



Policy recommendations for Spain (Balearic Islands)

Deliverable D4.1 : Towards Recovering, Experiencing and Boosting
Ecotourism in the WestMed Area

I. Introduction and main aims

The EMFAF REBOOT MED, “Recovering, Experiencing and Boosting ecoTourism in the WestMed area” aims to encourage public-private partnership co-defining Blue Economy Action Plans for the Recovery of the tourism sector, and to incubate, accelerate and test new eco/blue economy tourism packages in 10 pilot areas in 6 WestMed countries: France, Italy, Spain, Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania.

AETIB Balearic Islands Agency for Tourism is part of the Regional government of the Balearic Islands and has been involved in the project with the objective that the Balearic Islands can be a worldwide reference in sustainable, responsible, and circular tourism, whilst ensuring the sustainability of tourism and the environment and preserving the local culture, resources, and environment.

Therefore, REBOOT MED Action Plan for Balearic Islands aims at defining and implementing actions that can promote sustainable and responsible ecotourism activities with the aim to increase tourism SMEs competitiveness.

Thanks to the project, we have been able to make progress on three main aspects.

First, **through REBOOT MED co-creation and testing of ecotourism products in Balearic Islands we have supported our ecotourism SMEs.** They are small businesses: 90.7% of the companies have less than 10 employees, so they firmly need support in any possible way.

Second, **REBOOT MED has made it possible to create PERMANENT PUBLIC GOVERNANCE TABLE at regional government level.** AETIB -which belongs to Directorate General for Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism- and DG Natural Spaces & Biodiversity -which belongs to the Ministry of Environment. This Governance table will jointly agree on the actions to undertake for the activities done in the natural spaces competence of the regional government and later, will coordinate the implementation and monitoring of the Balearic Islands Blue Economy Action Plan for the recovery of the tourism sector developed under REBOOT MED, consequently, the ecotourism activities taking place on these spaces.

Third, thanks to **REBOOT MED it has been possible to work together and plan general strategies affecting ecotourism products.** Ecotourism is growing day by day and it is important to make clear that in the Balearic Islands is not a single product, but is made of multiple products, that sometimes includes active tourism too. Ecotourism and active tourism are strategic tourism segments (SETs)

in which promotion and development needs to be achieved within the coordination of public institutions and private entities.

This document has been elaborated in cooperation with the regional stakeholder group created within the framework of REBOOT MED and composed by representatives of the Balearic regional government, the involvement of the National government, the national ecotourism association, some municipalities that offer ecotourism products, local tourism associations, as well as around **40 representatives from ecotourism sector that actively participated in the Spanish Living Lab organised by AETIB on the 31st may 2023**. This event marked an important milestone for ecotourism in Balearic islands since:

- 1) It gathered, for the first time, representatives at national, regional, and local level from the 4 islands.
- 2) Set up a fruitful debate about ecotourism in the Balearic Islands, which allowed to jointly analyze:
 - Main benefits of ecotourism for Balearic Islands as a destination.
 - Main problems, obstacles, weaknesses of ecotourism in the Balearic Islands.
 - Main Areas of Improvement
 - Future actions to be done.

Furthermore, the mentoring phase of REBOOT MED in Balearic Islands aimed at improving the sustainability and competitiveness of each business in the ecotourism sector participating in the Call. Green Globe (the AETIB Technical Assistance in charge of the testing and mentoring) worked in collaboration with companies and the MEET network and Global Ecological Footprint Network to design new ecotourism products, and guarantee their visibility and competitiveness.

Therefore, the main outcomes from this public debate, together with some considerations made by the mentored SMEs companies during the testing and co-creation of products, have allowed to outline this Policy document, which contains the main Policy Strategies that need to be addressed by the regional Government through the PERMANENT PUBLIC GOVERNANCE TABLE.

II. Policy framework

This policy paper, elaborated by AETIB in cooperation with the Permanent Public Governance Table on Ecotourism

1. Acknowledge and thank

- The ecotourism companies that have actively participated in the mentoring and the co-creation of ecotourism products, namely: SKUALO, Martin Walks, Karakorum Adventures and Lemon Tours.
- The stakeholders participating in the process, at all levels, but specially DG Natural Spaces & Biodiversity, Department of Sustainability of the Spanish Government, and the Association of Ecotourism in Spain, Spanish Association of Ecotourism.

2. Recall

On the fact that in the **Sustainable tourism strategy of Spain 2030** the conservation of the Spanish extensive cultural and natural heritage is a priority objective. The importance of Ecotourism and nature products is also recognised by the ***Estrategia de Creación y Fortalecimiento de Experiencias Turismo de España***.

On the importance to note that the alternative to mass tourism in Balearic Islands exists in the form of ecotourism and nature tourism, but currently represents a very small fraction in comparison to mass tourism, which predominates on the islands. Therefore, **for blue tourism and ecotourism to become a real and viable alternative, it is essential to provide ecotourism companies with the necessary tools and support to grow and generate business in a sustainable way.**

3. Support the regional laws of the Balearic Islands Government such as the Decree-Law 1/2020, of January 17, on Responsible Tourism and the Improvement of Quality in Tourist Areas, the Law 3/2022, of June 15, on Urgent Measures for the Sustainability and Circularity of Tourism in the Balearic Islands and the Law 2/2016, of March 30, on the Tax on Tourist Stays in the Balearic Islands and Measures to Promote Sustainable Tourism, among others, which support:

The promotion of a tourism that respects ecological values, diversifies its tourist offer, reduces the impact of mass tourism and over saturation, and creates a more balanced and sustainable model that benefits both the local economy and the conservation of the environment.

III. Key policy recommendations

Economy

Encourage the Spanish State to continue working on the – Diversification and deseasonalisation through the National Sustainable tourism strategy of Spain 2030 and the Strategy for the Creation and Strengthening of Tourism Experiences in Spain, and thus:

- To develop new tourism products and improve the capacities of the Spanish destinations to achieve a diverse offer and seasonally adjusted demand.
- To develop products and destinations to attract tourists to new rural or inland destinations, reducing pressure on pioneering destinations, especially through the protection of the natural environment and historical and cultural heritage.
- To promote the digital transition applied to resources, products, and services to transform existing tourism experiences or allow the emergence of new tourism experiences and improve efficiency, accessibility, and agility.

Stress the importance for Regional and local authorities to Promote ecotourism sustainable activities and thus to:

- Promote Balearic Islands as ecotourism destination through better communication by putting in value the importance of this segment for our destination.
- Incorporation of new technologies to nature tourism by developing innovative products that offer environmental education and generate interest from the point of view of communication (e.g., Virtual reality to show the seabed) and/or achieve cooperation agreements with the municipalities that offer these ITC services to tourists.

Emphasize the importance of providing the Private sector with financial support coming from regional or national public administrations

- This should include promoting tax incentives or specific subsidies for micro-SMEs and self-employed workers in the ecotourism sector, which allow them to invest in sustainable equipment and reduce their impact on the environment. The companies we have worked with, are very small and with limited human resources, therefore face difficulties in making significant investments in equipment or materials in the performance of their daily activities

and when reducing their carbon footprint. This lack of investment capacity hampers their ability to implement more sustainable practices, such as using green technologies or procuring materials that respect the environment.

Social/cultural

Encourage the Spanish State to improve governance

- To achieve, through the search for new mechanisms and processes, to improve governance in the tourism sector by enabling formulas and spaces for common work. Improve networking and support entities to improve trust between agents and promote collaborative work.

Regional and local authorities need to promote closer collaboration between departments and with the private sector

- To favour cooperation between environmental administration, tourism administration and the ecotourism enterprises.

Stress the need for the Private sector to develop the necessary infrastructures for ecological tourism and/or the capacity to invest in sustainability.

- Need to make investments in green and sustainable infrastructures in the natural spaces, ports, trails, and other areas of access to natural spaces, to support the development of a respectful tourism with environment. The companies mentioned this need since these infrastructures are essential to guarantee the quality and sustainability of the tourism experiences.

Environment

Support the sustainability of tourism experiences

- Improve the sustainability of tourism experiences, both environmental, social, and economic, by supporting good practices and aligning them with the objectives of ecological transition, demographic challenge and circular economy.

Stress the need for National, Regional and local authorities to further develop, support and implement:

Ecotourism strategy and environmental education

- Define ecotourism strategies with environmental education, taking into consideration the Blue Economy Action Plan developed within the framework of REBOOT MED, with environmental education as a driving force, which values the importance of natural, cultural resources and their conservation, as well as the responsibility to contribute to sustainability and to position the islands as ecological natural destinations through better communication to tourists and residents.
- Improve the connection between ecotourism products and the primary sector encouraging direct sales with local producers and Eno gastronomy products or experiences.

Regulation and bureaucracy

- Create a more favourable regional legal framework for the development of ecotourism.
- Ensure Safety in Ecotourism Activities. Especially in areas where hunting activities are carried out. Hunting can involve a risk for tourists and ecotourism activities, which can generate insecurity and negatively affect the Ecotourism Experience

Improve the training of ecotourism for companies and professionals

- Design and implementation of training programs and workshops. Develop specialized training and education programs in the topics of ecology and biodiversity for tourism companies, facilitated by local experts or academic institutions. The MEET methodology and training, as well as the Global Footprint Network methodology, used in the framework of REBOOT MED, represent good practices that could serve as valuable sources of inspiration.
- To promote expert knowledge of natural environments. Ecotourism experiences always include interpretation about the natural heritage to involve the tourist in its conservation, so the role of the guide of natural spaces is crucial. These guides should be specifically trained in interpretation and natural resources.

Stress the need for the Private sector to understand and make awareness among tourists on the limitations and restrictions in natural spaces and protected areas

- Publish the limitations for each protected natural area on a web portal accessible to tourism companies, so that everybody is informed about the current regulations and limits.

- Create a "one-stop-shop" where companies can access information and apply also for licenses and permits to operate in the natural protected areas.

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