



[What requirements must my services comply with to attract European tour operators?](#)

The Package Travel Directive is the most important European legislation for the travel industry. European tour operators are likely to translate it into demands on you. Common non-legal requirements concern reliability, liability, sustainability and the protection of children in tourism. Sustainability certification is well on its way to becoming a mainstream requirement. Voluntary ISO standards support safety in several niche tourism markets.

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1 . With which legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply?

Package Travel Directive

The [Package Travel Directive \(2015/2302/EU\)](#) protects travellers' rights when booking package holidays, for example in terms of liability, repatriation and refunds. It applies to your European partners, as well as to any foreign party selling travel products directly to European travellers.

An updated version of this directive came into effect in January 2018 and became applicable 1 July 2018. This update increases the legal protection of European travellers. It expands the definition of package travel to include customised packages and linked travel arrangements, as well as traditional pre-arranged packages. The update also applies to online bookings, contains stronger cancellation rights and requires clear liability arrangements.

Even if you do not sell your travel products to European travellers directly, you should be familiar with the Package Travel Directive. European tour operators translate their requirements into demands on you, which are becoming stricter with the update, especially as the new directive makes them liable for all services in the packages they sell. Issues of health and safety are particularly important. Travellers can hold their European tour operators accountable for injuries or health problems on holiday.

However, tour operators' liability insurance often does not cover damage caused by third parties. This leads them to increasingly ask their suppliers to have liability insurance. With the new Directive formalising liability arrangements, this type of insurance becomes extra important. [TUI](#) already requires potential new suppliers to indicate the extent of their coverage. Unfortunately, in many African, Asian and Latin American countries the right type of liability insurance is not (yet) available.

Tips:

- Study the Package Travel Directive and its new rules and definitions. The European Union's factsheet on [stronger protection for package holidays](#) illustrates how it works in practice.
- Consult your country's regulations for the type of products you offer, as well as those on health and safety. Make sure you comply with the legal requirements and have all the required permits.
- Get liability insurance and clearly communicate that you have this insurance in place.
- If liability insurance isn't available in your country, regularly urge your authorities and trade associations to change this. Also discuss it with current and potential partners, as they might have some influence.
- Study your options to contract liability insurance in a different country. For example, companies in Southeast Asia can look at Hong Kong, China or Australia. If you have a European representative on your team, you could also consider having them establish a European entity.
- Require your customers to have travel insurance, especially if you don't have liability insurance. This does not affect your liability, but may divert claims as travellers often contact their own insurance first.
- Do not include international flights in your travel packages, to avoid responsibility for repatriation and accommodation in case of disruptions.

General Data Protection Regulation

To provide tourism services to travellers, you generally will need some of their personal data to process and confirm their booking. Personal data can range from a name or email address, to bank details, social media content, a photo or an IP address.

The European [General Data Protection Regulation \(2016/679/EU\)](#) (GDPR) aims to protect all European citizens from privacy and data breaches. Incompliance can result in fines up to 4% of annual global turnover or €20 million (whichever is greater). This new regulation is enforceable since 25 May 2018. It applies to any company processing the personal data of subjects residing in the European Union, regardless of the company's location. This means it also applies to you directly!

Some key consumer rights you must comply with include (but are not limited to):

- consent – consumers must explicitly consent by opting in, consent must be easy to withdraw and requests must be specific and in plain language
- right to access – consumers are entitled to know whether or not you will process their personal data, where and for what purpose
- data portability – consumers are entitled to a copy of their personal data, free of charge, in a commonly used and machine readable format
- right to be forgotten – consumers are entitled to have their personal data erased, processing halted and further dissemination halted
- privacy by design – data protection should be included from the onset of designing systems, data should be minimised and access limited.

If you wish to use the personal data you collected in the booking process for another purpose (newsletters, promotions, etc.) you need to get clear consent. The easiest way to do this is by

including a tick-box in your digital booking process, or providing a paper consent form when bookings are made in person.

Tips:

- Study the GDPR's new [European data protection rules](#) and [principles](#), for a good understanding of what is allowed and what is not.
- Audit your current data to determine whether it is GDPR compliant. What data do you have, where and why? Did you obtain explicit consent to use it for this specific purpose? Use, for example, ICO's [data protection self-assessment](#).
- Never collect and/or store more information about your customers than strictly necessary.
- Set up clear consent request forms and privacy policies that inform your customers how you process their personal data. For more information, see ICO's [GDPR consent guidance](#) and [Privacy notices under the GDPR](#).
- Keep records of your obtained consent.
- Note what data you store and where you do so, to be able to comply with potential consumer requests.
- Make sure your staff is aware of your policy, so they do not unintentionally violate GDPR regulations.
- Travel trade associations and events may be able to assist you, whether personally or via seminars/webinars. For example, for a more in-depth discussion of the GDPR's implications for the tourism industry you can watch the webinar [Surviving the GDPR - The Unstoppable Regulation](#).

2 . What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Reliability

European tour operators are looking for reliable, professional partners. They don't want to take any legal risks and try to avoid damaging their corporate image. This is especially true for large tour operators with valuable brand names. Tour operators are therefore likely to require you to comply with their code of conduct. These codes commonly include health and safety requirements, business ethics and social responsibility.

Tour operators often monitor compliance through regular audits. They also use feedback from guides and clients they receive via evaluation forms. In addition, they increasingly consult comments from travellers on social media and review websites like TripAdvisor. Membership of (inter)national sector associations can help to prove your reliability and professionalism.

Many European tour operators only do business with a select few destination management companies in their target countries. They hold these agents responsible for ensuring that all suppliers comply with their requirements.

Tips:

- Study European tour operators' codes of conduct and check how they correspond to your business practice. Adapt your business practice to increase your chances on the market.
- Join national and international sector associations and networks. For example your own

country's tourism trade association.

- Increase your trustworthiness by sharing photos/videos online and asking satisfied customers for testimonials and reviews.

Sustainability

European tour operators increasingly demand sustainability from their suppliers. The primary focus used to be on environmental sustainability, like pollution and waste, energy and water management. Recently, it has expanded to include social issues like human rights and labour conditions. Tour operators usually anchor these values in their code of conduct with a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy.

Animal welfare is also becoming a major issue, especially for tour operators in Northern and Western European countries. Many have recently eliminated animal attractions like elephant rides from their offers. Some of Europe's main tour operators are now committed to the [Global Welfare Guidance for Animals in Tourism](#).

In 2017, TripAdvisor banned ticket sales to attractions where travellers come into physical contact with captive, wild or endangered animals. World Animal Protection's [Wildlife Selfie Code](#) helps travellers ensure that their wildlife selfies are cruelty-free. Inspired by such initiatives, Instagram now warns users searching for terms like #slothselfie or #elephantride that these hashtags are associated with harmful behaviour to animals or the environment.

Preventing negative sustainability effects is essential to long-term survival in the tourism industry. In addition, European tour operators increasingly stimulate positive sustainable development. For example by preserving or restoring biodiversity and bringing economic growth to local communities. They communicate these activities to their clients and may let them participate. This is attractive to tour operators, as it provides their clients with authentic and 'feel-good' experiences.

Tips:

- Study the [Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria](#) and tour operators' codes of conduct. For example [Kuoni's Supplier Code of Conduct](#) or the [TUI Code of Conduct for Suppliers](#).
- Use this input to shape your own policy. Integrate sustainable practices into your product, like efficient waste, electricity and water management.
- Make sure your promises and measures are realistic. If your code is just empty words, this could result in substantial damage to your image.
- Identify ways to have a positive impact on sustainability by developing projects or joining existing initiatives. Be innovative and creative. Cooperate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or sustainability experts to ensure a truly positive impact. Be aware that sustainable development is complex, with potential unforeseen side effects.
- Study the [Global Welfare Guidance for Animals in Tourism](#) and try to commit to it.
- Promote your concern for sustainability in your marketing. Encourage your clients to post positive reviews on travel review websites like [TripAdvisor](#) and [Zoover](#).
- For more information, see our study about [the demand from European tour operators for sustainable tourism suppliers in developing countries](#).

Protection of children

One specific sustainability issue that is of crucial importance concerns the protection of children in tourism. Many European tour operators have signed [The Code](#). This is an industry-driven code of conduct against the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism. It includes a zero-tolerance policy throughout the value chain. Tour operators often require their suppliers to adhere to this.

Tips:

- Learn more about The Code and its [members](#).
- Read the [Compilation of Good Practices](#) based on the work of the [UNWTO World Tourism Network on Child Protection](#).

3 . What are the requirements for niche markets?

Sustainability certification

Whereas attention to sustainability is becoming relatively mainstream, actual certification continues to be a niche requirement. In recent years, sustainability certification schemes have become increasingly common. Both on a national and an international level. These schemes used to mainly focus on the sustainability performance of accommodations. Now their scope is expanding, to include agents and providers of activities and transportation.

The number of certified tourism suppliers in developing countries is still limited. The certification process can be demanding and expensive, making it most feasible for larger enterprises. However, large tour operators previously predicted certification to become a mainstream requirement. This prediction is now becoming reality, starting with accommodation. For example, TUI Benelux' accommodation partners must have sustainability certification by 2020.

Even when European tour operators don't demand sustainability labels, given the option they generally prefer certified suppliers. Globally recognised sustainable tourism certification programmes include [Green Globe](#), [Rainforest Alliance](#) and [Travelife](#). Local sustainability initiatives exist as well, like [ASTCF](#) in Uganda, [CST](#) in Costa Rica and [Vietnam Responsible Tourism](#).

Tips:

- Explore your options for certification. The [Global Sustainable Tourism Council](#) (GSTC) provides additional information on internationally recognised schemes.
- Apply for (inter)national sustainability certification.
- Make sure the logo is visible on your website and your company is visible on the certification body's website.
- For a list of other certification schemes in the tourism sector, check the [ITC Standards Map](#).
- Read about specific certification schemes in [our studies about various tourism segments](#).
- If you can't apply for sustainability certification, study the requirements anyway. Use them to shape your sustainable business practice and show you care. This also prepares you for

when certification may become a mainstream requirement.

Sustainable tour operators

In a recent trend, European tour operators increasingly apply for certification as well. Important European initiatives include [TourCert](#), [Travelife](#) and [ATR](#). These schemes greatly value sustainability throughout the tourism industry's value chain. This indirectly affects you, as certified tour operators are required to favour sustainable suppliers.

Tips:

- To target certified tour operators, you need to show a good sustainability performance.
- See the [GSTC Tour Operator Criteria](#) for more information on the certification requirements.
- For other tour operator sustainability certification schemes, see the [GSTC Certification for Tour Operators](#).

Sustainable destinations

Sustainability certification for destinations is a new phenomenon. The extent to which the tourism industry will embrace this trend is not yet clear. Some major players on the European market are enthusiastic. For example, TUI Netherlands has developed a policy to promote the concept of sustainable destinations. In the future, certification might become a condition for inclusion in their offers. International certification schemes include [Biosphere Responsible Tourism](#) and [EarthCheck](#).

Tips:

- Follow developments in the area of sustainability certification for destinations.
- If you see new business opportunities, seek cooperation with your local government and other local stakeholders.
- See the [GSTC Destination Criteria](#) for more information on the certification requirements.

CO2

Another new development involves labelling the CO2 footprints of tourism products. Dutch carbon calculator [Carmacal](#) is drumming up global interest by winning some prestigious innovation awards. The tool calculates the CO2 impact of travel packages. Several tour operators have expressed interest in using this tool to 'label' their products. After the carbon calculator is rolled out among tour operators, the goal is to make it available for consumers to make their own calculations.

Tip:

- Follow developments involving the application of CO2 footprint labels to tourism products.

Consult tour operators from the Netherlands, as this market is a frontrunner.

Voluntary ISO standards for niche tourism

ISO standards are voluntary, consensus-based, market relevant International Standards. They support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges. To support safe practices, there are specific standards for certain niche tourism markets. For example [adventure tourism](#), [Thalasso therapy](#), [diving](#), [wellness spas](#) and [food safety management](#) for culinary tourism.

Tips:

- Consult the [ISO Standards Catalogue](#) for relevant standards.
- Use the ISO standards to enhance your safety performance, meet expectations for participant and staff safety and demonstrate safe practices.

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