

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BALTIC COASTAL HIKING ROUTE

1. Challenge/problem addressed

Seasonality in tourism. How to create a new tourism product (long distance hiking path) out of the available resources on the coast.

2. Main scale of governance involved: local / regional / national / international

Local and regional

3. Description of what and where was done

Hiking Route along the Baltic Sea coastline in Latvia – Estonia was established along following activities:

- The whole route was inspected
- The visual identity of the route was developed
- Guidelines for route marking were issued
- The route was physically marked in nature
- Information stands and direction signs were placed
- Coastal electronic event calendar was created
- Guidelines for entrepreneurs “Service provision for hikers” were issued
- A guidebook, a coastal tourism map and a handbook for tour operators was published and distributed
- A home page of the route, as well as profiles in social networks and other marketing related activities were carried out

4. What sectors were involved?

Local municipalities (planners and tourism managers), forestry, nature conservation and environment protection, entrepreneurs

5. Which target/interest groups / stakeholders were reached?

- Local and foreign travellers (from Scandinavia, Germany, Benelux, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Estonia, etc.) – active tourism agencies

- Operators operating in the field of tourism and other tour operators
- Local authorities
- National authorities
- Non-governmental sector representatives, incl. organisations, hobby groups

6. What methods were applied?

- Conference and info seminars to trigger awareness in all stakeholder levels
- Gaining of experience and synchronising with hiking trails in Europe
- Developing visual identity and marking rules/guidelines of the route to achieve the Coastal Hiking route recognition
- Investments in improvement of the route conditions (small scale infrastructure)
- Taking GPS and GPX coordinates, collecting information for route description, preparation of maps to produce tourist information and support route marketing
- Digital visualisation of the route and presentation in the web for accessible information
- Cross-border network building activities, including network exchange visits, stakeholder handbook, stakeholder workshops to support the route management and maintenance
- Route testing to find and implement drawbacks and necessary improvements
- Production of the Coastal Hiking route marketing materials
- Promotion in social media and press
- Targeted marketing to ramblers and hiker's organisations in Europe
- Participation in travel fairs and exhibitions and in public hiking events
- Project final conference to celebrate the Coastal Hiking route implementation and disseminate experience

7. Lessons learned

There is a need to make trail **more accessible to various segments of the society**, including families with young children, seniors, people with mobility difficulties, or other limitations. In collaboration with organisations representing these community groups and project partners from Latvia and Estonia, environmental accessibility solutions will be developed, providing the opportunity for a wider range of the community to enjoy the hiking experience. The new project – Accessible Hiking Trails has just started, supported by Interreg Latvia-Estonia programme, and will be implemented till 2026.

Hiking trail is not just a tourism product – there are advantages of hiking in a more comprehensive meaning, presenting it not only as an outdoor activity or an alternative way of travel, but also as a tool to attract travellers, strengthen communities along the trails and foster local entrepreneurs, thus contributing to the prosperity of the society concerned.

- In parallel to development of the hiking trail, and based on the need to inform visitors about the rules and rights, the Latvian Rural Tourism Association “Lauku Celotajs” in the BESTbelt project (<https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/bestbelt>) of the European Union has developed the **Latvian Nature Common Code of Conduct** (available at <https://celotajs.my.canva.site/latvian-nature-common-code-of-conduct>), including what rights and obligations a tourist (or visitor) has in different environments.

When visitors are hiking, they also ask questions – where is it allowed to set up a tent, where is it allowed to come with dog, where is it allowed to make campfire, and **in Latvian coastline regulations of local municipalities differs between municipalities and sometimes they differ even between national regulations for different areas**. And very often for a visitor it is impossible to understand them. There is a need to agree on unified approach to the limitations and rules between coastal municipalities to make them easy understandable and common for all coastline. This still need to be done.

When planning the small-scale infrastructure (signs, paths, etc.) on the coast, it is necessary **to respect the conditions of the changeable character of the seashore**. Even if the conditions were taken into account in planning the infrastructure, often the sea water and wind destroyed it anyway – storms are becoming stronger, water level rise and in combination these conditions may damage the infrastructure.

On 2023 the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route was **included in the Lonely Planet 2024 Guide**, in the category “Sustainable travel” (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/best-in-travel#baltic-trails>). This is high international recognition and evaluation of this project and solution, and also shows that coastal tourism can also be sustainable. The idea of Baltic Coastal Hiking Trail as a sustainable tourism product is based on cooperation between everyone who uses these trails and who lives and farms around them. Nature attracts travellers, while the services they need, such as accommodation, meals, transport, information, are provided by local entrepreneurs. It provides an opportunity to earn, keeps rural areas populated, creates strong local communities with a sense of ownership. Therefore, the local community at each stage of the trail – entrepreneurs together with municipalities and other interested parties are responsible for how the trail lives.

8. To which Multi-level Governance steps this valuable practice contributes?

- Stakeholder involvement (planning the trail, creating the trail, marketing, supporting the route management and maintenance)
- Solutions and implementation (planning and creating the trail as a solution to prolongation of the tourism season)
- Evaluation and learning (also based on regular feedback from visitors about the situation on the route, necessary improvements)

9. Links to further information about the practice/case

<https://baltictrails.eu/en/coastal>

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Map of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route (map by Kurzeme Planning Region)



Baltic Coastal Hiking Route (photo by Kurzeme Planning Region)