

Good Practice Cases in Sustainable Tourism Destinations

The protection of the Mediterranean Monk Seal, Alonissos (Greece)

ITEMS		DESCRIPTION	PICTURES
Name of the organization submitting this practice case	Name	Coastal and Marine Union EUCC and the Municipality of Alonissos	
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Name (in EN) of the destination	Alonissos		
Administrative Organizations and country	<p>Alonissos is an island and a municipality located in the Aegean Sea, Greece. Alonissos (or Liadromia) belongs to the complex of Sporades Islands and it is separated from Skopelos and Pelagonisi by the channels of Alonissos (channel width: 2 nm) and Pelagonisi (channel width: 3.5 nm), respectively. This is a region of great geographical diversity, where visitors can discover not only Alonissos but also its neighbouring islands that collectively form a unique ecosystem: the National Marine Park of Alonissos and Northern Sporades, the largest marine park in Europe. Alonissos forms part of the Northern Sporades Island Group, and it is the largest and the only inhabited island in the National Marine Park of Alonissos Sporades.</p>		
Tourism Organizations	Regional Tourism Board of Alonissos, Municipal Council of Alonissos		
Surface	129.6 km ²		
Resident population	2,750		
Tourism Arrivals	N/A		
Tourism nights	N/A		
WHO	Name		
	Website	http://alonissos.gr/en/marine-park/ecosystem.html	
WHY	The reason for action	<p>Alonissos hosts a significant population of Mediterranean Monk Seal (MMS), the most endangered marine mammal in Europe and one of the most endangered animals in the world. It is estimated that less than 600 individuals remain in the wild, and almost half of the total population lives and breeds in Greek waters. The MMS is especially sensitive to human disturbance. In the last decades, the deterioration of its coastal habitats, mainly due to urban and tourism development, overfishing, and illegal fishing activities have resulted in a rapid decrease in the number of specimens. All this has highlighted the need for protecting the MMS in this area.</p>	

	Issues and challenge	The establishment of no-fishing zones to protect the MMS usually leads to conflicts with the local fishermen. Reconciling the interests of this group and the need of seal conservation measures is seen as one of the biggest challenges.	   
HOW		The Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal, or MOm, is a Non-Governmental Organization created in 1990, which is and has been playing an active and influential role in the conservation of the MMS in Greece in collaboration with the relevant government bodies. MOm has significantly contributed to the design and foundation of the National Marine Park of Alonnisos Northern Sporades (NMPANS), the largest marine protected area in Europe, especially designated to protect and conserve the habitat of the MMS. Although human activities are restricted in certain zones of the park to prevent further destruction of the habitat of the MMS, various tour boat operators offer education-based sailing trips to visitors. During the summer months public awareness programmes are held in the MOm Information centre in Patitiri, the capital of the island. In this centre, visitors and school children learn more about this endangered species and the conservation actions through display boards, exhibits, videos and briefing material. In addition, a Rehabilitation Centre for injured, ill or orphan seals, located in the village of Steni Vala, conducts educational programmes about the importance of the MMS for the marine environment and the threats they face.	
RESULTS	Benefits	The efforts for the preservation of the MMS have increased the awareness, commitment and interest of visitors and local people about this species. The MMS has become a well-recognised symbol for nature conservation in Alonissos and it has helped to bring the local community together and create a shared understanding and vision to care for the marine resources and wildlife. Due to the conservation measures and the extensive information campaigns that have been carried out in the area, for the past 10 years no incidents of a monk seal death have been registered, and more than 20 pups have been rescued, rehabilitated and released into the Natural Marine Park. The MMS has helped to create a small-scale nature-based tourism movement that has boosted the local economy in the island. From both a scientific and a cultural point of view, this is an area of great interest given the archaeological finds (shipwrecks, old monasteries and churches) dating back to the prehistoric era, the classical period or the Byzantine Empire. Incomparable natural beauty meets ocean myths and legends. Marine archaeology has verified the existence of old shipwrecks of historical interest dating back to the 4th and 5th centuries or the Byzantine period. Since 2011, there are 14 spots in the marine park where diving is allowed, according to the Greek Official Gazette No. – 1741/3.8.2011 "Approval of re-delimitation of the marine archaeological site of Northern Sporades & Alonissos". Visitors are welcome to enjoy swimming and diving, take pictures, record videos, go sightseeing, walk around or observe the wildlife in areas where public access is permitted. There are also specific marine	

		areas where fishing is allowed for amateur fishermen. Hunting is allowed only on the island of Gioura, subject to special permission. Travel agencies and outdoor activities clubs make special offers for adventure-loving tourists.
	Recognition and Awards	QualityCoast Gold Award 2012-'13
REFLECTION	Multiplier effect and transferability	The current status of the MMS, the urgent need for its protection and the successful conservation measures taken in Alonissos have led the Greek government to study the possibility of designating another monk seal breeding site as a national park to ensure the continuation of this species and to prevent its extinction. In other countries such as Turkey and Mauritania, which also host important colonies of MMS, national laws and conservation programmes have been implemented aiming to protect this species. In addition, a Conservation Action Plan has been created by the IUCN/SSC Seal Specialist Group in order to determine its distribution and status, and involve local fishermen in its protection.
	Lessons learned and critical success factors	The establishment of the NMPANS, the rehabilitation centre for orphan and wounded seals and the education and public awareness campaigns have demonstrated to be essential for the survival of the MMS.



*Pictures courtesy of Kostas Efstathiou, Panagiotis Dendrinis and the Municipality of Alonissos.