

## **Resilience in Crisis:**

### **The Role of Ukraine's Association of Incoming Tour Operators During Wartime**

*As the echoes of war reverberate across Ukraine, the country's tourism sector, once a vibrant contributor to the economy, has faced unprecedented challenges. Yet, even amidst the turmoil, the Association of Incoming Tour Operators of Ukraine (AITO Ukraine) stands resilient, not only preserving the essence of Ukrainian tourism but also using it as a tool to foster hope, solidarity, and global unity. AITO will be present at Matkamessut (Helsinki) on 17-19 of January 2025.*

### **Travel Matters: Beyond Exploration**

Travel has always been more than just visiting new places. It embodies solidarity, empathy, and the ability to connect people across borders. As Ukraine continues to defend its sovereignty, the Association of Incoming Tour Operators of Ukraine sends a heartfelt message to the world: "Support us and VISIT UKRAINE AFTER THE VICTORY. Travel matters. It is a contribution to creating peace and respect in this world."

This plea is more than a call to travel; it is an invitation to be part of Ukraine's recovery and to show compassion through the power of travel.

### **Championing Ukraine's Tourism Potential**

Before the war, all 34 AITO Members tirelessly showcased Ukraine unparalleled beauty and immense travel potential. From participating in major travel exhibitions worldwide to organizing unforgettable tours for media representatives, travel agents, and tourism boards, the Association consistently urged visitors to choose Ukraine as their next destination. Now, as the war continues, the Association has adapted its mission to focus on collaboration and long-term recovery. With a commitment to developing Ukraine as a premier travel destination, AITO works to create favorable conditions for the growth of the incoming tourism sector.

### **A Global Connection: Membership in ECTAA**

On June 9, 2023, AITO became a full member of the European Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Associations (ECTAA). This milestone connected Ukraine's tourism industry with national associations across Europe. Through this membership, Ukrainian tour operators gain access to a network of professionals specializing in the creation, promotion, and sales of national travel products worldwide. This collaboration strengthens Ukraine's presence on the global tourism map, ensuring its voice is heard even during the war.

### **Humanitarian Initiatives: Bringing Joy Amidst Tragedy**

AITO's mission extends beyond tourism—it is about making a difference in people's lives. In 2024 in partnership with the Association of Swedish Travel Industry (SRF), AITO organized a life-changing initiative: a first summer camp for 43 children of Ukraine's defenders. This camp in Sweden offered a much-needed respite for children living amidst the horrors of war. It allowed them to experience the beauty of Sweden, make new friends, and rediscover joy in challenging times.

The initiative inspired other ECTAA members to join. In 2025 many European associations are planning to organize camps for Ukrainian children in their own countries. During the Travel News Market 2024 in Stockholm, Didrik von Seth, Director of the Swedish Tourism Association, announced a new fundraising campaign for 2025. This campaign aims to bring more Ukrainian children to summer camps in different countries, giving them moments of peace and happiness and a chance to escape, even temporarily, from the harsh realities of war.

### **The Road Ahead: Building a Better Tomorrow**

While the war has brought devastation, it has also reinforced the resilience and determination of Ukraine's tourism community. AITO continues to prepare for the future, ensuring that Ukraine remains a top travel destination once peace is restored.

Ukraine's tourism sector is not just about showcasing beautiful destinations — it is about uniting people, fostering understanding, and building a better future. The Association of Incoming Tour Operators of Ukraine invites the global travel community to stand with them: "After the victory, visit Ukraine. Be amazed by its beauty, touched by its history, and inspired by its resilience. Together, we can make travel a force for peace and solidarity." As the world watches Ukraine's fight for freedom, its tourism industry remains a beacon of hope and connection. The Association of Incoming Tour Operators of Ukraine exemplifies how travel can transcend borders and hardships, proving that even in the darkest times, the spirit of exploration and unity can shine brightly.

We invite you to visit the booth #6g60 of the Association of Finnish Travel Industry (SMAL), that friendly invited AITO to be present at MATKA Travel Fair in 2025. The united efforts of the SMAL Board and the organisers of MATKA have provided Ukraine with this opportunity and demonstrated the great support of the Finnish tourism industry. A warm thank you also to Finnair and Scandic Hotels for travel arrangements for AITO representatives.

### **Schedule of seminars:**

**17 Jan 2024 at 14.15 p.m.- "Tourism matters: Visit Ukraine after the Victory"**

**19 Jan 2024 at 15.00 p.m.- "Ukraine and Finland: from heart to heart"**

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