



BEST PRACTICE: BLED, SLOVENIA



Key Challenge

Degradation and loss of biodiversity.

Type of Solution

Adoption of a tourism strategy and monitoring framework; Stakeholder participation and management; Promotional campaign; Investment in infrastructure and product development.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Rural

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 72 km² (Municipality of Bled)

Population | 8,190 in 2023

Type of Tourism | Ecotourism; Mountain; Rural; Cultural.

Tourism organisation | Three entities: Bled Tourism Board (local Destination Management Organisation); Občina Bled (local municipality); Turistično društvo Bled (Bled Tourist Association).

Main Stakeholders Affected |

Local residents; Tourists; Local businesses; Transport companies.

Additional Challenges Covered | Changing consumer preferences towards more sustainability; Waste production and pollution; Sustainable and smart mobility solutions; Lack of awareness of sustainability and resilience among tourism stakeholders.

Context & Background

Bled is part of the UNESCO Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve and has doubled both its overnight accommodation capacity and visitor numbers over the past decade. In August 2023, there were 10,091 beds in the municipality, which corresponds to 1.1 beds per inhabitant. 441,738 arrivals and 1.08 million overnight stays were recorded in 2023.

Key Challenge

The sharp increase in tourists, including day-tourists, has intensified the pressure on the destination's nature and biodiversity. In detail, there has been an increase in the amount of waste, which is putting a strain on the existing disposal infrastructure, as well as overloads to the transport infrastructure.



Implementation of Solutions: Bled's strategy for sustainable tourism development 2018 – 2025 is built upon an innovative zero-waste management system and the systematic reduction of car traffic.

SOLUTIONS

- The municipality's zero-waste concept includes the following measures:
 - *Labelling of waste bins* based on waste separation guidelines to help locals and tourists separating waste. *Digital weight sensors* in garbage bins indicate when a bin needs to be emptied, thus optimising garbage collection and monitoring the amount of garbage.
 - The installation of [water fountains](#) throughout Bled to avoid the use of plastic bottles. A map of all water fountains shows where water bottles can be refilled.
 - The [SKART Re Use Centre](#) offers residents and tourists second-hand products to buy and reuse.
 - In 2023, [NA KILO](#), the first zero-waste store in Bled, opened, offering loose products or in reusable packaging.
 - The zero-waste measures are widely promoted by all actors involved, for example through inscriptions for the SKART Re Use Centre on the municipal utilities' garbage trucks, the [Zero Waste Week](#) organised by the municipality, or an [educational video](#) on the DMO website. In the project *Ask me I'm local*, organised by Tourism Bled and the Bled Tourist Board, locals inform guests and visitors about correct sustainable behaviour in the destination.
- The waste management company has produced brochures and stickers, distributing them to all residential buildings and accommodation establishments for further use (information on waste separation, drinkable tap water, call to action: "Don't leave a footprint").
- As a member of [Alpine Pearls](#), a network promoting eco-mobility, Bled has implemented a number of measures to reduce traffic, including road closures to reduce traffic, the [Bled Bus](#) which is available to tourists and locals free of charge for trips around Bled and the surrounding area, designated walking and cycling routes to keep tourists controlled on these routes, improved parking infrastructure (e.g. improved information on available parking spaces, more parking spaces at the train station), and a [map](#) that provides information on the transport infrastructure and available transport options.
- [Designated outdoor bathing areas on the lake shores](#) to prevent uncontrolled bathing by visitors along the lake shore.

Replicability potential: High (requires cooperation with local authorities and other stakeholders).

Cost & funding source: Destination Management Organisation (DMO) budget for the development of the sustainability strategies and partly the Bled bus operation; Infrastructure investments are financed by the municipality and private companies.

Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: The early involvement of all stakeholders in the transformation process and their participation in all steps; Multiplier effect of the local residents, who pass on the idea of sustainability to guests and visitors.

Barriers: The high costs of implementing the measures from the population's perspective (it took some time for the locals to become aware of the positive effects of the measures); Sufficient financial resources, as the measures had to be financed by the municipality.

Results and Impacts

- Bled is a role model in the field of waste management and was awarded as the first zero-waste municipality in the EU.
- The zero-waste strategy led to major savings in the municipality through waste avoidance.
- Tourists were educated about waste, particularly through the influence of local residents and businesses as opinion formers.
- The cohesion within the community was strengthened, especially in relation to the zero-waste movement, as well as acceptance and adherence to rules of conduct on and around the lake.
- Bled was able to clearly position itself as a green destination through effective communication measures.

Recommendations by the Destinations

- It is necessary to have a clear vision and develop a strategy and concept for the future.
- The integration of stakeholders at all levels in the region is the biggest key to success – all relevant stakeholders must be engaged.
- Every idea and long-term vision should be shared with all stakeholder groups. Ideas of all stakeholders should be stimulated and considered, as this can motivate them.
- Younger generations should be involved. For example, the waste management company in Bled works with kindergartens and primary schools so that children can “educate” the older generations.

Useful Links

[Green Bled](#) | [Zero Waste Bled](#)

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