

European Federation of Tourist Guides Associations

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For immediate release

Landmark fraud protection ruling comes in time for peak travel season

ASA announces curbs on the UK "free tours" advertising

Paris, France - April 6th, 2017 - The UK Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) this week announced measures designed to curb unscrupulous tour operators and unqualified "guides" who offer fraudulently advertised "free tours" to unsuspecting tourists.

In many major cities, untrained, unpaid, untaxed and uninsured persons conduct "free" walking tours to unsuspecting visitors. "Free tours" are offered by companies or private persons with various names across the world. Consumers wrongly assume that the persons guiding them will be qualified to do so and that they are paid by the tour organisers, which is almost never true.

The ASA received many complaints by visitors-consumers about so-called "free tours" during which the persons guiding them demanded tips at the end of the tours, despite the tours being advertised as free. According to ASA, complainants felt overly pressurised to make such payments.

Last week these businesses and amateurs offering "free tours" in the UK were told to end this practice and adhere to new, stricter guidance laid out by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP). ASA says the advertising must prominently state that the guide will request discretionary payments, if this is the case. They must also make clear that discretionary payments are entirely voluntary, and that money from tips is not kept in full by the person guiding, if this is the case.

"This ASA ruling will raise the quality of the visitor experience, which in turn will enhance the reputation of the tourism industry of the country, said Efi Kalampoukidou, **European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (FEG)** President." "We all hope that more countries' authorities will follow the UK example and act immediately to protect the consumers, the destinations and the tourism professionals."

Since 2009, the **European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (FEG)** and the **World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA)** and their 200,000+ members have been warning the EU Commission, national authorities and MEPs that the "free tours" practice is misleading and bad for the image of any destination. The practice

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can compromise the health and safety of the consumer, as well as expectations of accurate information.

The persons conducting the tours are paid in tips only, which means low payment with no guaranteed income or employment. No professional qualification for conducting the tours is required. These are only short term engagements and could be seen as a way of exploiting young people who often report that this is a type of "slavery market" developed outside the professional labour market rules.

Many tour organisers demand their "guides" pay them a commission of 3 - 5 EURO per participant, so it's no surprise that the person guiding presses tourists to give tips. This amount is comparative to what a visitor-consumer would pay to attend any legally organised and advertised guided group tour conducted by a professionally qualified tourist guide.

The European **Federation of Tourist Guide Associations** and the **World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations** stress that several legal issues are raised and must be confronted by relevant authorities on international, European and national levels. They urge consumers, advertising-practice committees and members of government to act against this ever-growing "black labour" market.

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