

QualityCoast Award 2015 Jury Report

Sintra
Portugal



Leiden, July 2015

Final Version

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



QualityCoast is a programme of the Coastal & Marine Union (EUCC)
and partly funded by the European Commission

Date of Application:

March 2015

International QualityCoast Jury

Jury President: Prof F. Taveira Pinto (Portugal)
Vice President: Dr Anton Micallef (Malta)

Jury & Assessment Team

International:

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 Veecken (Netherlands)
Luz Paramio Martin (Portugal)

Leiden, the Netherlands:

Albert Salman
Hugo de Jong
Joana Mira Veiga

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.

Since 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 2015 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, which have been certified on both policy and status. Next 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://qualitycoast.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/qualitycoast-standard-2013.pdf>);
- ❖ Offers a sufficient touristic quality to visitors (mainly measured through 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 criterion 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 2015 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 2015-'16.

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 criterion, 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 criterion. 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 designated 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 criterion 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 are 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-D criteria 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

Overall Remark

The QualityCoast Jury confirms that there is sufficient evidence to approve the QualityCoast Award 2015, and congratulates Sintra 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, local identity and cultural heritage.

QualityCoast Award: validity and promotion

The validity of this QualityCoast Award is two years (24 months), from the date indicated in the Award Certificate. 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 for SINTRA

	Overall (max. 10)	Sustainability Policy (max. 10)	Visible Sustainability (max. 10)
NATURE	8.2	8.1	8.4
1. NATURE & CONSERVATION	7.6	5.5	8.0
2. ACCESS, INFORMATION & EDUCATION	9.0	8.9	9.3
3. GREEN POLICIES	8.2	8.2	-
4. OPEN LANDSCAPES	8.6	8.0	9.0
ENVIRONMENT	7.5	7.2	8.1
5. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	7.8	7.6	8.3
6. WATERFRONTS & SAFE BATHING	8.8	-	8.8
7. WATER MANAGEMENT	8.8	8.9	8.7
8. SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY	7.6	8.0	7.0
9. WASTE & RECYCLING	4.2	3.8	6.0
10. ENERGY & CLIMATE MITIGATION	6.0	6.0	6.0
11. CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION	7.3	7.0	7.6
IDENTITY & CULTURE	8.9	8.8	9.0
12. CULTURAL HERITAGE	9.6	9.3	9.9
13. TERRITORY & TRADITION	8.2	8.0	8.4
14. LOCAL IDENTITY	8.3	-	8.3
TOURISM & BUSINESS	7.2	7.2	7.4
15. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	8.0	7.9	8.3
16. BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT	5.4	5.2	6.0
17. HOSPITALITY & SATISFACTION	8.8	9.0	8.4
HOST COMMUNITY & SAFETY	8.7	8.6	9.3
18. FREEDOM & JUSTICE	8.4	8.4	-
19. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	8.3	7.7	9.0
20. HEALTH & SAFETY	9.1	8.9	10.0
FINAL POINTS & SCORE 2015	8.0	7.8	8.4
Number of categories score 8 or more	3		
QualityCoast Award type	GOLD		

NATURE

Considerations of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**

- Sintra has a large percentage of natural areas, most of which with protection status and associated management and planning regulations established by transposition of EU Directives and national legislation.
- The accessibility to these nearby natural areas provides ample opportunities for the visitor to explore in the form of hiking trails and observation of fauna (e.g. birds). There is specific regulation that establishes guidelines and rules for different sport modalities within the protected areas.
- Low urbanization at the coastal strip.
- Intensive actions to prevent fires and removal of invasive species.

- **Issues for improvement:**

- Availability of information and interpretation of the natural surroundings in languages pertinent to visitors.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

- Improving availability of information for visitors regarding the natural values and biodiversity present and observable in the area. This could include, e.g. a special section in the website for visitors regarding important species of flora and fauna present in the area and which of these can be observed in the different hiking tracks.
- To monitor the environmental impact of tourism, conserve habitats, species, and ecosystems, and prevent the introduction of invasive species. (GSTC-D)

ENVIRONMENT

Considerations of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**

- Most of beaches in the territory with “excellent” bathing water quality.
- Sintra is making efforts to facilitate access to two of its beaches to people with disabilities.
- Sintra is one of the first few Portuguese municipalities to develop a local strategic plan to face Climate Change. Currently it integrates the partnership of the promising project ClimAdaPT.Local.

- **Issues for improvement:**

- According to the EEA database on water quality, at least one beach (*Praia das Maçãs*) lacks “Excellent” bathing quality.
- The overall strategy of the Municipality for waste prevention and recycling seems poor and the overall % of waste collected for recycling could be improved.
- Stronger policies for mitigation of Climate Change, through plans to increase energy efficiency and reducing emissions of green-house gases in public services/infrastructures and private enterprises but also awareness among local population and visitors.
- No information on % of green energy produced locally or about environmental management plans.
- Lack of a system to monitor sensitive environment and monitor local resources from the impact of tourism.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

The Municipality is advised to:

- Despite the potential eligibility of its beaches, Sintra has not been attributed Blue Flag for any of its coastal bathing sites. As most of them are rural beaches and the application for Blue Flag can require considerable investments and structural modifications in these sites, the Jury understands the choice of Sintra to maintain the beaches as closer to their pristine state as possible. In any case, the Jury encourages the municipality to make sure that:
 - indication of bathing water quality is available on site and on internet according to the regular (weekly, bi-weekly) measurements;
 - there are sufficient waste bins available to allow for waste separation; that these are emptied frequently, especially during high-season; there are positive encouragements in place for a proper waste disposal behavior by visitors;
 - simple, minimal facilities, made of environmentally-friendly materials and designed fit into the natural landscape.
- Monitor water resources and ensure that use by tourism related enterprises is compatible with the water requirements of the destination community. (GSTC-D)
- Develop and implement a stronger waste prevention and recycling strategy and action plan. More ambitious goals for % of waste recycled are needed and in conjunction with tourism enterprises, retailers, etc. At coastal bathing areas, the Municipality could implement awareness tools (e.g. information boards) to sensitize beach users on consequences of their waste disposal behavior and the issues associated to marine litter. Local business could also be engaged to prevent waste production in sensitive areas (e.g. Implement deposit-refund schemes; reduce single-use packaging and other disposal items such as plastic straws). This can also be a topic to be included in the environmental educational programmes that the municipality is planning to promote among schools in the territory.
- Develop, implement and encourage adoption of policies to reduce green-house emissions at public and private levels (e.g. improve energy saving and efficiency, promoting sustainable transportation), including awareness-raising among local population.
- 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) (GSTC-D). There is a great potential for better exploiting solar energy in the destination.
- 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 address them. (GSTC-D)

IDENTITY & CULTURE

Considerations of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**
 - Sintra has been classified as UNESCO World Heritage site for its Cultural Landscape, including its monuments and parks. It maintains a built heritage alive, well preserved and promoted.
 - The Jury appraises the development of the “Talking Heritage” Platform mobile App and QR codes in several points of interest, together with several entities, to support the exploration of natural routes and the rich cultural heritage.

- **Issues for improvement:**
 - A proper regular maintenance of the “Talking Heritage” App, which seems to fail often based on several users’ reviews (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=pt.bitcliq.palace>)

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

- Sintra should continue to invest in valuing and promoting local products and services, and fostering their development in sustainable and environmentally friendly ways (e.g. encouraging organic production of local wines and apple varieties, which demand is becoming increasingly popular).

TOURISM & BUSINESS

Considerations of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**
 - Sintra is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Portugal and abroad. Tourism is important for the Municipality and is integrated in several different aspects of the management of the territory.

- **Issues for improvement:**
 - Local Business sector involvement in sustainability issues seems limited.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE JURY

- To strengthen the strategy for tourism and its service, with a stronger focus on sustainability and public participation.
- To strengthen 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 municipality is advised to enter more 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, e.g. 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).

HOST COMMUNITY & SAFETY

Considerations of weak and strong points

- **Strong points:**
 - Sintra is a safe and welcoming destination for tourists and residents.

- **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 and support 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. (GSTC-D)

- To monitor residents' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism, to be regularly recorded and publicly reported. (GSTC-D)