

European



DESIGNING YOUR ECOTOURISM BUSINESS

Aim: Offering guidelines on how to come up with an idea for an ecotourism business and how to shape that idea in accord with environmental sustainability principles.

Objectives:



Understanding how to start looking for a location for one's business and possible criteria for choosing it.



An overview of possible ecotourism activities and how to choose activities depending on the location.



Understanding sustainability issues an ecotourism business needs to address (local resources, energy, waste, including wastewater and garbage, transport); recommendations and possible solutions.



Building a mutually beneficial relationship with the local community; aspects to consider.

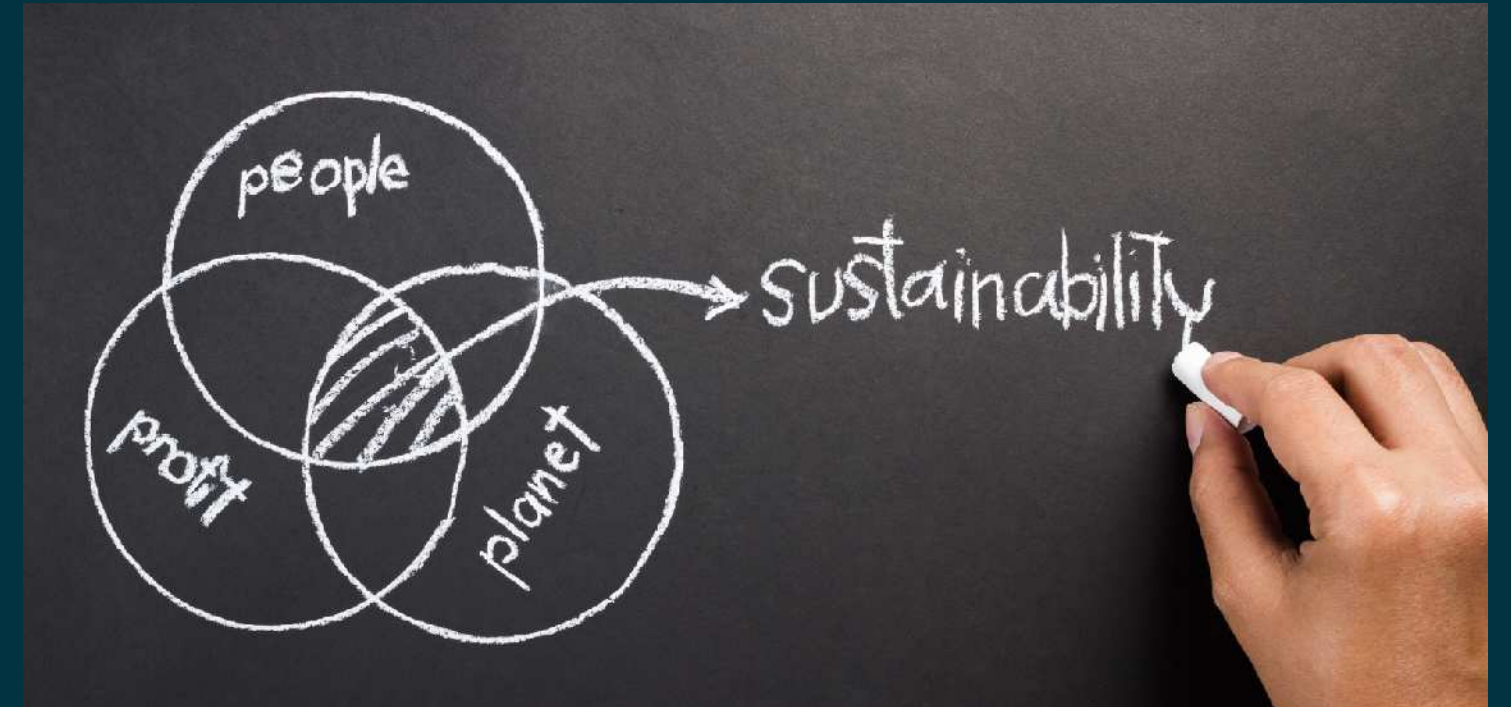


Awareness of the educational and storytelling dimension of an ecotourism business.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES



Ecotourism? Let's recap!



Ecotourism refers to a wide range of activities based on **nature and local culture**.

The main motivation of the tourist is to **observe, understand, learn and enjoy nature and local customs**.

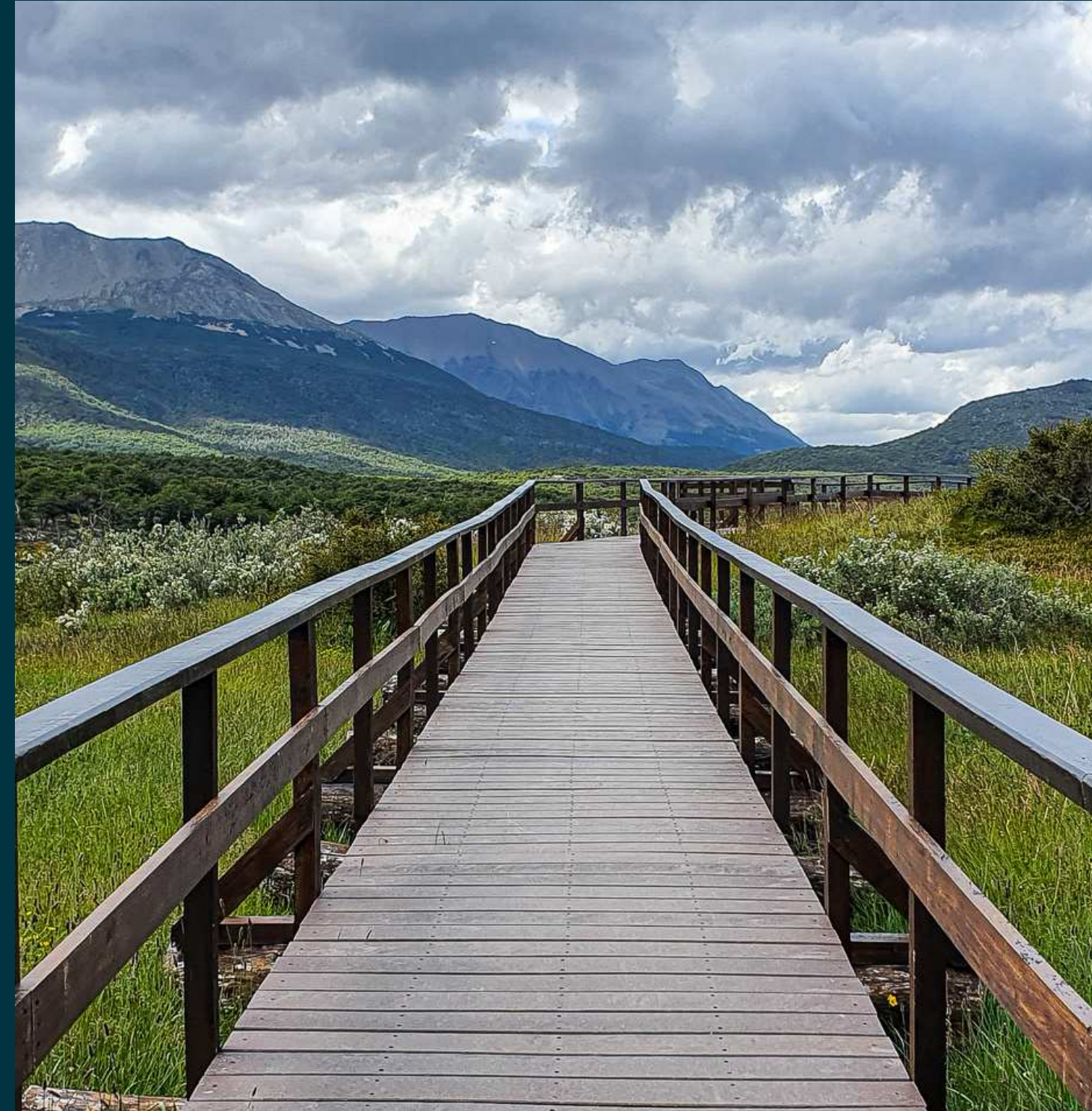
The purpose of **ecotourism activities** is to help **conserve and protect natural environment**.

Ecotourism?

Let's recap!

Ecotourism:

- helps conserve and protect the natural environment
- offers education in respect to nature, raising awareness among tourists and local communities
- has a minimal negative impact on the natural and socio-cultural environment
- contributes to the well-being of local communities;
- is based on local ownership and local initiative
- consists of small-scale businesses
- uses local human resources.



Plainly put, ecotourism is about **travel that leaves natural destinations better, not worse.**

Ecotourism? Let's recap!



Examples of ecotourism activities are:

- hiking
- fauna watching (including observation of animal signs and tracks)
- flora observation
- bird watching
- cycling
- horse riding
- cultural tours
- water activities
- winter activities (cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, sledding)
- photo tours
- gastronomic and wine tours
- agritourism as long as the farms comply with sustainability and ecological practices etc.

Ecotourism? Let's recap!



Agritourism (tourism at farms) can be included in ecotourism as long as the farms comply with sustainability and ecological practices, and there is an educational dimension to the visits.



Tourist accommodation and eating places can fall under the category of ecotourism as long as they comply with sustainability and ecotourism principles. (For example, they are in nature, they are environmentally sustainable, they use locally sourced resources, they benefit local community, they have an educational dimension etc.)



Other activities may be included (such as visiting other types of businesses or cultural tours) as long as they comply with sustainability and ecotourism principles, have a minimum negative impact on the natural and cultural environment and bring benefits to the environment and local community.

Hunting or motorized off-road activities are not ecotourism.

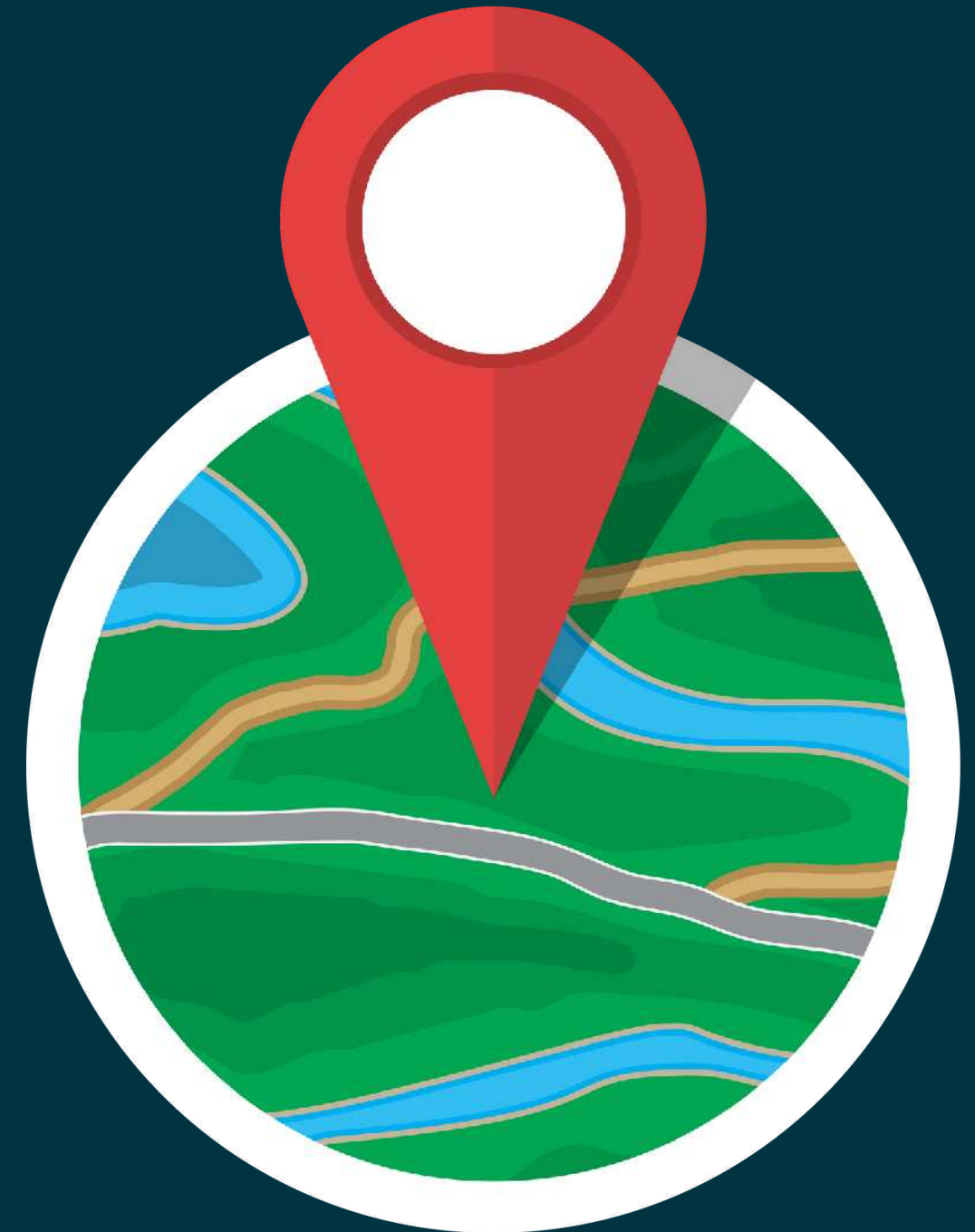
Where will your eco-tourism business be located?

Think of natural areas in your country, in your region or in the region where you would like to start a business. They can be national parks, nature reserves or other types of areas with variable degrees of protection.

Ecotourism takes place in nature.

It involves direct and personal experience of nature.

The emphasis on the natural area is of the essence of planning, developing and managing ecotourism!



You can start by exploring some of the following links:

List of National Parks by country: Click on the name of the country to see the list of National Parks in that country.

 en.wikipedia.org/

A national park is a natural park in use for conservation purposes, created and protected by national governments. Often it is a reserve of natural, semi-natural, or developed land that a sovereign state declares or owns. Although individual nations designate their own national parks differently, there is a common idea: the conservation of 'wild nature' for posterity and as a symbol of national pride.

 [Sourced from en.wikipedia.org/](https://en.wikipedia.org/)

National Parks usually have the highest degree of legal protection, therefore a limited range of permitted activities: only the ones that have limited impact on nature.



At the other end of the protection spectrum, there are the Natura 2000 sites.

Map of Natura 2000 sites



natura2000.eea.europa.eu

Natura 2000 is EU's network of protected areas, a core of breeding and resting sites for rare and threatened species, and some rare natural habitat types which are protected in their own right. It stretches across 27 EU countries, covering over 18% of the EU's land area and more than 8% of its marine territory.

Natura 2000 is **not a system of strict nature reserves from which all human activities are excluded**. While it includes strictly protected nature reserves, most of the land remains privately owned. **The approach to conservation and sustainable use** of the Natura 2000 areas is much wider, **largely centered on people working with nature rather than against it**.



[More info on ec.europa.eu](https://ec.europa.eu)

This makes the Natura 2000 sites ideal places for ecotourism businesses.



There are also various other **networks of protected areas**, at European and international level, that aim to help members improve the management of those areas, share examples of good practice, ensure visibility and compliance with certain standards. As these networks are based on voluntary membership, only some protected areas will be included.

However, you might consider setting up your business **in or in the vicinity of those areas**, as these network may also offer **visibility, certification and guidance to businesses**.

In the next slides you will find examples of such networks.



List of EUROPARC Sustainable Destinations:



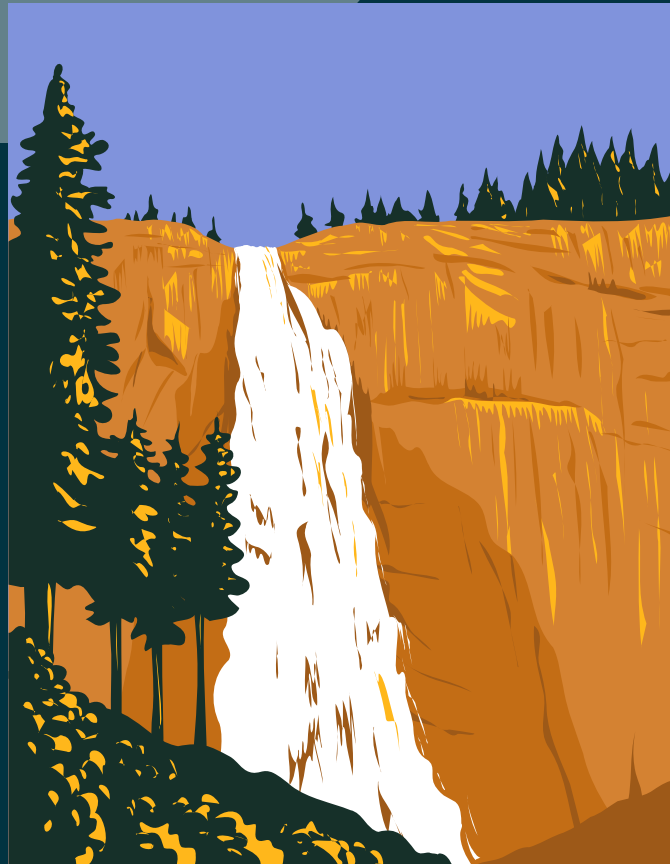
<https://www.europarc.org>

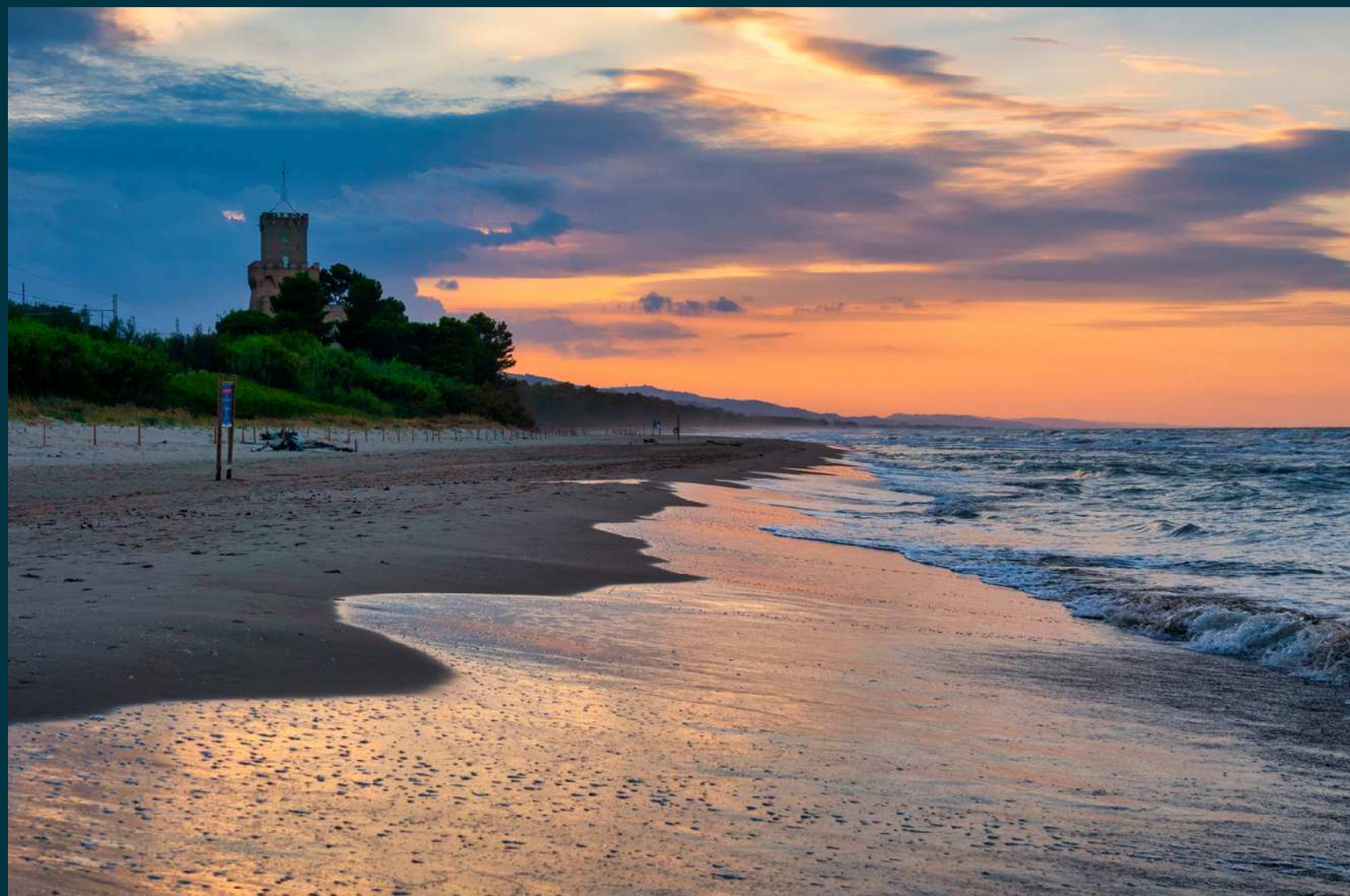
The EUROPARC Federation is umbrella organization of Europe's protected areas. It unites national and regional parks, nature and biosphere reserves, marine and landscape protected areas, together with a large number of Natura 2000 sites with the common aim of protecting Europe's unique variety of wildlife, habitats and landscapes.



Sourced from www.europarc.org

The EUROPARC Federation is also the body that oversees the evaluation and certification for **protected areas, business and tour operators** as complying with the **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST)**, the European equivalent of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria (as mentioned in the Introduction Module).





The title of **Sustainable Destination (ECST Area)** is awarded by the EUROPARC Federation Council the ECST Evaluation Committee to **authorities** managing a protected area.

The title of **Sustainable Partner in ECST Areas** is awarded **by the authorities of a Sustainable Destination (ECST) area** to **local tourism businesses** within that area.

The title of Sustainable Tour Operator in ECST Area is awarded **by the authorities of a Sustainable Destination (ECST) area** to **tour operators** bringing visitors to that area.



Sourced from www.europarc.org

Setting up a business in a ECST Area may enable you to apply for a Sustainable Partner certificate, a Sustainable Tour Operator certificate, or simply enjoy the benefits offered by a ECST Area.

Alternatively, if you set up your business in a non-ECST Area, keep in mind **you could encourage the authorities of the area to join the EUROPARC network.**

List of European UNESCO Global Geoparks:



<https://en.unesco.org>

UNESCO is the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It contributes to peace and security by promoting international cooperation in education, sciences, culture, communication and information.



Sourced from www.unesco.org

UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. They are not just about geology. The purpose of a UNESCO Global Geopark is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between that geological heritage and all other aspects of the area's natural, cultural and intangible heritages. It is about reconnecting human society at all levels to the planet we all call home.

Their bottom-up approach combines conservation with sustainable development while involving local communities.



Sourced from www.europeangeoparks.org



List of official Emerald Network sites:

 rm.coe.int

List of nominated candidate Emerald Network sites:

 rm.coe.int

The Emerald Network is an ecological network made up of Areas of Special Conservation Interest launched by the Council of Europe. Before being officially adopted as Emerald Network sites, all sites proposed to join the Network are thoroughly assessed at biogeographical level for their sufficiency to achieve the ultimate objective of the Network: the **long term survival of the species and habitats that require specific protection measures.**



However, as of February 2023, only eight countries had adopted Emerald Sites on their territories: Andorra, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Other countries had nominated candidate sites: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Russian Federation and Serbia.

 *Sourced from www.coe.int*

But the list might grow in the future.

There are various other networks of natural parks and protected areas, but those have a less official character and are more focused on ensuring visibility and promotion. For example:

List of parks on the Global Alliance of National Parks website:



national-parks.org

National:



national-parks.org

The mission of the Global Alliance of National Parks is to inspire and develop conservation and protection of the world's natural resources found within national parks through education, promotion, and global community awareness.

National park inclusion is free for any official national park organization. A representative of the national park just needs to contact the association through the contact page. The intent of membership is to establish a collaborative relationship to promote each national park and the natural resources they protect.



Sourced from national-parks.org

Seeing what protected area is part of what networks can give you an idea of the level of involvement of the authorities managing that area, as you will probably have to work with them to develop your business.



Where?



There might also be **networks of protected areas specific to your country or region**, so it might be worth doing a customized search.



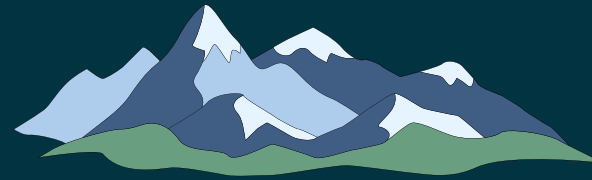
If the place you have in mind is not part of any network, that might make it a more attractive destination, as it might be under the radar of regular tourists. But it's something to keep in mind for when you will be planning the communication and promotion of your business. Being part of an existing network helps out with promotion and getting tourists.



Wherever you decide to set up your business, it's good to know as much as possible about the place, as **the place offers the opportunities for business.**



If you don't already have an idea for a business, you can start by thinking about the opportunities offered by the location:



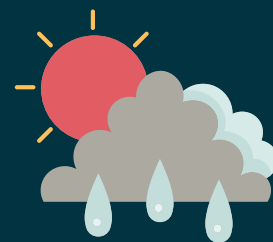
Is the place scenic? In what way? What is of interest about it? What would people want to see?

What is the terrain like? Is it appropriate for biking or hiking? How can people get around?



What kind of plants, animals, birds, insects live here? Would nature-watching, bird-watching or trekking work and would it be of interest? How about picking mushrooms or berries or fishing? (if it's permitted)

Are there waters and what are the restrictions about using them?



What is the climate like? What kind of activities does it favour/discourage?

What kind of activities are permitted? (if your activity will take place in a protected area, you need to make sure that activity is permitted)



Think of the local population and the way it has interacted with the environment along history:

- Who were/are the local populations? Where did they live? What did they eat? What did they do? What was their relation to other populations in the past? How about now? How do they live now?
- How did they relate to nature in the past? How do they relate to it now?
- Can we see how humans have shaped nature in this place? (for example, in the way the land is organized, in the crops grown, other particularities of the landscape). How about how nature has shaped humans?





Think of the local population and the way it has interacted with the environment along history:

- Are there any agricultural practices specific to the place? Forestry practices? Fishing practices?
- Are there any products that are traditional for the area? (food, crafted objects, even industrial products)
- Do people have traditions or beliefs specific to this area?
- Do they have specific cultural manifestations? (music, dances, costumes, stories, drawings, paintings, theatre representations etc.)





- Which of these aspects would be of interest to tourists and would paint a truthful image of the community?
- What would the community need?

Think of the local population and the way it has interacted with the environment along history:





Think of services needed in the area.
For example:

- Are there places for lodging? Are they enough? Are they sustainable? What would you do different/better?
- Are there restaurants? Are they enough? Are they sustainable? What would you do different/better?

(If such activities are not permitted within the protected area, think of setting up your business in the vicinity of the area.)



Some of the questions about traditional practices and products might also give you an idea for other types of businesses (agricultural or production-related) that can have ecotourism as an additional activity.



For example, **Geodora**, a company in Grasse, France, produces and sells organic environmentally sustainable perfumes in an area that has produced perfumes for centuries, while also offering tours of the business and workshops about perfumes.



Sourced from [geodora-parfums.com](https://www.geodora-parfums.com)



Mungo Murphy Seaweed Co. in Connemara, Ireland is an ecologically sustainable abalone and seaweed farm that also offers guided tours and workshops.



Sourced from www.mungomurphyseaweed.com

As you can see from the previous examples, your business can be a combination of activities:

- farming, selling products, guided tours of the farm, workshops
- processing, selling products, guided tours of the production facility, workshops
- farming, preparing and serving food
- offering accommodation, preparing and serving food; offering outdoor activities (hiking, trekking, bird-watching, nature-watching); offering guided tours of natural or heritage sites.

Or you can just focus on a type of activity:

- water sports
- winter sports
- outdoor activities for people with specific disabilities
- organizing tours to ecotourism objectives: farms, workshops, protected areas, cultural landmarks.



If you already have an idea for an eco-tourism business, make sure that the place you've selected is suitable for it.

If yes, the questions in the previous slides might help you see the place in a new light and see new opportunities or possible issues.

You now have a location and a set of activities in mind.



The next thing you want to do is **design your business** in line with the **principles of environmental sustainability**.

They can be found in the:

- Global Sustainability Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria
- The European Sustainability Tourism (ESTC) Criteria
- and the European Green Deal objectives.



Remember! Designing your ecotourism business from the start in accord with sustainability principles and Green Deal objectives can ensure compliancy with EU standards and regulation, bring in funding and financial incentives and win you the approval and interest of tourists.

The first thing to consider are

LOCAL RESOURCES

Using local resources:

- reduces the gas emissions of transport, as well as your costs as a business.
- ensures the money you spend goes to the local community, an objective of ecotourism and of sustainable tourism in general.
- local solutions might also be best adapted to the circumstances of the area: climate, soil etc.



Local resources can be physical resources, human resources or financial resources (such as funding offered only for businesses in that area).



PHYSICAL RESOURCES



For example, if you need a construction (whether a lodging, a restaurant, a workshop, a storage space etc.), think of **the building materials locally available**.

Think of the materials traditionally used for such constructions and their designs. **Traditional techniques and practices** often offer the best interaction between local resources and local circumstances. (For example, the slope of the roof and the material that covers it depend on the quantity of rain and snow falling in that area. The presence of a porch depends on how cold and windy it is throughout the year etc.)

New doesn't always mean better. If you choose **new materials**, make sure they are environmentally sustainable (for example, **biodegradable**).

PHYSICAL RESOURCES



You will probably also need things that are not available in your area. If possible, try to make sure they have been **transported in sustainable ways** (for example, by train or boat). This will get easier in time, as The Green Deal also aims to make the environmental impact of products more transparent, so that you can make informed decisions.



More info on commission.europa.eu



PHYSICAL RESOURCES



Existing buildings are also considered a local resource. Both the demolition of old buildings and the construction of new ones use up energy and create waste. You can save both by repurposing and reusing.



Remember! In the context of the current environmental crisis, the preservation and reuse of old buildings is no longer an act of reverence to the past, but a rational use of existing resources.

PHYSICAL RESOURCES

If your business will serve food, try to use ecological, locally sourced ingredients. This will help other businesses in the community, but it will also offer tourists a glimpse into local culture and way of life, as locally grown food is adapted to soil and climate.



This idea is also in line with EU's From Farm to Fork Strategy that aims, among others, to shorten the supply chain, lowering gas emissions level (by minimising transport distances) and incentivizing small environmentally sustainable farms.



PHYSICAL RESOURCES

The same goes for any other type of business that involves production. Think of what raw materials/additional ingredients you need and if they can be procured in the area.

For those that are not available in the area, think of how they can be procured in a sustainable way.



Sun, wind, water, tides also count as physical resources that might help you come up with an energy system customized to local conditions and opportunities.



HUMAN RESOURCES



Think of the local community. What are the people currently doing? Are there enough people to hire on your business? If not, where else could you find them? (Think of the neighbouring areas, keep in mind minimising the gas emissions of transport.)

In what circumstances would you hire people from the local community? Do you need to offer them training? Transport? Accommodation? Meals? Factor all that into your business plan.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES



Although financial resources are not necessarily related to ensuring your business is environmentally sustainable, knowing what funding is available for sustainable businesses in your area can help you design your business to meet the funding criteria and get money to help you start or develop your business.

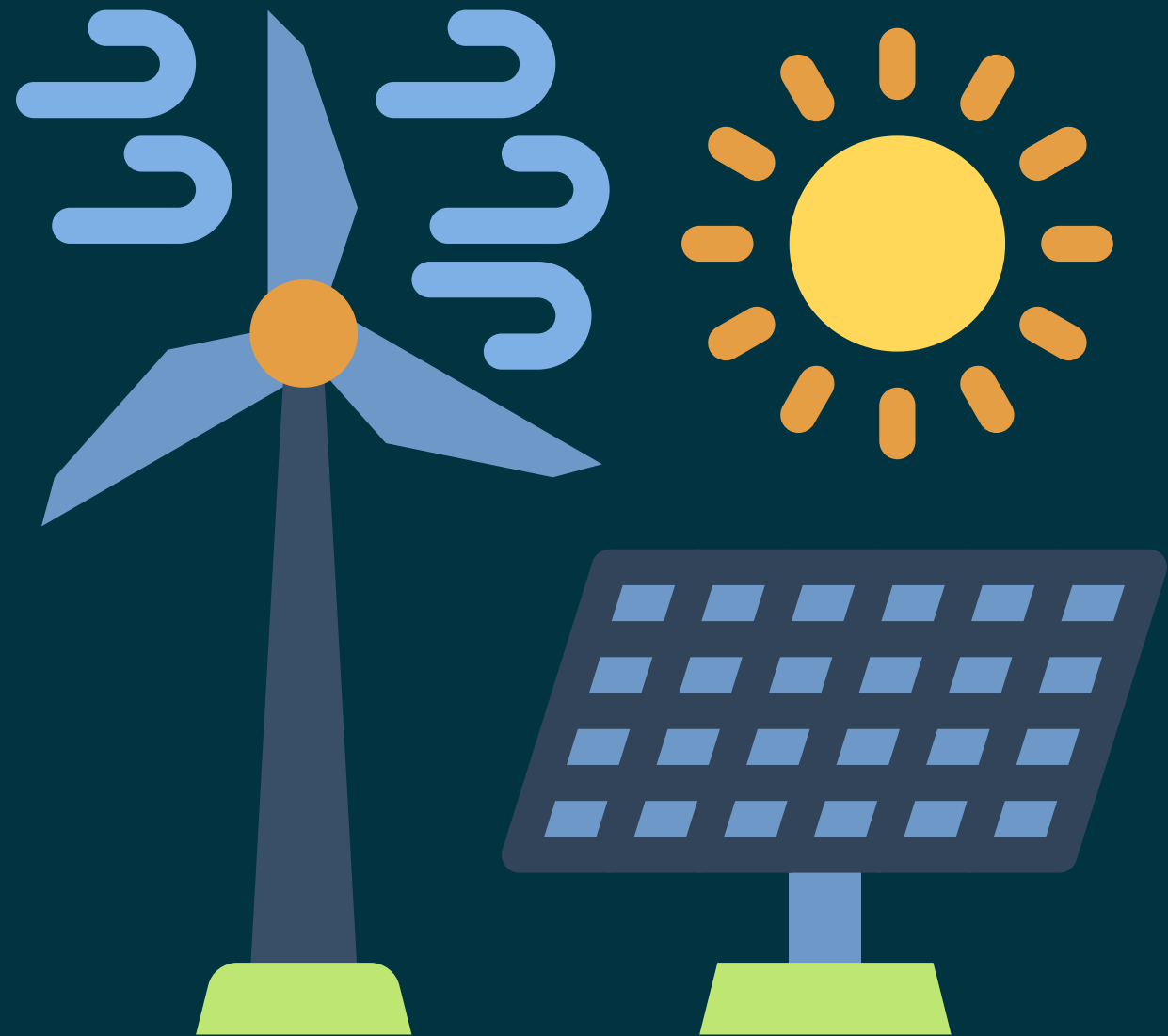
A guide on EU's funding for tourism with a list of currently open calls can be found here:



single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu

The second thing to consider is

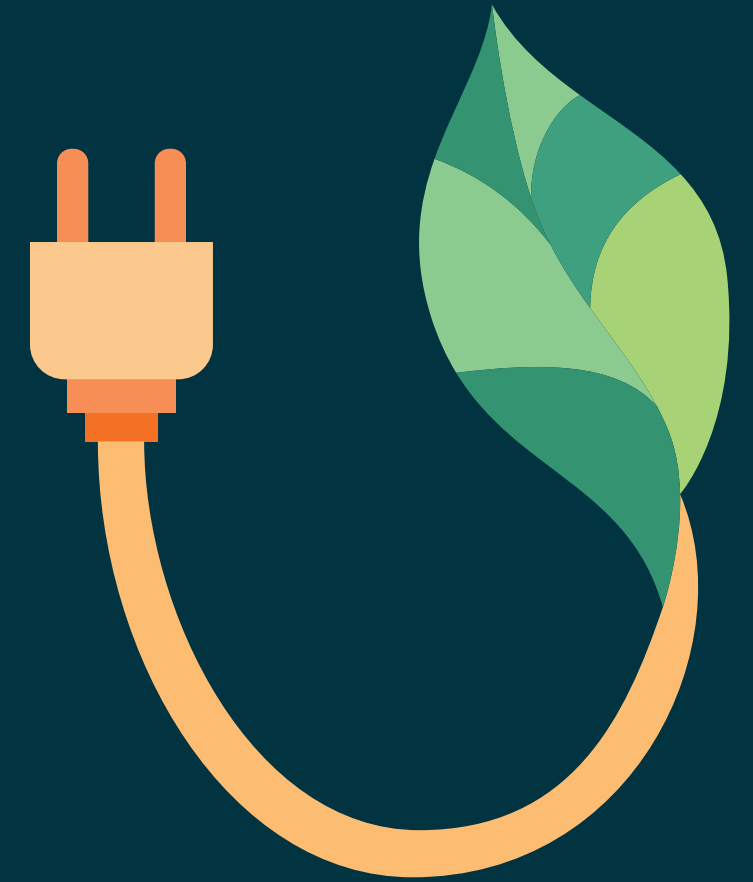
ENERGY



First you need to **assess your needs**.

- What will you be using energy for?
- How often?
- Who will use it?
- Will there be machines?
- How about laptops, desktops or servers?
- What appliances will you use?

The amount of energy needed depends on the type of business you are planning to have.



ENERGY



Secondly, you need to think of **how you will secure that energy**. **The energy system you choose needs to be able to supply all the energy you need.**

Moreover, **decarbonising the EU's energy system** is one of EU's priorities stated in the European Green Deal and is critical to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. In line with its principles:

1. As a ecotourism business, most of the energy you use, if not all, needs to come from **renewable sources**: solar energy, wind energy, hydropower (harnessing the power of moving water), geothermal energy (harnessing the heat coming from the core of the Earth), ocean power.

2. **Save energy**. Digitisation can make energy consumption more efficient, thus saving you energy.

ENERGY



The following link is a TED talk given by the creator of a business using technology to minimise energy and water consumption for tourist resorts:



www.ted.com



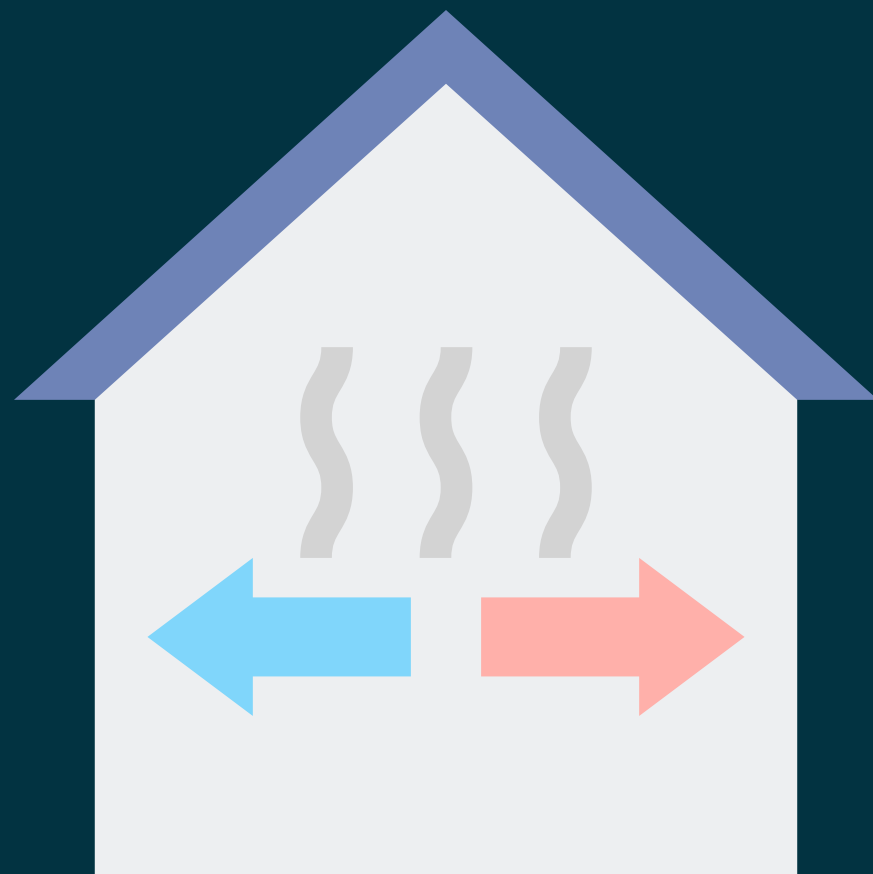
Similar businesses exist all over in Europe. There are also a lot of online resources about how to save energy.

Improving the **energy performance of our buildings** (ideally using locally sourced, biodegradable materials) is another way of saving energy.

ENERGY



For example, if you offer lodging, a space to eat, or run a small production business, make sure the facilities are thermally insulated and have been designed with energetic efficiency in mind (large window surfaces are a source of energy loss and are not appropriate for all types of climate).



Equip your facilities with appliances bearing in mind the same need for energy saving and thermal efficiency.

Don't forget to come up with a back-up plan in case the main energy system shuts down.



CONSTRUCTION WASTE

Construction is one of the most energy consuming and polluting activities.

Try to use **materials that don't pollute (are biodegradable)**, so that any waste resulting from the construction site doesn't end up polluting the environment.

Think if you can **use resulting waste (wood, sawdust etc)** in other aspects of your business.

If you can't help using non-degradable materials (such as concrete, metal etc), take the resulting waste to specially designated, state sanctioned areas. By no means do not discard them in nature.



FOOD WASTE

If you run a business that prepares and serves food, there will be inevitable waste, from food that goes bad or leftovers from customers.



These can be used as **compost**, which can in turn help **grow crops that can then be used in the kitchen.**

A lot of ideas for the sustainability of food businesses can be picked up from studying examples of **zero-waste restaurants.**



More info on www.ted.com

WASTEWATER

Water is a valuable resource and should be treated as such. There are various ways in which water can be used multiple times.



For example, water used for washing hands can be redirected for flushing.

Water used in the kitchen can be filtered, purified and redirected to water the lawn or the crops.

Zero-waste restaurants usually have a water circuit that you can draw inspiration from when designing your own circuit.

4 GARBAGE

Almost all activities produce garbage. Even simple ones, such as hiking or bird-watching might involve people carrying food or drinks, which might then result in garbage. You also need to have a plan for minimising the quantity of garbage and dealing with it in a sustainable manner.

Think of the activities in your business that will result in garbage. What are they? What type of garbage do you expect?

Garbage usually falls into one of the three categories:

organic, recyclable and unrecyclable.



ORGANIC GARBAGE

can be used as compost. You can either use it in your own garden, if you grow your own crops, or make a deal with a near-by farm and give it to them.

RECYCLABLE GARBAGE

has to be sorted and recycled. However, recycling uses up a lot of energy.

As an ecotourism business, you should strive to reduce to minimum the quantity of recyclable garbage you create.

It is particularly important to reduce your use of plastic. Avoid products in plastic packaging.

Replace plastic straws with metal ones. Use glass bottles instead of plastic ones. Aim to reuse rather than throw away.

Purchase objects made from recycled materials.

UNRECYCLABLE GARBAGE

will end up in the landfill. Aim to reduce the quantity of garbage you send to the landfill to zero! Buy appliances, technology and batteries that subscribes to the principles of circular economy and can be reused, repaired and updated, rather than thrown out!

FAECAL WASTE

Management of wastewater with faecal waste plays an important role in sanitation and disease prevention. Wastewater with fecal waste (or poop) can contaminate the local environment and drinking water supply, thereby increasing the risk of disease transmission. It is vital to have a system in place to manage wastewater and sewage. Various systems exist and you should look into them before starting your business.



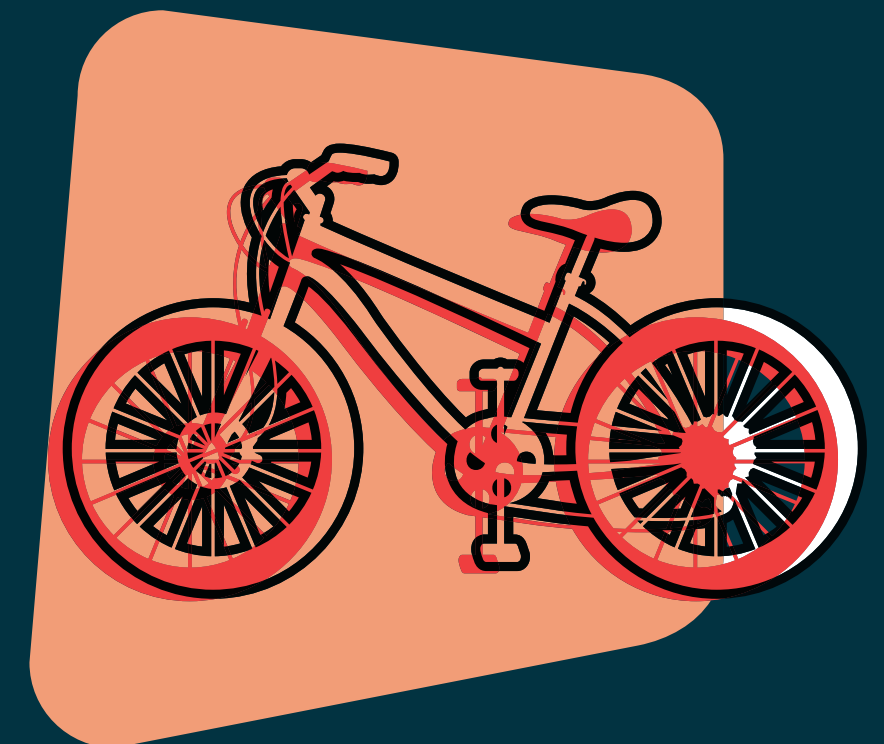
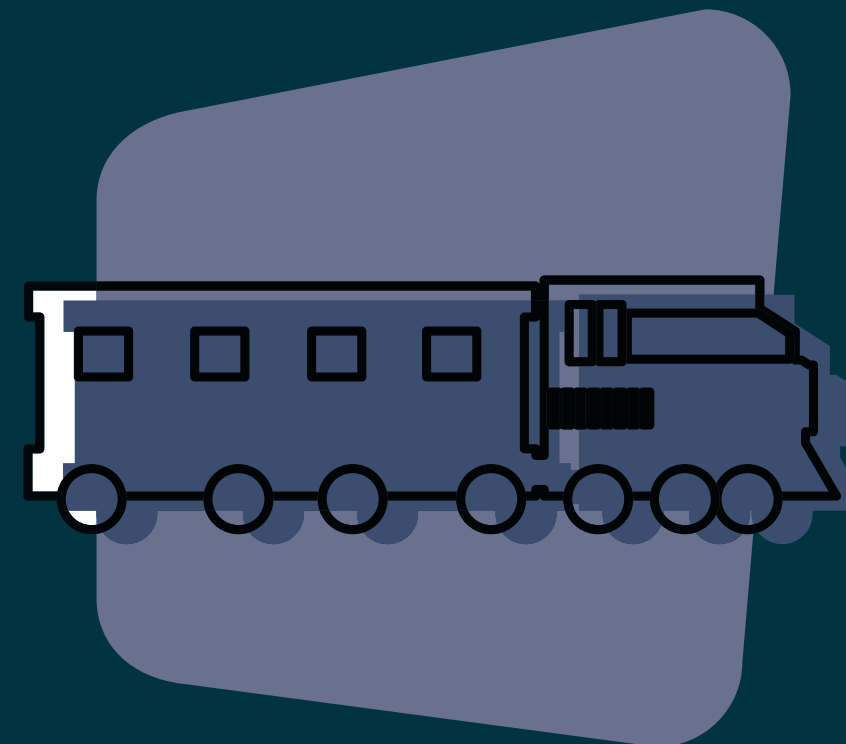
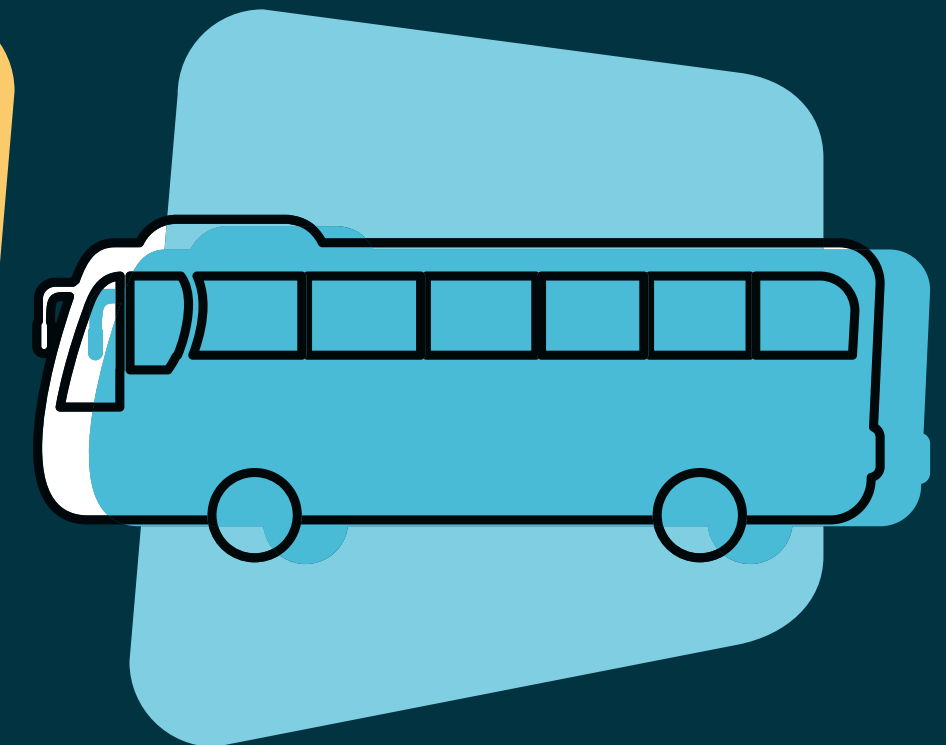
You also need to consider

TRANSPORT

Although you can't be responsible for the means of transport that your clients use to get to you, **make sure that any activities you offer include clean transport** (such as electric vehicles, bicycles, walking etc).

If you opt for electric cars, don't forget to plan for how they will be charged and factor that into your energy consumption and system design.

Think of how you can **make your tours more inclusive, for people with various levels of physical training or physical disabilities.**



Depending on the type of business you want to start, some of these aspects might now apply to you.

However, these are generally the aspects to consider:

- **What can I procure locally? (materials, products, employees)**
- **How will I procure other things I need?**
- **What products can I buy compatible with sustainability principles?**
- **What will I do about energy?**
- **How will I manage water use?**
- **How can I produce as little garbage as possible?**
- **What can I reuse?**



Ecotourism is about nature, but it's also about people in

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY



Your business must benefit and create opportunities for the local community. Tourists too will be happy to learn about local culture and interact with people.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY



Think of how your business can involve the local community:

- Do you need locally sourced materials or food?
- Do you need to hire people?
- Are there certain local crafts or other products made in the area?
- Are there other businesses?
- Can you partner with them and increase opportunities?
- Does your business portray the local community in a truthful respectful manner?
- Does your business do any damage to the community?
- Would the local community be able to use the services offered by my business?

KNOW YOUR CLIENTS

Another thing to consider are the profiles of the customers you want to attract, so you can tailor your business to their needs and expectations.



KNOW YOUR CLIENTS

Several studies (Blamey & Braithwaite, 1997; Diamantis, 1999; Palacio & McCool, 1997; Weaver & Lawton, 2002) have divided ecotourists into several categories:

YOUNGER ECOTOURISTS

(aged 18-44), consisting of:



Young professionals who have a high income but only a limited time to travel. They travel as couples or on their own, and are looking for unusual experiences. They choose the experience and comfort of a luxury eco-tourism holiday. Sustainability is not their main motivation.

Backpackers and young people taking a year off. They have a low budget. They want to experience the local way of life and try traditional products. They can also combine their trips with volunteer work on various conservation projects. Most of these young people will travel to the region for long periods of time.



KNOW YOUR CLIENTS

Families with children (usually over 8 years old), who are looking for experiences where they can relax and also spend time with their children. They are interested in activities that combine fun and adventure with learning. **For this segment of ecotourists, health and safety are also very important.**



Empty nesters are people aged between 45 and 65, who are in good health, have time to travel without their children and often have high financial potential. They are experienced travellers and **have high expectations in terms of value for money of tourist services, but are still willing to pay more for high quality ecotourism experiences..**



KNOW YOUR CLIENTS

With these profiles in mind, it's recommendable that you **design your business to cater to the needs of several types of clients.**

Think of what activities you could offer to each type of tourist. Some may be interested in learning as much as possible about nature, others might want to spend time with their children, while others might want to just relax in the middle of a beautiful landscape.

Think of the ages of the tourists. Try to take into account their physical ability and what they might require (rest, water, food) and how you would provide it.

Think of the expected quality of services. Design packages of different costs for different levels of expectations.

Come up with a range of offers addressed to different types of tourists.



KNOW YOUR CLIENTS

Remember! EU's concern with the environment goes hand in hand with its concern for preoccupation for accessibility and inclusivity. The European Green Deal is accompanied by a Just Transition Fund that want to make sure no citizen or region is left behind.



When designing your business, keep in mind making it accessible for differently abled people: those with visual or hearing impairments, with mobility issues etc.

Think of how you could tailor your services to their needs.

TELLING YOUR STORY

EDUCATION is an essential part of ecotourism. People engage in ecotourism to find out more about nature and local cultures.



Ecotourism businesses are part of the same ecosystem as nature and the local community. You have to be ready to tell visitors the story of the area where your business is located, as well as the story of your business.

This can be done through online communication and marketing, but it will also have to be done live, on the site, through interpretation. Interpretation is a mix of information, storytelling, lived experience, dialogue and revelation. The following two modules will elaborate on communication and marketing, as well as on interpretation.

CONCLUSION

Apart from the steps necessary in designing a regular business, an ecotourism business also requires you to consider:

- how to ensure environmental sustainability;
- how to create positive interactions and benefits for the local community;
- how to include an educational dimension and tell the story of your business in a way that connects it to nature and the local community.

