



All CCS and Cross-sectoral All Europe Countries Greening Inclusion Cross- Sectoral Policies and Governance

Award winning cities in our 2026 wish list

Holidays updating our wish lists, CU explored ideas for inspiring cities to visit in 2026. Travelers are invited to celebrate culture in the ECoCs 2026 and architecture in Barcelona (Spain), discover accessibility and inclusion in Zaragoza (Spain), greening in Guimaraes (Portugal), or innovation in Grenoble (France) and Aalborg (Denmark) and experience how cities across Europe lead by example. Read on.

The new year is almost here and comes with resolutions and plans to accomplish. Why not include in the wish list to get inspired by experiencing cities who leave be example? This would mean to celebrate the European Capital of Culture 2026, [Oulu2026](#) and [Trenčín2026](#) and get inspiring lessons of how accessibility may be ensured for all, in cities such as [Zaragoza which won the Access City Award 2026](#).

If fascinatged by looking to the future, [Grenoble and Aalborg. European Capitals of Innovation](#) are cities to definitely explore in 2026. For those passionate to the greening transition, heritage meets sustainability in [Guimarães \(Portugal\), the European Green Capital 2026](#). Barcelona, the [World Capital of Architecture 2026](#), also awaits us to discover the links between the built environment and community engagement. Ready to

ECoC enthusiasts are mostly welcome to [Oulu \(Finland\)](#) and [Trenčín \(Slovakia\)](#), the [European Capitals of Culture for 2026](#).

[Oulu2026](#) invites visitors to the north region of Finland with a versatile programme aspiring to a 'Cultural Climate Change'. [Oulu2026 Opening Festival](#) will take place during 16-18 January to warmly welcome the ECoC with a captivating winter city festival over three magical days.



[Photo: Harri Tarvainen / City of Oulu image bank.](#)

[Trenčín2026](#) will be transformed into one big city stage to celebrate the ECoC in the [Opening Weekend](#) during 13 - 15 February 2026. Visitors are invited to explore with 'Curiosity' countless opportunities for new experiences in the city's streets, on the squares, in clubs and schools.



[Photo of Trenčín2026 - Courtesy of Trenčín2026](#)

Accessibility matters in European, National, Regional, and Local Planning

[Zaragoza won the Access City Award 2026](#) and is a must-go as accessibility is key to inclusion. Key features of [the award ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy city services](#), such as access to hospitals, town halls, libraries, and sports halls, parks and playgrounds, including by taking the bus, tram and metro.

More Access City Awards include:

- 2nd prize winner: Valencia (Spain)

- 3rd prize winner: Rennes (France)
- Special Mention for Accessibility in Housing: Salzburg (Austria)
- Special Mention for Accessibility in Emergency Preparedness: Valencia (Spain)
- Special Mention for Information and Communications Technology: Piacenza (Italy)



Zaragoza and Ebro view from the highest tower by [Gregorio Puga Bailón from A Coruña, Spain, CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons.

[Guimarães \(Portugal\) is the European Green Capital 2026](#) and invites visitors to discover how sustainability can be deeply embedded into the fabric of a community. With its residents, national partnerships, and European collaborations, the city is forging a greener, brighter future for all.

By adapting a historic city to heatwaves, the city of Guimarães, welcomes visitors also during the summer. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Guimarães is leading a nature-based approach to urban cooling. Through its Green Radial Strategy and data-driven planning, the city is tackling extreme heat while preserving cultural heritage— offering a model for historic cities facing climate challenges.

[European Capital of Innovation awarded Grenoble and Aalborg](#) as the places to be in 2026, if interested in how cities innovate for a better future, reinforcing democracy and citizens' rights.

Grenoble Alpes Métropole has been awarded the title of European Capital of Innovation 2026, through its forward-thinking approach to sustainable urban development, emphasising renewable energy solutions, smart infrastructure, and community-driven innovation to tackle environmental and social challenges.

Aalborg has been named the European Rising Innovative City, by effectively integrating technology into urban planning, fostering a vibrant innovation ecosystem that values collaboration across diverse sectors, including education, healthcare, and clean energy.

Recognising their outstanding contributions to European innovation for 2026, runner-up cities include:

European Capital of Innovation category

- Grenoble Alpes Métropole (France), Winner
- Rotterdam (the Netherlands), 2nd place
- Liverpool (United Kingdom), 3rd place

European Rising Innovative City category

- Aalborg (Denmark), Winner
- San Sebastian (Spain), 2nd place
- Nicosia (Cyprus), 3rd place

Architecture lovers have to not miss Barcelona. Named by UNESCO and UIA - the International Union of Architects as the [World Capital of Architecture 2026, Barcelona](#) aspires to globally lead humanist and transformative architecture, committed to people, sustainability, and culture.

An estimated 1.500 activities are expected to be included in the Capital's program, scheduled to be announced in mid-January 2026.



Image at the header featuring Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar and the Ebro River, Zaragoza by [Jiuguang Wang, CC BY-SA 3.0 ES](#), via Wikimedia Commons.