

## Good Practice Cases in Sustainable Tourism Destinations Geotourism development, the Azores (Portugal)

ITEMS		DESCRIPTION	PICTURES
Name of the organization submitting this practice case	Name	Coastal and Marine Union EUCC and the Government of the Azores	    
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Name (in EN) of the destination	Azores		
Administrative Organizations and country	The archipelago Azores is formed by nine islands, several islets and the surrounding seafloor and it is divided into three groups: Eastern Group of São Miguel and Santa Maria; Central Group of Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico and Faial; and Western Group of Flores and Corvo. This Portuguese region has an autonomous government, the so called Autonomous Region of the Azores.		
Tourism Organizations	Associação Turismo dos Açores - Convention & Visitors Bureau Associação Regioanl de Turismo		
Surface	2,333 km <sup>2</sup>		
Resident population	245,746		
Tourism Arrivals	360,265 (guests)		
Tourism nights	1,077,420		
WHO	Name	The Government of the Azores and the Azores Geopark (European and Global Geopark)	
	Website	<a href="http://www.azores.gov.pt">www.azores.gov.pt</a> <a href="http://www.azoresgeopark.com">www.azoresgeopark.com</a>	
WHY	The reason for action	The Azores are distinguished by its unique marine and natural beauty. Due to its volcanic origin, the Azores archipelago has a very rich and remarkable geodiversity that includes a variety of landscapes filled with innumerable craters, volcanic lakes, cliffs and calderas, fumaroles, hot springs, volcanic caves, “fajãs”, fault scarps, marine fossil deposits and thermal water springs. The pressure that the increasing development of tourism is exerting on these geological sites over the last years, and the need to create alternative forms of tourism which contribute towards the socio-economic development in rural areas, have highlighted the importance to protect and promote the geological heritage of the Azores.	
	Issues and challenge	The volcanic landscape are the main motto of interest and development of geotourism in the archipelago and they present a wide range of possibilities for	

		<p>sustainable use, where several activities can be performed and associated tourist products can be developed.</p> <p>The main challenge to this new form of tourism is to keep the balance between the enjoyment into the geolandscapes, geological heritage and the geoconservation.</p>	
<p><b>HOW</b></p>		<p>Aware of the geotourism potential of the archipelago and aiming to conserve the Azorean volcanic landscapes, the regional and local authorities adopted a geotourism strategy which included the creation and implementation of a Geopark. With 121 geosites spread over the nine islands and surrounding seafloor, the Azores Geopark has recently been included in the European Geopark Network (EGN), achieving an international recognition. Several routes have been established, including the Volcanic Caves, the Belvederes, the Walking Trails, the Science Centers, the Thermal Spas and the Urban routes. Interpretation and visitor's centers, museums and observatories provide information, orientation, education and other services in order to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geological heritage of the region. In addition, visitors can choose from a great variety of geotourism-based products such as geotours, volcanospeleology, rock climbing, mountain climbing, diving, snorkeling, canyoning, coastering, thermal baths, and walking trails that are offered by various rural accommodation establishments and tourism companies. Several local products have been recognized as geoproducts of the Azores. This is the case for the wines "Terras de Lava", "Basalto", "Magma" or "Pedras Brancas", some cheeses like "Queijo do Morro" and the "Cozido das Furnas", a typical dish cooked in the ground with natural volcano steam.</p>	 
<p><b>RESULTS</b></p>	<p>Benefits</p>	<p>The development of geotourism in the Azores has contributed to sustainable tourism, promoting the local economy and minimizing the sociocultural and environmental impacts of tourism. The integration of the Azores Geopark in the European and Global Geoparks Networks has helped to alert and raise awareness for the preservation its geological features and it has made the archipelago a popular and attractive destination at an international level in terms of geology and landscape. This has reduced the effects of seasonality and it has led to the generation of new job opportunities, new economic activities and additional sources of income, especially in rural areas. Geotourism has demonstrated to be an excellent way to raise public awareness and appreciation for the Azorean's natural resources and the cultural heritage of the local community.</p>	
	<p>Recognition and Awards</p>	<p>QualityCoast Gold Award 2012-'13 European and Global Geopark (March 2013)</p>	

## REFLECTION

Multiplier effect and transferability

In 2011 the Azores were selected as the second best islands in the world for Sustainable Tourism by National Geographic Traveler due in a large part to the efforts of the Government in preserving and promoting the geological and cultural heritage of the region.

Each year new geoparks are included in the GGN. Currently 92 geoparks in 27 different countries compose the GGN, and it is expected that this number will continue increasing progressively. The Azores Geopark is a good example of the large social and economic benefits that well managed and developed geotourism can provide, and it can serve as reference model for other destinations in order to achieve sustainable tourism.

The Azores Geopark, located in the middle of the Atlantic could be a bridge between America and Europe/Africa, and could contribute for the creation of new geoparks in countries with Portuguese language, as Brasil, Cabo Verde, São Tomé e Príncipe, Moçambique, among others, as well could potentiate an Macaronesian network (Azores, Madeira, Canary islands and Cabo Verde) of geoparks (Azores geopark is presently the unique Global Geopark in this region).

The implementation of a strategic plan and the establishment of the GEOAÇORES Association, a non-profit association in charge of managing the geopark, articulating in one strategy the various geotourism actions taken by various partners entities, have been crucial factors to ensure the successful geotourism development in the Azores and the promotion and conservation of geologic heritage of the archipelago. The recognition by the EGN and GGN of the Azores Geopark as Global Geopark, and the networking with all the Geoparks, allows to reach new markets, bringing more visitors to this Region.

