## 2021 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

### Title of the Story: Meerssen launches digital Node-to-Node Hiking Trail Network

**Destination Name:** Meerssen, Limburg  
**Country:** The Netherlands  
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**Nomination Category:** (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

- ☐ Localizing the destination supply chain  
- ☐ Decarbonizing the destination supply chain  
- ☐ Culture & Communities  
- ☐ Environment & Climate  
- ☒ Nature & Ecotourism  
- ☐ Tourism Reset & Recovery

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*Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module “Good Practice Story”.*

*Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact top100@greendestinations.org*
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
What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice? Click to add your text

The region of Zuid-Limburg’s current network of hiking trails (covering 1,800 kilometres) consists of a series of multi-coloured wooden signposts, in which each trail is assigned its own colour. The trails are static, laid out so that they stay within municipal boundaries, and cannot be adapted to suit the wishes of individual hikers. The system has been in use for 40 years now, no longer meets modern-day requirements, and is due for replacement. The sixteen municipalities that make up Zuid-Limburg, which includes Meerssen, and DMO Visit Zuid-Limburg started discussing the implementation of a contemporary digital Node-to-Node Hiking Trail Network in 2017. The Node-to-Node Hiking Trail Network has now been taken into use in Midden-Limburg and Noord-Limburg.

The system: a digital Node-to-Node Hiking Trail Network
Trail numbers are selected on the map of a chosen hiking area using the RouteYou app or via the Visit Zuid-Limburg website. Clicking these connects the various points you have selected, thus creating a trail. The length of the trail is also shown (in kilometres). The trail numbers are physically shown on small signs in the relevant area. A small map showing the nodes in the direct vicinity can be found at every node.

Methods, steps and tools applied
How was the good practice implemented? Click to add your text

In March 2021, the sixteen municipalities comprising the region of Zuid-Limburg signed the ‘Node-to-Node Hiking Trail Network’ Partnership Agreement for the realization of a new digital network of hiking trails in Zuid-Limburg. The costs of the project, funded by the participants and the Province of Limburg, amount to 1.5 million euros. Visit Zuid-Limburg, in conjunction with the sixteen municipalities of Zuid-Limburg, is charged with the actual implementation of this project, in which the region is showcased as the Netherlands’ number one hiking paradise. The procedure for putting the actual implementation of the project out to tender has already been initiated.
2020 saw the adoption of the ‘Regional Plan for promoting the Leisure Economy of Tourist Destination Zuid-Limburg by 2030’. Thanks to the above plan and the fact the Zuid-Limburg is a fantastic area for hiking, it became clear that the time had come to realize a digital network of hiking trails. A brief explanation is outlined below.

**Regional Plan for promoting the Leisure Economy of Tourist Destination Zuid-Limburg by 2030**

Meerssen and sixteen other municipalities comprising Zuid-Limburg consider and promote their region as one big tourist destination. To do justice to this idea, they joined forces and, in cooperation with the Province of Limburg, drew up a regional ‘Plan for promoting the Leisure Economy of Tourist Destination Zuid-Limburg by 2030’ in 2020. The primary goals for Zuid-Limburg as a tourist destination in regard of the leisure economy are identified and the strategy for achieving these goals are determined in this plan.

According to this plan, recreation and tourism must contribute as much as possible to the quality of life and economic vitality of the entire region. Any negative effects of tourism must be mitigated to the greatest extent possible. The most significant negative effect for Zuid-Limburg is that it is overcrowded at certain times and in certain places. To solve this, it is important to work on solutions for this area that are tailored to the local situation, such as relocating hiking and cycling routes and creating new connections so that trail-related recreation can be better distributed across the entire area.

**Zuid-Limburg: a hiker’s paradise**

Hiking is the foremost activity of every tourist visiting Zuid-Limburg and is also popular among the region’s residents. Recreational walking became increasingly popular in Zuid-Limburg particularly during the pandemic, when travelling abroad was no longer matter-of-course and leisure activities had to be sought closer to home.

Based on an intention to promote high-quality rather than mass tourism in Zuid-Limburg, the region decided to invest in optimizing its offering with regard to recreational walking and cycling.
Lessons learned
While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome? Click to add your text

Zuid-Limburg has only just started implementing its digital Node-to-Node Hiking Trail Network system. The introduction of this network in the regions of Midden-Limburg and Zuid-Limburg has taught us that the speed and success of the project strongly depend on the focus of the participants. Explicitly stating that the success of the project largely depends on the extent to which the agreements made between the participants are met in the ‘Node-to-Node Trail’ Partnership Agreement is expected to significantly reduce the chances of participants failing to meet their obligations.

Results, achievements and recognitions
What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice? Has it received any rewards? Click to add your text

The system was developed to meet the following goals:
Hikes can be planned entirely digitally and can now start from the hiker’s front door. As all hikes start from home, there is no longer any reason for hikers to travel to a specific starting point first. The advantage to this is that people will no longer be inclined to travel to the starting point of their hike by motor vehicle, which is of benefit to the environment. Hikers can determine the length of their trail independently, in which municipal boundaries and country borders are no longer relevant: as a result, Zuid-Limburg will become a single destination.

Themed trails can be selected, such as the Meerssen Vineyard Trail, which was presented in 2021. Other examples are the Via Belgica Trail and the Camini Trail in Meerssen, which are both in the process of being digitized.

There are also plenty of opportunities along the trails for entrepreneurs. Proprietors of hotels and restaurants, for example, can use a node in their vicinity as a starting point to create their own trails or special packages for hikers.

The Node-to-Node Trail Network will help Zuid-Limburg prevent peaks in tourist activity in specific areas by ensuring a better distribution of tourism throughout the region.

The existing node-to-node networks of Echt-Susteren, the Belgian Voer Region and the Aachener Wald can be linked to Zuid-Limburg’s new system.
The networks of the Aachen Municipal Region and Selfkant (in Germany), which are currently in the pipeline, will also be connected in the near future. This will create a fantastic network of hiking trails that runs from the northern part of Limburg all the way to Luxembourg.

Collaboration has been sought with various nature conservation organizations such as Limburgs Landschap, Staatsbosbeheer (The Dutch Forestry Commission), and Natuurmonumenten (The Dutch Nature Conservation Foundation), as well as the agricultural sector, in order to take nature into consideration in the development of the digital network of hiking trails. This is particularly important during breeding seasons, for example.

Large billboards for the provision of information will also become a thing of the past, thus avoiding visual pollution in areas of natural beauty and public spaces.

The actual work on the implementation of the system is expected to start in the second quarter of 2022.

**Additional references**

Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from Youtube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/One Drive) download URL.

https://partners.visitzuidlimburg.nl/projecten/knopen-lopen/