

AÇORES

no rumo da sustentabilidade





MANAGEMENT POLICY FOR TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY IN THE AZORES

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1. Framework

1.1 Sustainability in the Azores

The Azores are located in the North Atlantic, scattered over a distance of 600 kilometres in length. The nine islands of the Archipelago are of volcanic origin and are divided in three geographical groups: the Eastern Group, composed of Santa Maria and São Miguel, the Central Group composed of Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico and Faial islands, and the Western Group composed of Corvo and Flores islands.

The Azorean territory has a **multiplicity of natural, historical and cultural resources** that make it unique. For that reason, for more than two decades initiatives for their protection and preservation have been prioritised. This vision has led to the continuous development of sustainability policies in the Region, for example resulting in the classification of almost 25% of its land as Protected Areas so as to best conserve the prevailing nature and biodiversity, managed by the Natural Parks established on each island in the archipelago.

Beyond awarding these protective statutes, sustainable policies have also targeted the production and management of energy, monitoring noise and air quality as well as waste and water supply, land and country planning in addition to carrying out environmental promotion and education initiatives to enhance the indigenous products, heritage and culture of the Azores.

Within this policy framework, the Government of the Azores seeks to maintain sustainability as a priority and core theme for the Region as reflected in a set of initiatives due for implementation over forthcoming years, which include highlights such as the “LIFE AZORES NATURA – Active and Integrated Protection and Management of the Natura 2000 Network” project, classified as the largest conservation project ever designed for the Azores and due for development over the next nine years.

Furthermore, there has been a set of land planning policies that seek to safeguard and value the environmental landscape and its natural resources with the Azores having taken a pioneering stance on this issue through the publication of Resolution no. 135/2018, of 10 December, thus contributing to the protection and management of the Azores.

The objectives of the Regional Government include continuing to **deepen this approach** to which tourism makes a core contribution, taking into account the growing importance of this sector to the Azorean economy. This multidisciplinary approach enables working on the sustainability of tourism in order to achieve a greater level of sustainability for the Azores as a whole.

1.2 Tourism Sustainability in the Azores

In the Azores, **tourism has, in recent years, gained an increasingly important role in the dynamic of the local economies and boosting their level of attractiveness**. In 2018, the Azores registered approximately 840,000 arrivals and 2.56 million nights spent with both figures setting new records.

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Simultaneously, the relative contribution of the tourism sector to the Azores economy has risen: from 6.9% to 8.9% of total Gross Added Value of companies between 2014 and 2016 (as regards accommodation, restaurant and other similar companies).

This evolution stems in large part from the **differentiated character of the tourism services range across this destination** leveraged by nature. The positioning of the Azores as a nature destination, across both the active and contemplative facets coupled with the complementary nautical, cultural and health and wellbeing tourism sectors, has strengthened its competitiveness in the tourism market.

These **inclusive norms of sustainability** seek to deepen the preservation and economic valuation of the cultural and natural heritage based on a balance between the environmental, cultural, social and economic dimensions. This seeks to ensure the Azores raises its profile still further as a leading tourism destination, distinguished for its sustainability, striving to boost the prevailing level of social and territorial cohesion alongside a clear commitment to sustainable development.

These norms, aligning with 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the UN Agenda 2030, reflect the priorities for tourism in the Azores:

- quality education (SDG 4);
- renewable and accessible energies (SDG 7);
- dignity at work and economic growth (SDG 8);
- reduction in inequalities (SDG 10);
- sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11);
- production and sustainable consumption (SDG 12);
- climate changes (SDG 13);
- protection of marine and land life (SDG 14 and 15);
- creation of partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in tourism (SDG 17).

Thus, the tourism development of the Azores should necessarily incorporate, within an environment of excellence allied with energy sustainability, a strategy for safeguarding the natural resources that drive the tourism activities of the Azores archipelago as a Nature-based destination.

2. Azores DMO

The **Management Structure for the Sustainability of the Azores Tourist Destination** (hereafter Azores DMO), was founded in 2018 by Government Resolution no. 58/2018 of 15 May 2018, is the entity responsible for the sustainable management of the destination under the auspices of the Regional Secretary for Energy, the Environment and Tourism (SREAT), the Regional Government body responsible for tourism. Azores DMO thus constitutes the SREAT entity with the mandate for planning, organising, implementing, managing and supervising the certification of the Azores as a Sustainable Tourism Destination as well as implementing the strategy for the tourism sector in the Azores based upon PEMTA – the Strategic Marketing Plan for Tourism in the Azores.

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The launching of this entity emerges in a context in which **tourism is increasingly becoming a fundamental sector to the region** and when the development of the Azores destination needs to **stand out for its sustainability**.

Azores DMO is therefore responsible for:

- a) Planning, organising, implementing and supervising the certification process as a Sustainable Tourism Destination in accordance with the criteria of EarthCheck, a certified member of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC Destination Criteria), based on the guiding principles of the UN World Tourism Organization and the Sustainable Development Goals;
- b) Preparing and promoting the implementation of the planning, management and monitoring tools for planning, managing and monitoring the Sustainability of the Azores as a Tourism Destination;
- c) Coordinating, dynamizing activities and organising the operations of GASDTA –the Monitoring Group for the Sustainability of the Azores as a Tourism Destination and FASDTA – the Monitoring Forums for the Sustainability of the Azores as a Tourism Destination and FCSDTA – the Charter Forum for the Sustainability of the Azores as a Tourism Destination;
- d) Preparing the proposals to submit to CCSDTA – the Consultation Committee for the Sustainability of the Azores as a Tourism Destination, to GASDTA, to FASDTA and to FCSDTA as well as accompanying the subsequent stages;
- e) Managing and operationally implementing the dynamics to the FCSDTA indicators and objectives;
- f) Undertaking the administrative management of the sustainable tourism destination certification processes and consequent renewals of such certification;
- g) Fostering the adoption of innovative individual or corporate practices through the awarding of incentives or other benefits;
- h) Fostering the implementation of the Strategic and Marketing Plan for Tourism in the Azores through planning, coordinating and implementing the measures and actions stipulated in that strategic plan;
- i) Monitoring the implementation of PEMTA.

The Azores DMO initiatives are to be coordinated with the population, members of the private and the public sectors (either municipal authorities or the various departments of the Regional Government), as well as associations and NGOs.

3. Objectives

Azores DMO is dedicated to **achieving the sustainability of the Azores destination** taking into consideration its intention of being “international recognised as preserved volcanic islands, with exuberant nature, exclusive and of a mystic beauty”. This clearly renders the Azores DMO commitment towards guaranteeing that destination development incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals within the context of Agenda 2030 and is applicable to all the tourism initiatives and actions in the Azores as well as DMO and its team.

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4. Commitment

Azores DMO commits to:

- Following the national and international sustainability guidelines, such as the World Tourism Code of Ethics;
- Defining Tourism related objectives that contribute towards sustainable development and, consequently, to achieving continuous improvements in the EarthCheck indicators;
- Integrating considerations interrelated with sustainability into the strategic and operational management of tourism in the Azores;
- Consulting, involving and raising awareness among local communities, partners and economy actors in the tourism chain of value in the decision-making around managing the sustainable development of the Azores destination, including the sustainability indicators, thereby enabling them to contribute towards obtaining the targets defined for the destination;
- Promoting the Azores Tourism Sustainability Management policy across all actors participating in the tourism sector;
- Fostering and encouraging the sustainability of the destination, establishing targets for the certification key performance areas (KPAs):
 - energy management and efficiency;
 - greenhouse gas emissions;
 - air quality protection, noise and light pollution controls;
 - management of drinking water resources;
 - management of wastewaters and sewage;
 - management and protection of ecosystems and biodiversity;
 - land planning;
 - transports;
 - solid waste management;
 - management of environmental harmful substances;
 - social and cultural management;
 - economic management.
- Stimulating and fostering the awareness and empowerment of our partners and economic actors in local sustainability;
- Involvement in innovative local initiatives and projects that strive to enhance environmental, cultural, social and/or economic sustainability and ‘green experiences’ – for residents and tourists;
- Boosting the employability of residents in tourism activities;
- Identifying the risks associated with tourism activities, mitigating their negative impacts through their prevention but while also enabling their positive impacts;
- Monitoring trends in tourism from the perspective of environmental, cultural, social and economic sustainability and providing precise information in promotional materials;
- Promoting and supervising the implementation of the Regional Program for climate change, specifically those climate change adaptation measures for the tourism sector.

Azores DMO **also commits to review the principles** that support the directives on destination sustainability on an annual basis and **to share them with the actors** intervening directly or indirectly in their management.

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8 August 2019

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