



2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: The Celebration of European Day of Parks in Estonia

Destination Name: *(include any state, province or region)*

Lahemaa

Country: Estonia

Submitter name: Kaisa Linno

Email address: kaisa@kolgakyla.ee

Position: Head of Lahemaa Tourism Association

Nomination Category: *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Islands & Seaside
- Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID -19
- Post COVID -19 recovery
- One of the 17 SDGs* *(if yes, which one)* Click or tap to choose

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: <http://tourism4sdgs.org/>

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DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

- The European Day of Parks has been celebrated annually in European protected areas since 1999. Europarc Federation, the European network of protected areas and the initiator of the tradition announced that due to the 2020 Corona virus pandemic the celebration of the day should be done online this year.
- The Environmental Board, the administrator of all Estonian protected areas and the Estonian partner in Europarc Federation, is responsible for the celebrations of the European Day of Parks and generally organises some free educative hikes. Because of the pandemic they were not allowed to do anything in nature this year.
- In Estonia people started going to nature frantically from the very beginning of the pandemic. They didn't have enough information where to go and more popular hiking trails became really overloaded. So instead of avoiding the crowds, people got unsafely close to each other in nature.
- Tourism sector suffered greatly from the pandemic. All nature tourism entrepreneurs were out of job, all bookings were cancelled. Estonia had managed to survive the pandemic relatively well but when the restrictions became less strict, customers did not dare to use any services.

Methods, steps and tools applied

Since Estonian restrictions were less severe and people crammed hiking trails, nature tourism service providers in and around protected areas took an initiative and used the European Day of Parks for a campaign to open the post-corona season and to direct visitors in small groups to less populated places in nature. This way being in nature was safe and educative for visitors and profitable to local service providers.

Lahemaa Tourism Association came up with the idea and after discussing it with local stakeholders, decided to invite other protected areas to participate and make the campaign national. Visit Soomaa, the cluster of another national park became a partner and together the national organisation was administered with the help of involved state agencies. This way Lahemaa Tourism Association co-ordinated the campaign both in Lahemaa and all over Estonia.

A national team was formed a month before the event, two online meetings were held before and one after the event to discuss the campaign thoroughly. All stakeholders worked



for a joint accomplishment. Each of 60 entrepreneurs had to take responsibility of his own event, think how to operate safely and to spread information about nature protection, sustainable tourism and protected areas. State agencies helped in compiling the introductory texts and rules for the entrepreneurs, observing that the regulations were followed, and writing promotional articles both in Estonian and English.

Promotion was mostly on the internet. Each service provider compiled his own event and Facebook promotion. These were advertised together nationally and cross marketing was used. Articles were published in regional newspapers. Target groups (hikers' and nature-lovers' groups) were informed directly. All the events were listed in the webpage of Estonian protected areas (<https://kaitsealad.ee/et/uudised/kaitsealade-paev-24-mail>) administered by the Environmental Board. Estonian Tourism Board published an article in their front page (<https://www.puhkaeestis.ee/et/puhka-eestis/eesti-kaitsealad-avavad-24-mail-kulastushooaja>) and spread the news in social media in Estonia and abroad.

On 24th May 60 European Day of Parks themed events were organised where more than 770 guests were able to visit 35 protected areas in small groups with local guides on hiking, canoeing and other programmes.

In Lahemaa, the oldest and biggest National Park in Estonia, a dozen hikes took place, from shorter cultural history walks to longer Nordic walking tours. Other activities included manorial and cinematography heritage, management of semi-natural communities and appreciation of edible flowers. Local restaurants were open, some offering take-away picnics.

After the event, feedback questionnaires were compiled and sent both to entrepreneurs and customers. 37 customers and 24 entrepreneurs answered. Everyone was either satisfied or very satisfied with the campaign. Service providers were happy to open the season together and to do co-operation with each other and with the state agencies. Many of them mentioned that this was the first time of co-operation where they were considered as equal partners. Customers praised good organisation, warm welcome and interesting stories they had heard.

Key success factors

The campaign was a great success. A national event was organised within a month in a very difficult situation. And every party involved was very satisfied with the result. The effectiveness was completely dependent on partnership.

It was a grassroots initiative where 60 service providers were involved. All of them took responsibility and contributed to the mutual success. The entrepreneurs were co-ordinated by Lahemaa Tourism Association and Visit Soomaa and supported by following big public organisations:



Europarc Federation provided this year's overall concept, the topic "Parks For Health", and the promotion banner.

The Environmental Board, together with other Estonian state agencies, such as the State Forest Management Centre and the Tourist Board, supported the entrepreneurs in organisation of the campaign and helped with promotion.

Estonian University of Life Sciences watched that necessary rules were observed, helped to collect feedback and make analyses after the event. Estonian Hiking Association and NGO Estonian Rural Tourism helped in spreading the word.

Lessons learned

- The campaign was a perfect combination of co-operation. Small organisations can be brave, are free and fast in their decisions and actions. Big state institutions have the volume and confidence of people.
- The biggest challenge during the campaign was to interpret the restrictions of the pandemic. The official regulations were a bit vague. The challenge was overcome by compiling specific rules with state agencies and distributing these to each service provider. Everyone had to take responsibility of his own event and think how to operate safely.
- Great things can be done without any money. The campaign had no budget, all co-ordination was done as voluntary work, no money was spent on promotion.
- People are willing to pay for spending time in nature. Generally national environmental events are free of charge. This time all the events were payable. But nobody complained. On the contrary, customers admitted that they had received good service for their money.
- The campaign was innovative and inspiring also in the sense that new attractive products were invented especially for the day that are now in use.

Results, achievements and recognitions

- The campaign was a great success. Nature tourism entrepreneurs could open the post-corona season much faster and wider than expected.
- The initiative was much appreciated both by the public and the state agencies and all parties involved hope that this will become a new annual tradition.
- The campaign saved not only the Day of the Parks but the whole month of nature protection because this year state organisations were not able to implement their usual nature events.
- The message of Day of Parks and sustainable tourism was spread much wider than previous years because much more stakeholders were involved.
- As the co-operation between entrepreneurs and state institutions worked out so well, other issues have already been raised to be dealt with together. E.g. in autumn the problem with guides in protected areas will be discussed.



- With organising the event, most Estonian nature tourism entrepreneurs were mapped and brought together. Co-operation between them has begun.
- The model is well transferable to other destinations, because it was very simple, easily and fast implemented. It was innovative in the sense that public sector gave its duties over to private sector, taking itself a helping and advising role. The only crucial part is the willingness of state institutions to give away their responsibilities.
- The campaign has already been propagated as a good practice story in Europe. Estonian University of Life Sciences made a case study of it in their international Erasmus+ ViSEnet project. Europarc Federation wrote a whole paragraph of Estonian on site events in their European overview of the day: (<https://www.europarc.org/news/2020/05/european-day-of-parks-online-events/>). Estonian Tourist Board used the campaign in their international post-corona social media communication.

Additional references

Photo gallery of the events in Estonia:

https://www.facebook.com/pg/loodusturism/photos/?tab=album&album_id=3175636069141573&ref=page_internal

Video of the events in Lahemaa: <https://vimeo.com/425268952>

