

## HOTREC and TripAdvisor join forces to call for faithful behaviour on online review platforms

Brussels – 23 February 2016 – HOTREC Hospitality Europe and TripAdvisor shine a spotlight on a challenge facing the travel industry – attempts at fraudulent activity on review sites – and raise awareness of how businesses can help combat the issue. Both organisations jointly condemn attempts to manipulate rankings on any online review platforms by individuals seeking to submit fake reviews. HOTREC and TripAdvisor believe these practices are harmful for consumers, detrimental to destinations and damaging to hospitality businesses in the tourism sector.

HOTREC and TripAdvisor strongly believe that fair and balanced reviews play an important role; they help consumers plan and book travel online, and help hospitality businesses promote their offering and improve service standards. Both organisations also agree that all content submitted to online review platforms should be subject to strict guidelines and rigorous checks. However, it is also the responsibility of consumers and individual businesses to ensure any content submitted to online review sites is reflective of a genuine experience and does not seek to manipulate or distort a property's online reputation. Consumers should act responsibly when writing and submitting reviews to ensure they are sharing their honest and unbiased opinion of a first-hand experience, while business owners should be aware that the practice of submitting fake reviews, either positive or negative, is unethical and forbidden.

*“Faithful and properly checked reviews constitute an opportunity to increase quality and consumer satisfaction for the benefits of future guests as well as for tourism businesses such as hotels, restaurants and cafes” emphasised Markus Luthe, Chair of HOTREC’s Distribution Task Force. “For hotels, they also complement the objective guidance provided by official hotel star rating systems.”*

*“Reviews strongly influence consumers’ booking decisions and help to improve service standards across the hospitality industry,” said Helena Egan, Director of Industry Relations at TripAdvisor. “The integrity of the content on TripAdvisor is critical to our company’s continued success, so we take content moderation and any attempts at fraud on the site extremely seriously. We have been tracking reviews for over 15 years, continuously enhancing our systems and employing best practices from other leading industries, such as credit card and banking agencies. Every review submitted is subject the same rigorous checks. We also have a team of over 300 content specialists who investigate any content that is flagged by our systems or reports received from our community of travellers and business owners,” added Mrs. Egan.*

TripAdvisor also recently informed business owners about ‘optimisation companies’ – individuals or companies that seek to manipulate rankings on travel sites through the submission of fake reviews. These optimisation companies pose a financial risk to honest hospitality businesses around the world and TripAdvisor will take the strongest action possible against these firms, as well as any person or property attempting to engage with these companies to distort the content available on TripAdvisor. In fact, in 2015 alone, TripAdvisor identified, investigated and shut down more than 40 ‘optimisation sites’. HOTREC and TripAdvisor are asking all those who have been approached or contacted by optimisation companies to report it to their national HOTREC member association and/or the travel site’s Content Integrity team for further investigation.

*“HOTREC has been calling for a fair and responsible online distribution market for many years. Fair reviews are one of the basics for prosperous development in the tourism market of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” concluded Christian de Barrin, CEO of HOTREC.*

***What is HOTREC?***

HOTREC represents the hotel, restaurant and café industry at European level. This industry includes around 1,8 million businesses, of which 99% are small and medium sized enterprises (91% of them micro enterprises, i.e. employing fewer than 10 people). These businesses make up some 59% of industry value added. The hospitality industry provides some 10.2 million jobs in the EU alone. Together with the other tourism industries, the sector is one of the largest industries in Europe. HOTREC brings together 43 national associations representing the sector in 29 different European countries.

For further information: [www.hotrec.eu](http://www.hotrec.eu),

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