relationships and individual European markets at [Passport to Trade 2.0](#). This organisation offers a number of [Country Guides](#) that offer advice on a country's culture, etiquette, customs and how to conduct business meetings that may be useful. Countries include some of the countries offering the most opportunities such as [France](#), [Germany](#) and many more.

You can also consult travel guides for the countries you are targeting, which may have a section covering common cultural behaviour, such as conventional greetings, title use, meaning and importance of gestures, negotiating styles and gift-giving customs.

### **Tips:**

Be aware of cultural differences between your country and your target country. Try to adapt your usual business practices to match theirs.

Addressing someone by their name is considered respectful in general and may improve goodwill and communication. Never forget to say 'thank you' in your dealings with European buyers.

Try to learn and use a few words in your buyer's native language. They will appreciate the effort.

It takes a long time to build trust in a business relationship. Being honest and keeping promises are paramount.

In meetings, always listen to your potential buyer. Unless there is a major reason, such as an emergency, it is considered bad manners to use a mobile device in a meeting for an unrelated matter.

## **2. Communicate in a clear and precise manner with European tour operators**

European tour operators are skilled business people who like clear, precise communication. These buyers like to have immediate, quick answers to their queries and problems. Always replying promptly sends a message of reliability and professionalism. Ensure that the information you provide is factual and accurate.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has made personal interaction with potential suppliers more difficult. However, it is important to try and keep communications going with possible suppliers and keep in touch with existing partners. The CBI study, [How to respond to COVID-19 in the tourism sector](#) will help you take the necessary actions to protect your business and prepare for the future recovery of tourism. In addition, you can find out how other businesses are keeping in touch with their buyers and suppliers. This blog, [Tips on how to maintain effective communications during COVID-19](#) offers some clear ideas on a communication strategy with clients, suppliers and investor during challenging times.

In normal times, face to face is often the best way to communicate in business as personal contact helps to develop relationships faster. One-on-one meetings can be held in business offices, on location or at trade fairs. Today, virtual meetings over the Internet using platforms such as [Microsoft Teams](#), [Zoom](#), [Google Hangouts](#) or [Skype](#) have become the norm for face-to-face meetings. The pandemic has also resulted in some trade fairs being hosted partly or fully online, such as [WTM London](#) in 2020, which is hosting both a participatory event and a virtual event.

For virtual meetings, it is relatively easy to set up and use digital communications. When scheduling telephone meetings or Teams/Zoom/Skype appointments, it is a good idea to confirm any meeting by email and make sure to begin the meeting on time. Pay special attention to possible time zone differences, office hours and holidays. In some countries, such as the UK, many offices are open seven days a week.

The pandemic has provided opportunities to increase your personal connectivity online, which is a cheaper option than face-to-face meetings. Nevertheless, once international travel is possible again, and if the circumstances are right, you could seek to arrange personal meetings at trade fairs or offer to visit European operators at their offices. In time, you could also invite potential buyers to visit your country so you can show them around and give them a taste of what you can offer while getting to know them better.

### Tips:

Consider planning a trip to Europe to visit a major trade fair, such as [ITB in Berlin](#) and [WTM in London](#), or join it virtually. Plan a schedule of meetings with tour operators and set up them up well in advance. ITB has established a [Virtual Market Place](#) to help find buyers/suppliers. Ensure to follow up promptly after every meeting, even if it is just to say, 'Thank you for your time. It was good to meet you'. Both fairs are currently scheduled to take place in 2021, but you should continue checking their websites in case the situation changes.

If they don't have time to meet you at the fair, suggest meeting at their offices. You could arrange to meet several operators on one trip to make the most of your time.

Make sure that the technology you have in your office is as up to date as possible so you can stay in regular contact with buyers. Find an IT expert to help you navigate technology if you need to.

Pledge to return calls and respond to email queries within a maximum of 24 hours, even if it's just to say, 'we will get back to you when we have an answer to your query'. Ensure you stick to whatever you commit to and keep in regular touch.

Ensure that your phone is answered by someone who can speak English reasonably well and is a confident communicator over the phone.

## 3. Honesty and clarity are paramount

Creating positive, sustainable and responsible travel experiences for European tourists is a high priority for European tour operators. Building relationships with suppliers is a crucial part of their business. They work with numerous suppliers to make this happen, often all over the world. Honesty and clarity from their suppliers are essential, since it takes time to develop a strong bond with a new supplier. As a local tour operator, building trust from the start will pay off in the long term.

You should also be open to visits and inspections by suppliers, who may want to see evidence of your systems and insurance policies.

### Tips:

It is important that you can show you know your destination well and demonstrate you have strong connections with local service providers of accommodation, food, transportation and tours.

Be honest about what you can and cannot provide since creating false expectations harms trust. Apply this across all your working practices: capacity, product quality, pricing, staff experience, etc.

Don't exaggerate your capacity, including how many visitors you can manage effectively or whether you have enough accommodation capacity for a large tour group. If you manage growth well, you can be open with your buyers about plans for upscaling your business to meet future needs.

Be upfront about issues that might affect tourism in your country or region, such as security issues. European tour operators are constantly monitoring safety and security issues on behalf of their clients. They are likely well aware of any problems in your destination and expect you to be well informed about them. Again, being honest about everything, including possible risks and any negative developments reaffirms trust.

Consult travel advisories from the governments or departments of foreign affairs from your buyers' countries. For example, in the UK, the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) issues travel advice to help

British nationals make decisions about travelling abroad. The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs offers a similar service, [Conseils aux Voyageurs](#), which is available in French only.

## 4. Create a unique selling point for your product

Travel to developing countries is often characterised as adventurous. However, the market is crowded and competitive and European tour operators are always looking for ways to differentiate their itineraries from others on the market. Creating a unique selling point (USP) for your adventure product will help it stand out from other similar trips and experiences on the market. Read the CBI report on [how to determine your unique value proposition](#) for additional information.

To help find your product's USP you should conduct an analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, known as a SWOT analysis. Put yourself in your customer's shoes and carefully consider what they want. Make sure you clearly understand what is special about your destination and the product you are offering. You must also analyse the USPs of your competitors so you can differentiate yourself from them.

Here are some ideas for creating a USP to make your product stand out:

- Have trained and knowledgeable guides with qualifications, good reviews and recommendations;
- Cater to several different languages to broaden your market;
- Visit different places from those offered by competing suppliers;
- Include community engagement to enhance traveller experience.

A good example of a local tour operator that has created an effective USP is the [Desafio Adventure Company](#) in Costa Rica, which clearly outlines its USP in the strapline, 'Top 3 reasons we will make your visit to Costa Rica unforgettable'. It won the Best Tour Operator for Local Economies in the 2010 World Responsible Tourism Awards for its contribution to the local economy by employing locals, sourcing local products, having guests stay in local accommodations and encouraging travellers to buy locally.

### Tips:

Stay up to date on emerging trends that could open opportunities for you to develop your USP. Read the CBI report on [trends, opportunities and risks in the European outbound tourism market](#).

Ensure your trips and experiences follow sustainable and responsible principles and promote that.

Clearly market what's special, different or unique about your products and ensure that you communicate this clearly to your buyer.

Once you have created your USP, include it in a strapline, also known as a tagline, and include it prominently on your website and promotional material.

Make your products sustainable and authentic – the key trends travel brands are using to create USPs.

## 5. Consider teaming up with other local operators or DMCs

Many European tour operators like to do business with destination management companies (DMCs), which work with a range of local operators to diversify business practices and make them more efficient. DMCs usually work

with local operators that specialise in different niches, such as bird watching tours, cultural tours, adventure excursions and hiking trips. By using DMCs, European tour operators gain flexibility to pick and choose which tours to add to their itineraries.

If there are no DMCs in your country or region, consider joining other local operators to create a coordinated marketing effort to promote to European tour operators. Presenting yourselves as a collective organisation with similar or complementary products may be more attractive to European tour operators.

Working with a DMC or collectively with other local operators could afford additional benefits, such as enhancing your reputation and generating cost savings in shared marketing costs to attend a trade fair.

### **Tips:**

Contact DMCs operating in your country or region to find out how to become one of their local operators.

Check the trips and experiences other local tour operators in your area offer to find out how they are similar or complementary to yours.

Contact other local operators in your country or region to find any common ground for potential joint business opportunities.

Read the CBI's [Tips for finding buyers in the European tourism sector](#) to identify trade shows and tourism fairs where DMCs also often exhibit.

## **6. Market your trips and experiences online**

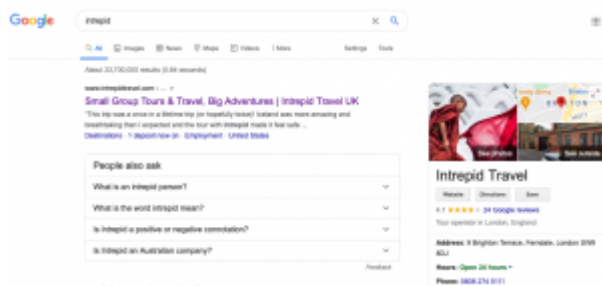
Your website is the face of your business for European tour operators and independent travellers. The Internet is a key business tool used by most European tourists to research their holidays. Your website should be professionally designed and offer inspirational content that appeals to potential buyers.

European tour operators are likely to do business with you under their name. This means they will purchase your services and market the trip to their customers under their brand. They will create their own marketing materials but will rely on detailed information from you to ensure all the details they publish are accurate. It is crucial that you are responsive and meticulous when providing information. Your clients work to tight deadlines and cannot afford to miss them. If any changes come to light, such as a change in itinerary or price alteration, you should inform them immediately. Keeping it undisclosed will only harm your relationship.

European travellers spend a lot of time researching where to go and which trips to take before deciding to book. An inspiring, well designed website with full trip details, lots of images and videos will appeal to this type of buyer.

It is also a good idea to list your business on [Google My Business \(GMB\)](#). GMB listings appear on the right of a Google search page, shown in the example of Intrepid Travel below:

Chart 1: Intrepid Travel's GMB Listing on Google



Source: Google

A GMB listing is free to set up and enables you to manage how your business appears on Google Search and Maps. A GMB listing helps your business to appear in a search the moment your customers are searching for your business or businesses like yours in the area. You can link your GMB to your website and customise it as you choose, making sure that important details such as address, phone number, website, reviews and opening hours are included. Read this blog by ATTA, which encourages tour operators to [Consider a Google My Business Page](#).

## Tips:

Read the CBI study, [How to be a successful tourism company online](#) for more information about creating a website and enhancing your online presence.

Do some more research on how European tour operators optimise their GMB listing. Read this blog, [How to optimise Google My Business for Tour Operators](#), or watch this YouTube video, [Google My Business Optimisation 2020](#).

## 7. Set a fair price for your services

If you sell both to European tour operators and directly to consumers you will need to create two different pricing structures. Both types of buyers will expect transparency in pricing. You should aim to start with a basic fee and add extras so your buyer can pick and choose what is most suitable for them. Avoid setting a fixed price structure, which is inflexible and might not meet the needs of your specific buyer. A transparent pricing structure will enable your buyers to understand the possible combinations and the overall structure of a trip or product, ultimately leading to satisfied customers and better reviews.

Start by setting a fair price for a basic itinerary. For instance, a set route that includes basic accommodation for one night. You can then add optional extras such as additional nights, excursions to local markets, an optional activity such as a three-hour hike, etc. You might want to consider additional upgrade fees for professional guiding or interpreter services. Differential pricing and upselling, when practised under clear, honest terms, provide more transparency and trust than fixed, all-in pricing. For additional information, Destination NSW in Australia has produced a useful guide for tour operators, [Pricing your tourism product](#), and you can read this helpful blog outlining [Five tips for pricing your tourism products](#).

When dealing with a new buyer, make sure to enter into a formal contract. You may wish to consider requesting a prepayment for the first services or the first six months, which could be renegotiated as the partnership develops and becomes more solid.

### Tips:

Check your pricing against your competitors. If yours are more expensive, make sure that you are offering more for value for the higher price.

Be precise and clear about your pricing and all options, especially what they do and don't include.

Discuss and agree on payment terms with tour operators, especially when payments are made. In Europe, it is not uncommon for terms of payment to be within 30 days. The Institute of Export and International Trade offers [this simplified chart](#) outlining different methods of payment.

Ensure your payment methods are easy for independent travellers. Credit card payments for online bookings are convenient and common throughout Europe. For direct bookings, credit card payments offer you and your customer convenience and peace of mind. Consult the CBI study, [How to implement online payment](#) for more information.

Consider absorbing credit card fees in the prices you charge. European travellers do not like additional fees added to quoted prices.

## 8. Be upfront about concerns over infrastructure

Deficient or inadequate infrastructure can affect the tourism industry in many developing countries. For example, luxury hotels and pristine beaches that have difficult access may not be attractive propositions for buyers in Europe. Infrastructure includes transportation by air, land or water, communication by phone or internet, electricity, water supply and other basics that some European travellers may expect. Being knowledgeable about infrastructure limitations at a specific destination plays an important part in developing an open and honest relationship with buyers. It is important for European tour operators to be confident that their customers will get the services they expect and pay for.

### Tips:

Make an honest assessment of the infrastructure in your destination so you can address this frankly with potential buyers. Being open and honest about issues will impress them. Make sure you can advise buyers on any workable solutions to problems they raise.

Research and stay informed about any major infrastructure investments planned in the short, medium and long terms.

As your business grows, continue to assess infrastructure conditions and changes in infrastructure to measure whether they will have positive or negative effects on growth.

Call on other local operators and trade associations to press relevant governmental bodies or other professional bodies for infrastructure improvements.

Ensure you know potential health risks to travellers, such as areas where malaria is prevalent, so you can advise your buyers accordingly.

## 9. Join trade membership organisations

Being a member of a national or international tourism trade organisation can help you gain credibility. While not mandatory, joining a trade membership organisation helps to build your reputation as a trustworthy local



operator and gives you good networking opportunities. European tour operators rely on local, dependable operator partners to keep their travellers safe. Being a member of a trustworthy trade body helps to provide evidence that your business is one such operator.

### Tips:

Identify suitable tourism trade associations that exist in your country or region and their membership criteria. The [Latin American Travel Association \(LATA\)](#), for example, promotes Latin America as a tourist destination and stimulates travel to the region.

As non-EU operator selling to clients the European Union, you may be able to register with European tourism trade associations, such as the [European Tour Operators Association \(ETOA\)](#).

Look for which international membership organisations might be the best fit for your business. The [Adventure Travel Trade Association \(ATTA\)](#), for example, is a global membership organisation for a wide variety of travel companies, including tour operators. In the autumn of 2020, ATTA was offering [limited time COVID-19 membership discounts](#) for tour operators, accommodations and other tourism organisations. Check to see if it is still being offered.

Ensure you include any membership logos prominently on your website and other promotional materials.

## 10. Seek advice

Export promotion schemes operated by government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in developed countries play an important role in helping SMEs in developing countries improve their export performance, often providing advice and training.

- The [Swiss Import Promotion Programme \(SIPPO\)](#) supports local tour operators in Colombia, Peru, Albania and Macedonia to find European buyers for sustainable tourism activities via business support organisations.
- Germany's [Import Promotion Desk \(IPD\)](#) supports local tour operators in developing sustainable tourism activities in Ecuador, Tunisia and Nepal. IPD offers training and workshops to help prepare suppliers for the requirements of the European travel market and connecting with potential buyers.
- The [International Trade Centre](#), the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations helps SMEs internationalise, improve international competitiveness and connect with relevant markets.
- The European Commission's [Enterprise Europe Network](#) provides support and expertise for SMEs to do business with international partners, including providing [a list of partnership opportunities](#)..
- The European Commission's Trade Helpdesk lists its [Member States' import requirements](#), including information about key organisations involved in import and export in each country.
- Many European nations have chambers of commerce that support both exports and imports. In the UK, [Chamber International](#) provides UK businesses with information on importing goods and services. In Germany, the [Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry](#) (in German only) plays this role.
- Contact the trade desks of embassies and consulates from your target countries to see if they can supply any export and import guides.

The CBI has produced other publications that might be of interest to you:


- Before doing business with European buyers, you should thoroughly research the market. The CBI report on [Tips for finding buyers in the European tourism sector](#) provides some practical advice.
- To ensure a successful launch of your travel product in the European market, read the CBI's [tips for organising your tourism export to Europe](#).
- Additionally, the CBI's [Exporting to Europe Guide](#) may also yield useful information.




This study was carried out on behalf of CBI by [Acorn Tourism Consulting Limited](#).

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).

Follow us for the latest updates

(opens in a new tab)  Twitter

(opens in a new tab)  Facebook

(opens in a new tab)  LinkedIn



[RSS](#)