



European Capital of Smart Tourism, including Digitalisation, Sustainability,
Cultural Heritage and Creativity.

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Type of best practice

Smart Tourism - Smart Destinations

Keywords

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Pafos applied for the European Capital of Smart Tourism Award in June 2022 and was selected by a jury of experts as a finalists amongst 6 other cities. Following a presentation at a EU institutions jury, it was selected as European Capital of Smart Tourism 2023 (together with Seville, Spain). The advantages of Pafos were the strong involvement of the Municipality in smart city initiatives and applications, previous European Capital of Culture (2017), the DESTI-SMART Interreg Europe project (2018-2022) and its UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

Organisation in charge of best practice

Pafos Regional Board of Tourism

Location

Pafos, Cyprus





Dates

June 2022 - December 2023, Main actions started January 2019, completed October 2023+

Description



Pafos as a destination has long been incorporating the concepts of sustainability, accessibility, innovation/digitalisation and cultural heritage-creative tourism into its planning. Pafos is motivated by a vision of being a quality destination where visitors can enjoy a diverse range of experiences while also contributing to sustainable tourism growth, respecting the natural environment and cultural heritage.

Pafos has evolved from a classic mass-tourist sun-and-sea hotspot to a sophisticated and innovative tourism destination. After over 15 years of evolution, the destination is now successfully incorporating sustainability themes into its comprehensive smart tourism strategy and operations.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004545.



Pafos, is well served by the Pafos International airport, offers outstanding hotel establishments, excellent quality services, broad range of recreational activities, beautiful rural areas, open spaces, cultural /religious retreats and much more. Visitors are happy to explore the broad range of assets more than 300 days of sunshine!

Pafos is currently reinvesting heavily in the region's infrastructure, tourist products, services & experiences offered, tourism technology and environmental protection.

Some of the most important best practice aspects towards Smart tourism, Smart destinations are:

- Enhancement of the old town Pafos with renovation of buildings, new pedestrian areas, installation of smart parking facilities, smart LED lighting, smart bus stops etc
- Continuous upgrades in Public transport by introducing low carbon public transport (electric minibus), provisions for e bikes and e cars like charging stations etc
- Accessible tourism facilities at attractions such as braille signage, wheel chair friendly routes, e buggies and more
- Continuous upgrades of Hotel establishments (rooms, public areas, spa, catering facilities etc)
- Introduction of renewable energy installations (photovoltaic), NO plastic policy, paper recycling, as well as water treatment/recycling facilities
- Development of new cultural routes (The Myth of Aphrodite-goddess of love and beauty, St Paul's footsteps route, Myths & Legends
- Development of Smart app for the UNESCO Archaeological park inc. audio guides and content in several languages, 360 touring, videos etc. Smart app about the Myth of Aphrodite including AR and more
- Introduction of Smart signs (QR codes) as a way to provide better interpretation and interaction while at the same time eliminating visual pollution by replacing the traditional static, large in size, signs.(Smart signs include content in several languages, 360 touring, video, photo gallery, audio guiding etc)
- Launch of an innovative digital campaign in 8 countries using a latest technology with an algorithm which traces potential visitors that show active travel intentions.

- Pafos has adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals as they apply to tourism sustainability, in particular 5 of the 13 SDGs
- 18 blue flag beaches, Quality Coast Gold Award 2013 -2023, part of the EU Green Destinations
- Over ten nature trails have recently been revalued and upgraded, and they are now all promoted through unique portals such as Komoot, Alltrails, and others.
- Most of the hotel properties are ISO140000 certified
- Continuous upgrades of the green & public areas
- Introduction of 9 new cycling routes covering the whole destination (installed parking places, digital maps and signage)
- Balanced economic performance of tourism, Rising, all-inclusive customer expenditure in the Pafos economy. Several developments aided this strategy, including the introduction of free "Meet the Locals" walking tours, the improvement of the Old Town and local transport, the expansion of direct flights and international access, the establishment of local arts and craft workshops and much more.
- Ease seasonality by investing in infrastructure and supporting the organisation of international sporting and cultural events such as the Cyprus Gran Fondo road cycling race, the Cyprus Marathon etc. Among other initiatives, Investment in digital marketing, and enhancements to the destination's experiences to be more FIT friendly.

- During off season the destination offers on a weekly basis, free Walking guided tours





“Meet the Locals” -Launch new cleanliness program, recycling programs, door to door pick up

-“Pafos Smart Parking” is a solution of effective parking management. Citizens and visitors to the municipality of Pafos can be notified and identify free parking spots swiftly and precisely by utilising Internet of Things (IoT) and Mobile Communications (Smartphones) technology.

-Intangible heritage-Phytiotiko weaving. As a first successful step, all participating partners have managed to register the Phyti embroideries in the ICH of Cyprus. The second phase is presently underway, with the goal of standardising the techniques for this specific weaving and moving on with the preparation of the application for the ICA’s world heritage list.

-European Cultural Route: "In the footsteps of St Paul, the Apostle of nations". The region of Central Macedonia in Greece, the Lazio region in Italy, the Pafos Regional Board of Tourism in association with the Municipality of Pafos in Cyprus, and the European Cultural Tourism Network based in Brussels, Belgium, have agreed to form a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) that develops, implements, manages, promotes, and supports the European Cultural Route: “In the footsteps of St Paul, the Apostle of nations,” .The above founding members of this EGTC have signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation in which they have pledged to collaborate on the development, implementation, management, promotion, and support of the transnational cultural route for final accreditation by the Council of Europe.

-Pafos Aphrodite Festival. The festival encourages cultural tourism by promoting the intangible heritage of opera and related CCIs. Pafos Aphrodite Festival has celebrated 20 years of success. -Creative destination-awards. Pafos was awarded the best creative destination award in 2016 and the ‘Best Strategy in Creative Tourism Development 2020’, by the Creative Tourism Network (CTN). -Innovative & creative private and public offerings. The Municipality of Pafos has established the KHAN, an artist space where local and visiting artists can exhibit their work. Private funding has also been provided, resulting in Pafos Creative Tourism uncovering hidden Cyprus for arts, handicrafts, and traditional products.

Pafos has gained the title of the European Capital of Smart Tourism 2023 because has a plan, commitment of residents, local authorities and stakeholders, resources and willingness to change things for a Smarter Pafos, thus for a better and a Smarter Europe.

Pafos has been**European Capital of Smart Tourism 2023,** together with Seville. Pafos Regional Board of Tourism currently holds the Presidency of the European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN).

The selection was made by a jury composed by representatives of EU institutions (European Parliament TRAN Committee 1st Vice President, Committee of the Regions NAT Commission President, senior officers of European Commission DG GROW).





The announcement was made in Brussels today, following presentations of all finalists to the Jury and the decision of the Jury. In breaking the news, a member of the Jury stated:

"Pafos is a city full of initiatives, has become a smart leader, thanks to your forward looking approach, so well done for that! We were particularly impressed by the commitment to meeting ambitious sustainability objectives, with constant monitoring at the same time and a strategy retune in place. And we were also pleased with you realizing your plan to work together with previous winners of this competition. You had a series of successes! You were a capital in ancient times, a former European Capital of Culture and now on top of this, well done, a 2023 European Capital of Smart Tourism, well done again!"

This is the first time that a tourist destination in Cyprus wins this contest. Pafos and Seville are the two Capitals of Smart Tourism for 2023, selected amongst seven finalists. The finalists had been selected by a panel of independent experts with specialist knowledge covering each award category (accessibility, sustainability, digitalisation, cultural heritage and creativity), who evaluated all submitted applications. This is the first time that a tourist destination in Cyprus wins this contest.

The cities that had been shortlisted for the **European Capital of Smart Tourism 2023** award were **Aarhus (Denmark), Gijón (Spain), Pafos (Cyprus), Porto (Portugal), San Sebastián (Spain), Seville (Spain), Zagreb (Croatia)**, as finalists selected from 29 candidates from 13 countries. All shortlisted cities presented their candidatures in front of a European Jury in Brussels on 9 September.

Coming with the title of 2023 European Capital of Smart Tourism, communication and branding support throughout 2023 will be provided to the winners. This includes a promotional video, a specially designed hashtag sculpture for the city to display, and tailored promotional actions designed to increase visibility at EU and global level and increase the number of visitors.

Smart tourism, according to the European Commission's definition, responds to new challenges and demands in a fast-changing sector, including the evolution of digital tools, products and services; equal opportunity and access for all visitors; sustainable development of the local area; and support to creative industries, local talent and heritage.

ECTN has supported this EU initiative from the outset and the candidature of Pafos.

Transforming quantity into quality with innovation and creativity

Pafos is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Cyprus and it attracts most of the visitors coming to the island. The whole city is included in the UNESCO world heritage list and people can discover important places of interest, such as the UNESCO Archaeological Park of Kato Pafos, the Medieval Castle by the ancient harbour, the Old Town, among others. This rich area attracts then over 550,000 international visitors with an average duration of stay of 8 days, has the capacity of 12,000 license tourist beds and it is estimated that the tourism industry within the city of Pafos employs around 14,000 people. The city is currently investing heavily in the region's infrastructures, tourist products, services and experiences offered, tourism technology and environmental





protection. Pafos has transformed from a traditional mass sun-and-sea tourism hotspot into a modern and innovative tourism destination.

Where myth meets technology

Pafos is at the heart of the myth of Aphrodite, with the beach of her birthplace. The city then offers a new experience to visitors with the possibility – coming soon – to download the Myth of Aphrodite app for free, after the success of the pilot project using AR (Augmented Reality). Users will be able to scan relevant photos of Aphrodite in three different places on the beach, to enjoy Aphrodite in a real environment through their smart devices. The scenes include the mythical goddess emerging from the foam of the sea, sitting on a rock, and reading a book on the beach. Users can then interact, and find information on the app, with locations and description. Culture lovers or explorers, all can download the app and enjoy it.

Pafos Aphrodite Festival – Opera in a UNESCO city

Since 1999, the Pafos Aphrodite Festival has taken place in the city in early September. It promotes the intangible heritage of opera and has been established as a cultural event of international recognition with high preconditions for artistic performances and administrative efficiency. Every year, there is great interest from an international audience of holidaymakers and visitors, with 3-day performances, and it always goes sold-out. With the imposing Medieval Castle of Pafos and the sea as a backdrop, the event attracts sponsors, who support it. This event has been successfully attracting cultural tourism for 20 years.



Links

<https://www.visitpafos.org.cy/pafos-european-capital-of-smart-tourism-2023>

https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/pafos-winner-2023-competition_en



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Resources needed

All involved stakeholders including local authorities, tourism related union and association, the state all contributed for the implementation of the actions. Key players though was the Pafos municipality and the Pafos Regional Board of Tourism where since 2016 have invested hundreds of thousands euro, human resource, Natural resources, resources (urban heritage, arts, archaeological values, traditions, science values, folk crafts and sub-cultural formations) and much more. A well qualified and committed team of tourism, smart cities and cultural heritage professionals. Commitment by the city authority Municipality and Mayor. Strong involvement of stakeholders, such as museums, heritage sites, tourism sector, etc., etc

Challenges encountered

Pafos Region is a relatively small area and all resources are limited, thus the only way forward was to act smarter. A great effort was placed to ensure that the City, the residents, businesses, and others are dedicated to smartness and sustainability. By nature people are resistant to changes, so a great effort was placed for citizens and stakeholders to convince them about the plan to accept the new way of thinking. Human resources with expertise in all four themes sustainability, accessibility, digitalization and cultural heritage creativity was not widely available. Securing financial resources was also a great challenge since money was not easily or readily available to implement projects. Be flexible and align on the team vision and goal. Keep up team engagement. In an era with fast changing travelling habits, emerging technologies and rational climate changes, a set of new challenges faced and had to adjust the initial plans and adapt to the new needs. In addition to the above, the collection of data for creating this digital database was a significant challenge as well as overcoming the restrictions and legislations from municipalities and councils. Last but not least had to face communication breakdowns, conflicts, lack of trust sometimes and difficulties in integrating diverse perspectives. However with effective leadership by the Mayor and the Tourism Board and open communication have managed to overcome these challenges.

Evidence of success

Pafos (Cyprus) and Seville (Spain) were selected as the winners of the 2023 European Capital of Smart Tourism, following a European Jury meeting in Brussels on 9 November 2022.

Potential for transfer

The key Good Practice features to share and transfer are: -Have a plan, the commitment of residents, local authorities, stakeholders and others, secure resources and show





willingness to change things -Sustainability: Recognise that we are part of problem and part of the solution and actively provide solutions -Accessibility: Adopt the motto, every single thing accessible to every single person and become more and more accessible every day -Digitalisation: Great success for Pafos was the change in the way we think! Digital Transformation Journey should accelerate. Introduce new initiatives and lead the way for more successful stories -Cultural Heritage and Creativity: Our slogan is Bridging Continents, Linking Cultures. Safeguarding and sharing culture, enhance local and European cultural heritage through a number of policies and programmes. To potential organisations that should have to act as a role model we recommend: -Have an innovative mechanism for collaboration, sharing values, and the ability to overcome obstacles. -Set clear values which are accepted from all involved parties. -Present passion, trust and ability to inspire. -Demonstrating commitment to goals and willingness to invest the necessary resources to achieve success. -Past and present successful initiatives and stories must share. All of the above contributes towards a smarter tourism, smarter destinations!

Further Information

The journey towards smart tourism, smart destinations is ongoing. Actions and initiatives need to be accelerated in the coming years. As a destination, the focus in the next years is to continue incorporating the concepts of sustainability, accessibility, innovation/digitalisation and cultural heritage-creative tourism into strategic planning. Some of the actions that are in progress by Pafos Municipality and Pafos Regional Board of Tourism are: - Water management system, to achieve optimal use and quality of water, - 'Pafos Now' app, for all services in the region. ECTN members Bremerhaven and Cork were finalists in the 'European Capital of Smart Tourism 2024' Award. ECTN is proud that two of our members, Bremerhaven, Germany, and Cork, Republic of Ireland, are selected in the seven finalists for the European Capital of Smart Tourism 2024 Award. ECTN has supported the European Capital of Smart Tourism Awards since the launch in 2019. Cultural Heritage and Creativity, as well as Sustainability are two of the four components of Smart Tourism directly linked to Sustainable Cultural Tourism that ECTN facilitates and promotes.

