



CRITICAL **ECOSYSTEM**
PARTNERSHIP FUND



ASSESSMENT OF NATURE-BASED TOURISM BUSINESS OPERATIVE IN VLORA AND ORIKUM MUNICIPALITIES



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The study was undertaken in the context of the SEA-Med Project in Albania (Sustainable Economic Activities in Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas - Karaburun–Sazan Marine Protected Area) with the support of CEPF (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund) and in collaboration with WWF MedPO (Mediterranean Programme Office), and the main purpose of this study is to identify and evaluate nature based sustainable tourism-related certification schemes available in, or appropriate for Albania.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- B&B - Bed and Breakfast
- CEPF - Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
- DHS - Directorate of Health Services
- GIS- Geographical Information System
- IATA - International Air Transport Association
- INCA - Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania
- MPA - Marine Protected Area
- NBAs - Nature Based Activities
- SME - Small and Medium Enterprises
- SEA-Med - Sustainable Economic Activities in Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas
- TO - Tourism Operators
- WWF Med PO- Mediterranean Programme Office



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I. INTRODUCTION

The Karaburun–Sazan Marine National Park is a Marine Protected Area (MPA) established by the Decision No 289, 28.04.2010, of the Council of Ministers. The overall surface of the protected marine area is 12,570.82 ha. This includes the marine area along the Karaburun Peninsula, which extends for 9,848.95 ha, and the marine area around the Sazan Island, which covers an area of 2,721.87 ha. The MPA was created due to the high biodiversity value of the area both in terms of marine habitats (the different littoral habitats, sea caves, *Posedonia* meadows, etc.) and species (monk seal, red corals, fish, etc). The MPA develops within two municipalities: the Vlora and Orikum Municipalities.

About 11,000 people live in the municipality of Orikum and above 145,000 people live in Vlora. Tourism is one of the sectors with the most priority in Vlora region, because of the natural and cultural resources that this area holds. The relationship between tourism and the local natural and cultural heritage is of particular importance. Tourism can play a key role in generating awareness and support directly or indirectly to the preservation of these values. On the other hand, the quality of the natural and cultural heritage in many areas is essential for generating economic prosperity through tourism improving the quality of life of local communities.

Throughout the ages, many tourists have seen unique natural areas and outdoor-related activities for their vacations. Today, an even larger portion of the world population is seeking nature-related experiences. Their activities cover a broad range including hiking, backpacking, camping, canoeing, fishing, hunting, nature photography, scuba diving, and nature tours. They are dependent upon many types of environments that are both public and privately owned¹.

But unlike many other sectors, NBAs are directly affected by the quality of the environment, which will directly impact the tourist satisfaction and will be a determining factor in the long-term. Nature-based tourism refers to those tourism experiences that are directly or indirectly dependent on the natural environment and require a land or water base².

There are several characteristics of Nature Based Tourism:

- It accounts for a large proportion of the global tourism industry³.
- This proportion is increasing as nature-based tourism continues to grow faster than the tourism sector overall.
- Nature-based tourism occurs in both public and private spaces and hence is managed by public agencies as well as private industry and non-governmental organizations.
- Nature-based tourism is an extremely diverse sector that encompasses such potentially incompatible activities (such as wildlife viewing, boating, skiing, walking in alpine areas, hiking, hunting, fishing, surfing, snowmobiling, river tours, rafting, etc).

¹ Nature – based tourism enterprises – Guidelines for success, Storm Thurmond Institute, 2000

² Characteristics of the commercial Nature-Based Tourism Industry in British Columbia, Tourism British Columbia Research Services, Wilderness Tourism Association, 2005

³Eagles et al., 2002, Newsome et al., 2002, Buckley 2003

- There is a complex array of potential economic, socio-cultural and environmental costs and benefit associated with nature-based tourism.

As with all forms of tourism, the planning and management of nature-based tourism is increasingly mediated by the paradigm of sustainability. Given the size, growth rate, ubiquity, diversity and variable impacts cited above, it can be argued that the goal of sustainability is especially imperative in the nature-based tourism sector. Indeed, the attempt to operate in a sustainable manner is universally acknowledged as one of the core criteria of tourism types which have as inputs nature based activities.

“Tourism businesses must meet each of the following criteria to be considered a nature-based tourism business:

- 1. Businesses actively market products and services to tourists who are engaging in nature-based activities.*
- 2. Businesses’ primary source of revenue is from clients, tourists or non-tourists, who are engaging in nature-based activities (ensuring this by an entry fee or a service fee).*
- 3. Businesses’ primary function is not retail sales.*
- 4. Businesses must be able to estimate the percentage of revenue generated from tourists.*
- 5. Businesses provide products or services related to the activities included in Nature Based Activities”⁴*

Even though tourism holds out the most promising opportunities for local development in Vlora region, to date standard, family-owned or low-end package tourism facilities are found in the Vlora region. The tourist area extends from the Orikum bay to the city of Vlora, including the Radhima bay to the south of Vlora. About 75 registered facilities, with a total capacity of 1,360 rooms and 3,530 beds offer accommodation to visitors from Vlora to Llogara. Many unrecorded private rooms add up to these figures.

In this context, INCA, Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania, has initiated an assessment of the tourism activities and businesses in the bay of Vlora under the SEA-Med Project (Sustainable Economic Activities in Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas) in Albania (Karaburun–Sazan Marine Protected Area) with the support of CEPF (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund) and in collaboration with WWF MedPO (Mediterranean Programme Office).

The main objective of this assessment is to make an inventory of all tourism- or recreation-related businesses operative in the bay of Vlora with a special focus on nature-based activities.

The area of study begins from the point of Uji i Ftohte and includes Radhima and Orikum bay.

This report is based on the interviewing process of the stakeholders of Vlora Bay, which base their activity on tourism services in this area.

⁴ Economic Value of the Commercial Nature–Based Tourism Industry in British Columbia, Tourism British Columbia Canada Research Services, 2004



In this context, a first research phase is undertaken to collect data which will be used as a basis for the development of a sustainable management plan for the National Park of Karaburun and Sazan. This plan will be developed in collaboration with a lot of stakeholders in the area, especially tourist operators.

Questions that try to get answers in this report are related with:

- Type of businesses, initiatives and Nature Based Activities (NBAs) in the area
- Types of services offered by different tourism businesses and initiatives
- The opportunities that lay behind the involvement of some operators in NBAs
- Problems related to the desired level of NBAs supply in the area