



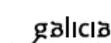
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THE "WILDSEA ATLANTIC OCEAN HERITAGE ROUTE" PROJECT

HANDBOOK FOR STAKEHOLDERS

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01 Why this Handbook?

Marine ecotourism is one of the key emerging pillars of the **Blue Economy**. As a dynamic driver and component of coastal tourism, it involves a wide variety of economic actors: diving & snorkelling centres, sea kayaking companies, whale watching operators, boat charter and other water-based operators, schools and training centres, water-sport equipment manufacturers and clothing or supplies shops, amongst many others. Hospitality services are also an integral part of the coastal tourism sector.

There are currently no specific economic figures to describe the size of the market for **marine ecotourism** in Europe, but its importance can be gauged through the existing **6 million divers** and **20 million snorkelers**¹ worldwide and by the **€2 billion global whale watching industry**². Nonetheless, its potential cannot be exclusively measured through market size, but also through the differentiating attributes that it sheds on our coastal destinations, improving their market position as dynamic, innovative, highly attractive and quality destinations; and on its profound contribution to the sustainable development of our coastal communities.

WILDSEA Europe is a public-private partnership of European tourism management organizations and operators working to collectively improve the competitiveness and sustainability of Europe's coastal tourism destinations through **marine ecotourism**. In its quest to realize its mission, members of **WILDSEA Europe** have earned the support of the **European Commission** to bring their efforts to a new level, creating the first **Sustainable Diving Route** along the **Atlantic: The WILDSEA Atlantic Ocean Heritage Route** (www.wildsea.eu/waoh).

This **Handbook** aims to convey the spirit and value of **WAOH!**, serving as a useful resource for **stakeholders interested in joining the Route**, supporting its development and benefiting from this European cooperation effort. While the Route has a clear commercial focus and is geared to give visibility to the best diving destinations in Europe and to support the marketing efforts of the business sector that fuels them, becoming a Route member is above all a strong signal of **environmental stewardship** and a of **commitment** to advance **sustainable tourism** in Europe, as well as a unique opportunity to take a leading role in its realization.

¹ The Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA)

² The global potential for whale watching. Marine Policy (Cisneros-Montemayor, Sumaila, Kaschner, Pauly, 2010).

02 What is the WAOH! Route?

2.1 The “WAOH! Route” concept

The **WILDSEA Atlantic Ocean Heritage Route** (“WAOH! Route”) is the first, European, **Sustainable Diving Route** connecting world-class diving sites from the extreme south in Portugal & Spain to the far north, encompassing Ireland & UK, which embody common European shared values and heritage. The Route will promote Europe’s 5,000 km of Atlantic coastline as a unique, transnational tourism itinerary and destination for divers and eco-tourists alike.

The Route seeks to distinguish Europe’s Atlantic destinations through their unique natural, cultural and historical values, adding new incentives to the practice of water sports (diving, snorkelling, sea kayaking) and other ecotourism activities (such as whale watching). The WAOH! Route will flow along the coasts of the **Algarve** and **Lisbon** (Portugal), **Galicia** (Spain), **Cornwall** (UK) and **Donegal** (Ireland) and will seek to include other Atlantic coastal tourism destinations in the future, to broaden its scope and content. The **WAOH Route** will connect world-class “**flagship**” **diving sites** and **destinations** that will encourage, create and unite synergy between water sports and Europe’s unique, Atlantic marine heritage of landscapes, wildlife and habitats in combination with a range of maritime cultural heritage.

The Route is a collaborative private-public network of **European tourism destinations** and **operators**, which jointly cater to practitioners of water sports and eco-tourists offering them an array of tourism products and services to experience **Europe’s maritime and natural heritage**:

- Travelecoology (Project Coordinator, ES) – www.travelecoology.com
- Donegal County Council (IE) - www.donegalcdb.ie
- Forum Oceano (PT) – www.forumoceano.pt
- Turismo de Galicia (ES) – www.turismo.gal
- Visit Cornwall (UK) - <https://www.visitcornwall.com>
- SUBMON (ES) – www.submon.org
- World Cetacean Alliance (UK) – www.worldcetaceanalliance.org

The Route will seek to enhance synergy of water sports (**diving & snorkelling and kayaking** – with over 25 million users worldwide) with upcoming marine eco-tourism opportunities (such as notably the €2 billion, global **whale watching** industry). It will notably promote synergy with Europe’s renowned maritime archaeology, museums, underwater tourism and gastronomy at the seaside, leading to an innovative offer of **new, transnational tourism products**.

The unique value proposition of the **WAOH! Route** can be summarized in one sentence:

“EXPLORING EUROPE’S ATLANTIC CULTURAL & NATURAL HERITAGE THROUGH MARINE ECOTOURISM: A DIVE INTO ADVENTURE”.

The Route not only highlights European tourism destinations as great “scenarios” for the practice of **diving, snorkelling, kayaking, surfing, coasteering, whale & dolphin watching** and other **wildlife watching** activities. It also delivers information on available diving and marine ecotourism experiences along the Route, provides experiential tourism packages for visitors and capitalizes on Europe’s Atlantic **cultural** and **natural heritage** to enhance the experience of diving and of engaging in other marine ecotourism activities in Europe. Therefore, the **discovery of maritime, cultural and natural heritage** is at the core of its value proposal. Destinations, experience providers and tourism experiences portrayed as part of the Route **have to be able to demonstrate a strong connection with Europe’s maritime, cultural and natural heritage and integrate it as part of its value proposal to visitors.**

2.2 Why WAOH? What will it do for European coastal destinations?

The WAOH Route has been developed to address some of the key challenges and opportunities currently faced by the coastal tourism industry in Europe, providing leverage for the successful promotion and sustainable development of Europe’s **Atlantic tourism destinations.**

Through the **WAOH Route**, the **Project Partners** seek to accomplish the following objectives:

1. **Encouraging cooperation amongst European coastal tourism destinations.** The great majority of nautical practitioners change their holiday destination every year in search of new nautical landscapes, going from one nautical destination to the next. This consumer behaviour supports the need to build a framework of cooperation amongst European nautical tourism destinations. Rather than competing with each other, Europe’s Atlantic destinations can realize huge opportunities by working together to attract visitors; to build customer loyalty by delivering a consistent, high-quality, sustainable offer and an excellent service across Atlantic destinations; and to capture nautical practitioners in Atlantic circuits (versus other competing, non-European destinations). The **WAOH Route** is one of the corner stones from which **WILDSEA Europe** intends to build that cooperation.
2. **Building a unique identity for Europe’s Atlantic destinations.** Europe portrays a rich and diverse offer of coastal tourism destinations. Each and every one of our thousands of coastal towns and villages has its unique history, culture and traditions. While thriving in this diversity, building a common, differencing identity that points to our comparative advantages

versus other non-European destinations is key to sustain our leadership in the tourism markets. Europe's Atlantic maritime and natural heritage cannot be imitated and it is difficultly rivalled. The **WAOH Route** will provide that common, unique identity to connect our Atlantic coastal tourism destinations with the invisible, yet persistent thread of our Atlantic maritime, cultural and natural heritage.

3. **Fostering co-opetition in a fragmented sector:** One of the main barriers that Europe's tourism sector faces to be competitive is the fragmentation of all the public and private agents involved, as well as a sector predominance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Despite the fact that Internet provides new opportunities for destinations and SMEs to access international markets, standing out in the digital universe remains a challenge. In order to achieve greater visibility and good positioning in the targeted segments it is necessary to join forces with other market players. In this context, there is a profound need to provide leadership and support to tourism destinations and SMEs, promoting collaboration to develop and market **competitive tourism products**. The **WAOH Route** delivers such leadership and support.
4. **Successfully addressing tourism seasonality.** Nautical sports attract international tourists in the summer time. During the rest of the year, the fall of volume in international visitors can be partially compensated by national tourists and residents that use existing nautical infrastructure and services, thereby contributing to maintaining economic activity at destination level. Through the **WAOH Route, WILDSEA Europe** aims at taking yet another step towards enhancing maritime culture and natural heritage as key ingredients of our European identity, creating a growing interest for nautical sports and marine ecotourism amongst our citizens.
5. **Advancing sustainability in the coastal tourism sector:** One of the key factors that determines European travellers' choice for a destination is the beauty of its **landscapes** and its **environmental quality**, according to the *Flash Eurobarometer* of the **European Commission**. Moreover, tourists are increasingly attracted by tourism experiences that are consistent with their evolving environmental values and that convey a positive message about preserving nature. Advancing environmental & social stewardship in coastal destinations will help us in our efforts to position our Atlantic destinations as world-class destinations and to continue to attract visitors from our target markets, building long-term customer loyalty.

The **WAOH Route** offers a unique platform to promote Europe's Atlantic tourism destinations. Through the Route, **WILDSEA Europe** opens a strategic gateway to facilitate collaboration, best practice exchange and the sharing of market intelligence amongst leading coastal destinations in Europe, which are currently investing in nautical sports and marine ecotourism as a strategic leverage for tourism.

2.3 The WAOH Route original landmark destinations

The following destinations have been chosen as the original **landmark destinations** that will conform the **WAOH! Route**:

- Inishowen (Donegal, Ireland)
- Fanad Peninsula (Donegal, Ireland)
- Donegal Islands (Donegal, Ireland)
- Donegal Bay (Donegal, Ireland)
- Newquay (Cornwall, UK)
- Falmouth Bay (Cornwall, UK)
- Isle Of Scilly (Cornwall, UK)
- South East Cornwall (Cornwall, UK)
- Mariña Lucense (Galicia, Spain)
- Costa de Morte (Galicia, Spain)
- Ria Arousa (Galicia, Spain)
- Cascais (Lisbon region, Portugal)
- Sesimbra (Lisbon region, Portugal)
- Portimão (Algarve, Portugal)

2.4 Tourism activities, services and resources featured in the WAOH Route

The **WAOH! Route** aims to give visibility to the rich array of **diving, kayaking and marine ecotourism activities** offered in Europe's Atlantic destinations, attracting visitors seeking to enjoy a **high quality, unique and environmentally responsible Atlantic tourism experience**. While the Route focuses primarily on diving activities, other complementary **marine ecotourism activities** that are attractive to divers and their non-diving travel companions are also featured.

The following **tourism companies** and **operators** are targeted for participation in the **WAOH! Route**:

- Diving & snorkelling centres.
- Kayaking companies.
- Whale & wildlife watching operators.
- Museums, interpretation centres and visitor centres connected to Atlantic maritime, culture and natural heritage.
- Other tourism routes that celebrate Europe's heritage along Atlantic destinations.
- Environmentally responsible hotels.
- Restaurants with a sound offer of local products.

Additionally, the **WAOH Route** will feature the following resources as part of the Route:

- **Diving sites:** Flagship diving sites located along the Route’s destinations.
- **Natural & cultural heritage:** Marine species and habitats; cultural heritage (i.e ship wrecks; mussel farms; underwater museums, etc.), which can be seen / visited / experienced in diving sites either from a boat, on board a kayak or when diving or snorkelling.
- **Other points of interest:** Relevant points of interest for natural, cultural & maritime heritage, including protected areas (such as national parks and reserves, EU Special Areas of Conservation, UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Biosphere Reserves), interpretation centres, museums, botanic gardens, historic nautical boats, maritime festivals, cultural events, urban art and/or tourism attractions of any kind that speak to the unique heritage of each destination (including any existing nautical Council of Europe cultural routes and other important natural and cultural areas of relevance).

2.5 The WAOH! Brand

The design of the **WAOH! Route** brand is part of the **WILDSEA Europe** (www.wildsea.eu) brand family and as such incorporates part of the elements of the **WILDSEA Europe** logo (i.e its blue “fin”). Building on this identity, the Route’s logo is built around the acronym of the project title, namely the "**Wildsea Atlantic Ocean Heritage Route**" (WAOH) and it seeks to recapture the sense of adventure conveyed by “travel stamps” of past times, inviting our target audience to “dive into adventure”.



Image: The WAOH Route Logo



Image: Variations of the WAOH Route Logo

03 Product development & promotion: Connecting diving and water based activities to natural & cultural heritage

3.1 Transforming natural & cultural heritage into added value for coastal tourism destinations and operators

Our European coastal destinations host a rich and diverse marine biodiversity, as well as being a thriving, although often unknown, source of history and cultural traditions that speak of our ancient connections to the Ocean and its seas. Together, these coastal destinations web an invisible network of **natural & cultural “hotspots”** that comes alive in its waters, museums, living fishing communities, pantheons devoted to famous mariners, ports and harbors, historical sites, exhibitions...a melting pot of ancient, traditional and modern maritime customs and knowledge that touches the curiosity and spirit of any sea lover.

The WAOH Route seeks to connect the great market potential of diving and other marine ecotourism activities to the inimitable **Atlantic natural & cultural heritage**, appealing to the passion of divers and marine ecotourists for the sea. The Route unveils such heritage and makes it visible and accessible to divers and ecotourists alike, signaling Atlantic Europe as a world-class destination for the practice of water sports - not only for its existing, state-of-the-art nautical infrastructure - but also for its unique natural values and for offering to experience a world of maritime history and culture that is unique to the **Atlantic**.

While some tourism operators already offer tourism activities with a strong built-in character that connects them to natural and cultural heritage, a wide array of water sports can potentially make that connection, transitioning into higher added value **marine ecotourism products and services**. Europe's coastal tourism entrepreneurs are building a great offer of coastal activities. Our coastline is alive with natural and cultural heritage. Let's bring them together! Just as shipwrecks of historical ships naturally make great diving sites, we hope that by bringing our Atlantic heritage to the forefront, tourism businesses and organizations will find new resources and incentives to come forward with new, innovative ways of providing a world-class service to the visitors of Atlantic destinations.

3.2 Developing transnational tourism packages: criteria

Beyond inspiring new ideas, the **WAOH Route** seeks to trigger product innovation in Atlantic destinations by becoming the “thematic backbone” for (initially) **2 transnational tourism products** that will combine the practice of **diving** with other **marine ecotourism activities (snorkeling, kayaking and whale watching)** that actively celebrate and promote the **natural** and **cultural heritage** of the **Atlantic Ocean** and its European coastal territories & communities. The intrinsic components of these 2 transnational tourism products will be determined through broad **stakeholder consultation**, but they are expected to combine the possibility of diving in different destinations along the Route and engaging in different activities over the course of several days (snorkeling, kayaking, whale watching, visiting maritime museums, tasting local, sea-related gastronomy, etc.), including alternatives both for divers and for their non-divers travel companions. These diving & marine ecotourism activities will be combined with additional, experiential ingredients and available tourism resources (as identified during the mapping effort), packaging them under unique “Atlantic” themes (to be determined). The product itinerary will take into consideration other relevant factors, such as connectivity between destinations, or availability of accommodation options.

The **activities** chosen as components of the transnational tourism products will cover a **wide range of activity types** (1-day activities vs. multiple day activities) and **target audiences** (expert / specialized vs. beginner / casual practitioner or family oriented) across the different activities profiled, allowing to build **complementarities** across targets and to reduce the seasonality of the Route, as well as creating **synergies** that support its successful commercialization.

These activities will be carefully selected taking into consideration both **service quality** and **environmental criteria** applied to tourism operators along the Route, such as:

- Holding a business permit to carry out coastal and marine tourism activities, and comply with all health & safety regulations.
- Complying with and respect all national regulation (legally binding; no open cases).
- Showing **environmental stewardship** and great disposition/commitment towards nature and environmental protection. Please read our guiding material **Best Practices for Marine Wildlife Watching** - http://www.wildsea.eu/ftp/library/00_WILDSEA_BEST_PRACTICE_MANUAL.pdf.
- Working in relation with coastal tourism activities and offer tourism services and experiences focused on the observation/appreciation of **marine wildlife** and/or coastal landscapes in the wild. **Cannot hold any wildlife in captivity for any reason** (display, harvest, etc., including rehabilitation).
- Engaging **trained staff** and/or **guides** who are **knowledgeable** on the local **flora** and **fauna** and/or **coastal ecosystems** and **landscapes** with which they interact.

Additionally, Route members will be expected to make progress towards:

- Integrating environmental education in their routine activities: clients receive information about marine life and/or the importance of protecting marine ecosystems.
- Striving to reduce their environmental footprint as much as possible.
- Striving to contribute to science and/or conservation: to be confirmed through collaboration with conservation projects in its area or through presentations in congresses / published papers / reports of specific projects.
- Striving to apply *citizen science* or have interest/a good disposition towards learning ways to engage its customers in citizen science through its activity in the future.

The Route will also serve to give visibility to a wide range of **diving** and **marine ecotourism** activities that can be enjoyed along the Route, and which are offered independently of the **packaged** transnational tourism products.

Stakeholders that engage in the Route will additionally be given the opportunity of taking part in a series of **Knowledge Sharing** sessions that will be held along the Route destinations in 2019.

If you would like your activities to be featured as part of the **WAOH! Route**, join **WILDSEA Europe** today and start working on your listings!

www.wildsea.eu

To list your activities in www.wildsea.eu you have to become a Member of the **WILDSEA Europe network**. To register as Member, please kindly follow this link: <https://www.wildsea.eu/log-in-area-for-members-membership>

Once you register and log-in with your Member account, you will be directed to your **Private Area**, where you will find the **tools to list your activities**. To add a listing from your Private Area, simply click on the button "**Add Experience**" and fill in the form with the information for each specific activity (for example, an activity would be a "Discover Scuba Diving" experience).

3.3 Your opinion counts! Help us shape the WAOH! Route

The **WAOH! Route** Project Partners will be celebrating an **International Stakeholder Workshop** in **Porto** (Portugal) in **November 14th, 2018**. The Workshop will be an opportunity to discuss the Route's core values, address product development opportunities and gather ideas and feedback on the planned short and long term development of the Route.

A selected group of **stakeholders** from the Route's landmark destinations will be invited to take part in this International Workshop. Participation of stakeholders is geared at ensuring a sound **bottom-up approach** to the conceptualization and development of the Route, ensuring that local knowledge is taken into account and integrated into the Route's **core identity, transnational tourism products, target markets** and associated **Marketing Plan**.

Stakeholders will be selected by means of a participatory process through which they will be asked to share available information on current initiatives undertaken at a destination or company level to address tourism sustainability. A questionnaire has been developed towards that end, which is available here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/waohroute>

In addition to participating in this survey, you can reach out to the Project Partner representing your destination anytime to convey your vision and ideas:

- **Donegal (Ireland):** Joy Harron | JoyHarron@donegalcoco.ie
- **Lisbon & Algarve (Portugal):** Toze Correia | toze.correia.peniche@gmail.com
- **Galicia (Spain):** Laure Gonzalez | laura.gonzalez-dopeso.portela@xunta.gal
- **Cornwall (UK):** Malcolm Bell | mal@visitcornwall.com

04 Promoting sustainable and responsible tourism in coastal destinations: The WAOH Route's destinations pledge to sustainability

The **WAOH! Route** destination management organizations, participating tourism operators and participating stakeholders will be expected to commit to the long-term implementation of a **shared vision** regarding the **sustainable development** of coastal tourism along the Route. The principles that guide such vision are structured around clear environmental, social and economic criteria, as described below.

Environmental Sustainability Criteria: Coastal and marine ecosystems must be maintained and preferably enhanced

The **WAOH! Route** destinations pledge to:

- With the help of scientific institutions, **promote scientific research** at destination (in collaboration with tourism operators, local NGOs, citizen science programs, etc.), assessing the ecological requirements of local marine ecosystems and habitats, and the carrying capacity for the activities taking place in the marine environment. Such research will guide and feed the development of tourism regulations at destination.
- Develop a joint **Action Plan** with local administration, tourism operators and other relevant stakeholders (fishing community, marinas, NGOs...) to **address threats to the coastal environment**.
- Have a **permit system in place** that regulates licenses for marine wildlife interactions according to the best available research and local knowledge (e.g. observations from fishermen or local operators) and that includes regular assessment and re-application. There should be a clear process for any breaches, including consequences for the offenders, as well as mechanisms to encourage compliance.
- **Develop and review guidelines or regulations for interactions between humans and marine wildlife** (might be improved from national regulation, if it already exists) **and for more general operations** (e.g. recycling on

board, using non-lead paint on boats, adequate change of oil, correct anchoring, etc.). Do this collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders, and adapted to seasons and specificity of destination.

- **Develop and review guidelines or regulations for the interaction between humans and the marine wildlife** (might be improved from national regulation, if it already exists), **and for more general operations** (e.g. recycling on board, using non-lead paint on boats, adequate change of oil, correct anchoring, etc.). Do this collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders, and adapted to seasons and specificity of destination.
- **Regularly share best practices between operators** with variable experience, or organize training sessions.
- **Ensure there is an active and on-going process to improve long-term sustainability** using recognised tools: for example, the *European Sustainable Tourism Indicator System*, or the *Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Criteria for Destinations*.
- **Promote more general sustainability initiatives** benefitting the marine environment; for example:
 - Encourage reduction in energy use and adoption of renewable technologies.
 - Measure and reduce carbon emissions.
 - Improve marine and terrestrial biodiversity.
 - Reduce water pollution.
 - Reduce plastics, discarded fishing gear and other solid waste entering the waterways (reduce use, encourage recycling, promote community vents to clean beaches and rivers, etc.)
 - Train staff on sustainability.
 - Participate in patrol programmes or reporting procedure to protect critical habitat.
 - Prioritise local, sustainable produce and local restaurants to provide food for visitors.

Social Sustainability Criteria: Local communities are recognised as key stakeholders and are involved in the process, achieving an Ocean Literate “pride” on the local marine heritage

The **WAOH! Route** destinations pledge to:

- **Inform the local community** about the Route and its initiatives through available local channels: radio, local news, public talks, events, citizen science initiatives, etc.

- **Provide information to visitors** that conveys the environmental, cultural, and historical importance of the marine/coastal heritage of the area.
- **Engage**, together with tourism operators, **in community events promoting marine conservation** and encouraging a sense of pride, heritage, history, sustainability and legacy, such as:
 - School outreach programmes.
 - Community beach clean-ups.
 - Citizen science projects.
 - Opportunities for local students to interact with the marine environment (going out whale-watching, snorkelling, studying the shore, etc.).
 - Award ceremonies for students.
 - Collaboration with local artists.
 - Organization of festivals or film nights.
 - Use important moments in the calendar year to celebrate the marine environment and wildlife (arrival of basking sharks, nesting puffins, moulting seals...).
- Address **accessibility** of citizens with reduced mobility or with any disabilities and **inclusion** of economic disadvantaged citizens in marine education and ecotourism initiatives.

Economic Sustainability Criteria: Sustainable livelihoods are created, generating employment and financial benefits in the community, to provide a clear demonstration of the economic value of responsible interaction with the marine environment

The **WAOH! Route** destinations pledge to:

- **Facilitate the employment of local youth** in the sector, encouraging the involvement of local university students (biology, marine science, tourism, naval engineering, administration, etc.).
- **Promote local businesses** related with marine/coastal experiences, both tourism operators and indirectly related services (transport, accommodation, local crafts, food suppliers, etc.).
- Prioritise the **use of local, sustainable products and services** that benefit local employers, and the employment of local youth.

05 About WILDSEA Europe

The **WAOH! Route** is an action lead by Partners of the **WILDSEA Europe** alliance, which seeks to promote and empower **marine ecotourism** in Europe.

Launched as a prelude to the **International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development**, www.wildsea.eu aims to give market visibility to a rich choice of ecotourism experiences in Europe, while building a pan-European network of tourism operators who actively nurture love and respect for the Ocean through sustainable, responsible tourism.

Other key elements of our **mission** include empowering small, local businesses of coastal communities, supporting sustainable livelihoods, enhancing ocean literacy through *citizen science* and preserving our marine ecosystems.

Get the full picture at:

www.wildsea.eu



This Handbook is part of the WAOH Route Project, which has received funding from the European Union. Its content has been produced by:

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