

Press information

**“National Parks and Benefits: Ensuring Socioeconomic Benefits in Regions Through Sustainable Governance of Protected Environmental Territories”
New Project Announced**

The Latvian rural tourism association Country Traveller has become involved in a project that is aimed at facilitating tourism-related co-operation in the territories of national parks so as to create new, high-quality and diverse tourism projects and to allow local residents to make use of the resources of national parks. The project has received support from the EU Interreg IV Programme B, and it involves 18 partners from countries around the Baltic Sea. Country Traveller is one of these partners, and it is organising a pilot project in partnership with the Ķemeri National Park.



The countries of the Baltic Sea region have outstanding and unique natural heritage. Sustainable environmental tourism, while respecting the requirements and goals of environmental protection, can become an important component in the national economies of the region. The economic potential of the environment has not been used to a sufficient degree. Opportunities for business activities are not sufficiently appreciated, and there are often biases against environmental protection requirements.

Demand for environmental tourism services that are available to broad ranges of society, not just specialised interest groups, is on the rise throughout Europe. National parks in Latvia offer diverse and interesting programmes and events which help people to learn about environmental values. There would be far more interested parties, however, if services were more easily available and at a higher level of quality in terms of making visits to national parks easier and nicer. Examples include the ability to eat lunch in a nice café, purchase refreshing beverages, rent bicycles, receive maps of parks with marked bicycle routes that are also marked in nature, etc. There are many ways of bringing together the strengths of environmental specialists and local businesspeople so that national parks are used not only for environmental protection, but also for the happiness, health and leisure of individuals who, at the same time, can learn more about the environment and the need to protect it.



The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is an instrument that will be used to ensure co-operation in this project. The charter requires analysis of the acceptable level of use of parks, specific standards for managing visitors, co-operation with local residents and businesspeople, as well as public information about benefits both in terms of environmental protection and of environmental development. Eight national parks in the countries of the Baltic Sea region will be assisted in obtaining the charter through this project.

The project in which Country Traveller is involved will establish five environmentally friendly tourism projects at the Ķemeri National Park – bicycling, hiking and boating routes, bird and animal watching, etc. All of the products will be featured at www.celotajs.lv. A national tourist guide for Latvia's National Parks will be produced with information about tourism offers in Latvia's four national parks. There will be sections on tourism destinations, activities, events and the tourism infrastructure. An international conference on environmental tourism will be organised at the conclusion of the project.



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