

QualityCoast Award 2013 Jury Report

**WESTVOORNE
The Netherlands**



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Coastal & Marine Union (EUCC)
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What is QualityCoast?

QualityCoast is a sustainability award for coastal communities, towns and islands. It is the only sustainable tourism destination award developed by local authorities themselves. It is the result of the European Union INTERREG project "Coastal Practice Network" (CoPraNet 2002-2005), led by the EUCC. The QualityCoast criteria have been developed to measure the success of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) at local level, in connection to the EU Recommendation for ICZM.

People are increasingly interested in sustainability issues, also when selecting their holiday destination. Tourism eco-labels have become common features in travel brochures and websites.

Whilst the Blue Flag specifically applies to individual beaches and marinas and Travelife and the Green Key to accommodations, QualityCoast is considering efforts for sustainable tourism in the whole territory of the coastal destination: towns, small regions and islands.

With the QualityCoast programme (www.qualitycoast.info), the Coastal & Marine Union - EUCC aims to establish an international network of coastal communities that share similar values on sustainable and socially responsible tourism, at the same time maintaining high standards in the quality of their tourism offer.

With the QualityCoast Award programme, EUCC aims to encourage tourism destinations for:

- a. their attractiveness for visitors interested in natural and cultural heritage, a clean environment, local identity, or business involvement in sustainable tourism;
- b. their policies re: sustainable tourism and any of the aspects mentioned under point a;
- c. a combination of a and b.

With the inclusion of all Destinations Criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) in the QualityCoast Award 2013 Application Form (July 2012), QualityCoast is now open for applications from all continents.

"QualityCoast" has been registered by EUCC as a European Union trademark; the use of the name is restricted under European law.

QualityCoast meets European and global standards

Since 2010 the indicator set is every year been adapted to the criteria of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the EU Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG).

In April 2012 the **Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)** has issued a set of destination criteria in order to increase global harmonization. At ITB 2012 in Berlin tour operators announced that they will in the future only use eco-labels that are recognised by the GSTC. EUCC / QualityCoast is a member of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) as well as of the European NECSTour network, and we aim to be among the first destination labels to be recognized by the GSTC and the European Commission. So all GSTC criteria have been included in the Application Form.

QualityCoast certifies sustainability status and sustainability policy

The QualityCoast Award is an international certification for destinations with a good sustainable tourism policy as well as with a good status of nature and landscape, environment and cultural identity. The Policy Award is issued for a period of two years.

The 21 QualityCoast Award winners of 2011 – 2012 lead the **QualityCoast destinations Top 100** (launched in May 2012 for the European Union). The other ca. 80 destinations of the Top 100 received the QualityCoast BasiQ Award – they are selected on the basis of their present status for environment, nature and cultural heritage, and local identity. BasiQ awarded destinations are encouraged to also have their policies certified, through a QualityCoast Policy Award application.

The importance of QualityCoast for tourism sustainability

Participation of local authorities in the QualityCoast programme improves their awareness performance and achievements in an international context. The comparison with other QualityCoast destinations provides the community with a good picture of its strengths and weaknesses. The international assessment and recommendations by the QualityCoast Jury provide the local authority with a guidance to be considered in an agenda for improvement.

Communities join a network of like-minded communities and share their experiences and best practices in order to improve sustainability and social responsibility in tourism. Their performance in these fields is connected to international tourism marketing through certification under the supervision of an independent international jury issuing the QualityCoast Awards.

Promotional benefits of participation in QualityCoast

The EUCC carries out a marketing campaign together with the QualityCoast Destinations to promote them as the most attractive destinations for visitors interested in nature and landscape, environment, and cultural identity and to highlight their performance in tourism quality and sustainability. The marketing campaign includes promotion at holiday fairs, media publicity, wide dissemination of brochures, promotion via the QualityCoast web site and social media.

The community's own international tourism marketing can profit from the status of QualityCoast Destination. Experience in several countries learns that this will continue to generate media publicity nationally and internationally. Sustainability based marketing efforts will increase the "green profile" of the destination both externally and internally and this will help mainstreaming sustainability on local policy and decision making.

What is the QualityCoast Award?

The QualityCoast Award is an independent international certification programme for sustainable tourism of coastal and island destinations that are:

- ❖ combining good overall policy performance in sustainable tourism with a good attractiveness for tourists;
- ❖ providing transparent information to residents and visitors;
- ❖ planning for improvement.

The programme is considering criteria representing five different categories:

- ❖ **Nature**
- ❖ **Environment**
- ❖ **Local Identity**
- ❖ **Tourism & Business**
- ❖ **Host Community & Safety**

Each criterium is measured through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators, on which the applicant must provide information regarding its entire territory.

What are the QualityCoast criteria?

See the titles of the 2013 Policy Award criteria on the page 8.

Definitions of the criteria and a complete list of indicators can be found in the QualityCoast Application Form 2012-'13.

The criteria and indicators will remain subject to annual revision, based upon European and global standards.

How is the QualityCoast Award attributed?

The QualityCoast Award is attributed on the basis of information to be provided by the applicant(s) through an Application Form. For many of the policy related indicators (especially the GSTC indicators) the applicant is invited to make a self-assessment by giving destination a rate from 1 to 5 ("1" meaning absence of any relevant policy for the indicator, and "5" meaning full availability of policy concerned); and in the case of a rate of 4 or 5 to clarify the rate or give examples.

The Application Form lists 58 core indicators (in 2011-'12: 86) and 153 optional indicators. Whilst all 58 core indicators need to be taken into consideration, applicants can choose on which of the optional indicators they will provide information, with a minimum of ca. two per criterium. This means that applicants will provide information on about a hundred indicators.

The Application Form is evaluated and assessed by the QualityCoast Secretariat. On the basis of all information provided by applicant, the QualityCoast Assessment team has prepared a draft Assessment Report and a draft score sheet. Draft scores are proposed by the assessment team, who has tried to give fair judgments on the basis of international references but also taking into account national constraints.

The Secretariat may ask or hire the services of local experts. The Draft Assessment is then reviewed by a number of members of the international QualityCoast Jury. For each application, EUCC designates a jury composed of at least three members including: an independent local expert (who is aware of the applicant community); a national expert; and an international EUCC-expert. In order to ensure its independence, the Jury will work anonymously until the moment it is concluding its assessment.

Jury members and Local Experts have been identified and appointed, based on their knowledge of the applicant's territory and performance.

Local Experts have been requested to consider information provided in the Application Form and in the draft Assessment Report, and to check, verify and validate or propose changes in the score given for each indicator.

Next, Jury members have been invited to review the draft Assessment Report and score sheet, and to add their comments and recommendations. The Assessment Report and score sheet have been adjusted on the basis of this work, and this results in the present Jury report.

The Secretariat and the jury assign scores to all indicators, ranging from 1 to 5; "1" meaning absence of any quality (or no information provided for an indicator); and "5" indicating excellence for an indicator. The self-assessment rates will also be reviewed by the secretariat and the Jury.

The score per criterium is based on the scores and weight factors of its indicators.

The average scores of all 20 criteria will then be calculated. This will be the final score. Applicants scoring '1' in two or more criteria will not be eligible for the QualityCoast Award, regardless the scores in the other criteria.

First time applicants with an average score no less than 5.7 will be granted a QualityCoast Award. Destinations applying for the 2nd time need score 5.8, for the 3rd time 5.9 and for the 4th time 6.0 (minimum).

The jury will issue a report with a complete list of criteria scores and with suggestions for further improvement.

Some of the indicators measuring the performance in the field of policies; others of indicators for sustainability status. This is why the QualityCoast team is able to produce indexes for sustainability policy and for sustainability status in each of the five categories.

The QualityCoast Jury hopes that the applicant will give consideration to the Jury recommendations included in the report, and take measures in the following years, since the Jury recommendations will be taken in special consideration in any next application for a QualityCoast Award.

For successful applicants the Jury report as well as the above-mentioned indexes will be published in www.qualitycoast.info.

No public reference will be made about unsuccessful applications.

QualityCoast Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum Awards

If the Award score threshold is met, the jury will also check whether the average scores of the individual categories (Nature, Environment, Identity, Tourism & Business and Host Community & Safety) reach a minimum of 8.0 ("excellence").

The following Award levels will be considered:

- QualityCoast Bronze, in case of excellence in one of the five categories;
- QualityCoast Silver, in case of excellence in two of the five categories;
- QualityCoast Gold, in case of excellence in three [but then no other category should be below 5.0] or four categories;
- QualityCoast Platinum, in case of excellence in all five categories.

Successful applicants become QualityCoast Destinations

Applicants who meet the score threshold are invited to the next international QualityCoast Award Ceremony and Workshop (May 2013), where they will receive the QualityCoast Award Certificate, a QualityCoast Flag and a QualityCoast Banner. They then become QualityCoast Destinations that can participate in the joint

marketing programme. QualityCoast Destinations can order extra flags and banners (at a cost basis), which can be displayed throughout the destination's territory during 24 months. One year after the application, the QualityCoast destinations are requested to update some of their public information (for the public website and brochures).

18 Months after their application the QualityCoast destination will be encouraged to submit a renewed QualityCoast Application. The assessment of the new application will take into consideration the coherence between the improvements indicated in the previous one and the integration of the suggestions and the recommendations made by the QualityCoast Jury.

Renewal of the Award: important note

The assessment will take into consideration that earlier scores related to sustainability performance reflect the state of knowledge and experience of previous periods. If no progress is demonstrated in certain indicators, this could result in lower scores. E.g. ambitions and implementation levels in renewable energy use are increasing with time, therefore a clear progress on this item should be shown within a period of four years; another example is the assessment of satisfaction of the destination, which should be carried out in periods no longer than two or three years.

It is also important for applicants to realise that the QualityCoast Team is annually improving the indicator set in order to better cover up-to-date considerations about sustainability and relevant criteria, and to increase harmonisation with the GSTC criteria and the European Union 's ETIS indicators. This is why the score for particular criteria can change compared to two years ago even when the situation hasn't changed.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT & COMMENTS

Comparability with the result from two years ago (for 2nd or 3rd time applicants)

The scores of this year's assessment is not fully comparable with the score of two years ago, because the QualityCoast programme had to adopt many new criteria from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). This was necessary to maintain the support and recognition by large tour operators, which will help promote certifications and awards that are GSTC compliant.

Conclusion

The QualityCoast Jury confirms that there is sufficient evidence to approved the QualityCoast Award 2013, and congratulates the applicant with the result.

This QualityCoast Award is a recognition for the high level of tourism quality and sustainability, in particular in terms of nature and landscape, environment, local identity and cultural heritage.

QualityCoast Award: validity and promotion

The validity of this QualityCoast Award is two years (24 months). You are entitled to display the QualityCoast flags, banners and flyers during this period, throughout your territory. The value of the QualityCoast Award for you as a sustainable tourism destination will highly increase if you are able to help make the QualityCoast Award better known among your inhabitants and visitors, through the flags, banners and flyers, and in your own publications, and website and social media.

GENERAL JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to maintain and improve this high level, the Jury would like to make the following general recommendations to all QualityCoast Destinations:

QualityCoast Committee

The Jury recommends to establish a local QualityCoast Committee on order to provide a think-tank and discussion platform for sustainable tourism on the implementation of the QualityCoast Jury Recommendations. A local QualityCoast Committee could also help promote synergies between stakeholders and contribute to the prolongation of the QualityCoast Award within two years. Within a next QualityCoast application in autumn 2013, the Jury would like to see involvement of the Committee and also to see the work of the Committee reported.

Tasks of this Committee could be:

- To help establish a multi-year tourism strategy that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, that considers environmental, economic, social, cultural heritage, quality, health, and safety issues, and was developed with public participation;
- To help develop a system to monitor, publicly report, and respond to environmental, economic, social, and cultural heritage issues;
- To help monitor residents' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism, to be regularly recorded and publicly reported.

We suggest that this Committee would represent:

- The local government (highest possible level),
- The local business sector;
- Independent expertise or NGO on nature conservation and management;
- Independent expertise or NGO on cultural heritage and landscape interests;
- Independent expertise or NGO on environmental issues.

SCORES

	Overall (max. 10)	Visible Sustainability (max. 10)	Sustainability Policy (max. 10)
NATURE	8.1	8.3	8.1
1. NATURE & CONSERVATION	7.8	7.7	7.8
2. ACCESS, INFORMATION & EDUCATION	7.9	8.9	7.0
3. GREEN POLICIES	8.1		8.1
4. OPEN LANDSCAPES	8.7	8.3	9.3
ENVIRONMENT	8.1	9.4	7.9
5. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	8.2	9.3	7.7
6. BLUE FLAGS & BEACHES	8.3	9.5	7.8
7. WATER MANAGEMENT	8.7		8.7
8. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION	7.6		7.6
9. WASTE & RECYCLING	8.0		8.0
10. ENERGY & CLIMATE MITIGATION	8.0		8.0
11. CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION	7.8		7.8
IDENTITY & CULTURE	7.6	7.3	7.9
12. CULTURAL HERITAGE	7.3	7.0	7.7
13. TERRITORY & TRADITION	7.4	7.0	7.7
14. LOCAL IDENTITY	8.2	8.0	8.3
TOURISM & BUSINESS	7.7	9.1	7.5
15. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	7.8	10.0	7.6
16. BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT	7.6		7.6
17. HOSPITALITY & SATISFACTION	7.7	8.2	7.3
HOST COMMUNITY & SAFETY	8.9	9.0	8.6
18. FREEDOM & JUSTICE	10.0		10.0
19. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	7.7	8.0	7.7
20. HEALTH & SAFETY	8.9	10.0	8.0
Average values	8.08	8.5	8.0
Number of Indicators considered	117/117		
QualityCoast Index	8.08		
Number of categories exceeding score 8	3		
QualityCoast Award Level	GOLD		

DETAILED COMMENTS & OPINIONS

NATURE

Considerations of weak and strong points

- Strong points
 - Progress in the field of Green Policy.
 - Improved information boards are placed in the nature areas.
 - The Jury is very pleased with the attention to improve the situation and landscape impact re: glasshouses. Active implementation of the remediation of scattered glasshouse in respect to the expansion of open landscape. Adoption of the zoning Rural Areas.
- Issues for improvement
 - Availability of information and interpretation of the natural surroundings as well as visitor behavior when visiting nature sensitive sites in various languages.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

The municipality is advised:

- to provide interpretative information about key natural sites, e.g. in the format of a flyer (or app) describing a walk or on info panels, preferably in various languages;
- to include recommendations or guidelines for visitor behavior to minimize the impact of visitors on these key sites.

ENVIRONMENT

Considerations of weak and strong points

- Strong points
 - The actions to reduce beach and marine litter - "Doe mee verlos de Zee".
 - Purchase and placement of new beach wheelchairs.
 - The municipality encourages visitors to use bicycles: a large number of bicycle routes; the possibility to take bikes in some buses.
 - The municipality promotes energy saving measures in the companies. There are 15 cooperation projects carry out energy waste prevention and sustainable energy use. The project "Stimuleren energiebesparende maatregelen bedrijven" ("Promoting energy saving measures companies") is one of the projects of the regional climate agenda. Objective of the project is to concern the energy conservation and renewable energy, encourage energy-saving measures and exchange the experiences in the field of energy saving measures and renewable energy between entrepreneurs.
- Issues for improvement
 - Lack of system to protect sensitive environment and local resources from the impact of tourism.
 - An overall climate change local strategy and awareness associated with climate change is lacking.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

Identify and monitor the key environmental issues connected with the peak tourism season, to minimise negative effects of tourism on the local community on the touristic attractiveness (water shortage, sanitation, waste, litter, pollution, energy, etc.), and improve the system to adress them.

The Municipality is advised to create an effective system to promote energy conservation, measure energy consumption , and reduce reliance on fossil fuel in *tourism relater enterprises*. The destination encourages tourism- related enterprises to conserve energy and use renewable energy technologies.

IDENTITY & CULTURE

Considerations of weak and strong points

- Strong points
 - Local restaurants use agricultural and horticultural products from region.
 - Shopkeepers in Westvoorne are actively involved in sale of local products.

- Issues for improvement
 - Lack of guidelines for interpretation and codes of behavior for visits to culturally sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

- To develop a system to conserve key cultural sites (historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual and cultural sites, including scenic cultural landscapes)
- To ensure that information of local identity culture is provided to visitors in various languages, also including recommendations or guidelines for visitor behavior to minimize the impact of visitors.

TOURISM & BUSINESS

Considerations of weak and strong points

- Strong points
 - Cooperation between the municipality and business sector in the field of sustainability and energy conservation.
 - Sustainable restaurant "Aan Zee".

- Issues for improvement
 - An overall sustainable tourism strategy / action plan is lacking.
 - Local Business sector involvement in sustainability issues is limited.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

- To create an up-to-date, publicly available inventory of its key tourism assets and attractions including natural, historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual, and cultural sites.
- To prepare a multi-year strategy for sustainable tourism that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, that considers environmental, economic, social, cultural heritage, quality, health, and safety issues, and was developed with public participation.
- To create an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism. This group has defined responsibilities for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural heritage issues.

The municipality is advised to enter into discussion with the local business sector, and especially hotels, campings and others in the tourism sector, to see what common actions can be taken involving the public and private sector, possibly involving the public at large, in the field of:

- Green energy: e.g. switch to green energy; or generate electricity through solar panels or collectors;
- Low energy schemes and equipment;
- Water saving schemes and equipment; an example is designing a towel washing policy in hotels – and make sure it's implemented;
- Waste reduction;
- Waste separation to enable better recycling;
- Equal opportunities for men vs. women;
- Accessibility for guests with disabilities;
- Buy or use (source) local/regional, sustainable, and/or fair trade goods and services.

Especially for the first two, green energy and energy conservation, it is recommended to prepare a common action involving the municipality, business sector and residents, which has advantages in cost efficiency, effectiveness and publicity.

The municipality is advised to monitor how many (%) tourism enterprises are involved in the above actions, apart from those having a broadly recognized eco-label (Travelife, Green Key).

The limited number of eco-label accos is compensated by the Milieu-estafette initiative, which is very positive and highly appreciated. The Jury hopes that this initiative will be strengthened and that the whole business sector will be inspired to make further progress in the future.

HOST COMMUNITY & SAFETY

Considerations of weak and strong points

- Strong points:
 - The municipality is a member of Westvoorne KIMO Netherlands and Belgium, a platform of coastal towns in Europe, where sustainable tourism and coastal policy are among the goals. In addition, residents and businesses are involved in a consultation about planning and initiatives.
 - The municipality has a program in place to combat tourism-related safety and health hazards. The municipality is part of the security Rijnmond taking an initiative in different scenarios. A number of public trainings for emergency response have been intensified in recent years for business, government and citizens.
 - Improvement of air quality is a covenant agreement with the Port of Rotterdam.
 - Monitoring and management of the beaches has been intensified and improved.

- Issues for improvement
 - Although various programs in place to monitor satisfaction, safety etc of visitors and locals, it would still be good to monitor to what extent visitors are satisfied with their overall experience in the destination as a whole, and to what extent they are aware of sustainability efforts in the destination.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

- To regularly monitor to what extent visitors are satisfied with their overall experience in the destination as a whole, and to what extent they are aware of sustainability efforts in the destination. This could perhaps be done together with or through tourist accommodations.
- To monitor residents' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism, to be regularly recorded and publicly reported.