QualityCoast Award 2014 Jury Report

Azores Portugal



Leiden, August 2014

Final version

Coastal & Marine Union (EUCC)
Leiden - Barcelona - Klaipeda



Date of Application:

April 2014

International QualityCoast Jury

Jury President: Prof F. Taveira Pinto (Portugal)

Vice President: Dr Anton Micallef (Malta)

Jury & Assessment Team

International:

Leiden, the Netherlands:

Julia Vera Prieto (Spain) Juan Pablo Pérez Gómez (Spain) Francisco Reis (Portugal) Margarida Nunes (Portugal) Xenia Loizidou (Cyprus) Claudia Coman (Cyprus) Steef Engelsman (Netherlands) Menko Wiersema (Netherlands) Gijs van Zonneveld (Netherlands)

Erwin van Liempd (Netherlands)

Suzanne van der Veeken (Netherlands)

Luz Paramio Martin (Portugal)

Albert Salman Marija Pejcic

Signature on behalf of the QualityCoast Jury

Albert Salman, Secretary, international QualityCoast Jury

Contact details: Coastal & Marine Union (EUCC)

c/o QualityCoast Team

P.O. Box 11232

NL-2301 EE Leiden, The Netherlands www.eucc.net, www.qualitycoast.net E-mail: secretariat@qualitycoast.info

Tel: +31 (0) 71 5122900

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, 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

The GSTC Destination Criteria (GSTC-D version 1.0), published 1 November 2013, have already been fully incorporated into the QualityCoast – QualityDestination 2014 Application Form. In February 2013, the European Commission launched the European Tourism Indicators (ETIS) aiming to measure and enhance the sustainability of destinations across Europe. All ETIS-indicators have also been included into our Award Application Form, mostly for optional use.

QualityCoast certifies tourism sustainability policy

We offer reliable and transparent international Award programmes and a certification option for destinations with serious ambitions for a good sustainable tourism policy. The Awards and certifications are issued for periods of two years.

The programme also offers an assessment of the visible sustainability (performance, or sustainability status) in a broad range of categories and criteria, since tourists are not only interested in policies, strategies, ambitions and plans, but especially on how they experience a destination. The years of experience in this field allow the programme to inform the tourism sector and the public in a transparent way on policies and performance of ca. 1000 destinations, through the national and international ranking lists of the Global Sustainable Tourism Review (http://www.qualitycoast.info/alldestinations.htm). Ranking lists are topped by the QualityCoast Policy Award winners, that have been certified on both policy and status. Nest are the destinations that received the QualityCoast BasiQ Award – they are mainly selected on the basis of their status and performance in environmental management, natural and cultural heritage, and local business involvement in sustainability.

The importance of QualityCoast for tourism sustainability

Participation of destination management organisations in the Award programme improves their awareness performance and achievements in an international context. The comparison with other awarded destinations provides the community with a good picture of its strengths and weaknesses. The international assessment and recommendations by our international 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 Awards.

Promotional benefits of participation in QualityCoast

EUCC carries out a marketing campaign together with the Awarded 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 our various web sites and social media. Awarded destinations are also recommended by a number of tour operators of TUI-The Netherlands, in their travel brochures.

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:

- Has a good overall policy performance in sustainable tourism, mainly according to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council Destination Criteria, according to our Standard (http://gualitycoast.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/qualitycoast-standard-2013.pdf);
- Offers a sufficient touristic quality to visitors (mainly measured though the BasiQ indicator set);
- Provides transparent information to residents and visitors (partly through our communication campaigns);
- Planning for improvement (according to the Recommendations of the International Award Jury).

The Award Standard is publicly available in www.qualitycoast.info.

The Award programme is considering policy and performance criteria representing five different categories:

- Nature
- ❖ Environment
- Local Identity & Cultural Heritage
- Host Community & Safety
- Tourism & Business.

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 2014 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 2014-'15.

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 the applicant is invited to make a self-assessment by giving the 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. For the GSTC-D indicators even in the case of self-assessment 1, 2 or 3, a clarification of the main obstacles for improvements is requested (not mandatory). It is useful to provide such clarification for the assessment team, but it is also useful for the annual improvement of the criteria.

The Application Form lists 88 Core indicators, and 127 optional ("Your Choice") indicators.

Core indicators: in principle all Core indicators need to be taken into consideration. However, destinations can ignore up to 25% of the GSTC-D indicators per criterium, if these are less relevant to them, indicating why they are less relevant. However, destinations are advised only to ignore GSTC-D indicators in case of low performance.

Your Choice indicators: applicants can choose on which of the Your Choice indicators they will provide information, with a minimum of one per criterium. This means that applicants will provide information on an additional 20 indicators only.

All information provided through the Application Form (including the self-assessment rates) is evaluated and assessed by the QC Secretariat. The Secretariat involves (or hires the services of) a local expert, as a 3rd party auditor. The assessment reports produced by Secretariat and local expert are then reviewed by a number of members of the International Award Jury. For each application, a Jury is designates 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.

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 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 of the 20 criteria will not be eligible for the QualityCoast or QualityDestination Award, regardless the scores in the other criteria.

First time applicants with an average score no less than 5.7 (score threshold) will be granted an 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 measure the quality of policies; others measure the performance (policy implementation) or the visible sustainability status. This is why the QC team is able to produce indexes for sustainability policy and for sustainability status.

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

No public reference will be made about unsuccessful applications.

QualityCoast Award levels

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:

- Bronze, in case of excellence in one of the five categories;
- Silver, in case of excellence in two of the five categories;
- Gold, in case of excellence in three [but then no other category should be below 5.0] or four categories;
- 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 tourism fair (ITB Berlin, Vakantiebeurs Utrecht, WTM London etc) or a National or Local Award Ceremony, where they will receive the Award Certificate, and an Award Flag. They can then participate in the joint marketing programme. Awarded Destinations can order extra flags and banners, which can be displayed throughout the destination's territory during 24 months.

18 Months after their application the Awarded destination will be encouraged to submit a renewed 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 Jury.

Renewal of the QualityCoast Award: important note

The QualityCoast Policy Award 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 global GSTC-Dcriteria and European 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 only help promote certifications and awards that are GSTC compliant.

Conclusion

The QualityCoast Jury confirms that there is sufficient evidence to approved the QualityCoast Award 2014, 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 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

AZORES (Portugal)	Overall		
YEAR 2012	Score		
NATURE	9,2		
NATURE & CONSERVATION	9,2		
INFORMATION & EDUCATION	9,0		
GREEN POLICIES	9,2		
OPEN LANDSCAPES	10,0		
ENVIRONMENT	8,1		
LIGHT & NOISE MANAGEMENT	8,2		
BLUE FLAGS & BEACHES	9,1		
WATER MANAGEMENT	8,0		
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION	7,1		
WASTE & RECYCLING	7,5		
CLIMATE & ENERGY	8,7		
IDENTITY & CULTURE	8,9		
CULTURAL HERITAGE	8,3		
TERRITORY & TRADITION	9,8		
LOCAL IDENTITY	8,2		
SOCIO-ECONOMICS	7,6		
DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	7,3		
BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT	6,4		
HOSPITALITY & SATISFACTION	8,6		
TOURISM	8,2		
HUMAN RIGHTS & JUSTICE	9,5		
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	7,6		
HEALTH & SAFETY	8,6		
FINAL SCORE 2012	8,4		
Number of categories score 8 or more	3		
QualityCoast Award level	GOLD		

AZORES (Portugal)	Overall	AZORES (Portugal)	Overall	Quality	Policy
YEAR 2012	Score	YEAR 2014	Scores	Scores	Scores
NATURE	9,2	NATURE	9,4	9,5	9,2
NATURE & CONSERVATION	9,2	1. NATURE & CONSERVATION	8,9	9,2	8,5
INFORMATION & EDUCATION	9,0	2. ACCESS, INFO & EDUCATION	9,5	9,6	9,0
GREEN POLICIES	9,2	3. GREEN POLICIES	9,1	9,5	8,9
OPEN LANDSCAPES	10,0	4. OPEN LANDSCAPES	9,7	9,6	10,0
ENVIRONMENT	8,1	ENVIRONMENT	8,6	7,9	9,2
LIGHT & NOISE MANAGEMENT	8,2	5. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	8,9	8,4	9,1
BLUE FLAGS & BEACHES	9,1	6. BLUE FLAGS & BEACHES	9,5	9,6	9,3
WATER MANAGEMENT	8,0	7. WATER MANAGEMENT	8,7	8,0	9,4
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION	7,1	8. SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY	6,7	5,8	9,0
WASTE & RECYCLING	7,5	9. WASTE & RECYCLING	8,1	6,7	9,3
CLIMATE & ENERGY	8,7	10. ENERGY & CLIMATE MITIGATION	8,9	8,0	9,0
		11. CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTION	9,2	9,0	9,3
IDENTITY & CULTURE	8,9	IDENTITY & CULTURE	9,1	8,9	9,1
CULTURAL HERITAGE	8,3	12. CULTURAL HERITAGE	9,2	9,1	9,7
TERRITORY & TRADITION	9,8	13. TERRITORY & TRADITION	8,4	8,3	8,5
LOCAL IDENTITY	8,2	14. LOCAL IDENTITY	9,2	9,2	
SOCIO-ECONOMICS	7,6	TOURISM & BUSINESS	8,3	8,2	8,0
DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	7,3	15. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	8,9	8,3	9,1
BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT	6,4	16. BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT	7,6	7,8	7,2
HOSPITALITY & SATISFACTION	8,6	17. HOSPITALITY & SATISFACTION	8,0	8,4	7,3
TOURISM	8,2	HOST COMMUNITY & SAFETY	9,3	8,4	9,4
HUMAN RIGHTS & JUSTICE	9,5	18. FREEDOM & JUSTICE	9,7	9,4	9,8
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	7,6	19. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	8,3	6,0	8,6
HEALTH & SAFETY	8,6	20. HEALTH & SAFETY	9,6	9,7	9,6
FINAL SCORE 2012	8,4	FINAL SCORE 2014	8,9	8,5	8,6
Number of categories score 8 or more	3	Number of categories score 8 or more	5	4	5
QualityCoast Award level	GOLD	QualityCoast Award level	PLATINUM		

7	Trend since 2012		
	0,2		
	-0,3		
	0,5	+	
	-0,1		
	-0,3		
	0,5	+	
	0,7	+ + + + + !!	
	0,4	+	
	0,7	+	
	-0,4	!!	
	0,6	+	
	0,2		
	0,2		
	0,9 -1,4	++	
	-1,4	!!!	
	1,0	++	
	0,7	+	
	1,6	+++	
	1,2	++ ++ ++	
	-0,6	!	
	1,1	++	
	0,2		
	0,7	+	
	1,0	+++++	
	0,5	+	

DETAILED COMMENTS & OPINIONS

NATURE

Considerations of weak and strong points

• Strong points:

- The Azores have been developing an innovative governance system of Protected Areas. The Regional Protected Areas Network aims to improve the management of nature and conservation and ensure the ecological structure and connectivity of the archipelago. Two main legal figures were established, the Nature Conservation and Protection Framework of the Regional Network of Protected Areas the Island Natural Parks (9, one for each island) and the Marine Park restoring the old dune brooks in the northern dunes.
- The Azores also have five different international designations for nature conservation and protection, namely: UNESCO as Biosphere Reserves (3 Islands), UNESCO World Heritage Sites (2), Ramsar Sites (13), OSPAR areas (11), Geopark (120 geo-sites), Natura 2000 areas (3 SCIs, 23 SACs and 15 SPAs). These designations show the international recognition of the Azores' rich natural resources.
- The great number of the marine protected areas, recognized by the OSPAR Convention and the Nature Network, also beyond Portuguese jurisdiction, stresses the importance of the Azores Archipelago as an oceanic key spot.
- The Azores have good conditions for eco-tourism with great opportunities to observe terrestrial, marine and coastal wildlife. Sustainable activities related to the nature have been supported by interpretative centers.

- Availability of information, education and training of community and stakeholders in the tourism sector.
- Availability of information and interpretation of the natural surroundings.
- Availability of information on proper visitor behavior at sensitive natural sites to stimulate visitors to learn more and gain more appreciation.

The Jury recommends to continue working on the nature conservation management; by maintaining and enhancing the management effectiveness of the existing protected areas and by designation of new areas. It is also important to note the processes of planning and management, where stakeholders engagement could be a strategic policy priority. The main recommendations are:

- To ensure the scientific attendance and nature monitoring in order to preserve the ecological status of the archipelago.
- To explore (cost-effective) ways of nature conservation as a key of sustainable development.
- To raise awareness of the local community on the nature heritage benefits and values.
- To develop actions to promote cooperation and co-management between several levels of community. The Jury recommends the stakeholders engagement as a strategic priority to ensure the green policies accomplishment.
- To invest and improve the sustainable monitoring tourism system with current data and information on the tourism impact on the nature.
- To publish and provide guidelines for proper visitor behavior at sensitive natural sites in order to minimize adverse impacts and strengthen positive visitor behaviors. Such guidelines aim to stimulate visitors to learn more and gain more appreciation about the destination. (GSTC-D)
- To provide accurate interpretive information at natural and cultural sites, e.g. in the form of leaflets, apps, books, maps, signs. The information is culturally appropriate, developed with community collaboration and communicated in languages pertinent to visitors. (GSTC-D).
- In connection to the last item, the Jury highly appreciates that EUCC, TUI Care Foundation and the regional government are involved in a cooperation aimed at the creation of QR-coded QualitySpots.

ENVIRONMENT

Considerations of weak and strong points

Strong points:

- The Azores have invested an effort to establish the bases for an adequate and adapted Environmental Policy, particularly at the Planning and Management level.
- The Azores have 61 bathing sites and 50% of them have been awarded with Blue Flag. There are also 6 marinas with Blue Flag. Approximately 100% of the bathing water quality is excellent according to the EEA/EU Bathing Water Directive (2013). The Azores archipelago is rich in Water Resources. Currently the Regional Secretariat of Natural Resources is implementing a Monitoring Hydrological Cycle Network for all islands. Sustainable use of water resources strategy has been drawn and published under the Regional Plan for the Water (PRAA). A number of various water bodies (and their ecosystems) have been recognized at the international level by the Ramsar Convention, which has classified 13 International Important Sites in the Azores. However, there are lakes in advanced eutrophication stage which could be moved to an action by the proposed restoration plans.
- The Government has taken several measures in the last few years to improve sustainable transportation. Indeed, more direct roads have been opened on São Miguel and Terceira islands decreasing travelling distances and time as well as lowering CO2 emissions. It is expected that 90% of the public transport vehicles will be renewed (according to Euro V standard), by the end of 2014. In the cities, there are some car-free zones. Related to the tourism investment, the Trail Networks have been restored and made more accessible.
- Waste Management is one of the pillars addressed in the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Azores Islands. The Government has invested in the Waste Management System improvement (infrastructure for waste treatment, vehicles and basic equipment for waste collection). The "Program Ecofreguesias" was implemented to reward the local administrations for good environmental practices, particularly in waste management. In 2013, almost one hundred towns and villages have won this award and have been recognized for their efforts to clean and remove abandoned dump sites, including water lines and shorelines as well as the development and participation in environmental awareness raising education.
- In 2011, a Commission for Climate Change was created (ComClima) to address the Climate Change issues. One of the main objectives was to design a Regional Strategy for Climate Change (Climate Scenarios and Projections for the Azores).

- o Public awareness on the environmental problems.
- Water supply and waste water treatment plant.
- Sustainable public transport network.
- Surveillance in the environmental protection and the law enforcement by the effective punishment mechanism.
- o Implementation of climate change local strategies.

- The Jury recommends more measures to improve sustainable transportation. In connection to transport sustainability and carbon footprint, the Jury hopes that the implications of cheap flight carriers connecting to the islands during the next years will be duly monitored and where possible mitigated.
- To continue the efforts and investments in the Waste Management. The "3R programmes" could be better implemented in order to reduce waste transport to the mainland, for the purpose of recycling.
- The Municipalities are advised to encourage tourism-related enterprises to measure, monitor, reduce, publicly report energy consumption and reduce reliance on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including emissions from service providers).
- Identify and monitor the key environmental issues connected with the peak tourism season, to minimize negative effects of tourism on the local community on the touristic attractiveness (water, sanitation, waste, litter, pollution, energy, etc.), and improve the system to address them. (GSTC-D)
- The Jury encourages the municipality actions related to the protection of the environment and their cooperation within the Regional Government.

IDENTITY & CULTURE

Considerations of weak and strong points

Strong points:

- The Azores have a specific identity related to the Atlantic and insularity features. The history of the Azores is strongly linked to the navigation and migration cycles, the islands were considered as a logistic and geostrategic platform located in the center of the Atlantic.
 - The religious identity remains strongly preserved. The traditional festivities are one of the cultural aspects considered as typical for the destination. There are approximately 34 cultural museums. The preservation of the cultural heritage is highlighted on Pico island, where are the Wine Museum, Whaling Industry Museum and Whaling Museum.
- o 45 % of the total archipelago land area is covered by cultural landscapes from before 1940s. The Azores have two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: The Central Zone of the Town of Angra do Heroísmo on the Terceira Island and the Landscape of the Pico Island Vineyard Culture. The "Virtual Visits to Azores Museums" project allows, through the new
 - The "Virtual Visits to Azores Museums" project allows, through the new technology application, to approach the Azores cultural richness from all over the world.
- There are action plans including the Rural Development Plan of the Azores (PRORURAL) and the Regional Tourism Plan of the Azores (POTRAA) taking into account the preservation of the manmade landscapes cultural value. The Rural Development Plan of the Azores (PRORURAL) defines the regional strategy for rural development and integrates measures to protect and enhance the natural resources and landscapes in rural areas. Through this program there are incentives to improve the diversity of rural landscape, promote sustainable production and protection of biodiversity and natural values. The organic production has been encouraged. In addition to financial incentives, workshops and courses for organic agriculture have been held. The Regional Government of the Azores has a clear stance on genetically modified organisms (GMO) by declaring the archipelago as a GMO "free zone".
- The political-administrative statute of the Azores preserves and promotes the identity, values and interests of the Azoreans and their cultural and historical heritage. There are several other legal regional decrees with rules of protection for the Azorean culture.

- o Lack of system to rehabilitate and conserve natural and cultural sites.
- The presence and level of protection of the elements that are connected to the history of the destination.
- Availability of information on proper visitor behavior at sensitive cultural sites to stimulate visitors to learn more and gain more appreciation.

- The Jury recommends the continuation of cultural heritage preservation of the Azores, ensuring that the relevant legislation is implemented.
- To develop an efficient mechanism to evaluate, rehabilitate, and conserve the natural and cultural heritage.
- To give more attention to the identification and public information on identity and cultural sites, including built heritage, rural sites and urban scenic views (historic, archaeological, religious, spiritual, wild landscapes). (GSTC-D)
- To publish and provide guidelines for proper visitor behavior at sensitive cultural sites. Such guidelines are designed to minimize adverse impacts on sensitive sites and strengthen positive visitor behaviors. (GSTC-D)
- The Jury recommends a special attention to the coastal and marine cultural heritage, including the archeological sites, as well as the management of underwater cultural heritage of the Azores (taking into account that work of the Azores Underwater Archaeological Map has been already done).
- Continuation of the efforts to achieve the cultural quality by the classification of estates of cultural importance; support archaeological investigation; support preservation and restoration of whaling heritage; continuation of works on several museums and cultural infrastructures.
- The Jury would like more available information on the goals, proposal and work of the CRADS, in the future application.

TOURISM & BUSINESS

Considerations of weak and strong points

Strong points:

- The Azores have experienced an increase of sustainable tourism activities and services, which provide a wide diversity of opportunities for environmentally friendly leisure and recreation. The wildlife observation, birds and cetaceans are the key activities.
- The Tourism Development Plan (POTRAA) presents nature tourism as its main strategic priority. The PROTAA considers promotion of products, such as "cultural and landscape tours", "nautical tourism" and "health and wellness tourism" programmes. The PROTRAA defines an action plan from four axes: Offer; Market; Promotion; Image.
 - The International Marketing Plan defines strategies that intend to reinforce and promote the ecotourism markets.
- The Azores Tourism Association is a non-profitable association, partnership between public and private entities, aiming to promote the Azores as a quality tourist destination. Beside this, the Government of the Azores created the Azores Tourism Observatory in such a way to support the analysis, dissemination and monitoring of tourism development.
- The tourism business grows into a sustainable way, providing long term social and economic benefits. During 2013, the Regional Government supported small/medium artisanal enterprises, through several measures: the improvement and innovation of traditional knowledge; handicraft/craft trainings/workshops; dissemination, promotion and marketing of arts and crafts; certification and protection of Azorean products and services.
- The Azores is widely promoted as a green, clean and sustainable destination. There is an increase number of accommodations awarded with Green Keys and Destiny. Also the Faial Natural Park has a European Destination of Excellence (EDEN) prize. Moreover, the Azores Government launched a domestic Green Key Awards Program called "Alojamentos Verdes Miosótis Azores", created to promote and support good practices of hotels, rural houses and apartments.
- There are several sustainable management measures, especially related to the natural sites, including limitation of human presence in certain areas; there is also a code of behavior in natural areas, implemented in each Natural Park.

- The investment in sustainable tourism strategy / action plan is lacking.
- o Local Business sector involvement in sustainability issues is limited.

- 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. (GSTC-D)
- 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 aesthetic issues and was developed with public participation. (GSTC-D)
- To create an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism with involvement by the private sector and public sector. This group has defined responsibilities for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural heritage issues. (GSTC-D)
- The Jury recommends 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 is implemented;
 - Waste reduction;
 - Waste separation to enable better recycling;
 - o 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.

HOST COMMUNITY & SAFETY

Considerations of weak and strong points

Strong points:

- A safe destination for tourists and residents. The Regional Services of Civil Protection and Health Secretary coordinate the civil protection activities as well as the fire departments. They take care of medical emergency transport and correct delivery of health care.
 - The Azores have a Regional Emergency Plan for Civil Protection.
- The Regional Secretariat for Social Solidarity has invested efforts to build an inclusive society. Nowadays, over the thousand Azoreans benefit from specialized services, mainly "Occupational Activity Centers".
 The Government also supports human rights meetings and discrimination combat: several NGOs and solidarity institutions (about 90 entities) working against domestic violence and offer support and protection of women and children.
- Presence of health, safety and secure environment and preventive measures.

Issues for improvement:

 Although various programs are 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.

- 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. (GSTC-D)
- The Jury recommends up-to-date collection of data related to the tourism social impact.
- The Jury recommends the programs to raise awareness of residents on the importance and contribution of the tourism to their wealth.
- To monitor residents' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism, to be regularly recorded and publicly reported. (GSTC-D)