Green Business Models Training Programme – Theoretical Chapters and Masterclasses

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GREEN BUSINESS MODELS TRAINING PROGRAMME

Introduction

Introduction

The FOOTPRINT Green Business Models Training Programme has been developed as a strategic response to the accelerating green transition reshaping the European tourism ecosystem. Across the EU, tourism businesses are operating in a context defined by climate urgency, biodiversity decline, resource volatility, regulatory tightening, digital transformation and evolving consumer expectations. These structural forces are reshaping how tourism businesses compete and operate across Europe.

Tourism and hospitality enterprises, particularly SMEs that dominate the European visitor economy, stand at a critical juncture. They are both highly dependent on environmental and social capital and directly exposed to climate, regulatory and market risks. In this context, sustainability is no longer a reputational enhancement. It is a prerequisite for business continuity, investment readiness and destination relevance.

The Green Business Models Training Programme is designed to move tourism SMEs beyond awareness and into structured transformation. It provides a coherent pathway from conceptual understanding to operational redesign. Rather than treating sustainability as a collection of isolated measures, the programme positions it as a core dimension of business model innovation.

The structure reflects this ambition:

- The Theoretical Chapters establish the economic, environmental and policy foundations of sustainable tourism within the EU context.
- The Masterclasses translate these foundations into sector-specific, applied tools focused on ecotourism, cultural tourism and adventure tourism as pathways to resilient growth.

Together, the programme supports tourism businesses to:

- Reduce environmental exposure and regulatory risk
- Strengthen local legitimacy and social value
- Improve operational efficiency and cost stability
- Align with EU Green Deal priorities and international sustainability standards
- Build differentiated, future-ready value propositions

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GREEN BUSINESS MODELS TRAINING PROGRAMME

Theoretical Chapters

Green Business Models Training Programme - Theoretical Chapters

Overview

The Theoretical Chapters provide the strategic architecture of the Green Business Models Training Programme. They are designed to equip learners with the analytical lens required to navigate the green transition intelligently and confidently. Sustainable transformation in tourism cannot be achieved through fragmented actions. It requires clarity regarding:

- The structural characteristics of the EU tourism ecosystem
- The material environmental, social and economic impacts generated across tourism value chains
- The policy and financial signals shaping future operating conditions
- The vulnerabilities and leverage points specific to SMEs

The three chapters follow a deliberate progression.

1) **Chapter 1: Strategic Context and Sectoral Foundations**

This chapter establishes the macroeconomic scale of tourism in the EU and clarifies core concepts such as sustainable and regenerative tourism. It situates SMEs within the wider ecosystem and identifies the sector's material impacts across emissions, resource use, biodiversity and community well-being.

Critically, it introduces the policy architecture driving the transition, including the European Green Deal, the Transition Pathway for Tourism and international frameworks such as the SDGs and GSTC criteria. By doing so, it reframes sustainability as a strategic alignment exercise with tangible implications for finance, compliance, procurement and market access.

2) **Chapter 2: Operationalising Sustainable Development**

The second chapter translates global sustainability ambitions into operational realities. It connects environmental management, climate adaptation and local value creation directly to cost efficiency, resilience and competitive positioning.

Rather than presenting sustainability as an abstract ethical framework, this chapter positions it as an operational discipline embedded in energy, water, waste, mobility, biodiversity and community engagement decisions.

3) **Chapter 3: Applied Case Pathways**

The final chapter bridges theory and implementation through diverse case studies across ecotourism, cultural tourism and adventure tourism contexts. These examples demonstrate

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that sustainability is not uniform but context-sensitive, shaped by governance structures, partnerships and local assets.

Collectively, the theoretical chapters aim to:

1. Reposition sustainability as a strategic business determinant.
2. Clarify risk exposure and opportunity structures for SMEs.
3. Prepare participants for structured business model redesign.

By the conclusion of this section, participants should recognise that sustainable tourism is not a niche alternative. It is the direction of travel for the European visitor economy.

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01

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Tourism and Sustainable Tourism

Chapter 1: Introduction to Tourism and Sustainable Tourism

Title	*Introduction to Tourism and Sustainable Tourism*
Learning Outcomes	● Define and distinguish core concepts (tourism, hospitality, sustainable/regenerative tourism) and explain why sustainability is a strategic necessity for the sector. ● Describe the EU tourism ecosystem's scale and structure (with SMEs at its core) and summarise key trends and challenges shaping competitiveness. ● Identify and map principal environmental, social and economic impacts relevant to a tourism/hospitality business. ● Recognise the role of EU and international frameworks (e.g., Green Deal, Transition Pathway, SDGs, GSTC) and articulate why alignment matters for compliance, market access and finance. ● Prioritise one or two near-term actions and a simple KPI, demonstrating how awareness translates into credible, measurable improvement.

Introduction

Tourism creates jobs, supports local economies and connects cultures. However, the growth of tourism has also increased pressure on environments, infrastructure and communities in many destinations. For tourism businesses, this creates both opportunities and responsibilities. Sustainable tourism provides a practical approach to managing these challenges. It encourages businesses to consider how their activities affect the environment, local communities and the long-term attractiveness of the destinations on which tourism depends.

For tourism managers and business owners, sustainability is increasingly linked to everyday business decisions. It influences operating costs, visitor expectations, regulatory requirements and long-term competitiveness. Businesses that understand these dynamics are better positioned to manage risks, improve efficiency and create attractive visitor experiences.

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Purpose

FOOTPRINT's overarching aim is to accelerate the transition of Europe's visitor economy towards greener, fairer, and more resilient models. This aligns with the broader policy direction in Europe that encourages decarbonisation, circular resource use, digital innovation, accessibility, and skills development across tourism ecosystems. Within this context, small and medium-sized enterprises, and particularly those in hospitality, are pivotal: they design the offered guest experience, procure from local suppliers, employ and train staff, and interact daily with residents and environments.

This programme is therefore practical by design. It focuses on tools that managers can implement within their own operations: auditing energy and water, preventing food waste, redesigning offers to reduce impacts while enhancing value, investing in people and governance, and using data to guide improvement. By grounding sustainability in the realities of service delivery and guest experience, FOOTPRINT aims to build business models that are commercially viable and capable of contributing positively to destination well-being. The concepts introduced here will be carried forward through the rest of the programme, providing a common frame for strategy, measurement, and continuous improvement.

Theoretical Overview

Key Definitions and Concepts

Tourism

UNWTO defines tourism as the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year, for leisure, business or other purposes. This definition underpins official statistics and Tourism Satellite Accounts used across the EU.

Hospitality and tourism industries

In the European statistical system, "tourism industries" encompass a set of NACE activities such as accommodation (I55), food and beverage service (I56), passenger transport (H49–H51, H50, H53), and selected rental and cultural services. Hospitality—largely accommodation and food & beverage—is therefore a core subset of tourism supply.

Sustainable tourism

UNWTO's widely used definition states that sustainable tourism "takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." This definition frames sustainability as a balancing of value for people, planet and prosperity over the long term.

Green tourism

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Commonly used to denote environmentally oriented practices (e.g., energy, water, waste), often linked to eco-labels or green procurement, whereas *sustainable tourism* explicitly integrates social and economic dimensions alongside environmental aspects.

Regenerative tourism extends sustainability by seeking net-positive outcomes for ecosystems and communities; it is increasingly referenced in destination strategies, though not yet codified in official statistics.

Tourism and Hospitality in the EU Economy

Tourism is a substantial component of Europe's economy and labour market. In 2022, almost 1 in 13 enterprises in the EU business economy belonged to tourism industries, employing around 12.3 million people; three-quarters of enterprises were in accommodation and food services (Eurostat, 2024). The tourism sector is highly SME-driven, which shapes how sustainability measures must be implemented. Out of about 3.2 million tourism businesses, 99.8% are micro, small or medium-sized, a structural feature that shapes how policy and support measures must be implemented (European Commission, 2022).

From a macroeconomic perspective, the sector's recovery has restored and exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that in 2024, Travel & Tourism contributed approximately €1.8 trillion to EU GDP (just over 10% of the economy) and supported more than 24.5 million jobs, roughly one in nine jobs across the EU (WTTC, 2025). While these figures are derived from satellite-account modelling that includes direct, indirect and induced impacts, they illustrate the scale at which tourism and hospitality interact with European supply chains and regional economies.

Industry Trends and Challenges

Mass tourism and destination pressure

Popular destinations face seasonal peaks and concentrations that strain public space, housing and infrastructure. This has catalysed policy responses (visitor management, carrying-capacity tools, data sharing) in line with the EU's Transition Pathway for Tourism.

Climate impacts and emissions

Peer-reviewed research estimates tourism's global carbon footprint at around 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions (2009–2013 baseline), driven primarily by transport, food consumption and retail supply chains linked to tourism demand (Lenzen et al., 2018). At the same time, climate change increasingly affects tourism destinations through risks such as heat stress, wildfire exposure, water scarcity and ecosystem degradation, creating operational challenges for tourism businesses and highlighting the importance of both mitigation and adaptation strategies (IPCC, 2023; Scott, Gössling, & Hall, 2012).

Changing traveller expectations

European consumer surveys indicate growing interest in responsible travel choices and sustainable tourism practices. Travellers increasingly value environmentally responsible services,

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transparent sustainability information and low-impact mobility options, which influence tourism product design, communication and booking decisions (European Commission, 2023; Booking.com, 2023).

Policy and market signals for the green transition

Policy frameworks at EU level are accelerating the transition toward more sustainable tourism systems. The European Green Deal commits the European Union to climate neutrality by 2050 and to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels (European Commission, 2019). Within the tourism ecosystem, the Transition Pathway for Tourism translates these objectives into sector-specific actions focused on decarbonisation, circular resource use, digitalisation, skills development and investment support for tourism SMEs (European Commission, 2022).

Digitalisation and data for decision-making

The ecosystem's competitiveness increasingly depends on the capacity of SMEs to collect and use operational data (energy, water, waste, mobility, sourcing) to set targets and evidence progress, an expectation reinforced by destination strategies and, for larger firms, by evolving sustainability reporting regimes.

Workforce and business-model resilience

Structural features, such as seasonality, skills gaps, and the prevalence of micro-firms, make capability-building central to transformation. Improving job quality, training and governance (including co-operative and community models) helps align business resilience with destination well-being.

Impacts of Tourism

Environmental

Tourism exerts environmental pressures across the full value chain, including transport, accommodation, food and beverage services, retail consumption and recreational activities. Global modelling studies estimate that tourism-related supply chains generated approximately 5.2 gigatonnes of CO_2-equivalent emissions in 2019, representing about 8.8% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Sun et al., 2024). These emissions are driven largely by transport, food consumption and retail supply chains linked to tourism demand, with aviation and energy-intensive services playing a particularly significant role. Historical trends show that tourism emissions have grown faster than the global economy, as demand for travel and tourism services has expanded more rapidly than improvements in energy efficiency or low-carbon technologies. This dynamic highlights the need for rapid decarbonisation across tourism value chains, particularly in mobility, accommodation, energy use and supply systems (Lenzen et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2024). Beyond emissions, destination ecosystems face water stress, waste generation and habitat disturbance. European assessments note mounting pressures on rivers, lakes and groundwater from over-abstraction, pollution and drought, alongside climate-driven extremes that compound resource scarcity in popular destinations. These pressures raise operational risks

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(e.g., higher utility costs, restrictions) and reputational risks when visitor use competes with local needs.

Climate change intensifies environmental risks for the tourism industry itself. Rising temperatures, heatwaves, wildfire risk, declining snow reliability in mountain regions, marine heatwaves and biodiversity loss are already affecting tourism destinations and the quality of visitor experiences. These impacts can shorten tourism seasons, increase operational costs and affect infrastructure, insurance and visitor safety. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report highlights increasing heat- and water-related risks across Europe, with particularly high exposure in Mediterranean destinations and snow-dependent mountain tourism areas, reinforcing the need for climate adaptation planning and product diversification within tourism systems (IPCC, 2022; Scott et al., 2019).

Social

Tourism can drive positive social value through cultural exchange, place pride, skills development and support for heritage when visitor flows and spending are well managed. UNESCO's destination-level approach emphasises stakeholder dialogue, community participation and integrated planning to ensure tourism contributes to the protection and enhancement of cultural and natural assets rather than undermining them (UNESCO, 2018).

Conversely, unmanaged tourism growth can generate overtourism effects, including pressure on public spaces and infrastructure, housing market disruption associated with short-term rentals, congestion and a perceived loss of community control over local development (Goodwin, 2017; Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2019). These dynamics frequently trigger local resistance and regulatory responses. Recent European analyses show that cities and regions are experimenting with visitor-management strategies, including carrying-capacity tools, visitor caps, zoning policies and registration or licensing systems for short-term accommodation platforms in order to rebalance resident–visitor relationships (European Commission, 2022; OECD, 2020).

For tourism businesses, these developments translate into new compliance requirements and increasing expectations to demonstrate tangible local benefits. Equity considerations also influence internal organisational performance: job quality, seasonality, inclusion and governance structures affect employee retention, service quality and employer reputation (ILO, 2020). Business models that deepen stakeholder participation, such as co-operative governance structures or community partnerships, can strengthen a firm's social licence to operate while improving service authenticity and long-term resilience (Hall, 2019).

Economic

Travel & Tourism is a major economic engine in the EU, contributing around 10% of GDP and supporting tens of millions of jobs when direct, indirect and induced effects are considered. Recent estimates indicate that in 2024 Travel & Tourism generated approximately €1.8 trillion in GDP and supported more than 24.5 million jobs across the European Union (WTTC, 2025). Such scale underscores the sector's potential leverage for driving the green transition, while also highlighting the exposure of many local economies to climate and market shocks.

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At destination and firm level, the economic balance of tourism depends on factors such as leakage versus local value capture, seasonality, productivity and capital allocation (UN Tourism, 2023). Sustainable practices can reduce operating costs through improved efficiency in energy, water and materials, enhance pricing power through differentiated value propositions, and stabilise demand by aligning with changing traveller preferences. However, over-dependence on a narrow visitor profile or seasonal demand pattern can increase economic volatility. Diversification, circular supply chains and data-driven management are therefore increasingly recognised as key elements of long-term tourism resilience (European Commission, 2022).

Implication for managers and owners: addressing environmental, social and economic impacts in an integrated way is not only a compliance or reputational task; it forms the basis for resilient business models that protect critical assets, maintain community support and deliver durable economic returns.

Policy and Strategic Context

Tourism businesses operate within a multi-level governance environment that increasingly shapes how sustainability is implemented across the sector. Policy frameworks influence energy use, resource management, climate mitigation, labour conditions and environmental protection, while also creating new opportunities through funding, partnerships and market positioning. For tourism SMEs, understanding this policy landscape is important not only for compliance but also for identifying strategic opportunities linked to the transition toward greener and more resilient business models.

Two levels of governance are particularly relevant. European Union policy frameworks establish the regulatory environment within which tourism enterprises operate, while global sustainability frameworks provide guiding principles, voluntary commitments and operational standards that shape sustainability practices across the tourism sector.

EU Frameworks

At the European level, sustainability policy is increasingly integrated into economic strategy, climate legislation and sector-specific initiatives. These frameworks influence how tourism businesses manage energy, waste, mobility, procurement and environmental impacts.

The European Green Deal represents the European Union's overarching strategy for achieving climate neutrality by 2050 while protecting biodiversity, promoting circular economy principles and ensuring a just transition for businesses and communities. The Green Deal has reshaped the EU policy landscape and influences a wide range of sectoral regulations that affect tourism enterprises, including energy efficiency in buildings, sustainable mobility, waste management and environmental protection.

Building on this broader policy direction, the Transition Pathway for Tourism provides a sector-specific roadmap designed to support the tourism ecosystem's transformation toward a greener, more digital and resilient future. Developed collaboratively with industry stakeholders, the pathway identifies priority actions related to decarbonisation, circular resource use, digitalisation,

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skills development and investment. Particular emphasis is placed on supporting SMEs, which represent the vast majority of tourism enterprises in Europe.

Climate legislation within the Fit for 55 package further operationalises the EU's climate targets by introducing measures intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030. These policies influence areas such as renewable energy deployment, energy efficiency standards and low-carbon transport systems. For tourism businesses, especially in accommodation and food service sectors, these developments increasingly shape investment decisions related to building upgrades, energy monitoring and renewable energy sourcing.

Another significant development is the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the accompanying European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). Although these requirements primarily apply to larger companies, they have important implications for SMEs through supply-chain relationships. Tourism SMEs may increasingly be asked to provide sustainability data on issues such as emissions, labour conditions or resource use when working with larger partners or corporate clients.

Financial policy instruments also play an important role in supporting the transition. The EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities establishes a classification system that helps investors and financial institutions identify environmentally sustainable investments. In practice, this framework influences access to green financing and investment conditions for projects such as energy-efficient building renovations, renewable installations or water-saving technologies in tourism facilities.

Public procurement policies further reinforce sustainability objectives. Through Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria, public authorities are encouraged to prioritise environmentally responsible suppliers when purchasing goods and services. Tourism enterprises that demonstrate strong environmental performance may therefore gain advantages when competing for publicly funded tourism services, events or destination partnerships.

In addition, voluntary environmental management systems such as the EU Ecolabel for Tourist Accommodation and the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) provide recognised frameworks for improving environmental performance and demonstrating credible sustainability practices. These certifications can strengthen marketing credibility and may also support eligibility for public tenders or sustainability incentive programmes.

Finally, EU legislation related to waste management, water protection, packaging reduction and food waste prevention continues to evolve. These regulations introduce compliance obligations but also encourage operational practices that often reduce costs through improved efficiency and resource management. These EU policy frameworks establish the regulatory and economic context within which tourism businesses operate, shaping both compliance requirements and strategic opportunities linked to sustainability.

Global Frameworks

Alongside European policy initiatives, tourism businesses are also influenced by a broader set of international sustainability frameworks that shape expectations across the global tourism sector.

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Unlike EU legislation, these frameworks generally operate as guiding principles, voluntary commitments or internationally recognised standards rather than binding regulations. However, they play an important role in defining best practice, informing certification systems and guiding sustainability strategies adopted by destinations and tourism enterprises worldwide.

At the global level, sustainability priorities are articulated through the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs provide an internationally recognised framework linking economic development, environmental protection and social inclusion. Tourism has been explicitly recognised as a sector capable of contributing to several of these goals, particularly those related to sustainable economic growth, responsible consumption and production, climate action and ecosystem protection. For tourism businesses, the SDGs provide a widely recognised structure for communicating sustainability commitments and demonstrating how tourism activities contribute to broader development outcomes.

Global climate action is further guided by the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which commits countries to limiting global temperature rise and achieving net-zero emissions during the second half of the century. Although the agreement operates primarily at the government level, it has significant implications for industries such as tourism, as national climate policies increasingly influence energy systems, transport infrastructure and emissions reduction targets.

Within the tourism sector itself, several international initiatives translate sustainability principles into tourism-specific guidance. The UN Tourism principles for sustainable tourism provide a widely recognised conceptual framework that balances environmental protection, social well-being and economic viability while addressing the needs of visitors, industry stakeholders and host communities. These principles have influenced many national tourism strategies and sustainability certification systems.

Climate action within the tourism sector has recently been strengthened through initiatives such as the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism, launched at COP26. Organisations that endorse the declaration commit to halving tourism-related emissions by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, while developing climate action plans and reporting progress. Although voluntary, the declaration has become an important signal of commitment for tourism businesses and destinations seeking to align with global climate objectives.

Operational guidance is also provided through internationally recognised sustainability standards. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria establish baseline sustainability standards for tourism businesses and destinations. These criteria address areas such as environmental management, cultural heritage protection, community engagement and sustainable economic development, and they form the basis for many tourism certification schemes worldwide.

Measurement frameworks further support credible climate action. The Greenhouse Gas Protocol and the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) provide internationally recognised methodologies for measuring greenhouse gas emissions and setting reduction targets aligned with climate science. As sustainability reporting becomes more common across global supply chains, these

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frameworks help tourism businesses ensure that their climate commitments are transparent and comparable.

Finally, international management system standards such as ISO 14001 for environmental management systems and ISO 21401 for sustainable accommodation provide structured approaches for integrating sustainability into organisational governance and operational processes. These standards support continuous improvement and provide recognised evidence of responsible environmental management to partners, auditors and customers. These global frameworks complement regional policies by providing the guiding principles, measurement tools and voluntary commitments that support the tourism sector's transition toward more sustainable and resilient business models.

Building Awareness

Why Tourism Businesses Need to Understand Sustainability

Sustainability is no longer a niche concept in tourism. It has become an important factor shaping how tourism businesses operate and compete. Environmental pressures, changing visitor expectations and evolving regulations are influencing the long-term viability of many tourism destinations. For tourism SMEs, understanding sustainability is therefore essential. It helps managers make informed decisions about resource use, investments, partnerships and product development. Businesses that recognise these trends early are better able to adapt and remain competitive. Several key factors explain why sustainability awareness is becoming increasingly important.

One key driver is business continuity. Tourism activities are closely linked to environmental conditions and resource availability. Climate-related disruptions such as heatwaves, floods, wildfires or declining snow reliability can affect seasonality and visitor experience, while rising energy, water and waste-management costs increasingly influence operational performance. Businesses that recognise these risks are better positioned to adapt and maintain service quality. Market expectations are also evolving. Travellers increasingly consider environmental responsibility, authenticity and fairness alongside price and convenience when choosing tourism services. At the same time, tour operators, corporate buyers and digital platforms are raising sustainability expectations across their supply chains, making responsible practices increasingly important for maintaining visibility and market access.

The regulatory environment is another important factor. Policies at the EU, national and destination levels are progressively tightening in areas such as energy efficiency, emissions reduction, waste management and labour standards. Businesses that anticipate these developments can adapt more smoothly, while those that delay action may face higher compliance costs or operational restrictions. Sustainability also offers practical business benefits. Improving efficiency in energy, water and materials can reduce operating costs, while stronger relationships with local communities and suppliers can enhance destination reputation and resilience. In addition, many employees increasingly seek employers with clear social and environmental values, meaning sustainability initiatives can support recruitment, retention and workforce development.

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Sustainability awareness strengthens investment readiness. Financial institutions and investors are increasingly integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations into lending decisions. Tourism businesses that monitor their environmental performance and demonstrate responsible practices are therefore better positioned to access green financing and public funding opportunities. Taken together, these factors illustrate why sustainability awareness is not simply a matter of environmental responsibility. It is increasingly a condition for resilience, competitiveness and long-term success in the tourism sector.

High-level Opportunities

Sustainability is often perceived primarily as a compliance obligation or environmental responsibility. However, when approached strategically, it can also create significant opportunities for tourism businesses. Integrating sustainability into operations and business models can strengthen competitiveness, reduce costs and improve relationships with customers and local stakeholders.

Key opportunities for tourism SMEs include:

- **Revenue growth through differentiation**

  Tourism experiences that demonstrate credible environmental responsibility or strong community engagement can appeal to emerging market segments and may support premium pricing, improved reputation and increased visitor loyalty.
- **Cost savings through resource efficiency**

  Reducing energy consumption, water use and material waste can generate significant operational savings while also lowering exposure to volatile resource prices.
- **Access to new markets and procurement opportunities**

  Alignment with recognised sustainability standards, certification schemes or destination sustainability programmes can open new distribution channels, including partnerships with responsible tour operators, corporate clients or public procurement initiatives.
- **Stronger local partnerships and supply chains**

  Working with local suppliers, producers and community partners can improve product quality, strengthen destination identity and create more resilient local economic networks.
- **Enhanced brand value and customer trust**

  Transparent sustainability communication and credible certification can strengthen brand reputation and increase customer confidence.
- **Improved workforce attraction and retention**

  Businesses that demonstrate clear environmental and social values often attract employees who are motivated by purpose-driven work, improving recruitment and retention outcomes.

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- **Innovation and product renewal**

  Sustainability initiatives often encourage businesses to redesign tourism experiences, introduce low-impact activities or develop new offerings that extend visitor stays and diversify seasonal demand.

- **Improved risk management**

  Measuring environmental impacts and planning for climate-related risks helps businesses anticipate disruptions and strengthen long-term resilience.

High-Level Risks

At the same time, failing to address sustainability challenges or doing so without credibility can create significant risks for tourism businesses. Environmental pressures, regulatory changes and evolving market expectations mean that inaction or poorly implemented sustainability initiatives may undermine long-term competitiveness.

Key risks include:

- **Regulatory and compliance risks**

  Stricter requirements related to energy performance, waste management, water use or labour conditions may increase operational costs or restrict business activities if standards are not met.

- **Market access risks**

  Tour operators, corporate buyers and booking platforms are increasingly requiring environmental and social performance data. Businesses unable to demonstrate responsible practices may face reduced visibility or exclusion from certain markets.

- **Cost volatility**

  Inefficient energy, water or material use exposes businesses to higher operational costs, particularly during periods of price volatility.

- **Reputational risks and greenwashing concerns**

  Unsubstantiated sustainability claims or poorly implemented initiatives can damage trust among customers, communities and partners.

- **Operational disruption from environmental pressures**

  Climate-related events such as extreme weather, water shortages or ecosystem degradation may directly affect tourism infrastructure, visitor experiences and seasonal demand.

- **Workforce challenges**

  Poor job quality, seasonal instability or limited career progression can make it difficult to attract and retain skilled staff.

- **Community resistance and destination pressure**

  Perceived negative impacts such as congestion, housing pressure or cultural disruption may lead to regulatory restrictions or loss of local support.

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- **Financial and investment risks**

  Businesses that do not demonstrate progress on sustainability indicators may face difficulties accessing green finance, public funding or sustainability-linked investment.

Building awareness is not an end in itself; it enables informed decisions about where to start, which actions deliver the highest value, and how to evidence progress credibly. The remainder of this programme translates these drivers into practical tools, metrics and governance choices that support resilient, competitive and responsible business models.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

Strategic relevance

- In your own words, why does sustainability now belong at the core of your business model rather than as an add-on, and where is the clearest link to revenue, cost, or risk in your operation?

Impact mapping

- Which environmental, social, and economic impacts of your offer are most material in your context, and what existing practices (if any) already mitigate them?

Framework alignment

- Which EU or international frameworks (e.g., Transition Pathway, SDGs, GSTC) feel most relevant to your business, and how could they guide your next 12 months of action?

Opportunities and risks

- Where do you see the strongest near-term opportunity to differentiate your offer sustainably, and what is the principal risk if you delay action?

Evidence and credibility

- What single KPI would you start tracking next week to demonstrate progress credibly to guests, staff, partners, or lenders, and why?

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Chapter Summary Box

Key Takeaways

- Sustainability in tourism is a strategic necessity, not a marketing add-on; it directly affects costs, revenues, risk exposure, talent, and brand trust.
- Tourism is a major EU economic sector and SME-dominated, which means progress depends on practical, scalable actions rather than complex or resource-intensive solutions.
- Sustainable tourism integrates environmental, social, and economic value, while green tourism focuses mainly on environmental performance; regenerative approaches aim for net-positive outcomes.
- Tourism activities generate material environmental, social, and economic impacts, including emissions, water and waste pressures, community effects, and exposure to climate risks.
- EU and international frameworks (e.g. Green Deal, Transition Pathway, SDGs, GSTC) provide shared direction and credibility, shaping regulation, market access, and finance.
- Awareness enables prioritisation: businesses should focus first on high-impact, near-term actions that deliver measurable improvement.
- Translating awareness into action requires simple KPIs (for example, energy, water, food waste, or emissions per guest) to evidence progress and avoid greenwashing.

The concepts and messages introduced in Chapter 1 form the foundation for the upcoming masterclasses, where SMEs are guided through practical tools, methods, and real-world applications. The masterclasses will translate these operational areas into concrete implementation steps adapted to the needs and capacities of tourism SMEs.

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02

CHAPTER 2

Sustainable Development and the Environment

Chapter 2: Sustainable Development and the Environment

Title	**Sustainable development and the environment**
Learning Outcomes	▪ Identify how sustainability policies affect tourism SMEs. ▪ Understand the key environmental and social impact areas of SME operations. ▪ Recognise the importance of climate adaptation for business continuity. ▪ Explain why sustainability strengthens SME competitiveness.

Introduction

Tourism is a dynamic sector that relies heavily on environmental quality, social well-being, and economic viability. However, tourism also contributes to climate change, resource depletion, and pressure on local communities and ecosystems. Sustainable development provides a strategic response to these challenges by helping tourism businesses, especially SMEs, operate in ways that balance profitability with environmental responsibility and long-term resilience.

For small tourism enterprises, sustainability is no longer a peripheral concept or a branding exercise. It is increasingly connected to cost efficiency, risk management, regulatory expectations, market positioning, and access to funding. Travellers are becoming more conscious of environmental impacts, and European tourism markets are rapidly evolving toward greener business models. This transition creates both opportunities and obligations for SMEs, who represent the majority of the tourism sector in Europe.

This chapter aims to provide a practical foundation for understanding how sustainable development applies to tourism from an SME perspective. It explains the wider policy context driving sustainability expectations, presents key environmental and social priorities relevant to tourism operations, and identifies the business case for adopting greener practices. The chapter also prepares the ground for the upcoming masterclasses by clarifying why sustainability is not only environmentally necessary but strategically advantageous for tourism businesses.

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From Policy to Business Reality

The Green Transition Context

The European Union has placed sustainability at the centre of its long-term economic strategy. Initiatives such as the European Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan, and EU tourism guidance are reshaping expectations for how businesses operate in relation to climate, resources, energy, and environmental protection.

These policy directions are aligned with broader international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, which together establish the long-term climate and sustainability expectations for the tourism sector.

What These Policies Mean for Tourism SMEs

For larger tourism operators, compliance often appears in the form of formal sustainability strategies or reporting obligations. For SMEs, however, the effects are felt more operationally and immediately, through:

- Increased exposure to energy, water and material costs
- Growing visitor expectations for responsible tourism services
- Access to grants and financial instruments that depend on sustainability criteria
- Destination-level requirements linked to sustainability commitments
- Higher transparency expectations from intermediaries and supply chains

In practical terms, this means that sustainability is no longer optional. Instead, it is progressively becoming an operational baseline.

Relevance to Green Transition in Tourism (why SMEs need to adapt)

Tourism SMEs are particularly sensitive to environmental quality, climate impacts, and destination reputation. Companies that move early toward sustainable operations gain efficiency, differentiation, and trust. Those who delay risk higher costs, reputational decline, and future regulatory or market exclusion. Sustainability is increasingly a condition for long-term business continuity.

Sustainability in Tourism: An Operational Perspective

Tourism sustainability can be more effectively understood when translated from abstract principles into concrete areas of business practice. For SMEs, sustainability is lived through daily operational decisions rather than theoretical frameworks.

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The environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainability are reflected here through the operational areas that most directly affect tourism SMEs.

Energy in Tourism SMEs

Energy consumption is one of the highest-impact areas in tourism, particularly in accommodation and services dependent on heating, cooling, lighting, or kitchen equipment. Reducing energy demand through efficiency measures can deliver immediate cost savings while also lowering emissions. Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable solutions further strengthens resilience and aligns businesses with long-term climate goals. Even small-scale improvements, such as improved insulation, LED lighting, or smart thermostats, can generate financial benefits for SMEs.

Water Management

Water scarcity and irregular supply are increasingly common challenges for tourism destinations, especially those affected by climate stress or seasonal demand peaks. SMEs can mitigate this pressure through low-cost interventions such as installing water-saving fixtures, ensuring rapid leak detection, encouraging responsible guest behaviour, and tracking usage patterns. Efficient water management protects a business from vulnerability to shortages and rising utility fees while contributing to broader destination sustainability.

Waste

Tourism generates a wide range of waste. This includes food waste, single-use packaging, cleaning supplies, and general waste associated with guest turnover. Reducing material intensity, favouring reusable alternatives, and separating waste streams can significantly reduce environmental impacts. These actions also reduce disposal costs and form the basis for more advanced circular economic practices, which will be expanded upon later in the masterclasses.

Mobility and Accessibility

Mobility affects both the environmental footprint of tourism and the inclusiveness of the visitor experience. While long-distance transport is outside the control of SMEs, local travel decisions can be influenced by the way businesses communicate options, structure services, and collaborate with local partners. Providing information about walking routes, public transport, shuttle services, or bike rentals encourages low-impact mobility choices. Ensuring accessibility also supports social inclusion and widens the visitor base.

For SMEs, mobility considerations involve:

- Collaboration with local transport providers
- Providing visitors with alternatives to private car use
- Facilitating walking and cycling infrastructure or access to it
- Ensuring mobility solutions remain inclusive for all users

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Nature and Biodiversity

Many tourism experiences are rooted in natural landscapes, ecosystems, or cultural environments. Biodiversity loss, land degradation, and poorly managed visitor flows can diminish the attractiveness of destinations and harm local livelihoods. SMEs can protect natural capital by managing resource use responsibly, avoiding disturbance to sensitive areas, and supporting local environmental initiatives. Acting as stewards of place strengthens a business's relationship with the territory on which it depends.

SMEs can support biodiversity by:

- Sourcing food and products from regenerative or local suppliers
- Protecting natural areas around tourism sites
- Reducing noise/light pollution that affects wildlife
- Collaborating with environmental NGOs or local conservation initiatives

Local Value and Community Well-being

A tourism business contributes to sustainability not only through environmental performance but also through its relationship with the host community. SMEs strengthen social sustainability when they employ locally, collaborate with community suppliers, and respect cultural authenticity. These actions reinforce destination identity, build local trust, and ensure that tourism benefits are shared rather than extracted. In many regions, community goodwill is also a key factor in business continuity and reputation. For SMEs, this can involve:

- Local hiring and skills development
- Partnerships with community producers and artisans
- Promotion of cultural authenticity and heritage
- Transparent engagement with local stakeholders

This dimension connects environmental sustainability to social legitimacy and destination cohesion.

Climate Adaptation in Tourism SMEs

Climate change affects not only global systems but also day-to-day business operations for tourism SMEs. Unlike mitigation, which focuses on reducing emissions, adaptation is about coping with the impacts already occurring or expected to intensify.

Why Adaptation Matters to SMEs

Tourism is highly climate sensitive. Temperature extremes, water shortages, storms, and ecological stress all directly affect business continuity. SMEs have fewer financial buffers than large enterprises, making adaptation essential to risk management. In this context, adaptation becomes not only an environmental responsibility but also a condition for economic resilience.

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Common risks for tourism SMEs include:

- Heat stress affects guest comfort and increases cooling costs
- Water scarcity is reducing supply reliability, especially during peak season
- Flooding or storms damaging infrastructure or interrupting access
- Wildfire exposure threatens safety and destination image
- Erosion and landscape degradation reduce attractiveness
- Ecosystem decline affecting nature-based tourism quality

In this context, adaptation is not only an environmental concern but a strategic element of risk management and business continuity.

Practical Adaptation Measures

SMEs can apply adaptation strategies that are realistic, low-cost, and proportionate to their size and level of exposure. The focus is on practical protection and continuity, not on large-scale infrastructure investment.

Impact Area	Example SME Adaptation Measures
Increasing heat	Shade structures, passive cooling design, ventilation upgrades, and adapted opening hours
Water scarcity	Storage tanks, water-saving equipment, drought-tolerant landscaping, and guest awareness
Flooding/storms	Improved drainage, protective barriers, relocation of vulnerable equipment, and emergency protocols
Wildfire risk	Vegetation buffers, safe perimeters, evacuation signage, and coordination with authorities
Nature degradation	Supporting restoration actions, reducing disturbance in sensitive zones, and sustainable sourcing

These measures help SMEs safeguard core services, maintain customer experience, and demonstrate responsibility toward destination resilience.

Adaptation as a Strategic Advantage

Adaptation is not only a response to risk; it can also strengthen competitiveness. Tourism destinations increasingly prioritise operators who can guarantee continuity of service, protect local assets, and contribute to climate resilience efforts. SMEs that proactively adopt adaptation measures are perceived as more reliable partners for intermediaries, destination managers, and visitors.

Adaptation also builds reputation. A business that protects its natural surroundings, manages climate risks responsibly, and safeguards guest wellbeing positions itself as forward-looking and

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trustworthy. This reinforces brand value and strengthens ties with local authorities and stakeholders working toward sustainability goals. In this sense, adaptation is both a resilience strategy and a market differentiator, helping SMEs remain viable and attractive as environmental pressures intensify.

The Business Case for Sustainability in Tourism SMEs

For tourism SMEs, sustainability is not only about compliance or ethics; it is linked to competitiveness, market positioning, risk reduction, and long-term viability. As consumer expectations evolve and destinations prioritise responsible growth, businesses that integrate sustainability are better positioned to capture demand and secure stakeholder trust.

Cost Efficiency and Resource Stability

Energy, water, and material costs are rising across Europe. Efficiency measures reduce long-term operational expenditure and make SMEs less vulnerable to market volatility. Even small shifts in resource management can generate long-lasting financial returns.

Market Differentiation and Reputation

Travellers increasingly prefer providers that reflect environmental and social responsibility. Sustainability can therefore be a differentiation strategy, signalling quality, care for place, and alignment with emerging tourism values. It enhances trust and widens visibility in destination networks and supply chains.

Business Continuity and Risk Reduction

By anticipating climate, regulatory, and market risks, sustainability-oriented SMEs protect operational continuity. Adaptation and environmental stewardship build resilience and reduce reputational exposure. Tourism businesses that fail to adjust may face exclusion from future value chains or destination strategies.

Reflection Questions

- Where are the main resource pressures in my operations?
- What environmental or climate risks could affect service continuity?
- Which sustainability actions could also reduce costs or improve experience?
- Which local actors could I collaborate with to advance change?

These “entry points” are conceptual rather than technical. They help SMEs build awareness and readiness for the practical instruments and methodologies that will follow in the masterclasses of WP3.

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Chapter Summary Box

Key Takeaways

- Tourism SMEs are affected by sustainability policies not as abstract frameworks but as operational expectations.
- Environmental performance, climate adaptation, and local value creation are interconnected drivers of resilience and competitiveness.
- Sustainability is increasingly a condition for market access, reputation, and partnership opportunities.
- Monitoring basic indicators helps SMEs anticipate future improvement without immediate complexity.
- The next step is to move from understanding to practical application through the masterclasses.

The concepts and messages introduced in Chapter 2 form the foundation for the upcoming masterclasses, where SMEs are guided through practical tools, methods, and real-world applications. The masterclasses will translate these operational areas into concrete implementation steps adapted to the needs and capacities of tourism SMEs.

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CHAPTER 3

Case Study Collection

Chapter 3: Case Study Collection

Introduction

The case studies showcased in this chapter offer illustrations of sustainable tourism in practice. Whereas Chapter 1 covers the basics of tourism and sustainable tourism, including definitions, industry trends and the sector's contribution to the EU economy, and Chapter 2 explores the concepts of sustainable development, environmental management and the green transition, this chapter transitions the emphasis from theory to application. It highlights how sustainability principles are successfully put into practice by organisations in settings and at different scales.

Each case study presents structured sustainability approaches implemented by SMEs, cooperatives, networks, NGOs and public authorities seeking to balance environmental stewardship, social value and economic viability. These examples demonstrate how diverse actors translate strategic sustainability commitments into measurable, locally grounded action. These examples illustrate how structured collaboration, innovation and stakeholder engagement can generate measurable sustainability outcomes.

Across Europe, tourism actors have implemented measures such as:

- They have rolled out environmental management systems and earned green certifications.
- They have built networks rooted in the community, putting money and energy back into local heritage and people's well-being.
- They have come up with low-impact tourism options, like offering a mix of land, sea, and cultural activities, guided educational tours, and cultural trips that leave a light footprint.
- They make sure visitors and locals learn more about sustainability, turning education into action.
- And they've brought public and private groups together, making sure their efforts have a lasting impact in the region.

This chapter connects the theory behind sustainable tourism with what actually happens on the ground. It shows there's no single route to making tourism more sustainable - there are lots of ways to get there. Sustainable transformation emerges through structured planning, inclusive governance and coordinated stakeholder engagement.

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Eco-tourism

Ecotourism refers to responsible travel to natural areas that prioritises conservation, community well-being and environmental education. In Europe, it's often a real boost for rural and protected areas. When strategically managed, ecotourism can support conservation objectives while strengthening rural economies. The following examples illustrate how ecotourism can integrate conservation, community participation and innovative tourism practices. They demonstrate that environmental stewardship and economic performance are not mutually exclusive; when strategically aligned, they can reinforce and strengthen one another.

1 Best Practice 1:

Title	Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN)
Country	*Ireland*
Organiser/Provider/ Sector	• Network of SMEs, NGOs, public bodies • Tourism Operator • Public Authority collaboration
Executive Summary	The Burren Ecotourism Network pulls together over 60 tourism businesses from the Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Global Geopark. The Network aims to integrate sustainability systematically into daily business operations rather than treating it as a promotional narrative. Everyone in the network follows the Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism. The Code provides structured guidance covering energy, water, waste, conservation, community engagement and visitor education. There are training and self-check tools to help people keep on track. The network collaborates with Geopark initiatives such as Leave No Trace to promote responsible visitor behaviour and strengthen environmental stewardship. As a result, collaboration among businesses has strengthened while environmental impacts have been reduced and local heritage has been reinforced.
Background & Challenge	Small businesses lacked coordinated tools, shared metrics and a coherent sustainability narrative capable of supporting market positioning. No real tools, no common game plan, nothing to help them cut down their impact or pull together a convincing story about sustainability. And because of all that, getting into new markets felt almost impossible.

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Goals	To help businesses take better care of the environment, encourage them to reinvest in local heritage, and create a destination that stands out for its sustainability. A place people recognise as both market-ready and genuinely committed to preserving what matters.
Approach/Actions Taken	Geopark LIFE and its partners came up with a Code of Practice that's pretty hands-on. They offer training to help set baselines and targets for energy, water, and waste. Regular audits keep everyone on track, and there's a clear path toward earning third-party labels. To join the network, you have to stick to the Code and use the destination branding properly - this way, everyone's efforts actually make a difference.
Results	• **Environmental:** The Code of Practice focuses on how energy and water are used, the waste managed, and how the landscape is looked after. Leave No Trace is included in the training as something people actually learn and use. • **Social:** Strong connections with others in the Geopark community were built, and everyone works together and helps each other grow. There's plenty of networking, skill-building, and chances for visitors to learn something new. • **Economic:** BEN members team up on marketing, which helps everyone stand out. This approach makes local small businesses tougher and keeps tourism going all year, not just in the busy months.
Recommendations/ Lessons Learned	• *Share practical approaches that work for SMEs.* • *Get everyone on board with a common set of guidelines.* • *Offer hands-on training that people can actually use.* • *Track your progress and compare results to see what's working.* • *Set a clear timeline to meet trusted certification standards and stick to it.*
Website	*https://www.burrengeopark.ie/sustainable-tourism/code-of-practice/*
Justification for the selection	BEN shows how a destination-wide code, supported by training and monitoring, can mainstream sustainability across many small operators, making it a scalable model for rural regions.

Self-Reflection Questions

1. What minimum data should SMEs collect to baseline impacts credibly?
2. How can a destination code encourage rather than burden micro-enterprises?
3. Which third-party certifications best fit small rural operators?

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2 Best Practice 2:

Title	Ecotourism in the Picos de Europa
Country	*Spain*
Organiser/Provider/ Sector	• Public Authorities • SMEs, NGOs • Tourism Operators
Executive Summary	The 'Ecoturismo en Picos de Europa: Destino Onís' plan started right in the heart of Onís, a rural pocket of Asturias tucked inside the Picos de Europa mountains. The idea is to move away from the usual crowds and noise and focus on a kind of tourism that actually works for the people who live there. This aims to reposition tourism through a community-rooted sustainability framework. Local small businesses get a real chance to shine. The plan pushes them to join the 'Soy Ecoturista' network, but only if they respect the environment, celebrate local traditions, and make sure the benefits actually stay local. They are rolling out guided nature walks, putting the spotlight on local food - especially Gamonéu cheese, which pretty much sells itself - and rethinking how people get around, so everything runs cleaner and smarter. The initiative emphasises community participation and stakeholder engagement. Onís illustrates how ecotourism can be implemented successfully in rural mountain destinations. This acts as an example of how environmental protection, cultural preservation, and economic development can be advanced simultaneously through integrated destination planning.
Background & Challenge	Onís is located in the heart of the Picos de Europa, a region characterised by rich biodiversity, long-standing pastoral traditions, and mountain communities that have historically experienced geographic isolation. In recent years, however, the area has begun to experience growing tourism pressure. Visitor flows from popular nearby attractions, such as the Lakes of Covadonga, increasingly extend into the municipality, creating new management challenges. At the same time, many local businesses remain highly dependent on seasonal tourism, resulting in fluctuating income and limited economic stability outside peak periods.

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Goals	To move tourism in a new direction - less impact, more real value. It focused on building stronger ties to heritage and agro-pastoral traditions, while giving local businesses the tools to grow in a way that actually helps the community. The objective was to develop ecotourism products aligned with biodiversity protection, cultural heritage and low-impact mobility. People would help protect biodiversity, choose greener ways to get around, and avoid the usual crowded tourist spots. Instead, they'd get to explore the Picos de Europa through options that leave a lighter footprint and offer something different from mass tourism.
Approach/Actions Taken	Onís teamed up with local businesses, NGOs, and regional authorities to roll out a big Ecotourism Plan. The project combined strategic planning with practical implementation measures supported by structured training and investment. Over four years, they ran more than 200 hours of training for local businesses, covering everything from sustainability and digital skills to accessibility. They helped small businesses join the national Club de Ecoturismo en España, so local tourism got a real boost in credibility. They also mapped out new themed routes that show off the area's biodiversity, its old shepherd traditions, and the famous local cheese. On top of that, they put money into eco-friendly ways to get around, like cycling paths and an electric shuttle for visitors. They upgraded signs, fixed up visitor centres, and made new guides to help people really connect with the place. All of this pushed Onís into the spotlight as a top choice for sustainable travel in the Picos de Europa.
Results	● ***Environmental:*** *The organised trail system takes some of the load off fragile areas, helps protect habitats, and lets people explore without causing much harm.* ● ***Social:*** *When locals lead activities - like cheese-making tours, shepherd walks, or wildlife spotting - it boosts community pride and keeps traditions alive. People living here help shape the experiences and guide visitors, so they build skills and really feel they own the process.* ● ***Economic:*** *Rural incomes grow as people branch out - think guided nature tours, selling local products, or small businesses getting certified. It's not just about more visitors; it's about making each visit count.*
Recommendations/ Lessons Learned	● *Start with a solid destination plan and get certified with Soy Ecoturista. It sets clear benchmarks, offers real training, and gives your project some market credibility.* ● *Build experiences around themes that connect nature, culture, and local products - this way, visitors get more out of their trip and remember it.* ● *Include the local community. Bring them in from the beginning. Their support is key if you want things to last.*
Website	*https://www.onisecoturismo.es/*

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Justification for the selection	It's a great example of public authorities leading the way on ecotourism in a protected, high-value natural area. Local small businesses get involved, too - think cheese makers, shepherds, and people working in the pastures. Conservation plays a central role, with a focus on biodiversity and species observation. There's even infrastructure for low-impact travel, plus help with certifications. Altogether, it shows how rural places can move toward sustainable tourism in a way that actually works and can be repeated elsewhere.

Self-Reflection Questions

1. What indicators should the destination and participating SMEs track to measure success in conservation, community benefit and economic resilience?
2. In what ways can local heritage (cheese production, shepherding, local wildlife, etc.) be integrated into visitor experiences without commodifying or losing authenticity?
3. What visitor-management strategies (routing, signage, mobility, etc.) are most effective to prevent environmental degradation in mountain ecosystems?

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Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism centres on the interpretation and experience of tangible and intangible heritage assets, including architecture, traditions, gastronomy and creative industries. It brings people together, helps communities hold onto their identity, and sparks real conversations between locals and visitors. When done right, cultural tourism doesn't just protect heritage - it lets locals shape the story and actually benefit from it. You will find plenty of places across Europe taking fresh approaches, using their heritage and creative industries to build more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable futures. The following case studies illustrate how these approaches are implemented in practice.

3 Best Practice 3:

Title	Les Maisons du Voyage
Country	*France*
Organiser/Provider/ Sector	• Travel Agency - SME
Executive Summary	Les Maisons du Voyage is a French travel agency that focuses on custom trips and small group adventures, not just in France but all around the world. The agency differentiates itself through a strong commitment to culturally immersive, ethically structured travel experiences. Their trips are built around supporting heritage, nature, and local communities. This commitment is formalised through the 'Agir pour un Tourisme Responsable' certification.

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Background & Challenge	Les Maisons du Voyage has spent decades crafting journeys that actually mean something. The organisation prioritises immersive travel experiences that foster meaningful engagement with local cultures and communities. Since 1991, they've become experts in designing trips that feel personal, helping people really connect with the places and communities they visit. Their commitment to responsible travel isn't just talk - they back it up with ATR certification and a long partnership with the GoodPlanet Foundation, supporting projects with real social and environmental impact around the globe. Operating responsible long-haul travel products presents measurable environmental and operational challenges. Creating high-quality, responsible tours takes a ton of effort, and the travel world can change overnight. Les Maisons du Voyage proves that a small, passionate company can make sustainability part of everyday work - even when the challenges of the tourism industry rise.
Goals	Les Maisons du Voyage wants travellers to experience local cultures and really connect with the people and traditions they encounter. The organisation prioritises ethical travel design grounded in environmental and social responsibility principles. Sustainability isn't just a buzzword for them; it's woven into everything they do, from crafting personalised trips to choosing the right partners. The organisation aims to design journeys that create positive outcomes for both travellers and the destinations they visit. In addition to designing responsible travel experiences, the organisation also supports wider environmental and social programmes. Les Maisons du Voyage gets involved in bigger projects, too - think reforestation, agroforestry, and helping communities grow stronger. They believe travel can do more than just open minds; it can actually make a difference. For them, cultural tourism doesn't have to choose between making money and doing the right thing. You can have both.
Approach/Actions Taken	Back in 2020, Les Maisons du Voyage made their commitment to responsible tourism official by earning the ATR label, certified by Ecocert. For their clients and partners, this turned their long-held values into a real, audited promise. This commitment was institutionalised through the establishment of a dedicated internal sustainability function responsible for governance and transparency. Since 2017, they've teamed up with Fondation GoodPlanet, backing projects all over the world. Examples include agroforestry projects in Ecuador, support for family farming initiatives in Ethiopia, and forest conservation programmes in Peru. Their impact stretches way past just tourism. When it comes to travel, they design their trips for genuine cultural exchange and small-group experiences. They want travellers to connect with local communities and respect heritage, always choosing quality and authenticity over mass tourism. Plus, they share an ethical charter with travellers, encouraging everyone to travel responsibly. For them, sustainability isn't just a policy - it's woven into every part of the journey.

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Results	● ***Environmental:*** *It gets people thinking about how their travel choices affect the planet. It highlights eco-friendly destinations and activities - think eco-lodges, helping out with endangered species, or connecting with local NGOs. It also encourages travellers to slow down and try softer ways of getting around.* ● ***Social:*** *It's about real cultural exchange and respecting local traditions. Tourism becomes a way to build understanding, tolerance, and social inclusion. Travellers get to dive into local cultures and connect with communities.* ● ***Economic:*** *It boosts local economies by creating demand for experiences that feel genuinely authentic. Local suppliers benefit, too. Plus, it shows that sustainability isn't just good for the world - it's a solid business move.*
Recommendations/ Lessons Learned	● *Get certified for responsible tourism.* ● *Build an internal sustainability team that actually cares about making a difference.* ● *Work with organisations you trust - people who know what they are doing.* ● *Create real experiences that bring travellers and local communities together.* ● *Show travellers how to travel responsibly and get them involved.*
Website	*https://www.maisonsduvoyage.com/*
Justification for the selection	This agency includes sustainability in everything it does. The trips aren't just about sightseeing – they are designed so travellers experience the local culture, actually connect with people, and leave a positive mark. They stick to the 'Agir pour un Tourisme Responsible' label, which isn't just a box to tick. It means they pay attention to the environment, support local communities, and respect local heritage, all at once. Their whole approach proves you can run a travel agency that gives travellers something real, helps the places they visit, and still looks out for nature and tradition.

Self-Reflection Questions

1. How can a tourism provider balance providing authentic, culturally rich experiences with environmental and social responsibility?
2. What steps can a company take to formalise its sustainability commitments, such as obtaining certifications, creating internal policies, or forming strategic partnerships?
3. How can travellers be engaged to adopt responsible behaviours that support local communities and protect the environment?

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4 Best Practice 4:

Title	Mazovian Open Air Museum in Sierpc – Living Heritage & Sustainable Tourism
Country	*Poland*
Organiser/Provider/ Sector	• Public Museum/ Cultural Institution
Executive Summary	The Mazovian Open Air Museum in Sierpc adopts an immersive heritage interpretation model recreating rural Mazovian life within its historical landscape context. Through hands-on exhibits and local craft workshops, they make history feel real. The museum prioritises local materials and regional food products while supporting local artisans and demonstrating traditional sustainable living practices. This approach demonstrates how cultural tourism can support both environmental responsibility and community engagement. The Museum of the Mazovian Countryside takes this idea further. They work hard to keep local traditions alive and share them in a way that feels genuine. They blend the museum into the natural surroundings, keeping their environmental footprint small, and they really go for community involvement. Through education and by encouraging responsible tourism, they make sure the focus stays on preserving what matters - both the culture and the land.
Background & Challenge	The Museum of the Mazovian Countryside in Sierpc was established back in 1971, right when Mazovia's old rural ways were fading fast. Traditional rural architecture, artisanal production systems and intangible cultural practices were at risk of disappearance due to demographic and structural shifts. The museum took on a tough job. It wasn't just about saving buildings. They wanted to keep the whole picture alive: the land, the layout, the spirit of how people lived. When you visit, you don't just see artefacts - you get a real sense of daily life and traditions from the Mazovian countryside, the way they really were.
Goals	The museum wants to keep local architecture and folk traditions alive. It rebuilds an old village, piece by piece, so visitors can step right into the past and feel how rural life used to be. People learn through hands-on exhibits, workshops, and all sorts of seasonal events. The museum focuses on real education - not just putting things on display, but actually showing how things worked. And instead of turning heritage into just another tourist trap, the museum works to protect and breathe new life into local culture, making sure tourism helps the community instead of just selling it off.

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Approach/Actions Taken	The museum brings history to life by moving and rebuilding old buildings, filling them with traditional objects, and keeping the feel of a real Mazovian village. You see more than just walls - you get gardens, orchards, fields, and animals, all woven into the landscape. These living pieces keep old ways alive and help the environment at the same time. Visitors don't just look - they get involved. Seasonal festivals, hands-on workshops, and craft demonstrations pull people in and make them part of the story. It's a place where you start to really get why this heritage matters, and you leave wanting to protect it. The museum keeps things authentic, but it doesn't shut people out. Paths, signs, and facilities make it easy to explore, but they don't get in the way of the real experience. It's a spot where tourism doesn't just preserve the past - it keeps traditions alive and connects people to the community.
Results	● ***Environmental:*** *Promotion of traditional, low-impact materials and sustainable farming practices.* ● ***Social:*** *Preservation of intangible cultural heritage, education on rural life, and community participation.* ● ***Economic:*** *Local sourcing, artisan employment, and regional product promotion.*
Recommendations/ Lessons Learned	● *Reconstruction and relocation as a conservation strategy.* ● *Living heritage and participation.* ● *Sustainable tourism model balancing authenticity and visitor needs.* ● *Cultural sustainability through engagement.* ● *Multipurpose use - museum, education centre, community hub, filming location.*
Website	*https://mwmskansen.pl/*
Justification for the selection	This museum shows how cultural institutions can really embrace sustainability. It brings together tourism, education, and heritage preservation in a way that actually works. When visitors come, they are encouraged to travel responsibly, and the whole place helps tie culture even more closely to the local economy. It's not just about looking at old artefacts - it's about supporting the community and keeping traditions alive.

Self-Reflection Questions

1. How can a tourism provider in your community integrate local heritage, traditions, or crafts into its offerings to create meaningful cultural connections for visitors?
2. In what ways can a tourism provider design experiences that allow guests to actively participate in cultural practices without compromising the authenticity or integrity of the heritage site?
3. What strategies can an organisation implement to ensure that growth in visitor numbers does not degrade the cultural, social, or natural resources it relies on?

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Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism gets people out into nature—think hiking, climbing, paddling—while making sure they respect the environment and local cultures along the way. It pushes travellers to discover places off the beaten path, bringing them closer to remote or rural communities and helping to foster stewardship, inclusion, and real benefits for locals. When destinations manage this kind of tourism well, it eases the pressure of peak seasons, helps protect natural areas, and gives communities more reliable ways to make a living. The case studies below show how different places use adventure tourism to bounce back and build a more resilient future.

5 Best Practice 5:

Image by Ghost Acolyte on pexels

Title	Arrábida Natural Park
Country	Portugal
Organiser/Provider/ Sector	• Public Authorities • SMEs, NGOs • Tourism Operators
Executive Summary	Located south of Lisbon, Arrábida Natural Park has emerged as a structured model for conservation-aligned adventure tourism. Local guides work with conservation teams to run everything from hiking and kayaking to diving and exploring the coast. This demonstrates how structured adventure tourism can generate economic value while safeguarding ecological integrity. This way, the park moves away from the usual crowded beach scene. Instead, it brings in visitors all year, boosts the local economy, and inspires people to care for the land and sea.

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Background & Challenge	Arrábida Natural Park has been around since 1976, covering 176 square kilometres of rugged hills and Mediterranean coastline. The park encompasses dramatic limestone cliffs, Mediterranean ecosystems and marine biodiversity hotspots. Over the years, unregulated tourism, fishing, and boating started putting real pressure on the place, especially on fragile spots like the seagrass meadows. The big challenge was to try and protect the environment while tourism keeps growing. It's a constant balancing act - keeping nature safe, using sensitive areas responsibly, and making sure the local community actually benefits.
Goals	Arrábida's adventure tourism aims to do more than just entertain visitors. It's about creating real, memorable experiences that respect the environment and local culture. The idea is to help people connect with the area's heritage and traditions, not just soak up the scenery. At the same time, this approach supports local jobs and businesses, protects both land and sea, and gives people a reason to visit beyond the usual beach holidays. In the end, it's all about building a deeper bond between travellers, the community, and the natural world.
Approach/Actions Taken	Local operators such as Vertente Natural started out running tours on land, but now they offer kayaking, boat trips, and coastal adventures too, thanks in part to public funding. They stick to ICNF's rules for protected areas, so conservation stays front and centre—especially in marine zones. On guided tours, visitors learn about local wildlife, geology, and culture. Technology plays its part as well, keeping track of visitor numbers and spreading the word about protecting the environment. The destination prioritises small-scale, nature-based tourism aligned with conservation management frameworks. The destination prioritises small-scale, nature-based tourism rather than high-volume tourism development. Instead, people come to walk, cycle, watch birds, and leave a light footprint.
Results	● ***Environmental:*** *nature-based tourism reduces pressure on fragile beaches, promotes habitat protection, and uses sustainable practices like energy and water efficiency. Educational programs and digital tools raise awareness of biodiversity and conservation.* ● ***Social:*** *year-round tourism creates jobs for local youth in tourism and environmental fields, helping them stay in the region, while guided experiences strengthen connections to nature.* ● ***Economic:*** *local providers attract national and international visitors, generating year-round employment and boosting sustainable economic growth in the region.*

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Recommendations/ Lessons Learned	• *Involve Park authorities, local communities, and tour operators to align tourism with conservation and local needs.* • *Offer a mix of land, sea, and cultural activities to reduce pressure on vulnerable sites and prevent overtourism.* • *Use guided tours, interpretive content, and digital tools to educate visitors and promote responsible behaviour.* • *Train and employ local residents to build skills, create year-round jobs, and keep benefits in the community.* • *Implement environmental practices in hospitality and enforce protected-area regulations to balance tourism and conservation.*
Website	http://www.natural.pt/en
Justification for the selection	Arrábida Natural Park provides a diverse setting for nature-based tourism activities such as hiking, kayaking and diving. You can hike, kayak, climb, or dive, all while surrounded by wild beauty that's carefully protected. The park operates under a conservation management framework that involves local businesses and communities in tourism development. The destination integrates nature-based tourism, cultural heritage and local community involvement. The destination demonstrates how adventure tourism can support long-term regional resilience and sustainable development. Local tour operators aren't just showing people around; they are creating real jobs, especially with some help from public grants. Tourism here actually lifts up the local economy, without trashing the environment.

Self-Reflection Questions

1. What strategies could a tourism provider implement to balance tourism development with environmental protection?
2. Based on Arrábida's example, how could low-impact tourism be applied to reduce ecological pressure and support local communities?
3. How could a tourism provider use education to increase visitor awareness in their local area?

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6 Best Practice 6:

Title	Killary Adventure Centre
Country	*Ireland*
Organiser/Provider/ Sector	• Killary Adventure Company - SME - Adventure tourism, accommodation & eco-tourism
Executive Summary	Killary Adventure Company has been around since 1981, right on the edge of Killary Fjord in Connemara. What started as a small operation now offers all kinds of adventure activities and places to stay, with a big focus on the environment. Lately, they've really doubled down on sustainability - earning B Corporation certification, opening a new eco-hostel, switching to renewable energy, cutting down on waste, and working more with locals. The company operationalises sustainability principles through measurable environmental performance and recognised certification. Killary Adventure Centre shows how adventure tourism can actually work in a place as sensitive and beautiful as this.
Background & Challenge	Founded in 1981 by outdoor enthusiasts, Killary Adventure Company was established as one of Ireland's early adventure tourism operators. Since then, they've branched out. Now it's not just about adventure holidays - they run school tours, summer camps, corporate programs, water and land activities, guided and unguided tours, and even big adventure events through their spin-off, Gaelforce Events. But running an adventure tourism business in such a wild, beautiful spot isn't easy. You are working right in the middle of mountains, a fjord, and patches of native woodland. That means you have to keep a sharp eye on waste, energy use, and the way you use the land - all while trying to protect the landscape and keep local plants and animals thriving. And as more people showed up and they added places for them to stay, the pressure on the environment only got heavier.
Goals	Killary Adventure Company wants everyone to experience outdoor adventure, no matter their background. They offer eco-friendly places to stay and run their activities in a way that looks after the environment. Their goal is to keep their impact on nature as low as possible, help out the local community, and boost the local economy. They are out to prove that adventure tourism doesn't have to harm the planet - in fact, it can set a new standard for responsible tourism in rural Ireland.

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Approach/Actions Taken	Killary Adventure Company takes sustainability seriously. The company has invested in energy-efficient infrastructure, renewable energy systems and integrated waste management solutions. You will see their impact in the local community too - creating jobs, bringing old buildings back to life, and keeping adventure activities going all year. Their B Corporation certification demonstrates their commitment to responsible environmental and social business practices. And they never really stop - they are always upgrading their place, always pushing for better, more responsible tourism.
Results	● ***Environmental:*** *They reduced their environmental impact through renewable energy, waste management, and preserving the surrounding natural landscape.* ● ***Social:*** *The company created jobs and supported the local community while making outdoor adventure accessible to a wide range of people.* ● ***Economic:*** *the variety of activities and accommodations has boosted tourism and strengthened its reputation for sustainable business.*
Recommendations/ Lessons Learned	● *Start with sustainability and adapt over time to improve eco-friendly practices.* ● *Offer diverse activities and services to manage visitor demand and seasonal fluctuations.* ● *Design infrastructure thoughtfully using renewable energy, efficient buildings, and local materials.* ● *Support the local community through jobs, historic building restoration, and local sourcing.* ● *Maintain transparency and certification to build trust and ensure responsible tourism.*
Website	*https://killaryadventure.com/en/environment*
Justification for the selection	Killary Adventure Centre has been around for years, showing everyone that tourism doesn't have to hurt the planet. They look at the big picture when it comes to sustainability - not just the environment, but also the people, the local economy, and how they run day-to-day. Their spot is pretty special too, right in the middle of a fragile landscape, so they've learned how to balance fun with protecting nature. With things like B Corp certification under their belt, they are leading the way in sustainable tourism. Other adventure tourism businesses can actually look at what Killary does and follow suit. The model demonstrates scalability and replicability within rural adventure tourism contexts.

Self-Reflection Questions

1. How can adventure tourism operators balance business growth with environmental conservation in sensitive natural areas?
2. In what ways can integrating social, economic, and ecological sustainability enhance the long-term success of a tourism business?

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3. What lessons from Killary Adventure Centre could be applied to my own approach to responsible and sustainable tourism practices?

The concepts and messages introduced in Chapter 3 form the foundation for the upcoming masterclasses, where SMEs are guided through practical tools, methods, and real-world applications. The masterclasses will translate these operational areas into concrete implementation steps adapted to the needs and capacities of tourism SMEs.

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GREEN BUSINESS MODELS TRAINING PROGRAMME

Conclusion

Conclusion

This theoretical handbook has established a comprehensive foundation for understanding sustainability in tourism from a European SME perspective. Across the three chapters, the text has moved deliberately from core concepts and definitions, through policy and environmental contexts, and into concrete examples of sustainability in practice. Together, these chapters clarify why sustainability is no longer a peripheral concern for tourism businesses, but a strategic imperative that directly affects competitiveness, resilience, and long-term viability.

- Chapter 1 introduced the fundamental concepts of tourism, hospitality, and sustainable and regenerative tourism, situating them within the scale and structure of the EU tourism ecosystem. By highlighting the dominance of SMEs and the material environmental, social, and economic impacts generated across tourism value chains, the chapter reframed sustainability as an operational reality rather than an abstract policy ambition. The discussion of EU and international frameworks further demonstrated how regulatory, financial, and market signals increasingly shape business conditions for tourism enterprises, making alignment both a risk-management strategy and a source of opportunity.
- Chapter 2 deepened this understanding by translating sustainable development principles into the everyday realities faced by tourism SMEs. It explored how environmental performance, climate adaptation, and local value creation intersect with cost efficiency, service continuity, workforce stability, and destination resilience. By focusing on practical operational areas such as energy, water, waste, mobility, biodiversity, and community engagement, the chapter reinforced the idea that sustainability is embedded in daily decisions rather than isolated initiatives. Importantly, it positioned climate adaptation not only as an environmental responsibility, but as a critical component of business continuity in an increasingly volatile climate context.
- Chapter 3 then shifted the focus from theory to application, demonstrating how sustainability principles can be implemented in diverse tourism contexts. The case studies illustrated multiple pathways towards sustainable tourism, ranging from ecotourism networks and cultural heritage institutions to adventure tourism operators in protected landscapes. Collectively, these examples showed that there is no single model for sustainable tourism, but rather a spectrum of approaches shaped by local context, governance structures, and business capacity. What unites them is a commitment to collaboration, credible measurement, community engagement, and long-term stewardship of place.

Taken together, these chapters do more than build awareness. They establish the strategic logic for transformation. They clarify the risks of inaction, the opportunities embedded in sustainability, and the structural shifts underway in the European tourism ecosystem. The Masterclasses that follow move from understanding to execution. They translate strategic insight

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into operational design. Where the theoretical chapters have explained why sustainability matters and where impact occurs, the masterclasses focus on how tourism SMEs can redesign their business models, define measurable indicators, prioritise interventions, and embed sustainability into core value creation.

Through structured exercises, business model templates, and applied planning tools, the Masterclasses support tourism enterprises in turning sustainability from an abstract principle into a practical and measurable competitive strategy. Specifically, the Business Model Template introduced in the Masterclasses serves as the practical instrument through which this strategic transformation is operationalised. This transition marks a deliberate shift: from reflection to action, from awareness to structured change, and from theory to transformation.

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GREEN BUSINESS MODELS TRAINING PROGRAMME

Masterclasses

Green Business Models Training Programme – Masterclasses

Overview

The Masterclasses represent the implementation core of the Training Programme. While the theoretical chapters establish why sustainable transformation is necessary, the masterclasses demonstrate how it can be operationalised within real tourism business contexts.

Each masterclass focuses on a strategic sustainable tourism pathway:

- Ecotourism and Environmental Sustainability
- Cultural Tourism and Social Sustainability
- Adventure Tourism and Economic Sustainability

These themes represent practical entry points through which tourism SMEs can redesign their value propositions, strengthen resilience, and align with EU green transition priorities.

The masterclass structure is deliberately action-oriented. Learners are guided through a structured process that includes:

- Mapping operational impacts
- Identifying priority sustainability interventions
- Defining measurable performance indicators
- Redesigning core value propositions
- Integrating sustainability into business model logic

A central feature of the masterclasses is the Business Model Template, which ensures that sustainability is embedded within core components such as partnerships, cost structures, revenue streams and customer segments. This prevents sustainability from being treated as an add-on and instead positions it as a driver of long-term competitiveness.

By the end of the masterclasses, learners will have developed:

- A structured Green Action Plan
- Clear KPIs
- A redesigned sustainability-aligned value proposition
- A roadmap for continuous improvement

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The masterclasses, therefore, shift the focus from awareness to implementation. They demonstrate that sustainability-led business models can reduce systemic risk while strengthening profitability, resilience and destination value.

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01

MASTERCLASS 1

Ecotourism & Environmental Sustainability

Masterclass 1: Ecotourism & Environmental Sustainability

Module Title	**Ecotourism & Environmental Sustainability**
Target group	● Tourism & Hospitality Business Owners ● Business Managers ● VET trainers
Introduction	Ecotourism is more than travel - it is a commitment to protect nature and support local communities. By focusing on low-impact activities, conservation, and education, it allows tourism businesses to reduce their environmental footprint while creating authentic experiences that add long-term value for both visitors and destinations. As climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion increasingly threaten natural areas, ecotourism and environmental sustainability have become essential strategies for responsible tourism. Integrating these practices helps businesses contribute to a healthier planet while staying competitive in a growing market for sustainable travel.
Learning outcomes	1. Understand the core principles of ecotourism and environmental sustainability. 2. Identify the main environmental impacts of tourism (e.g., emissions, waste, biodiversity loss). 3. Recognize practical strategies to reduce environmental footprints in tourism operations. 4. Apply eco-friendly practices in energy, water, waste, and mobility management. 5. Develop a Green Value Proposition to enhance business competitiveness. 6. Create an actionable sustainability plan for short-, mid-, and long-term goals.
Duration	7 hours
Preparation	The facilitator: - Reviews the module structure, objectives, and activities. - Ensures required materials: a projector, posters, flip charts, handouts, and access to videos.

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LESSON PLAN (2 HOURS)	
Short Video	**Overview:** This video introduces the key principles of sustainable tourism, focusing on minimizing environmental impacts, promoting responsible practices, and highlighting the benefits for both businesses and destinations. It is ideal for tourism entrepreneurs looking for practical guidance on implementing sustainable solutions in their operations. **Watch:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oL-X2iQi864 **Overview:** This video explains ecotourism and its role in promoting environmental sustainability. It highlights practical ways tourism businesses can reduce their impact on nature while benefiting local communities. **Watch:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxOgeDBX8w4
Module development	**A. Introduction to the module (5 min)** Natural capital underpins tourism competitiveness and destination attractiveness across Europe. Over the centuries, people have travelled to experience these natural spaces, seeking adventure, relaxation, and connection. Yet as tourism has grown, so too has its impact on the environment - forests shrink, wildlife habitats are disturbed, and pollution threatens the very beauty that draws visitors in the first place. Ecotourism provides a structured framework for aligning tourism development with conservation priorities. It is not simply about visiting natural areas; it is a way of travelling that respects ecosystems, promotes conservation, and engages local communities as partners rather than spectators. By integrating environmental sustainability into tourism operations, businesses can reduce their footprint, preserve natural resources, and provide authentic experiences that benefit both visitors and host communities. This module introduces the principles of ecotourism and environmental sustainability, framing them within the broader context of EU policies, global environmental challenges, and practical business strategies. Participants will explore how tourism can be a force for regeneration rather than degradation, learning not just the theory but actionable tools to implement sustainable practices in their own businesses. Through this module, we aim to empower tourism operators to rethink their relationship with the natural world, to design experiences that are low-impact, educational, and enriching, and to recognize that sustainability is both an ethical responsibility and a competitive advantage. **B. Module Development (1h 45 min)** **1: Introduction to Ecotourism (5 min)** Ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education". This session introduces participants to the core principles of ecotourism, emphasizing its distinction from mass tourism. Key topics include: ● **Definition and principles**: Understanding ecotourism's focus on conservation, community well-being, and education.

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- **Comparison with mass tourism**: Highlighting the differences in impact and approach.
- **Role in the EU Green Deal**: Discussing how ecotourism aligns with EU sustainability goals.

Example: The EU Ecolabel for tourism accommodations sets criteria for energy use, water consumption, chemical use, and waste management, promoting environmental responsibility (European Commission, 2023).

2: Environmental Impacts of Tourism (15 min)

Tourism can lead to significant environmental challenges, including greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, and waste generation. This session explores these impacts and discusses strategies for mitigation:

- **Key environmental pressures**: Identifying major environmental issues caused by tourism.
- **Group discussion**: Analyzing local examples of negative impacts and potential solutions.

Example: High tourist numbers can strain local ecosystems, leading to habitat degradation and increased pollution (Gössling et al., 2021).

3: Tools for Sustainability (15 min)

Implementing sustainable practices requires effective tools and frameworks. This session covers:

- **Green certifications**: Overview of EU Ecolabel and GSTC standards.
- **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA)**: Understanding their role in planning and decision-making.
- **Sustainable infrastructure design**: Principles for developing eco-friendly facilities.

Activity: Participants use an "Ecotourism Audit Checklist" to assess a sample tourism destination, identifying areas for improvement.

Example: The GSTC-Recognized Standards for Hotels assist businesses in implementing sustainable practices, focusing on environmental, social, and economic sustainability (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2023).

4: Greening Your Operations (15 min)

Operational changes are crucial for sustainability. This session focuses on:

- **Energy, water, and waste management**: Strategies for reducing consumption and waste.
- **Supply chain and sustainable procurement**: Sourcing responsibly and reducing environmental impact.
- **Green certifications and best practices**: Implementing recognized standards to guide operations.

Example: Green Globe certification helps tourism businesses improve their sustainability performance, covering areas like energy efficiency and waste management (Green Globe, 2023).

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Task: Draft a short action plan highlighting one operational improvement you can implement immediately (e.g., energy reduction, waste sorting).

5: Eco-Mobility in Tourism (15 min)

Transportation significantly contributes to tourism's environmental footprint. This session explores:

- **Types of eco-friendly transport**: Walking, cycling, electric shuttles, and public transport.
- **Planning green visitor routes**: Designing itineraries that minimize environmental impact.
- **Accessibility and inclusivity**: Ensuring sustainable options are available to all visitors.

Example: Copenhagen's initiative rewards tourists who use public transport or bicycles, promoting eco-friendly mobility (City of Copenhagen, 2024).

6: Marketing & Visitor Experience (15 min)

Effective communication of sustainability efforts enhances visitor engagement. This session covers:

- **Communicating your green values**: Strategies for transparent and authentic messaging.
- **Storytelling and digital tools**: Utilizing narratives and technology to connect with audiences.
- **Working with local communities & DMOs**: Collaborating to enhance the visitor experience.

Example: The "Best Tourism Villages" initiative by UNWTO highlights destinations that demonstrate sustainable tourism practices (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2024).

Activity: Marketing Mini Plan (10 min) - participants outline a short campaign highlighting one sustainable practice in their business.

7: Planning for Change (15 min)

Turning knowledge into action is essential. This session focuses on:

- **Business self-assessment**: Evaluating current sustainability practices.
- **Setting goals**: Identifying changes to implement in the short, medium, and long term.
- **Green Action Plan**: Developing a roadmap for sustainable development.

Example: The Green Growth National Action Plan 2021 to 2025 outlines strategies for enhancing sustainability in the tourism sector (Jordan Ministry of Environment, 2021).

8: Peer Exchange & Wrap-Up (10 min)

Sharing experiences and insights fosters learning. This session includes:

- **Sharing ideas and case examples**: Discussing successful initiatives and challenges.

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- **Optional presentations**: Participants present draft plans for feedback.

Example: Killarney, Ireland, is striving to become the most sustainable town by 2030, implementing initiatives like eliminating single-use cups and promoting conservation (The Times, 2024).

C. Conclusions (10 min)

Ecotourism is not just a niche segment - it is a pathway toward resilient, responsible, and profitable tourism businesses. Through this module, participants have explored the principles of ecotourism, examined the environmental impacts of tourism, and learned practical tools to integrate sustainability into operations, marketing, and visitor experiences. Sustainable practices are both an ethical responsibility and a competitive advantage. By reducing carbon footprints, conserving biodiversity, and engaging local communities, tourism businesses can enhance their brand reputation, attract eco-conscious travelers, and contribute to the long-term health of destinations. The combination of theory and practice in this masterclass equips managers and business owners to:

- Identify environmental pressures in their operations and implement effective mitigation strategies.
- Apply sustainability tools such as green certifications, impact assessments, and eco-friendly infrastructure planning.
- Communicate green practices to guests in an authentic and engaging way.
- Design actionable plans to transform their business model toward long-term sustainability.

Ultimately, ecotourism and environmental sustainability are interconnected: every small improvement contributes to a larger positive impact on ecosystems, communities, and the tourism sector as a whole. Businesses that embrace this approach are not only supporting the planet —they are shaping a future where tourism thrives in harmony with nature.

LESSON CONTENT

Introduction to Ecotourism

Based on Theoretical Content Results

Definition & principles

- Comparison with mass tourism
- Role of Ecotourism in the EU Green Deal

Comparison: Ecotourism vs Mass Tourism

Aspect	Ecotourism	
Main focus	Sustainability and conservation	Entertainment and profit
Scale	Small-scale, low visitor numbers	Large-scale, high visitor numbers
Environmental impact	Low, carefully managed	High (pollution, overuse of resources)

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Local community role	Active participation and benefits	Often marginalised
Economic model	Long-term, local development	Short-term, external investors
Tourist experience	Educational, nature-based, authentic	Standardised, consumption-based
Infrastructure	Eco-friendly, low impact	Large resorts, heavy infrastructure

Role of Ecotourism in the EU Green Deal

*The **European Green Deal** is the EU's strategy to achieve **climate neutrality by 2050**, promote sustainable growth, and protect natural ecosystems. Ecotourism directly supports several of its objectives.*

Contribution Areas

Climate Action

- Promotion of low-carbon travel options
- Energy-efficient accommodations
- Support for carbon reduction strategies in tourism

Biodiversity & Nature Protection

- Encourages protection of Natura 2000 sites
- Supports ecosystem restoration and conservation projects
- Reduces pressure from over-tourism in sensitive areas

Sustainable Economic Growth

- Creates green and local jobs
- Supports rural and remote regions
- Encourages circular economy practices (waste reduction, local sourcing)

Social Inclusion & Regional Development

- Strengthens local communities
- Prevents depopulation of rural areas
- Supports fair and inclusive tourism models

Environmental Impacts of Tourism

- Key environmental pressures (GHG emissions, biodiversity loss, waste generation)
  - Increased pressure on natural resources (water, energy, land)
  - Pollution of air, water, and soil (transport, waste, sewage)
  - Damage to ecosystems and biodiversity (habitat loss, wildlife disturbance)
  - Generation of large amounts of waste, especially in peak seasons
  - Contribution to climate change through transport-

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	related emissions o Degradation of landscapes and cultural-natural sites due to overcrowding o Overuse of fragile environments (coasts, mountains, protected areas) • Potential for conservation support when tourism is well-managed (funding, awareness)
New forms of more sustainable offer for Tourism	• Eco-lodges, guided nature experiences, conservation volunteerism - eco-lodges are environmentally friendly accommodations designed to minimize energy use and environmental impact while blending into natural surroundings. Guided nature experiences focus on education, biodiversity awareness, and responsible interaction with ecosystems, often led by trained local guides. Conservation volunteerism allows tourists to actively participate in environmental protection projects, such as wildlife monitoring or habitat restoration. Together, these forms of tourism support local economies while contributing directly to nature conservation. • Minimum impact tourism - minimum impact tourism aims to reduce negative environmental effects by limiting resource consumption, waste generation, and carbon emissions. It promotes practices such as small group travel, low-impact transport, and sustainable accommodation. Tourists are encouraged to follow responsible behavior, respecting wildlife, landscapes, and local cultures. This approach helps preserve natural areas for future generations while maintaining tourism viability. • Highly specialized offers - highly specialized tourism offers target niche markets such as birdwatching, hiking, wildlife photography, or cultural heritage tourism. These experiences are usually small-scale and carefully managed to avoid overuse of natural and cultural resources. They attract environmentally conscious travelers who value quality and authenticity over mass consumption. As a result, specialized offers generate higher value with lower environmental pressure.
Value propositions & Best practices	• Value Propositions for Masterclass topic Example of a Case Study 1 • This case study focuses on a community-based ecotourism initiative in a protected natural area. It demonstrates how local involvement enhances conservation outcomes and visitor satisfaction. Participants learn how shared value creation supports both environmental and social goals. Example of a Case Study 2 • This case study examines an eco-lodge that integrates renewable energy and resource-efficient technologies. It highlights the role of transparency and guest education in promoting sustainable behavior. The example shows how comfort and sustainability can coexist with hospitality.

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	Example of a Case Study 3 • This case study presents a conservation volunteer tourism program. It illustrates how hands-on participation increases environmental awareness and emotional engagement. Learners understand how meaningful experiences can drive long-term support for conservation initiatives.
Innovation and digital tools	• GIS for Conservation Mapping - Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are used to map and monitor natural resources, protected areas, and biodiversity hotspots. They help tourism planners identify sensitive ecosystems and manage visitor flows to reduce environmental pressure. GIS supports evidence-based decision-making by combining spatial data with environmental indicators. This technology is essential for balancing tourism development with conservation goals. • Smart Sensors for Water and Energy Monitoring - Smart sensors enable real-time monitoring of water and energy consumption in tourism facilities. They help identify inefficiencies, leaks, and excessive use, allowing operators to reduce resource waste. By providing accurate data, smart sensors support cost savings and environmental responsibility. Their use contributes to lower carbon emissions and more sustainable operations. • Online Eco-Certification Platforms - Online eco-certification platforms allow tourism businesses to assess, document, and verify their sustainability practices digitally. They increase transparency and credibility by providing standardized sustainability criteria and public reporting. These platforms help tourists make informed choices when selecting environmentally responsible services. As a result, eco-certification encourages higher sustainability standards across the tourism sector. • Intelligent Energy Management in Hotels & Restaurants - Intelligent energy management systems optimize heating, cooling, lighting, and appliance use based on real-time demand. They use automation and data analytics to reduce unnecessary energy consumption without compromising guest comfort. Such systems lower operating costs while supporting climate goals. Their adoption is a key innovation for improving energy efficiency in hospitality businesses.
Creation of New Business Models	• CANVAS methodology The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a strategic tool used to design, analyze, and innovate business models in a clear and visual way. It consists of nine building blocks that describe how a company creates, delivers, and captures value. In sustainable tourism, the CANVAS methodology helps integrate environmental and social value alongside economic performance. It supports innovation by making sustainability goals visible and measurable within the business model. • Business model template A business model template provides a structured framework for developing and documenting a company's operations and strategy. It typically includes key elements such as value proposition, customer segments, revenue streams, and key partnerships. In sustainable tourism, templates are adapted to include sustainability indicators like resource

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	efficiency, community impact, and carbon footprint. This helps businesses align profitability with long-term environmental and social responsibility. • Examples of more sustainable business models Sustainable tourism business models often focus on low-impact operations, local sourcing, and community-based ownership. Examples include eco-lodges using renewable energy, tour operators offering carbon-neutral travel, and hotels applying circular economic principles. These models emphasize long-term value creation rather than short-term profits. By reducing environmental impact and supporting local communities, they contribute to a more resilient tourism sector.
Inclusive tourism for diverse groups (ethnic, gender, ability)	Nature experiences adapted for visually impaired, mobility aids on trails Inclusive tourism aims to ensure that tourism experiences are accessible, safe, and welcoming for people of all backgrounds and abilities. Nature experiences adapted for visually impaired visitors may include tactile trails, audio guides, Braille signage, and guided sensory experiences. Mobility aids on trails—such as boardwalks, ramps, and accessible viewing platforms—enable people with limited mobility to enjoy natural environments independently. By removing physical and social barriers, inclusive tourism promotes equal participation while supporting social justice and diversity in sustainable tourism development.
Tools for implementation	• Green certification programs (EU Ecolabel, Green Key) Green certification programs such as **EU Ecolabel** and **Green Key** provide recognized standards for environmental performance in tourism and hospitality. They evaluate criteria including energy efficiency, water use, waste management, and sustainable sourcing. Certification helps businesses improve their environmental practices while increasing credibility and trust among environmentally conscious tourists. These programs also support alignment with EU sustainability policies and climate objectives. • Environmental impact calculators Environmental impact calculators are digital tools used to measure the carbon footprint and resource use of tourism activities. They help tourism businesses and travelers understand the environmental consequences of transport, accommodation, and consumption choices. By providing quantifiable data, these tools support better decision-making and encourage emission reduction strategies. Their use contributes to transparency and continuous improvement in sustainable tourism management.
Financing the change of business models	• Estimation of transformation costs & investment needs Estimating transformation costs involves assessing investments required for energy-efficient technologies, sustainable infrastructure, staff training, and digital tools. This process helps businesses understand short-term expenses versus long-term savings and environmental benefits. Accurate cost estimation reduces financial risk and supports strategic planning. It also helps identify priorities and realistic timelines for transitioning to more sustainable business models. • Financing Sources: EU LIFE Programme, Horizon Europe, green micro-loans

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	The EU LIFE Programme supports projects focused on environmental protection, climate action, and biodiversity conservation. Horizon Europe provides funding for innovation, research, and pilot projects, including sustainable tourism solutions. Green micro-loans offer accessible financing for small and medium-sized tourism enterprises implementing eco-friendly measures. Together, these financing sources enable businesses to invest in sustainability while reducing financial barriers to transformation.
NETWORKING EXCERSICES (1 HOUR)	
Case Studies	Up to 3 case studies of Environmental tourism based on experience of participants Case Study 1: Community-Based Ecotourism in a Protected Natural Area Participants take part in guided walks led by local community members who share knowledge about ecosystems and traditional land use. Visitors report a strong sense of connection to nature due to small group sizes and minimal environmental disturbance. Educational activities, such as wildlife observation and conservation talks, increase awareness of biodiversity protection. Tourists appreciate that their fees directly support conservation and local livelihoods. Overall, the experience is described as authentic, educational, and socially responsible. Case Study 2: Eco-Lodge Stay Focused on Sustainable Living Guests staying in an eco-lodge experience renewable energy use, water-saving systems, and locally sourced food. Many participants highlight how sustainable practices are clearly explained and visible throughout their stay. Nature-based activities, such as birdwatching and guided forest tours, enhance environmental learning. Visitors often report increased motivation to adopt sustainable habits after returning home. The eco-lodge experience combines comfort with environmental responsibility. Case Study 3: Conservation Volunteer Tourism Experience Participants join short-term conservation projects such as habitat restoration or wildlife monitoring. Hands-on involvement creates a strong feeling of personal contribution to environmental protection. Tourists value working alongside experts and learning practical conservation skills. Group collaboration and shared goals foster a sense of community among participants. The experience is frequently described as meaningful, impactful, and emotionally rewarding.
Creation of New Business Models Ecotourism & Environmental Sustainability	• CANVAS methodology The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a strategic tool used to design, analyze, and innovate business models in a clear and visual way. It consists of nine building blocks that describe how a company creates, delivers, and captures value. In sustainable tourism, the CANVAS methodology helps integrate environmental and social value alongside economic performance. It supports innovation by making sustainability goals visible and measurable within the business model. • Business model template A business model template provides a structured framework for developing and documenting a company's operations and strategy. It typically includes key elements such as value proposition, customer segments, revenue streams, and key partnerships. In sustainable tourism,

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SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES (4 HOURS)	
Readings, videos, podcast, and other resources	- Scientific literature/scientific articles on the topic - Videos and documentaries on the topic - Books and other readings - Other resources
Activity	In this section you can write an activity to evaluate the module. You are free to choose an activity: write an article, essay or other. Prepare a short video about what you have learned. Feel free to propose any activity!

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Business Model Template

Business Model Elements	Key Information
1 Customers Segments (Key Target Groups) *Description of main customers group, their demand potential and key needs*	**2 Values Provided** *What values will be cornerstones of the new business offer for the customer*
3 Revenue Sources *Description of key products* *What will be sold to customers?* *How will customers pay for the products / services (one-off, per night bases, subscription etc.)?*	**4 Cost Structure** *What are main costs for the planned model?* *How big are planned margins?* *What is the structure of the costs?*
5 Sales & Distribution Channels *Description of sales and distribution*	**6 Customer Relationships** *How to attract and maintain customers, what tools and strategies should be implemented.* *Marketing ideas, strategies and tools.*
7 Key Resources *Main resources owed to implementing new business model* *Key resources to obtain necessary for the model implementation.*	**8 Key Partners** *Key partners in the business model (suppliers, sales partners etc.). Description of the main groups and relations with them.*
9 Implementation Schedule (Action Plan) *Description of key activities/task necessary to implement the model into business practice*	

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Readings, videos, podcast, and other resources

Top Podcasts on Ecotourism & Environmental Sustainability

The Tourism RESET (Rebecca Woolford)	**Focus: Reimagines how travel can serve people, places, and nature — with deep dives into ecotourism, carbon, community tourism, and conservation.** **https://kiwanotourism.com/stories/the-tourism-reset/?utm_source=chatgpt.com**
GOOD Awaits (Centre for GOOD Travel)	Focus: Explores regenerative tourism — how tourism can not only reduce harm but actively *improve* communities and environments, with stories from New Zealand and beyond. https://www.good-travel.org/storytelling/good-awaits-podcast?utm_source=chatgpt.com
Curious Tourism: Responsible Travel Podcast	**Focus**: Shorter, practical episodes about how travellers can reflect sustainability and minimize negative impacts when planning trips. https://podcast.feedspot.com/sustainable_tourism_podcasts/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Top Articles on Ecotourism & Environmental Sustainability

***PLS-PM Model for Sustainable Development of Ecotourism:* (Sciendo, case study of Ulytau Nature Park, Kazakhstan)**	**Focus: A mix of quantitative and qualitative research that builds a predictive model for sustainable ecotourism development, grounded in community perceptions and strategic planning.** **https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/eoik-2025-0019?utm_source=chatgpt.com**
Toward green tourism: the role of renewable energy for sustainable ... (Frontiers in Sustainable Tourism / BIMSTEC region)	**Focus:** This paper investigates how renewable energy can mitigate the environmental impacts of tourism in South and Southeast Asia, highlighting the synergy between tourism and green energy. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sustainable-tourism/articles/10.3389/frsut.2025.1512922/full?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Top Ecotourism & Environmental Sustainability Videos of 2025

Eco-Tourism 2025: A New Way to Travel and Protect the Planet	**Focus: This piece travels through eco-friendly destinations, indigenous-led sustainable tourism projects, and green travel innovations — a good primer on what regenerative travel might look like.** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RLSEuG3zAA**
Ocean with David Attenborough (2025)	Focus: A lush, beautifully shot deep dive into the oceans, their ecosystems, and the threats they face. It's not solely about tourism, but it

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02

MASTERCLASS 2

Cultural Tourism & Social Sustainability

Masterclass 2: Cultural Tourism & Social Sustainability

Module Title	**Cultural tourism & Social Sustainability**
Target group	• Tourism & Hospitality Business Owners • Business Managers • VET Trainers
Introduction	This masterclass explores the intersection between cultural tourism and social sustainability, examining how travel experiences can foster cultural understanding, preserve heritage, and contribute to community well-being. Participants will analyze the role of tourism in promoting cultural identity, equity, and inclusion while discussing challenges such as over-tourism, cultural commodification, and social displacement. Through case studies and practical frameworks, the session provides strategies for developing responsible tourism models that prioritize local engagement, ethical practices, and long-term social impact.
Learning outcomes	1. Understand the relationship between cultural tourism and social sustainability within global and local contexts. 2. Identify key challenges and opportunities in developing socially responsible cultural tourism initiatives. 3. Analyze the social, cultural, and ethical implications of tourism on local communities and heritage preservation. 4. Apply sustainable practices to tourism planning that promote cultural diversity, inclusion, and equity. 5. Design strategies that foster authentic cultural exchange and long-term community benefits.
Duration	7 hours
Preparation	The facilitator: - Reviews the module structure, objectives, and activities. - Ensures required materials: a projector, posters, flip charts, handouts, and access to videos.
LESSON PLAN (2 HOURS)	
Short Video	**How to Pick a Sustainable Destination** In this TEDxBarcelona talk, speaker Khalisah Stevens guides the audience through principles and criteria for choosing travel destinations that align with sustainability values. She discusses environmental, social, and cultural factors that travelers should consider in minimising negative

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	impacts and maximizing positive contributions to host communities. Through examples and actionable advice, the presentation offers a practical framework for making more responsible travel decisions. https://youtu.be/P4Ipb5radew?si=5nhQxplAiORhF5AH
Module development	**A. Introduction to the module (5 min)** Brief presentation and introduction to the module, objectives, theoretical framework, etc. **B. Module Development (1h 45 min)** **Step 1. Welcome and Icebreaker** (5 minutes) ● Quick introduction round ● Ask: "What comes to mind when you hear 'sustainable tourism'?" (Responses noted on flip chart) **Step 2. Brainstorming Activity: What is Sustainable Tourism?** (20 minutes) Participants will identify sustainable practices already present in their community and brainstorm how a local tourism provider could adopt sustainable principles, analysing the potential community impact. Individually or in pairs, reflect on the sustainability principles covered in the module. ● Part 1: Think about your community: Identify 1-2 examples of best practices that promote sustainability (eco-friendly transport, local food sourcing, waste management, community-led tourism) Write down: ● The practice ● Why it's sustainable ● Which sustainability principles does it represent (environmental stewardship, community participation, economic viability) Part 2: Now think of a local tourism provider (hotel, tour guide, cultural site) that could be more sustainable. Answer the following: ● What changes or actions could they take to be more sustainable? ● Which principles of sustainability would these changes support? ● What impact would these changes have on the community (job creation, environmental benefits, cultural preservation)? Encourage using real examples and being creative, but realistic, ideas (switching to solar energy, hiring local guides, reducing plastic use). Ask volunteers or each group to share 1 idea from Part 1 and 1 from Part 2. Note these on the board to find common themes or especially innovative ideas. Questions for further discussion: ● What challenges might tourism providers face in becoming more sustainable?

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- How can communities support these transitions?

Step 3. Content Development: Sustainable Tourism (60minutes)

Content to Cover

1. Introduction to Cultural tourism
2. Environmental Impacts of Tourism
3. New forms of more sustainable offer for Adventure Tourism
4. Innovation and digital tools
    - Tools for implementation
5. Financing the change of business models

Step 4. Group Discussion: Local Applications

Task: In pairs or groups (10 minutes)

- Identify a local tourism issue or opportunity where sustainability could be improved.
- Share examples of how training or education could support that improvement.
- The facilitator circulates and supports reflection.

Step 5. Wrap-up and Evaluation (25 minutes)

- Quick recap of key takeaways
- Share any final insights
- Discuss the questions included in the activity section.
- Guide participants to the material for self-directed learning (SDL) and explain the activity that follows the SDL

C. Conclusions (10 min)

As we conclude this module on Principles of Sustainable Tourism, participants should now have a clearer understanding of how tourism can become a positive force for environmental protection, social wellbeing, and economic resilience. Through interactive activities, reflection, and the TEDx talk by Khalisah Stevens, we explored how individual choices and community-level actions shape the sustainability of a destination.

Participants identified sustainability practices within their own communities, assessed opportunities for improvement among local tourism providers, and discussed practical ways education and training can support sustainable transitions. These insights highlight that sustainable tourism is not a fixed model but an ongoing commitment that requires awareness, collaboration, and innovation.

By applying the principles reviewed (environmental stewardship, community participation, and economic responsibility) participants are now better equipped to make informed decisions as travelers, educators, or tourism professionals. The path toward sustainability is collective, and small steps taken locally can generate meaningful long-term change. This module encourages continued reflection, community engagement, and the adoption of practical strategies that contribute to more responsible and resilient tourism development.

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LESSON CONTENT	
Introduction to Cultural tourism	Cultural tourism is the type of tourism that focuses on discovering and experiencing the culture, heritage, and traditions of a place. It involves visiting museums, monuments, festivals, and interacting with local communities to understand their way of life. Its main principles include respect for local culture, authenticity, community participation, and sustainability, ensuring that cultural expressions are preserved and that local people benefit from tourism activities. Unlike mass tourism, which is large-scale, standardized, and mainly seeks leisure and profit, cultural tourism promotes smaller, more meaningful experiences centered on learning, respect, and exchange. It aims to create positive social and cultural impacts while supporting community development.
Environmental Impacts of Tourism	• Key environmental pressures (GHG emissions, biodiversity loss, waste generation) • Over-commercialization of culture • Displacement and gentrification • Seasonal and precarious employment
New forms of more sustainable offer for Adventure Tourism	• Community-based cultural tourism • Creative tourism • Living heritage experiences • Cultural routes and trails • Culinary heritage and gastronomy tourism • Intercultural exchange programs • Inclusive cultural tourism
Innovation and digital tools	• Digital storytelling & VR/AR heritage interpretation • Cultural GIS mapping • Smart ticketing and crowd-management tools • Online cultural marketplaces • AI-based translation and accessibility tools
Tools for implementation	• UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Toolkit • European Capitals of Culture / Creative Cities Network • Fair Trade Tourism and Ethical Charter standards • Cultural impact assessments (CIA) • Community benefit-sharing models
Financing the change of business models	• Estimation of transformation costs & investment needs • Financing Sources: EU LIFE Programme, Horizon Europe, green micro-loans
NETWORKING EXCERSICES (1 HOUR)	
Case Studies	**Kyoto, Japan – Heritage and Community Engagement** Kyoto leverages its temples, gardens, and traditional ceremonies to promote cultural tourism. Local residents and artisans participate in

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	workshops and performances, ensuring authentic experiences. Tourism generates significant economic benefits but also brings challenges such as congestion and pressure on housing and public services. **Cusco and Machu Picchu, Peru – Community-Based Cultural Tourism** Cusco combines Inca and colonial heritage and promotes tourism that involves local communities. Visitors experience Quechua traditions, local cuisine, and handicrafts, generating income and reinforcing cultural identity. Sustainable management protects archaeological sites and reduces environmental pressures, though mass tourism remains a challenge. **Barcelona, Spain – Urban Cultural and Creative Tourism** Barcelona integrates art, architecture, and gastronomy into urban tourism. Cultural districts and events involve both residents and visitors, enhancing social inclusion. Tourism contributes significantly to the economy but requires careful management of city infrastructure and public services to maintain sustainability.
Creation of New Business Models Cultural & Social Sustainability	**Objective:** Learn how to design cultural and socially sustainable tourism businesses using practical tools. **Content & Activity:** 1. **CANVAS Methodology:** Brief introduction to the Business Model CANVAS, a tool to map key elements of a business (value proposition, customer segments, channels, revenue streams, key activities, resources, partnerships, cost structure) with a focus on **social sustainability**. 2. **Business Model Template:** Short template showing how to structure a cultural tourism business integrating community involvement, heritage preservation, and equitable benefits. 3. **Examples:** Ask participants to provide 2–3 real examples of cultural tourism businesses that demonstrate social sustainability (e.g., community-led heritage tours, urban cultural districts, artisan workshops). 4. **Group Exercise:** In small groups, participants will use the CANVAS methodology and the template to **create a new cultural tourism business model**. Each group briefly presents their idea to the class. **Outcome:** Participants understand how to apply CANVAS and a business model template to design tourism businesses that are socially responsible, culturally authentic, and community focused.
SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES (4 HOURS)	
Readings, videos, podcast, and other resources	Videos and documentaries on the topic **Tourism – A Primary Connector of Communities | Patrick Tuttle | TEDxMSSU (15 minutes)** In this TEDx talk, Patrick Tuttle explores how tourism serves as a vital connector between communities, fostering cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and shared growth. He emphasizes viewing tourism not merely as an economic activity but as a social force that strengthens human connections.

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	https://youtu.be/AqQW-N5Y7b8?si=-jmHoJPYYxmtLnPO **Overtourism: How to be a Responsible Tourist – The Global Story podcast, BBC World Service (15 minutes)** This podcast-episode video discusses the challenges of overtourism, exploring how an excessive influx of visitors can strain local communities, natural resources, and cultural heritage. The hosts debate possible solutions such as visitor dispersion, tourist quotas, and promoting responsible travel behavior to protect destinations and communities. https://youtu.be/gfcKTMN-5CI?si=JadgnLNf3x0NMD6h **CAS Trips: Student Travel for Global Citizens (5 minutes)** The film follows school groups in Lisbon engaging in authentic, sustainable experiences with locals, including learning crafts from elder women, cooking with local chefs, and creating traditional Portuguese tiles. CAS Trips emphasizes social impact, circular economy awareness, and fostering global citizenship through immersive, hands-on cultural interactions. https://sustainabletravel.org/episode/cas-trips-student-travel-programs/ **The Rise of Cultural Tourism | Everything You Need to Know About Cultural Tourism (15 minutes)** Cultural tourism is growing in popularity around the world. Whilst almost all vacations will encompass some form of cultural tourism, this will look very different in different contexts. In this video I teach you all about the cultural tourism industry, I give you lots of examples of cultural tourism and I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of cultural tourism. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMEQI6KNNWs Scientific literature/scientific articles on the topic **Measuring and evaluating the influence of cultural sustainability indicators on sustainable cultural tourism development: Scale development and validation (85 minutes)** This study develops and measures a new scale of Cultural Sustainability Indicators (CSIs) to assess their impact on Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development (SCTD). Findings reveal that most CSIs—such as authenticity, awareness, and empowerment—positively influence SCTD, highlighting culture as a key factor in achieving sustainable tourism. **The Place and Role of Environmental Labels for Tourist Accommodations: A Survey-Based Characterisation for the European Union (45 minutes)** This study highlights that while EU tools like the EU Ecolabel support the green transition and tourism's contribution to the European Green Deal, greater harmonization and transparency are needed to improve their effectiveness. https://www.mdpi.com/2673-5768/6/1/22
Activity	Article or Blog Post (600–800 words) Prepare an engaging article titled: **"Can Cultural Tourism Build a More**

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Sustainable Society?"

Your article should:

- Explain the connection between culture, tourism, and sustainability in an accessible way.
- Include at least one concrete example (city, heritage site, community initiative).
- Use visuals or links (if digital) to make it appealing to a general audience.

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Business Model Template

Business Model Elements	Key Information
1 Customers Segments (Key Target Groups) *Description of main customers group, their demand potential and key needs*	**2 Values Provided** *What values will be cornerstones of the new business offer for the customer*
3 Revenue Sources *Description of key products* *What will be sold to customers?* *How will customers pay for the products / services (one-off, per night bases, subscription etc.)?*	**4 Cost Structure** *What are main costs for the planned model?* *How big are planned margins?* *What is the structure of the costs?*
5 Sales & Distribution Channels *Description of sales and distribution*	**6 Customer Relationships** *How to attract and maintain customers, what tools and strategies should be implemented.* *Marketing ideas, strategies and tools.*
7 Key Resources *Main resources owed to implementing new business model* *Key resources to obtain necessary for the model implementation.*	**8 Key Partners** *Key partners in the business model (suppliers, sales partners etc.). Description of the main groups and relations with them.*
9 Implementation Schedule (Action Plan) *Description of key activities/task necessary to implement the model into business practice*	

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03

MASTERCLASS 3

Adventure Tourism & Economic Sustainability

Masterclass 3: Adventure Tourism & Economic Sustainability

Module Title	**Adventure tourism & Economic Sustainability**
Target group	• Tourism & Hospitality Business Owners • Business Managers • VET Trainers
Introduction	Adventure tourism plays an increasingly important role in contemporary tourism economies, particularly in rural and nature-based destinations. Through activities that rely on guiding services, equipment, accommodation, and local supply chains, it has the potential to generate income, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities. At the same time, adventure tourism businesses operate in contexts shaped by seasonality, environmental dependence, financial risk, and external shocks. Economic sustainability therefore becomes a central concern for both individual enterprises and destinations. This module explores how adventure tourism businesses can strengthen their economic viability through sustainable business models, practical tools, and informed investment decisions, while remaining embedded in their local context.
Learning outcomes	By the end of this module, participants will be able to: 1. Explain the role of adventure tourism in supporting local and regional economic sustainability 2. Identify practical tools for implementing sustainable business models in adventure tourism enterprises 3. Assess financing options that support the transition to more sustainable and resilient adventure tourism models 4. Apply basic indicators to monitor the economic sustainability of adventure tourism businesses
Duration	7 hours
Preparation	The facilitator: - Reviews the module structure, objectives, and activities. - Ensures required materials: a projector, posters, flip charts, handouts, and access to videos.
LESSON PLAN (2 HOURS)	
Short Video	**Overview:** This video is about sustainable tourism and adventure travel. It explains how travellers can explore the world in a way that respects the environment and local cultures, combining exciting outdoor experiences with responsible practices that minimize ecological impact. **Watch:**

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	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gPsDQCbJy0
Module development	● **Introduction to the module (5 min)** Adventure tourism plays an increasingly important role in local and regional economies, particularly in rural and nature-based destinations where small businesses and guiding services are intricately linked to local resources and communities. While the sector can generate income, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities, it also operates in contexts shaped by seasonality, limited resources, financial uncertainty, and dependence on natural and social environments. Ensuring long-term economic viability therefore requires more than short-term profitability; it calls for business models that use resources responsibly, support stable livelihoods, and remain compatible with local environmental and social conditions. This module introduces adventure tourism from an economic sustainability perspective, focusing on how businesses can build long-term resilience and profitability while contributing positively to their destination. Participants will explore key concepts, practical tools, and financing approaches that help align economic performance with responsible resource use and local value creation, supporting prosperity for both present and future generations. ● **Module Development (1h 45 min)** **Step 1. Welcome and Icebreaker** (5 minutes) ● Quick introduction round ● Ask: "What comes to mind when you hear 'adventure tourism'?" (Responses noted on Mentimeter or another online platform) **Step 2. Brainstorming Activity: What is Sustainable Tourism?** (15 minutes) Group discussion prompt: ● "What economic benefits does adventure tourism bring to your local area?" ● "What economic risks have you observed?" **Step 3. Content Development: Sustainable Tourism** (50minutes) **Content to Cover:** 1. Introduction to adventure tourism 2. Social, environmental, and economic impacts of adventure tourism 3. New forms of more sustainable offer for adventure tourism 4. Innovation and digital tools for economic sustainability 5. Tools for implementation 6. Financing the change of business models **Step 4. Activity: Innovation & Digital Tools for Economic Sustainability** **Task:** Small groups (3–5 participants) (25 minutes) ● Divide participants into small groups and assign (or let them choose) one adventure tourism scenario, for example (3 minutes):

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a local hiking or trekking company/ a rafting or kayaking operator/ a mountain bike or climbing destination/ a community-based adventure tourism initiative/ a nature-based tour operator in a fragile ecosystem.

- Each group answers: "What are the main economic sustainability challenges this business faces?" (6 minutes). Prompt them to think about: seasonality, low margins, overdependence on intermediaries, inefficient operations, limited access to markets, lack of data for decision-making. They should list 2–3 key challenges.
- The groups brainstorm digital or innovative solutions that could address those challenges (8 minutes): "Which digital tools could help this business earn more without increasing negative impacts?". Groups select 1–2 tools and explain: How it improves economic sustainability; Why it fits adventure tourism specifically.
- Quick share (8 minutes): Each group shares: their chosen challenge, one digital tool/innovation, one clear benefit (e.g. higher margins, better visitor management, diversified income).

Step 5. Wrap-up and Evaluation (10 minutes)

- Quick recap of key takeaways
- Share any final insights
- Discuss the questions included in the activity section.
- Guide participants to the material for self-directed learning (SDL) and explain the activity that follows the SDL.
- **Conclusions (10 min)**

Economic sustainability is essential for the long-term viability of adventure tourism businesses and the resilience of the destinations in which they operate. Throughout this module, participants have explored how adventure tourism can generate stable economic value while remaining compatible with local environmental and social conditions. By focusing on long-term planning, efficient use of resources, and strong local linkages, adventure tourism businesses can strengthen their profitability while reducing economic vulnerability.

The mix of theory and practice in this module has enabled participants to understand economic sustainability as a core pillar of green tourism, recognise the potential of adventure tourism to support resilient local economies, identify the importance of innovation, partnerships, and diversification in reducing financial risk, apply long-term thinking to balance profitability with stability and local value creation.

For business owners, the key message is that sustainable economic performance depends on resilience rather than short-term gains. For VET educators, the focus lies on translating these principles into practical tools and learning activities that reflect real-world business contexts.

Economic sustainability in adventure tourism is achieved through continuous improvement. Even small, concrete actions such as adjusting an activity offer, strengthening a partnership, or improving planning practices can contribute to more resilient businesses and more

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sustainable destinations.

LESSON CONTENT

1. Introduction to adventure tourism

Definition & principles

Adventure tourism is usually defined as "a form of travel that combines physical activity, engagement with the natural environment, and often a degree of cultural immersion. It typically involves some level of perceived risk or uncertainty and can range from gentle, low-risk activities to demanding, high-risk expeditions" (Huddart & Stott, 2019). Recent reviews define adventure tourism around three intertwined elements:

- Risk and danger (real or perceived);
- Physical activity and challenge;
- Natural (often remote) environments and/or deep cultural immersion.

Type of adventure	Typical features	Examples
Soft adventure	Low–moderate risk, accessible to most people, guided, shorter duration (Janowski et al., 2021; Mykletun, 2018; Huddart & Stott, 2019; Petroman et al., 2018)	Guided hikes, horse riding, snorkeling, snow skiing, water skiing, easy rafting, cycling, glacier walks on prepared routes, camping.
Hard adventure	Higher skill, exertion, and risk; overlaps with extreme sports (Janowski et al., 2021; Mykletun, 2018; Swarbrooke et al., 2003; Buckley, 2012)	Rock/ice climbing, wilderness trekking, caving, white-water kayaking, skydiving, mountain biking

The main global in adventure tourism are:

- **Rapid growth and mainstreaming**: Adventure tourism has shifted from a niche activity to a mainstream global tourism segment, showing strong pre-COVID growth and sustained post-pandemic expansion.
- **Soft adventure dominance:** Soft adventure activities now dominate the market, outperforming extreme and high-risk adventure forms.
- **New consumer segments:** Participation is broadening to include older adults and families, while younger consumers increasingly favour short, local "micro-adventures."
- **Post pandemic drivers:** Health, well-being, stress reduction, self-development, and social connection now function as key drivers, positioning adventure tourism as a tool for psychological recovery.
- **Globalisation and new destinations:** New and non-traditional regions, especially in developing countries, are emerging as adventure tourism destinations due to improved access and digital distribution.

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- **Digital and social media influence:** social media strongly influences destination choice and participation patterns, highlighting new activities.

The main European and regional trends are:

- **Youth and Millennial-driven demand:** Millennials represent a large share of outbound travel and strongly influence demand for active, nature-based, and digitally mediated adventure experiences.
- **Growth of nature- and water-based adventure:** this growth intensified during and after COVID-19 due to increased demand for nature-based, low-density recreation.
- **Adventure as "everyday" and accessible:** Adventure tourism is increasingly framed as accessible rather than extreme.
- **Micro-adventures and nearby nature:** Short, nearby adventure experiences are increasingly preferred over long-haul trips.
- **Policy and product implications:** Adventure and active tourism are prioritized as growth niches in tourism policy. They are leveraged for destination diversification, rural development, and sustainability objectives.

Mayor demand patterns/ motivations

Adventure tourism demand is broad and segmented by age, culture, motives, and "hard vs. soft" activity preferences. Research identifies several distinct target markets with different expectations and spending patterns.

Core motivation clusters in adventure demand:

- Relaxation & escape in nature (Wide market, incl. families, seniors);
- Thrill, fear, challenge, self-discovery (Youth, hard adventure);
- Learning & competence, cultural immersion (Youth, educated travellers);
- Safety, biosecurity, sustainability (Post COVID, all ages).

Socio-demographic and cultural patterns:

- **Gender & age**: Adventure tourism shows clear age- and gender-related patterns: men and younger adults are more involved in high-risk, hard adventure activities, while women and older adults prefer softer, guided experiences. Younger generations, especially Gen Y and Gen Z, seek novelty, identity-building, and socially shareable "transformative" experiences, whereas baby boomers and seniors increasingly favour moderate, well-managed adventures focused on enjoyment, authenticity, and social interaction rather than risk ((Gross et al., 2023; Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016); (Schlegelmilch & Ollenburg, 2013; Reynolds & Hritz, 2012; Gardiner et al., 2023).;(Chandel, 2022; Patterson, 2018; Alén et al., 2017).

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- **Personality**: Extraversion and a desire "to get to know oneself better" predict hard adventure choices (Gross et al., 2023).
- **Culture**: Youth share novelty seeker and social identities, suggesting a homogeneous global youth adventure market, but with cultural nuances in risk and nature perceptions (Janowski et al., 2025; Gardiner et al., 2023).

Role of SMEs and micro-enterprises in adventure tourism ecosystems

SMEs and micro-enterprises form the backbone of adventure tourism ecosystems. They are the primary providers of adventure-related services, key drivers of local value creation and innovation, and essential contributors to sustainability and community development, while simultaneously facing structural vulnerabilities due to limited resources.

Key roles within adventure tourism ecosystems:

- **Dominant local service providers** (guiding, accommodation, transport, equipment, food), particularly in rural and nature-based destinations, strongly shaping visitor experiences and destination competitiveness.
- **Anchors of local value chains and innovation** ecosystems, linking tourism with local producers, community enterprises, government, and education actors.
- **Custodians of place-based and cultural capital**, creatively using local landscapes, heritage, and knowledge to develop distinctive, low-impact adventure offerings.
- **Drivers of socio-cultural sustainability** through local sourcing, inclusion, education, and community collaboration.

Constraints and policy implications:

- SMEs face persistent **vulnerabilities** related to finance, skills, governance capacity, seasonality, and crisis exposure, as well as barriers to digitalisation and circular economy adoption.
- Effective adventure tourism ecosystems **require** targeted capacity building, leadership development, technology support, networking platforms, and supportive policy frameworks to enable SMEs to deliver high-quality, sustainable adventure tourism.

2. Social, environmental, and economic impacts of adventure tourism

Social and environmental impacts - Adventure tourism generates economic benefits, but concentrates visitors and activities in sensitive environments, creating significant environmental and social pressures.

Environmental pressures:

- Transport (car use and air travel) is the main source of emissions in European adventure tourism.
- High-altitude expeditions organized from Europe externalize carbon emissions to distant regions.
- Nature-based tourism damages vegetation and wildlife in

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protected and rural areas, requiring stricter regulation.

- Residents perceive both economic benefits and environmental degradation linked to tourism growth.

Overtourism and gentrification:

- Adventure gateways face overcrowding, commercialization, and rising housing costs, similar to urban overtourism.
- Short-term rentals and tourism-oriented businesses displace residential functions.
- Surf, ski and climbing towns risk following gentrification trajectories seen in major European cities.

Precarious employment:

- Adventure tourism relies heavily on seasonal, low-paid and insecure labour.
- Tourism employment often reinforces social and economic inequalities.
- A clear socio-economic divide exists between adventure tourists and tourism workers.

Potential for stewardship:

- Adventure activities can foster well-being and pro-environmental attitudes.
- Strong interpretation, environmental education, and community leadership can help shift impacts toward stewardship.

Economic impacts - Adventure tourism can generate strong local economic benefits, particularly in rural and peripheral regions, but these gains come with significant risks related to volatility, inequality, and long-term sustainability. Strategic planning is therefore essential to convert short-term growth into durable economic value.

Positive economic impacts:

- Generates high local spending on guiding, equipment, lodging, food, and transport, strongly benefiting small regional economies.
- Creates more local jobs per dollar spent than mass tourism and integrates more local firms into supply chains.
- Produces strong multiplier effects through indirect and induced income, infrastructure investment, and regional hub formation.
- Supports economic diversification by adding service- and experience-based activities to agricultural or resource-based economies.
- Community-based adventure and ecotourism models enhance local ownership, income stability, and long-term rural

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development.

Economic risks and challenges:

- Strong seasonality and tourism dependence create income instability, idle capacity, and weak firm growth.
- High vulnerability to external shocks (pandemics, geopolitics, economic crises) can trigger boom–bust cycles.
- Regulatory ambiguity increases uncertainty, compliance costs and discourages investment.
- Infrastructure gaps, safety risks, and environmental hazards constrain growth in many adventure regions.
- Unequal benefit distribution, economic leakage, and limited local capacity can shift value to external operators.

Importance of long-term economic planning for adventure tourism businesses:

- Long-term financial and crisis planning improves resilience, cash-flow stability, and recovery capacity during shocks.
- Strategic planning helps balance short-term revenues with long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability.
- Integrated planning linking infrastructure, risk management, community engagement, and environmental protection strengthens year-round demand and destination resilience.

Key strategic priorities for adventure businesses:

- Environmental stewardship and certification to protect natural assets, reduce costs and strengthen market positioning.
- Sustainable financial strategies to improve capital access, manage risk and enable green innovation.
- Community partnerships to secure local support, shared prosperity, and destination stability.
- Market competitiveness and innovation through investment in safety, product development, and circular economy practices.

3: New forms of more sustainable offer for adventure tourism

Adventure tourism is shifting from volume-based growth toward value-based models that prioritize regeneration of ecosystems and communities, high-quality experiences, and circular use of resources. Rather than merely minimizing harm, new adventure offers actively contribute to environmental restoration, social value creation, and long-term destination resilience.

Shift from volume- to value-based adventure tourism:

- Regenerative adventure tourism embeds conservation, habitat restoration, and social initiatives directly into travel experiences.
- Value-based models limit visitor numbers, prioritize locally owned SMEs, and target higher-yield segments to reduce pressure on

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	resources while increasing local economic benefits. **Sustainable adventure product innovation:** ● Emerging formats include regenerative trekking and biking, community-based eco-adventure trails, Adventure–wellness–ecotourism (AWE) retreats, managed off-roading and spatially planned soft-adventure activities. ● Small-group, longer-stay experiences reduce ecological pressure while increasing authenticity, learning, and local income. ● Local guides, homestays, and storytelling strengthen visitor experience, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. ● Combining adventure with cultural, agritourism and nature-based experiences diversifies income and supports SDG-aligned development. **Circular economy principles in adventure tourism:** ● Circular economy approaches replace linear tourism models with resource efficiency, waste reduction, and regenerative systems. ● Equipment reuse, repair, rental and sharing schemes reduce material impacts and appeal to eco-conscious travellers. ● Local sourcing and partnerships with farmers, energy providers and waste services shorten supply chains and strengthen local value chains. ● Digital platforms enable circular tourism ecosystems by connecting certified providers with conscious markets. **Evidence from sustainable adventure tourism cases:** ● Community-based trekking and eco-adventure models in Nepal, Sikkim and Ladakh show that local ownership, benefit-sharing, and visitor management can simultaneously support livelihoods and conservation. ● Circular economy applications in European and Chinese accommodations demonstrate how closed-loop systems reduce costs and environmental impacts while strengthening market positioning.
4. Innovation and digital tools for economic sustainability	Economic sustainability in adventure tourism is increasingly enabled by digital innovation, which supports efficiency, stable revenues, resilience and reduced environmental and social costs. ● **Operational efficiency and cost reduction:** Tools such as GPS, mobile apps, wearables, smart platforms, and data-driven booking systems improve safety, route planning, capacity management and pricing, lowering operational costs and reducing inefficiencies. ● **Market access and demand stimulation:** Digital marketing, social media, AR/VR previews, and platform-based distribution expand market reach, reduce perceived risk, and create new

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revenue streams, especially for small and rural adventure operators.

- **Sustainability and circularity support:** Digital monitoring, QR tracking and cloud-based systems enable resource efficiency, equipment reuse and circular business models that cut costs and appeal to eco-conscious visitors.
- **Risk management and resilience:** Real-time data, wearables and predictive analytics enhance safety, crisis response, and destination management, protecting brand value and long-term revenues.
- **Long-term competitive advantage:** Firms that combine digital leadership with eco-innovation and knowledge-sharing strengthen green absorptive capacity and achieve more durable, sustainability-driven competitiveness.

Digitalisation is not merely a technological upgrade but a strategic lever that improves efficiency, safety, sustainability, and profitability, even for small-scale adventure tourism businesses.

Innovation / tool area	How it supports economic sustainability in adven ture tourism
GPS, mobile apps, wearables	Improve safety, route planning, and self-guided expe riences, lowering guiding/operational costs and wide ning markets.
AR/VR experiences	Pre-trip previews and virtual tours reduce perceived risk, increase bookings, and allow new revenue streams (virtual excursions, offseason sales).
Digital marketing & social media	Targeted campaigns and user generated content increase demand at low cost, crucial for small adventure firms and community operators.
Smart platforms & big data	Platforms using AI, big data, IoT, and booking systems optimize pricing, capacity, and visitor flows, improving profitability and reducing overtourism risk.
Circular economy digital solutions	Digital monitoring of resources, waste, and energy helps adventure SMEs adopt circular models, cutting resource costs and appealing to eco-conscious visitors. Tools like QR tagging and cloud-based tools track gea r, transport, and rentals. Reduces loss and maximises asset life.
Blockchain & fintech	More efficient, transparent transactions and smart co ntracts for bookings and insurance reduce intermedi aries' fees and support trust in small adventure providers.
Knowledge management & digital leadership	Digital leadership plus knowledge sharing tools strengthen eco-innovation and "green absorptive capacity," building durable competitive advantage.

5. Tools for implementation

Adventure tourism enterprises are typically small, place-based, and intricately connected to local communities and ecosystems. For this reason, practical and transparent tools are essential to support economically and socially sustainable decision-making.

Several established frameworks support the design and management of

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sustainable adventure tourism businesses:

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria - The GSTC Criteria are the most widely recognised sustainability framework for tourism. For adventure tourism operators (e.g., trekking, rafting, climbing, wildlife tourism), the criteria provide a baseline standard for responsible operations, guidance for business model design, support for defining sustainability KPIs, preparation for certification processes.

UNWTO Sustainable Tourism Indicators - These indicators offer measurable tools to monitor sustainability performance, including ecosystem pressure, visitor impacts on trails, wildlife, and water resources, employment generation and local income creation.

The main environmental and risk management tools are:

- **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** - EIAs are particularly relevant when planning new adventure activities or infrastructure (e.g., trails, lodges, camps, access roads). They allow operators to assess impacts related to erosion, waste management, noise and emissions effects on rivers, wildlife, and ecosystems.
- **Adventure Risk Management (ARM)** and **ISO 21101 - ISO 21101 (Adventure tourism — Safety management systems)** defines minimum requirements for safety management systems for adventure tourism providers. Its objectives include enhancing safety performance, ensuring participant and staff safety, demonstrating safe practice, supporting legal compliance, ARM frameworks integrate safety planning, environmental limits, operational risk management.

Some ethical and responsible business practices are:

- **Fair-Trade Tourism Standards** - These support ethical supply chains, fair working conditions, and strengthen the credibility of sustainability claims in marketing.
- **Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA)** - is a global network of adventure tourism stakeholders (guides, operators, lodges, destination organisations). Through its standards, guidelines, and professional networks, ATTA promotes responsible business practices, environmental stewardship, community-based tourism approaches.
- There are also community engagement and benefit-sharing tools because sustainable adventure tourism relies heavily on strong local relationships. Practical tools include **community-based business models** (revenue-sharing agreements, community-owned lodges, guiding cooperatives and local sourcing (food, transport, crafts) and **Participatory Planning Workshops**. These support community involvement in route design, visitor capacity limits, cultural protocols and co-creation of experiences and conflict prevention

A structured stakeholder mapping process strengthens sustainable business development, starting with: Identify key actors (Community associations, land managers, local SMEs, transport providers, artisans, training centres; Map roles and benefits (Jobs, supply contracts, conservation agreements, co-governance arrangements); and link

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	partners to sustainability indicators.
6. Financing the change of business models	Transitioning toward more sustainable forms of adventure tourism often requires significant upfront investment. These investments may increase short-term financial pressure, therefore access to appropriate financing mechanisms is essential for enabling sustainability transitions, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises and community-based operators. **Financing the transition to sustainable adventure tourism can be supported through a combination of public, private, and community-based funding mechanisms**. **Public funding and grants** play a particularly important role in supporting green transitions, innovation, and rural development in tourism, as they are often designed to reduce the financial risk associated with sustainability investments. At the European and national levels, programmes such as **structural funds, rural development funds, and tourism innovation schemes** target small and medium-sized enterprises and climate action initiatives. **Destination Management Organisations and local governments** may also provide incentives or co-funding. Public and institutional funding at the European level further supports the transition toward sustainable adventure tourism. The **EU LIFE Programme** focuses on environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and climate action, and supports initiatives such as habitat restoration linked to tourism activities and climate adaptation in nature-based destinations. This programme is particularly suited to pilot projects and destination-level initiatives that aim to test and scale sustainable tourism practices. **Horizon Europe** is also highly relevant, as it supports innovation in sustainable tourism models, the development of digital tools for impact monitoring, and climate-resilient adventure tourism systems. In addition to public funding, **green finance and ethical banking** play an increasingly important role in enabling sustainability transitions at the enterprise level. Green finance refers to financial products that explicitly integrate environmental and social criteria into lending and investment decisions. Relevant instruments for adventure tourism include **green loans for investments** in energy-efficient buildings, renewable energy systems, low-emission vehicles, and certified equipment. **Ethical and cooperative banks** apply environmental and social screening criteria and may offer more favourable terms for sustainability-oriented tourism projects. Research shows that green finance instruments such as green bonds, concessional green loans, and sustainability-linked credit can have strong long-term positive impacts on sustainable tourism development and green growth. Access to these financial instruments requires documented sustainability plans, risk management measures, and impact indicators, which can strengthen overall business models and improve long-term financial credibility. For small-scale and community-based adventure tourism operators, alternative financing mechanisms such as **microfinance and cooperative models** are particularly important. In many destinations, small tourism firms rely on **informal microfinance institutions and savings groups** when conventional banks perceive tourism as a high-risk sector. Revenue-sharing and cooperative ownership models allow guides, local communities, and small suppliers to co-own assets or share profits, increasing local retention of economic benefits and reducing individual

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	financial risk. Research suggests that these models contribute to a more equitable distribution of economic benefits while supporting long-term local engagement in sustainable tourism development. Finally, **hybrid financing approaches** further strengthen the financial sustainability of adventure tourism initiatives. **Public–private partnerships** enable shared investment between local authorities, tourism businesses, and conservation organisations and are particularly useful for financing infrastructure, trail systems, and access to protected areas. Revenue-reinvestment models, in which a portion of tourism income is reinvested into conservation activities, community development projects, and training and monitoring systems, represent another effective approach. **By linking financial performance directly to environmental and social outcomes, these models enhance long-term sustainability while reinforcing local support and stakeholder collaboration**.
NETWORKING EXCERCISES (1 HOUR)	
Case Studies	Up to 3 case studies of Adventure tourism based on experience of participants
Creation of New Business Models Adventure tourism & Economic Sustainability	• CANVAS methodology • Business model template • Examples of more sustainable business models • Preparation of example for a new business model proposition (group work)
SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES (4 HOURS)	
Readings, videos, podcast, and other resources	**Scientific literature/scientific articles on the topic** World Tourism Organization & Adventure Travel Trade Association. (2014). *AM Reports, Volume 9: Global report on adventure tourism* (First printing). World Tourism Organization. https://www.untourism.int/archive/middle-east/publication/global-report-adventure-tourism Adventure Travel Trade Association & Switzerland Tourism. (2021). *High moments, low impact: Rethinking adventure travel's sustainability efforts*. Adventure Travel Trade Association. https://www.stnet.ch/app/uploads/2021/10/Knowledge-Report_No.1.pdf Adventure Travel Trade Association. (2024). *2024 adventure travel industry snapshot* (Annual research report). Adventure Travel Trade Association. https://learn.adventuretravel.biz/research/2024-adventure-travel-industry-snapshot/ Adventure Travel Trade Association & Switzerland Tourism. (2023). *Creating sustainable experiences in adventure travel* (Research report). Adventure Travel Trade Association. https://learn.adventuretravel.biz/research/creating-sustainable-experiences-in-adventure-travel **Videos and documentaries on the topic:** What Is Adventure Tourism? https://www.youtube.com/watch?

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	v=_VK6dJAfbM8 Adventure travel - sustainability by default, Gergana Nikolova - Green Destinations Conference 2022 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMYLC74HO9c). Hokkaido's Adventure Tourism: A Sustainable Journey (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fegeSTUlUAk). Sustainable Vs. Regenerative Tourism? - Resort 2 Travel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XMx9zV8ey4). How Adventure Travel Skyrocketed After Pandemic (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDSJ9gNqTqE) What Is Adventure Tourism And Why Should We Be 'Adventure Tourists'? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lh2xcai9ofM). **Books and other readings** Buckley, Ralf. (2010). Adventure Tourism Management. 10.4324/9781856178358. Available at: (PDF) Adventure Tourism Management Szromek, A. R. (Ed.). (2021). *Sustainable Business Models in Tourism*. MDPI Books. Available at: https://www.mdpi.com/books/reprint/3937-sustainable-business-models-in-tourism
Activity	**Reflective policy & strategy brief -** *Strengthening Economic Sustainability in Adventure Tourism: A Strategic Brief.* Participants prepare a 1,000–1,500 word **policy or strategy brief** addressed to one of the following: a destination management organisation/ a regional tourism authority / a network of adventure SMEs/ a training institution (VET context). The brief must: 1. Explain the economic importance of adventure tourism in rural/regional economies; 2. Identify 3 key economic risks (e.g., seasonality, external shocks, regulatory ambiguity, labour precarity); 3. Propose 5 strategic actions at destination level (e.g., diversification incentives, digital capacity building, green financing access, certification support, cooperative models); 4. Include measurable indicators for monitoring economic sustainability. Participants must reference insights from the self-directed learning materials. Optional alternative format 6–8 minute recorded video presentation simulating a professional advisory pitch. **Evaluation Criteria:** strategic clarity, policy relevance, evidence-based reasoning, practical and measurable recommendations. **Purpose:** Assesses higher-level synthesis, systems thinking, and the ability to operate at destination or governance scale.

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Business Model Template

Business Model Elements	Key Information
1 Customers Segments (Key Target Groups) *Description of main customers group, their demand potential and key needs*	**2 Values Provided** *What values will be cornerstones of the new business offer for the customer*
3 Revenue Sources *Description of key products* *What will be sold to customers?* *How customers will pay for the products / services (one-off, per night bases, subscription etc.)?*	**4 Cost Structure** *What are main costs for the planned model?* *How big are planned margins?* *What is the structure of the costs?*
5 Sales & Distribution Channels *Description of sales and distribution*	**6 Customer Relationships** *How to attract and maintain customers, what tools and strategies should be implemented.* *Marketing ideas, strategies and tools.*
7 Key Resources *Main resources owned to implement new business model* *Key resources to obtain necessary for the model implementation.*	**8 Key Partners** *Key partners in the business model (suppliers, sales partners etc.). Description of the main groups and relations with them.*
9 Implementation Schedule (Action Plan) *Description of key activities/task necessary to implement the model into business practice*	

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Conclusion

Ecotourism and environmental sustainability are not niche concepts reserved for protected areas or specialised operators. They represent a strategic pathway for tourism enterprises seeking resilience, relevance and long-term competitiveness in a rapidly changing operating environment.

Throughout this masterclass, participants have examined the environmental impacts embedded within tourism value chains and explored practical strategies to reduce resource use, strengthen biodiversity protection and enhance local environmental stewardship. More importantly, they have translated these insights into operational decisions and business model adjustments. Sustainability in this context is not limited to isolated improvements such as waste sorting or energy efficiency upgrades. It requires structural integration into:

- Core value propositions
- Service design
- Infrastructure planning
- Supply chain management
- Visitor communication
- Performance measurement

By developing a Green Action Plan and identifying measurable indicators, participants have moved beyond awareness and into structured implementation. This shift from intention to measurable progress is critical for credibility, regulatory readiness and market positioning.

Ecotourism demonstrates that environmental responsibility and business performance are not opposing objectives. When strategically embedded, environmental sustainability can:

- Reduce operating costs
- Strengthen destination relationships
- Enhance brand trust
- Improve risk management
- Attract sustainability-oriented market segments

The masterclass, therefore concludes with a clear message: environmental sustainability is not a constraint on tourism growth. It is a condition for sustainable competitiveness. The tools introduced here provide a framework for continuous improvement. The next step is consistent application, monitoring and refinement. In doing so, tourism enterprises contribute not only to environmental protection, but to the long-term resilience of their own business models and the destinations on which they depend.

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