



TOURISMLink review conference offers industry solutions

At the TOURISMLink review conference in Brussels, industry leaders gathered to discuss the challenges of developing European tourism and how the TOURISMLink platform could be the answer.

Brussels, Belgium, 30 June 2014 – TOURISMLink is a Europe-wide platform on which small tourism businesses – such as hotels, restaurants and cafés, and travel agents or tour operators – can connect and share information. Backed by the European Commission, the project has completed its two-year pilot studies and will now enter the market.

A review conference, held in Brussels on June 24, was a success, attended by leaders from across the board of the European tourism industry and generating dynamic discussion.

The aim of the conference was to review TOURISMLink's pilot project, look at the problems currently faced by the European tourism industry, and discuss the ways in which TOURISMLink can provide a solution. Suggestions on how the platform will now be managed and supported were put forward.

Conference speakers included representatives from Amadeus, Microsoft, Toolisse, TripAdvisor and Deutsche Bahn. TOURISMLink partners HOTREC and ECTAA had a strong presence, while Eduardo Santander, CEO of the European Travel Commission, and Máximo Buch Torralva, Valencia Minister of Economy, Industry, Employment and Tourism also took part in panel discussions.

The tourism professionals in attendance mentioned that the industry is dangerously fragmented and that this – along with an increasing monopolisation of the travel sector – must urgently be addressed.

Speakers agreed that the TOURISMLink platform could be a solution, creating standards for tourism ICTs and digitalising SMEs.

"Interoperability lowers the cost of digitalisation, increases competitiveness, and opens new markets," pointed out Professor Rodolfo Baggio, Università Bocconi. While Michel de Blust, Secretary General, ECTAA said that: *"Industry stakeholders and destinations both agreed on the importance of a common messaging language to overcome the fragmentation of the market."*

In general, the perception of TOURISMLink by those who participated in the pilot project has been positive.

"Why do I like TOURISMLink?" said Massimo Baldinato, Cabinet Member of the Vice President Antonio Tajani, European Commission. *"Because it's about innovation, it's about digitalisation and it targets tourism small and medium enterprises, the backbone of our tourism industry."*

Those involved in the trial project talked about how TOURISMLink isn't simply another booking platform. *"It's not about making a second booking.com,"* said Francois-Xavier Peêrs, Project Coordinator of TOURISMLink, *"this model is a federation of distribution platforms."* The hub and spoke model means that new and varying software can be easily incorporated without companies having to make expensive or radical changes.

Moving on to the future of the platform, questions were raised about which financial model is best for the platform, how TOURISMLink will connect to two million travel companies in Europe, and who should lead the project into the future. A range of solutions into making the future of TOURISMLink successful was proposed, including further support from the European Commission with the focus being on welcoming private players and creating a pay model of the platform.

"From today onwards we enter into the second phase of TOURISMLink," said Kent Nyström, President of HOTREC, during his speech. *"We aim to extend the platform to other countries, to make it European-wide, and to make the platform sustainable. It is a challenging phase, but we will put all our efforts into making this second phase of TOURISMLink equally successful."*

The conference ended with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the TOURISMLink consortium and authorities who will now work together to guarantee the future development, maintenance and promotion of the platform.

European tourism businesses can join TOURISMLink and start to use the platform by contacting info@tourismlink.eu.

National Tourism Authorities or tourism portals interested in joining the TOURISMLink network of hubs can contact the TOURISMLink team for further information.

About TOURISMLink

TOURISMLink aims to improve the competitiveness of the tourism sector by fully utilising information and communication technologies (ICTs). The TOURISMLink platform will offer three main elements: a central reservation system (CRS) that centralises all products and destinations into one database; a property management system (PMS); and channel management, allowing immediate and automatic integration and adaptation of all data. A two-year trial period, backed by the European Commission, has now come to an end but partners expect the project to continue, with the platform being implemented across Europe. (www.tourismlink.eu)

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