



The QualityCoast programme in 2011-'12

With the QualityCoast programme, the Coastal & Marine Union - EUCC aims to establish a worldwide network of coastal communities that share similar values on sustainable development, nature and biodiversity, cultural heritage and identity, and social responsibility, at the same time maintaining high standards in the quality of their tourism. QualityCoast has been developed in the EU INTERREG IIIC project Coastal Practice Network (CoPraNet) by 21 partners from 11 countries under the lead of the Coastal & Marine Union – EUCC, one of the largest coastal expert networks in the world. The QualityCoast programme was the result of the development of success indicators of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) at local level, in connection to the implementation of the EU Recommendation for ICZM (2002).

QualityCoast provides new ways of cooperation between coastal communities. Communities join a network of like-minded communities and share their experiences and best practices in order to improve sustainability and social responsibility in tourism. Their performance in these fields is connected to international tourism marketing through certification under the supervision of an independent international jury issuing QualityCoast Awards.

The importance of QualityCoast for tourism sustainability

People are increasingly interested in sustainability issues, also when selecting their holiday destination. Within a few years, tourism eco-labels will be common features in travel brochures and websites.

Whilst the Blue Flag specifically applies to individual beaches and marinas, and Travelife and the Green Key to single accommodations, QualityCoast is taking the whole territory of the coastal destination into account: towns, small regions and islands.

Participation of local authorities in the QualityCoast programme improves their awareness performance and achievements in an international context. The comparison with other QualityCoast communities provides the community with a good picture of its strengths and weaknesses. The international assessment and recommendations by the QualityCoast Jury provide the local authority with a guidance to be considered in an agenda for improvement.

The community's own international tourism marketing can profit from the status of QualityCoast Destination. Experience in several countries learns that this will continue to generate media publicity nationally and internationally. Award winners can widely disseminate the international QualityCoast brochure and refer to the QualityCoast public website (www.qualitycoast.info). Such sustainability based marketing efforts will increase the "green profile" of the destination both externally and internally and this will help mainstreaming sustainability on local policy and decision making.

Our contacts with European travel agencies and tour operators have shown that there is serious interest in highlighting the QualityCoast destinations in their travel brochures and/or websites. TUI-the Netherlands already started to mention the QualityCoast awarded destinations in its travel brochures.

The QualityCoast Awards

The QualityCoast Awards provide an independent international certification of sustainability aspects of coastal and island destinations. 5 Award levels exist, depending on the extension of the evaluation and on the performance of the destination in sustainability efforts. With a new two-tier approach (see box), combining the QualityCoast policy awards (Bronze to Platinum) and the QualityCoast BasiQ award, the QualityCoast programme will be better able to inform consumers about sustainability aspects of an increasing number of destinations.

The QualityCoast policy awards (Platinum to Bronze)

To apply for this category of awards, the local government(s) needs to provide detailed information not only on the situation (attractiveness of the destination) but mainly on the policies and efforts towards sustainability.

The profile of a QualityCoast Award destination: (at least a) sufficient level of sustainability of the tourism product and appropriate policy performance in the areas of nature, environment, identity and socio-economics, according to international standards.

In applications for Awards information must be provided for ca. 70 core indicators (including the 30 "BasiQ" status indicators, see below); additional information for ca. 40 optional indicators is welcome. Indicators represent four categories: 1. Nature; 2. Environment; 3. Identity and 4. Socio-economics.

Evaluation: QualityCoast International Secretariat (Leiden), assisted by National Secretariats and experts.

Certification by: the QualityCoast International Jury, composed of independent national experts, chaired by EUCC's President, Belgium Minister of State Mr Johan Vande Lanotte. For some countries the International Jury is working on the basis of National QualityCoast Juries.

Applicants with a sufficient score (5.7 minimum on a scale of 0-10) receive a QualityCoast policy award (certificate, banner and flag) for 2 years.

All QualityCoast policy award winners are mentioned in the '2012 QualityCoast Top 100' list.

The QualityCoast BasiQ award was launched in 2011 as a certification of the attractiveness of coastal tourism destinations from the point of view of tourists interested in natural and cultural heritage, local identity, environment and sustainability. QualityCoast BasiQ does not look at policy reports or their implementation.

The profile of a QualityCoast BasiQ destination: highly attractive for visitors interested in a green, clean and/or culture destination; potential quality in sustainable tourism product.

BasiQ scans are based upon ca. 30 indicators (that are also among the mandatory indicators of the QualityCoast policy awards).

Validation, evaluation and certification: same as QualityCoast policy awards.

Destinations with a minimum BasiQ score of 7 (on a scale of 0-10) are eligible for a QualityCoast BasiQ Award.

Winners of the BasiQ Award will receive a special flag but their status will only be valid for 1 year.

The "2012 QualityCoast Top 100" will include, by order of best qualification, first the QualityCoast policy award winners (Platinum to Bronze) and for the remaining number: the best scoring QualityCoast BasiQ destinations.

All QualityCoast indicator sets take the scores from various other eco-labels into account, such as the number of Blue Flags, Travelife and Green Key accommodations.

QualityCoast policy award

Since 2007, 35 coastal communities from 13 European countries have received a QualityCoast Gold, Silver or Bronze Award. The only region where all communities have met the QualityCoast Award requirements (2010), are the Azores (Portugal).

Preparing a QualityCoast Award application takes a substantial effort (one or two weeks preparation work by a local authority officer) and an evaluation procedure of several months. But there are also numerous benefits for the awarded communities: for a detailed description, please have a look at the related document, which is herewith attached.

QualityCoast BasiQ

Compared to the application for the QualityCoast policy awards, preparing a *QualityCoast BasiQ* scan takes less time. Therefore, *QualityCoast BasiQ* is also a very useful tool for (self-) assessment of coastal communities; it is a suitable first test for destinations that consider applying for the more prestigious QualityCoast policy award.

Till Oct 2011, the QualityCoast BasiQ scan has been performed for international (coastal) tourism destinations in the following countries:

- ❖ Belgium
- ❖ Bulgaria
- ❖ Cyprus
- ❖ Germany
- ❖ Greece
- ❖ Slovenia
- ❖ Malta
- ❖ France
- ❖ Spain
- ❖ Portugal
- ❖ Italy
- ❖ The Netherlands.

In 2011-'12, more international coastal tourism destinations will be scanned including in Denmark, the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Developing the QualityCoast Partnership

Since January 2011, EUCC has started to develop a new partnership of NGOs (that are independent from the coastal communities to be assessed), to help implement the programme at a national level.

So far the QualityCoast partnership consists of:

- ❖ AKTI Project and Research Centre, Nicosia, Cyprus
- ❖ Black Sea Coastal Centre, Constanta, Romania
- ❖ Centro Mediterraneo EUCC, Barcelona, Spain
- ❖ Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles (*to be confirmed*)
- ❖ EUCC-France, Lille, France
- ❖ EUCC-Germany, Warnemünde, Germany
- ❖ EUCC-Malta, Valetta, Malta
- ❖ Vereniging Kust & Zee, Leiden, the Netherlands.

The QualityCoast 2012 International Jury

The QualityCoast Jury(s) will meet in March 2012 to decide on the final list of QualityCoast Award winners and on the final list of destinations for the 2012 QualityCoast Top 100. To this end, the jury will take the assessments of the QualityCoast Secretariat into consideration as well as the reports of National Juries. The National Juries can delegate representatives to the International Jury.

The international jury will make sure that the rules of the QualityCoast programme have been implemented in an equal way in all countries, yet taking the national situation into account. In this way the jury will make sure that destinations (local authorities) will not be too severely punished by constraints and problems at a national level.

On the basis of its considerations, the jury will announce the Official Nominations for the QualityCoast Awards 2012 around 1 April 2012. The Jury will have an internal and provisional agreement on the QualityCoast Gold and Silver Award winners, since this may be subject to

further review by the QualityCoast Secretariat and jury, this will not be announced before the 2012 QualityCoast Ceremony.

2012 QualityCoast Events

The 4th international QualityCoast Event (including an Award Ceremony and a Workshop) will be held in the 2nd week of May, 2012. At this event representatives from local and regional authorities will exchange experiences in the field of sustainability in tourism. On behalf of EUCC's President, Minister of State Johan Vande Lanotte (Belgium) and the international QC Jury, representatives from the European Commission and national Ministers will be invited to address the audience and present the QualityCoast policy awards. It is expected that award winners will represent more than 10 countries.

The international event is followed by a series of national QualityCoast Events, where the QualityCoast BasiQ awards will be presented.

More information

For more information please check:

- ❖ the QualityCoast website for partners and applicants: www.qualitycoast.net
- ❖ the QualityCoast website for the public: www.qualitycoast.info

or contact the QualityCoast Team at EUCC in Leiden (NL): secretariat@qualitycoast.info, tel. 0031 71 5122900.

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Albert Salman, Coastal & Marine Union – EUCC, www.eucc.net