

COMPETITION FOR THE EUROPEAN GREEN PIONEER OF SMART TOURISM 2026

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW



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1. ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism is an initiative, implemented by the European Commission and currently financed under the Single Market Programme (SMP) – former COSME Programme. Its aim is to recognise and award smaller destinations that have implemented successful strategies to boost sustainable tourism through green transition practices.

The **European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism is the successor of the European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) competition** which was first introduced by the European Commission in 2007 as an initiative to reward non-traditional, emerging sustainable tourism destinations in Europe.

The 2026 European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism is the third edition of the competition. Benidorm, Spain was the winner of the 2025 European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism competition, while Grosseto, Italy was the winner of the 2024 competition. Previous EDEN winners include Kranj, Slovenia (2023) and Middelfart, Sweden (2022).

This Guide for Applicants contains all the information destinations need to know, to submit an eligible application for the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism 2026 competition.

The destination showing the most successful strategies or green transition practices to boost sustainable tourism and convincing the European Jury with an exciting programme for the year in which they hold the title – will be awarded the title of the "European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism 2026".

2. TIMELINE

Launch of competition	5 March 2025
Application deadline	30 May 2025 by 17:00 (CET)
Evaluation Phase / including evaluation Step 1 by independent experts	July - August 2025
Announcement of shortlisted finalists	September 2025
Presentation of finalists in front of the European Jury and announcement of the winner	November 2025

3. ADMISSIBILITY AND ELIGIBILITY

3.1 ADMISSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Applications must be submitted the latest by **30 May 2025 at 17:00 CET**. Applications received after this deadline will not be accepted.
- All applications must be submitted via the online application submission tool, which is accessible via www.SmartTourismCapital.eu. Applications submitted by any other form will not be taken into account.
- Applications must be readable, accessible and printable.
- We will only be able to accept applications that are complete in all their parts, including the requested signed and stamped Mayor's Endorsement.
- You may apply in any official language of the European Union. You can find a list of all eligible languages [here](#). We would suggest writing, or submitting material, in English, to the extent possible, to speed up the evaluation process and comparability of applications.

3.2 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The eligibility criteria for applying to win the title of the “**European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism 2026**” are as follows:

1. The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism competition is open to EU Member States, as well as the non-EU countries that take part in the Single Market Programme – former COSME Programme¹.
2. All destinations that are located in an EU Member State or a non-EU country participating in the Single Market Programme, with demographic population between 25 000 – 100 000 inhabitants, can apply.
3. For smaller countries with total population below 1 million, destinations with more than 5 000 inhabitants are eligible to apply.
4. Previous European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism winners (2025 Benidorm, Spain and 2024 Grosseto, Italy) as well as EDEN winning destinations from previous EU-wide editions of the EDEN competition (2023 Kranj, Slovenia and 2022 Middelfart, Sweden) are not eligible to compete for the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism 2026 competition. Runner-ups of the national and EU-wide former editions are eligible.

¹ 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

5. A “destination” is understood to be a city, town, or other urban area and is understood as an administrative unit governed by a city /town council or another form of elected body.
6. The signatory official for the application submission should be the Mayor or the highest-ranking representative, authorised by national law to legally represent the destination.
7. The EUROSTAT database for the last available year is a reference for checking the number of inhabitants in EU Member States:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/urb_cpop1/

For non-EU countries that take part in the Single Market Programme, the national statistics office database for the last available year can be used as a reference for population data.

The European Commission may perform specific checks when assessing the eligibility criteria.

3.3 EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Cities will be disqualified should any, or more than one, of the following apply:

- The applying destination is subject to an administrative sanction (i.e. exclusion)²
- The applying destination is in one of the following situations³:
 - Bankrupt, being wound up, having their affairs administered by the courts, entered into an arrangement with creditors, has suspended business activities or is subject to any other similar proceedings or procedures under national law (including persons with unlimited liability for the participants debts).
 - Declared in breach of social security or tax obligations by a final judgement or decision (including persons with unlimited liability for the participant’s debts).
 - Found guilty of grave professional misconduct⁴ by a final judgement or decision (including persons with powers of representation, decision-making or control).
 - Convicted with fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including persons having powers of representation, decision-making control).

² See Articles 131(4) and 106 (1) Financial regulation

³ See Articles 138(2) and 106(1), 107 of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 (OJ L 218, 26.10.2012, p.1).

⁴ Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information, participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition, violation of IPR, attempting to influence decision-making processes or obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain an advantage.

- Shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under a procurement contract, grant agreement or grant decision financed by the EU or Euratom budget (including persons with powers of representation, decision-making or control).
- Found guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) or Regulation No 2988/95 (including persons with powers of representation, decision-making or control).
- Applicants have misrepresented information required for participating in the contest or failed to submit such information.
- Any conflict of interest, in any form, duration, or severity, is in existence between applicants and the evaluation panel and/or the organisers of the competition, at the time of application, and throughout the process. For more details, please see par. “9.2 Conflict of interests”.

4. APPLICATION TEXT AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

In the application form, destination representatives will be asked to present the sustainability practices and green transition measures that have made the town a sustainable tourism destination. To give room to the overarching context, the destination will also be required to write an introduction, presenting their overall achievements as a sustainable tourism destination. This will be described below, under chapter “7. How to apply: Step by step”.

4.1 APPLICATION TEXT

Here you will find examples of what you can include in your application. These are intended to help you gain a better understanding, but they are by no means exhaustive, they serve as a general orientation. We encourage applicants to think beyond these examples and to demonstrate your destination’s specific cases, concrete actions and solutions.

The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism competition awards smaller destinations that have implemented successful strategies or measures to boost sustainable tourism through innovative and green transition practices. The competition also seeks to foster the exchange of best practices between European cities, by identifying successful and transferable measures that can work for multiple destinations.

Please describe the green transition practices (e.g.: projects, initiatives, legislative investments etc.) your city has implemented towards the goal of becoming a sustainable tourism destination.

These green transition practices should be related to one or more of the following aspects, but this list is not exhaustive, you may also include others:

- Managing / protecting natural resources in your tourism destination fully respecting environment and biodiversity
- Implementation of resource efficiency measures, more sustainable consumption (e.g., waste, water, energy)

- Measures aimed at reducing tourism seasonality
- Implementation of a scheme to measure sustainability of tourism destination
- Implementing measures aimed at climate adaptation
- Involvement of local communities, including social inclusion, through tourism, linking visitors with locals (sharing history, gastronomy, protection of nature, etc.)
- Balanced economic performance of tourism including sharing revenues with local communities, contribution to local employment, contribution to diversification of local economies, returning tourism revenues into local development

What has been the impact of these green transition practices? (please consider both the environmental impact, as well as the benefits for the local community)

How are the green transition practices that you have implemented, transferable to other tourism destinations? (What can other cities learn from you?)

4.2 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES

Applicants are asked to describe concrete examples of measures that have been implemented with the aim of boosting sustainable tourism through green transition practices. How well a destination is performing will be assessed on the basis of the following four assessment criteria:

1. **How significant is the impact of the green practices? And what is the level of innovation? (To what degree can we consider the destination as a “thought leader”?)** Applying this criterion, the evaluating experts will assess how impactful the implemented measures are. They will also look at why these measures were innovative in the applicant destination.
2. **How far does the local community benefit from the green practices?** Under this criterion, the experts will assess the benefits of the measures on the local business environment and the local community. Detailed information about the tangible and, where possible, measurable impacts of the implementations, including delivering quantitative data on relevant indicators, will support the assessment.
3. **How transferable / replicable are the green transition practices for other destinations?** Applying this criterion, the evaluating experts will assess what strategies were applied, how they have changed the tourism experience and if they can be implemented in other cities.
4. **How strategic is the commitment to a long-term green transition as a tourism destination?** Under this criterion, the experts will assess the strategic, long-term solution-based approach, instead of just short-

term problem fixing. It will also be assessed, how the results of the implemented measures are being sustained over time.

Remember: When describing your measures, please make sure to address the four assessment criteria above. The more specific you are in describing your best practices, the better the chance to score high in the aforementioned criteria. Please state how the measure(s) changed tourism in your destination, what impact it brought on tourism arrivals/ employment/ tourists satisfaction ratings. **Give us concrete numbers, if you have them, and demonstrate the tangible, measurable results of your actions. Presenting tangible and measurable impacts of the measures implemented will increase chances of your application to be scored high.**

5. THE EVALUATION PROCESS

5.1 EVALUATION STEP 1

All submitted applications, under the condition that they are admissible and eligible, will be reviewed in a pre-selection phase (Evaluation Step1) by a panel of independent experts in the field of sustainable tourism.

The experts will evaluate and score each application, on the basis of the assessment criteria (listed under 4.2). The evaluating experts will score them as follows (half marks are possible, decimals are not):

- For each assessment criterion the destination can score from 0 to 10 points.
- Overall, the destination can score a maximum of 40 points.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	POINTS
CRITERION 1: How significant is the impact of the green practices? And what is the level of innovation? (To what degree can we consider the destination as a “thought leader”?)	Min 0 – Max 10 points
CRITERION 2: How far does the local community benefit from the green practices?	Min 0 – Max 10 points
CRITERION 3: How transferable / replicable are the green transition practices for other destinations?	Min 0 – Max 10 points

CRITERION 4: How strategic is the commitment to a long-term green transition as a tourism destination?	Min 0 – Max 10 points
THRESHOLD	20
TOTAL MAXIMUM	40

In order to be shortlisted and compete for the title of the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism in front of the European Jury, applicant destinations must pass an initial threshold of 50 % of the maximum possible score (at least an average of 5 points in each of the four criteria).

The European Commission reserves the right to assess whether the number of applications is lower than expected, and to adjust the threshold accordingly.

A majority of points attained in one criterion cannot level out a missed threshold in another criterion.

Applicant destinations that received the minimum necessary score in all four criteria individually and hence pass the threshold will be ranked according to their overall score of all four criteria combined.

It is always the highest overall score of all four criteria combined that will determine on the qualification of a destination to be shortlisted.

A maximum of 4 destinations with the highest overall score will be shortlisted as finalists.

The four highest scoring cities among the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism applicants shall be then shortlisted.

If two or more applications achieve the same overall score and that would result in more than 4 potential top-scorers, an independent panel of sustainability experts and advisors will compare these applications against each other to recommend a maximum of 4 destinations to be shortlisted.

Based on the evaluation of the experts, the Commission will establish a shortlist of a maximum of 4 destinations, expanding the selection if multiple cities achieve the same score during the evaluation process.

5.2 EVALUATION STEP 2

In September 2025, applicant destinations will be informed if they are shortlisted, or not.

The shortlisted destinations will be invited to present their candidatures and the programme they intend to implement during 2026 as the potential European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism, in front of the European Jury in November 2025.

Each finalist destination will outline its programme including the EU dimension of its actions. The destinations are free to propose the activities they deem relevant (promotional actions, events, marketing measures, launching of specific projects, etc.). The destinations will need to present how they foresee making the most of the title of the “European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism” in promotional activities and raising its profile as a

sustainable tourism destination. Destination representatives should describe the added value the title would bring to position the tourism destination as a 'sustainable tourism pioneer' and to attract tourists from third countries. The presentation should also further elaborate on how the title would contribute to foster sustainable tourism development and how the destination would involve other EU locations in promoting and disseminating green measures and best practices.

The finalist destinations will receive further guidelines on this presentation at a later stage.

The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism 2026 will be selected officially by the European Jury out of the shortlisted destinations.

6. ANNOUNCING THE WINNER

After the Jury Meeting, and still on the same day, the announcement of the winner will take place at a cocktail networking event, with the participation of all shortlisted destinations and the Jury members. The European Jury Meeting and the announcement of the winner will take place in November 2025. More details regarding the event will be communicated in due time.

For the participation at the Jury meeting and the announcement of the winner, the cost of travel and accommodation for a maximum of 2 nights for 2 representatives per finalist destination will be covered by the organisers.

7. HOW TO APPLY: STEP BY STEP

7.1 GETTING STARTED

You can apply in four easy steps via our online submission system, which you can access by clicking 'Apply now' on the contest page at www.SmartTourismCapital.eu.

Applications reaching us by other means are regarded as 'not submitted' and will not be evaluated. We will only accept applications that are submitted via our online application tool through the electronic submission system.

The online application tool consists of four parts:

- Create an account
- Provide administrative information
- Upload your application and necessary documents

- Last question: where have you heard about the initiative?

7.2 HOW TO APPLY

7.2.1 STEP 1: Create your account

You are requested to create an account with your name and email address. You will then get a password sent to you via email, with which you can log in and access the application tool from any device. You need to create an account in order to log in any time you want to work on your application, up until the deadline for submission.

You can create multiple accounts per destination and work on the application together. A single application by a destination can have multiple co-authors. The representative from a destination who first creates an account simply needs to make sure that the submitting author has allowed co-authors to edit the application/ proposal. Co-authors' accounts are created automatically once the application submitter (the person first creating an account) has added these co-authors. Once this is done, all co-authors can log in to their dashboard/account and collaborate on editing the submission.

Each account will be password secured and the application will be saved automatically.

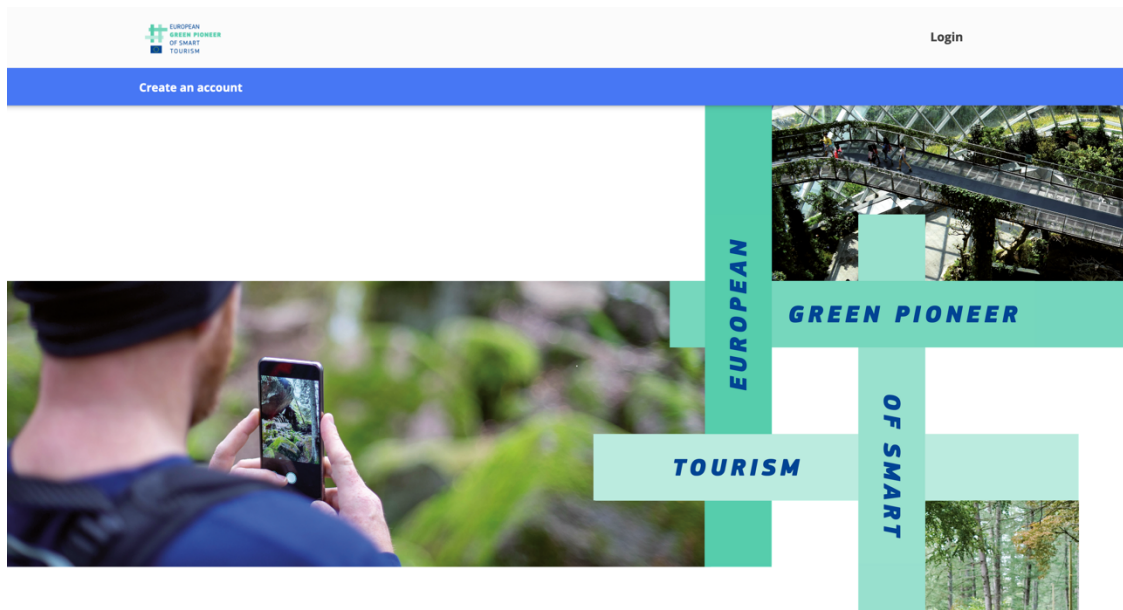
7.2.2 STEP 2: Filling in the application form

PART 1: APPLICANT DETAILS

You will submit your application electronically on the contest page www.SmartTourismCapital.eu under the "APPLY" page for the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism.

After clicking on the button **Start your application / APPLY NOW**, you will be able to submit the first part of your application, the **applicant details**:

- Please fill in all requested information identifying your destination as an applicant to this contest, including contact details of one main contact person and one back-up alternative contact.
- **Please make sure to state the official name of the applying entity in both English and local language.**



APPLYING ENTITY (OFFICIAL NAME IN EN AND LOCAL LANGUAGE)	
NAME OF THE DESTINATION	
COUNTRY	
NAME OF THE MAYOR / PRESIDENT OF THE DESTINATION SIGNING THE APPLICATION	
ADDRESS	
WEBSITE	
CONTACT NAME AND POSITION	
TELEPHONE	
EMAIL	
ALTERNATIVE CONTACT (NAME AND POSITION)	
TELEPHONE	
EMAIL	

PART 2: YOUR APPLICATION

Here you will enter your submission into a word-based online application tool.

You can also upload additional material in support of your application illustrating measures/ best practices you will be describing (for example: promotional material, photos, statistics, user feedback, impact evaluations, etc.).

Please note that files/links in other languages will not be translated into English.

Destination profile - description of your tourism destination:

Here we ask you to provide a short summary (max. 400 words) describing why your destination is a ‘sustainable tourism pioneer’ and why it deserves to be the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism 2026. You may also add data in regard to annual tourist numbers and/or main assets/attractions that make your destination especially appealing etc.

In the next section you are asked to describe your best practices or measures of excellent sustainability measures your destination has implemented. You can write up to 800 words and upload further supporting material and/or links that provide more information or demonstrate the best practices.

Uploaded documents must be in PDF format (portable document format) and be no larger than 25GB.

In the application form, described under 4.1 (see above) you can find examples of different aspects you might want to cover in your description of best practices and implemented measures. These examples are not exhaustive, and you are welcome to include any other information you deem relevant for the evaluation of your proposal.

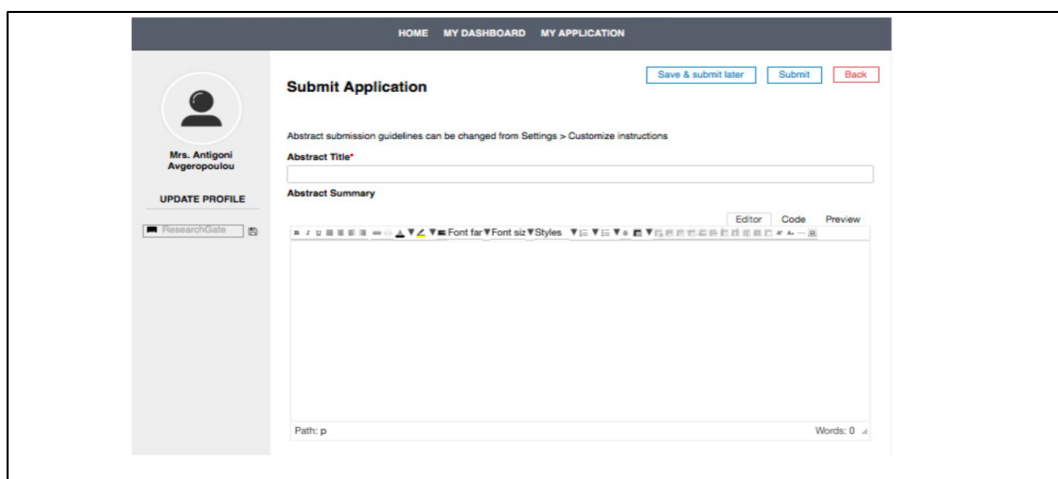
PART 3: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please briefly indicate here where and how you first learned about the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism competition.

MANDATORY DOCUMENTS TO BE UPLOADED:

At the end of part 3 you will also be asked to upload the **following mandatory documents in support of your application:**

Proof of Mayor’s endorsement: Please download the document under “How to Apply” on www.SmartTourismCapital.eu <https://ec.europa.eu/eden> or go to the last page of this document. Fill out



the Proof of Mayor's endorsement, have it signed by the Mayor and scan it, so you can upload it in a pdf format and attach it to your application.⁵

7.2.3 STEP 3: Editing your proposal

You can modify your proposal at any time up to the deadline. Once you have finalised your proposal, just click "submit application" button.

Your application will not be accessible to the organisers in its draft phase. Only when you click "submit" will it be made accessible for the organisers and passed on to evaluation.

We are not able to "recover" any un-submitted or draft applications.

7.2.4 STEP 4: Submission

Please make sure to submit your proposal by the deadline: **30 May 2025 by 17:00 CET**.

Any submissions after this deadline cannot be taken into consideration.

7.2.5 STEP 5: Application status page

Reaching this step means that your application has been successfully submitted. You should have also received a short e-mail confirmation about the successful submission of your application. If not, please check your spam folder. Please note that confirmation of successful application does not mean the application is valid, admissible or eligible in all respects.

Here you can:

- **Download the application.** It is advised to download the application to check that it has been correctly sent. The PDF is digitally signed and time stamped.
- **Withdraw the application.** If the application is withdrawn, it will not be considered for evaluation. A reason for the withdrawal will be requested.

(Note: Once an already submitted application is withdrawn, the withdrawal action can be reversed, but only before the deadline, by simply re-submitting the application).

7.2.6 General information

Applications must be submitted by **30 May 2025, 17:00 CET**.

⁵ or the equivalent highest political representative authorised by national law to legally represent the city/ town/ destination as specified in the application form.

After this deadline, the application can no longer be modified. It is however visible in a read-only version.

You can save a draft well before the deadline. The last version of your application submitted before the deadline is the one that will be taken into consideration; no later version can be substituted, and no earlier version can be recovered.

Help & General Assistance

If you encounter problems in the submission process or have questions about the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism competition, please contact us here: info@smarttourismcapital.eu. The Secretariat for the competition will reply not later than one working day.

8. PUBLICITY - PROMOTING THE AWARD

8.1 PUBLICITY BY THE WINNER

Both finalists and the winner must contribute to promoting the initiative, contest and its results, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner. Unless the Commission requests or agrees otherwise or unless it is impossible, any communication activity related to the action (including in electronic form, via social media, etc.) must:

- display the EU emblem
- include an agreed-upon text which will be decided at a later stage. The text will include the mention of the Award.

When displayed together with another logo, the EU emblem must have appropriate prominence. For the purposes of their obligations, the finalists and the winner may use the EU emblem without first obtaining approval from the Commission. This does not, however, give them the right to exclusive use.

Moreover, they may not take the EU emblem, or any similar trademark linked to the initiative for their own use, either by registration or by any other means.

8.2 PUBLICITY BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The Commission may use, for its communication and publicising activities, information relating to the action as well as any other material, such as pictures or audio-visual material that it receives from the participating destinations (including in electronic form). In order to better deal with press requests, it is recommended that all applicants appoint a dedicated spokesperson to directly react to specific queries.

The Commission will publish both the name of finalists and the winner, as well as the award's nature and purpose — unless they have requested to waive this publication (because of disclosure risks threatening its security and safety or harm its commercial interest).

Photos and videos taken by the Commission either in preparation of or during the announcement of the winner are the sole property of the Commission.

In line with the objectives of the initiative to foster sharing of best practices, the European Commission can publicise best practices submitted by the applicants during the application phase in the report/ compendium, on the website or by other means. With the submission of your application, you mark your agreement that the contents of the application and accompanying material can be used for this purpose.

8.3 LAUNCHING EVENT IN THE WINNING CITY

To mark the official start of the winning city's year as the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism, a 'Launching Event' will be organised. The launching event will take place in the 2026 European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism within the first quarter of 2026.

The objective of the event is to kick-off the year of activities the winning city will implement as the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism and attract attention of media, local stakeholders, other European cities and tourism industry. The event will showcase the city's sustainable practices in tourism, the programme to be implemented and contribute to its EU-wide visibility. Wide media coverage and participation of representatives from EU institutions is foreseen.

9. LEGAL NOTICE - PROMOTING THE AWARD

9.1 DISSEMINATION AND EXPLOITATION OF RESULTS

The winner must comply with the following obligation - Processing of personal data:

- Processing of personal data by the Commission: Any personal data will be processed by the Commission under Regulation No 45/2001⁶. All finalists and the winner consent that the Commission publishes the following information:
 - Name
 - Member State/ Town/ Destination
 - Their activities in relation to the award in whatever form and medium

⁶ Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data (OJ L 8, 12.01.2001, p.1)

- Processing of personal data by the participants: the participants must process personal data in compliance with applicable EU and national law on data protection (including authorisations or notification requirements, if any).

9.2 CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The participants must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective award is being compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('conflict of interests').

They must inform the Commission without delay of any situation constituting or likely leading to a conflict of interests and immediately take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation.

To avoid conflict of interest both by participants and members of the jury, the Commission may verify that the measures taken are appropriate and may require additional measures to be taken by a specified deadline.

9.3 LIABILITY FOR DAMAGES

The Commission cannot be held liable for any damage caused to the participants or to third parties as a consequence of the award, including for gross negligence.

The Commission cannot be held liable for any damage caused by any of the participants in the context of the award.

Participants shall indemnify and hold harmless the Commission and any of its affiliates, employees, agents, officers or sub-contractors with respect to all claims, demands, actions, costs, expenses, losses, damages and all other liabilities arising from or incurred by reason of the actions and/or omissions of the participants in relation to this competition.

9.4 CHECKS, AUDITS AND INVESTIGATIONS

The Commission, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the European Court of Auditors may carry out checks, audits and investigations in relation to the award.

9.5 WITHDRAWAL OF THE TITLE AND AWARD

The Commission reserves the right to withdraw the award after it has been granted if it finds out that:

- false information, fraud or corruption was used to obtain it

- a winner was not eligible or should have been excluded
- a winner is in serious breach of its obligations stated under 3.3.

9.6 CANCELTION OF THE CONTEST

The Commission may cancel the contest or decide not to grant the award — without any obligation to compensate participants — if:

- No applications are received
- The jury does not find a winner
- The winner is not eligible or must be excluded

9.7 COMPLAINTS

Complaints against decisions negatively affecting the rights of a participant or winner can be brought before the General Court — or, on appeal, the Court of Justice of the European Union — under Article 263 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU).

10. CONTACT

For more information, please check the award website www.SmartTourismCapital.eu or contact the award secretariat: info@smarttourismcapital.eu

In case of questions, please also refer to the FAQs on the website: www.SmartTourismCapital.eu.

PROOF OF MAYOR'S ENDORSEMENT

To whom it may concern,

I, _____ (the undersigned), endorse the application of _____ (name of destination) to the EU competition for the title of the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism 2026.

DATE, PLACE

NAME

SIGNATURE

STAMP