



WILL YOUR CITY BE THE NEXT EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF SMART TOURISM?



FACTSHEET





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The European Commission is launching a competition to award the title of European Capital of Smart Tourism 2026. This initiative rewards European cities and gives them the opportunity to share their exemplary practices as smart tourism destinations.

The initiative will showcase accomplishments by European tourism destinations¹ in the following areas:

SUSTAINABILITY

DIGITALISATION

CULTURAL HERITAGE
& CREATIVITY

ACCESSIBILITY

One city showing the most intelligent, innovative and inclusive solutions in all the above-mentioned areas will be awarded the title of “**European Capital of Smart Tourism 2026**”.

Apply online via the website SmartTourismCapital.eu
by **30 May 2025** at 17:00 CET.

WHAT IS THIS INITIATIVE ABOUT?

The tourism sector is EU’s third largest socio-economic activity and has a crucial role in contributing to growth, jobs and cohesion. It has an immense potential to grow further by enhancing visitors’ experiences, creating new partnerships and cooperation opportunities as well as strengthening innovation in Europe’s cities and regions.

¹ Cities across the EU, as well as the non-EU countries that take part in the Single Market Programme (SMP) – former COSME Programme. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine; https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf



By awarding exemplary practices of smart tourism exploiting this untapped potential, the European Union wants to encourage innovative and inclusive solutions in sustainable and accessible tourism, promote digitally smart tourism and strengthen the role of heritage and cultural and creative industries as tourism assets.

Building on the successful experience of previous editions of European Capital of Smart Tourism, this initiative will continue to raise the profile of Europe as a tourism destination and to set up a network to share best practices among European destinations.

WHAT MAKES A CITY A SMART TOURISM CAPITAL?

A smart tourism city, for the purpose of this contest, is defined as a city which:

- implements innovative, intelligent, and inclusive solutions in the field of tourism
- uses its territorial, social, and human capital for the growth of its tourism sector, the prosperity of the city and better-quality life for its inhabitants
- offers enriched and customised tourism experience through valorising local assets while respecting and involving local communities
- facilitates access to tourism services and products through new technologies, interconnectivity and interoperability of services

As such, a European Capital of Smart Tourism shall be:

- **accessible:** physically accessible to travellers with special access needs, regardless of age, social or economic situation, with or without disabilities. Easily reachable through different means of transport and with a strong transport system within the city.
- **sustainable:** working to preserve and enhance the natural environment and resources while maintaining economic and socio-cultural development in a balanced way.
- **digital:** offering innovative tourism and hospitality information, products, services, spaces and experiences adapted to the needs of the consumers through ICT-based solutions and digital tools.
- **cultural and creative:** by making resourceful use of its cultural heritage and creative industries for an enriched tourism experience.



WHY SHOULD YOUR CITY APPLY TO BE THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF SMART TOURISM?

The title of **European Capital of Smart Tourism 2026** will offer a unique opportunity to get targeted communication and branding support for a year from a specialised international PR and communication company. By means of extensive communication activities, the cities will be put on the smart tourism destination map and will gain visibility as pioneers of smart tourism in the EU.

In addition to a trophy, the winning city will receive a large tailor-made sculpture that will be placed in the city centre to mark their commitment to tourism that is **SUSTAINABLE, ACCESSIBLE, DIGITAL** and **CULTURAL**.

Among other benefits, the city's promotional actions will be enhanced through the development of a short presentation video highlighting smart tourism achievements and an exhibition during a major EU tourism event or travel fair.

Being the **European Capital of Smart Tourism 2026** will therefore allow the winning city to serve as an inspiration to other tourism destinations across Europe, enhance their city's profile as a quality travel destination, attracting visitors and generating economic growth in a sustainable way.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

The competition is open to cities that:

- are located in an EU Member State or a non-EU country participating in the Single Market Programme – former COSME Programme²
- have a population of over 100 000 inhabitants - in countries where there is no city with more than 100 000 inhabitants, the largest city is eligible to apply

Please refer to the Guide for Applicants for detailed information on the eligibility criteria to be met.

HOW WILL THE WINNER BE SELECTED?

A call for applications will be **launched in March 2025**, with the deadline for applications set for May 2025. During a pre-selection phase, all eligible applications will be evaluated against a set of established award criteria by a panel of independent experts. On the basis of their evaluation, the Commission will establish a short-list of maximum 4 cities that will be invited to present their candidature in front of a European Jury who will select the European Capital of Smart Tourism 2026.

Please refer to the Guide for Applicants for more detailed information on the application requirements and evaluation system.

² Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine; https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf



KEY DATES

Launch of competition: **05 March 2025**

Application deadline: **30 May 2025 by 17:00 CET**

Evaluation period: **July – August 2025**

Announcement of shortlisted finalists: **September 2025**

European Jury meeting and announcement of winner: **November 2025**

MORE INFORMATION:

Please read the **GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS** at SmartTourismCapital.eu

Contact us via info@SmartTourismCapital.eu