



TRAINING MODULE 4

IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND RURAL SETTINGS



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Table of content

Executive Summary.....	3
EN	3
EL.....	3
IT.....	4
ES	4
PT.....	5
INTRODUCTION.....	6
1. GOAL OF THE MODULE.....	6
1.1. Chosen Methodology for the development and implementation of training content	6
1.2. Beneficiary country and responsible for Piloting	7
1.3. Target Groups:	7
2. MODULE SUBTOPICS	8
2.1. Introduction to Rural Sustainable Tourism	8
What sustainable cultural tourism means in practice for rural areas and small communities?8	
2.2. Identifying and capitalising in a sustainable manner on local heritage	16
2.3. Capitalising in a sustainable manner on local heritage - Designing Sustainable Tourism Experiences.....	21
2.3.1. Moving from mapping to experiences	21
2.4. Key trends and skills supporting effective sustainable cultural tourism implementation ..	27
2.4.1. Key Trends in Sustainable Cultural Tourism Experiences.....	27
2.4.2. Key Skills for Sustainable Cultural Tourism.....	30
2.5. Beyond a single product – conclusions on sustainable cultural tourism strategies for rural areas and peripheral regions	32
3. ANNEXES.....	39
Glossary of Terms.....	39
Key Resources	40
Interactive Activities	41



Sustainable Cultural Tourism
on the Mediterranean

IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND RURAL SETTINGS

Executive Summary

EN

CultMed Training Module 4 - Implementing sustainable cultural tourism in local communities and rural settings, provides a practical framework for developing sustainable cultural tourism (SCT) in rural, small-town, and peripheral areas. It supports practitioners in creating tourism that attracts visitors while protecting cultural heritage, respecting environmental limits, and generating long-term local value.

The module promotes an approach based on transforming existing local assets, as traditions, crafts, food, stories, or landscapes, into authentic, small-scale experiences. Rather than focusing on mass tourism, it emphasises low-impact, locally rooted development that balances cultural integrity, environmental sustainability, and economic viability.

It introduces key principles such as authenticity, community benefit, integration of culture and nature, value over volume, and attracting respectful visitors aligned with local contexts. The module also highlights the importance of gradual growth, protection of sensitive assets, and managing seasonality through cultural activities.

With a strong focus on practical application, the module provides step-by-step tools and methods to help users identify cultural assets, design meaningful visitor experiences, test ideas, and develop sustainable tourism strategies tailored to their context.

Through practical guidance and real-life examples, the module demonstrates how even the most remote communities can successfully develop authentic, inclusive, and sustainable tourism models, while equipping practitioners with the skills and tools needed to implement sustainable cultural tourism in diverse local settings.

EL

Η Εκπαιδευτική Ενότητα 4 του CultMed – Εφαρμογή βιώσιμου πολιτιστικού τουρισμού σε τοπικές κοινότητες και αγροτικές περιοχές, παρέχει ένα πρακτικό πλαίσιο για την ανάπτυξη βιώσιμου πολιτιστικού τουρισμού σε αγροτικές, μικρές αστικές και περιφερειακές περιοχές. Υποστηρίζει τους επαγγελματίες στη δημιουργία τουριστικών εμπειριών που προσελκύουν επισκέπτες, προστατεύοντας παράλληλα την πολιτιστική κληρονομιά, σεβόμενες τα περιβαλλοντικά όρια και δημιουργώντας μακροπρόθεσμη τοπική αξία.

Η ενότητα προωθεί μια προσέγγιση που βασίζεται στη μετατροπή των υφιστάμενων τοπικών πόρων, όπως παραδόσεις, τέχνες, τοπική γαστρονομία, ιστορίες ή τοπία, σε αυθεντικές, μικρής κλίμακας εμπειρίες. Αντί να εστιάζει στον μαζικό τουρισμό, δίνει έμφαση σε μια ανάπτυξη χαμηλού αντίκτυπου, βαθιά συνδεδεμένη με την τοπική κοινωνία, που εξισορροπεί την πολιτιστική αυθεντικότητα, την περιβαλλοντική βιωσιμότητα και την οικονομική βιωσιμότητα.

Εισάγει βασικές αρχές όπως η αυθεντικότητα, το όφελος για την κοινότητα, η ενσωμάτωση πολιτισμού και φύσης, η έμφαση στην αξία αντί στον όγκο, καθώς και η προσέλκυση επισκεπτών που σέβονται το τοπικό πλαίσιο. Η ενότητα αναδεικνύει επίσης τη σημασία της σταδιακής ανάπτυξης, της προστασίας ευαίσθητων πόρων και της διαχείρισης της εποχικότητας μέσω πολιτιστικών δραστηριοτήτων.

Με έντονη έμφαση στην πρακτική εφαρμογή, η ενότητα παρέχει εργαλεία και μεθόδους βήμα-βήμα που βοηθούν τους χρήστες να εντοπίσουν πολιτιστικούς πόρους, να σχεδιάσουν ουσιαστικές εμπειρίες για επισκέπτες, να δοκιμάσουν ιδέες και να αναπτύξουν βιώσιμες τουριστικές στρατηγικές προσαρμοσμένες στο δικό τους πλαίσιο.

Μέσα από πρακτική καθοδήγηση και παραδείγματα από την πραγματική ζωή, η ενότητα δείχνει πώς ακόμη και οι πιο απομακρυσμένες κοινότητες μπορούν να αναπτύξουν με επιτυχία αυθεντικά, συμπεριληπτικά και βιώσιμα τουριστικά μοντέλα, εξοπλίζοντας παράλληλα τους επαγγελματίες με



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τις απαραίτητες δεξιότητες και εργαλεία για την εφαρμογή του βιώσιμου πολιτιστικού τουρισμού σε διαφορετικά τοπικά περιβάλλοντα.

IT

Il Modulo di Formazione CultMed 4 – Implementare il turismo culturale sostenibile nelle comunità locali e nei contesti rurali – offre un quadro pratico per sviluppare il turismo culturale sostenibile (SCT) in aree rurali, piccoli centri e territori periferici. Supporta gli operatori nella creazione di un turismo capace di attrarre visitatori, proteggere il patrimonio culturale, rispettare i limiti ambientali e generare valore locale nel lungo periodo.

Il modulo promuove un approccio basato sulla valorizzazione delle risorse locali esistenti – come tradizioni, artigianato, gastronomia, narrazioni e paesaggi – trasformandole in esperienze autentiche e su piccola scala. Piuttosto che puntare sul turismo di massa, si concentra su uno sviluppo a basso impatto, radicato nel territorio, che equilibri integrità culturale, sostenibilità ambientale e sostenibilità economica.

Vengono introdotti principi chiave quali l'autenticità, il beneficio per la comunità, l'integrazione tra cultura e natura, la centralità del valore rispetto ai volumi e l'attrazione di visitatori consapevoli e rispettosi del contesto locale. Il modulo sottolinea inoltre l'importanza di una crescita graduale, della tutela delle risorse più sensibili e della gestione della stagionalità attraverso attività culturali. Con un forte orientamento pratico, il modulo offre strumenti e metodi passo dopo passo per aiutare gli utenti a individuare le risorse culturali, progettare esperienze significative per i visitatori, testare le idee e sviluppare strategie di turismo sostenibile adattate al proprio contesto.

Attraverso indicazioni operative ed esempi concreti, il modulo dimostra come anche le comunità più remote possano sviluppare con successo modelli di turismo autentici, inclusivi e sostenibili, fornendo agli operatori le competenze e gli strumenti necessari per implementare il turismo culturale sostenibile in diversi contesti locali.

ES

El Módulo de Formación CultMed 4 – *Implementación del turismo cultural sostenible en comunidades locales y entornos rurales* proporciona un marco práctico para el desarrollo del turismo cultural sostenible (TCS) en zonas rurales, pequeñas localidades y áreas periféricas. Su objetivo es apoyar a los profesionales en la creación de un turismo que atraiga visitantes al mismo tiempo que protege el patrimonio cultural, respeta los límites ambientales y genera valor local a largo plazo.

El módulo promueve un enfoque basado en la transformación de los recursos locales existentes —como tradiciones, artesanía, gastronomía, relatos o paisajes— en experiencias auténticas y de pequeña escala. En lugar de centrarse en el turismo de masas, hace hincapié en un desarrollo de bajo impacto y arraigado en el territorio, que equilibra la integridad cultural, la sostenibilidad ambiental y la viabilidad económica.

Asimismo, introduce principios clave como la autenticidad, el beneficio para la comunidad, la integración de cultura y naturaleza, el valor por encima del volumen y la atracción de visitantes respetuosos con el contexto local. El módulo también destaca la importancia del crecimiento gradual, la protección de los recursos sensibles y la gestión de la estacionalidad mediante actividades culturales.

Con un fuerte enfoque en la aplicación práctica, el módulo ofrece herramientas y métodos paso a paso que ayudan a los usuarios a identificar activos culturales, diseñar experiencias significativas para los visitantes, probar ideas y desarrollar estrategias de turismo sostenible adaptadas a su contexto.

A través de orientaciones prácticas y ejemplos reales, el módulo demuestra cómo incluso las comunidades más remotas pueden desarrollar con éxito modelos de turismo auténticos, inclusivos y sostenibles, al tiempo que dota a los profesionales de las habilidades y herramientas necesarias



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on the Mediterranean

para implementar el turismo cultural sostenible en diversos entornos locales.

PT

O Módulo de Formação 4 do CultMed — Implementação do turismo cultural sustentável em comunidades locais e contextos rurais — fornece um quadro prático para o desenvolvimento do turismo cultural sustentável (SCT) em zonas rurais, pequenas cidades e áreas periféricas. Apoia os profissionais na criação de um turismo que atraia visitantes, protegendo simultaneamente o património cultural, respeitando os limites ambientais e gerando valor local a longo prazo.

O módulo promove uma abordagem baseada na transformação dos ativos locais existentes, tais como tradições, artesanato, gastronomia, histórias ou paisagens, em experiências autênticas e de pequena escala. Em vez de se centrar no turismo de massa, enfatiza um desenvolvimento de baixo impacto e enraizado localmente, que equilibra a integridade cultural, a sustentabilidade ambiental e a viabilidade económica.

Introduz princípios-chave como a autenticidade, o benefício para a comunidade, a integração da cultura e da natureza, o valor em detrimento do volume e a atração de visitantes respeitosos, alinhados com os contextos locais. O módulo também destaca a importância do crescimento gradual, da proteção de ativos sensíveis e da gestão da sazonalidade através de atividades culturais.

Com um forte enfoque na aplicação prática, o módulo fornece ferramentas e métodos passo a passo para ajudar os utilizadores a identificar bens culturais, conceber experiências significativas para os visitantes, testar ideias e desenvolver estratégias de turismo sustentável adaptadas ao seu contexto.

Através de orientações práticas e exemplos da vida real, o módulo demonstra como mesmo as comunidades mais remotas podem desenvolver com sucesso modelos de turismo autênticos, inclusivos e sustentáveis, ao mesmo tempo que dota os profissionais das competências e ferramentas necessárias para implementar o turismo cultural sustentável em diversos contextos locais.



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INTRODUCTION

This module will help you understand the concept of sustainable cultural tourism, its different forms, and the practical approaches for identifying cultural assets and transforming them into valuable, community-led experiences. It supports professionals in promoting and valorising local culture, attracting respectful forms of tourism to rural areas, small towns, and peripheral regions, and in sharing this knowledge with the key actors in their communities.

Beyond conceptual understanding, the module equips participants with the skills and tools needed to support the development and implementation of sustainable cultural tourism products and strategies. Through clear concepts, real examples, and hands-on methods, it prepares professionals to:

- **Identify and assess cultural assets** as the foundation for authentic visitor experiences,
- **Translate heritage into experience ideas** using practical frameworks for small-scale, respectful, and community-driven activities.
- **Facilitate co-creation processes**, including community mapping workshops, participatory prioritisation, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative decision-making.
- **Develop locally rooted tourism strategies** that balance visitor interest with community values, sustainability principles, and long-term cultural preservation.
- **Support implementation**, guiding communities in piloting experiences, refining concepts, protecting sensitive areas, and ensuring cultural and environmental responsibility.

By strengthening both strategic insight and practical facilitation skills, the module empowers professionals to help local communities in design, implementation, and sustaining meaningful cultural tourism initiatives that reflect their identity and contribute to long-term vitality. The module is aligned with the European GreenComp framework for sustainability competences, ensuring that the skills developed support responsible, future-oriented practices.

1. GOAL OF THE MODULE

This module looks to provide tourism sector professionals, culture custodians and other agents engaged in supporting cultural tourism across Mediterranean and beyond with the skills and strategies needed to implement and promote sustainable cultural tourism in rural and peripheral areas contexts. The module explores how small communities can leverage their cultural heritage, traditions, and landscapes related to cultural heritage to attract responsible tourism, generate local benefits, promote their culture and preserve authenticity.

1.1. Chosen Methodology for the development and implementation of training content

This module is designed to give users a practical understanding of the key concepts and real-world methods needed to capitalise on cultural heritage in a sustainable way. The approach is intentionally simple, accessible, and action-oriented, using clear language, concrete examples, and step-by-step application guidelines.

The module functions as a practical learning pill with ready to use toolkit supporting hands-on implementation. It addresses common limitations faced by practitioners in rural and peripheral regions, such as lack of accessible practice-oriented training, existing materials being too theoretical, academic, or policy-making-oriented, limited time to engage with complex frameworks, and the need for ready-to-use models and tools to support creation of products and initiatives in line with sustainable cultural tourism principles in non-urban settings.

The methodology therefore focuses on learning by doing, co-creation, and direct applicability, helping professionals and community actors move from understanding concepts to designing and implementing sustainable cultural tourism initiatives in their own contexts.



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1.2. Beneficiary country and responsible for Piloting

While within the development the main focus of the CultMED project is on support to the Mediterranean region, the materials have been developed for benefit of all small communities, rural areas and peripheral regions across Europe looking to share and benefit from their cultural resources within the sustainable cultural tourism model. To ensure the responsiveness of the methodology and the provided materials to the needs of practitioners, the training has been tested with local stakeholders in Portugal and Italy and, based on their feedback, has been revised to better serve communities across the Mediterranean, Europe, and beyond.

1.3. Target Groups:

This module supports the broad ecosystem of actors shaping sustainable cultural tourism in rural and peripheral areas. It focuses on three key groups:

1. Organisations supporting tourism and cultural heritage - Tourism boards/DMOs, municipalities, heritage authorities, development agencies, chambers of commerce, cooperatives, NGOs, community enterprises, and VET providers that through the training gain practical tools to strengthen local tourism strategies, support community stakeholders, and design sustainable, culturally grounded tourism development initiatives.
2. Tourism professionals and heritage custodians - Hospitality and tourism entrepreneurs, local guides, experience providers, rural accommodation operators, cultural site managers, route custodians, and tradition bearers (associations, NGOs, individuals, cultural sites etc.) to learn how to create responsible, authentic visitor experiences, improve sustainability practices, and enhance local value while safeguarding cultural integrity.
3. Creative, Cultural, and Artisan Entrepreneurs - Artisans, craftspeople, gastronomy producers, artists, creative startups, cultural associations, and community cultural groups to explore ways to integrate creativity and heritage into tourism offers, reach new audiences, and develop sustainable, culturally rooted products and experiences.

2. MODULE SUBTOPICS

2.1. Introduction to Rural Sustainable Tourism

A VILLAGE ON THE CROSSROADS

Imagine a small Mediterranean village.

Old stone houses, a central square where elders gather under a plane tree telling stories and practicing old crafts. Narrow streets where the smell of fresh bread mingles with herbs carried by mountain wind.

For decades, young people left, shops closed, and fields slowly abandoned.

But then, visitors began arriving, attracted by its authenticity, legends, and landscapes. Local residents wondered:

"Can tourism help us revive our community... without losing who we are?"



"Can tourism help us revive our community... without losing who we are?"

"How can we share our heritage with visitors without turning it into a performance?"

"How do we welcome guests in a way that keeps our culture alive, rather than reshaped for outsiders?"

"How can we build tourism together as a community, not have it done to us?"

"How can tourism help protect our cultural sites, traditions, and landscapes, rather than put pressure on them and how do we prevent cultural erosion or commodification as more visitors come?"

Those are key central questions behind sustainable cultural tourism. **Sustainable cultural tourism aims to "provide opportunities for economic development in local communities, enhance local culture, and protect and preserve the heritage and authenticity of the destination.** Its ultimate goal is to balance the needs of visitors seeking meaningful experiences with the needs of local communities, ensuring that tourism strengthens, rather than erodes, local identity and long-term sustainability.

What sustainable cultural tourism means in practice for rural areas and small communities?

It means using what a community already has: its traditions, stories, food, crafts, culturally relevant landscapes, and historic places, to create small, respectful tourism experiences.

It's about locals leading the way, keeping control over what is shared, and making sure tourism brings real benefits: income, pride, restored heritage, and vivid community life. It focuses on authentic, low-impact, meaningful encounters that help a village or destination stay alive while staying true to who it is rather than looking for crowds and rush development.

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It helps communities attract customers for local businesses, promote and keep alive both material and non-material cultural assets, and stay proud of who they are.

For visitors, this type of tourism is attractive because it offers real, meaningful experiences they can't get in busy destinations: meeting locals, learning traditional skills, tasting homemade foods, hearing unique stories, and discovering places that feel genuine and welcoming. It gives travellers what many seek nowadays: connection, authenticity, slow moments, and unique memories.

Valuable sustainable cultural experiences turn unique local assets into authentic experiences.

Examples of potential models for sustainable initiatives in rural and small communities ↓

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Infographic 1: Types of sustainable cultural tourism initiatives in rural and small town settings examples.



Sustainable Cultural Tourism Initiatives in Rural and Small Communities

- #### 1 Community-led Craft Workshops



Residents invite visitors to learn local crafts such as weaving, pottery, basket-making, traditional mask carving, or embroidery—taught directly by elders or artisans.
- #### 2 Local Producers'-led Food Experiences



Local farmers, shepherds, or beekeepers guide visitors through traditional food production: olive oil pressing, cheese-making, herb collecting, or cooking family recipes.
- #### 3 Revival of Seasonal Rituals and Festivals



Communities re-energise local festivities, seasonal rituals, harvest celebrations, and ancient ceremonies, sharing stories and practices that unite locals and visitors in respectful, community-led celebration.
- #### 4 Storytelling Trails and Local Myth Routes



Locals create guided or self-guided trails where visitors discover legends, folk tales, symbolic landscapes, and ancestral pathways.
- #### 5 Digital Storytelling and Local Memory Projects



Villages document songs, recipes, historic sites, old crafts, and personal stories, turning them into apps, QR pathways, or small exhibitions, to preserve memory while enriching visitor experience.
- #### 6 Creative Tourism Networks



A group of local creators: artists, cooks, writers, musicians, craft makers, collaborate to offer participatory experiences, e.g. music, food & craft night market or Make-Your-Own Souvenir Hub.
- #### 7 Community Cooperatives Restoring Heritage Buildings



Residents come together to restore abandoned homes, barns, mills, and workshops, turning them into guest rooms, small museums, ateliers, or cultural spaces that both preserve heritage and generate income for the community.
- #### 8 Regenerative Heritage Walks and Activities



Locals lead small group volunteer activities where visitors participate in e.g. restoring terrace walls, replanting native gardens, or documenting community memories, engaging, but also contributing to preserving and restoring culture.
- #### 9 Heritage-based Gastronomy Routes



Clusters of villages or producers link their traditional foods into a route - wine, honey, cheese, olive oil, herbs, heritage dishes etc. offering tastings, storytelling, and demonstrations.
- #### 10 Micro Festivals of Intangible Heritage



Small-scale events centred on music, dance, oral traditions, or village customs, celebrating living culture and promoting it among residents and visitors.

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Download the infographic [HERE](#).

As you see, there are multiple ways to use cultural assets and turn them into valuable sustainable cultural tourism initiatives that we will explore further across the module. It usually starts from small grassroot initiatives and grows into more complex tourism offering with time.

This is exactly where the story of Casa da Lúcia begins, with a village facing challenges of decreasing and aging population, eroding traditions and fading of traditional sources of income.

Case 1: The Artisan House That Sparked a Creative Tourism Hub

In a quiet coastal village between olive groves and the sea, stood a traditional Alentejo house everyone called *Casa da Lúcia*. Lúcia was the last master weaver in the area, known for the vibrant textiles she had woven since she was ten. Her cloths carried the colours of the land - ochre from the cliffs, deep blues from the ocean, greens from spring fields.

As years passed and young people left for cities, weaving became a fading art. Lúcia however kept weaving, not for income, or recognition, but to keep her grandmother's patterns alive. Her loom was her comfort, her connection to the past long gone and a way to enjoy quiet time.

One morning, a passing traveller asked Lúcia if she maybe could show him how she makes her fabrics. Despite being surprised anyone cares, she agreed. As the traveller tried to pass the shuttle between threads, she realized sharing and passing on her craft felt to her as joyful as weaving!

Word has spread among slow travellers and cultural explorers: *"In this village, you can learn real weaving, not a demonstration, but the real thing."*

Soon, other artisans noticed. A potter opened her courtyard to visitors. A baker invited people to learn kneading techniques passed down through generations. An elder fisherman began offering storytelling sessions about traditional nets, tides and ocean adventures.

Within two years, the village had quietly transformed into a creative tourism hub. Not with big investments or marketing campaigns, but through local talent, hospitality, and authenticity.

Visitors stayed longer, ate in local taverns, bought handmade crafts, and, most importantly, created relationships and opportunities that made the village feel alive again.

The local school invited Lúcia to teach part-time. The municipality supported artisans with micro-grants. In opposition to earlier years, more and more young people got inspired by the change in the area and returned home after getting external education to start small creative or tourism and hospitality related businesses.

Tourism didn't extract value; it **activated dormant cultural resources**, strengthened personal pride, and generated gentle, steady income. The heart of it all remained Casa da Lúcia, where a single loom and simple human curiosity and openness to connect became the spark that reawakened a community's creative soul.

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Sustainable cultural tourism is not about large campaigns or chasing trends. It is about using what your community already has, its traditions, stories, crafts, food, and landscapes, to create authentic value. It can be as simple as a basic 5 step-model:

1. Start from what already exists

Identify everyday activities, agricultural practices, culinary or artisanal traditions that can be shared with visitors without altering their meaning.

2. Begin with small-scale pilot experiences

Test simple activities, such as local guided tours, small workshops, or seasonal events, before developing more structured offerings.

3. Involve the community from the beginning

Consult residents, local associations, and cultural groups to ensure that tourism reflects community values.

4. Integrate culture and nature

Many rural traditions are closely linked to the landscape, agriculture, and biodiversity. Experiences should therefore connect cultural heritage with the natural environment.

5. Monitor and adapt

Collect feedback from residents and visitors to continuously improve activities and ensure they remain sustainable over time.

When applied well, sustainable cultural tourism offers practical ways to address common challenges faced by rural and peripheral communities:

- Depopulation & loss of vitality - Small, locally led activities, such as workshops, hosting, guiding, or creative experiences, can create income and purpose, especially for young people. This makes staying or returning more attractive and helps bring life back to the

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community.

- Loss of Traditions and Cultural Erosion – By turning traditions into shared experiences, communities can keep them relevant and valued. Cultural tourism encourages collaboration between generations and allows tradition and innovation to evolve together, without turning culture into a performance.
- Economic Reliance on a Single Activity – Adding tourism-based micro-activities (crafts, food experiences, heritage walks, small events) diversifies income and spreads opportunities across residents, without replacing existing livelihoods. It helps bring new income opportunities and, if managed well, decrease dependence on seasonal activities.
- Infrastructure gaps - Sustainable cultural tourism works with what already exists, small groups, local spaces, simple setups. At the same time, gradual visitor interest in destinations can support improvements such as better signage, restored buildings, improved access by public transportation or improved digital access.

Watch [the video](#) to learn more about the link between sustainable cultural tourism and its impact on challenges of rural and peripheral communities.



Small rural communities rarely have the resources to compete with big tourism destinations. But they don't need to, and in fact, for they own good, they should not. Their strength lies in what is uniquely theirs - stories, crafts, festivals, landscapes, and ways of life shaped over generations. That is exactly why sustainable cultural tourism works: it transforms **local identity** into **local opportunity** while keeping the community firmly in the driver's seat.

Sustainable cultural tourism works for small communities exactly because it is not designed for mass appeal. It works best when communities attract visitors whose expectations, behaviour, and values align with local culture, pace, and sustainability goals. One of the most important decisions a community can make is not how many visitors to attract, but **which visitors to welcome. Who is the type of visitors, we want to see more and interact with in our community?**

Visitors We Want	Why They Fit Sustainable Cultural Tourism	Visitors to Avoid / Be Cautious About	Why They Create Challenges
Slow Travellers	Stay longer, spend locally, reduce pressure on infrastructure. Build relationships with hosts.	Mass / High-Volume Tourists	Disrupt daily life, overwhelm small spaces, reduce quality of experience. Focus on short stays, bring strain on services and little to no local connection.

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 Cultural Explorers	Interested in traditions, stories, and people. Help preserve intangible heritage.	 “Checklist” Tourists	Focus on ‘viral’ photos and quick visits. Low engagement and limited local benefit.
 Experiential Learners	Participate in workshops (crafts, food, farming). Support knowledge transfer and local skills.	 Passive Observer	May be drawn to ‘poverty/peripheral-lifestyle safari’-type experiences - observing local life without engagement and understanding, which can undermine dignity and create one-sided, extractive interactions without real value.
 Eco-Conscious Travellers	Respect nature, accept low-impact conditions, support environmental protection.	 Resource-Intensive Tourists	Expect high water, energy, or infrastructure use, i.e. high-volume festivals etc. put too much pressure on local supply - unsustainable in most rural settings.
 Respectful & Adaptive Visitors	Adapt to local customs, rhythms, and limitations. Strengthen trust and positive exchange.	 Demanding / Non-Adaptive Visitors	Expect the destination to change for them putting pressure on culture and lifestyle change.
 Community-Oriented Visitors	Value local ownership, buy local products, support small businesses.	 All-Inclusive / External-System Tourists	Use services of external operators, for local visits, exploiting resources without benefiting local businesses.
 Curious & Open-Minded Visitors	Appreciate simplicity, authenticity, and learning.	 Luxury-Driven Visitors (in fragile contexts)	Demand high-end standards that may require changing architecture, culture, or scale.
 Off-Season / Flexible Travellers	Help reduce seasonality and stabilise income across the year.	 Peak-Only Tourists	Concentrate pressure in short periods making stress on community and environment, often in critical for community-life cycles moments.
 Small Groups / Independent Travellers	Easier to manage, more personal interaction, lower impact.	 Party / Entertainment Tourists	Noise, behaviour conflicts, and misalignment with community values.
 Value-Driven Travellers	Choose destinations based on meaning, sustainability, and authenticity.		

How do you target the right visitors?

Describe experiences clearly and honestly, avoid the temptation to oversell

→ “Simple family homestay, no Wi-Fi, shared meals”

Highlight values, not just activities

→ “Respect for traditions and local rhythms required”

Use storytelling instead of mass marketing

→ Attract those who resonate with your identity



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Set expectations early

→ The right visitors will self-select

Remember - clarity filters visitors better than restrictions!



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Now, that you are more familiar with the concept of sustainable cultural tourism, its forms and benefits share that knowledge with key stakeholders in your environment. Use the provided content to introduce your local community to the concept and its benefits. You can introduce it within community activities or a dedicated event.

Reflection challenge:

In the next section you will learn how to challenge the participants to engage in activities for defining cultural assets and envisage different ways to translate them into sustainable cultural tourism models that could benefit the local community and visitors. Before you move on think or invite your participants to consider a few aspects of the community readiness:

1. Community mindset and motivation

- Does your community **want** to share aspects of its culture, traditions, food, stories, or landscapes with visitors? (Think about openness, values, and willingness and not specific assets.)
- Are there people in your community who might be interested in (or open to consider) welcoming visitors, teaching something, guiding, or hosting an activity? (You don't need to list names, just consider if interest exists.)
- Does your community generally prefer small-scale, slow, respectful forms of tourism over large or fast development approaches?

2. Local challenges that could be addressed and targeted by initiatives and strategies.

- Which local challenges do you think sustainable cultural tourism could help ease that are key barriers for long term well-being of your community?

Choose one or two: a. depopulation, b. youth leaving, c. lack of opportunities, d. fading traditions, e. abandoned buildings, f. weak local economy, g. low visibility of local products, h. declining community life, i. fragile landscapes, j. limited mobility or services, k. lack of identity or community pride, l. other ? (specify)

- How this type of tourism could help in your context?

3. Current state

- Are there currently any tourism, culture or creative activity that are harmful to our community and could benefit from being redefined toward more sustainable, community and local environment friendly model?

2.2. Identifying and capitalising in a sustainable manner on local heritage

Sustainable cultural tourism can grow from almost any element of a community's identity, as long as it is **meaningful to locals, authentic, and respectfully shared**. In rural and small communities, heritage is often richer and more diverse than people realise. The most valuable assets usually fall into four interconnected categories:

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on the Mediterranean

Infographic 2: Categories of cultural heritage in the heart of sustainable cultural tourism

TANGIBLE HERITAGE

the physical traces of community life

visible, touchable elements that tell the story of a place:

- Traditional architecture (stone houses, farm buildings, courtyards)
- Historic sites (churches, mills, archaeological remains)
- Working heritage (old olive presses, wine cellars, shepherd shelters, workshops)
- Cultural landscapes (terraces, vineyards, olive groves, grazing routes).



Why they are valuable?

Visitors love seeing how past and present meet in real spaces. These assets provide powerful settings for activities.

INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

living traditions, knowledge & expressions

practices passed through generations that give a community its identity:

- Music, dance, and local performing arts
- Oral traditions, legends, and storytelling
- Seasonal rituals, festivals, and religious celebrations
- Crafts and artisan techniques (weaving, pottery, mask-making, woodwork)
- Traditional foodways: recipes, cooking methods, harvest rituals
- Local languages, dialects, and expressions



Why they are valuable?

Often the strongest driver of cultural tourism because it is what is unique, personal, and irreplaceable.

CREATIVE AND CONTEMPORARY HERITAGE

new expressions rooted in tradition

modern reinterpretations that keep heritage alive through new creative practices:

- Contemporary crafts inspired by traditional motifs,
- Modern festivals based on local stories or rituals,
- New interpretations of cuisine using heritage ingredients,
- Artist residencies, workshops, and creative hubs,
- Community cooperatives or cultural associations revitalising old spaces.



Why they are valuable?

This type of heritage shows a living culture - not a museum. Visitors appreciate seeing how traditions adapt and evolve.

CULTURAL ASSETS

NATURAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

where nature and tradition meet

environments that hold heritage shaped by centuries of interaction between people and the land:

- Ancient paths, shepherd routes, pilgrimage trails
- Rivers, springs, forests, mountains with cultural meaning
- Agricultural landscapes tied to traditions (almond groves, wheat fields, citrus terraces)
- Local biodiversity linked to food, crafts, medicine, or stories.



Why they are valuable?

These landscapes offer experiences that combine culture, nature, and wellbeing, perfect for slow tourism, eco-tourism, and regenerative tourism models.

Download the infographic [HERE](#).

Possessing relevant cultural heritage and being open to share it in a sustainable way with others is just the first step to turning culture into an asset and tool to overcome challenges within rural and peripheral contexts. In the next stage, the module will guide you through the process of mapping assets, actors and opportunities related with sustainable cultural tourism in your environment. You can start the mapping with your own vision, but inviting people with different knowledge and perspectives will help you build more comprehensive view of the reality and opportunities.

Implementation exercise 1.

Identifying cultural assets and translating them into sustainable tourism experiences - GUIDELINES FOR HERITAGE MAPPING & CO-CREATION ACTIVITIES

This tool will support you in implementation of community mapping workshops where different agents with local voices come together to map the cultural, natural, and creative resources of a village or region and look for different strategies to capitalize on them.

Exercise guidelines:

A. Purpose	B. Who to invite
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify tangible and intangible heritage• Understand local values and sensitivities• Build shared ownership of tourism development• Reveal hidden or forgotten cultural assets• Strengthen community participation and trust	<p>Aim for a balanced group of 8–25 people, including different actors across the groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elders and tradition keepers• Youth representatives• Artisans and craftspeople• Farmers, shepherds, producers• Local tourism/hospitality actors• Cultural associations and NGOs• Municipality or parish representatives• Business owners, cooperatives• Interested residents• Aspiring entrepreneurs
C. Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maps (printed or hand-drawn)• Coloured stickers or markers• Flipcharts and post-its• Photos of local heritage (if available)• Large table/tables or open walls

Step-by-step implementation process

Step 1. Warm-up: “What Makes Our Place Special?” – proposed time - 10 minutes

Ask participants to think and share one thing that represents their community’s identity. This activates local memory and sets a positive tone.

Step 2. Mapping tangible heritage – proposed time - 15 minutes.

Divide participants in smaller groups +/- 3-5 participants and ask to take 10 minutes to identify:

- historic buildings
- mills, workshops, warehouses
- old paths, springs, viewpoints
- agricultural landscapes
- heritage trees or farms
- other relevant interest points

You can use post-it or a simple board or sheet of paper or a village/map outline.

Follow up: ask participants to think and mark “*which physical places tell our story?*”. Ask each group to explain which places and why each of the groups selected.

Following this exercise introduce the participants to the [Infographic 2 – Categories of cultural heritage in the heart of the sustainable cultural tourism](#) or introduce each category in a short presentation. Underline the relevance and value of the intangible cultural assets and invite participants to the follow up exercise (step 3).

Step 3. Mapping intangible heritage – proposed time - 15 minutes.

Follow up with identifying *what practices or knowledge make us who we are?*”:

- festivals, rituals, seasonal events,
- local crafts, artisanal skills,
- legends, oral histories, songs,
- cooking traditions,
- dialect words or expressions,
- other.

While tangible and intangible assets are in the heart of the cultural initiatives, it's the people that are the key to their authenticity and successful engagement with visitors. Follow up with turning the group attention to the custodians of cultural assets and those that have the potential to contribute to embedding them into valuable experiences (step 4).

Step 4. Mapping people and community assets – 10 minutes.

Identify key actors. *Who holds cultural knowledge here? Who should be actively engaged into implementing cultural experiences to keep them authentic and locally owned?*


- Artisans,
- home cooks,
- storytellers,
- young creatives,
- farmers & producers,
- associations,
- others.

Follow up with a dedicated artisan & producer scan for identifying economic potential and to map artisan skills and local products that could become experiences.

Step 5. Mapping skills and their tourism application potential – 15 minutes.

1. List all craftspeople, producers, cooks, makers and other holders of traditional knowledge. Try to involve as many of them in your sessions as possible.
2. For each try to define (ask the present ones and discuss in groups for those that are not present but could bring valuable input):
 - skills they could teach,
 - stories behind their craft,
 - willingness to host visitors.
3. Rank feasibility:
 - high (ready for experiences),
 - medium (needs support/training),
 - low (only suitable for documentation/protection).

This step can especially contribute to understanding the ways to directly engage visitors and capitalize on live culture and traditional skills.

 **Pro tip!** Depending on settings or capabilities, this session can include break for field exercise where participants can visit and interview local holders of those skills – i.e. if the workshops are hold in small village/town during working hours of the local craftsmen and the access is easy; or a follow up activity for collection of those information before moving on to a planning stage.

Many traditions are closely linked to the calendar, and local celebrations can play an important role in attracting interest and increasing the visibility of small communities. They can also help reduce seasonality. For this reason, seasonal rituals, celebrations, and special occasions should be included in the mapping process.



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on the Mediterranean

Step 6. Include cultural calendar mapping – 5-10 min

Draw a 12-month calendar and identify seasonal rituals, food cycles, and community events. Add: harvests, local celebrations, religious events, seasonal food traditions, craft cycles. Remember to include niche, potentially dying rituals, and those coming from marginalized groups in your community.

Identify moments suitable for:

- micro festivals,
- workshops,
- themed experiences.

Sustainable cultural tourism looks not only to protect and promote relevant culture and foster benefits for local community. It looks to ensure that community values are respected in the process of sharing cultural experiences with visitors. To help your community understand what they want to keep out of the visitors experiences and where their boundaries of respectful and inclusive experiences are, follow up with the next question.

Step 7. Mapping feelings and sensitive spots – proposed time - 15 minutes.

Invite participants to list or mark areas that are:

- culturally sacred,
- environmentally fragile,
- socially sensitive.

Think carefully about what should be protected before promoted?

When developing tourism experiences, it is essential to fully respect local traditions, cultural practices, and religious beliefs. Some activities, rituals, or spaces may have a spiritual or identity-related significance that should not be turned into tourist attractions. Consider:
- *Are there traditions which should not be shared with visitors? Would participation of visitors in some traditions could be offensive or inappropriate? Are there rituals or celebrations that should remain private? How can we ensure that visitors understand and respect local cultural norms? What boundaries should we set to prevent excessive commercialization or the trivialization of traditions?*

Think also about marginalized groups in your community.

Encourage participants to consider - *“Are there marginalised groups in our community whose voices, spaces, or cultural practices need special care or protection?”*

That may include families living in isolated areas, minority groups, elders, people with disabilities, or individuals who may be affected differently by tourism. The aim is to ensure the process is inclusive and respectful of everyone’s needs.

Wrap up the session with summarizing the mapping process.

2.3. Capitalising in a sustainable manner on local heritage - Designing Sustainable Tourism Experiences

THREE POTTERS, THREE PATHS

In one village, three potters shared the same clay, the same tradition, and the same workshop wall.

But when visitors began showing interest, each imagined a different way to welcome them:

- João offered “A Slow Pottery Day”, a calm, hands-on session where visitors shaped clay while listening to village stories.
- Marta created an “Eco-Pottery Walk”—a short forest and village trail explaining where clay used to be collected, and showing different forms of clay expression present in the area.
- Lila launched an “Expressive Clay Studio”—a playful session for making tiny pieces, including DIY souvenirs inspired by local patterns, .



Three different personalities. Three different models. All equally meaningful, all rooted in tradition, all respectful of community values.

Their story shows a key truth: Sustainable cultural tourism does not require one “perfect model.”

It thrives when people share what they know, in a way that feels natural to them. When they use a bit of creativity to see traditional activities as a center of new experiences.

This section will help you and your community design such experiences in your environment.

2.3.1. Moving from mapping to experiences

In the previous section, you mapped your local cultural assets. Now it is time to translate those insights into viable tourism experiences. In practice, this translation often happens either through small, on-the-ground initiatives led by individual craftspeople or community groups, or through more centralised planning by public authorities. However, the best results are achieved when different actors and perspectives are brought together. Below, you will find structured guidelines for co-creation activities, which serve as a natural follow-up to the work introduced in Section 2.2.

Implementation exercise 2:

Experience Design Lab: Turning Assets Into Experiences

STAGE I. Selection and defining the asset and its potential.

Step 1. Prioritisation

Present a brief summary of the mapping session and its consolidated results, showing all identified ('nominated') assets, either as a map or a poster with categorised elements. Ensure that all key assets are included - crafts, stories, buildings and other structures, skills, rituals, places, food, and traditions. Provide each participant with small stickers and ask them to place one or two stickers next to the assets they consider most valuable and/or urgent to include in sustainable cultural tourism planning.

Guide the selection process with a question:

Which of our mapped assets offers a story, skill, or place that we want to promote and could offer an authentic experience to visitors?

Introduce 3 selection criteria:

- **Cultural relevance.** Is this meaningful to the community?
- **Visitor interest potential.** Would respectful visitors find this unique, engaging, or immersive?
- **Feasibility & protection.** Can this asset be shared without harming culture or environment?

The prioritization process will help keeping the exercise focused and achievable.

Step 2. Clarifying the story

Divide participants into small groups (+/- 3-5 participants), each group taking on one of the most selected assets. Ask the groups to clarify information about the asset using 3 guiding questions:

1. Why does this matter to our community?
2. Who carries this knowledge?
3. What emotion, memory, or tradition is attached to it?
4. What would make visitors feel connected?

That will help keep in mind the original significance of the asset during the planning process and inspire authentic experiences rather than creating 'products without soul'.

💡 Example: Imagine that participants selected a basket-weaving tradition in Step 1. This practice is closely linked to the natural environment (through the collection of local reeds), as well as to community life (with women gathering to weave and share stories). The patterns often symbolise the village, and the baskets themselves are used in harvests and celebrations. For visitors, this can offer a meaningful, hands-on experience that is authentic, symbolic, and intergenerational, while also sharing the stories behind the craft, its connection to nature, and its relevance in today's sustainability practices.

STAGE II. From Ideation to Prototyping.

Invite participants to design a quick action plan. *What small actions can be developed around the chosen asset with minimal time and resources to build visibility and momentum?*

Start from reminding participants about key pillars of sustainable cultural experiences: authenticity, cultural value, sustainability and mutual benefits.

Infographic 3. Key pillars of sustainable cultural experiences

What Makes a Tourism Experience 'Sustainable' and 'Cultural'?

The infographic is a 2x3 grid of images with text descriptions. The top row contains: 1. A village with traditional wooden houses and a dirt road. 2. A group of people in traditional red and white clothing dancing. 3. A man and a woman in a garden, one holding a basket of vegetables. The bottom row contains: 4. A group of people sitting around a table in a restaurant. 5. A group of people, including a man in a hard hat and safety vest, looking at a document. 6. A large, ancient tree with extensive roots in a rural landscape.

 <p>Authentic Based on real community life, not staged or artificial.</p>	 <p>Small-scale Designed for small groups, minimal infrastructure, and gentle interaction.</p>	 <p>Mutually beneficial Visitors gain meaningful experiences; residents gain pride, income, and visibility.</p>
 <p>Respectful Cultural boundaries, fragile sites, and community comfort are protected.</p>	 <p>Community-led Locals guide, teach, and host experiences.</p>	 <p>Rooted in culture Experiences grow from heritage and traditions.</p>

Download the infographic [HERE](#) .

Experiences can take many different forms, such as craft workshops, guided walks, seasonal community events, food tastings, creative tourism activities, and much more.

[The Infographic 1](#): Types of Sustainable Cultural Tourism Initiatives in Rural and Small Town Settings can serve as inspiration when brainstorming possibilities.

However, it is important for participants to remember that the best experiences are those that reflect the true spirit, values, and personality of the community. Sustainable cultural tourism is not about copying models from elsewhere, but about creating activities that feel natural, meaningful, and rooted in local identity.

Encourage participants to think openly and creatively: new ideas, unique combinations, and fresh interpretations of tradition are also welcome, and essential. Innovative approaches that remain respectful of culture and community can lead to some of the most memorable and impactful visitor experiences.

Step 3. Start with a quick ideation exercise.

Ask each participant to grab 3 post-its. Ask them to write one idea per post-it, answering: “*What small thing could we do with this heritage asset that visitors would love and our community would feel proud of?*”. Keep time very short. Encouraging fast, instinctive ideas without overthinking.

This creates a pool of ideas before judgment or planning begins. Place them onto a joint paper sheet.

Follow up with challenging participants to think about creative ways to engage the asset.

Step 4. Creative approach to traditional assets

Push participants to reimagine traditions, history and culture in fresh, respectful ways. Ask groups

to reframe the asset using creative prompts:

- What if this tradition was shared through taste?
- What if this could be experienced outdoors or indoors (opposite to initial asset)?
- What if youth introduced it in a modern way?
- What if we linked it to a season or ritual?
- What if we turned it into something visitors make and take home?
- How can we make it into group or individual activity (opposite to the original asset)?



If participants struggle to generate ideas, you can support them by presenting examples that combine or reinterpret traditional practices in creative ways, such as:

- Weaving and food experience - weave a small breadbasket and taste local olive oil and jams,
- Remixed weaving products – young artisans reinterpret old patterns on baskets, and integrate weaving elements as a part of design of home décor and fashion pieces,
- Nature & weaving experience – collect reeds or natural fibres in the landscape, learn about local ecosystems and seasonal cycles, and create a simple woven item using those materials,
- Live music nights with weaving presentations where young artists turn traditional songs sung by weavers and tells related to weaving tradition into modern tunes while local producers offer tasting boards with local products.

Add ideas coming from participants to the ideas pool.

Step 5. Designing the experience

Ask participants to provide characteristics of good practices in sustainable cultural tourism. Ask *“What does a tourism experience need in order to protect and promote our culture, nature and heritage, help our people, and offer something meaningful to visitors?”*

Collect answers from participants and wrap it up with the good practices characteristics.

Table 1. Elements of good practices in sustainable cultural tourism:

1.	It brings direct benefits to local communities. It: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Generates economic opportunities for local communities (jobs, entrepreneurship). -Ensures fair revenue sharing with local stakeholders. -Prioritizes locally owned businesses and services to keep income within the community. -Avoids reliance on external operators or large chains that extract profits without reinvesting locally. -Supports the development of sustainable business models that empower local entrepreneurs and ensure profitability.
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Sustainable Cultural Tourism
on the Mediterranean

2.	It fosters cultural preservation and respect:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Protects and promotes local cultural heritage (traditions, language, sites). -Involves locals in showcasing and educating visitors about their culture authentically. -Reinvests part of the profits into preserving cultural assets and practices. -Does not negatively impact local lifestyle and life quality.
3.	While focusing on local community and cultural preservation and promotion factors it does include sustainable use of resources:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Minimizes environmental impact (waste reduction, energy efficiency). -Supports conservation efforts, reinvesting in protecting natural and cultural assets. -Encourages businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices that align with sustainable tourism principles.
4.	It takes place in line with community objectives and not against the local community will:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Involves community members in decision-making and tourism planning. -Promotes inclusive participation, ensuring benefits reach marginalized groups. -Encourages community ownership or co-management of tourism enterprises.
5.	It provides a high-quality visitor experience:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Offers meaningful, immersive, and respectful cultural experiences for travelers. -Educates tourists about the culture and sustainability of the destination. -Includes opportunities for tourists to directly contribute to community projects or sustainable initiatives.
6.	It translates to economic or social benefits for local community:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Supports locally owned, self-sustaining enterprises that create lasting economic benefits. -Facilitates capacity-building programs for local entrepreneurs to run successful tourism-related businesses. -Establishes diversified income streams for communities (e.g., combining tourism with crafts, farming, or eco-services). -Encourages reinvestment of profits into the community or local development projects.
7.	Includes measures of monitoring and is conducted in a transparent way:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Tracks and reports on the economic, cultural, and environmental impact. -Continuously improves based on feedback from the community and travelers. -Implements metrics to evaluate the profitability and sustainability of local businesses involved.
8.	It is transferable and scalable:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demonstrates a model that can be adapted to benefit other communities.

With that knowledge, ask each group to select one idea from the pool that they believe has strong potential to become a good practice in sustainable cultural tourism in their community. Using this idea, invite them to sketch a visitor journey.

Ask participants to divide a sheet of paper into 4–6 boxes, each representing a stage of the experience (e.g. arrival, welcome, main activity, special moments - such as storytelling, tasting, or making, complementary elements, and ending). Then ask each group to visualise how the experience unfolds for the visitor from start to finish.

For each phase participants should define:

1. Step-by-step journey,
2. Who leads it? (e.g. authentic host – Ana the weaver, local youth as assistants),
3. What do visitors do? (e.g. observe, learn, make, taste, walk),
4. Where does it happen? (e.g. courtyard, workshop, field, trail, garden, tavern),
5. Why is it meaningful? (e.g. weaving experience of weaving mini-coaster and hearing different patterns stories - revives a fading craft; connects generations; visitors learn a real skill and local culture embedded engaging and cheerful stories).

Step 6. Quick prototyping

Each group invites a participant(s) from other group(s) to take the role of a visitor(s). The group members act as hosts. Participants role-play the experience taking “visitors” through every step of the journey. Depending on the type of experience, this can involve either simulating the activity in practice or describing it step by step.

At the end, the ‘visitors’ provide feedback on strengths, areas for improvement, and potential challenges. For example: visitors may need a sample pattern before weaving; there may be insufficient shade (suggesting a need for a tent or a different time of day); or the story may be engaging but too long, requiring a shorter and more accessible introduction.

Step 7. Red and Green Flags.

Ask all participants to analyse each experience in terms of its potential and value as a sustainable cultural tourism initiative. Encourage them to consider all aspects of the experience (see Table 1. Elements of good practices in sustainable cultural tourism), with particular attention to visitors appeal and community and environmental benefits and risks.

👉 You can use the guiding questions:

On the visitor side: *“Why would a visitor choose this experience?”, “What makes it unique to our place?”, “What emotion will they leave with?”.*

On the community side: *Who benefits? How do we involve youth? Does it help preserve our culture or tradition? Could it inspire new small businesses? Does money flow into community, not out? Could this activity put pressure on natural or cultural resources?*

Prepare a sheet to collect the feedback in 2 categories:

Green Flags

E.g. authentic
Entertaining
New income stream potential
Protecting dying off tradition
Community-led

Easy to implement and sustain
Engaging people across generations

Red Flags



Sustainable Cultural Tourism
on the Mediterranean

E.g. Requires large investment
Trespassing on private areas belonging to residents not interested in engaging with the activity,
Might attract mass tourism rather than authenticity seeking respectful cultural tourists,

Does not account for the need to protect environment during the experience,
Put at risk scarce resources in the village,

This exercise will allow identifying the strong and weak point of an idea to redesign it accordingly.

2.4. Key trends and skills supporting effective sustainable cultural tourism implementation

While authenticity and originality are the heart of sustainable cultural tourism, it is equally important to understand how tourism is evolving and what visitors increasingly look for. These broader trends do not replace local culture, they simply help communities design experiences that are culturally rooted and aligned with emerging traveller motivations.

Across Europe and the Mediterranean, many visitors are shifting away from quick sightseeing and mass tourism. Many seek slower, more meaningful encounters, local food and crafts, opportunities to meet real people, and experiences that feel honest, respectful, and connected to place.

Sustainable cultural tourism fits this shift perfectly. By understanding a few current tourism trends and developing complementary skills helping deliver meaningful experiences among local actors, communities can shape offerings that satisfy both local values and visitor expectations.

2.4.1. Key Trends in Sustainable Cultural Tourism Experiences

There are many new developments in tourism that can be capitalized on within the models of sustainable cultural tourism in rural areas, small towns and peripheral regions. Below are examples of three major experience models that are growing in relevance and that naturally complement cultural tourism in small communities.

A. Slow Tourism



Why it fits rural cultural tourism?

- Encourages overnight stays and repeat visits,
- Reduces environmental pressure,
- Strengthens relationships between visitors and locals,
- Makes small experiences (a workshop, a walk, a home meal) more attractive.

Practical examples

- A half-day pottery session instead of a quick demonstration,
- A village "day with a farmer" experience,
- Storytelling evenings that encourage visitors to linger.

B. Eco-Tourism and Nature-Culture Blends



Why it fits rural cultural tourism

- Strengthens pride in local landscapes,
- Preserves biodiversity and agricultural heritage,
- Adds value to activities already practiced by residents,
- Attracts visitors who prefer low-impact, meaningful travel.

Practical examples

- Heritage walks combining landscape-related stories and legends with cultural stops,
- Regenerative activities: path cleaning and restoration, terrace maintenance, orchard planting, culture inspired orientation runs in nature,
- Herb-collecting walks ending with a local cooking activity.

C. Experiential & Participatory Models



Why it fits rural cultural tourism

- Highlights crafts, skills, food traditions, and stories,
- Generates income through small, hands-on activities,
- Supports intergenerational transmission of knowledge,
- Makes visits memorable and personal.

Practical examples

- Bread-making with a village baker,
- Traditional weaving or wood-carving workshops,
- Music, dance, or storytelling circles,
- Seasonal micro-festivals or culinary events.

How to use these trends in practice?

Encourage participants to ask themselves: *"Which of these models naturally fits our assets, personality, and community values?"*

The goal is not to copy trends, but to place local heritage within formats that visitors understand and appreciate, while keeping control and meaning in local hands.

2.4.2. Key Skills for Sustainable Cultural Tourism

Strong cultural tourism experiences depend on more than ideas and cultural assets. They require skills across the community. These skills don't need to be perfect or extremely professional. They just need to be developed step by step.

Below are the essential skill areas that support successful, respectful, and sustainable initiatives.

Infographic 4. Skills for sustainable cultural tourism

KEY SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM

Sharing culture sustainably doesn't require perfection. But right skills will help transform local heritage into authentic visitor experiences that honour local heritage and bring culture and places to life.



Key areas

<p>CULTURAL INTERPRETATION & STORYTELLING</p> <p>The ability to communicate meaning simply and respectfully. Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling stories connected to objects, landscapes, and traditions • Explaining the "why" behind cultural practices • Sharing emotion, not performing or exaggerating 	<p>HOSTING, HOSPITALITY & VISITOR CARE</p> <p>Hospitality in rural areas is simple and human, based on warmth and authenticity. This often sets it apart from urban tourism. Skills include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making visitors feel welcome, • Giving clear guidance, • Providing shade, water, rest, or comfort, • Offering boundaries kindly when something is private or sacred.
<p>EXPERIENCE DESIGN & FACILITATION</p> <p>Clear, well-structured experiences make activities enjoyable for visitors and easier for hosts to deliver. Skills include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structuring the experience with a simple, logical flow • Making activities attractive, engaging, and able to generate fair income • Blending culture with nature, food, crafts, stories, or daily life • Creating hands-on participation moments • Managing timing and group dynamics • Ensuring safety, respect, and accessibility 	<p>COMMUNITY COLLABORATION & CO-CREATION</p> <p>Tourism becomes stronger when actors collaborate rather than work alone. Skills include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating between artisans, farmers, guides, and associations • Combining experiences into routes or seasonal events • Negotiating roles and responsibilities respectfully
<p>BASIC COMMUNICATION & VISIBILITY SKILLS</p> <p>Ability to ensure clear and honest communication rather than marketing. Skill include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing experiences simply and accurately • Setting clear prices and schedules • Responding politely to messages • Using basic digital tools when possible 	<p>SUSTAINABILITY & SAFEGUARDING AWARENESS</p> <p>Hosts must understand how to protect their culture, environment, and community wellbeing. Skills include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising fragile or sacred elements • Limiting group sizes • Defining respectful visitor behaviour • Ensuring fair compensation for local knowledge • Protecting nature during activities

Download the infographic [HERE](#).

The skills needed for sustainable cultural tourism are closely aligned with the European Commission's [GreenComp framework](#) (European Sustainability Competence Framework). GreenComp defines key competences that support individuals and communities in contributing to sustainability transitions. In this module, these competences are translated into practical skills that can be developed through real-life tourism activities in rural and peripheral communities.

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2.5. Beyond a single product – conclusions on sustainable cultural tourism strategies for rural areas and peripheral regions

Sustainable cultural tourism grows step by step. It does not require large infrastructure, big investments, or complex products. It begins with simple, authentic actions: a craft demonstration, a seasonal tasting, a short storytelling walk, a revived ritual. These first, easy-to-implement experiences are essential. They allow communities to test ideas, build confidence, engage new actors, learn what visitors appreciate most, and what works for local community.

But while starting small is the sustainable way to go, the long-term goal is bigger: to gradually develop a diverse, year-round offer that is not dependent on one season, one festival, or one source of income. When communities expand their experiences across seasons - spring herb walks, summer craft evenings, autumn harvest rituals, winter cooking workshops, they strengthen their resilience, attract respectful visitors throughout the year, and reduce pressure on local resources. Learn more about using the sustainable cultural tourism to reduce sustainability [↓](#).



CULTMED_Creating complementary or multidimensional sustainable cultural tourism products ENG

This module has prepared you to guide that journey. Throughout the activities, you learned how to:

- Understand the foundations of sustainable cultural tourism and its relevance for rural and peripheral regions.
- Identify cultural assets (tangible, intangible, natural, and human) that can inspire respectful tourism experiences embracing and promoting your cultural roots.
- Facilitate community mapping, prioritisation, co-creation, and decision-making processes.
- Translate heritage into authentic experiences through structured ideation, visitor-journey planning, and quick prototyping.
- Use key trends, as slow tourism, experiential tourism, regenerative tourism, and nature–culture blends, to design offers that resonate with today’s travellers while remaining deeply rooted in local values.
- Strengthen the essential skills among community actors: storytelling, hosting, collaboration, facilitation, environmental sensitivity, and entrepreneurial thinking.

The future of sustainable cultural tourism in rural areas and peripheral regions depends on exactly these capabilities:

- >> the ability to see value in what already exists,
- >> the courage to experiment,
- >> and the commitment to protect culture while welcoming visitors in meaningful ways.

As your community develops and refines its ideas, remember:

- Authenticity is your strongest asset.
- Small is powerful when it is meaningful.
- Seasonal diversity builds resilience.
- Valuable visitors appreciate connection over consumption.
- Good tourism strengthens identity rather than reshaping it.

Do you want to test your understanding of the module key concepts?

Check your understanding joining a short quiz game: [HERE](#).

To see how sustainable cultural tourism in rural and small-town settings can look in practice and get inspiration check initiatives across Europe recognized as best practices in the area:



- On using sustainable cultural tourism to keep traditions and traditional craft alive and promote local pride in sustainable manner - Best Practice: [Zalipie Art Village, Poland](#)

- On using sustainable cultural tourism for village revival - Best Practice: [A Model Village for Sustainable Cultural Tourism, Kalopanayiotis, Cyprus](#)

- On using intangible heritage to bring life to peripheral regions - Best Practice: [Friday 13 - The Night of The Witches - Montalegre, Portugal](#)

Is your community still seem to you too small or too remote for trying to build the sustainable cultural tourism model? Think again. The model works well in the most remote communities across the world, as long as you focus on unique, authentic value and visitors that look for something special.

Case Study: How Raja Ampat Became a Model for Community-Led Sustainable Tourism through Stay Raja Ampat

“What if tourism could protect paradise instead of consuming it?”

In one of the most remote and biodiverse marine regions in the world, the islands of Raja Ampat faced a familiar paradox: growing global interest from travellers, combined with highly limited infrastructure, fragile ecosystems, and communities at risk of being excluded from tourism benefits if international chains were to dominate development in the region.



Rather than allowing external investors to take control, a different model emerged - **Stay Raja Ampat**, a locally rooted initiative that transformed tourism into a tool for community empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental protection.

[Stay Raja Ampat](#) is a local homestay association that provides a platform linking homeowners and visitors in a highly remote island context, where transport connections are limited, basic services are often lacking, and digital connectivity is very low. In a region where communities have traditionally relied on fishing and face challenges such as limited economic opportunities, risk of external exploitation, and increasing pressure on natural and cultural resources, the association supports indigenous communities in developing sustainable, locally owned tourism.

It connects travellers with a network of simple homestays, guides, and local service providers, while ensuring that tourism benefits remain within the community. Instead of replicating major booking platforms, Stay Raja Ampat operates as a community-driven initiative and a key access point to accommodation in the region. It provides a simple booking system that prioritises locally owned homestays, access to clear information and setting transparent expectations, as well as mediates communication whenever necessary.

The screenshot shows the Stay Raja Ampat website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the logo and links for 'Accommodation', 'The Ultimate Raja Ampat Guide', and 'Contact Us'. Below the navigation bar, the page title is 'Raja Ampat accommodation' with a subtitle 'Showing 5 results for Kabui Bay'. On the left side, there is a search filter panel with 'Search keywords' and 'Locations' (Arborek, Batanta, Fiwien, Gam, Kabui Bay, Kri, Mansuar, Pam (Fam) Islands, West Waigeo/Manyafun, Waigeo) and 'Price/person' (Below IDR 400,000). The main content area displays two accommodation listings: 'Feey Yef Homestay' (WAIGEO - KABUI BAY, 5 stars, 19 reviews) and 'Mandum Stay' (WAIGEO - KABUI BAY - NEAR WAISAI, 5 stars, 13 reviews). Each listing includes a photo of the homestay and a brief description.

Beyond booking, the organisation sets shared standards, such as minimum requirements for accommodation, sanitation, food hygiene, cleanliness, and environmental impact, in a context where formal standards are absent. It monitors quality and supports social, environmental, and economic goals, including conservation, cultural preservation, and community livelihoods. It also provides guidance and capacity building to help local families prepare their homes to welcome visitors, while maintaining traditional ways of living, building, and hosting. This makes community-based tourism feasible in such a remote context.

By coordinating local actors and reinvesting its income into community development and environmental initiatives, Stay Raja Ampat functions not just as a booking platform, but as a collective community-led system for managing sustainable tourism in the region.

While large booking platforms are slowly entering the space, Stay Raja Ampat offers what they cannot easily replicate: authentic, place-based experiences, strong local connection, and direct economic and sustainable development benefits for residents. At the same time, the platform acts as a key intermediary, helping visitors navigate remote conditions (such as limited infrastructure, communication barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and unrealistic expectations), while supporting hosts in managing expectations and improving service quality.

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By clearly communicating the realities of staying in a remote environment (where communities may live without constant electricity, refrigeration, or internet access), Stay Raja Ampat attracts visitors who value authenticity and are willing to adapt. This naturally filters out high-volume or expectation-driven tourism. The initiative operates with a mission-led approach, focusing on authenticity, trust, community benefit, and long-term sustainability.

Sustainability and Cultural Preservation

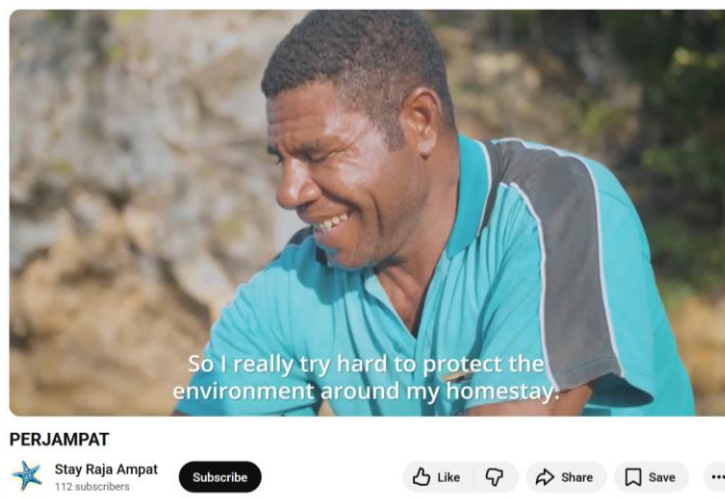
The model reinforces environmental stewardship and cultural integrity by directly linking community income to environmental quality and cultural authenticity.

Because income depends on healthy ecosystems and preserved traditions, communities are encouraged to:

- protect coral reefs
- avoid overexploitation of marine resources
- maintain cultural practices

Visitors come specifically for healthy reefs and authentic local life, meaning that environmental protection and cultural preservation become economically beneficial rather than restrictive.

To strengthen this, Stay Raja Ampat reinvests part of its income into marine-protection, awareness-raising and education among homestay owners and their communities (to learn more watch the video [↓](#)).



Moreover, to be part of the network, homestays are expected to reflect traditional building styles, materials, and techniques, as well as local ways of living (food, daily rhythms, social life). This is prioritised over Western accommodation standards or standardised hotel models. Cultural identity is therefore preserved through the continuity of everyday life, while visitors are encouraged to

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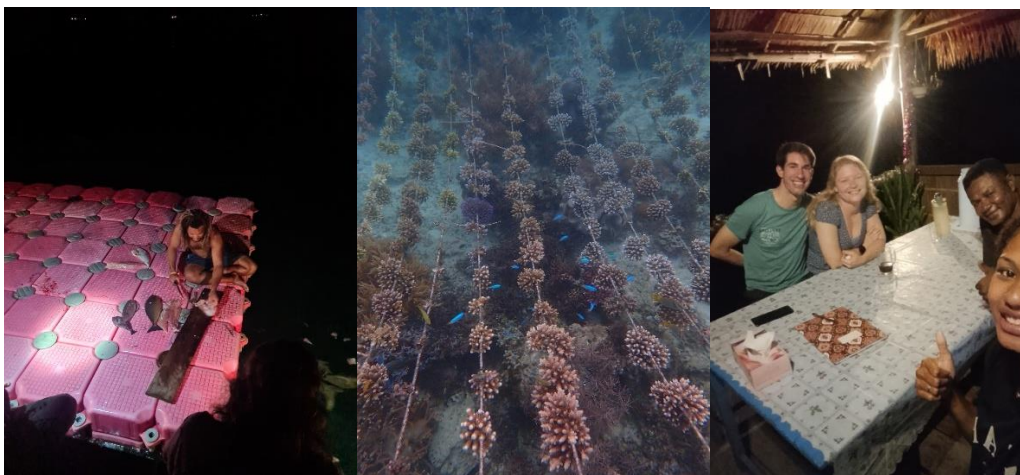
adapt to local conditions rather than the opposite.

Because accommodation is mostly family-owned and small-scale, and construction is limited by the remote location and regulatory constraints, overall capacity in Raja Ampat remains naturally low. Even with growing global interest, this helps prevent overcrowding and reduces environmental pressure, supporting a balance between tourism, community life, and nature.

Why the Experience Feels Unique

While visitors are often attracted by Raja Ampat's exceptional natural heritage, the homestay model offers a level of cultural immersion that is difficult to replicate:

- **Culture is not “performed”. It is lived.** Visitors are integrated into daily life – eating local food and following local diet and schedules, observing routines, and joining simple activities. While the lack of formal tourism training could be seen as a limitation, it ensures that interactions remain genuine and often unexpected. Culture is experienced as it naturally happens, not as a curated product.
- **The environment is part of the experience.** The extreme remoteness - limited electricity, no Wi-Fi, and simple housing, encourages visitors to slow down and engage more deeply with nature and community life.
- **Knowledge is shared informally.** Hosts are not trained guides, but they possess deep knowledge of the marine environment, traditions, and local stories, which they share naturally in everyday interactions.
- **Relationships replace service delivery.** Visitors are by default treated as temporary members of the community. Conversations, knowledge exchange, and connections happen spontaneously, creating emotional engagement rather than transactional experiences.
- **Simplicity enables connection.** Without packaged entertainment, strict schedules, or modern distractions, visitors become more open to interaction and participation. The experience becomes co-created rather than delivered.



In this model, value does not come from professionalization. It comes from proximity to real life. Because conditions are basic and clearly communicated, the model attracts visitors who are curious, adaptable, and motivated by authenticity. These visitors value connection over comfort and are willing to engage with the realities of remote community life.



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What Can Other Communities Learn?

The value of sustainable cultural tourism does not lie in creating something entirely new, but in organising and coordinating existing local assets, even if extremely limited, in a sustainable way:

- Start with what already exists (homes, skills, traditions)
- Build networks of small local providers, not large infrastructure
- Use clear communication to attract the right visitors
- Keep decision-making and benefits within the community, avoiding external service providers, whenever possible
- Grow gradually and intentionally, not rapidly
- Focus on what is unique. Avoid copying neighbouring destinations or following mass tourism trends.

Learn more about Stay Raja Ampat and its work at:

<https://www.stayrajaampat.com/ultimate-raja-ampat-guide/news/raja-ampat-homestay-association/>

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Do you want to test your knowledge of sustainable cultural tourism before you go?

[Try the Cultmed Interactive Activities](#) 



Interactive Activities

Select a Module

- Module 1: How to organise sustainable cultural events based on ISO standards (ISO - 20121)
- Module 2: Applying sustainable practices at Archaeological sites
- Module 3: Transforming cultural tourism entities like galleries and museums into green destinations
- Module 4: Implementing sustainable cultural tourism in local communities and rural settings



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3. ANNEXES

Glossary of Terms

Sustainable cultural tourism - tourism that creates opportunities for economic development within local communities, enhances local culture, and protects and preserves the heritage and authenticity of the destination. Its ultimate goal is to balance the needs of visitors seeking meaningful experiences with the needs of local communities — ensuring that tourism strengthens, rather than erodes, local identity and long-term sustainability.

Best practice in sustainable cultural tourism - an initiative that benefits local communities, preserves and respects cultural heritage, and uses resources responsibly, while being community-led, financially fair, and providing high-quality, meaningful experiences for visitors. It ensures that tourism supports local livelihoods, empowers diverse community members, protects fragile cultural and natural assets, operates transparently with ongoing monitoring, and offers a model that can be adapted or scaled to other communities. **See more Table 1.**

Key Resources

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CultMED (2025). *CultMED Best Practices Report*. Available at cultmed.eu

Duxbury, N. (2019) *CREATIVE TOURISM IN SMALL CITIES AND RURAL AREAS :LESSONS FROM THE CREATOUR PROJECT, PORTUGAL*. [PDF] Available at: <https://estudogeral.sib.uc.pt/bitstream/10316/87529/1/Creative%20tourism%20in%20small%20cities%20and%20rural%20areas.pdf>

EYRACADEMY (2015) *Developing Sustainable Rural Tourism*. [PDF] Available at: <https://www.euracademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Thematic-Guide-1.pdf> .

Grammalidis, N., Grammatikopoulou, A. (2024) *Smart Participatory Methodologies for Sustainable Cultural Tourism*. [PDF] Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-51038-0_35 .

Rural Pact Support Office (2025) *Sustainable rural tourism – Highlights Report*. Available at: https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en .




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Yanan, L., Ismail, M. and Aminuddin, A. (2024) *How has rural tourism influenced the sustainable development of traditional villages? A systematic literature review*. Elsevier. [PDF] Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S240584402401658X>

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Interactive Activities

#	ACTIVITY TYPE	LINK	QR CODE
1	Training Video 1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDoxmCVaqQA	
2	Training Video 2	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3f6KjBqAI4	
3	Educational Games	https://cultmed.eu/educational-games/	
5	Interactive Quizzes	https://cultmed.eu/interactive-activities/	