

Ecological aspects of sustainable tourism development – the case of Green Sea Safari

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In this engaging session, Marlena Cukteras explores how biodiversity, local engagement, and environmental awareness form the foundation of sustainable tourism along Croatia's Dalmatian coast. Through inspiring examples such as the *Green Sea Safari* initiative, she demonstrates how tourists, students, and local communities can actively contribute to protecting marine and coastal ecosystems while enriching their travel experience. This session is ideal for learners interested in ecotourism, community-based tourism models, and practical ways to integrate sustainability into tourism operations.

Presentation script (introduction, objectives...conclusion)

Introduction

Two weeks ago, I attended an international conference in Opatija, Croatia, where we spent two full days discussing a single but crucial topic — *sustainable development* and how to implement *year-round tourism* across the Mediterranean.

Although I am a physicist and marine scientist, my work also involves teaching ecology and environmental sciences to students — many of whom will soon work in the tourism and hospitality industry. It's essential that they understand the balance between economic, social, and ecological needs — the foundation of sustainable tourism.

Main Content

In this presentation, I'll connect biodiversity and tourism through the example of Dubrovnik and its surrounding region, the Dalmatian coast.

This area is exceptionally rich in ecosystems — from caves and wetlands to rivers, mountains, and islands — all of which form the natural base for sustainable development.

Our preserved nature, abundant water resources, and Mediterranean climate give us the potential to be recognized as a true *sustainable tourism brand*.

Part of my work involves field research — especially on birds and wetlands — where tourist trails often overlap with bird migration paths. This shows how ecological research, education, and tourism can coexist. Collaboration with locals is also key: sustainable development is only possible when we connect local communities, private businesses, and the public sector.

Let me show you how visitors can experience Dubrovnik and its surroundings sustainably — not just for one day in the Old Town, but by engaging in eco-friendly activities such as canoe or photo safaris, kite surfing, and enjoying local food produced through traditional, low-impact methods. These activities not only preserve nature but also bring economic value and awareness to the region's biodiversity.

The Green Sea Safari Project

Our best practice example is the *Green Sea Safari*, born from a conversation among three friends — myself, Mario (a local SME owner), and Alan (an NGO volunteer). We wanted to create tours that combine nature protection and tourism. Instead of traditional sightseeing tours around Dubrovnik's Elafiti Islands, we introduced eco-actions where tourists spend part of the trip collecting marine litter.

Each tour includes learning about biodiversity, meeting locals, and enjoying the sea — but also taking 30–45 minutes to collect waste found along the coast. We've signed agreements with cleaning companies and built a system that turns tourists into "small heroes for the planet."

The initiative has grown rapidly: we collect data on the waste, study its origin, and measure participants' awareness and satisfaction. Families, students, and locals all take part, and the tours are open throughout the summer.

Beyond the tours, we continue educating young people about sustainability, involving them in field trips and international presentations — from local festivals to exhibitions in New York, where students present the Green Sea Safari through VR and 3D models. The initiative has been featured in documentaries, tourism awards, and international TV programs, and now aims to expand across the Mediterranean.

Conclusion

The Green Sea Safari shows that sustainability is not an abstract concept — it's a living practice that connects nature, people, and tourism.

By engaging tourists directly in conservation, collaborating with locals, and integrating education into tourism, we can achieve a true balance between economic, social, and ecological needs — the essence of sustainable tourism.