

Request for proposals

Optimisation and Enhancement of the VisitEurope.com Portal

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Request for proposals

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Request for Proposals (RfP) is launched in the framework of an ad-hoc grant of the European Commission (EC) to the European Travel Commission (ETC) with the aims to support the promotion of thematic trans-European tourism products in third countries.

The present document is intended as a guideline based on ETC's goals and requirements. A clear understanding of these goals and requirements should be reflected in the proposal. Applicants are asked to interpret all aspects of this document carefully yet creatively, using their business intelligence, market experience and expertise to propose the best possible solution for the project. Additional ideas and suggestions that contribute to achieving the objectives of the project are welcome and should be clearly outlined in the proposal.

CONFIDENTIAL: The information in this document may not be used for any purpose other than to respond to this tender. This document is and will remain at all times, the property of ETC.

1.1 ABOUT THE EUROPEAN TRAVEL COMMISSION (ETC)

The European Travel Commission (ETC) is an international non-profit making association of official National Tourism Organisations (NTOs) in Europe. The organisation was established in 1948 and is headquartered in Brussels (Belgium).

ETC's mission is to support the promotion of Europe as a tourist destination in major long-haul markets. For its member NTOs, ETC also provides a broad portfolio of market intelligence services and encourages the sharing of best practices. ETC is established as a private body (AISBL) under the law of Belgium.

Moreover, within the scope of its mission, ETC works regularly with the European Commission on a series of initiatives aimed at maintaining Europe's position as the world's leading travel destination.

Further information about ETC can be found on the website www.etc-corporate.org.

2. INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

2.1 DESCRIPTION

ETC intends to contract a service provider, hereinafter referred to as the **contractor**, with expertise in website design and development.

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RfP) is to **revamp** ETC's existing consumer portal under the domain **VisitEurope.com** to meet current web standards, improving loading speeds, mobile responsiveness, security features, and overall user experience and engagement.

The VisitEurope.com portal serves as the central digital platform for ETC's promotional activities, acting as the primary touchpoint for our target audiences. It functions not only as a dynamic content hub but also as a comprehensive repository that consolidates all communication and marketing initiatives. Its purpose is to effectively showcase Europe as a premier destination for responsible travellers, providing valuable resources, inspiration, and information to encourage sustainable travel practices across the continent. The portal integrates

seamlessly with multi-channel campaigns, acting as a core platform that supports and enhances social media, email and influencer marketing, and paid advertising campaigns, ensuring a unified and cohesive promotional strategy.

The content on the portal is developed and managed by the ETC with input from its member National Tourism Organisations¹. The content is available in English, with selected content translated into French, Portuguese, Spanish and Japanese.

The current portal was built in 2017 on WordPress 6.7.2 and contains approximately 2000 webpages and articles. However, given the dynamic nature of web technologies, the current portal suffers from slow load times, outdated backend technology, limited mobile responsiveness, and suboptimal SEO performance and data tracking capabilities.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the project are:

- Strengthen Europe's image as a safe and sustainable tourist destination in long-haul markets by showcasing its diversity and unique travel experiences
- Inspire and educate travellers on responsible travel practices when planning their trips to Europe
- Enhance user experience and engagement by improving loading speeds, mobile responsiveness, search functionality, and offering intuitive navigation and personalised content
- Enhance accessibility compliance with WCAG standards
- Improve search engine ranking (SEO), AI optimisation (AIO), and increase organic traffic
- Strengthen data privacy and security compliance in adherence to GDPR
- Upgrade portal analytics tools to gain deeper insights into user behaviour, enabling more targeted, data-driven communication strategies
- Reduce the carbon footprint of the portal

2.3 TARGET GROUPS

The VisitEurope.com portal serves as a central content hub and repository of all communication and marketing activities of ETC. These activities target affluent **Free Independent Travellers (FITs)**², who are in the **dreaming, consideration, or sharing stages** of their travel cycle, travelling for leisure and seeking experiences related to the following passion points:

¹ See <https://etc-corporate.org/our-members/>

² A Free Independent Travellers (FITs) is an individual or a small group of individuals (<10) who travel independently rather than as part of an organised group. FITs plan and arrange their travel online by themselves. However, it should be noted that long-haul FITs may still consult a tour operator or advisor, who previously arranged individual products and services for independent travellers, to book their trip given the particular knowledge, time and confidence required to plan a holiday to an overseas destination, making them semi-FITs.

- **Nature and the Outdoors:** Inspiring experiences and stories framed around human or nature-powered journeys that connect with the outdoors in line with the ethos of the Slow Adventure movement³. This includes nature experiences that provide a better understanding of the environment, but also of the local culture, food, people and traditions, especially in rural areas (ecotourism). This passion point connects with the community of **Immersive Explorers**⁴; 18-34-year-old couples with children, and solo travellers (male bias) who find togetherness in the wilderness and enjoy experiencing nature at their own pace. They want to learn about new cultures, experience new adventures and expand their perspectives from what they learn when travelling.
- **Creative Cities:** Inspiring experiences and stories framed around the local cultural scene and lifestyle, with a focus on contemporary arts, architecture and design, handicrafts, fashion, music, festivals, gastronomy, street and performing arts (creative industries), as well as high-end products in small or medium-size urban areas. This passion point connects with the community of **City Life Enthusiasts**⁵: 18-34-year-old couples with children, and solo travellers (female bias) who swap landmarks for local life, trade the well-worn path for a secret side street and crave a culture of creative contrast and artistic reinvention. They want to “live like a local” while developing their creativity and emphasising the atmosphere of the places they visit.
- **History and Ancestry:** Ancestry and heritage-related experiences and stories in connection with historical places and events (places of memory, contemplation and commemoration) which exerted an influence on world history. This passion point connects with the community of **Explorers of Cultural Identity and Roots**⁶; 35+ year-old couples with children and empty nesters (Male bias) who step beyond borders into the theatre of world history, learning from the stories of yesterday with a desire to discover their own roots.

While the above passion points appeal to a global audience, the focus is on engaging FIT travellers from North and South America and the Asia-Pacif region. Demographic segmentation prioritises the 18-34 age group, followed by 35-49 years old, with no distinction based on gender.

3. REQUIREMENTS

The contractor must fulfill the minimum requirements outlined in the following sections. Any essential items necessary for the project’s successful execution, even if not explicitly mentioned, should be considered included in the list of minimum requirements. Proposals that do not meet these requirements will be excluded from the evaluation process.

3.1 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

ETC will require the contractor to manage all tasks related to the process of **redesigning (where needed), developing, testing and launch** of the VisitEurope.com portal. This shall at minimum include the following:

³ Please see the Slow Adventure Guide for a detailed overview of the ethos of the Slow Adventure movement: https://etc-corporate.org/uploads/2020/03/The_Slow_Adventure_Guide_compressed.pdf

⁴ For further information on the profile the community of Immersive Explorers, see: <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/tourism-passion-communities-immersive-explorers/>

⁵ For further information on the profile the community of City Life Enthusiasts, see: <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/tourism-passion-communities-city-life-enthusiasts/>

⁶ For further information on the profile the community of Explorers of Cultural Identity and Roots see <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/tourism-passion-communities-explorers-of-cultural-identity-and-roots/>

PORTAL REDESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

- Development of a responsive and dynamic travel destination website using a common CMS, like WordPress or Drupal inter alia, and using modern web standards (HTML5, CSS3, and JavaScript). The CMS should support various user roles (such as website administrators, editors, etc.) and provide an interface that enables non-technical users to easily upload and edit content. The proposed solutions must be flexible, allowing a variety of customisations without the need for continual back-end development.
- Based on an audit of the current portal's content, structure and functionalities, the contractor will propose a strategic approach to organising content (site map), identify existing content that can be repurposed for the new portal and opportunities for improvement and enhancements that will contribute towards reaching the project objectives.
- UI/UX design refresh, incorporating modern aesthetics and usability improvements. The portal navigation must be clear with an intuitive search function that allows users to find the content they need quickly. Use data and AI to offer dynamic content personalisation, tailoring content based on users' interests, location, and previous browsing behaviour, ultimately leading to increased engagement and conversion rates. For instance, personalised destination recommendations, web articles, itineraries, or travel tips.
- Multimedia integration. The portal must integrate text with visually appealing content types and formats such as images, videos, and interactive features (such as maps, AI chatbots, etc) to showcase the diversity of Europe as a travel destination through immersive storytelling and dynamic content. It should automatically optimise the size of multimedia elements to effectively manage the database size without compromising quality.
- Lead generation features such as newsletter sign-ups.
- Microsite building capabilities.
- Fast loading speeds. The content must load fast on both desktop and mobile devices. The contractor must implement caching, image compression, and minimize the use of heavy scripts to ensure the portal loads quickly, especially on mobile devices.
- Responsive and sustainable design: The portal must be designed with a responsive layout to adapt to various screen sizes and resolutions, ensuring a consistent experience across different browsers and devices (desktop, tablet, mobile).
 - The portal must be fully compatible with the most popular and widely used internet browsers to ensure a seamless user experience across diverse platforms and devices. This includes, but is not limited to, compatibility with the latest versions of the following browsers: Google Chrome, Safari, and Edge.
 - Mobile responsiveness. The portal must be design using a mobile-first approach to ensure it functions seamlessly across all screen sizes, as mobile browsing is critical for global users.
 - The portal must adhere to best practices for sustainable website design, ensuring it is optimised for carbon efficiency without comprising quality. This includes implementing strategies to minimize

energy consumption, reduce carbon emissions, and enhance the overall environmental impact of the portal, while maintaining a seamless and engaging user experience.

- Be compatible with third-party integrations such as social media feeds, Google analytics for tracking user behaviour and performance monitoring, CrowdRiff for integrating user-generated photo galleries, and other necessary plugins and widgets.

COMPLIANCE WITH WCAG STANDARDS

The portal must follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines WCAG 2.1 AA and WCAG 3 to accommodate users with disabilities. This includes inter alia:

- Providing text alternatives for images (alt text)
- Ensuring all interactive elements are keyboard navigable
- Using colour schemes with sufficient contrast for readability
- Making sure that all videos have captions or transcripts for accessibility

SEARCH ENGINE RANKING (SEO) AND AI OPTIMISATION (AIO)

The portal must rank high on the most popular search engines. It must incorporate structured data markup for enhanced search engine visibility. All on-page elements must be optimised, including titles, meta descriptions, headers, and alt texts, ensuring they align with relevant search keywords. It must use a clean URL structure and optimise the portal's internal linking to enhance crawlability by search engines.

The portal must also be optimised for AI-powered search systems, chatbots, and generative AI.

COMPLIANCE WITH DATA PRIVACY, SECURITY COMPLIANCE, GDPR AND OTHER LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The portal must adhere strictly to all relevant General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements, ensuring full compliance. It should empower users to manage their data preferences effectively, including providing clear options to opt in or out of tracking technologies, thereby promoting transparency and control over the use of personal data.

The contractor is responsible for advising the European Travel Commission (ETC) on legal obligations related to data protection and privacy. This responsibility encompasses implementing all necessary compliance measures, such as cookie policies, terms and conditions, and data protection protocols, throughout the project's lifecycle.

Moreover, the contractor must proactively monitor any changes to GDPR and other applicable privacy laws. In the event of regulatory updates or amendments, the contractor is required to implement necessary adjustments promptly and inform ETC in advance, securing approval prior to any changes. This diligent approach ensures that the portal remains fully compliant with the latest legal standards at all times.

CONTENT MIGRATION AND OPTIMISATION

- The contractor is expected to take care of the migration and upload of content to the new platform. All copy, videos and photos to be provided by ETC.

- Multilingual support. The content of the portal must be available in at least the following five languages: English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Japanese

PERFORMANCE TESTING, DEPLOYMENT AND POST-LAUNCH SUPPORT

- The contractor is expected to conduct comprehensive tests (Beta testing) to ensure performance before launch such as load testing, browser compatibility testing, security issues, etc.
- The contractor must outline a clear deployment plan for the launch of the website. This includes the steps for transferring from the development environment to the live production environment, ensuring minimal downtime during the transition. The plan should also consider data migration (if applicable), server setup, and configuration of any necessary integrations (e.g., payment gateways, APIs).
- After launch, the contractor must provide a period of post-launch support to address any immediate issues that arise. This support should include troubleshooting of unforeseen technical problems, ensuring smooth operation of all website features, and providing quick resolutions to any urgent concerns or bugs reported by users.

STAFF TRAINING

The contractor is required to deliver comprehensive technical support and training for ETC staff on effectively managing the portal upon its launch. This training should cover all aspects of portal administration, including content management, user roles, troubleshooting, and system updates. The goal is to ensure that ETC staff are fully equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to independently maintain and operate the portal.

HOSTING

Note that the contractor is not required to provide hosting services for the portal. However, the contractor is expected to suggest potential improvements to the existing hosting setup, if applicable, that could enhance the portal's overall performance.

3.2 TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

PUBLICITY

The project outputs must clearly acknowledge ETC's and the European Union's financial contribution. In this respect, the contractor is required to give prominence to the Europe-visiteurope.com logo and the EU emblem on all materials produced in the framework of the project:

Logo of Europe-visiteurope.com



Name and emblem of the European Union



The usage guidelines and the corresponding graphic files can be downloaded from the following link: <https://etc-corporate.org/publicity-guidelines/>

In addition to the above, ETC reserves the right to request the use of partners' logos in any materials produced.

ASSIGNMENT OF RIGHTS

The contractor shall explicitly provide ETC and its partners (when applicable) with a worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive, perpetual license to exercise the Intellectual Property Rights of all materials created for or in the course of the project, such as the website code, as stated below:

- a) to reproduce the project material or incorporate the project material into other material, and to reproduce it as incorporated in such other material;
- b) to create and reproduce derivative works from the project material;
- c) to distribute copies and display publicly the project material, whether independently or as part of other material;
- d) to distribute copies and display publicly derivative works from the project material.

The contractor should obtain any licenses or permits as needed.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The contractor must have specialized and thorough experience and expertise in website design and development. Specific experience with clients in the travel and tourism industry is an asset. The contractor demonstrates compliance with this requirement by providing at least three case studies of relevant past comparable work and contract value carried out within the past five years.

The contractor must have a professional project management team who is able to provide adequate staffing over the duration of the entire contract period. The contractor should designate at least one English speaking staff member to manage the account and all project-related communication by email and phone as required. The account manager should provide regular updates to ETC on the project implementation, either by email, on the phone or via an online call.

3.3 DELIVERABLES AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The contractor must outline in the proposal the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the project's impact on target groups, including their corresponding target values (goals) and methods of verification. KPIs may include metrics such as unique visits, pageviews, time spent on site, bounce rate, website authority, performance score, PageSpeed Insights data, website CO2 emissions, etc.

The contractor is required to deliver the following outputs through the course of the project:

- An action plan with specific recommendations, strategies and tactics for the portal redesign and development.
- A full final report including all necessary documentation for portal administrators to make use of the CMS, including technical information and user manuals.

- A plan for post-launch support and portal maintenance such as regular performance checks, security patches, software updates, and the addition of new features as necessary to improve the portal's functionality and user experience over time. This, however, will be subject to a separate contract.

All documents should be written in British English and delivered in electronic format (.doc or .pdf file)

3.4 IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

The implementation period of the project is expected to start in **May 2025**, with the portal required to go live by **31st December 2025** at the latest. Post-launch portal maintenance and support as well staff training must be provided for a minimum of **8 weeks**.

3.5 BUDGET AND INVOICING

The maximum available budget for this project is **85,000 EUR** (eighty-five thousand euros) excluding VAT and including any other applicable taxes.

Invoicing will be done in three instalments:

- 1st instalment: 20% upon delivery of the action plan and portal design approval
- 2nd instalment: 50% upon completion of portal development and launch
- 3rd instalment: the remaining percentage upon completion of staff training and final project approval

ETC will review and approve the deliverables to ensure their correctness before requesting the contractor to submit the corresponding invoice. All payments to the contractor will be made in Euros.

This project is subject to co-funding from the European Union. The payment from ETC to the contractor may be subject to reduction in the event of any breach of the contractor's obligations. Breaches may include but are not limited to failure to deliver the required deliverables or incorrect use of the Europe-visiteurope.com logo and the European Union emblem.

4. SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Proposals must be **clear, concise** (not exceeding 20 pages in total) and **written in English**. The proposal structure is open, but it must provide all information relevant to the assessment of the proposal by elaborating on each of the award criteria (see 5. *Award Criteria*) and include, at least, the following:

- 1) Brief **company profile**
- 2) Description of the **project team** designated for the project implementation, detailing their credentials, field of expertise and roles in the project.
- 3) **Three case studies, references or examples** of relevant experience in successfully delivering comparable work. For each reference, the contractor must use the model reference form (Annex 1) which must be filled in completely and correctly.
- 4) Detailed description of the **methodology** to deliver the project
- 5) Detailed project **timeline** with key milestones.

- 6) **Economic offer.** The proposal must present a detailed breakdown of the budget for the different services to be provided. The economic offer should include all costs following the scope of work of the project (including third party costs if any). Any licenses that may be required for the project and the proper running of all portal functionalities for the duration of the contract are to be included in the economic offer. If any work for the project is to be subcontracted to a third party, the contractor must clearly specify in its proposal all tasks and deliverables that are to be outsourced. The contractor will bear any costs related to outsourcing and be the sole party responsible for the outsourced work's delivery

All prices should be quoted in Euro and exclude VAT and other taxes which may be recoverable by ETC (being a private VAT-registered entity based in Belgium) and including other taxes, if applicable.

4.1 USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The contractor is allowed to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the preparation and submission of a proposal. However, the contractor is required to disclose any AI usage involved in the proposal preparation. This disclosure must include:

1. A description of the AI tools or technologies used.
2. The specific areas of the proposal where AI was applied.

4.2 DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION

Proposals must be submitted in electronic format via the submission form on ETC's website: <https://etc-corporate.org/procurement/submission-form/>

Proposals must be received by **30 April 2025** at 23:59 (CEST). Proposals submitted after this deadline will not be considered. ETC recommends that contractors avoid submitting their proposals in the final hours before the deadline to ensure ample time to resolve any technical issues that may arise.

The proposal and prices quoted in it must be valid for at least three months after the submission deadline.

A contractor may submit one proposal only. Any contractor who submits multiple proposals will have all of their proposals rejected.

4.3 QUESTIONS

Questions about this Request for Proposal must be sent in written via the contact form on the ETC website <https://etc-corporate.org/contact/> with the subject "RFP VisitEurope.com Portal" until **25 April 2025** at noon (CEST).

ETC will publish the answers to all the questions received in due course on the website <https://etc-corporate.org/rfp-visit-europe-portal-qa/> by **25 April 2025** at 18:00 (CEST).

5. AWARD CRITERIA

Proposals should elaborate on all award criteria to score as many points as possible. The mere repetition of mandatory requirements without going into details will only result in a lower score.

Proposals will be initially assessed based on the quality criteria and subsequently evaluated against the financial criteria outlined below. Proposals must achieve a minimum score of 50 out of 100 points in the quality score. Proposals that score below this threshold will be excluded from further evaluation and will not be ranked.

The following formula will be used to calculate the final total score of the proposal:

- **Quality criteria:** 50% of the total evaluation score
- **Financial criteria:** 50% of the total evaluation score

$$\text{Final score} = [(\text{lowest price} / \text{proposal price}) \times 100 \times 0.5] + (\text{quality score} \times 0.5)$$

In the event of a tie in the final total score, the following tiebreaker criteria apply in order of prevalence:

- proposal with the highest total score obtained in the financial criteria;
- proposal with the highest total score obtained in the quality criteria.

If the tie persists after applying the above tiebreaker criteria between one or more proposals, the proposal selected in a draw will be awarded.

QUALITY CRITERIA

Each quality criterion and their relative weights are as follows:

Quality criteria	Weight
<p>Contractor profile, experience, and qualifications of the project team. The degree of relevance and appropriateness of the contractor's specialization, expertise, and proven references for the project, as well as the specialization and expertise of the project team.</p>	20
<p>Project management and methodology The extent to which the proposed solution and methodology meets the project requirements, is well-structured and appropriate, effectively contributes to achieving the objectives, and demonstrates creativity and innovation.</p>	60
<p>Project timeline and delivery The extent to which quality, efficiency and timely delivery of services can be ensured.</p>	20

Each quality criterion will be given a score in a range from 0 (zero) points to 10 (ten) points in accordance with the following scale:

0 Not available/not provided	The application fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1-2 Poor	The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
3-4 Fair	The application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

5-6 Good	The application addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
7-8 Very good	The application addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
9-10 Excellent	The application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

6. FINAL PROVISIONS

This Request for Proposals is in no way binding on the European Travel Commission, its members, nor any of the European Union institutions. Any contractual obligation commences only upon the signature of the particular agreement between ETC and the contractor.

ETC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received as a result of this Request for Proposals as well as to cancel this project, either partially or totally. In the event of cancellation of this Request for Proposals, this should not entail any financial obligation from ETC towards any applicant. Any costs incurred during the preparation and submission of proposals are to be borne by the applicant contractor.

Submission of a proposal implies acceptance of the terms and conditions set out in this document.

We thank you in advance for your time and interest in working with ETC.

Brussels, 15 April 2025

European Travel Commission

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ANNEX 1

Reference Form*

Name of the project:	
Scope and objectives of the project:	
Total value of the contract (in euros):	
Period of execution:	
Place of execution:	
Description of the work performed by the contractor and main results:	
Client:	Name:
	Registered address:
	Website:
Client contact person:	Name:
	Position:
	E-mail or telephone:
Attached certificate of good execution:	YES / NO

* All fields in the form are required.