

## Ecotourism development in Lithuania and Estonia

### Report 2015

This is a report of the project “[Improve preconditions for eco-tourism in Lithuania](#)”, that was partly financed by the [Nordic Council of Ministers](#) and took place in Lithuania in 2014-2015. Project was coordinated by [Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania](#). Partners – [Estonian ecotourism association](#) and [Swedish ecotourism society](#).

The overall object of the project – to improve preconditions for eco-tourism development in Lithuania. This would have been impossible to accomplish without partners meeting in Lithuania and assistance of marketing professional.

Here you can find detailed documentation on below mentioned project activities:

1. Ecotourism product development: planning, expert testing, young families testing (see Annex 1)
2. Development of set of criteria for eco-tourism products (see Annex 2)
3. Development of marketing strategy and communication plan to promote ecotourism in Lithuania. (see Annex 3)



This document is made for public no-commercial use. It is mostly dedicated for tourism service providers and people who are interested in responsible tourism development. Feel free to share it.

“

*Ecotourism is a way of eating the cake while still keeping it.*

## Annex 1

### Ecotourism product development

In order to prepare ecotourism service that involves both – deep nature knowledge and fun, project team tested the animal-tracking product 3 times: with nature lovers; experts and young families. Before testing, there was a planning stage.

#### Planning and first testing – Phase I

##### Choosing the product

For ecotourism product development, Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania (BEF) chose nature activity that could be easily adaptable in various territories after it is developed as an ecotourism product. NGO Baltic Wolf had created and time-to-time offered animal tracking courses. From its essence, it was not an ecotourism service: this activity was mainly designed for their members and supporters, included a lot of scientific knowledge and was offered free-of-charge. BEF had an idea (and asked for Baltic Wolf's approval) to create an ecotourism service, which would include all aspects of ecotourism, be acceptable for wider audience and have economic viability. For developing and testing it, BEF chose a few territories (Rūdininkai polygon and forest in Dzukija National Park) that has unique nature and is not very far from the capital city. For choosing the product it is crucial to judge guides' knowledge and competences. Since BEF had a team member, who is very experienced in animal-tracking, it was chosen for a product development.



##### Development and testing

In order to prepare tourism product, project team (project coordinator and guide) went to the territory 2 times. The first time, they went only by themselves to plan the route and decide on attractive stories they can tell for tourists; and the second time – with the group to test it.



Participants gathered in the meeting point in Vilnius; discussed logistical things and went to Rūdininkai. This nature experience took around 8 hours (from early morning till the dark). Testing went really successfully, group was very happy spending a day in the unique and diverse place, getting a lot of interesting knowledge about animal behaviour and environment. The group of unknown people got to know each other and formed a group. Very emotional moment was a group hug for a guide at the very end of the trip. Participants expressed their gratitude and even offered money for the guide (this testing was free-of-charge). The main observations after testing were:

**Things the group liked most:**

- Variety of information that was provided (about everything tourists see around);
- Walking in the night time (the mystery, stars, the silence);
- Very unique place (polygon, a lot of different ecosystems, changing landscape).

**Some things to emphasized more:**

- The expertise of guide (no questioning about his competence);
- Broader perspective of ecotourism and its benefit for local people and general society;
- Demonstrate links between animal and people life;
- Opportunity for tourists to feel scientists and making something special;
- The element of competitiveness;
- Encourage sharing of experience gained;
- Entertaining elements (acting like animals; animal sound making or etc.);
- Time for fire place, discussions and peaceful being in the nature;
- Giving opportunity for participant to share their knowledge;
- Conditions of the trip (clothing, inventory necessary and etc.);

**Things to think about:**

- The length of the route – whether to have a long one and to see variety of different landscapes; or to make the route shorter, deeper and less diverse;
- Climate conditions – when it is cold, think about some activities to warm up and more intense beginning of the route;
- Ending the day having sauna or common dinner;
- The speed – there suppose to be a slow trip, giving the opportunity to look around, to listen and feel the place;
- Scenarios of accidents – prepare scenarios, what would happen when people will get wet; get some injuries or etc.
- Animal tracking documentation – find an interesting form for documentation of tracking.

Having all things in mind, we prepared a shortened version for the second Phase – expert testing.

## Expert testing and further development (February 10-12, 2015)– Phase II

In February, 9 ecotourism development professionals accompanied by marketing expert gathered in Rūdininkai to test animal tracking and put their advises for further development of product itself and its marketing strategy.



After experiencing half-day animal tracking, experts discussed product itself and its marketing strategy. Discussions took place for 2,5 days.

### Participants of the meeting:

Aivar Ruukel - Estonian Ecotourism Association, tour operator

Jeppe Klockareson - Swedish Ecotourism Society

Audrius Savickas - Marketing expert

Tomas Selickas - Baltic Wolf

Žymantas Morkvėnas, Kęstutis Navickas, Rita Norvaišaitė, Aivaras Jefanovas, Radvilė Jankevičienė, Šarūnas Večerkauskas - Baltic Environment Forum Lithuania



Discussion has started when marketing expert asked participants to express their strongest emotions felt during animal tracking. There were 2 main questions: What touched you most (positively or negatively) and what is the beauty of animal tracking. Most of participants were impressed by the possibility to see variety of footprints (specially, the rare ones) and learn about them. Ancient method of tea making (melting the snow and putting herbs collected by participants) was indicated as another important element of the tour and adventures - as crucial thing to grab attention and



increase involvement. Participants found wide nature knowledge and specific stories about the place very valuable while group moderation have been decided to be improved. It became clear that the most important thing in ecotourism services is **expertise of guides**.

During discussions, some **suggestions for product development** came out:

1. Structure clearly the tour;
2. Think when to say what;
3. Think about risks and prepare plan what will you do when accident occurs.
4. Plan the round route (that you don't have to come back on the same way), no more than 8-10 km for 1 day tour.
5. Evaluate risks that could destroy the image of ecotourism service (natural landscape): hunters, berry pickers, cars running around.

The following **structure of animal tracking** tour was offered:

1. Briefing. Guide gives short information (10 minutes) about context, safety, behaviour issues, explains the importance of ecotourism. All this is done in relaxed atmosphere, preferably – sitting all together around the table. Guide scans the audience and makes decisions about changes that needs to be done according the group. Try to catch the special interests of tourists.
2. The experience suppose to have discovering element. The route starts at the certain distance from the “main discovery” and the guide tells stories about uniqueness of this “discovery”, reveal the “secrets” of the territory. On the way to territory, the guide starts telling the stories.
3. Give a chance to be near the risk / chalanges. Tell people strictly to follow the guide.
4. Heathland. Tell the story about specific habitat, features of heath, nature management possibilities and polygon history.
5. Show old map of the territory (e.g. ortophoto) and tell stories (what it looks like, what you can “read” from the map and etc.).
6. Involvement. Encourage people to get involved, to make tasks. Prepare flags, ask to find animal footprints at the “crossroad” of animals, mark them and define them. Tell stories about animal life, their behaviour. Motivate to concentrate on one sense (listening in the silence or etc.)
7. Landscape view on the hill. Ask about what do they see and can tell about the lanscape. Then, tell them what nature marks really you can see.
8. Full spectrum of stories. Try to show diverse footprints (on the trees) and tell variety of stories (not only about nature, but also – local culture and history).
9. Ecotones. The guide helps to indicate them in the nature.
10. Funny methods to measure the altitude of the tree.
11. Lunch at the shore of the bog. Try local food. (Experience throught the taste).
12. Tea collection. In order to involve tourists to the collection process, divide them into small groups giving specific plant (or group of plants) to look for.
13. Fire place in the island. Show how to make a fire. Boil the tea from the herbs collected. Ask tourists to share not only tea but also their knowledge and emotions.

For fully developed service it has to prepared:

- Rubber boots for rent;
- Bags for tea collection;
- Flags for marking the footprints;
- Cups.

Having in mind all those aspects, it becomes clear that high quality ecotourism services require a lot of expertise and preparation, could be guided only in small groups and should follow nature cycles (e.g. groups can not be taken to see birds during their breeding period). Therefore, the **price** of those products is **very high**. The situation is even more difficult in Lithuania, where fully undeveloped free of charge ecotourism activities distort the market. They form usual practise that experiencing nature accompanied by a professional suppose to be arranged in this particular way - voluntary activity taken without full responsibility.

A representative from Estonian ecotourism association, running his private business, shared his experience which shows that all so called "deep nature" services are mainly directed to **international market** because of its high price. Going to international market also means extra costs (~20-25% commission fee) for tourism companies that organizes international trips.

### Young families testing and further development (April 11)- Phase III



Project team also tested animal tracking in different territory with one of target audiences – young families. According to above mentioned suggestions, the service was improved. Two components of the experience were specially designed for children to keep their engagement – we used flags for marking the footprints found and the Elixir of Strength to give children energy to continue the route. Group also made gypsum prints of footprints. The experience took 3 hours and costed 5 euros per-person. Food (except sap for Elixir of Strength) was not included to the experience. 20 people attended tracking. Everyone said they enjoyed the service and the price was adequate for it. Of course, some expressed their wish to see



real animals but they all were really happy about their experiences and knowledge they got.



Animal tracking was part of nature's festival "[Vidur giriu](#)". We communicated them together. To inform about the festival and animal tracking we used social media, direct mailing to environmentally orientated people, press releases (some articles in news portals and radio appeared), direct communication with journalists, few of our webpages ([www.gamtoje.org](http://www.gamtoje.org), [www.bef.lt](http://www.bef.lt)). We did not have any information partners for the festival, that could cause us lower audience reach. Nevertheless, we had full group for the activity.

Interestingly, price for nature festival and animal tracking



aroused discussions about pricing experiences in nature. As mentioned earlier in this document, Lithuanians are used to get nature experiences free-of-charge, therefore, paying services seems odd and inappropriate for them. It creates a feeling for them that someone is trying to take *publicly owned* nature and make it private. This clearly indicates, that paying nature services

suppose to promise and give something extra, something bigger and better than usual nature experiences. It also shows that only certain part of Lithuanian society will be willing to pay for that kind of services and the price is relatively low.

[See the animal tracking service presentation on the web.](#)

[See more picture from the animal tracking in Dzūkija](#)



## Annex 2

### Ecotourism criteria

During the partner meeting basic requirements for ecotourism services (criteria) were also discussed. Suggestions for improvement were made for the already existing Lithuanian Protected Area Labeling system.

The participants agreed on the following **criteria of ecotourism services** that are used world-wide:

- Minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness, and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Produce direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates.
- Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.



GRAŽUTĖS  
REGIONINIO PARKO  
PRODUKTAS

According to **criteria** listed above and experience of the Swedish labeling system „Nature's best”, the project team suggested to specify **3 new product groups** in the already existing Lithuania Protected Areas Product Labeling System. The criteria were defined.

#### 1. Tourism product

- The product does not cause any harm to nature and the environment; it was tested and approved by Protected Area administration
- Involves nature knowledge
- Gives general information about responsible tourism
- Offered only in small groups (up to 20 people)
- If it includes catering, the food is made locally
- Provides information about possibilities to travel by public transport; uses bicycles or other nature-friendly transport for short trips (up to 3 km)
- Avoids using disposable products and packaging
- The leading person is local or well acquainted with the area
- The landowner is contacted about tours in his land.
- The products are based upon an ecologically sustainable and ethically acceptable usage of resources.
- Local community benefits from the tourism product

#### 2. Guide

- Is local or well acquainted with the area



- Guides 50% of his tours for small groups (up to 20 people), when guides bigger ones, consults with Protected Area administration in order to assure that nature is not damaged.
- Provides information about possibilities to travel by public transport; uses bicycles or other nature-friendly transportation for short trips (up to 3 km).
- Involves nature knowledge in his tours. Have basic knowledge about species living in the protected area and its disturbance.
- Gives general information about responsible tourism
- Provides visitors with information about other local products, places to visit and tourism services.
- The Landowner is contacted about tours in his land.
- In 2 years have not broken down the rules of Protected Area

### 3. Tour operator

- Is local or well acquainted with the area
- All tours offered are certified with Protected areas product label (“tourism product” category) others are informed about ecotourism principles and labeling
- Provides information about possibilities to travel by public transport
- Gives general information about responsible tourism
- Avoids using disposable products and packaging
- Does not operate activities that can cause a negative effect for nature, species and environment. Protected Area administration has been contacted to assure that.
- All activities are based upon an ecologically sustainable and ethically acceptable usage of resources.
- In 2 years have not broken down the rules of Protected Area

After long discussions, it became clear, that full adaptation of Sweden’s ecotourism labeling system could encourage responsible tourism development in Lithuania and other countries. The main feature of this „Nature’s best Sweden“ labeling is orientation to evaluation and improvements process, not the final certification. It encourages responsible tourism development even for the companies that do not get the label at the end. That could give a impulse to move business forward nature protection. In order to implement this, a separate project should be initiated.



## Annex 3

### Marketing strategy and communication plan

Marketing planning started on expert meeting and was revised after that. It also involved some testing. Later on, suggestion and recommendation were summarized in communication plan.

#### Marketing planning – Phase 1

Marketing expert defined marketing as creating, communicating, delivering value to target audience at profit. He stressed that we have to think about marketing as about expectation management. That means: clearly define what we are actually offering; find people that would be interested in that; convince them to buy that; adapt the service according to visitors expectations (to know that at the very beginning of the service) and trying to fulfill their expectations.

One of the most important aspect in marketing was said to be the real value tourist gets from the service. In order to define that, marketing expert asked all participant to think about animal tracking and answer the question “what is it for me?”. Then he asked the same question for the same person few times more and step by step the real value came up.

Ideas to be used formulating value of the tour:

- A) Escape, Excitement, Experience, Do unusual -> Clear your mind -> Relaxation, free air -> Health -> Peace -> Balance -> Motivation, creativity, Out of box ideas.
- B) See something you can not see -> Different from other -> Post on Facebook -> Proud -> Interesting, popular, likes
- C) Re-connect -> better understanding -> “Armchair warriors” -> Personal growth, Development, Learning new things. (Not to get away - go some place)
- D) See tiny part of the nature -> bigger picture -> relax, unique, experience -> feeling free of problem -> Relaxation
- E) Escape from comfort zone -> disconnect routine -> Get away -> Recharge
- F) Get out from routine -> emotions -> Activities -> Exciting -> Learn who we are -> Understand yourself.

Later on, the expert, grouped all values into 2 groups: internal motivation (mine) and external motivation (be likable and impress others). So, at least 2 very different groups having very different motives can be targeted (with different communication).

Other marketing ideas from the experts session:

1. Pricing - 50 Eur per person (individuals). 8 hours long tour, transfer and food included. 6-8 persons per group. Those prices are more suitable for foreigners.
2. Target group ideas: a) Double income, no kids big cities dwellers, b) 50-60 years old c) youngsters, d) families, e) foreigners.



3. Media channels ideas - leaflets, web, Estonians use "[Mare Balticum Reisen](#)" travel agency

4. Use hotels as sales channels (Estonian experience). Hotels expect 10-25% for sold tours. That price should be included in product price, so that the prices would be the same.

Later on, marketing expert and project team once again went through the steps of marketing more in detailed.

### Segmentation:

1. Business to consumer
  - a. Seekers of meaning (orientated to meditation, philosophy and etc.)
  - b. Couples
  - c. Families
  - d. Retired
  - e. Young no kids big cities dwellers

! School children are not considered as target audience of this service because of coming in huge-sized groups and low price they usually spend during those trips.

2. Business to business
  - a. Gift web-portals
  - b. Personnel managers in huge organizations (difficulty to divide into small groups)
  - c. Training companies (difficulty to divide into small groups)
  - d. Event organizers (difficulty to divide into small groups; but small events are OK, e.g., stag night)
  - e. Country tourism homesteads and hotels (close to the tourism service area)

The main feature of all ecotourism services causing segment we chose is small size of a group (optimal – till 10 people) and high price.

### Pricing

Advice from marketing professional: for pricing check out your expenses and divide the price for development of a product for few years instead of one. It is also very interesting to check who are your real competitors. There is one (the first one) psychological boundary of 20 euros in Lithuania (higher price requires something different and special - reasonable).

Project team counted the price of a service in the following way: they presumed to organize 12 tours per year (1 tour per month) for a group of 10 people and divided the development expenses for 3 years. It turned out, that a person should pay almost **3 euros** per tour only for the **development costs**. They counted variety of options for a



one day long tour (supplying food, transportation, deliverables, 1 extra leading person and with ought him), the price range (selling directly for customer, including development price) was **11-30 euro**. If we presume, that we would need intermediary, it would be at least 10% extra (**12-33 euro**). Two days tour would cost **61-85 euro** per person.

This price would be quite competitive with other tourism services in Lithuania (prices found on the internet and gift portals), but our service requires to collect **minimum 6 people** in a group.

## Marketing testing – Phase 2

After we counted the price of a product, we contacted one popular gift portal (that, according to marketing professional, feels the market very well) and asked about possibilities to add this kind of service to their product list. Sum up from the discussion – the most important aspects:

- The minimum number of participants (so that it would be worth delivering the service). The best sold products are for 1-2 people. For bigger groups only 1-2 services are sold in a year. It is very hard to pick the right date for all different participants.
- Seasonality. It is difficult to sell seasonal products.

So, the hardest question: **how to form the group of the right size (10 people)?**

There would be a better option, of course, to cooperate with some other guides/service providers and deliver service for bigger groups. This would make it easier to sell the service for companies.

In order to offer products for foreign market, some experience should be get at first. Therefore, for starting ecotourism service, we recommend to concentrate on local market.

**2 easiest possibilities** to formt the group of the right size: to offer the service for 2 friend families; group of friends (special ocation)

### Different packages could be offered to:

- Families (oriented to children expriences, fun);
- Adventure lovers (involve climbing, physical activities, chalanges);
- Stag/hen parties (some tasks for groom/bride).

### Communication plan (suggested but not the only one possible):

The service could be oriented to **city people**, that does not have a lot of nature experience during his regular day.

Very good and relatively cheep tool for communication is press releases. But in order to attract media attention, you need to write a really good article. Better to consult with proffessional.

On the web. Webpage with good search engine optimization and visually attractive information is obligatory. You can also cooperate with other ecotourism service providers, to make the webpage or try to cooperate with [www.gamtoje.org](http://www.gamtoje.org) and to use already made system.

Find below suggestions for communication actions according target audience.

<b>Families</b>	<b>Adventure lovers</b>	<b>Stag/hen parties</b>
Promotional programmes for tourism oriented people, media (specialized for every audience*) and celebrities** of that particular audience		
Originaly styled lefflets in their gathering places (shops, coffes, libraries, clubs)		
Special offers for birthdays and other family celebrations are presented on the webpage	Posters in sport clubs, climbing centers	Prepare presentation (video featuring a lot of chalanges and fun), make it available on the Internet
Seminars in kindergardens/schools about animals and animal tracking	Presentations in sport and travel equipment shops, running competition organizers, adventure parks, prepare special offers	Special offers on discount and group-selling portals
Try to get direct contacts to parents and send them visual presentations	Direct mailing, posting in specialized groups on social media	Contact event organizers (bussness to bussness model)
Articles in parent (mother) magazine	Instalation in cities on favourite running routes: animal footprints leading to the main webpage	Articles, how to organize a good party in media and on the internet
Send special offer for family party in the nature for event orgnizers and gift portals		Special T-shirt for participants with company logo
Attending special fairs (“Vaikų šalis”, “Adventur” and orther)		
Contact local hotels and country tourism places, give them deliverables		
After experience: Encourage sharing pictures on social media. Ask to use hashtags		

\* Families get information from different sources that *adventure lovers* or young people looking fo ideas for stag parties. Just think about normal week of those people – what they do, what they read, where they go, and where information can reach them.

\*\* Favourite celebrities also differes for target audience.

It is also necessary to make the tour leader as a star/charackter. Talk a lot about his proffesionality and competences, make him talk to media and express his opinion. It is also good to decide on his costume and visual appereance.



**After testing the tour itself and its communication, it is good to get to the international market. The best way would be** contacting tour operators, organizing international trips and having agreements with hotels and other accommodation providers. Also, consider going to present your products to the international fairs.

Use tools that are free of charge and very popular: register your service on [www.tipadvisor.com](http://www.tipadvisor.com) ; hide some treasures for <https://www.geocaching.com/play> ; put pictures on <https://www.facebook.com/>; <https://www.pinterest.com> and other social media.

“

*When considering communication action, think about your audience: where they go, what they do, where information can reach them*

---

### **The most important advises** when developing ecotourism product:

1. Think not only about nature knowledge that you would like include but also about funny gamified elements, attractions and convenience for visitors;
2. Think how to improve the service having in mind its impact for the environment and local community. The specialists of protected area can definitely advise you and ecotourism criteria to help you getting inspiration;
3. Test the service few times. Mistakes are better seen from the outside;
4. Focus on the uniqueness, interesting facts and unexpected stories of species and the area; ask visitors, involve them to the process;
5. When deciding on the price, take a look to other offers of leisure activities that can compete with your service in attracting target audience's attention. Activities in the nature is not the only service-competitor. Consider other forms of leisure – cinema, concerts and other.
6. Cooperate with other tourism and catering service providers, which think in a similar way. It is easier when 1 person is responsible for 1 component of the service;
7. Pay a lot of attention for the visualization of the service. Communication should focus on emotions. It is well expressed in [British Columbia branding presentation](#).

For more information, please contact Rita Norvaisaite: [rita.norvaisaite@bef.lt](mailto:rita.norvaisaite@bef.lt)