



**Blue
Tourism
Initiative**

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE BLUE TOURISM: TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND POLICY PATHWAYS



Blue Tourism Initiative promotes a holistic vision of maritime and coastal management in line with worldwide efforts to deliver the 2030 Agenda around marine regions. This initiative aims to improve the governance of coastal and marine tourism to ensure sustainable, inclusive and resilient development, and address the associated environmental, health, socio-cultural and economic challenges.

It supports exchanges of knowledge, good practices, projects and experiences between three major marine regions sharing similar environmental and social challenges related to coastal and maritime tourism: the Mediterranean, the Western Indian Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.



IDDRI is an independent think tank based in Paris (France) at the interface of research and decision-making that investigates sustainable development issues requiring global coordination.



Eco-Union is an independent Think and Do Tank based in Barcelona (Spain), whose objective is to accelerate the ecological transition of the Euro-Mediterranean region.



CORDIO East Africa is a nonprofit research organization based in Kenya focus on the sustainable use and management of coastal and marine resources in the Western Indian Ocean.



IUCN Centre for Mediterranean, established in Malaga (Spain), works to bridge gaps between science, policy, management and action in order to conserve nature and accelerate the transition towards sustainable development in the Mediterranean.



CANARI (Caribbean Natural Resources Institute) is a non-profit institute headquartered in Trinidad and Tobago, facilitating stakeholder participation in the stewardship of renewable natural resources in the Caribbean.



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Towards Sustainable Blue Tourism: Trends, Challenges and Policy Pathways

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The Blue Tourism Initiative

The [Blue Tourism Initiative](#)¹ is a global multi-stakeholder innovation program focused on the environmental management, governance and planning of coastal and maritime tourism in three marine regions: the Mediterranean, the Western Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. In these three regions, the project supports the participatory development of sustainable blue tourism initiatives through policy actions and a multi-stakeholder approach to inform the scalability of sustainable blue tourism in other regions .

The objectives of the Blue Tourism Initiative are to:

1. Assess the current global and regional situation of blue tourism with a particular focus on challenges and opportunities, and recommended directions for sustainable blue tourism development.
2. Support and monitor the implementation of sustainable blue tourism initiatives in the Mediterranean, West Indian Ocean and the Caribbean.
3. Integrate sustainable blue tourism management and governance at the regional policy level, share best practices and raise awareness among key local, national and regional stakeholders.

In line with the objectives of the Blue Tourism Initiative, this report proposes an overview of the blue tourism sector, presenting the sector's key stakeholders, the sectoral challenges and opportunities for greater resilience and proposing policy pathways for a more sustainable blue tourism future .

¹ Blue Tourism Initiative www.bluetourisminitiative.org

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACS: Association of Caribbean States

BE: Blue economy

BT: Blue tourism

CAGR: Compound annual growth rate

CARICOM: Caribbean Community

CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity

CMRs: Coastal and marine regions

CMT: Coastal and maritime tourism

CREST: Center for Responsible Travel

CSOs: Civil society organizations

DMO: Destination management organizations

GDP: Gross domestic product

GHG: Greenhouse gas

GMP: Gross marine product

GSTC: Global Sustainable Tourism Council

GVA: Gross value added

ICZM: Integrated coastal zone management

IDAs: International development agencies

IFC: International Finance Corporation

IGO: Intergovernmental organizations

IORA: Indian Ocean Rim Association

IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature

LBS: Land-based sources

LME: Large marine ecosystems

MEA: Multilateral Environmental Agreement

MDBs: Multilateral development banks

MPA: Marine protected area

NBT: Nature-based tourism

NBS: Nature-based solutions

NDCs: Nationally determined contributions

NEP: Note evaluation project (Project evaluation note)

NGO: Non-governmental organizations

OECMs: Other effective area-based conservation measures

OTAs: Online travel agencies

PA: Protected area

RSCAPs: Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans

SMEs: Small and medium-sized enterprises

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

SIDS: Small Island Developing States

TOs: Tour operators

UfM: Union for the Mediterranean

UNEP: UN Environment Programme

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization

WIO: Western Indian Ocean

WSSD: World Summit on Sustainable Development

WTTC: World Travel and Tourism Council

WWF: World Wildlife Fund

Executive summary

This report reviews the current situation of coastal and maritime tourism and identifies the challenges and opportunities faced by stakeholders today towards the development of a more sustainable blue tourism sector. The report introduces blue tourism, the main factors characterizing this tourism sub-sector, its governance and the legal and institutional framework. Moreover, blue tourism's main market segments are examined, followed by a review of tourism impacts, and the current global issues that affect the sector. Drawing from a review of the key challenges and opportunities for a more sustainable blue tourism economy, policy pathways are recommended to reorient the sector towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

Tourism, a major source of incomes and jobs

Tourism is a main driver of socio-economic growth in many countries. In 2019 alone, the tourism sector contributed 10.3% to global GDP² (US\$9.6 trillion) and 10.3% of all jobs (333 million).³ In this context, coastal and maritime tourism, also referred to as blue tourism, involves beach and nautical leisure activities in coastal waters and represents at least 50% of the global tourism sector and supports millions of jobs. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the tourism sector hard, generating significant impacts through a drastic drop in international arrivals, a fall in tourism receipts of 50.4% in 2020, and the loss of 62 million jobs.⁴ Marine and coastal destinations were not immune to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic with the total disruption of reliable flows of tourists from air travel and cruise ships, producing cascading effects on businesses, governments, and communities. Nevertheless, while the pandemic has shown how the tourism sector is highly sensitive to economic, political and health crises, it has also opened a window for structural changes in the sector towards a more sustainable industry.

2 WTTC, (2021). [Economic Impact Reports](#).

3 WTTC, (2021). [Economic Impact Reports](#).

4 WTTC, (2021). [Economic Impact Reports](#).

An overview of coastal and maritime tourism

The blue economy⁵ (BE) and blue tourism (BT) are fundamental concepts of coastal and maritime tourism. The BE, which is defined as the “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and job creation”, is expected to support and preserve the long-term capacity of ocean and coastal ecosystems to provide services and remain healthy and resilient. The BE refers to a range of economic sectors including coastal and maritime tourism (CMT) which account for the majority. It is expected to become the largest value-added segment in the ocean economy by 2030, at 26%.⁶

CMT is one of the oldest tourist industry⁷ segments, having evolved from leisure activities in the 19th century through to the mainstreaming of paid vacations, all-inclusive resorts and means of transportation. BT has developed rapidly in recent decades with the consolidation of large hotel corporations investing in coastal destinations and tour operators, leading to the homogenization and standardization of maritime and coastal destinations, with higher concentrations of retail areas, entertainment clusters and tour options. Also, other forms of tourism, e.g., ecotourism and nautical tourism are experiencing growth.⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis have led to price increases in tourism services, but also to a growing demand for environmentally-friendly services and diversified touristic products and experiences.

5 World Bank, (2021). [Riding the Blue Wave: Applying the Blue Economy Approach to World Bank Operations](#).

6 World Bank, (2017). [Sustainable tourism can drive the blue economy: Investing in ocean health is synonymous with generating ocean wealth](#).

7 Honey M. & Krantz D., (2007). [Global Trends in Coastal Tourism](#).

8 Tonazzini, D., Fosse, J., Morales, E., González, A., Klarwein, S., Moukaddem, K., Louveau, O., (2019) [Blue Tourism. Towards a sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in world marine regions](#). Edited by eco-union. Barcelona.

Focusing on the Mediterranean, Caribbean and West Indian Ocean

The Mediterranean, the Caribbean, and the West Indian Ocean are among the main marine regions for blue tourism. The Mediterranean region, which includes 22 countries with different economic and social conditions, is the most visited tourist region in the world. The region accounts for 30% of global tourism, and is also home to around 9% of the world's marine biodiversity, making it a biodiversity hotspot with around 30% of species being endemic and nearly 1,200 marine protected areas (MPAs).⁹ The Caribbean Sea, while covering less than 1% of the world's oceans, directly supports the economies of 37 territories. The Caribbean is the world's most tourism-dependent region and in 2017 alone the travel and tourism industry contributed to 20% of regional GDP and 19% of employment.¹⁰ The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) has a coastline of over 15,000 km and includes 10 countries marked by high levels of population density and growth.¹¹ Economic sectors that depend on the ecological functions of the sea amount to around US\$20.8 billion in the annual gross marine product (GMP), which largely comprises tourism-based activities (around 69%).¹² CMT is a major contributor to the WIO's economy, especially for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as the Seychelles and the Mauritius.¹³ Tourism is also an important source of foreign exchange.

The blue tourism stakeholder landscape

Numerous stakeholders are directly and indirectly involved in CMT. These stakeholders often have different interests, priorities and concerns related to the sector,¹⁴ and the effective management of tourism activities requires collaboration and cooperation among them to build a shared vision. The main blue tourism actors include: public authorities at the national, and local levels, with direct involvement in promoting and developing tourism (e.g., policy development, marketing strategies, infrastructure development, capacity-building); the private sector, which includes accommodation providers, online travel agencies (OTAs)¹⁵, hospitality, transportation as well as trade associations; and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the tourist industry, which make up the backbone of the sector with larger enterprises representing a smaller share of the private sector.

Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) are also considered an essential actor to promote the development of the tourism industry in a sustainable and inclusive way. In addition,

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focus on accounting for the negative environmental effects of mass tourism by simultaneously promoting clear standards of sustainability through certification programmes as well as local community activities. International development agencies (IDAs)¹⁶ and multilateral development banks¹⁷ are also increasingly committed to fostering economic and social progress, especially in developing countries by financing projects and supporting investment in sustainable tourism. Furthermore, universities and research institutions are contributing to tourism-related research, developing training programmes, as well as developing guidelines and conducting policy analysis.

Governance framework

The institutional and legal frameworks that regulate (blue) tourism and its development in CMT are varied. This report reviews some of the main Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), including: the [Convention of Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#) and [Rio+20 \(2012\)](#) with "The Future We Want" declaration, which provide the basis for initiatives such as the UNWTO and [UNEP's 10-year Sustainable Tourism Programme](#);¹⁸ which directly relates to the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#); and the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#).¹⁹

In addition, recent initiatives have focused on developing and supporting industry codes and standards that promote tourism inclusivity and environmentally-sustainable practices that directly impact on future blue tourism developments. Examples include the [UN One Planet Initiative](#), [The Glasgow Declaration](#), the [Tourism Panel on Climate Change](#), and the [Future of Tourism](#). At the marine-region level, the main initiatives and programmes include the [Regional Seas Programme \(UNEP\)](#) that promotes the protection and sustainable use of the world's coastal and marine resources through interregional and regional ocean governance to deliver the [Global Oceans Agenda](#) and to respond to emerging issues.²⁰

9 MedPAN et. al., (2016). [The 2016 status of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean: Main findings](#). Brochure MedPAN & UN Environment/Map-SPA/RAC.

10 Caribbean Development Bank, (2017). [Caribbean Economic Review, 2018 Outlook](#). 22p.

11 UNEP, Secretariat for the Nairobi Convention, (2018). [Vision: A Prosperous Western Indians Ocean Region with Healthy Rivers, Coasts and Oceans](#).

12 WIOMSA and UN-Habita, (2022). [The Cities of the Western Indian Ocean \(WIO\) and Blue Economy. The Status Report](#).

13 UNWTO, Economic Development in Africa Report, (2017). [Tourism for Transformative and Inclusive Growth](#).

14 Byrd, E.T., (2007). [Stakeholders in sustainable tourism development and their roles: applying stakeholder theory to sustainable tourism development](#). *Tourism Review*, Vol. 62 No. 2, pp. 6-13.

15 Expedia, (2015). [What is an OTA?](#)

16 World Bank, (2021). [What's IDA?](#)

17 European Investment Bank (EIB), (2019). [Multilateral development banks](#).

18 UNWTO, (2014). [Harnessing Power: One billion tourists sustainable future](#). Press Release No. 14076.

19 UNCC, (2015). [Paris Agreement](#).

20 Akiwumi, P., & Melvasalo, T., (1998). [UNEP's Regional Seas Programme: approach, experience and future plans](#).

Main market segments of blue tourism

The main market segments for CMT are beach and coastal resorts, representing the most globalized and territorialized economic activity of the sector.²¹ Cruises and recreational boating are among the fastest-growing and most profitable segments of the blue tourism sector.²² While both segments generate benefits, they are notably responsible for negative environmental and social impacts on coastal and marine areas, particularly the cruise industry which is a major source of air, noise and marine pollution.²³

Marine and coastal-based sport tourism²⁴ includes travel and activities related to the observation, participation or engagement in marine-based sporting events, activities or facilities. Some of these sports have become highly popular tourist attractions in coastal areas, with a positive impact on the economy of coastal communities, promoting regional development and creating jobs.²⁵

Nature-based tourism is an emerging and fast-growing sector in the blue tourism industry that aims to redirect small numbers of travellers towards less mainstream locations and activities to alleviate their impact on ecosystems.²⁶ Finally, there is increasing interest in marine culture tourism, which involves the exploration of the cultural heritage and lifestyles of communities living in and around coastal and marine environments.²⁷ This type of tourism can bring benefits to local populations and to the sustainability of coastal regions, also representing an opportunity to overcome seasonality in tourism flows in coastal and maritime areas.²⁸

The impacts of multiple crises on tourism

The main impacts of tourism in coastal and marine regions can be categorized as environmental, economic and social. Environmental impacts are usually linked to the use and management of natural resources, the main ones include coastal artificialization, marine pollution, and biodiversity loss.²⁹ The economic impacts of tourism on coastal communities can be positive, such as job creation, community development (local businesses, infrastructure) among others, and negative, such as seasonality and unequal distribution of tourist income.³⁰ Regarding social impacts, positive effects include raising awareness of the preservation of local cultures and

traditions and the promotion of education, while negative impacts include changes to cultural authenticity (touristification) and gentrification. It is also important to consider the effect of global crises on the tourism sector, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions (e.g. the Russia-Ukraine conflict³¹) and climate change, which are having profound consequences on tourism activities especially in vulnerable areas such as coastal and island regions.³² The analysis of the relationship between tourism and sustainability highlights the link between blue tourism and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), especially Goal 8, 12, and 14.

Challenges, opportunities and pathways to more sustainable blue tourism

Blue tourism stakeholders face challenges as well as opportunities for sustainable development. Some of the challenges are more strategic, such as those related to limited policy cohesion (e.g. tourism and environmental policies) and limited collaboration among actors in marine regions. Other challenges tend to be faced directly by tourism businesses, including access to information,³³ knowledge and innovation opportunities, high costs to initiate and/or join more sustainable initiatives and practices,³⁴ and an absence of technical support.³⁵ Key opportunities include growing knowledge among private actors of innovative business models,³⁶ a willingness to invest in sustainable solutions and emerging digital technologies, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic,³⁷ to foster more collaborative governance. In the light of these challenges and opportunities, a number of policy pathways are proposed and summarized in the following table.

21 Tonazzini, D., Fosse, J., Morales, E., González, A., Klarwein, S., Moukaddem, K., Louveau, O., (2019) *Blue Tourism. Towards a sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in world marine regions*. Edited by eco-union. Barcelona.

22 The Guardian, (2016). *The world's largest cruise ship and its supersized pollution problem*.

23 Plan Bleu, (2011). *Cruises and Recreational Boating in the Mediterranean*.

24 Galatsopoulou, F., (2022). *Water Sports Tourism*.

25 Lagarene, B. E. S., & Walansendow, A., (2016). *Developing Marine and Coastal-based Sport Tourism on the Waterfront: The Case of Manado Waterfront, Indonesia*. *Journal of Indonesian Tourism and Development Studies*, 4(3), 107

26 World Bank, (2020). *Tools and Resources for Nature-Based Tourism*.

27 OECD, (2009). *The Impact of Culture on Tourism*. OECD, Paris

28 European Commission, (2017). *Challenges and Opportunities for Maritime and Coastal Tourism in the EU*.

29 Fosse J., Klarwein S., Kosmas I. & Gonzalez A., (2021). *Ecosystem Approach for a sustainable coastal and maritime Tourism in the Mediterranean*. Edited by Eco-union.

30 Tonazzini, D., Fosse, J., Morales, E., González, A., Klarwein, S., Moukaddem, K., Louveau, O., (2019) *Blue Tourism. Towards a sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in world marine regions*. Edited by eco-union. Barcelona.

31 UNWTO, (2022). *Impact of the Russian offensive in Ukraine on international tourism*.

32 Peeters, P., Papp, B., (2023). *Envisioning Tourism in 2030 and Beyond*. The changing shape of tourism in a decarbonising world.

33 De la Campa, S. A., (2022). *The Role of the Internet in the Development of Island Communities*.

34 Martínez-Cabrera, J., & López-del-Pino, F., (2021). *The 10 most crucial circular economy challenge patterns in tourism and the effects of COVID-19*. *Sustainability*, 13(9), 4940.

35 Tapia, C., Bianchi, M., Pallaske, G., & Bassi, A. M., (2021). *Towards a territorial definition of a circular economy: exploring the role of territorial factors in closed-loop systems*. *European Planning Studies*, 29(8), 1438-1457.

36 Manniche, J., Larsen, K. T., & Broegaard, R. B., (2021). *The circular economy in tourism: transition perspectives for business and research*. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 21(3), 247-264.

37 Indar, L., Kissoondan, S., Daniel, K., Williams, R., & Mohammed, F., (2022). *Improving Resilience and Recovery to the Travel and Tourism Industry in the Caribbean*. *Open Journal of Applied Sciences*, 12(8), 1439-1467.

1.1. Promote policy and strategic cohesion

Policy and strategic cohesion is essential to reduce fragmentation in the blue tourism policy frameworks and to foster sustainable blue tourism.¹ Cohesion should occur at different political, geographical and sectoral levels and have a common vision to contribute to global environmental commitments (e.g., 2030 Agenda; SDG 12 Sustainable Consumption and Production;² SDG 13 Climate Change,³ SDG 14 Ocean Conservation⁴ and the Paris Agreement.⁵ The public sector should consider enhancing policy cohesion through stakeholder engagement in decision-making and facilitating communication among them.⁶

1.2. Develop a multi-level blue tourism strategy (regional/national/local levels)

A blue tourism strategy or a national tourism strategy and/or a strategy for the sea and coast with a blue tourism component, would define and consolidate the strategic and participatory framework for sustainable blue tourism for the region, country and/or destination, indicating a cohesive vision, sustainability targets, regularly reviewed objectives, and required synergies between policies and between tourism and environmental conservation (e.g. marine spatial planning).⁷

1.3. Strength multi-agency collaboration in decision-making processes

Fostering collaboration among relevant government agencies would enable more synergies for sustainable blue tourism. Given the interlinked nature of tourism, collaboration among public sector agencies including environment, economic development, culture, and transportation is beneficial for more aligned governance and identifying government priorities and establishing common directions.⁸ An example is the NECSTouR initiative that aims to build competitive regional governance for sustainable tourism by involving different public sector regional agencies.⁹

1.4. Foster community and stakeholder engagement in decision-making

Community and stakeholder engagement should be encouraged in coastal communities throughout planning and management processes.¹⁰ The government can enhance community engagement through the development of participatory tools and create a feedback loop between policies and communities.

1.5. Encourage multi-stakeholder networks and partnerships

The government can consider supporting the creation of multisectoral/level networks and partnerships as a participatory approach to sustainable blue tourism development. Resilient networks can be achieved by involving communities and civil society, by implementing better risk management strategies at the company level, by putting the emphasis on risk awareness and greater transparency in the value chain, and by promoting adaptability. Governments can support the building of more resilient global value chains by collecting and sharing information on potential concentration and bottlenecks upstream, by developing stress tests for essential supply chains and by creating a conducive regulatory environment.¹¹

1.6. Boost collaboration among marine regions

Fostering policy dialogue and technical cooperation among marine regions could strengthen the sharing of knowledge and expertise. This can be achieved through transnational and inter-regional partnerships and networks such as regional seas conventions, which engage a wide range of stakeholders to enhance regional cooperation.¹²

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2 United Nations, (2023). *Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*.

3 United Nations, (2023). *Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*.

4 The Global Goals, (2023). *Goal 14: Life below water*.

5 United Nations, (2015). *Paris Agreement*.

6 Stratigea, A., Katsoni, V. A., (2015). *Strategic policy scenario analysis framework for the sustainable tourist development of peripheral small island areas – the case of Lefkada-Greece Island*. European Journal of Futures Research. 3, 5

7 Hickey, V. (2023). *Transformation: The Role of Coastal and Marine Tourism in a Sustainable Ocean Economy*.

8 OECD, (2019). *Recommendation of the Council on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development*.

9 Plan Bleu, (2022). *State of Play of Tourism in the Mediterranean*, Interreg Med Sustainable Tourism Community project.

10 De Marzo, C., (2019). *Ensuring effective monitoring of tourism sustainability in the Mediterranean region*.

11 OECD, (2020). *COVID-19 and global value chains: Policy options to build more resilient production networks*.

12 UNEP Regional Seas Programme

2.1. Promote sustainable production and consumption

Existing and new policies and regulations can focus on supporting low resource consumption throughout the tourism value chain. The principles of the circular economy¹ should be increasingly integrated into tourism policies and practices.² This is particularly relevant for coastal and island destinations that are often subject to resource scarcity and require context-aware solutions for their sustainable development.³

2.2. Boost certifications programmes

Sustainability certifications can be supported by the public sector while ensuring that these certifications are accessible to smaller tourism operators. Technical and financial support may be provided by the public sector for smaller tourism enterprises seeking to re-design their business models. Certification labels could influence the financial and non-financial performance of businesses such as cost-savings and lower resource use.⁴

2.3. Promote sustainable product diversification and marketing

The public sector can consider supporting the diversification of the tourism offer through incentives and technical and marketing support to minimize social and environmental pressures on destinations.⁵ However, strong marketing support is needed for new and alternative forms of tourism products that may be targeted to niche market segments. The public sector can consider supporting links between businesses and tour operators and creating online spaces where sustainable tourism businesses and experiences can be promoted.

2.4. Support tourism businesses overcoming barriers to change

Tourism businesses, especially SMEs, tend to face technical and financial challenges to the adoption of sustainable practices.⁶ The public sector should consider enhancing technical assistance programmes and the establishment of one-stop centres. Moreover, increasing accessibility to innovation and training for businesses and especially SMEs located in more peripheral blue tourism destinations is essential to equally mitigate challenges faced by tourism stakeholders.⁷

1 Ellen MacArthur Foundation, (2023). [What is a circular economy?](#)

2 Martínez-Cabrera, J., & López-del-Pino, F., (2021). [The 10 most crucial circular economy challenge patterns in tourism and the effects of COVID-19](#). Sustainability, 13(9), 4940.

3 Sciacca, A. (2020). [Circular Economy Transition in Small Island Destinations](#).

4 Hellmeister, A., & Richins, H., (2019). [Green to gold: Beneficial impacts of sustainability certification and practice on tour enterprise performance](#). Sustainability, 11(3), 709.

5 Cisneros, J. D. & Fernandez A., (2015). Cultural tourism as tourist segment for [reducing seasonality](#) in a coastal area: The case study of Andalusia. Current Issues in Tourism, 18 (8) , pp. 765-784

6 Manniche, J., Topsø Larsen, K., Brandt Broegaard, R., & Holland, E., (2017). Destination: A [circular tourism](#) economy: A handbook for transitioning toward a circular economy within the tourism and hospitality sectors in the South Baltic Region.

7 ten Brink, P., Kettunen, M. & Watkins, E., (2017). Expert Group on Green and Circular [Economy in the Outermost Regions](#): Final Report.

3.1. Reinforce climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience in the tourism sector

The public sector can consider enhancing mitigation, adaptation and resilience in blue tourism destinations by strengthening a combination of actions including targeted and tailored capacity building, financial actions at the destination level and communication for awareness building. For example the consolidation of observatories, organization of forums, and committees composed of local stakeholders can address the needs of destinations facing climate change.¹

3.2. Promote destination stewardship

Ensuring the balance between the needs of the destination, tourists and the environment is crucial for a sustainable blue tourism sector. Through a variety of actions, the public sector should consider partnering with the private sector and with communities to bring together all stakeholders in an effort to preserve local heritage.²

3.3. Support transition communities for sustainable tourism

The public sector can support the creation of innovation transition communities through funding and technical resources. Transition communities can bring together stakeholders to develop and support the development of sustainable tourism solutions.³ Examples include the Quadruple Helix frameworks⁴ and joint purchasing frameworks.⁵ Supporting innovation communities can drive sustainability and collaboration in the tourism sector.⁶

3.4. Ensure appropriate visitor management in sensitive areas

Establishing visitor monitoring and management systems, especially in sensitive sites such as MPAs or cultural heritage sites, is becoming increasingly required to minimize the impacts of tourism activities.⁷ This includes include studies on carrying capacities, LCA approaches⁸ and PAVIM⁹ and extend to terrestrial and marine sites, and related means of transport

3.5. Endorse nature-based solutions (NbS) and regenerative practices

NbS and regenerative approaches can support destinations and businesses to ensure a positive impact on nature and host communities, while addressing societal challenges such as climate change. This needs to be carried out under sound operational frameworks and standards¹⁰ and linked with the wider tourism value chain, for example with regenerative agriculture.¹¹ Five principles illustrate how regenerative and nature based solutions can be developed for the tourism sector: 1. prioritizing community needs; 2. improving ecosystem integrity and biodiversity; 4. embracing diverse and inclusive business models; 5. developing transparent governance structures accountable to all stakeholders; and 6. enhancing regenerative partnerships¹².

3.6. Foster renew marketing specializations and destination brandg

With the involvement of specialized NGOs and the willingness of businesses, motivated by public funds and policies, coastal and maritime destinations should work towards the diversification of blue tourism Products, through new market specializations such as Cultural Marine Tourism, Ecotourism, Pescatourism, and others. Essential segments for long-term sustainability and for renewing marketing strategies include those that represent opportunities to reduce the seasonality of tourism flows in coastal and maritime areas, that collaborate with local communities, respecting their traditions and practices, and that adhere to sustainable tourism practices.¹³

1 Greening the Islands, (2023). The first GTI Observatory Summit kicks off in Gran Canaria to consolidate leading committees and outline action-oriented agenda towards COP28.

2 WTTT, (2021). Towards Destination Stewardship: Achieving Destination Stewardship through scenario & a governance diagnostic framework.

3 Chan, J., Sciacca, A., Coles, A.M, et al., (2022). Circular tourism and support from local authorities: How local authorities can support small-medium size tourism enterprises in coastal destinations in six strategic steps. Other. Interreg 2 Seas project FACET.

4 2 Seas Interreg Project FACET, (2023). Collaboration Structures for Circular Initiatives.

5 Weijis, R. H., Coles, A.M. and Chan, J. H., (2022). Joint Purchase in a Circular Economy A paper on Joint Purchases created for entrepreneurs and stakeholders in the tourism and recreational sector.

6 Chan, J. H., Roskam, H., van Maldegem, A., Ieromonachou, P., Sciacca, A., Von Schomberg, L., Coles, A.M., Witt, S., Zavala, J., Métreau, E., Debruyne, D., Brinkman, M., (2023). Accelerating the adoption of the Circular Economy in the tourism and leisure sector: the 3-M Framework as the Foundation of Circular Entrepreneurship. Interreg 2 Seas project FACET.

7 Liabastre, T., Leung, L. and Rieder, L., (2022). Carrying Capacity Assessment for Tourism in Coron and El Nido: A Step toward Sustainable Management of Marine Ecosystems.

8 Goodwin, H., (2019). Limit of Acceptable Change.

9 Farrell, T. A., & Marion, J. L., (2002). The protected area visitor impact management (PAVIM) framework: A simplified process for making management decisions. Journal of sustainable tourism, 10(1), 31-51.

10 IUCN, (2020). IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions. Gland, Switzerland. IUCN, 2020. vi, 21p. : ill., maps. 2020 ISBN: 978-2-8317-2058-6

11 Fieser, E., (2021). The Intersection of Regenerative Agriculture and Travel.

12 King, C. & Burns, O., (2022). Climate Action through Regeneration: Unlocking the Power of Communities and Nature through Tourism.

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4.1. Develop enabling policies for digital and smart tourism development

Tourism and/or digitalization policies can support investments for the development and management of smart/digital tools and infrastructure in tourism.¹ For blue tourism destinations located in more peripheral areas, these investments should target, where needed, the basics of smart development in tourism such as internet coverage. It is vital that reducing or avoiding digital inequalities should be on the digital / smart tourism development agenda.²

4.2. Ensure tools and infrastructure for smart tourism development

Smart tourism destinations can only develop and function with the presence of key infrastructure, such as connectivity, cyber security systems and data centres, as well as the digital skills of host communities and tourists.³ It is crucial the identification of the destination digital readiness and related actions to ensure that the destination can leverage on digitalisation⁴. For more peripheral destinations, connectivity can be a main development challenge.

4.3. Elaboration of innovative indicators and data analysis systems

The public sector should consider supporting the development of spin-off methodologies to generate an indicator system to analyse tourism impacts at environmental, social, and economic levels, and the impact of the multiple crisis on the tourism sector. Such indicators will be necessary to fine-tune plans. Also, the development of comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and statistics schemes should be advanced, particularly for the measurement and monitoring of blue tourism impacts on natural ecosystems⁵.

4.4. Support awareness building on smart technologies

Smart technologies can often be costly, both for businesses and destinations, making stakeholders potentially reluctant to invest in smart initiatives⁶. Increasing awareness of the long-term benefits of smart technologies may motivate new investments that may lack short-term returns.

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- 5 Tonazzini, D., Fosse, J., Morales, E., González, A., Klarwein, S., Moukaddem, K., Louveau, O., (2019) [Blue Tourism. Towards a sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in world marine regions](#).
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5.1. Establish partnerships with universities and other research institutions

Research should be supported on an ongoing basis by governments and partnerships with universities and other established research centres. This could boost innovation through the informed development of technologies and sustainable blue tourism practices.¹ More funds would allow the interdisciplinary studies of blue economy and blue tourism, and also enable further development of strategic tools such as MPAs and land-based management strategies.

5.2. Implementation of tools to support market studies

Sustainable tourism needs research to identify innovative development opportunities and strategic management strategies. Emerging tools such as remote sensors and big data management systems can enable the study of the effect of seasonality and tourist flow and their behaviour^{2 3}. The use of this data can make impact prevention processes more effective as strategies will be informed, monitored and adapted to changes over time. Moreover, research can inform solutions that enhance tourist experience, and create a more viable and long-lasting tourism sector.

5.3. Support climate change adaptation and mitigation research

Policy formulation must be based on the careful monitoring of the impacts from climate change on coastal communities. The public sector should consider supporting research that not only monitors the environmental impacts from climate change, but also the socio-economic ones. Moreover, research should question the extent to which blue tourism activities are helping coastal communities adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change.

5.4. Promote capacity building activities

Collaborations with educational institutions can also be key in terms of capacity-building for local (blue tourism) projects supporting innovation in the sector and the development of soft and technological skills for community-members

1 Rinaldi, C., Cavicchi, A., & Robinson, R. N., (2022). [University contributions to co-creating sustainable tourism destinations](#). *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 30(9), 2144-2166.

2 Kalvet, T., Olesk, M., Tiits, M., & Raun, J., (2020). [Innovative tools for tourism and cultural tourism impact assessment](#). *Sustainability*, 12(18).

3 Blanco-Moreno, S., González-Fernández, A. M., & Muñoz-Gallego, P. A., (2023). [Big data in tourism marketing: past research and future opportunities](#). *Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC*, (ahead-of-print).

6.1. Establish and promote financial incentives

Financial incentives can take various forms, including grants and subsidies, tax incentives and voucher schemes¹ as well as support for marketing and promotion for businesses that adopt sustainable solutions. In blue tourism destinations these financial incentives can help mitigate the often low economies of scale of coastal and island regions.²

6.2. Identify and create access to alternative financing options

The public sector can support alternative forms of financing for sustainable blue tourism. For example the idea of destination-based crowdfunding platforms has been recently proposed to support tourism entrepreneurs in adopting circular economy solutions.³ Other alternative financing options can be piloted at the destination level, such as user fees and environmental taxes to establish a trust fund which can be resilient to downturns in visitor numbers. These options have been proven effective to finance community-led and conservation initiatives.⁴

6.3. Adapt financing mechanisms for SMEs

Current funding mechanisms should be adapted to suit the requirements of the blue tourism economy, and the application processes should be simplified for tourism entrepreneurs. Funding applications can be particularly complex for SMEs, with high barriers to eligibility. Their simplification is crucial for major financial accessibility to scale up sustainable blue tourism solutions.⁵

6.4. Create partnerships with financial institutions

Partnerships with financial institutions could facilitate the development of new financing mechanisms for blue tourism entrepreneurs and investments in sustainable tourism initiatives. Moreover, the involvement of different types of funding for the financing of sustainable blue tourism initiatives would guarantee the alignment of development aid and cooperation schemes.

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2 ten Brink, P., Kettunen, M. & Watkins, E., (2017). *Expert Group on Green and Circular Economy in the Outermost Regions: Final Report.*

3 Chan, J., Sciacca, A., Coles, A.M., et al. (2023) *Financing the circular economy in the tourism sector: How can tourism SMEs use reward-based crowdfunding to finance circular solutions?* Other. Interreg 2 Seas project FACET.

4 Travindy (2022). *Destinations funding sustainability through tourist taxes.*

5 OECD, (2018). *Tourism Trends and Policies 2018.*

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